

# China's Strategic Culture and Sino-US Military Relations: A Re-view

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*China's strategic culture professes both peace and aggression, but is also marked by ruse and deception. Military power is a necessary ingredient of great power status and China's current rise includes hi-tech military modernisation that can challenge the only contender it has in the Asia-Pacific, the United States. Sino-US relations in the post-Cold War period have been marked by both peaceful economic cooperation and discord over various military and non-military issues, but given America's economic enmeshment in China, a level of engagement even at the military-to-military level has been always maintained. However, China's military growth is not transparent, and from what can be gauged its focus is on how to strike at American power without matching it quantitatively or qualitatively. Studying Sino-US military relations can therefore give an insight into China's military power.*

*"People who remember their oneness with each other and flow in peace and harmony do not contend with each other".*

*- Confucius, The Analects, Book III, c. 551-479 B.C.<sup>1</sup>*

*"All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near. Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him".*

*- Sun Tzu, The Art of War, c. 500 B.C.<sup>2</sup>*

## Introduction

It is important to understand the psyche of a state through a study of its historic war or peace traditions in order to develop any kind of strategic response to its military development.<sup>3</sup> China is considered by many to be the rising star – the next superpower – of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, not only because of its amazing economic growth record, but also because it is modernising its military technology and making the People's Liberation Army (PLA) a modern fighting force capable of taking on any country not by sheer numbers alone, but through strategy and superior technology as well. China has always claimed that its civilisation is pacifistic, and this has

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been articulated not only in its 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence', but again and again in various official policy statements. It bases its claims to 'peace and harmony' on its historical Confucian culture. According to its 1998 Defence White Paper: "The defensive nature of China's national defense policy...springs from the country's historical and cultural traditions...throughout history the Chinese people have longed for peace in the world and for relations of friendship with the people of other countries. In military affairs, this maxim means solving disputes by non-military means, being wary of war and strategically gaining mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck".<sup>4</sup> Its latest Defence White Paper (2010) also emphasises the defensive nature of China's military build up stressing that "China maintains its commitment to the new security concepts of mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination...China strives to build, through its peaceful development, a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity".<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, China also has a history of war and aggression. Leaving aside the history of the Warring States period (403-221 B.C.),<sup>6</sup> the history of modern China shows that it does act aggressively although it also follows Sun Tzu's dictum of using ruse rather than outright force as a strategy, and moreover, again following Sun Tzu's advice, has never been involved in any long drawn war. Its acts of aggression against India (1962) and Vietnam (1979), though not highlighted by Western China-scholars, who prefer to discuss China's stance during the Korean War (where Mao Zedong appeared to be predisposed to intervene early in the crisis), were both brief but bloody. However, China has mainly tended to use means other than war against its enemies: for instance, transfer of nuclear technology and the facilitation of transfer of missiles through its territory to enemies of its perceived enemies, as well as overt and covert aid to regimes friendly to China, which may actually be destabilising international peace and harmony through ethnic cleansing, authoritarian repression or even genocide.

Both Confucius and Sun Tzu lived around the same time and both influenced the culture of China, one with his pacifist and philosophical sayings, the other with his 'art of war', thus imparting a kind of duality to China's strategic culture. There is also a duality in the popular perception of China, particularly in the West: on the one hand, China is seen as a problem, that is, as a country that violates human rights norms, denies the rule of law, resists democratisation, contributes to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and is yet successful economically and can provide an alternative model of growth that eschews democracy; on the other hand, some analysts, particularly in Asia and Africa see China's development as providing an alternative paradigm, with Joshua Cooper Ramo popularising the term 'Beijing Consensus' as an alternative to the

Washington Consensus.<sup>7</sup> The Beijing Consensus takes a pragmatic approach to reforms, supports a larger role for the state than the Washington Consensus did, emphasises economic reforms before democratisation, and promotes the Chinese view that even universal human rights are contingent on local circumstances. For Third World countries where democracy and liberalism have failed to solve the problems of social inequality and human development and where following the Washington Consensus norms often meant further poverty and deprivation for the masses, the Beijing Consensus provides a kind of East Asian model that will enable developing countries to grow in their own way, just as China has done. At the same time, Western states, particularly some American scholars, view the rise of China and the role it may play in future world politics as a threat to Western, especially American, predominance.

