

China's National Sovereignty and the Tightening Noose Around the Senkaku Islands

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Testimony before Hearing on the Hotspots Along China's Periphery

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I was asked to discuss plans for People's Republic of China (PRC) operations to take the Senkaku Islands, including the capabilities it will be able to employ against Japanese and United States (U.S.) and forces responding to the attack. Specifically, this paper will address: How would a military campaign to take the Senkaku Islands likely unfold, to include China's campaign objectives; how the PRC would counter U.S. intervention; how it would occupy and control the islands; the likely Chinese military assets to be used in the 2020 timeframe; and the impact of current PLA reforms and organization. I will also provide you eight specific recommendations to deal with the increasingly threatening situation with which China is confronting us. Let me set the stage first, in order to specifically answer these questions and give recommendations.

In February 2014, I gave a speech in San Diego in which I publicly stated the People's Liberation Army (PLA) "has been given a new task...to be able to conduct a 'short sharp war' to destroy Japanese forces in the East China Sea, followed by what can only be expected - a seizure of the Senkakus...or even the Southern Ryukyus."¹ My 2014 assertion received a bit of international attention at the time, and it still bears on this panel's topic of East China Sea contingency operations. To set the record straight, the idea that China is actively planning to conduct a "short, sharp war" to seize the Senkaku Islands and possibly the entire Nansei Shoto was originally revealed by PLA Navy Rear Admiral Yin Zhou on Beijing Television in January 2013.² Although Admiral Yin is well known for his hawkish statements, and his original television remarks have been removed from the internet, it does not detract from the truthfulness of his declaration that China is planning for a "short, sharp war" to take the Senkaku Islands. Moreover, it does not diminish the deadly implications for both Japan and the United States were such an operation to take place.

It is not just Beijing's words, but it is the actions of the PLA Navy and the Chinese Coast Guard that have validated Admiral Yin's revelations. Western analysts today increasingly and publicly admit to China's campaign of maritime expansionism, while President Xi Jinping openly promotes China's maritime ambitions as an essential part of his "China Dream". My words were "provocative" in 2014 because although I was being truthful, the message was not aligned with an official Executive Branch narrative of security partnership with China. Now my warnings about China's maritime expansionism seem obvious, even conservative, and not forward leaning—even possibly too late. Three years on, not only do I still stand by the assertion of China's intentions regarding the Senkaku Islands, but I also assert that the PLA has dramatically increased its military capability, lethality and readiness for combat. Last summer, the PLA Navy proudly publicized a practice run in the East China Sea, calling it a "sudden cruel war."³ It is the same meaning as the term "short, sharp war". China has in effect tightened its noose around the Senkaku Islands and is on the verge of being able to successfully conduct a "short, sharp war" to take these islands.

Before detailing my thesis, it is important to note that the concept of "short, sharp war" is nothing new to the PRC's rulers. During the PRC invasion of the Korean peninsula in 1950, the 1962 Sino-India War, its 1969 border battles with the Soviet Union, the 1974 Paracel Island assault, and the 1979 invasion of Vietnam, China sought victory in "short, sharp wars" based on doctrines emphasizing strategic deception, highly mobile offensive operations, and battles of annihilation. It is also worth noting the PRC was willing to sustain massive casualties and economic hardship in order to win what it hoped would be "short, sharp wars" designed to settle border disputes in its favor and—especially in the case of India and Vietnam—to teach its adversaries a "serious lesson".⁴

My thesis is simple and straightforward: while China would prefer to never fire a single shot to restore what its leaders claim is its sovereign territory, the PRC has prepared itself for just such an aggressive combat operation. Today, China is now more prepared than ever to be able to conduct a "short, sharp war" against these islands, to restore its perceived sovereign territory and thus fulfill President Xi's direction "to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation".⁵

Furthermore, if China's leaders perceive that the non-kinetic forms of their Comprehensive National Power have not produced results they desire, there will be increasing pressure from within the PRC to use the military option. China will employ

the military option sometime during what I describe as the “Decade of Concern”, from 2020 to 2030.

The Senkakus—A “Core Interest”

While no Chinese government official has yet to publicly declare the Senkaku Islands (“Diaoyu Islands” in Chinese) are a “core interest”, all available evidence indicates China believes the Senkaku Islands are an inherent part of its territory, as it does Taiwan and the South China Sea. This is a significant point. Many in academia and the intelligence community incorrectly believe that a public PRC assertion of the term “core interest” is the only real proof of China’s perceived vital strategic interests; these incorrect assertions have led to a flawed national security policy that is having strategic, and potentially devastating consequences for the U.S. and our allies.

So allow me to emphasize again: the Senkakus are now a Chinese “core interest”.

Nevertheless, the PRC's strategic interest in the Senkaku Islands is rather recent despite official proclamations that they have been an inherent part of China since "ancient times".⁶ Following the end of World War II, the Senkaku Islands were under the control of the United States, as stipulated in Articles 3 and 4B of the 1950 Treaty of San Francisco.⁷ Control of the islands was then relinquished by the United States and given to Japan in 1971, as stipulated in the two nations' "Okinawa Agreement".⁸ Since that time the Japanese government has maintained administrative control over the islands.

Following a United Nation's report alleging the continental shelf between Taiwan and Japan might be extremely rich in oil reserves, China's Foreign Ministry in December 1971 made their first formal claim to the Senkaku Islands.⁹ While China publicly "set aside" its differences with Japan over its sovereignty claims after World War II, that did not change Beijing's belief that the Diaoyu islands are unquestionably China's sovereign territory. Beijing's belief was made clear in the following passage from their 2012 "White Paper" on this topic:

“Diaoyu Dao [island] has been an inherent territory of China since ancient times, and China has indisputable sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao. As China and Japan were normalizing relations and concluding the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Peace and Friendship in the 1970s, the then leaders of the two countries, acting in the larger interest of China-Japan relations, reached [an] important understanding and consensus on "leaving the issue of Diaoyu Dao to be resolved later."^{10 111}

For the next nearly 40 years, China’s leaders followed Deng Xiaoping’s famous dictum of *Taoguang yanghui, yousuo zuowei*: “Bide time, conceal capabilities, but do some things”, China’s leader’s largely refrained from aggressively and publicly expressing their claims of sovereignty over the islands.¹²

On December 8th, 2008, the Chinese conducted an operation that deliberately up-ended their previous maritime policy of avoiding confrontations; they sailed to the Senkakus, circumnavigated them, returned home and publicized the act. It was

¹ The Government of Japan has never accepted China’s assertion of this so-called “setting aside” agreement.

completely legal within the context of international law, but it was an abrupt change that marked the operational beginning of China's maritime expansionism campaign in both the East South China Seas. However, it was subtle at first as China tested the resolve of its neighbors whose maritime rights it intended to seize, and their ally the United States.

The first real evidence that China was changing its self-declared "setting aside" posture occurred in September 2010, when a Chinese fishing trawler rammed a Japanese Coast Guard ship that was patrolling near the Senkaku Islands.¹³ The event was internationalized with the arrest (and subsequent release) of the Chinese fishing trawler captain and the leak of a Japanese Coast Guard video showing the aggressive and dangerous action by the Chinese fishing trawler.¹⁴

The most significant event in this timeline occurred not in the East China Sea, but in the South China Sea with the Scarborough Shoal Incident of April to June 2012. This incident was a watershed event in China's expansionist strategy. The Philippine president traveled to the United States to personally beseech the support of President Obama but received no specific statements of support, and no operational support followed. The PRC read the signal and seized sovereign rights at Scarborough Shoal from a U.S. ally—something never before done—without firing a shot. The leader of the Leading Group that orchestrated the seizure was at that time not well known in the West, a man named Xi Jinping, who had been selected by the Chinese Communist Party to become China's next president the following year.

