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軍備競賽、安全困境與在東部和南中國海的領土爭端

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Arms Races, Security Dilemmas and Territorial Disputes in the East and South China Seas

Abstract: This paper examines current military modernisation trends in Asia, and seeks to explore whether this process of military modernisation could evolve into an arms race in coming years. It explores security dilemmas related to the crises in the South China Sea and East China Sea, and examines how these are promoting a degree of reactive modernisation. It examines the potential role of an information-led Revolution in Military Affairs as a next step in military modernisation, and examines how rapid change in the character and conduct could lead to regional arms racing. It argues that an arms race, emerging from current modernisation, appears increasingly likely.

Key Words: Military modernisation, Revolution in Military Affairs, South China Sea, East China Sea, Naval capabilities
ARMS RACES, SECURITY DILEMMAS AND TERRITORIAL DISPUTES IN THE EAST AND SOUTH CHINA SEA

Introduction

Is an Asian arms race underway? Current trends, whilst worrying, do not suggest an arms race has occurred in Asia since the end of the Cold War. Rapid military modernisation and transformation has occurred, though in an uneven manner across the region. However might an Asian arms race break out in the future, particularly as a result of security dilemmas emerging between China and its neighbours over security disputes such as the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, and the South China Sea dispute? The answer, worryingly, seems ‘quite possibly’. This paper seeks to explore whether current Asian military modernisation could evolve into an arms race, explain why this might happen, and consider whether the information-led revolution in military affairs (RMA) that will increasingly be a key element of Asian military modernisation might accentuate the risks of such an arms race occurring. In particular, the paper examines how military modernisation and the potential for a future arms race is driving emerging security dilemmas that are emerging in Asia, which are accentuating tensions between key regional states. These issues are considered against the strategic context of a rising China, and growing tension over disputes in the East and South China Sea in particular. China’s rapid military modernisation and its willingness to adopt a more assertive military posture in these disputes is leading some states in East Asia, notably Japan, Vietnam, and potentially the Philippines, to respond to China’s modernisation of its military by acquiring military capabilities that give them asymmetric counters to Chinese military power.

There is growing concern that China will not accept and act within an established rules-based international order, but instead, will seek to act in a revisionist manner. This could involve using military power coercively or even aggressively to resolve territorial disputes in its favour. China’s recent declaration of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over much of the East China Sea, and its hint that it might consider a similar step in the South China Sea, has done nothing to alleviate the concerns of its neighbours about its future intentions. Noted China analyst Andrew Erickson sums up China’s strategic intent in East Asia.

‘China seeks to address historical grievances and rise again as a great power that commands neighbours deference,…[and] to carve out from the global commons the Yellow, East and South China Seas and the airspace above them as a zone of exceptionalism within which existing global, legal, security and resource management norms are subordinated to its national interests.’

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Such a development, were it to happen, would certainly occur at the expense of other states' security interests and would be certain to intensify security dilemmas that in turn would increase the risk of competition and military conflict across Asia. More significantly it would erode established norms against the use of military power in a manner that would challenge the established rules-based international order.

**Arms Races and Security Dilemmas**

Any analysis of whether an arms race is occurring, or may occur in the future must start with clear definitions of terms. What is meant by the term ‘military modernisation’, and how does this differ from an ‘arms race’? Military modernisation does not imply either a ‘reactive dynamic’ or suggest the implication of increasing threat leading to the emergence of security dilemmas that is associated with an arms race. Ashley Tellis defines military modernisation as:

‘…the relevant upgrade or improvement of existing military capabilities through the acquisition of new imported or indigenously developed weapons systems and supporting assets, the incorporation of new doctrines, the creation of new organisational structures, and the institutionalisation of new manpower management and combat training regimes.’

In contrast, an arms race is defined by rapid purchases of military capabilities that generate an ‘action-reaction’ dynamic in the relationship between two or more countries. Till argues that arms races are:

‘…usually bilateral; intense in terms of effort, rapidity and expression; associated with high levels of political tension; operationally specific; indicative of high strategic stakes; and, regarded as such, [noting that] ‘rapidity in arms procurement and action-reaction dynamics may be necessary conditions for an arms race, but they are not sufficient. There needs also to be an intention, real or perceived, to use these increased capabilities against other states.’

In analysing military acquisitions in Asia Desmond Ball stated in 2008 that:

‘...by 2010, most countries in the region will face the demands not only of continued force modernisation but also of replacement of the weapons systems acquired in such large volumes in the late 1980s. Defence budgets and acquisition programmes may enter another cycle of substantial increase – but this time from a base of higher numbers and more sophisticated capabilities than obtained during the round of the late 1980s and early 1990s.’

