

Revisiting the Songs of the Chu

by

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November 2011

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A Chengyu is a set of four Chinese characters used to convey the essential theme of a mythical or historic tale. The Chengyu 四面楚歌 (Surrounded by Songs of the Chu) comes from the ancient war between the State of Chu and the Han Kingdom. During the final battle, the leader of the Han forces out flanks and surrounds the Chu Army. During the night, he orders his troops to sing songs from the Chu homeland which causes the Chu warriors to lose heart thinking that many of their fellow soldiers had defected to the other side. The current meaning of the Chengyu is to be surrounded and besieged.

National borders impact the fundamental characteristics, historical development and stability of a state. These invisible lines of demarcation represent the sovereignty of a government and color its perceptions on a variety of security issues that range from forming alliances, to external threats. Through necessity, nations that share multiple borders develop complex strategies and policies to deal with the competing demands of their various neighbors. The failure to properly gauge and adequately manage these often conflicting interests, has the potential to result in disastrous consequences and possibly even cause states to fail.

Arguably, the Chinese nation sprang from and continues to thrive in one of the most complex, and at times hostile, geo-locations on the planet. China's periphery has common borders with fourteen separate nations and shares adjacent waters with the Philippines, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Furthermore, the diversity in languages, culture, topography and economics in these vastly different locations, lining its roughly 22,000 kilometer landmass and 14,500 kilometer coastline, is staggering.



Border States	Border States	Adjacent Waters
Afghanistan	Burma (Myanmar)	Japan
Bhutan	Nepal	Philippines
India	North Korea	South Korea
Kazakhstan	Pakistan	Taiwan
Kyrgyzstan	Russia	
Laos	Tajikistan	
Mongolia	Vietnam	

It is no wonder, given these complex geopolitical dynamics and all the potential pitfalls for conflict, that from 1931-1988, the People's Republic of China engaged in major hostilities or skirmishes with six of its eighteen neighbors. Indeed, even today, China has few neighbors with which it does not have some major unresolved border or sea issue. A few examples of potential border issues that could spark future conflicts are: border demarcations, drug trafficking, influx of illegal arms, insurgent infiltration, fresh-water rights, ocean-held hydrocarbons and traverse of sea lanes.

Blue Views and Red Paradigms

In 2003, the US Defense Science Board Task Force filed a report on Red Teaming and its importance to Department of Defense analysis. In defining the benefits of the program, the report stated that Red Teaming could offer a hedge against potentially catastrophic surprise by providing “wider and deeper understanding of potential adversary options and behavior that can expose potential vulnerabilities in our strategies, postures, plans, programs, and concepts.”¹ This holds especially true for China. We have been conditioned to evaluate its military actions through a “Blue Lens” and apply US conditions to a uniquely Chinese situation.

Over the last several years, a central question surrounding China's military rise has focused on intent. In 2005, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld addressed the International Institute of Strategic Studies on China's military buildup. During his talk to the institute, Secretary Rumsfeld posed the question, “Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: Why this growing investment? Why these continuing large and expanding arms purchases?”²

In response to such questions, Beijing counters that the US is trying to foster a “China Threat Theory” in order to carry out Washington's policy of containment. They contend that by spreading innuendo of regional and global ambitions, the US seeks to isolate China from its neighbors. Beijing further asserts that China's posture is strictly defensive in nature and poses no threat to anyone.

These two opposing views, of the same situation, illustrate the gulf that exists when conclusions are drawn from polar opposite vantage points. While China is in the process of building a modernized military with regional power projection capabilities, it is perhaps for the nefarious reasons envisioned or perhaps not. We understand our own concerns but do we truly grasp all the forces driving China's military buildup?

The goal of this paper is to fulfill the mandate set by the Defense Science Board Task Force and bring to light those factors influencing China's options and behaviors. Understanding these drivers will better enable senior leaders and policy makers to

¹ “The Role and Status of DoD Red Teaming Activities,” Defense Science Board Task Force, Sep 03, as downloaded from <http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/redteam.pdf>

² “Rumsfeld: China Buildup a Threat to Asia,” *Associated Press*, 4 Jun 05, as downloaded from <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/8091198/>

formulate accurate and proportioned responses to a rising China. To accomplish this task, it is best to examine these threat perceptions through a “Red Lens.”

To cope with external and internal security issues, China has divided the country into seven military regions. These seven military regions are the linchpins that define China’s military posture. It is impossible to fully comprehend their perspective without framing the problem through the prism of these individual regions

This paper will first present a brief evolution of the regional military system and its transition that will influence Beijing’s current thinking on border and coastal defense. Next, we will take a 360 degree tour around China’s periphery, outlining some of the major challenges facing each of the individual military regions. Finally, how these external and internal factors affect China’s military forces will be summarized.