This brings us to the question of how the United States (US) views the rise of China. The US is now the sole superpower in an, as yet, unipolar moment. While US-China relations during the Cold War period hinged on a third angle to the equation – the Soviet Union (USSR) – and both countries saw the USSR as the bigger threat to be leveraged through cordial relations between themselves, China's phenomenal rise in the post-Cold War period and its effect on US-China relations is another story altogether. In fact, there appears to be a duality in every aspect of contemporary relations. In the economic sphere, Sino-US trade and investment have helped the US economy to survive, but on the other hand, it has resulted in huge trade deficits for America, and now China holds the largest number of American treasury securities.<sup>8</sup> Business with China has created a strong pro-China lobby in Washington, but there is also a strong pro-human rights, pro-democracy, anti-China pressure group as well that influences policy. On the security front, China's rapid military modernisation programme along with its slow but steady power projection, makes it a country to contend with as well as engage, so that America's interests in the region and elsewhere are not subverted. The ups and downs in policy perception are apparent in President Clinton seeing China as a potential 'strategic partner', while his successor, George Bush initiated a shift in approach, at least verbally, by describing the country as a 'strategic competitor'.<sup>9</sup> The Obama administration began its stint by prioritising China, but its perceptions of that country appear to be changing. The purpose of the present paper is to show how China's military modernisation is causing the US to reorient the focus of its military research and development and perhaps re-assess its strategic partnerships with countries neighbouring China. At the same time, perhaps because of its economic stakes *vis-à-vis* China, it cannot afford to antagonise that country and therefore follows a policy of not only economic but also strategic engagement with China leading to a kind of duality in its foreign policy approach: on the one hand, it is wary of China and is

matching China's military growth item by item; on the other hand, it is continuing its strategic dialogue with the country. China's military policy is less transparent and is made more complex by repeated assurances that it seeks peace and harmony in the world, although some of its provocative actions do not match its words. The fact is that it is a rising power and military might is one of the main attributes of great power status in contemporary world politics. Therefore, although China claims that its military modernisation is only for defensive purposes, its motives are yet not clear. This paper will first briefly review Sino-US military diplomacy in the post-Cold War period; it will then discuss China's military modernisation programme; it will finally examine whether or how the modernisation of the PLA is a threat to the US and America's response in that context, particularly whether its response will include some of China's neighbours, for instance, India.

### **Sino-US Military Diplomacy**

The Kissinger/Nixon breakthrough in Sino-US relations in the early 1970s marked the transformation of a relationship from hostile military confrontation to one of "military restraint and cautious accommodation", and even though the two countries were far from being allies, there were "certain elements of parallelism and even of tacit cooperation".<sup>10</sup> Since then, the relationship has gone through periods of forward movement and regression, interspersed by periods that can best be described as 'plateaus'. What is interesting is that even during the phases of stress, there appeared to be a desire on both sides to limit the erosion and maintain a positive public façade.<sup>11</sup>

Military relations were the weakest aspect of Sino-US relations because of differences in the policy on core security concerns like arms sales, the Taiwan issue, North Korea, WMD proliferation etc. Despite these differences, there were high points: the US-China nuclear agreement of 1985 for instance, that authorised the sale of nuclear reactors, major reactor components and low-enriched uranium (LEU) to China. The agreement was significant because this was not only America's first trade pact with a communist country but it was also the first such bilateral agreement with another nuclear weapon state. Moreover, Article 8, Section 2 of the agreement exempted bilateral safeguards on transferred items, even though critics voiced concerns over China's record of assisting non-nuclear states to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>12</sup> By 1987, four weapon technology transfer agreements had been signed: a \$22 million large calibre artillery modernisation programme, a \$8 million MK-46 Mod 2 torpedo sale, a \$62 million AN/TPQ-37 artillery locating radar sale, and a \$500 million F-8 interceptor avionics modernisation programme.<sup>13</sup> While the PLA was interested in America's military hardware, the US was interested in

gaining knowledge about the PLA through military contacts which would ensue from the sale of its hardware. The PLA, however, was far from transparent, and military relations in any case soured because of China's sale of Silkworm anti-ship missiles to Iran in 1987 (which China publicly denied), and a later revelation in 1988 that it had sold CSS-2 Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles (IRBMs) to Saudi Arabia.