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More recently, Geoffrey Till echoed Ball’s earlier warning, stating in an analysis on the possibility of an Asian naval arms race, that:

‘…what’s happening is not a naval arms race at the moment, but it is far from impossible that the naval modernisation process we see around the region could turn into one.’

The map on the following page sets out significant military developments in Asia between 2012 and 2014.

Asian Military Modernisation and China

Current trends in Asia show that military expenditure continues to increase, though this increase is not uniform across the region, and the rate of increase has slowed since the 2008-09 Global Financial Crisis. The most significant military developments have occurred in China, where SIPRI data shows that China’s military spending has increased 7.8 per cent in 2012, and 10.7 per cent for 2013, and most recently 12.2% in 2014. The rate of Chinese defence spending increases, in comparison to other major Northeast Asian states, in terms of billions of US dollars between 2003 and 2011, is illustrated in the chart below.

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2012, pp. 198-9

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Some significant military developments in Asia 2012-2014

China:
High sustained investment in "Counter-Intervention Capabilities" (AAR/ADS) including: advanced submarines, long-range ballistic missiles (inc. ASBMD), advanced fighter aircraft, Cyberwarfare, Counter-Space capabilities; greater investment in expeditionary capabilities including aircraft carriers, amphibious vessels, army aviation forces.

South Korea:
Purchase of F-35A JSF for F-X competition, but growth of sophisticated indigenous defence capabilities and industry. Increasingly competitive defence industrial base is allowing South Korea to not only acquire cutting-edge capabilities, including naval and air systems, space, and CRSS, but also export these capabilities. Development of medium-range ballistic & cruise missile capabilities targeted against North Korea.

Japan:
Reversal of decline in Defence Spending in late 2013 under National Defense Program Guidelines and National Security Strategy deployment of first of two 7,700 ton helicopter carriers (the Izumo) in August 2013; purchase of additional destroyers, submarines, airpower (inc. F-35 JST) and amphibious capabilities to respond to China and North Korea; Greater emphasis on expeditionary amphibious capabilities to protect overseas territories and resources. Dynamic Defence Force includes reorientation of JSDF to southern orientation.

Vietnam:
Acquisition of six Project 638 Kilo class diesel-electric submarines (SSKs) equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs); four SIGMA class corvettes, also missile armed, and additional Sukhoi Su-30 advanced fighters ... (Yak-130) land-based anti-air missiles. Vietnam is developing its own small AAD capability against China.

Taiwan (R.o.C.):
Seeks indigenous submarine development in absence of a foreign provider. Development of up to 12 fast-attack craft (missile) - PAC Mk. underway. Upgrade of SAV F-7A with new avionics and ASEA radars.

United States:
Responding to China rising power, US embraces "rebalance" to Asia, and formulates "Air-Sea Battle" concept. But fiscal constraints may limit US ability to sustain a rebalance of significant size, and a potential reintroduction of "sequestration" may severely constrain US defence capabilities. CDR 2014 emphasizes reduction in land power and cuts in existing capabilities to sustain modernisation. The F-35 JSF survives for the moment!

Thailand:
Seeking acquisition of up to three SSNs, two guided-missile frigates, as well as the extra IAS-39C Gripen fighters to complement 12 existing aircraft, plus SAAB 140 NSW aircraft. Growing emphasis on building Network-Centric Warfare and Joint Warfare capabilities.

Malaysia:
Acquisition of Scorpene class submarines, service and establishment of naval command base at Bintulu, Bintulu from James Shoal. Modernise SSNMR capability. Multi-role combat aircraft program for 18 aircraft to replace MiG-29Ks to proceed.

Australia:
12 EA-18G Growlers to be acquired by 2017; new Defence White Paper in 2015 to review "force 2030" force structure concept; commitment to F-35 and Future Submarine Intact, but reduced numbers of F35s likely; delays for both capabilities; AWD and LHD projects continue, though delays with AWD are growing, increasing concerns over gap between strategic objectives and resources. Ambitions to achieve 2% GDP on Defence Spading must remain questionable.

Indonesia:
Acquired three Cheng-Beo Type 209/1200 SSNs to replace two Cakra Type 209/1200 submarines, with up to ten new SSNs remaining of key interest to the TNI AL. Turns down offer second-hand Russian Kilo class SSKs. Additional Kr-30 MKII

Philippines:
Purchasing of maritime patrol vessels and 12 FA-50 lightweight fighters. But Manila lacks the means and money to seriously counter Chinese moves in the South China Sea. But internal security challenges remain a factor.

Singapore:
Deployment of two Archer class submarines, acquisition of F-35B JST, expansion of F-35G force. New emphasis on modernisation and emphasis on "knowledge edge" makes Singapore the leading defence power in Southeast Asia.