Historical Evolution of China’s Military Regions

In 1927, following the Nanchang and Autumn Harvest uprisings, Chinese communist forces began setting up rudimentary military regions along the border region between Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. These two uprisings marked the beginning of hostilities between communist and nationalist forces, the opening salvos of the civil war and the establishment of the People’s Liberation Army. While considered the foundation of the modern military regional system, it is best to describe these fledgling regions as areas of opportunity, situated where communist forces enjoyed heavy support from the local populace and relative isolation from the superior Kuomintang forces. The system was not designed for comprehensive national defense, merely as staging areas to fight and defend against the nationalist forces. Later, they would also be used in the same manner to resist the Japanese occupation.³

On 25 November 1931, the Jiangxi Republic Central Revolutionary Military Committee was established in order to unify and lead these disparate military regions. The committee ordered that beginning in 1932, the Red Army would turn these bases into military regions. During the war of resistance against Japan, each military region was assigned the task of organizing the civilian population to resist the occupation while “main forces” were charged with arming both local area units and the masses.⁴

The Shandong Military Region was established in the autumn of 1942 and the very next year was forced to reorganize in order to fit the circumstances of the war. The Shandong Military Region was given jurisdiction over: the Shandong Eastern, Central, and Southern Military Regions; the Qinghe Military Region; the Hebei-Shandong Provincial Border Military Region; and the Binhai Military Region.⁵

³ “The Evolution of the People’s Liberation Army Military Region System,” Jun 2004, Hebei government website, downloaded from <http://www.hbnq.gov.cn/shyy/list.asp?id=315>

⁴ Ibid

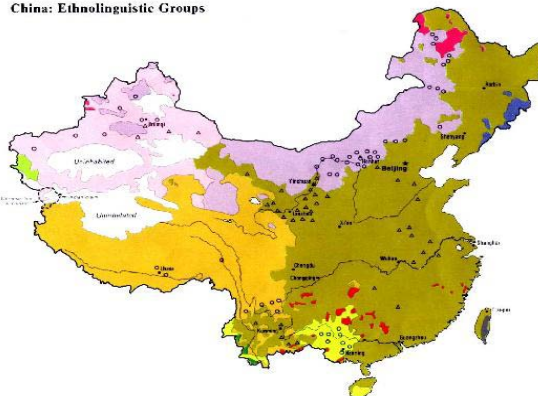
⁵ Ibid

In August of 1945, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party decided to consolidate all of the commands into the Shanxi, Hebei, Shandong and Henan Military Regions. Expansion and reorganization of the communist forces would characterize the time period from 1945-49. From this development flowed the establishment of the six greater military regions comprised of the Northeastern, North China, Northwestern, Central Plains, Eastern and Central-Southern areas.⁶

The readjustment period from 1950 through 1984, would see the most dramatic swings in the number of military regions. The number would go from as few as five, to as high as 13 and coincide with the drawdown of one million men. Finally, in 1985, the Central Military Committee implemented a simplification and reorganization plan that reduced the number of military regions from 11 to the current seven that exist today: Beijing, Shenyang, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Lanzhou.⁷

The Chinese narrative covering the evolution of the military regions indicates that the lines were drawn strictly for tactical, logistic and administrative purposes. However, a side-by-side comparison with an ethno-linguistic map shows that if the two maps were superimposed, there would be striking similarities.⁸ These similarities do not appear when viewing other China related maps such as climate patterns, natural terrain or vegetation patterns. It should also be noted that that the military regions elongate into areas with strong Han influence. The Lanzhou and Chengdu Military Regions have been especially elongated to fall within this sphere of influence.

China: Ethnolinguistic Groups



⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ University of Texas, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_ethnolinguistic_83.jpg

Current Thinking on Border and Coastal Defense

Owing to the country's extensive history of being conquered and broken apart, maintaining border control and internal integrity are of paramount importance to the Chinese state. The *2006 White Paper on China's National Defense*, noted that special attention was being paid to secure border and coastal defenses. According to the report, China spent more than 2 billion RMB (approximately US \$281 million) on construction projects related to these areas:

- 20,000 km of patrol roads
- 6,000 km of barbed-wire fences
- 600 sets of monitoring equipment
- construction of duty piers, monitoring stations and auxiliary facilities⁹

Addressing the critical issue of border disputes, the *National Defense White Paper* provided an update on completed and ongoing efforts toward resolution:

- Signed land border treaties or agreements with Burma (Myanmar) and 11 other neighboring countries
- Negotiated with India and Bhutan to settle boundary issues
- Enacted bilateral consultation on maritime demarcation and cooperation with the Republic of Korea and Japan
- Enacted demarcation of the Beibu Gulf with Vietnam
- Reopened the border trade route at Nathu La Pass with India¹⁰

It was not just external border issues that were highlighted in the *White Paper*; it was pointed out that maintaining internal border security also figured prominently in the planning process. Toward this end, the PRC has accomplished the following:

- In the early days of "New China," one million PLA officers and men were sent to Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang and Yunnan provinces to aid in economic development
- Since the late 70s, the state set up 253 open ports to include Northeast China
- PLA border defense forces and border public security forces have taken part in the economic development of border areas¹¹

Weapons smuggling, drug trafficking, illegal border crossings, human trafficking, separatist, and terrorist activities were specifically mentioned as areas of concentration and concern.¹²

⁹ "China's National Defense 2006," *Information Office of the State Council People's Republic of China*, 29 Dec 06, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html#7>

¹⁰ "China's National Defense 2006," *Information Office of the State Council People's Republic of China*, 29 Dec 06, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html#7>