Shortly thereafter, the Tiananmen Square massacres led to a total breakdown of military-to-military activities with the PLA including suspension of attaché exchanges, technology transfer, arms sales etc. But this soon led to a debate in American policy circles regarding the impact of such disengagement on the US because it deprived the US of a chance to see the other face of China – information on Chinese military sales etc, that could not be picked up through satellites.<sup>14</sup> As a result of this re-think, President Clinton adopted a policy of engaging China even from the military angle, and even though there was reason enough for military relations to sour, the Clinton administration continued to consider China as a potential strategic partner through the rest of the decade. According to US defence secretary, William Perry, “The military relationship with China could pay significant dividends for the DoD”. He hoped that US engagement would make the PLA more open and lessen the chances of disagreement.<sup>15</sup>

Although the US did pass a law in 1995 to bar the Pentagon from assisting the PLA in defence conversion, military relations remained robust in this period despite diplomatic spats over Taiwan. The Chinese defence minister General Chi Haotian visited the US in 1996 when the two sides agreed to facilitate exchange of ship visits. In 1997 and 1998, the two sides agreed to restore a number of functional military exchanges, multilateral dialogue and adopt confidence-building measures, and in 1997, the US and China held their first Defence Consultative Talks (DCT). In 1998, America signed the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) with Beijing, which was designed to reduce the chances of a military misunderstanding in the air or at sea. US army representatives made several visits to selected PLA bases, and their PLA counterparts also made return visits to US installations - including an unauthorised visit to an US submarine.<sup>16</sup> May be the bonhomie was going too far: the *Washington Times* leaked a defence department ‘game plan’ that called for at least 80 different military-to-military activities with the PLA including PLA observation of training manoeuvres by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Army and a trip to Sanda National Laboratory.<sup>17</sup> What was interesting is that all this was happening at a time when there were allegations of Chinese espionage against the US.

China's strategic culture is further revealed by the fact that while maintaining good relations with the US which was then trying to promote the Missile Technology

Control Regime (MTCR), the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) all over the world, China was involved in the transfer of nuclear technology to Pakistan during this period. US analysts, however, did not mention it at the time, and even today, despite the matter being proven, American scholars prefer to play it down although this went against the non-proliferation regime that President Clinton was trying to promote. This may be explained by the fact that the US considers Pakistan to be an ally, and in any case cannot afford to destabilise the country because of its own interests in the region. However, it is a fact that China was a supplier of MTCR-restricted missiles, components and technology not only to Pakistan in the 1990s but also to Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria.<sup>18</sup>

Pakistan was also sold a nuclear reactor that was said to be a replica of China's first indigenous nuclear power plant. While the US did impose sanctions on China for supplying Pakistan with M-11 missiles, these were mild and did not hamper overall Sino-US military relations. China may also have played a role in facilitating the sale of North Korean Nodong missiles to Pakistan (which in any case had to pass through China to reach Pakistan), which were re-christened as 'Ghauri'. Although US relations with Pakistan cooled, those with China remained strong throughout the decade of the 1990s.

Apart from Pakistan, China apparently helped Iran in its efforts to develop nuclear capacity. It is said to have supplied two sub-critical 'training reactors' to Iran in 1985 as well as a small electromagnetic isotope separator (a calutron) for use in its Isfahan facility. In 1990, the two countries signed a 10-year nuclear cooperation agreement and China helped build a 27 KW research reactor which became operational in 1994. Although this was for civilian purposes, the fear was that technology was being transferred. As a result of US pressure, as well as some China-Iran financial disagreements (which may be the primary reason), US and China signed a deal cutting off China's remaining assistance.<sup>19</sup> China also apparently helped North Korea to develop its missile technology although later, in tandem with changing geopolitics, the People's Republic's (PRC) priorities too have changed as can be seen from its diplomatic recognition of South Korea in 1992. However, China may not wish to destabilise North Korea – which could lead to unification and democracy, a prospect that would go against China's strategic interests. As such, despite its apparent facilitation of the six-party negotiations, it has never been too keen to stretch matters so as to alienate North Korea.<sup>20</sup>