Sources:
IHSS, Pacific Defence Weekly Online; Christian Le Miere, "The Spectre of an Asian Arms Race" in Survival, IISS, Vol. 56, No. 1; IISS 2014 Military Balance; Map Imagery: Wikimedia Commons
Liff and Erickson argue that ‘China’s defence budget has increased at a rate far exceeding that of any other major power, albeit roughly consistent with GDP growth’, noting that China’s official defence budget is three times that of India, and second only to the United States of America (US). This investment has allowed China to transform the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) from what was an inward-looking backward force based around Maoist-era ‘People’s war’ doctrine into a sophisticated military force with the ability to undertake counter-intervention operations (known as ‘anti-access and area denial’ in Western circles), and an ability to fight ‘local wars under Informatized conditions’. Such a change represents one of the most significant shifts in Asian military affairs since the end of the Cold War.

It is not merely the pace and scope of Chinese military modernisation that is causing concerns across Asia and within defence planning circles in the United States, but also the nature of capabilities being acquired which is generating increasing risk of regional arms racing. China is investing in ‘counter-intervention capabilities’, known in the West as ‘anti-access and area denial’ (AA/AD) systems. These are systems designed to prevent entry into China’s air and maritime approaches in the ‘Near Seas’ within the First Island Chain by US naval, air and amphibious forces, and the forces of key American allies. Furthermore, Chinese modernisation of its AA/AD capabilities is gradually extending the range of these systems out to the Middle Seas between the First and Second Island Chains, and thus placing forward-deployed US air and naval forces and bases at greater risk further from China.

Anti-Access systems being introduced into the PLA include long-range ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, including the controversial Dong-Feng (DF-21D) Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile (ASBM) that has now achieved initial operating capability (IOC). New missile capabilities are emerging, including longer-ranged conventionally-armed intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) able to strike US facilities on Guam. More recently, China has tested the Wu-14 hypersonic glide vehicle on 9th January, 2014, which if operationally deployed on long range ballistic missiles like the DF-21D and follow on IRBMs would dramatically increase the threat to both US and allied naval vessels, as well as forward bases in Asia. These long-range missile capabilities are linked to Chinese space-based surveillance and communication satellites, airborne platforms, including UAVs that provides

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12 The term People’s Liberation Army is used in this article to include not only ground forces, but also the People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and Peoples Liberation Army Second Artillery Corps (PLASAC), unless specifically mentioned otherwise.
a greater degree of situational awareness for China within the air and maritime approaches inside the first island chain.¹⁷

**“Near Seas” vs. “Far Seas”**

![Map showing China's maritime claims and strategies.](image)


In terms of area denial capabilities, China is rapidly modernising its submarine forces with both very quiet diesel-electric boats such as the *Yuan* class, as well as more capable nuclear-powered submarines including the *Shang* class SSNs and *Jin* class SSBNs. The Type 095 SSN is likely to replace the *Shang* class SSN starting in 2015, and will be considerably quieter, and thus much harder to detect. All of China’s submarines are armed with advanced antiship cruise missiles (ASCMs) including SS-N-27 Sizzler which is a potent capability given its long range, high speed and extremely low altitude flight profile. An even more advanced ASCM – the ‘Shredder’ – is currently in development.¹⁸ Chinese airpower is also being modernised, with the development of two new fifth generation fighters – the Chengdu J-20 ‘Black Eagle’ and the Shenyang J-31 ‘Falcon Eagle’ already flying, and suggestions of a Chinese stealth bomber also under development.¹⁹


¹⁹Dan Lamothe, “Is This China’s New Stealth Bomber?” at *Foreign Policy*, accessed at [http://complex.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/12/30/is_this_chinas_new_stealth_bomber?](http://complex.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/12/30/is_this_chinas_new_stealth_bomber?), on
Chinese strengths in air, missile and naval warfare capabilities contrast with a significant gap in China’s anti-submarine warfare (ASW) skills, capabilities and experience – a vulnerability that threatens to undermine much of the effectiveness of China’s AA/AD effort in the face of superior US and allied submarine capabilities. Even this gap now appears to be closing, with evidence emerging that China understands its vulnerabilities in this area, and the importance developing more sophisticated ASW capabilities. Since 2012, China has deployed fixed ocean floor acoustic arrays within the First Island Chain that are designed to monitor submarine activity in the Near Seas. Together with the rapid production of PLAN Type 56 ASW Frigates, and a limited Maritime Patrol Aircraft capability, China seems set to address this gap in its ability to deny access and raise the cost of entry to US and allied submarine forces.

