CHAPTER 3
MILITARY OPTIONS

As indicated in Chapter 1, this research divides the various options from which the rational actor has to choose from into two main categories: options whose execution is predominantly tied to military power and options whose execution is inherently not based on military might. To put it simply, Chapter 3 deals with military-centric options, such as invasion or coercion, while Chapter 4 deals with more diplomatic options, such as bilateral negotiations or adjudication.

Military power has traditionally played a key role in interstate politics, and despite arguments for the transition into a post-military state of international relations, military might continue to be a key component of statecraft. As a school of thought, political realism has traditionally offered centre stage to military power in interstate relations. Defensive realism adopts a defeatist approach to the use of military power in the pursuit of state interests, as the name suggests emphasizing its role in defending against external interference. In contrast, offensive realism recognizes military power as a valid component of states’ toolbox to pursue their interests and as the ultimate arbiter of interstate disputes. It is in this spirit that Mearsheimer argues that “offensive realism emphasizes that force is the ultima ratio of international politics”\(^1\), namely that military might can provide a final resolution to international disputes especially when diplomacy or other attempts at resolution have failed. The same argument is recognized by Gray when arguing that, while not all problems should be solved through military means, some problems can only be resolved through the exercise of military force. However, this recognition should not be interpreted as an advocacy for mindless aggression.

\(^1\) Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 56.
Whether use of force is the rational course of action is still determined by rational choice considerations.

Schelling in *Arms and Influence* distinguishes two main potential avenues to use force. One he characterizes as “brute force” where the political objective is achieved through the unilateral use of force. The other he characterizes as coercion where, albeit military force is used, it is done so in the context of a bargaining process.\(^2\) The primary purpose of this chapter is to discuss these two potential courses of actions within the context of China's strategic dilemma over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The examination within this chapter is based on the following framework for each option:

First, in order to provide a comprehensive analysis, the options are grounded in their respective strategic cultural contexts. This part of the examination begins with exploring how these particular options fit into China strategic culture and military doctrine. This is followed by an overview of their tentative execution within the specific strategic context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. This aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of what a particular course of action entails.

Second, the chapter proceeds to analyse the feasibility of these options in order to narrow down the ‘feasibility set’ upon which the rational choice decision will be based. The key focus here is to determine whether Beijing could conceivably pursue these options in light of the balance of power between China and Japan and other potential influencing factors. It is important to note that feasibility is not the equivalent of rationality. It is simply the first step in the process.

Third, the chapter examines the utility of each option surviving feasibility testing, i.e. the costs and benefits associated with the successful execution of each

potential course of action. There are three main areas to focus on within this section: One, the extent to which each option allows China to pursue its key interests discussed in Chapter 2. Two, any other potential benefits associated with a particular course of action that is unique to that option and entails benefits beyond those already discussed. And three, the potential political, economic, strategic and other costs of selecting that option. Through this, one can establish a cost/benefit ratio, which will be one of the key metrics used to compare and contrast options in Chapter 5.

Fourth, as Beijing has to undertake the rational decision under imperfect information, one must introduce the concepts of risk and failure. As discussed in Chapter 1, risk is introduced to account for negative influences beyond the control of Beijing that could doom an option to failure despite careful strategic planning. There are two key issues to consider here: the costs of failure, i.e. the list of negative outcomes China would be burdened by if it fails to execute a given option, and the chance of failure, i.e. the likelihood of external factors exerting a meaningful influence upon the execution of a potential course of action.

After one option have been discussed based on these steps, the chapter progresses to do so for the other. The conclusion of the chapter reiterates the main findings discussed previously. Overall, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive analysis on the potential application of Chinese military power within the context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute. Determining feasibility, utility and risks are both essential when attempting to anticipate future Chinese behaviour and when analysing its implications for regional security. Chapter 3 is followed by a similarly organized chapter on non-military options, and the results of these two chapters are compared and contrasted in Chapter 5, as part of the final phase of the rational choice analysis.
3.1 Potential Course of Action 1: Direct Use of Force

In *Arms and Influence*, Schelling argues that when it comes to the direct use of force:³

Some things a country want it can take, and some things it has it can keep, by sheer strength, skill and ingenuity. It can do this forcibly, accommodating only to opposing strength, skill, and ingenuity and without trying to appeal to an enemy's wishes.

In practical terms, the direct use of force refers to the application of military power that seeks to achieve a specific objective and thus prevent the opponent from altering the new status quo. Essentially this application of military power sidesteps seeking to alter enemy behaviour and seeks to achieve an objective through the unilateral application of brute force, which distinguishes it from coercion through military power.