This event made him a national hero just when he most needed the political legitimacy, at a time when he was battling political rivals, including Bo Xilai. The acquiescence of the U.S., the Philippines, and others turned out to be a significant turning point—a real pivot—for President Xi and his vision to "restore" China's territorial claims by destroying the system of alliances that had long contained China's expansionism. The incident demonstrated, that despite the U.S.'s longstanding presence in the region and its much publicized "rebalance to the Pacific", there was a vacuum in the political decision making process in Washington. This vacuum encouraged President Xi to aggressively move forward his plans for the national restoration of China's imagined territories. While in the West the Scarborough seizure was treated as a minor fisheries dispute, Chinese scholars recognized the significance of Xi's template for mooting U.S. alliances by undercutting confidence in the agreements, calling it the "Scarborough Model."

It also highlighted the shallowness of U.S. understanding of China's intentions, both in our academic community and in our intelligence assessments, but that is a topic for another day.

Then in September 2012, President Xi led the dramatic escalation in political tension surrounding the Senkaku Islands by leveraging the Japanese government's six-month advance notification to China of its decision to convert its lease on the islands to ownership on 11 September. It was entirely an administrative act, an internal paperwork drill, but it elicited an immediate, and furious, response from China. China's Ambassador to the United Nation's, Li Baodong, condemned Japan's actions as constituting "a serious encroachment upon China's sovereignty". More threateningly Ambassador Li stated the "Chinese government and people will never waver in their will and determination to uphold China's territorial integrity and sovereignty."¹⁵

That same month, the PRC's State Council Information Office released an official "White Paper" on "Diaoyu Islands".¹⁶ The document reasserted China's position that the islands are "an inseparable part of the Chinese territory" and that "China enjoys indisputable sovereignty" over these islands.¹⁷ The paper concludes with these subtly threatening words, that "the Chinese government has the unshakable resolve and will to uphold the nation's territorial sovereignty. It has the confidence and ability to safeguard China's state sovereignty and territorial integrity."¹⁸ Since that time there have been many more official and unofficial statements from China condemning Japan's "purchase" of the islands and asserting China's sovereignty over the islands. However the most important demonstration of China's strategic intention has been by its actions on, above, and presumably below the islands' waters by China's maritime forces.

Strategic and Campaign Doctrine

It has been stated, "strategy is best judged by what is actually done rather than what is said or claimed".¹⁹ However, any analysis of China's plans to take the Senkaku Islands is better understood when placed into the context and perspective of Chinese strategy and campaign doctrine. Although the PRC has not published its strategic military campaign plan for taking the Senkaku Islands or even made "a unified, single doctrine for guiding military operations" available to the public, documents like the 2006 *Science of Campaigns* and 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* provide insight into Chinese military strategy and doctrine.²⁰ To be understood, Chinese military doctrine is "the combination of several documents and guidelines at different command levels of the armed forces, united into a hierarchical system that the Chinese refer to as a "Science of Military Strategy."²¹

At the top of this hierarchy of Chinese military doctrine are the three concepts of “Active Defense”, “Local War under Conditions of Informatization” and “People’s War”.²² All three have some relationship to how the PLA would conduct an operation against the Senkaku Islands.

A Mao-era operational concept, the PLA asserts that Active Defense is a “policy of strategic defense and will only strike militarily after it has already been struck”.²³ But that notion has given way to the concept of “gaining the initiative by striking the first blow” (xian fa zhi ren)—the absolute requirement to seize the initiative in the opening phase of a war.²⁴

Noteworthy also is that the policy of Active Defense includes the stipulation “that such a defensive strategic posture is only viable if mated with an offensive operational posture.” Moreover, the first strike that triggers a Chinese military response need not be military; actions in the political and strategic realm may also justify a Chinese military reaction.”²⁵ In the context of the Senkaku Islands, this is especially important given Japanese government use of its coast guard to provide the first layer of administrative control over the island. For instance, Beijing could use something as innocuous as a change in Japan Coast Guard force posture or even the language Japan uses when patrolling the islands as a justification for initiating an Active Defense military operation.

Official PLA doctrine since 1993, Local War under Conditions of Informatization asserts that future warfare will be conducted within local geography, primarily along China’s periphery, and will be limited in scope and duration.²⁶ While limited in scope and duration, under this doctrine, the PLA expects to act decisively and be victorious, especially when its forces are aided by modern, lethal weapons and are connected by robust, redundant and reliable command and control systems. Situational awareness is a key priority for operating under this doctrine and the PLA will utilize a densely layered intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance network to provide its agile force the capability for high-tempo power projection operations to achieve China’s strategic aim, in this case—to take the Senkakus and place them under its physical control.

Finally, when discussing the macro levels of Chinese military doctrine as it relates to a Senkaku Islands campaign, the concept of People’s War is “one in which the people actively support the military during times of warfare: this active support can be logistical, political, or operational.”²⁷ Under this doctrine, the PLA has designated the Chinese population and local governments as being vital resources, especially during a “Local War” scenario like taking the Senkaku Islands. Ultimately, under the doctrine of

People's War, the PLA believes "the local population can be decisive even in a local, high-technology war."²⁸

Specifically, the "local population" will be the principal maritime element of any People's War against the Senkaku Islands. This will be in the form of the "People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia" (PAFMM) and China's civil/military fishing fleets, the largest fishing fleets in the world.²⁹ As recently reported by the U.S. Navy War College's *China Maritime Studies Institute*, Professors Kennedy and Erickson provide evidence that "China's PAFMM is an armed mass organization primarily comprising mariners working in the civilian economy who are trained and can be mobilized to defend and advance China's maritime territorial claims, protect "maritime rights and interests," and support the PLA Navy (PLAN) in wartime."³⁰ Given the growing presence of Chinese sea forces around the Senkaku Islands over the past five years, it has become obvious that China not only believes the islands are their sovereign territory, but are actively preparing a "short, sharp war" military campaign using the PAFMM as the vanguard to take back the islands.

Senkaku Island Campaign Scenarios

While much of the evidence regarding China's actions around the Senkaku Islands remains classified, there are several indicators in unclassified press reporting that provide a clear insight into the operational elements of a Chinese military campaign to take control of the islands by force. Given China's doctrine and the observed actions of its military and para-military forces over the past five years, there are likely three Chinese vectors for a "short, sharp war" against the Senkaku Islands:

- 1) Maritime Law Enforcement Scenario,
- 2) PLA Exercise Scenario, and
- 3) Taiwan Island Attack Scenario.

Under each scenario, the goal of the PRC would be to physically occupy the Senkaku Islands and maintain permanent control over them. To varying degrees, each scenario would have significant overlap in terms of forces used to seize the islands, the difference predominately being *how* the attack was initiated.

Maritime Law Enforcement Forces

First among these scenarios deals with what is known collectively as China's "Maritime Law Enforcement Forces" (MLEF). Originally known as the "Five Dragons", China's

National People's Congress in March 2013 passed legislation to create an "entirely new maritime law enforcement entity", to be called the China Coast Guard Bureau (zhongguo haijingju).³¹

As it did during the 2012 Scarborough Shoal Incident, China has dispatched an increasing number of MLEF ships to the Senkaku Islands to demonstrate resolve and to apply increasing pressure to the Japanese Coast Guard, which has patrolled the islands on a daily basis for years.