From the perspective of the US and its allies in Asia, China’s decision to rapidly modernize its armed forces and embrace an ‘RMA with Chinese characteristics’ to pursue an ability to fight and win ‘local wars under Informatized conditions’, when combined with an apparent readiness to adopt a more assertive military posture in the East and South China Seas is generating suspicion and concern over China’s ultimate goals, and whether China is moving away from Deng’s dictum of ‘hide your time, hide your strength’. It is the speed and scale of China’s growing military power, combined with concerns over Beijing’s high military spending and uncertainty regarding its strategic intentions that are causing great concern. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has noted that opacity in China’s foreign policy and a lack of transparency in its military intentions is causing concern. He raises this issue in a recent article in Foreign Affairs, questioning:

‘Whether China will continue to work cooperatively within the current rules based global order once it has acquired great-power status or instead seek to reshape that order more in its own image.’

Therefore the question on the lips of policy makers in the region is will China use force to change the status quo in its favour? In particular, the maritime and territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas provide a focal point for a regional arms race were it to occur, and raise the prospect of intensifying security dilemmas, driven by rapid military modernisation that could take on the form of an arms race, and driven by historical enmity, nationalist fervour, geostrategic interests and resource competition. Yet it is important to see the question of China’s future intentions in a balanced way. China’s most recent Defence White Paper highlights its perception of an increasingly challenging strategic environment, characterised by multiple and complicated security threats and challenges, noting that ‘...China has an arduous task to safeguard its national unification, territorial integrity and
development interests.’ The White Paper alludes to US ‘rebalancing’ as making the situation in Asia ‘tenser’, identifies neighbouring states as exacerbating tensions over China’s ‘territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests’ whilst directly identifying Japan as ‘…making trouble over the issue of the Diaoyu Islands.’ From the viewpoint of Beijing, its rapid military modernisation is justified by its requirement to support broad national strategic goals that include safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity. Moving beyond an out dated ‘people’s war’ doctrine and replacing obsolete military capabilities with modern ‘Informatized’ military capabilities is understandable given that it has large maritime and air approaches, with territorial disputes with its neighbours, as well as emerging global maritime security interests. It is the active territorial disputes – the dispute between China, Japan and Taiwan over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea and the dispute between China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines and Brunei in the South China Sea – that represent the greatest risk of military competition, including reactive military modernisation, leading to armed confrontation in coming years.

Both the East and South China Seas disputes involve the use of air and maritime forces within disputed maritime zones that are complicated by differing interpretations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as well as contending historical perspectives on ownership of both land-masses and contiguous waters. The role of historical enmity and grievance, combined with rising nationalism adds fuel to the fire. Furthermore, both disputes are occurring within maritime regions that are astride vital sea-lanes of communication (SLOCs) to major Asian powers – the security of which is vital to the continued economic growth and thus political stability of the key actors in the dispute. Finally, within these seas of contention, exist strategically valuable resource deposits in terms of oil, natural gas and strategic minerals, as well as fisheries.

Tension over military modernisation increases regional ‘security dilemmas’ over the East or South China disputes, particularly if military modernisation offers a state a greater capability to threaten other states interests within these disputes. Booth and Wheeler describe a security dilemma as:

‘…uncertainty between states over motives, intentions and capabilities of others, and generating likely responses that would increase the risk of creating a significant level of mutual hostility, even if initial intent on the part of states seeking military modernisation was not to engage in hostility.’

This definition aptly describes the current security situation in Asia, specifically the disputes in the East and South China Seas. Regional military modernisation, driven in part by Chinese military modernisation and its assertive posture in these disputes, is contributing to a growing

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24 Information Office of the State Council, The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces, Beijing, April 2013.
25 Information Office of the State Council, ibid.
26 Adam P. Liff, Andrew S. Erickson, ibid., p.20.
risk of an ‘action-reaction’ dynamic emerging, and driving a potential arms race in the future. Whilst not yet a full-blown arms race, the combination of regional tensions and the rapid acquisition of military capability is laying the basis for a future arms race to emerge that would be highly destabilizing and threaten security in East Asia. Japan is responding to Chinese challenges regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with acquisitions of military capabilities designed to reinforce its ability to defend its claim, strengthening the maritime functions of the Self Defence Forces, and improving surveillance over its remote islands in response to the continuing territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea. The decision to deploy a surveillance radar and supporting forces to the island of Yonaguni, 150km from the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands represents the latest step in this policy. 