The reason that all this is being mentioned is because that at the time that the US was trying to 'engage' China, it was pursuing its own agenda, and with hind

sight it seems to have been following Sun Tzu's policy of gaining 'victory' without war, through ruse and deception, which had also been reflected in Mao Zedong's concept of People's War (though in a different context). One point that needs to be emphasised is that the PRC has never been transparent in its military dealings or affairs. While there has been some transfer of technology from the US to China, the US has little knowledge of China's military affairs. China on the other hand, appears to have well placed sources in the US who can supply information clandestinely: the Director of US Central Intelligence, George Tenet, reported in 1999 that classified US nuclear weapons information had been obtained by China through espionage, and this had helped to accelerate the Chinese nuclear weaponisation programme including that of the neutron bomb.<sup>21</sup> At a time when military-to-military relations were at a peak, the bipartisan House Select Committee on US National Security/ Commercial Concerns with China (Cox Committee, 1998) reported that information about the W88, the advanced nuclear miniature warhead deployed on the Trident II SLBM, may have been leaked to China from Los Alamos.<sup>22</sup> All this increased concerns regarding US national security and there was a rethinking of America's China policy by the next administration: President Bush's administration thought of China more as a strategic competitor than a strategic partner. Although the terror attacks on critical American institutions on September 11, 2001, gave a new twist to US foreign policy, the Bush administration remained wary of China's emergence as a military major power,<sup>23</sup> and perhaps the rapid improvement in India-US strategic relations during this period beginning with the 'Next Steps in Strategic Partnership' (NSSP) and ending with the signing of the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, almost on the terms that India wanted, had something to do with the American perception of China as a threat.

### **China's Military Modernisation Programme**

According to Prof. John Mearsheimer, of the University of Chicago:

China – whether it remains authoritarian or becomes democratic – is likely to try to dominate Asia the way the US dominates the Western hemisphere...why would a powerful China accept US military forces operating in its backyard?...Following the logic of the Monroe Doctrine, would not China's security be better served by pushing the American military out of Asia?...[But] The US does not tolerate peer competitors...Therefore, the US can be expected to go to great lengths to contain China...In essence, the US is likely to behave towards China much the way it behaved towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Mearsheimer is of the opinion that neighbouring countries like India, Japan, Russia, South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam that fear the rise of China are likely to join "an American-led balancing coalition" to check China's rise.<sup>24</sup> It is a fact that US military relations with China's neighbours are improving; it is also true that China is improving its relations with many of its neighbours and has gained / is attempting to acquire military bases in other countries. China has also begun to rapidly modernise its military, making it capable of power projection, a matter of considerable worry to the US. To understand the possible trajectory of US-China military relations, it is important to analyse the PLA's post-1991 modernisation and its command and control structure, although little information is available due to China's lack of transparency.

Following the 1991 Gulf War and America's display of its many different types of fire power, China embarked on a period of rapid military modernisation. It had the world's largest standing army, but its weaponry was obsolete. This realisation made China focus on a 'Revolution in Military Affairs' (RMA), which became part of its military strategy from 1993. It acquired advanced weaponry from Russia including the Sovremenny class destroyers, Su-27 and Su-30 aircraft, Kilo class diesel-electric submarines etc. The PLA air force built indigenous J-10 fighter jets and China built Jin class nuclear submarines, capable of launching nuclear warheads across the Pacific, in 2004. In the army, technology intensive elements were introduced, which included special operations forces, army aviation (helicopters), electronic warfare units, long range precision strike capability, unmanned aerial vehicles, surveillance and reconnaissance systems and mobile command and control units. The navy introduced the CJ-10 naval cruise missile system in 2009. Further advances have been made in the last couple of years: in January 2011 (coinciding with the visit of the US defence secretary, Robert Gates, to China, it confirmed the successful test flight of its J-20 stealth fighter jet, which will rival Lockheed Martin's Raptor, the world's only operational stealth fighter so far, that has been designed to evade enemy radar. Modernisation has also included early warning aircraft and in-flight refuelling capacity to give its fighters greater reach. It is also likely to launch its first aircraft carrier in 2011.<sup>25</sup> In June 2005, China began sea trials of Luyong II guided missile destroyers, which are equipped with a system similar to the US navy's Aegis battle management system, a technology that allows forces to simultaneously attack land targets, submarines and surface ships.<sup>26</sup>