According to the Japanese Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs reporting, from the period 2008 to September 2012, Chinese military law enforcement vessels rarely conducted intrusions into the 12 nautical mile (nm) territorial limit of the Senkaku Islands, with only one intrusion in 2008 and one in 2011.³²

Following Japan's September 2012 announcement of nationalization of the islands, China's maritime law enforcement vessels dramatically increased their intrusions into the Senkaku Islands territorial waters. In the final three months of 2012, Chinese intrusions increased to 23 times with over 68 Chinese Coast Guard ships (an average of three ships per intrusion) entering the 12nm limit and directly challenging Japan's sovereignty of the islands.³³ (Figure 1)

Chinese Coast Guard intrusions into the Senkaku Islands territorial waters are just the tip of the iceberg in China's response. For instance, when the Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels were not conducting intrusions into the 12nm territorial limit they would remain in the general area of the islands (within 30nm) and would frequently conduct intrusions into the islands 24nm contiguous zone. The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) defines the contiguous zone is "the area where coastal State may exercise the control necessary to prevent the infringement of its customs, fiscal, immigration or sanitary laws and regulations within its territory or territorial sea, and punish infringement of those laws and regulations committed within its territory or territorial sea."³⁴ As at Scarborough, Beijing's strategy was to visibly ratchet up the pressure on Tokyo by increasing the presence of its MLEFs in and around the Senkaku Islands and to demonstrate gradually increased Chinese civil administration over the islands, a key component of its maritime sovereignty expansion campaign.

In the first year (September 2012 to October 2013) Chinese maritime law enforcement vessels conducted 52 intrusions into the Senkaku's territorial waters. Then from 2013 through 2016, these intrusions normalized to an average of 34 times per year, or two to

three times per month.³⁵ The pressure continued to build, when in December 2015 Japan reported that for the first time an armed Chinese Coast Guard cutter, *Haijing 31239* (formerly a PLA Navy *Jiangwei I*-class frigate) entered the contiguous zone on 22 December and then the territorial waters on the 26th.^{36, 37}

China's probing of Japan's defense of the islands came in many forms. For instance, as the Chinese Coast Guard began its presence around the islands, it became obvious that their craft were deficient for the task of continuous presence due to the small size of their patrol boats. Generally smaller than 1,000 tons, these vessels had a limited ability to remain on station near the islands, especially during bad weather and in higher sea states (usually above sea state 3-4). This all began to change in 2014 when Chinese MLEF vessels patrolling the Senkaku Island began to increase in size.³⁸ For instance, in August of 2014 at least one frigate-sized 3,000-ton Chinese MLEF vessel deployed to the Senkaku Islands and by February of 2015 there were reports of the first intrusion by three MLEF vessels greater than 3,000-tons.³⁹

Size matters in confrontations at sea, especially between coast guard vessels. As China has sought more of its neighbors' maritime sovereignty, it has built ever-larger coast guard ships. These are intended to enable its civil maritime forces to carry out China's campaign more aggressively (having the biggest ship on scene), and to conduct them at increasing distances from China's coastline. As such, China has demonstrated its commitment to have the largest coast guard vessels in the Asia Pacific region. In 2014, China commissioned the largest coast guard cutter in the world, at 12,000 tons, the *Zhongguo Haijing 2901*. This cutter first went to sea for the first time in May 2015 and is subordinated to the East China Sea area of responsibility.⁴⁰ A second ship of the class, *CCG3901*, was completed and made ready for operations in January 2016.⁴¹ The Communist Party's *People's Daily* made the purpose of these ships crystal-clear, stating they were designed to have "the power to smash into a vessel weighing more than 20,000 tons and will not cause any damage to itself when confronting a vessel weighing under 9,000 tons. It can also destroy a 5,000 ton ship and sink it to the sea floor."⁴²

Note carefully the combat assault mission of these Chinese Coast Guard ships.

While most other nations emphasize their maritime law enforcement agencies' ability to support safety at sea, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations with an emphasis on saving lives and helping those in distress at sea, China has taken a different approach. China instead boasts their large Coast Guard vessels as being designed not to save lives at sea: China publicly admits their large cutters are designed to sink coast guard ships and fishing boats. This "ram and sink" Chinese

Coast Guard mission provides a unique insight into the PRC's potential operational plan to take the Senkaku Islands by force.

While the size and scope of operations of China's MLEF are important factors in being able to support a "short, sharp war" against the Senkaku Islands, so is the proximity of these operational forces. Beijing quickly realized that any plan to use the MLEF as a proxy force in operations against the Senkaku Islands would be constrained by the distances of existing Chinese MLEF bases to the islands. Consequently, in June of 2015, the first reports emerged of China Coast Guard building a new base near the city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, much closer to the Senkaku Islands.⁴³ The plans, as posted to the city website (which have since been deleted) indicated the base is being designed to "occupy about 500,000 sq. meters and will have a pier around 1.2 km long with a facility where six vessels—including large ones with a displacement of up to 10,000 tons—can moor, a hangar for airplanes and helicopters, and a large training facility."⁴⁴

Interestingly, and no doubt related, were China's plans for construction of another new base, this time for PLA Navy on the island of Nanji near the new coast guard base at Wenzhou.⁴⁵ Nanji Island is 60nm closer to the Senkaku Islands than are the military bases of Japan and the United States located on Okinawa. These islands are reported to already have "an advanced radar system in place and a heliport for use by carrier-based helicopters."⁴⁶ It is also expected to have a runway that would diminish flight time to the Senkaku Islands, as well as increase available on-station time by either Chinese Coast Guard or PLA air forces.

Another interesting element that can be derived from these reports is the emphasis China places on the integration of MLE and PLA forces. When it comes to the Senkakus, China's leaders recognized that a closer proximity for its civil and military forces was absolutely necessary in order to meet the demands of a "short, sharp war" to take the islands.

The Chinese would start the war the same way they started their seizure of Scarborough Reef from the Philippines, by progressively leaning in on the feature with fishermen, and MLE forces "protecting" them. They'd increase their presence in fine increments—coming closer, anchoring, taking resources, landing on the islands, building on the islands—until the Japanese had one of two choices: either surrender their territory to the encroachment as the Philippines did at Scarborough Reef when we declined to operationally support them, or take some defensive enforcement action.

That defensive action, no matter how slight and non-confrontational, would be magnified in Beijing's propaganda and exploited as the excuse for China's rapid escalation to destruction of the Japanese Navy in the East China Sea—within hours, the short sharp war—before calling for a truce. Beijing would anguish over the destruction caused by the Japanese provocation, and beseech the community to stop the fighting with no more forces being poured into the region. The call for talks of course would be attractive to the U.S., and it would leave China in place, in control of its newly seized territory.

The war-fighting aspect of this scenario is actually difficult. It is technically hard to cause dozens or hundreds of cruise and ballistic missiles to converge on a moving target inside a short time window, and it's very expensive to practice. The U.S. Navy can't afford it, but the Chinese are investing significant national treasure and effort into preparations for this conflict. They've re-organized their forces, particularly their rocket forces, which will help them ensure they can bring a maximum volume of ballistic and cruise missilery to bear. At the end of 2016, they published a video bragging about their ability to rapidly re-task their Rocket Force against ships, implying they had done it against the USS Ronald Reagan in July when it sailed through the South China Sea.

Their H-6 bombers are now regularly practicing to deter the U.S. Navy from approaching the Philippine Sea, and you've already heard of the PLA's anti-ship ballistic missiles.

This level of violence is complex to coordinate, but they've stood up an East Sea Joint Operations Center. Given the increasing presence, size, and frequency of Chinese MLEF vessels into the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands, the next logical question is how would China use these forces to take physical control of the islands?

An event from August 2016 may prove to have been a rehearsal of how China may take the islands.

Around mid-day on the 5th of August 2016, some 200-300 Chinese fishing boats swarmed into the contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands of Kuba and Uotsuri, accompanied by one Chinese MLEF vessel.⁴⁷ By the 9th of August up to 15 Chinese MLEF vessels had first entered the contiguous zone and then drove on into the 12nm territorial water limit of the islands. This was the first time China had ever put that many fishing ships and law enforcement vessels into the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands. This surge of 15 MLEF ships was a dramatic and significant increase compared to the average number of three (3) MLEF vessels that had deployed into the contiguous zone since 2012.⁴⁸

Particularly noteworthy was the fact that a large number of these vessels were observed with deck-guns, greatly increasing the potential volatility of these intrusions.