Japan’s development of the first of two Type 22 Izumo class helicopter destroyers (DDH) will give it a greater ability to respond to Chinese naval capabilities, particularly in terms of enhancing the Japanese Maritime Self Defence Force (JMSDF) anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and border protection capabilities. Furthermore, Japan’s consideration of future acquisition of tilt rotor aircraft such as the US MV-22 Osprey would also enhance the Japanese Ground Self Defence Force (JGSDF) ability to rapidly reinforce its hold on the islands in the face of a Chinese challenge. In commenting on the formation of an amphibious capability for the JGSDF, Lt. Gen Toshiyuki Shikata (rtd) has stated ‘…this unit definitely aims to respond to China’s possible attacks on the disputed Senkaku Islands and to take them back.’ In the air, the Japanese Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) would respond to probes by Chinese reconnaissance aircraft, and its decision to acquire the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter reinforces Japanese Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) operational advantages against PLAAF fighters, whilst reinforcing interoperability with US and other neighboring allied states.

Japan’s move to bolster its ability to undertake expeditionary operations in response to perceived Chinese challenges in the East China Sea is likely to see a Chinese response. China’s recent commissioning of the aircraft carrier Liaoning is now being followed by construction of China’s first indigenously designed aircraft carrier near Shanghai, which is in line with Chinese intentions to build potentially up to three of its own aircraft carriers for the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) by the 2020s. However, there would be no reason why China could not choose to build additional aircraft carriers beyond that first batch of vessels, and such a step would be in character with China’s approach to naval shipbuilding as seen with the development of naval surface combatants over the past twenty years.

33 James Hardy, *ibid.*, 7th August, 2013, p.6
A Chinese aircraft carrier capability does not imply that China is directly challenging US Navy aircraft carrier capabilities at a global level. However, China’s aircraft carrier aspirations if realized will give Beijing added operational military capability against its immediate neighbors in the East and South China Seas as well as against Taiwan, strengthening Beijing’s hand in ‘local wars’, and enhancing its ability to impose local sea control around contested areas. China, like Japan, is also developing amphibious vessels designed to deploy helicopters for supporting amphibious and heliborne assaults. It is building between four and six Type 71 Yuzhao class amphibious transport docks (LPDs) and up to six larger Type 81 helicopter landing docks. The growth in naval expeditionary capability for operations within the first island chain is being matched by a strengthening of the PLA’s Army Aviation forces. Richard Fisher notes that the PLA’s Army Aviation command has moved from the ground forces of the PLA to a position directly subordinate to the General Staff Department of the Central Military Commission (CMC). Fisher argues that ‘this may mean that as a strategic striking force that approaches that of the Airborne forces, which are usually under the peacetime command of the PLA Air Force (PLAAF).’ To further enhance the speed and responsiveness of its Army Aviation capabilities China is now looking to develop its own advanced tilt-rotor aircraft that would allow it to rapidly deploy ground forces at long range. Taken together, the acquisition of aircraft carriers for the PLAN, enhanced amphibious capabilities, and a boost to PLA air mobility in the form of advanced Army Aviation capabilities, including tilt-rotor technology, would give China the ability not only to undertake air and naval operations to ensure sea control over disputed territories in the South and East China Sea, but to rapidly seize and hold such territories with expeditionary ground forces.

Much more capable PLAN naval surface vessels are emerging, with the Type 52D Luyang II DDG now entering service, with as many as twelve vessels likely to be completed. The Type 52D represents a significant leap in capability for the PLAN, given its advanced radar, data-links, and more sophisticated missile capabilities, including vertical-launch system design. Andrew Erickson notes that China can produce warships quickly using modular construction, and suggests that at least three shipyards across China can mass produce advanced surface combatants. Southeast Asian responses to China’s growing naval and air capabilities are occurring at both the political and military levels. Southeast Asian defence spending trends between 2003 and 2012 suggest a slow increase in investment in capabilities, which has continued in 2013. States are investing primarily in air and naval capabilities to ensure regional states can protect offshore interests, and deter military challenges in maritime disputes. There is a determined effort on the part of Southeast Asian states to enhance military capabilities, with investment in submarines being most notable. In terms of defence investment, Singapore continues to lead regional spending with its focus to maintain a military-technological edge over its neighbors.

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Singapore armed forces are investing in modern airpower, including very capable F-15SG strike aircraft, and more recently the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, as well as upgrades to existing F-16 C/D fighters.  

Singapore’s purchase of advanced Swedish A-17 class submarines – the Archer class, equipped with air-independent propulsion represents the leading edge of submarine purchases in the region. Indeed it is submarines that seem to be the most significant item on regional shopping lists, with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand investing in, or seeking to purchase, new submarine capabilities.