China apparently has 100 to 400 nuclear weapons, and about 1400 missiles pointed at Taiwan.<sup>27</sup> What is significant is China's an indigenous aeronautics industry as well as a formidable design capability. The number of domestic suppliers to the PLA is formidable, some of the important ones being Norinco, Aviation Industry

Corporation of China, Harbin Aircraft manufacturing Corporation, China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, China State Shipbuilding Corporation, to name a few. This implies that China need not depend on foreign suppliers or technology particularly for its air force, although Russia, Israel, France and Germany, among others, remain its suppliers for military equipment, and it does import crucial minerals etc including uranium from African states. However, dependence on foreign suppliers (for other than raw materials) is less for China than for other emerging states.

What is even more significant is its development of space-age technology. In 1985, the US had successfully destroyed one of its own satellites with a missile, but no further anti-satellite (ASAT) tests had been undertaken till recent times. In 2007, however, China launched a ground based missile against one of its own 4-foot wide weather satellites, destroying it at 530 miles above the earth. This was followed by the US shooting down one of its own malfunctioning spy satellite, USA 193, 150 miles above the earth, using a sophisticated SM-3 missile – an operation that took only three minutes. China, soon after, on January 11, 2010, conducted a test on ground based midcourse missile interceptor technology “within its own territory”: this involved a SC-19 missile launched from the Korla Missile Test Complex that successfully intercepted a near-simultaneously launched CSS-X-11 medium range ballistic missile launched from Shuangchengzi, at an altitude of 250 kms. This was followed by a US ‘laser plane’ shooting down a missile.<sup>28</sup> The US demarche after the January 11, star-wars-like Chinese scenario has been reported in *Wikileaks*: it questioned China on whether the intercept flight-test was a part of its Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programme and in the context of missile defence, how did China view this in relation to Asia-Pacific military balance, deterrence and stability. It called for a bilateral dialogue to enhance transparency, but at the same time expressed its desire to tell Australia, South Korea and Japan to send similar demarches.<sup>29</sup>

The point here is that a kind of rivalry in space weaponisation appears to be emerging between the US and China. Despite its profession of peace towards all, China realises the importance of satellites and BMD in future wars. In a world of fast growing dependence on space-age instruments to conduct its wars (through the Global Positioning System and spy satellites, for instance) and even to run its daily life (communications systems, computer-driven technology etc), if a country can knock off the key satellites of an enemy state, it will undoubtedly have an edge in the war. While conventional war machines are important, China will take quite some time to catch up with the US in terms of numbers and quality, but if it focuses on new types of weapons that can strike at the heart of America’s military strength, it certainly will have an advantage. It is in this context that one can also

view China's development of cybernetics, and the ease with which the Chinese hack the most difficult of codes. In recent years, there have been many reports of official complicity in Chinese hacking incidents. For instance, according to the *New York Times*, Wikileaks cables revealed that the US was blaming the Chinese Politburo for hacking into Google: "[It] was part of a coordinated campaign of computer sabotage carried out by government operatives, private security experts and Internet outlaws recruited by the Chinese government. They have broken into American government computers and those of Western allies, the Dalai Lama and American businesses since 2002...".<sup>30</sup> In fact, although China denies it, a mystery electronic spy network dubbed GhostNet, which was traced to China by Canadian researchers, infiltrated at least 1295 computers in 103 countries belonging to embassies, media groups, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government foreign ministries and the office of the Dalai Lama. Further, it appeared to be more focused on countries of South and South East Asia. Interestingly, this bug could turn on cameras and microphones in the infected computer, and therefore anyone in the room could be spied on.<sup>31</sup> Pentagon officials are aware of the threat since cyber attacks could cripple American financial, military and communications capabilities early in any war. The Pentagon logged over 79,000 attempts at hacking as early as 2005, of which 1300 were successful and included computers linked to the US military's 101<sup>st</sup> and 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Divisions. The US identified two hackers from the PLA, who, according to the author of a US Army War College report, Larry M. Wortzel, produced a "virtual guidebook for electronic warfare and jamming".<sup>32</sup> According to a 2010 report of the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, these activities continue and have some level of Chinese state support.<sup>33</sup> Such activities are of obvious concern to other countries as well, particularly those whose interests do not coincide with those of China. What should be noted is that China appears to be aware of its shortcomings and strengths, and to overcome its weaknesses, it is developing technology (ASAT, BMD etc) as a means of war against the world's leading military power that it cannot hope to match in conventional warfare in the near future but can cripple through technological means. Current developments imply that it has plans for a brief but decisive war and it is employing ruse (espionage, hacking etc) as per Sun Tzu's dictum.