¹¹ "China's National Defense 2006," *Information Office of the State Council People's Republic of China*, 29 Dec 06, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html#7>

The Seven Military Regions

The organization of the seven military regions allows for decentralized operations while maintaining centralized control in Beijing. Military region commanders exercise control over the combat units located in their region, while also supporting regional diplomatic goals with their immediate neighbors. The diversity of the landscape dictates that all regional commanders will be met with distinctive challenges and concerns.¹³

Different military regions face strikingly dissimilar scenarios, forcing group armies to display units and equipment combinations appropriate to their unique area of responsibility. Ground force heavy regions such as Beijing and Shenyang are configured for land threats from the north. The Lanzhou and Chengdu Military Regions are equipped for suppression of separatist activities in Tibet and Xinjiang and any scenario involving India. Similarly, the Shenyang Military Region is prepared for Korean contingencies. The Jinan, Nanjing and Guangzhou Military Regions, among the least ground force oriented, are used for blunting maritime threats from the Sea of Japan and deterring Taiwanese independence. The Beijing Military Region acts as the control hub and political center.¹⁴

The *2006 Chinese White Paper on National Defense* provided a detailed explanation of the duties, responsibilities and hierarchy of a military region:

*Military regions (theaters of operations) are military organizations set up according to the administrative divisions of the state, geographical locations, strategic and operational directions, and operational tasks. They are CMC [Central Military Commission]-appointed organs for commanding joint theater operations. They direct the military, political, logistical, and equipment work of the troops under them. Under a military region are the headquarters, the political department, the joint logistics department, and the armament department. A military region is mainly in charge of formulating programs and plans for combat readiness and operations of troops in the theater and for the reserve force buildup of the theater, organizing and commanding joint theater operations involving different services and arms, and providing joint logistical support. At present, the PLA has seven military regions, namely, Shenyang, Beijing, Lanzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou and Chengdu. Under a military region are combined Army corps, units of various Army arms, logistical support units, and provincial military districts (garrison districts).*¹⁵

The breakdown of the seven military regions that follows will not list every potential for conflict. These would be too numerous. Instead, the paper will only provide

¹² "China's National Defense 2006," *Information Office of the State Council People's Republic of China*, 29 Dec 06, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html#7>

¹³ Xinhui, http://www.china-defense.com/orbat/pla_orbat/pla_orbat_02.html

¹⁴ James Mulvenon, "The PLA Army's Struggle for Identity," *globalsecurity.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/pla-china_transition_10_ch06.htm

¹⁵ "China's National Defense 2006," *Information Office of the State Council People's Republic of China*, 29 Dec 06, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html#7>

a sampling of the challenges to demonstrate the difficulty in designing a comprehensive and cohesive fighting force capable of answering the country's complex problems.

The Chengdu Military Region

The Chengdu Military Region borders India, Vietnam, Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. It also encompasses the Chinese portion of the opium producing Golden Triangle (Burma/Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand). In addition to tensions between different nationalities, ethnic groups, and drug trafficking, potable water has also become a central issue. China is in a position to control the water flowing across the nation's southern border and as populations increase and human industrial and agricultural requirements grow, conflict over water becomes increasing likely.¹⁶

Drugs:

China's war on drugs began in earnest in 2005 and is listed as one of the country's top security concerns. The borders opposite Vietnam, Laos and Burma will figure prominently in the effort to eradicate illegal drug trafficking. As a side effect of the drug trade, HIV infection rates have been increasing in the border towns due to intravenous drug use.¹⁷

Unrest:

While tensions over Taiwanese independence may have subsided with the reemergence of the Kuomintang,¹⁸ separatist activities in the Chengdu area continue to expand and could potentially strain the People's Liberation Army's ability to deploy effectively.¹⁹ Recent riots in Tibet saw large numbers of combat units subordinate to the Chengdu Military Region ordered to suppress the uprisings. This prompted speculation on whether or not China had sufficient numbers of troops to cope with the rise of India and Vietnam, the ongoing situation in Afghanistan and a simultaneous outbreak of unrest in the northwest and southwest regions. Should the situation arise where additional troops would need to be withdrawn from China's eastern section to reinforce Chengdu, it could possibly leave the door open for Taipei to reexamine their current pacification efforts.²⁰

¹⁶ Jin Qianli, "Backbone of Communist Party of China (CPC) in Battle Against Taiwan; Profile of Lt Gen Li Shiming, Newly Promoted Commander of Chengdu Military Region," *Chien Shao*, 01 Jan 08 - 31 Jan 08 No 203, pp 48-51, OSC ref CPP20080214710014

¹⁷ "U.S. Relations With the People's Republic of China," Consulate General of the United States, Mar 2008, as downloaded from http://hongkong.usconsulate.gov/uscn_narcos_2008022901.html

¹⁸ In 2008, the Guomindang (KMT) regained control of the Taiwanese government from the Minjindang (DPP). The DPP is considered as more of an advocate of Taiwanese independence while the KMT is viewed as trying to maintain the status-quo.

