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### **Asia's Naval Arms Race: Myth or Reality?**

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# ASIA'S NAVAL ARMS RACE: MYTH OR REALITY?

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25<sup>TH</sup> ASIA-PACIFIC ROUNDTABLE

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It is true that during the past two decades after the Cold War, many countries in the Asia Pacific region have made great efforts to modernize their maritime forces. From China, Japan to Southeast Asia to India, maritime forces have been adding new capabilities that they did not possess earlier. A large number of new types of surface warships, submarines, aircraft and missiles have been acquired, which led to the expansion of force projection capabilities. And most Asia-Pacific maritime forces are engaged in greatly expanding and upgrading their C4ISR capabilities. So now arise the following questions,

Is there a Naval arms race in the region? Are recent naval purchases tantamount to an arms race?

**First**, I want to say that these aspects have **not** spurred a general arms race in the Asia Pacific. There is no discernable naval arms race but naval modernisation in

this region. I don't think modernization activity itself by any given country will presage an arms race. Naval developments are not significant enough to affect the balance of power in this region. However, procurement or aspirations to procure submarines could be destabilising.

I think the rationale for the enhancement of such maritime capacities in this region are multifarious and varying for different countries. It depends upon their own perceptions and their own national security demands, and is an individual Nation's choice. But by and large, I think they focus **on four primary reasons**.

**Firstly**, regional countries have tended to focus on maritime capacities in recognition of an increased concern towards growing security challenges in the maritime dimension, and the greater need to secure sea lines of communication (SLOCs) from a range of threats, including piracy, proliferation of WMD and maritime terrorism. One of the most defining features of the modern world is increasing inter-dependence among countries brought about by globalization. The economic benefits of the increased commerce resulting from

globalisation also drive the growth of strong navies, to safeguard and protect seaborne trade and commerce at extended ranges.

**Secondly**, given that Asia Pacific is a region that is prone to sea based natural calamities capable of causing extreme destruction and loss of human life, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief could qualify as a cause of growth in maritime capacity especially if that particular country is vulnerable to such disasters or conversely is keen to provide assistance to less capable states in the region.

**Thirdly** , naval technologies have been through a process of rapid development in recent times and it is not surprising that regional navies wish to access and harness these technologies for achieving national objectives.

**Lastly**, of course we are all aware of the traditional roles of the Navies. Since ensuring the protection of security, sovereignty and sovereign rights will always remain the prime political imperative, it goes without saying that the military role is therefore the *raison d'être* of any naval force. Since potential for conflict, even though minimized, can never cease to exist, Naval Forces will

continue to be developed as traditional means of **deterrence** and **national defence**. Where conflict threatens our national interests, a strong navy can **deter** the **ambitions of aggressors** and **protect our citizens** while working to **maintain good order at sea**.

Here I'd like to speak a little about the Chinese naval development. China pursues a national defense policy which is purely defensive in nature, and implements a military strategy of active defense. In the historical course of China's reform and opening-up over the past three decades, the PLA has invariably taken modernization as its central task. Entering the 1990s, the PLA began to vigorously promote RMA with Chinese characteristics. In the new century, the PLA has been dedicated to performing its new historical missions and improving its capabilities to counter various security threats and accomplish diversified military tasks. It has accelerated the composite development of mechanization and informationization, to continuously increase the core military capability of winning local wars in conditions of informationization and the capability of conducting MOOTW.

The PLA Navy assumes such tasks as safeguarding China's maritime security and maintaining the sovereignty of its territorial waters,

along with its maritime rights and interests. In line with the requirements of offshore defense strategy, the PLA Navy takes informationization as the orientation and strategic priority of its modernization drive. It also attaches importance to MOOTW. As to upgrading weaponry and equipment, and optimizing the weaponry and equipment system., efforts are being made to build new types of submarines, destroyers, frigates and aircraft, forming a preliminary weaponry and equipment system with second-generation equipment as the core and the third generation as the backbone. The Navy has gradually deployed new types of large integrated supply ships, medical ships and ambulance helicopters, and succeeded in developing many types of maritime support equipment and a number of key technologies.

At present, the PLA Navy is still in the phase of mechanization and semi-mechanization, and at the initial stage of informationization. PLA Navy lags far behind the developed countries in the aspect of weaponry and equipment. Even compared to some developing countries, PLA Navy's weaponry and equipment is not at a high level in many aspects. PLA Navy has a long way to go if it intends to better fulfill its sacred mission of maintaining state sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and to realize overall transformation to informationization.