The US decision in its 2012 Defence Strategic Guidance document to rebalance to Asia sends a clear message of US commitment to Asia in the face of China’s rise, and has led to a series of diplomatic agreements for closer defence relations between the US and its key Asian allies. Most significantly, Japan and the Philippines have announced a strategic partnership which will see Japan provide the Philippines with ten coast guard patrol craft allow Japanese SDF air and sea units to participate in joint exercises with both the Philippines and the US, and potentially could see Japanese forces training in the Philippines. Such an agreement, including the provision of ten patrol craft would provide the Philippines with a significant

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boost to its naval capabilities, though still less capable than less well armed paramilitary Chinese Maritime Security Agency vessels which undertake the majority of patrolling operations in the South China Sea.42

The agreement between Japan and the Philippines is part of a broader response to China by Manila, which is engaged in a broader military modernisation in the face of China’s assertive military activities in the South China Sea. Significant military capabilities to be acquired under the Armed Forces Modernisation Program include eight attack helicopters, wide area defence surface to air missile capabilities and the acquisition of two naval frigates which are to be built locally in the Philippines.43 Yet the Philippines is constrained by lack of financial resources to afford new capabilities, and is attempting to transition its defence policy from a focus almost exclusively on internal security challenges to a greater focus on traditional external challenges such as that posed by Chinese activities in the South China Sea.44 In spite of a clear priority for responding to China’s challenge against Philippine-claimed territories in the South China Sea, it is uncertain that the Philippines will be able to acquire the types of capabilities necessary to deter Chinese actions against its interests. The agreement, with Japan and the Philippines’ desire for a closer defence relationship with the US suggests that the formation of counter-balancing arrangements seems the best way forward for the Philippines given the constraints that it faces.

If the Philippines is struggling to respond to the growing security dilemma in East Asia, Vietnam seems much better placed to build substantial military capabilities designed to protect its territorial and resource interests in the South China Sea. Vietnam has been engaged in a spending spree on advanced military capabilities, most of which enhance its ability to ensure control of offshore territorial interests, and deter or counter challenges from other claimants, most significantly China.45 Of critical importance to Vietnam is ensuring control of large offshore energy and resource claims that are vital to sustain the growth of its economy such that it will become a fully industrialized and modernized country by 2020 and an ‘Asian economic powerhouse’ by 2025.46

The size of Vietnam’s oil and gas reserves underscores the requirement for the country to enhance the protection of these resources, particularly in the view of the contested nature of some of the territory in which they reside, including areas around the Spratly and Paracel islands and the Johnson reef. It is in Vietnam’s efforts at military modernisation as well as defence reorganization that the clearest evidence of an ‘action-reaction’ dynamic within Asia is visible. The creation of the Vietnamese Coast Guard is designed to ‘address Chinese incursions into Vietnamese waters in a non-escalatory manner’, whilst the Vietnamese People’s Navy (VPN) has developed a naval air arm designed to enhance its ability to patrol maritime territory. More significantly has been naval acquisitions including orders for six Kilo class submarines since 2009 as well as Sigma and Gepard class frigates, fast attack craft,

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42Lyle J. Goldstein, Five Dragons Stirring up the Sea – Challenge and Opportunity in China’s Improving Maritime Enforcement Capabilities, US Naval War College – China Maritime Studies Institute, April 2010, p. 5-21.
45Sam Perlo-Freeman, Carina Solmirano, Helen Wilandh, ibid., p. 132.
missile corvettes, and patrol craft. These vessels will be missile armed, will be supported by land-based Russian ‘bastion’ coastal defence missile systems which are equipped with SS-N-26 Sunburn antiship missiles, and will strengthen Hanoi’s ability to meet an adversary as far away from Vietnamese territory as possible. The Vietnamese Peoples Air Force (VPAF) will acquire twenty Sukhoi Su-30MK2V Flankers to complement twelve existing Su-27SK/UBK fighters that were acquired in the mid-1990s as a counter to growing Chinese PLAAF and PLAN Air Force capabilities. However Carlyle Thayer, an expert on Vietnam’s military remains skeptical that Vietnam can absorb a rapid expansion of advanced military capabilities, noting that Vietnam’s acquisition of the six Kilo class submarines may be highly challenging for the country to manage because of the distortion they will cause to the budget, the maintenance, the backup and the logistics.

‘Next Wave’ modernisation in Asia and the Revolution in Military Affairs

What are the next steps in this process of military modernisation, and are future possibilities for military modernisation likely to drive a greater risk of a regional arms race? Certainly one aspect of regional military modernisation that is of key interest is the degree to which states in Asia are able to exploit a RMA that is defined as a combination of advances in military or militarily-relevant technology, combined with innovation in doctrinal thought, together with organisational reform, that is brought together in a manner that produces revolutionary change in the character and conduct of warfare such that it delivers a decisive military advantage to the actor which can fully exploit such a development. The RMA is not a new idea or concept, emerging initially from Soviet thinking on a ‘military-technological revolution’ in the 1970s, and being demonstrated during the 1991 Persian Gulf War and subsequent conflicts, most recently, the 2003 Iraq War, where a combination of achieving a ‘knowledge edge’ through “…networked sensors, command and control (C2), and precision-strike capabilities led to shared awareness, increased speed of command, high tempo of operations, greater lethality, increased survivability and a degree of self-synchronisation.’