¹⁹ "Riots of Ethnic Minorities Challenge China's General National Defense Strategies," *Kanwa Asian Defense Review*, 12 Aug 08, pp 20-22, OSC ref CPP2008081

²⁰ "Riots of Ethnic Minorities Challenge China's General National Defense Strategies," *Kanwa Asian Defense Review*, 12 Aug 08, pp 20-22, OSC ref CPP2008081

Border/Maritime Conflict:

External border issues continue to plague China and may be especially problematic in the Chengdu Military Region. While relations with India seem to be improving, many areas of contention still exist. Final demarcations of this 4,057 km joint border have yet to be resolved since the 1962 Sino-Indian War. India lays claim to the territory of Aksai Chin and Kashmir that still fall under Chinese control. China has also failed to relinquish control over the five thousand square kilometers of land in Kashmir ceded to India by Pakistan in 1963.²¹ In July of 2008, Indian sources reported an increase in the number of Chinese border incursions into the disputed region of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims and refers to as “Southern Tibet.” New Delhi has responded by reestablishing an airfield near the border.²²

Maritime disputes are also beginning to appear on the horizon and could possibly be a source of friction between the two countries. The sea lanes passing through the Indian Ocean move 30% of China’s sea trade and 77% of its oil imports.²³ As China continues to push into the Indian Ocean, expanding its sphere of influence and protecting its sea lanes, New Delhi is bound to grow more concerned and could be forced to respond.

Water Resources:

While much of the world is engaged in the competition to find and secure access to oil and natural gas supplies, another precious natural resource, water, could be the catalyst for even greater conflict in southwest Asia. China controls the Tibetan plateau and water run off from its massive glaciers feeds most of the major rivers in Southwest Asia. Nearly all of the countries in the region, from India to Vietnam, get their water supply from the Tibetan system as it passes through mainland China. Unfortunately, many of China’s rivers have been damaged by unregulated industrial production, and in a section of the world that already suffers from water shortage, it may be tempting to divert that flow for internal consumption. Nations, though difficult, can survive without fossil fuels but not without water.²⁴

Lanzhou Military Region

The Lanzhou Military Region is bordered by Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. The military command in Lanzhou faces many of the same problems as the Chengdu Military Region, such as minority unrest, a rising India and drug trafficking. The area comprising the Lanzhou

²¹ Sudha Ramachandran, “China toys with India’s border,” *Asia Times Online*, 27 Jun 08, as downloaded from http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JF27Df01.html

²² “Chinese incursions along the border with India are up,” *Asia New*, 25 Jul 08, as downloaded from <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=12856&size=A>

²³ Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Article Warns Against Chinese Effort To Establish Presence in Indian Ocean,” *Strategic Analysis*, 1 Jan 08, OSC reference number SAP20080730524001

²⁴ Brahma Chellaney, “China Aims for Bigger Share of South Asia Lifeline,” 26 Jun 07, as downloaded from <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/eo20070626bc.html>

Military Region has become China's largest producer of oil and natural gas, ensuring that both internal and external security will be high priorities. Certainly a unique aspect of the Lanzhou Military Region is how it deals with Central Asia.²⁵

Nationalism:

Relations between China and Mongolia center on the two key themes of economics and security. While the two countries have had historical clashes dating back as far as the invasion of Genghis Khan, all indicators are that the relationship is currently stable. There is some apprehension Mongolian nationalism could interfere with the process but at present, that is not seen as a major concern. This bright spot of stability is fortunate since the Sino-Mongolian border is China's longest shared boundary. Due to the length of the border area, Mongolia figures in key aspects of Chinese security.²⁶

Insurgent Infiltration/Crossings:

China's interest in Central Asia is both strategic and tactical. Maintaining good relations with the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in the oil-rich region of Central Asia, provides China with access to abundant reserves and further allows it to shape pipeline routes. However, dating back to 1996, China's original intent for forming the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was to prevent insurgent infiltration and separatist border crossings. While the Shanghai Cooperation Organization stated that the charter was created to ease border tensions and reduce troop levels, from China's perspective it was primarily to prevent separatists from operating outside of its borders with impunity. A number of recent Chinese anti-terrorism exercises conducted in the Lanzhou Military Region underscore just how seriously they take maintaining internal and external stability in the northwest. It is reasonable to conclude that disruptions to this lucrative market will be dealt with sharply and Beijing will act with little hesitation to clamp down on the border.²⁷

Religious Militancy:

Traveling the periphery of the Lanzhou Military Region, it is often difficult to find a neighbor that does not present a possible security threat of one type or the other. Even though the two countries only share a small common border, Pakistan could be considered one of the less troublesome regions and a traditional friend. Pakistan has been willing to politically support China in the region and in the international community. For its part, China has assisted Pakistan with economic and military development. The two black clouds appearing on the horizon are growing religious militancy in Pakistan and China's deepening ties with India. In June of 2007, seven Chinese nationals were taken

²⁵ Charles Hawkins and Robert Love, The New Great Game, Foreign Military Studies Office, 2006, pp 137-156

²⁶ Wang Wei-fang, "'Pan-Mongolism' and U.S.-CHINA-MONGOLIA Relations," *Jamestown Foundation*, 5 May 05, as downloaded from

http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=408&issue_id=3322&article_id=2369707