Here I want to make it clear that the Chinese naval development is an evolutionary process, not a revolutionary course. It is not aimed against any country or any navy. China will never take part in naval arms race against any country. **China's military development has a clear purpose, that is, to maintain national security and unity and ensure smooth economic and social development.** As you know, China pursues a three-step development strategy in modernizing its national defense and armed forces, in accordance with the state's overall plan to realize modernization. The first step is to lay a solid foundation by 2010, the second is to make major progress around 2020, and the third is to basically reach the strategic goal of building informationized armed forces and being capable of winning informationized wars by the mid-21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Now I will come to the question: what can be done to moderate the associated negative consequences of the competitive arms build-up?**

**First, I think the best way is to carry out more maritime confidence building measures, including exchanges of visits of military personnel, ship visits, security dialogues and forums , joint exercises and so**

**on.** We know that sometimes unintended conflict may arise from failures of communication. Through these maritime confidence building measures, we can deepen mutual understanding and mutual trust, reduce the possibilities of misunderstanding. As a matter of fact, elements of security architecture have already emerged in this region, for instance, ASEAN, ASEAN-led forums like ARF, ASEAN Defence Minister's Meeting (ADMM), and also the recently established ADMM Plus 8, CSCAP..

I think military confidence-building is an effective way to maintain national security and development, and safeguard regional peace and stability. With political mutual trust as the groundwork and common security as the goal, China is promoting the establishment of equal, mutually beneficial and effective mechanisms for military confidence-building, which should be based on the principles of holding consultations on an equal footing, mutual respect for core interests and recognition of major security concerns, not targeting at any third country, and not threatening or harming other countries' security and stability.



China attaches great importance to defense and security consultations with neighboring countries. It has established mechanisms for defense and security consultation and policy dialogue with neighboring countries, including Mongolia, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, India and Pakistan, and has held regular consultations and dialogues at different levels with its neighbors, which focus on Asia-Pacific security, bilateral military relations and regional flashpoint issues. Such consultations and dialogues play a positive role in promoting mutual understanding, consolidating good neighborliness and friendship, deepening mutual trust and cooperation, and maintaining regional peace and stability.

China takes an active part in dialogue and cooperation on international maritime security. It strictly complies with the UN Charter, the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and other universally recognized norms of international relations. It consistently pursues common security and development, and respects the sovereignty, rights and interests of coastal states. China perseveres in dealing with traditional

and non-traditional maritime threats through cooperation, and strives to maintain maritime security through multiple peaceful ways and means.

In October 2005, China and Vietnam signed the Agreement on Joint Patrols by the Navies of China and Vietnam in the Beibu Gulf. The two navies established the Office of Joint Patrols in the Beibu Gulf, organized ten joint patrols, and held five annual meetings. In February 2009, direct telephone links were officially established between the Chinese and ROK naval and air force troops stationed in adjacent areas. Since 2008, China and Japan have held several consultations over the establishment of a maritime liaison mechanism. The Chinese Navy has taken an active part in the activities of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), and in seminars on maritime security sponsored by the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

In the past two years, the Chinese Navy has sent more than 20 naval ships in over ten convoys to visit more than 30 countries, and received port visits from more than 30 naval ships representing over 20 countries.

**A multi-tiered and composite framework of Asia-Pacific regional security cooperation is taking shape, and numerous security cooperation mechanisms have been further developed.** China takes an active part in establishing security dialogue and building security mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific region, strengthens mutual political trust and security cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries, promotes military confidence-building, and endeavors to maintain regional peace and stability.

China actively participates in multilateral security meetings within the framework of the ARF, ASEAN Plus One (China), and ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan and the ROK). Initiated by China, the ARF Conference on Security Policies was officially

staged in 2004, and has developed into a dialogue mechanism for the highest ranking senior defense officials within the ARF framework. In May 2010, at the seventh ARF Conference on Security Policies, China proposed initiatives on strengthening research on non-traditional security cooperation and on promoting practical cooperation. In October 2010, China attended the first ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+) and proposed to advance regional security dialogue and cooperation. In recent years, the PLA has hosted the China-ASEAN Defense and Security Dialogue (CADSD), the ASEAN Plus Three Forum on Non-traditional Security Cooperation between Armed Forces, and the ARF workshop on formulating legal rules for armed forces' participation in international disaster relief operations.

Since 2007, China has sent senior defense officials on an annual basis to attend the Shangri-La Dialogue held in Singapore to elaborate its national defense policy and opinions on regional security cooperation.

**Second, conduct more maritime operational cooperation among navies.** Confidence and trust should be built and manifested through concrete and constructive actions and cooperation. Globalisation imperatives themselves also provide an impetus for concerted and cooperative effort of maritime forces in securing the maritime highways. Cooperative efforts of the littoral countries of the Malacca Strait, for example, have led to a dramatic decrease in incidents of piracy and armed robbery. Further away, on the Western flank of the Indian Ocean region, the efforts of the multi-national navies are underway to keep maritime crime in check.

**Third, we should stick to the principle of peacefully solving disputes through talks and dialogues among regional countries .** There may be disputes and disagreements between the neighbours. I think the problems should be solved by peaceful negotiation. The Chinese Government has always stood for negotiated settlement of international disputes through peaceful means. In this spirit, China has solved questions

regarding territory and border with some neighboring countries through bilateral consultations and negotiations in an equitable, reasonable and amicable manner. China is committed to working with the countries concerned for proper settlement of the disputes BETWEEN China and related countries through peaceful negotiations in accordance with the universally-recognized international law and the contemporary law of the sea, including the fundamental principles and legal regimes set forth in the 1982 U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).