Andrew Tan notes that ‘…all of the United States’ key allies in East Asia have felt compelled to respond to the RMA’ having observed the impact of information-led warfare capabilities in recent conflicts. As a result there has been uneven investment in RMA type capabilities. In particular there has been an emphasis on building ‘the knowledge edge’ through investment into advanced networked C4ISTAR systems. These depend on acquiring space-based military capabilities in particular to allow ‘network-centric warfare’ within a joint operating environment, and to support the employment of and precision-strike systems. Within the East Asia region only certain states – Singapore, Australia, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan – are well placed to acquire and exploit such capabilities, with varying degrees of scope and success. However it is not just US allies in Asia that aspire to exploit the RMA as a key

48Jon Grevatt, ibid., p. 27.
51Command, Control, Communications, Computers (C4) plus Intelligence, Surveillance, Targeting and Reconnaissance (ISTAR)
52Andrew Tan, ibid., p. 93-94.
element of military modernisation. The Chinese government has stated in its most recent defence white paper:

‘…China’s armed forces firmly base their military preparedness on winning local wars under the conditions of Informationisation, make overall and coordinated plans to promote military preparedness in all strategic directions, intensify the joint employment of different services and arms, and enhance warfighting capabilities based on information systems.’ 53

China is making ‘Informatization’ of the PLA a critical and central element of its military modernisation process, and a key foundation for the development of military doctrine, organisational reform, training and strategic thinking. Tan suggests that China is pursuing ‘counter-RMA’ capabilities, but it can be equally argued that China’s approach is an ‘RMA with Chinese Characteristics’ – which incorporates both aspects of Western RMA thinking, and its own ideas, capabilities and concepts. 54 Dean Cheng notes that China studied how the US and its allies have employed information-led warfare capabilities, advanced network-centric warfare, and precision-strike, and this has been used to inform Chinese development of operational concepts to enable the PLA to fight and win ‘local wars under Informatized conditions’. 55 Thus Chinese military modernisation through development of ‘shashoujian’ (Assassin’s Mace) capabilities such as Anti-Satellite (ASAT) weapons and the DF-21D Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile, add to China’s ability to fight and win a local war under Informatized conditions. In analysing Chinese thinking on the RMA, Newmyer states that:

‘…the Chinese RMA vision is to acquire the capability to inflict significant costs on an adversary, even a conventionally superior one, through a variety of means from targeting space assets and electro-magnetic pulse attacks to strikes on aircraft carriers and even civilian computer networks.’ 56

Most significantly, the Chinese have understood that technology alone does not make an RMA – it is technology combined with doctrinal innovation and organisational reform that when brought together generates decisive change in military effectiveness. This has led to a greater emphasis on transformation within the PLA to include the emphasis on building a means for Integrated Joint Operations (IJO) through both organisation reform and new approaches to military training and education, as well as developing Information Warfare (IW) as a central aspect of Chinese military thinking on future operations, and fully understanding and exploiting advances of other states to ‘leap ahead’ in developing new military capabilities.

If there is to be an arms race in East Asia, it would seem two prospective drivers may emerge. The first is in the development of capabilities designed to neutralise information-led ‘RMA’ type capabilities – most notably in terms of capabilities design to attack an opponent’s critical

53Information Office of the State Council, The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces, Beijing, April 2013.
56Newmyer, ibid., p. 501.
information systems, and conversely, defend against such attacks. Cyberwarfare and ‘cyber weapons’ represent the cutting edge of military capabilities designed to exploit – or deny, an information-led RMA. The combination of rapid disabling or disrupting capabilities provided by Cyberwarfare challenges the very basis of an information-led RMA, and countering such a capability will be critical for the US and its allies in Asia. Thus an offensive vs. defensive race to prevent one state acquiring a decisive advantage in Cyberwarfare is likely in a manner that may intensify the risk of security dilemmas given the opaque and unregulated nature of state-based development of Cyberwarfare as a new form of warfare in the 21st Century.