This sustained “pressurization” by the Chinese MLEF vessels into the territorial waters and contiguous zones of the Senkaku Islands not only represents a significant threat to Japan’s ability to administer the islands, but is in fact the most likely avenue of approach for any Chinese attempt to take the islands by force.

This scenario is especially possible during a period of bad weather and high sea-states that would drive away the Japanese Coast Guard from their patrol stations within the 12nm territorial limit. Even the temporary absence of Japanese Coast Guard ships could open a window of opportunity for China’s Coast Guard to surge into the vacuum and thus take control of the islands, with the PLA Navy lurking just over the horizon.

The Role of the PLA

China has enjoyed recent successes in acquiring territory and maritime sovereignty from its neighbors through the threat rather than use of force, like at Scarborough Shoal in 2012 and the building of new so-called “Spratly Islands” from 2012 to present. Nonetheless, the Communist Party of China has charged the PLA with transforming itself into a force that will be ready to take Taiwan by 2020.⁴⁹ By all accounts, the PLA is well on their way towards achieving that goal.

Equally as important is the reality that if the PLA can take Taiwan, then it can also take the Senkaku Islands. It isn’t hard to recognize the multiple overlapping military requirements for both scenarios, especially for the smaller Senkaku Islands. The military capabilities required to take Taiwan apply to a scenario like the Senkaku Islands, and China is more likely to be use them against the Senkakus because of the smaller scope and shorter campaign the PLA anticipates to be necessary to achieve victory. Likewise, a case can be made that the Senkakus could also be a prerequisite for the acquisition and assimilation of Taiwan.

Since taking office, President Xi has accelerated this transformation of the PLA through a high profile anti-corruption campaign within the Party and PLA and a restructuring of China’s seven military regions into five theater commands. He has also “subordinated the ground force to an army service headquarters, raised the stature and role of the strategic missile force, and established a Strategic Support Force (SSF) to integrate space, cyber, and electronic warfare capabilities.”⁵⁰

Furthermore by early 2016, President Xi had re-organized and streamlined the senior echelons of the PLA by discarding “the PLA’s four traditional general departments in favor of 15 new CMC functional departments.”⁵¹ And to put a capstone on this transformation, President Xi announced the Central Military Commission (CMC) would now be in charge of the “overall administration of the PLA, People’s Armed Police, militia, and reserves” with the new theater commands (sometimes referred to as “joint war zones”) to focus on combat preparedness. Meanwhile the various services would be responsible for the development of what in the U.S. are the “Title 10 authorities” to man, train, and equip the force.⁵²

The PLA Navy

In addition to this transformation rests the largest military modernization effort since the end of World War II. The growth of the PLA Navy from 2000 to 2015 far exceeds the build-up in any other nation’s Navy in the post-World War II era, save for the U.S. Navy during the Reagan years of the 1980s. Some believe this growth has reached its apex, but they are wrong. Given the stated intentions of China’s leader to fulfill the “China Dream” of national restoration and rejuvenation, China’s demonstrated shipbuilding capabilities and capacities, and its significant growth in blue-water operations, it is clear the PLA Navy will be a dramatically larger and a more combat capable navy than has been previously estimated or accepted by conventional wisdom.

While the “modernization” of the PLA Navy cannot be denied, even more obvious has been the changing pattern of PLA Navy operations. Instead of being a coastal water Navy force steaming within 50nm of China’s coastline, today the Chinese Navy has pushed out into the blue water of the Pacific Ocean and beyond. (Figure 2 & 3)

I would also emphasize the relationship between the “rate of growth” of the PLA Navy and its modernization program that is increasingly testing new hull designs and weapon systems. What this means in real terms is that in order for China’s leaders to achieve their vision of a “rejuvenated” and “restored” China, they needed a fleet that can expand China’s “interior lines” out into the maritime domain. That goal will be largely met by 2020. It will most certainly provide Beijing with the means to take the Senkaku Islands by force.⁵³

Far Seas Operations

As introduced by President Hu Jintao's "New Historic Missions" speech to the Central Military Commission in 2004, the PLA Navy was given new responsibilities to "defend China's expanding national interests" and to "uphold world peace."⁵⁴ President Hu's "New Historic Missions" effectively inaugurated China's Maritime Strategy and shifted the PLA Navy's focus from the "near seas" to a "far seas defense."⁵⁵

In view of the Party's strategic direction and consistent with China's growing global economic interests, over the course of the past decade the world has witnessed the PLA Navy's expanded operations, which President Xi has not only sustained but has increased under the rubric of his vision of the "China Dream." Whether it is eight year's of sustained anti-piracy task force operations in the Gulf of Aden, non-combatant evacuation operations of its citizens from Libya, escorting and supporting United Nations operations to remove chemical weapons from Syria, global "goodwill" deployments, or out of area nuclear submarine operations, China's maritime forces today sail the seven seas.

Some argue "the speed and scope of PLAN movement toward the Far Seas remains unclear" principally, because of the complexity and experience required for such operations.⁵⁶ Proponents of this view believe the pace of PRC naval modernization, specifically shipbuilding, will remain the same or could even diminish over the next 15 years. But an examination of previous PLAN operations and emerging missions instead strongly suggests the trajectory of growth will only increase. This increase will provide Communist Party leaders the confidence in the PLA necessary to undertake combat operations in the East China Sea.

An examination of PLA Navy "blue water operations" over the past fifteen years reveals "China's ambitious naval modernization has produced a more technologically advanced and flexible force". This evolving naval force will provide Beijing the capability to successfully conduct a military campaign to take the Senkaku Islands.⁵⁷ This pattern of activity over the past decade has instituted a new normalization for PLAN far seas operations and "is an important step toward an emerging new maritime strategy that will incorporate far seas defense", something that is especially applicable to a Senkaku Islands scenario.⁵⁸

This transformation has required a new force structure, one that has increased both the number and type of naval platforms. With respect to far seas operations, the Office of Naval Intelligence 2015 report, "The PLA Navy – New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century" stated that "during the past decade, requirements for diversified missions and far seas operations have stimulated an operational shift and have catalyzed the

acquisition of multi-mission platforms”. These multi-mission platforms are perfectly suited for naval combat against Japan naval forces tasked to defend the Senkaku Islands.⁵⁹

China’s naval shipbuilding requirements will NOT cease over the next decade. Instead, they will increase and will provide PLA Navy leaders the capability to conduct naval warfare within the First Island Chain, specifically against Japanese Maritime Self Defense Forces.

Not only does the present day PLA Navy present a significant threat to Japan, but it now also threatens the U.S. Navy.

In Holmes and Yoshihara’s recently published monograph “Taking Stock of China’s Growing Navy: The Death and Life of Surface Fleets”, they assert the PLA Navy is “particularly well-suited to seize islands.”⁶⁰ They say the PLAN assault forces will be led by surface combatant strike groups comprised of its premier combatant, the Type 052D *Luyang III*-class guided missile destroyers, the Type 054C *Luyang II*-class guided missile destroyers, the Type 054A *Jiangkai III*-class guided missile frigates and the Soviet-built *Sovremenny*-class destroyers.

Not only could these surface action strike groups provide withering naval gun fire support for an amphibious landing force with their superior (range, speed, and survivability) anti-ship cruise missile inventory, but these combatants would provide sea-based air defense that would constrain or even preclude U.S. or Japanese air operations near an amphibious operation.⁶¹ Given China’s superior number of advanced surface combatants “it is far from clear that the United States retains its accustomed supremacy”, especially in a Senkaku Islands campaign where naval warfare will determine mission success.⁶²

In addition to PRC MLEF and PAFMM ships, PLA Navy forces have also increased their operations in and around the Senkaku Islands since 2012. Prior to 2012, PLA Navy warships generally patrolled on the west side of the “Median Line”. Since 2012 there has also been an increase in the number of Chinese warships operating for sustained periods of time east of the “Median Line”. This trend culminated on 19 June 2016 when the Japanese destroyer *Setogiri* confirmed a PLAN *Jiangkai I*-class frigate had entered the Contiguous Zone of the Senkaku Island of Kuba.⁶³

While this event was linked at the time to the transit of a Russian *Udaloy*-class destroyer between the Kuba and Taisho Islands, the larger point is that a PLA Navy

warship was in the immediate area of the Senkaku Islands, as if on patrol station. The implications from this event demonstrate the PLA Navy is steaming closer and closer to the Senkakus, tightening its noose.