²⁷ John C. K. Daly, "Sino-Kyrgyz relations after the Tulip Revolution," 7 Jun 05, as downloaded from <http://www.asianresearch.org/articles/2614.html>

hostage by militants who suspected the Chinese citizens of operating a massage parlor fronting for prostitution. Chinese requests to protect their citizens resulted in Islamabad cracking down on the militants who were holed up in the Red Mosque. In July of 2007, three Chinese citizens were killed in retaliation for the Pakistani government crackdown.²⁸

Drug Trafficking:

Until recently, China has had little financial interest in Afghanistan but that has all changed with the Karzai government's decision to open the country to foreign investors. China was quick to bid on the development of the Aynak copper field and may have plans for other raw materials.²⁹ However, Afghanistan also produces 93% of the world's opium output and many of the smuggling routes pass through Chinese territory. The drug addiction rates for Chinese citizens that live along the narcotics transit routes are extremely high. The war on drugs has been placed very high on Beijing's list of non-traditional security concerns. Some have speculated that rapid changes in China's social structure, brought on by economic development, is the primary cause for the estimated 2-3 million addicts. The sudden loss of the traditional cohesive family unit has left some Chinese citizens turning to drugs as a method to ease the pain.³⁰ In May of 2008, China, India and Russia called for an anti-drug belt to be built around Afghanistan in order to halt the flow of heroin.³¹

Shenyang Military Region

The Shenyang Military Region borders North Korea, Russia and the Yellow Sea. Most border issues with its northern neighbor, Russia, have been resolved or are in the process of being ironed out. A more problematic relationship exists between North Korea and China. There are a few minor border matters to clear up, such as islands in the Yalu and Tumen Rivers and the boundaries around Mount Paetu but the main question concerns the stability of Kim Jong Il's regime. Should the regime collapse or hostilities breakout between North and South Korea, China could end up dealing with tens of thousands of North Korean refugees.³²

²⁸ Tarique Niazi, "China, Pakistan, and Terrorism," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 16 Jul 07, as downloaded from <http://www.fpif.org/fpiftxt/4384>

²⁹ Nicklas Norling, "The Emerging China-Afghanistan Relationship," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute*, 14 May 08, downloaded on <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4858>

³⁰ Maureen Fan, "U.S.-Style Rehabs Take Root in China As Addiction Grows," *Washington Post*, 19 Jan 07, as downloaded from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/18/AR2007011801774.html>

³¹ "Russia, China, India Seek Afghan Anti-Drug 'Belt'," *Reuters*, 15 May 08, as downloaded from <http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL1486613820080515?feedType=RSS&feedName=worldNews>

³² "The World Fact Book," CIA, updated 8 Aug 06, as downloaded from http://zonecours.hec.ca/documents/H2007-P4-862729.CIA_Factbook.pdf

Pollution:

While most of the tensions that existed between the old Soviet Union and China from 1968-1978 have faded into history, the current era of mass industrialization introduces problems of its own. In November of 2005, a chemical plant located in the Shenyang Military Region exploded causing the release of toxins such as Benzene and other chemicals into the Songhua River. Due to the river's path, Chinese emergency crews were mobilized in an effort to clean the spill before contaminants crossed the border into Russia.³³

Refugees:

The ramifications of the North Korean famine that occurred in 1995, continues to drive large numbers of refugees to cross the border into China. This places Beijing in the awkward position of trying to please North Korea, its strategically aligned ally and South Korea, its third largest trading partner. China has many disaffected people among its own populace and the addition of North Korean refugees only adds fuel to an already difficult internal situation.³⁴

China began constructing a concrete and barbed wire fence along the border with North Korea to deter the flow of illegal immigrants entering the country. Professor Kim Woo-jun, of the Institute of East and West Studies in Seoul said, "China built wire fences on major defection routes along the Tumen River in a project that began in 2003, and since September this year, China has been building wire fences along the Yalu River."³⁵

Jinan Military Region

The Jinan Military Region enjoys the rare distinction of not occupying a common land border with any other country. It functions simultaneously as a major training command, a source of strategic reserves, logistics train and rapid reaction force for the People's Liberation Army. However, being home to the headquarters of the North Sea Fleet, its role in international disputes is just as complicated, if not more so than that of other military regions.

From 1960-1989, the North Sea Fleet's primary mission was to counter any aggressive moves from the Soviet Pacific Fleet. While this threat has greatly diminished with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it has been replaced with disputes over Exclusive Economic Zones in the sea areas surrounding China.³⁶ The source of these disputes range from fishing rights to underwater oil and natural gas reserves:

³³ "China, Russia calmly deal with cross-border river pollution," *Xinhua*, 2 Dec 05, as downloaded from http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200512/02/eng20051202_225030.html

³⁴ Mikyoung Kim, "Beijing's hot potato: North Korean refugees and human rights debates," *Jamestown Foundation*, 16 Mar 05, as downloaded from <http://www.asianresearch.org/articles/2544.html>

³⁵ "China erects fence along N. Korea border," *USA Today*, 16 Oct 06, as downloaded from http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2006-10-16-china-nkorea_x.htm

³⁶ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, Naval Institute Press, 2001, p. 170