It is important to study the control structure of the PLA to understand the complexities of dealing with a country adopts a dual approach. According to Mao: "The party commands the gun but the gun must never command the party".<sup>34</sup> Many scholars are of the opinion that the Long March established the control of the party over the military and forged a link between the civil and military leadership.<sup>35</sup> But

China has come a long way since then and its more recent leaders like Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao do not have any military experience and certainly did not participate in the Long March. Still, the PLA is an essential element in Chinese politics, both internal and foreign, because it is assumed to have a deep impact on political outcomes. Moreover, the PLA as an institution was seen by scholars in the 1990s as being more bellicose than the civilian political leadership.<sup>36</sup>

The PLA is under the command of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC). The Chinese ministry of national defence, which operates under the State Council, does not exercise any authority over the PLA, and is apparently far less powerful than the CMC; its function is that of a liaising with foreign militaries. This may imply that the PLA today is independent of state control. However, a military man has never been chair of the CMC, a position that has always been occupied by the *de facto* or *de jure* paramount political leader of the day. As such, there is ultimate political control over the PLA and though it may be involved internally in policy decisions and crisis management, it does not make statements on behalf of the Chinese government. For example, in crises like the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 or the mid-air collision of an EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft with Chinese F-8 fighter jet over the South China Sea, China spoke with a single voice demanding that the US claim responsibility and apologise, unlike the US where the military made statements before the government.<sup>37</sup>

However, the PLA must be playing a major role in strategy formation and military decision making. For Mao the essence of revolutionary war as one waged by the army with the people, defined as the People's War. In the post-Deng period, the PLA dictum changed to "Local, Limited War under High Technology Conditions".<sup>38</sup> This requires expertise and therefore, differentiates the military leadership from the political. The change implies that the PLA is now trained to fight short wars, with minimum Chinese casualties, outside China's borders by using high technology and limiting the fighting. The added implication is that since political leaders no longer have military expertise, the PLA must have a major say in strategy formation and foreign policy decisions, even though the political leadership has ultimate control over the PLA.

### **Modernisation of the PLA and Its Implications**

With the kind of dual signals coming out of China, the US too has blown both hot and cold *vis-à-vis* China. China's economy makes it attractive, particularly because it claims that its intentions are peaceful; at the same time, its military posture makes

it appear a looming threat. To be fair, America's huge presence in the Pacific and its criticism of China for wanting to upgrade its military capability far beyond its borders may appear unreasonable to a rising power,<sup>39</sup> particularly one that has suffered humiliation from foreigners for at least a century. But at the same time, the US, the only remaining superpower, would also like to hold on to its superpower status, unchallenged by any country as long as it can.