The challenge for the defending force of Japanese and U.S. warships operating within the First Island Chain is compounded by China's ability to bring firepower of all three of their fleets into the sea area around the Senkaku Islands. In addition, naval fires will also come from a densely populated submarine force armed with supersonic, sea-skimming, 290nm range YJ-18 ASCM, as well as air-delivered ASCMs from PLA Air Forces. With these surface, subsurface, and air forces at hand in the East China Sea the PLA Navy has the capability to conduct a "short, sharp war" to take the Senkaku Islands.

PLA Navy Amphibious Forces

Perhaps the most important aspect to any successful Chinese Senkaku Islands campaign involves the act of physically moving forces ashore.

While no secret PLA battle plan for taking the Senkaku Islands has been revealed to the international press, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest China's leaders believe that in order to be fully restored as a nation, Chinese forces will need to occupy all of the disputed areas.

First, we have seen China take physical possession of Scarborough Shoal, and create seven new man-made islands in the Spratly Islands. If Beijing believed that only a diplomatic agreement was sufficient, why build 48 square miles of new islands at a huge cost both economically and diplomatically—unless you are committed to the old lawyer's adage, "possession is 9/10ths of the law".⁶⁴

Not only has China taken physical possession of these islands and shoals in the South China Sea, they have continued to train their naval and amphibious forces in the art of expeditionary warfare, a skill set that can be applied to a Senkaku Islands campaign. Most recently in the South China Sea, two amphibious dock landing ships, three air-cushion landing craft, and two ship-borne helicopters conducted beach landing exercises.⁶⁵ This type of training is ubiquitous across the East and South China Sea and is the most tangible evidence of the PLA's intention of being prepared to conduct such a mission.

One facet of President Xi's transformation of the PLA includes a dramatic expansion of the PLA Marine Corps (PLAMC) to 100,000 strong personnel—a tenfold increase of its Marine Corps of just a few years ago. According to the *South China Morning Post*, “two special warfare brigades had already been incorporated into the PLAMC, raising the forces' complement of soldiers to 20,000.”⁶⁶ While the reporting indicates that some of these new PLAMC forces will be dispatched to far-flung installations like in Gwadar, Pakistan or the new PLA Navy base in Djibouti, there is little doubt that the growth of PLAMC personnel is necessary to keep up with the increasing number of high-end, large amphibious warships that China has acquired and is intent on building over the near term.

For instance, according to the *Office of Naval Intelligence* as of 2015, the PLA Navy has 56 amphibious warships, ranging from a few WW-II era landing ships to the four of the large, modern *Yuzhao*-class Type 071 amphibious transport docks (LPD), “which provide a considerably greater and more flexible capability than the older landing ships.”⁶⁷ The *Yuzhao* is perfectly fitted for a Senkaku Islands campaign as it “can carry up to four of the new air cushion landing craft”, as well as “four or more helicopters, armored vehicles, and troops”.⁶⁸

Not content with the *Yuzhao*, China has announced it “has started building a new generation of large amphibious assault vessels that will strengthen the navy as it plays a more dominant role in projecting the nation's power overseas”.⁶⁹ PLA Navy Commander, Vice-Admiral Shen Jinlong, reportedly visited the Hudong Zhonghua Shipbuilding Company in Shanghai where the new ship, identified as the Type 075 landing helicopter dock (LHD), is reportedly under construction.⁷⁰

The Type 075 is much larger than any other amphibious warship previously built for the PLA Navy. It is approximately the same size as the U.S. Navy's *Wasp*-class amphibious ships.⁷¹ What makes the Type 075 uniquely suited to a Senkaku Islands campaign is the large amount of attack and transport helicopters it will be able to carry compared to the *Yuzhao*-class's four helicopters. The Type 075 is projected to be able to carry up to 30 helicopters and have the ability to launch six helicopters simultaneously.⁷² This becomes critically important because at present the closest PLA airfield from which the PLA could launch attacking helicopters against the Senkaku Islands is well over 180nm away. The Type 075 will provide the critical, or “missing”, element of China being able to project “boots on the ground” as far as the Senkaku Islands.

In terms of timing, “the first vessel may be launched as early as 2019 and put into full service in 2020.”⁷³ Given the Chinese shipbuilding industry's past performance in

building the *Yuzhao* and the new Type 001A indigenous aircraft carrier, it is likely the PLA will be able to build and operate up to four of these amphibious warships by 2025. Whatever the final number of amphibious vessels, it is likely the PLA Navy and Marine Corps will be ready to “answer the bell” when called upon by President Xi to take the Senkaku Islands.

PLA Air Forces

The importance of PLA air forces in a Senkaku Islands scenario became clear on 23 November 2013, when the PRC abruptly declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea.⁷⁴ Despite their unilateral action having been “called out” by senior U.S. Defense and State Department officials, as “a provocative act and a serious step in the wrong direction”, China has not backed down.⁷⁵ Not deterred by history or international norms, the PRC government and media propaganda statements declared the ADIZ gave China the right to take “emergency measures” against non-compliant aircraft in international airspace, even aircraft that were not vectored at the Chinese mainland.⁷⁶ While the ADIZ was portrayed to be about protecting China’s mainland, it could equally be a valuable tool in any Chinese Active Defense stratagem to take the Senkaku Islands.

Since the ADIZ declaration, PLA air forces have increased the scope and scale of flights in and around the Senkaku Islands. In December 2012, a China Maritime Surveillance aircraft entered the Senkaku Islands territorial airspace, the first time in 50 years for such an event to happen.⁷⁷ This event ushered in an era of expanded PLA air force activities in the East China Sea where fighter, airborne warning and control, signal and electronic intelligence aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles have expanded their air operations further and further southeast towards the Senkaku Islands.⁷⁸ Accordingly, Japanese increased reactions to Chinese aircraft from approximately 300 events in 2012 to nearly 700 in 2016.⁷⁹

Additionally, PLA air forces began an aggressive transition from being an exclusively territorial air defense force to one that is now more active and comfortable over the open seas than at any time in its history. For instance in 2013, PLA air forces began flights into the Western Pacific Ocean via the Miyako Strait, and have since averaged between five and six events per year with multiple aircraft.⁸⁰ The aircraft types conducting flights near the Senkaku Islands include bomber, fighter, refueling, electronic intelligence, and airborne early warning aircraft, all attesting to the comprehensive nature of how China would employ air power to help secure and maintain their control over the Senkaku Islands.

Adding complexity to the air domain, the PLA Air Force conducted “its first-ever exercise over the western Pacific via the Bashi Channel” in late March 2015.⁸¹ Despite PLA Air Force public assertions that these drills were routine and not targeted against “any particular country, regions or targets”, there is little doubt PLA air forces entering the Philippine Sea via the Bashi Channel or the Miyako Strait provide the PLA considerable operational and tactical flexibility in any Senkaku Island attack campaign.⁸²

Upping the ante, the PLA Air Force announced in mid-September 2016 that it would conduct “regular” exercises flying past the First Island chain.⁸³ True to its word, PLA air forces have conducted routine flights through the Miyako Strait and Bashi Channel with the most recent big event occurring on 3 March as China sent 13 aircraft through the Miyako Strait.⁸⁴ According to the Japanese Ministry of defense this was “the largest number of foreign planes Japan has scrambled jets for since such data first became available in 2003.”⁸⁵

In response, in February, Japan’s Defense Ministry announced their Air Self Defense Forces (JASDF) “doubled the number of fighter jets it scrambles when responding to airspace checks by foreign planes”.⁸⁶ According to the latest reports by the Japanese, the number of JASDF scrambles launched between April 2016 and January 2017 had already surpassed “the annual record of 944 set in fiscal 1984, when the Cold War was in full swing and airplanes from the former Soviet Union were active.”⁸⁷ JASDF pre-planned response procedures since 1958 had been to send up only two jets per scramble, now the JASDF is sending up four fighters per scramble event. It is apparent the JASDF has been forced to change its protocols due to the provocative and probing nature of China’s air activity around the Senkaku Islands and the Nansei Shoto, where both nations’ ADIZs now overlap.