*Under the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the exclusive economic zone or EEZ is covered by Articles 56, 58 and 59. The EEZ is defined as that portion of the seas and oceans extending up to 200 nautical miles in which coastal States have the right to explore and exploit natural resources as well as to exercise jurisdiction over marine science research and environmental protection. Freedom of navigation and over flight, laying of submarine cables and pipelines, as well as other uses consented on the high seas, are still allowed.*³⁷

Fishing Rights:

In August of 2008, China and South Korea continued to argue over ownership of Ieodo Reef. South Korea launched a complaint against the Chinese Oceanic Information Network when the organization claimed that the Ieodo Reef was in Chinese territorial waters. The area around Ieodo has been an active fishing zone for Chinese citizens for many years. The Oceanic Information Institute later deleted the claim from their website. A South Korean official noted, “South Korea and China agreed in 2006 that the Ieodo Islet is a submerged rock, not an island, so that it would not be subject to a territorial dispute. The Internet site referring to Ieodo as Chinese territory is against the agreement. So, we will take necessary measures to rectify the territorial claim, including demanding the Chinese foreign ministry correct the record.”³⁸

Offshore Drilling:

Offshore drilling on the continental shelf will become another potential problem for Beijing, where estimates of petroleum reserves have ranged from 1 billion to 130 billion barrels. Counter claims against Chinese ownership have been made by North Korea, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam.³⁹

Hydrocarbons:

China and Japan continue to spar over the median-line in regards to development of undersea hydrocarbons in the East China Sea. A report from the *Jamestown Foundation*, in June of 2008, noted that negotiations were still ongoing in the development rights of the Chunxiao field. The *Jamestown Foundation* summarized the dispute as follows:

The territorial dispute in the East China Sea is centered on jurisdictional entitlements to the potentially vast hydrocarbon resources which lie beneath. Sino-Japanese tensions over the dispute have been high since August 2003 when Chinese oil company CNOOC entered into a partnership with Unocal and Royal Dutch/Shell to produce natural gas at

³⁷J. Emmett Duffy, “Exclusive Economic Zone,” Encyclopedia of the Earth, 26 Aug 08, as downloaded from [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Exclusive_economic_zone_\(EEZ\)](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Exclusive_economic_zone_(EEZ))

³⁸ Jung Sung-ki, “China Retracts Claim Over Ieodo Islet,” *Korea Times*, 17 Aug 08, as downloaded from http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/08/116_29511.html

³⁹ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, Naval Institute Press, 2001, p. 56

*the Chunxiao gas field located 3 mi from the Japanese claimed “median line” in the East China Sea.*⁴⁰

China, Taiwan and Japan are still sorting out their territorial claims over the Diaoyutai/Senkaku islands, which further complicate the delicate balance in the East China Sea. The ownership of the island chain has been in dispute since the US turned them over to Japan in 1971.⁴¹ The main source of this conflict probably stems from a report by the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East showing the area might contain large reserves of natural gas.⁴² In February of 2007, when questioned about the ongoing debate over the island, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Jiang Yu gave the following reply:

*Our position on this question is quite clear. Diaoyu Island and its adjacent isles have been Chinese territory since ancient time, and China has indisputable sovereignty over them. China will not accept any representations by Japan on the premise of territorial claim over Diaoyu Island. Chinese ship's normal marine research in the waters near Diaoyu Island is an exercise of China's legitimate sovereignty and has nothing to do with the informing mechanism. We have expressed our dissatisfaction to Japan through diplomatic channel for unreasonably making an issue of this matter.*⁴³

Nanjing Military Region

Taiwan:

Like its Jinan neighbor to the north, the Nanjing Military Region is without an international border and similarly home to People's Liberation Army Navy's East Sea Fleet. The East Sea Fleet has the distinction of being the first of three naval commands to make international port calls and also the first to visit the US when it docked in Hawaii in 1989.⁴⁴ While able to support both the North and South Sea Fleets, the East Sea Fleet's major area of focus is Taiwan. Geographically pointed at the very heart of Taiwan, the Nanjing Military Region will likely function as the jump-off point for any military action against Taiwan. Many military analysts consider the unresolved conflict between China and Taiwan the most likely issue to drag the U.S. and China into a military conflict. This

⁴⁰James Manicom, “Hu-Fukuda Summit: The East China Sea Dispute,” *Jamestown Foundation*, 4 Jun 08, as downloaded from http://www.jamestown.org/china_brief/article.php?articleid=2374218

⁴¹ Explanation of dispute: “Japan currently has sovereignty over the islands. Its claims are based on the Senkaku's inclusion in the Ryukyu island chain, which includes Okinawa. Japan seized the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and the Diaoyu islands before World War II. Although they were forced to return Taiwan to China after the war, the language of the treaties did little to mention the status of sovereignty of the Senkakus. The Japanese use the *Okinawa Reversion Treaty* as further proof of their sovereignty over the islands. The Senkaku islands were included in the group of islands which the United States returned to Japanese authority in 1972.”