The Obama administration began its stint with what it called a policy of "strategic reassurance" with China, the idea being that if the US assured China that it would not impede its global rise, China would reciprocate by working with the international community on global issues.<sup>40</sup> This did not happen; instead, China sharply cut back its military contacts with the US after America announced a major weapons sale (\$6.4 billion) to Taiwan in early 2010. In fact, through that year, US concerns rose as China bullied its neighbours over the long-disputed issue of the South China Sea; when North Korea sank the South Korean ship, *Cheonan*, in March 2010, it did not criticise North Korea as the US expected it to do; when North Korea shelled Yeongpyeong Island off the coast of South Korea in November, killing South Korean civilians, China barely protested; on the other hand, it imposed an embargo on rare earths against Japan in the wake of a Chinese fishing boat collision with a Japanese patrol boat. Chinese submarines have, in fact, been spotted in Japan's territorial waters, and the PLA helicopters have been buzzing Japanese troops. China further signalled its defiance of the US by testing its J-20 stealth fighter during the visit of US defence secretary Robert Gates in January 2011. Chinese ships have also been shadowing US ships in the South China Sea.<sup>41</sup> The year ended with Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo winning the Nobel Peace prize and China's tirade against Liu and the Nobel Committee. The US retaliated with senior officials including the secretaries of state and defence making pointed comments on China's actions. Later, when attempts began to be made for improvement of relations, Robert Gates anticipated that there could only be "evolutionary" growth in US-China military-to-military relations, not "breakthroughs and headlines".<sup>42</sup>

The fact is that there is a mutual suspicion between the US and China regarding each other's military intentions. The Chinese military White Paper" of 2010, while professing China's peaceful intentions and setting out its defence priorities, also expressed fears regarding the US and other countries:

International military competition remains fierce. Major powers are stepping up the realignment of their security and military strategies, accelerating military reform, and vigorously developing new and more sophisticated military technologies. Some powers

have worked out strategies for outer space, cyber space and the Polar Regions, developed means for prompt global strikes, accelerated development of missile defence systems, enhanced cyber operations capabilities to occupy new strategic commanding heights. Some developing countries maintain the push towards strengthening their armed forces, and press on with military modernisation...Suspicion about China, interference and countering moves against China from the outside are on the increase. The United States, in defiance of the three Sino-US joint communiqués, continues to sell weapons to Taiwan, severely impeding Sino-US relations and impairing the peaceful development of cross-Strait relations.<sup>43</sup>

It also voiced its concerns regarding the US reinforcing its regional military alliances and increasing its involvement in regional security affairs. It is interesting that both the US and China have increased their military budgets – China, from 532.1 billion yuan in 2010 to 601.1 billion yuan in 2011, and the US proposed a \$553 billion budget for 2012, up \$22 billion from 2010. What is even more interesting is the focus of China's military modernization as presented in the White Paper, which confirms the present papers premise regarding the PLA's plans for the conduct of future wars:

It strengthens the building of a new type of combat capability to win local wars in conditions of informationisation, strengthens the composite development of mechanisation and informationisation with the latter as the leading factor, focuses informationisation on raising its fighting capabilities based on information systems, and enhances the capabilities in fire power, mobility, protection, support and informationisation.<sup>44</sup>

However, despite differences and mutual mistrust, the US and China cannot afford to let military tensions get the better of military diplomacy in a period of volatility. Low level military contacts have been maintained kept right through and consultations held on maritime safety etc. Senior PLA officers accompanied civilian officials for the first time at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Strategic and Economic Dialogue in May 2011, the idea being that security issues cannot be totally separated from other issues when having a 'strategic' dialogue. This was followed by a week long visit by PLA officials led by General Chen Bingde, the PLA's chief of general staff, who met with his US counterpart, Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff. Both sides are concerned about misunderstandings and misjudgments that could impact bilateral relations and even trigger limited conflagrations. The visit was not

aimed at resolving fundamental policy differences, but to keep military-to-military relations from derailing, and as such, although there is an improvement from the past year and a half, there have been no major breakthroughs. For China, the three primary obstacles to better relations with the US are: arms sales to Taiwan, military reconnaissance in what China considers to be its exclusive economic zone, and US laws restraining exchanges and technical cooperation between the countries. The US, however views the South China Sea as international waters, and it also views China's military technological advance with suspicion; it therefore uses China's crushing of dissidents to block technology exchange.

### **US-China Military Relations and Implications for India**

What is the importance of studying US-China military relations from the Indian point of view? Although this question is peripheral to the central focus of this paper, it is important to draw lessons from the military relations between the two countries which will help India to draw up its own policies *vis-à-vis* China. The US is the sole superpower and is wary of the rise of China, which it predicts will be a leading military power by 2025.<sup>45</sup> China's military modernization has everything to do with rivaling America's advanced military technology as is evident from the present paper. Studying Sino-US relations will give an insight into China's strategic culture as well as the kind of weapons that it has been focusing on.