Noteworthy has been the increasing proximity of Chinese aircraft towards the Senkaku Islands. According to Japan’s Ministry of Defense, China has increased the number of PLA air forces that fly south of the 27 degrees north latitude, an unspoken demarcation line and something Japan has considered a “defensive border line.”⁸⁸ JASDF tactical objectives are designed to keep Chinese planes from flying within a minimum protective air umbrella of approximately 60nm from the Senkaku Islands.

Given the dramatic increase in provocative PLA air force activity and Japanese responses to them in the East China and Philippine Sea, the likelihood for an explosive event has risen greatly. This is especially true since Tokyo and Beijing do not have a “hot line” communication network “that can be used by their militaries to avoid

accidental aerial or maritime clashes.”⁸⁹ The risk of an untoward event in the air has increased, as was seen in December 2016 when Japanese fighters were forced to expend “flares” in response to provocative actions by PLA air force aircraft in the Miyako Strait.⁹⁰ Untoward incidents have not been limited to just China and Japan. U.S. military aircraft have likewise been harassed in the East China Sea. The most recent incident occurred at the end of March 2017, when a U.S. B-1 bomber aircraft flying from Guam to the Korean Peninsula was warned by Chinese air controllers that it was “illegally flying inside” China's ADIZ.⁹¹

While Japan ‘s air force seeks more flexibility by controlling their fighter jets across all of its regions, the fact remains China could easily begin a “short, sharp war” against the Senkaku Islands by exploiting and surprising local air commanders. Specifically, the PLA air forces could launch a large number of fighters and other aircraft towards Okinawa via the Miyako Strait and up through the Bashi Channel with the goal of diverting, diffusing and degrading JASDF efforts to get to the airspace over the Senkaku Islands where a main invasion force, either airborne from helicopters or seaborne, would be conducted concurrently.

And this combined arms diversionary and main assault would all take place under the cover of one of the most sophisticated missile and rocket forces on the planet.

PLA Rocket Forces

In terms of kinetic fires for all three scenarios, per the Chinese military doctrine of “Joint Fire Strike Campaign”, it should be anticipated that Beijing would use its extensive ballistic and cruise missile arsenal, from both the PLA Rocket Force and PLAAF/PLANAF/PLAN, to disrupt rear area operations along the Ryukyu Islands. More importantly, Japan and the U.S. should expect attacks against military bases on the main island of Honshu and Guam where the majority of Japanese and U.S. military strength resides.

Commander Tom Shugart’s recently published article, “Has China Been Practicing Pre-Emptive Missiles Strikes Against U.S. Bases?” convincingly argues “the greatest military threat to U.S. vital interests in Asia may be one that has received somewhat less attention: the growing capability of China’s missile forces to strike U.S. bases.”⁹²

The purpose of these supporting fires, as articulated in “Joint Fire Strike Campaign” doctrine would be to coordinate and synchronize anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles, land-attack cruise missiles, air strikes with precision-guided munitions, and counter-

C4ISR strikes with specialized weapons. These fires would facilitate the main objective of seizing the Senkaku Islands and isolating Japanese and U.S. military forces arrayed across the region.

PLA Informatization Department and Strategic Support Forces (SSF)

An equally important element of China's warfighting strategy is what the PLA calls "Informatization", which is at the core of everything it wants to accomplish, especially in a "short, sharp war" against the Senkaku Islands. From high-tech missions in space and cyberspace, to long-range precision kinetic and non-kinetic strike to naval war-at-sea operations, "the ability to transmit, process, and receive information is a vital enabler."⁹³ PLA strategy addresses Informatization in its offensive combat and "counter intervention" operations.

Reforms to the PLA Informatization Department began in 2015 and are expected to be complete by 2020 when lines of responsibility are further delineated with the newly-created Strategic Support Force. While the Informatization Department's mission has "traditionally been invested in the Information Assurance Base (信息保障基地), which has remained under the Information and Communications Bureau", the SSF's mission is reportedly focused on "strategic-level information support" for "space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare".⁹⁴

The SSF is a critical enabler for joint operations through this mission of strategic-level information support. The SSF has also assumed responsibilities for strategic information warfare. Although usually discussed in the context of a Taiwan contingency, China's cyber forces would play a critical role in any "counter-intervention" (fan jieru; 反介入) strategy against both U.S. and Japan in a Senkaku conflict. The two organizations responsible for this, 3PLA and 4PLA, are both confirmed to be subordinated to the SSF.⁹⁵

With regards to electronic warfare, China has invested heavily in counter-satellite electronic warfare capabilities to force a "no satellite, no fight" environment for the United States, while the role the SSF takes regarding space warfare is less clear. Clearly, the SSF has consolidated the management and control over space-based ISR assets—and it may also have non-kinetic ASATs, such as directed energy weapons. Given the 4PLA is confirmed to be under the SSF and given the force's role in space and EW, it's clear that one of its main missions will be strategic denial of the electro-magnetic spectrum.⁹⁶

China has also taken very real steps to empower their psychological warfare forces, most notably the "three warfares" base or 311 base, located in Fuzhou. This base has been brought under the SSF and is integrated with China's cyber forces. Chinese strategic literature has particularly emphasized the role of psychological operations, legal warfare, and public opinion warfare to subdue an enemy ahead of conflict or ensure victory if conflict breaks out. The operationalization of psyops with cyber is key to this strategy.⁹⁷

The fight for "Public Opinion" will be the PRC's "second battlefield." Prior to initiating its offensive, China will begin worldwide psychological operations and public opinion warfare as part of a concerted Political Warfare campaign. Chinese front organizations and other sympathizers, along with both Chinese and other-nation mass information channels such as the internet, television, and radio, will be used. The focus of these influence operations will be to support China's position and demonize the U.S. and Japan. Internally, this campaign will be important in mobilizing mass support for the "righteous" action, while externally the campaign will attempt to gain support for China's position. This Political Warfare campaign will continue through the island operation, and after--regardless of the success or failure of the operation.

Ultimately the purpose of these organizations is to ensure the sanctity of national and theater level command and control as well as enhance the warfighting effectiveness of each of the individual services. In the confines of a "short, sharp war" against the Senkaku Islands these "invisible" forces will provide precise situational awareness, target identification of opposing forces, network defenses, and real-time command and control that will enable the PLA to take and hold the Senkaku Islands.

An example of these efforts was revealed in 2014 when PLA established a permanent joint operations command center (JOC) responsible for integrating the operations of its army, navy and air forces. It was the first time such a JOC had been established and is seen as being able to "boost the unified operations of Chinese capabilities on land, sea, air and in dealing with strategic missile operations."⁹⁸ When combined with President Xi's other PLA reforms, it seems clear that China's ability to command and control all of its forces in a "short, sharp war" scenario against the Senkakus is well established and practiced.