<http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Shrine/2475/diaoyu.html>

⁴² “Senkaku / Diaoyutai, Islands” *Global Security*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/senkaku.htm>

⁴³ Jiang Yu, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in St. Lucia, 6 Feb 07, as downloaded from <http://lc.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/fyrth/t295875.htm>

⁴⁴ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, Naval Institute Press, 2001, p. 27

would seem an accurate assessment given the three previous crises (1954, 1958 and 1996) that came very near to drawing the two countries into direct confrontation.⁴⁵

Guangzhou Military Region

The Guangzhou Military Region borders Vietnam, the South China Sea and it houses the headquarters of the South Sea Fleet. Arguably, the most difficult mission of all three of the naval commands, the South Sea Fleet faces a myriad of complex interactions. The outfitting of the South Sea Fleet indicates it would also play a major role in the event of a crisis with Taiwan. The fleet contains a majority of the newer amphibious landing craft and bases for the People's Liberation Army Marine Corps. Farther to the south, the mission is protecting China's interest in hydrocarbons, fishing and sea lines of communication. With more than 85% of China's and 50% of the world's merchant shipping passing through the South Sea, the ability to control these lines will be vital to any nation. Countries in contention for these resources with China include Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei. The main contested areas are the Spratly Islands, the Paracel Islands and perhaps the Natuna Islands.⁴⁶

Islands:

The Spratly Islands are jointly claimed by China, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei. Undersea hydrocarbons and sea lines of communication are being contested by all sides and implications loom large for it being a future hotspot. Estimated reserves around the Spratly Islands range from around two hundred thousand barrels a day to two million barrels a day. Having the largest, most modern navy operating in the islands has given China a significant advantage in pressing negotiations to their advantage.⁴⁷

The Paracel Islands, located in the northwestern section of the South China Sea are claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam. The site has been the scene of several naval engagements between China and Vietnam and in addition to hydrocarbons, also contains abundant fisheries. The quest for oil exploration in the South China Sea could also escalate tensions between China and Vietnam. Lip-service has been paid to mutual cooperation and friendly exploration but more often than not, these talks appears to be jockeying for position. On 23 July 2008, it was reported that China had recently filed a complaint with ExxonMobil over its agreement to work with the Vietnamese state oil company on oil and gas exploration. China warned ExxonMobil that continued

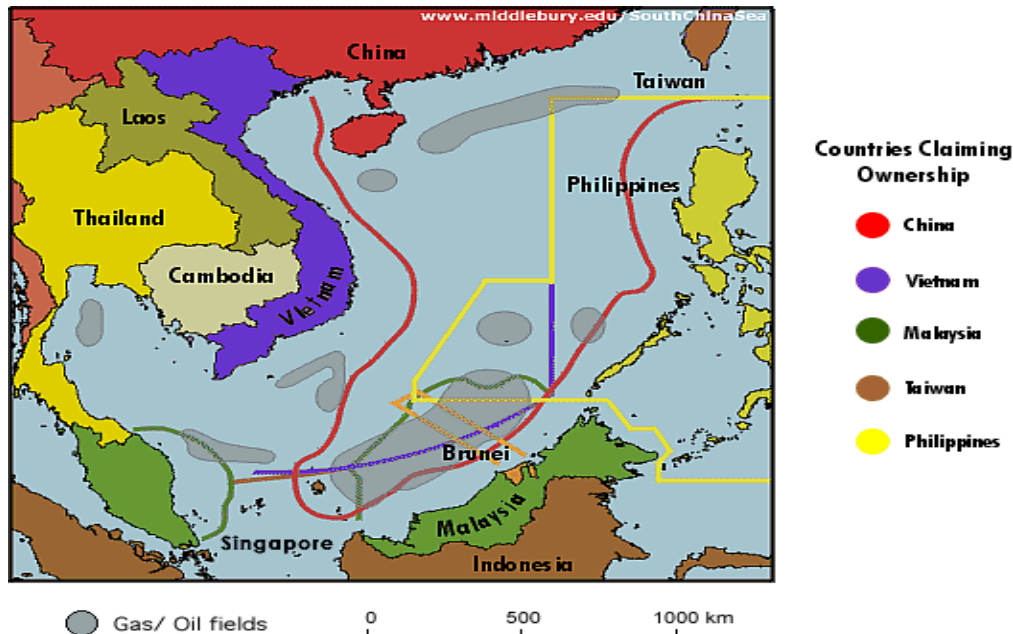
⁴⁵ "First and Second Taiwan Strait Crisis, Quemoy and Matsu Islands of Taiwan," *Coldwar.org*, as downloaded from http://www.coldwar.org/articles/50s/taiwan_straits.asp

⁴⁶ Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, *Naval Institute Press*, 2001, pp. 37-41 and p. 84

⁴⁷ "The Importance of the Spratly Islands," PINR, 28 Nov 06, as downloaded from http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=589&language_id=1

cooperation with PetroVietnam could result in the loss of future oil contracts on the mainland.⁴⁸

Previously, no other country had infringed on Indonesia's claim to the estimated 46 trillion cubic feet of recoverable reserves surrounding the Natuna Islands, until an official Chinese map was released calling its ownership into question. The map seemed to indicate that the Natuna Islands could be within Chinese waters. In 1996, Indonesia responded with large-scale military exercises. Indonesia has begun natural gas production in the region without any objection from China.⁴⁹



Beijing Military Region

The Beijing Military Region borders Russia and Mongolia. Previously, one of the most heavily armed of all the seven military regions, Beijing was responsible for protecting the leadership, the capital and blocking the old Soviet advance. With the latter threat now all but non-existent, its active defense role has been greatly diminished. The Beijing region primarily serves as the command and control structure for the rest of the military.