Further, while China and America have been engaging each other, both have been approaching South and South East Asian countries for improved military relations. Perhaps both countries are seeking allies in their race for power in the Asia-Pacific. China's defence minister, Gen. Liang Guanglie, attended the recent Shangri-La Dialogue (Asia Security Summit, Singapore, 3-5 June 2011) on regional security issues for the first time, indicating China's increased engagement with the region. Interestingly, the Indian defence minister, A.K. Antony did not attend and sent the deputy minister instead. According to Tim Huxley, the executive director of the International Institute of Strategic Studies-Asia, the organiser of the conference, Antony's absence, "may highlight the determination and relative coherence of China's regional posture and the contrastingly weak nature of India's".<sup>46</sup> The US has been participating from the beginning and has also participated in other Asian security dialogues. China is often viewed as one of the major security challenges for India by its policy makers.<sup>47</sup> In today's world, the most pragmatic way of meeting challenges is by neutralising them through engagement with the country concerned as well with other countries in the region and elsewhere. It is time for India to have its own security strategy, which should include regular and not casual engagement with regional powers as well as with the US.

India's defence capabilities are certainly not at par with those of China and India should do well to remember the lessons of 1962, and not take China's professions of peace and good faith at face value given its territorial disputes with China as well as its housing of the Dalai Lama, in addition to its strained relations with Pakistan, China's ally. China's strategic culture is based on ruse and deception, and India would do well to study its relations with other countries to assess the PRC. India should also synchronise its interests with the US, and gauge how far India can cooperate with the US without losing sight of its own national interests. China's "string of pearls" naval strategy, despite Hu Jintao's profession of the goal of a "harmonious ocean", puts India at a disadvantage, just as it affects US military strategy because China can control the choke points from Hong Kong to Port Sudan. The US too realises that if it has to effectively contain China militarily, it will need the assistance of countries that are also wary of China's rise, for instance, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and of course, Australia and Japan. The Bush administration's successful attempt to push through the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, despite all odds, can be partially explained by the rationale that the US wants to see a strong India as a counter to China. The current Obama administration too has reviewed its defence relations with India. Robert Gates, speaking at the Asian security conference in 2010 said: "In coming years, we look to India to be a partner and net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond".<sup>48</sup> Among the means that he visualised for the development of military cooperation was inter-operability through common equipment, since joint exercises have been going on since 2002. Although China is never specifically mentioned anywhere, the fact that India and the US have held high altitude exercises in Ladakh - an area that borders both China and Pakistan- only signifies common concern.<sup>49</sup> The fact that China too followed this up with its own high altitude live fire exercises in Tibet has implications for both Sino-Indian and US-India relations. India needs to study China and the PLA from all angles and come up with a credible strategy that would involve engaging more with the US, without joining any kind of alliance, for improving its military technology and training.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it can be said that there is no doubt that China's ambition is to be a global power within the next few decades, and this assumes that it will be among the military heavyweights of the world. Its main contender in the Asia-Pacific in this context is not an Asian power but the US. America's defence spending is much larger than that of China and its military technology is as yet far superior to China's. Air-to-air refuelling, precision guided bombs, unmanned aerial vehicles fitted with specialist eavesdropping equipment, air-borne warning and control (AWAC) systems, stealth aircraft (and perhaps helicopters), thermobaric fuel-air

bombs and many other state-of-art technologies were developed by the US many years and even decades earlier. China knows it will be a long time before it can catch up with the US. The premise of this paper is that China, in order to accelerate its rise to great power status, is focusing on technologies that can strike quickly at the heart of America's technology-driven military power, thus paralysing its advantages by targeting satellites and communications systems. It is also using ruse and deception, which are inherent in its strategic culture *a la* Sun Tzu to gain information to put it in an advantageous position and at the same time, promote itself as a peace-loving and non-aggressive country. The US will not let go of its superpower position easily, and it too is developing concepts that were thought to have become passé with the end of the Cold War such as – BMD, ASAT systems, Theatre Missile Defence etc. It is therefore important for countries like India, which also look at China's rise with a degree of suspicion, to keep a close tab on Sino-US relations in order to shape their own military policies regarding both China and the US. 

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