Nor would such a race be purely constrained to Cyberspace. China’s approach to network-centric warfare is based on its concept of ‘Integrated Networked Electronic Warfare’ (INEW) and includes kinetic, as well as electronic warfare (EW) and Cyberwarfare based counter-space capabilities designed to neutralise an adversary’s critical satellites. Thomas argues that China’s goal with INEW is to ‘…take the initiative and effectively destroy the enemy’s electronic information systems.’ Therefore states which embrace an information-led RMA, and are dependent on space-based intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance satellites, communications satellites, and precision navigation and timing satellites (e.g. GPS) to sustain their ability to undertake military effectiveness, will be directly challenged by the growing capabilities of China in Information Warfare, Cyberwarfare, INEW, and counter-space capabilities. Indeed, the combination of Cyberwarfare and Space Warfare capabilities to counter an opponent’s ‘knowledge edge’ represents the greatest risk of an intensifying arms race that could act to destabilise the region.

Secondly, the current emphasis on building information-led warfare capabilities also includes platforms as part of a system of systems approach to warfare. Acquisitions of advanced air and naval capabilities, missile systems, and platforms designed to support ‘the sharp end’ of armed forces, such as airborne ISR and logistics platforms, will continue. As noted above, there is already a degree of action-reaction acquisitions amongst certain states within East Asia, in part driven by instability in the East and South China Seas. Development of more sophisticated naval and air capabilities are clearly underway, with investment in aircraft carrier and amphibious vessels, submarines, and more advanced combat aircraft, along with advanced missile systems.

A third factor that bears watching is the growing utility of unmanned systems in the air and on and under the sea. Unmanned systems have shot to prominence as a result of the use of ‘drones’ in the war on terror. The use of missile-armed drones to attack terrorist and insurgent forces has not only generated a multitude of legal and ethical issues related to the legitimacy of the use of force, but it highlights a potential ‘next step’ in warfare beyond the information-led RMA – specifically, the depopulation of the battlespace. China is rapidly developing a range of airborne unmanned systems which would be most likely employed in an airborne surveillance role over disputed territories. But such unmanned systems could also be armed, allowing China the option to use force without risking its personnel. The role of unmanned systems is already generating regional concerns. Japan has warned of its willingness to shoot

down Chinese unmanned aircraft entering declared Japanese airspace around the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. China has responded that such a step would represent an act of war on the part of Japan.\textsuperscript{60}

**Conclusion**

Whether current trends in Asian military modernisation evolve towards a regional arms race depends on the regional security context. To return to an earlier question, does China seeks to change the status quo in a manner that is inimical to the interests of its neighbours and the US a key player in the region? Current indicators in terms of the responses of China’s neighbours – notably Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam – to China’s activities in the East and South China Sea do not bode well for a more peaceful environment that is conducive to managing arms acquisitions through cooperative security architectures, or through Confidence and Security Building Measures such as a proposed ‘Code of Conduct’ on the South China Sea.

The compressed geostrategic environment of both ‘seas of contention’ combined with the accelerating pace of modern information-led warfare increases the risk of incidents occurring between disputing parties, generating pressures for rapid escalation. Furthermore the nature of 21\textsuperscript{st} Century military capabilities – in particular the role of Cyberwarfare – and the implications of deploying unmanned systems around disputed territories raises further difficulties about just what constitutes aggression, and what constitutes a legitimate response.

Any consideration of an East Asian arms race in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century would be lacking if it ignored the broader prospect for major power competition between a rising China, and the US which could prompt rapid change to force structures and postures on both sides, with potentially unpredictable consequences. From the perspective of Beijing, the US ‘rebalancing to Asia’ is already seen as a form of US ‘containment’ that threatens China’s legitimate right to recapture great power, or even superpower status.\textsuperscript{61} Conversely China’s development of advanced counter-intervention (i.e. anti-access and area denial) capabilities has generated concerns that China seeks to prevent the US enjoying freedom of navigation of the seas within strategically important regions of Asia, and in the process, challenge US strategic primacy in Asia. The US counter-response is in the form of both rebalancing, and the development of the ‘Air Sea Battle’ concept, even though the US does not declare Air Sea Battle to be aimed at China per se.\textsuperscript{62} Whilst it can certainly be argued that China’s military modernisation is a ‘natural and legitimate outcome of its economic growth’, it is equally valid to be wary given that this will inevitably affect the strategic calculations and posture of regional countries and is changing the balance of military power in the western Pacific.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60}Harumi Ozawa, “Japan’s PM warns China on use of force as jets scrambled” in *Defense News*, October 27\textsuperscript{th} 2013.


\textsuperscript{62}Benjamin Schreer, *Planning the unthinkable war – ‘AirSea Battle’ and its implications for Australia*, ASPI, April 2013, p. 10

\textsuperscript{63}Australian Department of Defence, *Defence White Paper 2013*, 2.29, p. 13