PLA Exercise Scenario

One of the more contentious elements of my 2014 speech was when I made the assertion that the PLA exercise "Mission Action 2013" was linked to the PLA having

been given a task to conduct a “short sharp war against the Senkaku Islands. Some scholars criticized this analysis, asserting that if the “PLA wanted to attack the Senkakus, the operation would not look like Mission Action 2013. Moreover, any attack begs the issue of how China would defend and supply forces isolated on islands 200 miles from its coast.”⁹⁹ While leaving themselves an escape clause suggesting that maybe someday the Chinese might be able to conduct such an operation, their analytic error was in discounting the possibility the PLA could use a training exercises like “Mission Action” for other targets than just Taiwan.

It is important to note that since 2014 the PLA has conducted several large-scale exercises that could very well be rehearsals for a Senkaku Islands campaign. Of greater concern, these exercises could also be intended as a deception campaign, designed to lure U.S and Japanese audiences into complacency, so that when the actual “short, sharp” Senkaku Islands campaign commences, it is mistaken for “just another exercise.”

Whether it is the Mission Action (Shiming Xingdong), Joint Action (Lianhe Xingdong), Stride (Kuayue), or even the Firepower (Huoli) series, the PLA is actively training its forces “to improve joint integrated operational capabilities by collecting data to support training and doctrinal development and then implement lessons learned from training assessments and evaluations.”¹⁰⁰

The PLA conducts its exercises under as close to “actual combat conditions” as possible for supporting research and development for future training and operational methods, but also as means to overcome lack of combat experience.¹⁰¹

During these exercises the PLA focuses on skill sets including command and control, logistics, civil-military integration, joint campaign planning, long-range firepower and precision strike, deployment of special operational forces, reconnaissance, information warfare, electronic warfare, long-range mobility, and reconnaissance operations to name a few.¹⁰²

Decade of Concern

Given the Communist Party’s desire for so-called “restoration” of territory, then we must ask: How long will the PRC wait to celebrate the achievement of their goal of national rejuvenation and restoration?

Some have argued (like Mike Pillsbury) that China desires to celebrate the complete restoration of their nation by the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 2049.

Given that assumption, the next logical question is: What will happen if Beijing is unable to achieve complete restoration *via* non-violent means?

It seems clear that Beijing would prefer to acquire their perceived outstanding territorial areas without "firing a shot", as they were successful at doing at Scarborough Shoal and with the creation of their seven "New Spratly Islands". But what if Japan or Taiwan doesn't acquiesce? Will Beijing be inclined to use military force if their strategy runs afoul of a nation that does not bend to the non-kinetic methods of China's Comprehensive National Power?

More simply, how long can Beijing go before they believe they will have to use military force in order to achieve their ultimate goal of national restoration?

For the last five years I have postulated a new theory entitled the "Decade of Concern". Central to the theory is the belief that China has calculated a timeline for when they could use military force at the latest possible moment AND still be able to conduct a grand ceremony commemorating their national restoration in 2049. (Figure 4)

I believe China's leaders have a template for calculating that date and it is the time period from Tiananmen Square to the 2008 Olympics.

As you recall in 1989, the international community largely condemned Beijing's actions of slaughtering its own citizens at Tiananmen Square. Yet, just 19 years later the world's leaders flocked to Beijing to attend the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Remember the scene on August 8th 2008 at the Bird's Nest stadium?

There were tens of thousands of people in the seats watching one of the most impressive Olympic opening ceremonies in history. There at the top of the stadium, in a cool, air-conditioned skybox were the nine members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo (PBCS), looking down over the masses of humanity. At the center of the PBCS was President Hu Jintao, wearing his black Mao suit. President Hu was cool, calm, and collected and what did he see down in those seats, in the 95-degree temperature and 95% humidity?

Why, it was the President of the United States, with big sweat stains under his armpits, who later went on to describe the event as being "spectacular and successful".¹⁰³

What was the strategic message from this event? I believe it reinforced a belief among China's leadership that the West has a short-attention span regarding issues such as crimes against humanity and vicious misuse of military force. In short, Beijing believes the West can be counted on to forget even the most barbarous actions after about a 20-year time span.

Given that logic, then the latest Beijing could use military force to physically restore their perceived territory would be around 2030. This would then allow for 20 years of "peace" before Beijing would conduct a grand ceremony to memorialize the "second 100"—the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

Which leads to the question of when is the earliest China could use military power?

Well, given the current environment and readiness of the PLA, it literally could start at any time. However, a more precise answer is 2020.

As referenced earlier, all-source analysis strongly indicates the PLA has, over the past decade, been given the strategic task of being able to take Taiwan by force by 2020. If the PLA is able to take Taiwan by force in 2020, then it stands to reason that a "lesser included" task to seize the Senkaku Islands would also be something the PLA could achieve.

Which brings us back full-circle to the "Decade of Concern". I believe that starting in 2020, there will be pressure within China to use military force in order to achieve the "China Dream" of national restoration by 2049. The chorus for the use of force will grow each year and will crescendo in the late 2020s and possibly end in a violent clash to seize Taiwan and the Senkakus...or any other area Beijing deems to be a "core interest".

Conclusion—Recommendations

Given China's strategic intention to restore its so-called territorial integrity, its modernization and transformation of the PLA, and its commitment to a pre-determined timeline prompt the question: What can be done to dissuade, deter, or in the worst case defeat a Chinese "short, sharp war" against the Senkaku Islands and the Nansei Shoto?

The answers to this question fall into two categories: 1) those the United States can take on its own and 2) those that it can propose or pursue jointly with Japan. My subsequent recommendations will first address those unilateral actions that the United States can make, followed by those that are suggestive in nature with Japan.

First, and foremost, there needs to be a fundamental transformation in the U.S. national security “culture” of how we deal with China, one that acknowledges that China is the biggest threat to our national security interest. The new administration should declare that U.S.-China relations have entered a new period. We do not need to explicitly reject “new type of great power relationship” asserted by President Xi, but we would implicitly reject it by affirming that the United States relationship with all countries, both great and small, is based on U.S. core interests in respect for international law, Westphalian rights, and negotiated dispute resolution without coercion, with resort to third parties when bilateral negotiations fail. The United States should explicitly support the July 12th, 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, and explicitly reject all claims that conflict with it. Given the dire nature of not just the Senkaku Island situation, but all the other diplomatic, financial, economic, legal and human rights points of friction that have emerged since U.S.-PRC relations were established in 1979, America must now deal with the PRC from a position of strength, one in which we assert our core interests just as the PRC relentlessly does, if not more so.

Regarding the Senkaku Islands, this means the U.S. will not simply say that the Senkaku Islands are covered under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Mutual Defense Treaty. The U.S. must say we will actively and aggressively reinforce the U.S. commitment to use military force against China should it ever attempt to conduct a “short, sharp war” or occupation by military or non-traditional forces.

Second, it also means actively and routinely re-asserting U.S. naval operations in the Indo-Asia Pacific region. There should be no more walking on egg shells, worrying about whether or not routine actions in the Indo-Asia Pacific region are “provoking” China. Beijing has deftly turned that fear into a tool to manipulate the U.S. As an example, the U.S. Pacific Fleet should resume routine operations in the East China Sea, returning to pre-2000 levels where U.S. Navy warships routinely operated west of the Median Line, as well as in the Yellow Sea.

Third, while seemingly unrelated, suggestions for recalibrating the United States China Policy, regardless of whether we call it by Beijing’s title of “One China Policy” or something else, should be openly explored if for no other reason to remind Beijing that threats to Japan will have far ranging and significant consequences. For instance, the

notion that U.S. warships cannot make the occasional port call in Taiwan needs to be honestly examined, discussed with our friends in Taiwan, and if deemed appropriate then executed without fanfare or advance notification.

The message to China should be that freedom of navigation and free access to ports is a core interest of the United States and that the U.S. is not going to be constrained by Beijing's threats.