⁴⁸“China confirms contact with ExxonMobil on Vietnam deal,” *Quamnet*, 23 Jul 08, as downloaded from <http://www.quamnet.com/newscontent.action?articleId=900617>

⁴⁹ “South China Sea,” US Energy Information Agency, http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/South_China_Sea/Full.html

Conclusions

China's border dilemma could be described as an intricate game of consequence management, where each decision brings about untold dangers to the overall strategic picture and where few attractive moves are left to the player. Shifting focus from one cardinal direction to the next unbalances an already burdened system and drags it closer to potential chaos.

Redeploying forces from east to the west opens the door for Taiwanese independence, Hong Kong activism, Japanese influence and encroachment on sea resources. Movement from the west to the east leaves the country vulnerable to a rising India, increased insurgency, loss of influence in oil rich Central Asia and drug trafficking. Response to a volatile/failing Korean Peninsula or resurgent Russia risks US intervention in their sphere, puts the southern sea lines of communication at risk, and diminishes negotiating power on hydrocarbons and fisheries. Southern deployments, the least risky, still open the entire border from Central Asia to the Pacific and all of those inherent risks. In short, the People's Liberation Army's 2.5 million man army seems daunting at first blush but is severely hampered from moving by significant border issues.

Ji You, a Senior Lecturer at the University of New South Wales, came to nearly the same conclusions but further elaborates on the strategic direction imposed on China.

The new security complex has demanded that China readjust its national defence strategy for the new century, resulting in a doctrine called "beishounangong", (projecting a posture of 'defensive defence' in the sanbei areas (North, Northwest and Northeast China) and a 'defensive offence' posture in the section of China's coast facing the Taiwan Strait). Although this doctrine places greater focus in the Western Pacific as opposed to China's land borders, it draws a painful lesson from the late Qing period - that a relatively weak military facing multiple security challenges must align its strategic priorities with a proper policy.

The prospect of multi-theatre wars has propelled Beijing to draft plans for different scenarios that would exert a huge impact on the PLA's force deployment scenarios, R&D programs and its overall level of readiness. There is little doubt that with the demise of the USSR, China has been freed from the major threat of land invasion for the first time in 500 years. This allows the PLA to concentrate its forces on the coastal flank. On the other hand, the PLA continues to envision serious security challenges around its land borders.⁵⁰

China describes its plan for national defense in terms of broad strategic directions. This makes it difficult for western analysts to pinpoint the regions exerting the greatest influence over the military buildup. Closer examination of the key challenges facing China suggests that it might be easier to understand the dilemma by recasting this as the two strategic arches. One strategic arch would extend from the border of Kazakhstan to Burma and the other from Vladivostok to the Gulf of Tonkin. Drawing arrows radiating from these two arches in any direction should assist us in deciphering new equipment

⁵⁰ Ji You, "Defending China's Land Borders," *Opinion Asia*, 24 Jul 07, as downloaded from <http://www.opinionasia.org/DefendingChinasLandBorders>

acquisitions and the implementation of fresh doctrine due to the strategic importance of these areas. For example, increased purchases or building of equipment designed for amphibious operations could be a prelude for a conflict with Taiwan. Improvements in bases near the Indian border could signal mounting border tensions.

Recent developments between India and China could see a westward shift in this directional focus described by Ji You if tensions increase. Growing strategic emphasis by Beijing on securing China's sea lanes and encroaching on the Indian Ocean would certainly necessitate a modification in force alignment. While Beijing has correctly identified and is in the process of working on deficiencies within the People's Liberation Army, these reforms will take time. Simple modernization will not remove the barriers geography has placed in its path for regional mass redeployments.

Education, standardized training and conscription fixes are far too rudimentary at this stage to allow for plug-and-play units to be spliced to other locations with vastly different missions. Resolution of external and internal strife will ease numerous pressures restricting China's military from acting in a unified manner. Understanding the geopolitical realities of China's challenges will give us better insights into the nature of China's military buildup and better clarity in evaluating its intent. Further dialog on the differing regional security perceptions between the US and China should be encouraged to reduce lingering doubts.

Continued observations of the geopolitical activities of the military regions will benefit the US military and diplomatic policy makers. As China is home to the single largest national population, an expanding economy, and considerable regional influence, understanding their actions and intentions is essential to national security. Knowing the force structure needed to address these regional problems offers the opportunity to assess changes that signal a shift towards a more offensive posture.⁵¹ China has given us an excellent tool to use for this assessment in the division of military regions and their assigned roles. Each military region acts as a bellwether to determine China's strategic direction and force posture if we have a clear understanding of Beijing's own threat assessment of the area.

⁵¹ M. Taylor Fravel, "Securing borders: China's doctrine and force structure for frontier defense," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Aug 07, as downloaded from <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/section?content=a780703452&fulltext=713240928>