Closely related to this topic, the U.S. must end the practice of "unconstrained engagement" with China by the Department of Defense. Specifically, the U.S. should suspend China's invitation to the "Rim of the Pacific" (RIMPAC) exercises until Beijing alters its threatening behavior, economic sanctions, hate campaigns, and rhetoric against our allies Japan and the Republic of Korea. RIMPAC should be returned to its origins as an exercise by which the free nations of the world practice the combat skills to deter lawless expansionism of dictatorships, rather than the naval social event. It is simply astonishing that we do not invite our allies, Thailand, because their democracy does not meet our standards, yet we invite the Chinese and host them even as they simultaneously aggress our allies and others.

Fourth, given that this "cultural" change is a national issue, one driven from the top down by the President, it will also require the Congress to adequately fund the Department of Defense. A U.S. return to a strategy which accommodates two major contingency operations is required to drive the national security planning and acquisition process, thus enabling for full funding of the unique military requirements for fighting and defeating any PRC attempt to take the Senkakus, as well as any other PRC attempt to use force to alter the Indo-Asia Pacific status quo.

In this regard, America needs to return to being a truly global maritime power. We carelessly neglected this vital aspect of America's national power during the past two plus decades of emphasis on the CENTCOM area of responsibility. While the U.S. Navy can dispatch ships around the globe, today, the U.S. Navy is not adequately sized or outfitted to meet U.S. national security requirements in the Indo-Asia Pacific region. Even worse, it is certainly debatable whether or not the U.S. could stop a Chinese "short, sharp war" against the Senkaku Islands. The PLA Navy likely will have over 500 ships and submarines by 2030. In order to provide a credible deterrent force and to fight and win wars at sea, the U.S. Navy must get bigger...a lot bigger than the current plan for 350 ships.

Fifth, the new administration should proclaim its commitment to a forward deployed presence, especially for our naval forces, and then it should follow these fine words with concrete, tangible actions. Not only are these necessary to bolster the flagging confidence of U.S. allies, it will also send a clear and unambiguous statement to China. In addition to the current forward deployed force structure, new options can also range from home-porting a second U.S. Navy aircraft carrier in Guam to home-porting ships in South Korea, and forward deploying ballistic missile defense systems (like the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system) in Japan.

Sixth, and closely aligned, is a commitment to conduct more robust and public information campaign to provide an accurate portrayal of China's campaign to expand its maritime sovereignty at the expense of its neighbors and our allies Maritime Intelligence Operations. While the introduction of the P-8 aircraft and the soon-to-be-deployed Triton Unmanned Aerial Vehicle have improved U.S. Department of Defense Title 10 collection capabilities in the Indo-Asia Pacific region, overall the U.S. has displayed a conspicuous lack of will to publicly report the PRC's actions in the maritime domain. For instance, during the recent deployment of China's aircraft carrier *Liaoning*, U.S. PACOM did not provide unclassified pictures of China's inaugural carrier flight operations in the open ocean, even though reconnaissance flights had most probably been conducted. Our reluctance to tell the truth about Beijing's bad behavior needs to end.

There is a tremendous amount of scholarly documentation regarding China's military pursuits, led by experts in think tanks and academia, but even this research is grossly inadequate for truly understanding China's military.¹⁰⁴

Although this information shortfall cannot be faulted due to the secret nature of many of the movements of Chinese naval, coast guard, and militia forces across the vastness of the world's oceans, we do have institutions whose primary mission is to observe such things and to compile databases regarding these activities.

It is a responsibility of the U.S. Navy to know the answers to these secrets, to track ships, submarines and aircraft at sea. Even with U.S. government leaders, civilian and military, being the first priority, U.S. Navy intelligence has the capability and capacity to provide the kinds of primary source material that the academic and think-tank community needs to better and effectively comprehend China's nautical ambitions.¹⁰⁵

Sharing sanitized and declassified information "would not only improve the quality of scholarship and elevate the public debate, it would also go a long way to help frustrate

China's current—and, to date, unanswered—strategy of quiet, coercive-expansion", especially as it relates to China's tightening noose around the Senkaku Islands.¹⁰⁶

As a former Director of Intelligence and Information Operations for the U.S. Pacific Fleet, I remain convinced that "sharing information about the movements and activities of Chinese forces could be done without compromising the secrecy of the sources and methods used to collect it."¹⁰⁷

Also on this point, the sharing of facts about Chinese activities at sea is not just good for democracy, but it is also smart diplomacy. "Making such information widely available would help counter spurious Chinese narratives of American actions as being the root cause of instability in the Western Pacific. Both outcomes are in our national interest."¹⁰⁸

According to U.S. doctrine Phase 0, "shaping operations", are intended to shape the public perception environment, which should also drive what an adversary military can and cannot do. By allowing China to operate clandestinely in the South and East China Seas, the U.S. is foregoing an important opportunity of increasing its own soft power while degrading China's soft power. By providing such damaging information to the public, the USN will better inform the public and provide U.S. leadership with bargaining leverage over China.

Seventh, the U.S. could encourage and support Japan's efforts to physically occupy the Senkaku Islands. Some will suggest that by adopting such a strategy Japan would cross a "red line" and thus force China to act militarily. However, given China's methodological approach to military campaign planning, it is more likely that Beijing would reconsider the military correlation of forces as well as the international implications for launching an attack against occupied islands.

Practically speaking, the U.S. should encourage Japan to construct permanent facilities like a weather station, lighthouses, heliports, and a harbor across the Senkakus, as well as station personnel on the islands. The effect of Japan taking these actions on the islands today, will lead to deterrence in the future. As has been recommended, "a proactive policy is necessary now. Proactive does not mean aggressive (just as caution, in this case, has not translated into greater security). Indeed, one cannot be "aggressive" in exercising one's sovereign rights over one's own territory. Proactive is thoughtful and consistent—and the time has come to move away from caution and towards a proactive approach to securing the Senkakus as the rightful territory of Japan."¹⁰⁹

Eighth, the United States should offer Japan to conduct joint operations in defense of the Senkaku Islands. The basic definition of an alliance is that aggression against one is an attack on all, but the PRC aims to reduce our alliances to friendship agreements. The statement that the “U.S. takes no sides” on a sovereignty dispute involving an ally is illogical; an alliance is the taking of a side. Like marriage, it means something. Our disingenuous quibbling over issues such as the sovereignty of Scarborough Reef, Mischief Reef, and the Senkakus is an invitation for China’s expansionism. China has become bold in its campaign to diminish our alliances. Just this month, China is challenging the right of South Korea to defend itself from North Korean nuclear missiles.

For instance, U.S. Pacific warships could conduct “over-the-horizon” patrols of the Senkaku Islands with their counterparts from JMSDF and JCG. Likewise, American fighter aircraft from the U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps could be integrated with their counterparts from the JASDF when scrambling against Chinese probes of Japan’s ADIZ and the areas around the Senkaku Islands. And perhaps most important, U.S. Marines and the amphibious-trained Japanese Ground Self Defense Force Southwest Army should conduct amphibious assault training exercises together in the Senkakus to demonstrate that if the islands were occupied by Chinese forces, the combined U.S. and Japan forces have the capability and will to retake the islands with “boots on the ground and bayonets”.

By offering these services, the U.S. would not only be helping to relieve the stress that their Japanese counterparts are experiencing, but it would be a significant enhancement in the interoperability between both forces. Finally, it would send another clear and unambiguous signal to China that if they were foolish enough to attempt such an attack, they would be facing an extremely integrated, competent and committed fighting force.

In conclusion, PRC action against the Senkaku Islands is just a matter of time as Beijing tightens its noose around them. We are very close to beginning the “decade of concern”, when it will become increasingly likely that China could launch a “short, sharp war” to take the Senkaku Islands and put the Nansei Shoto under missile and air assault. Accordingly, these recommendations should be immediately explored and acted upon by Congress. I will be happy to help you expand upon them, and to build more to ensure the U.S. is capable of responding to China’s increasing threats and destabilization of the peace and stability of the Indo-Asia Pacific.

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