To understand China’s potential for direct use of force, one has to discern how such application of military power fits into the larger context of Chinese strategic culture. While offensive realism’s argument that military force is the *ultima ratio* of international politics⁴ transcends national or cultural boundaries, it would be simplistic to argue that the actual application of military power is not influenced by the nation’s unique strategic traditions. From a systemic perspective, it is true that military power plays a crucial role in interstate relations. However, whether, and how, military might is employed in a particular case is influenced by the state’s strategic culture, as even Mearsheimer cautions against interpreting offensive realism as a theory of mindless aggression.⁵ The question of relative power is equally important for China, the United States (U.S.), or Japan, but their respective strategic traditions dictate how they will actually employ their existing power in a particular case. As Gray highlights, policy

³ Ibid., 1.
⁵ Ibid.
decisions concerning the application of military power, as well as actual strategic decisions, are conducted within a particular political and socio-cultural context that needs to be accounted for if a policy is expected to be effective.\textsuperscript{6}

This is especially so in the case of China, which has a long civilizational history, accompanied by a strategic culture whose roots stretch back some 2500 years. \textit{The Art of War} by Sun Tzu, besides the works by Clausewitz and Thucydides, is considered to be one of the key foundations for contemporary military strategy.\textsuperscript{7} \textit{The Art of War} is considered to be part of the seven military classics of Ancient China, a mandatory reading for PLA officers, and thus continues to be influential over Chinese strategic culture. Thus, the first step in understanding how direct use of force fits into Chinese strategic culture would be to examine how \textit{The Art of War} deals with the unilateral application of force.

Sun Tzu recognizes that warfare is of vital importance to the state. In \textit{The Art of War}, he advocates a strategic school of thought that emphasizes the importance of the context of battles over the actual battles themselves, i.e. Sun Tzu highlights the importance of preparation prior to battle over heroism during battle. One of the often quoted maxims of this school of thought is that the victorious army ensures victory and then seeks battle while the defeated enemy engages in battle and then seeks victory.\textsuperscript{8} In Sun Tzu’s view, the route to victory lies in careful preparation and manoeuvring, rather than in bravery and heroism on the battlefield.

When it comes to conducting military campaigns, Sun Tzu emphasizes three key elements: One, \textit{The Art of War} focuses on the idea of limited warfare, where the force employed is comparable to the objective one hopes to achieve. Sun Tzu argues that

\textsuperscript{6} Gray, \textit{Fighting Talk: 40 Maxims on War, Peace and Strategy}, 3-6.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 58-61.
\textsuperscript{8} Ralph D. Sawyer, \textit{The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China (Sun Tzu: The Art of War)} (London: Westview Press, 1993).
prolonged warfare weakens the state and that victory is dependent on “controlling the tactical imbalance of power in accord with the gains to be realized”⁹. In some sense, The Art of War can be considered to be the precursor to modern limited/local war doctrines, such as the one followed by the PLA today. Two, The Art of War emphasizes the importance of maintaining the initiative as a force multiplier. “If I determine the enemy’s disposition of forces while I have no perceptible form, I can concentrate [my forces] while the enemy is fragmented”¹⁰. By maintaining the initiative, primarily by being pro-active and on the offensive, one can reap the benefits of being able to determine when and where to battle, while the enemy is forced to be reactionary, leading to it weakening its position as it needs to disperse its forces to defend from all directions. Three, Sun Tzu emphasizes the importance of deception and intelligence. Warfare is based on control over the enemy and oneself. To be successful one has to know the plans and disposition of the enemy while denying the same to the adversary. This facilitates having the initiative and allows one to execute strategic surprise, which can make up for material or numerical weaknesses.

The thoughts expressed by Sun Tzu found their continuation in the People’s Republic’s strategic culture. Mao’s ‘People’s War’ doctrine that dominated the PLA’s strategic thinking for most of its existence has been significantly influenced by ideas from The Art of War. The key goal of People’s War is to addresses the strategic conundrum caused by the material inferiority of the Chinese military post-1949.

People’s War deviates from the strategic teaching of Sun Tzu when it comes to the objectives of a war: The Art of War focuses on limited, politically driven conflicts, while People’s War focuses on the need to fight a total war, potentially involving nuclear weapons, in the defence of the PRC. However, despite this difference, in

⁹ Ibid., 158.
¹⁰ Ibid., 167.
execution the doctrine is strongly influenced by Sun Tzu. The strategic goal of People’s War is defensive. However, on the tactical level it is executed in an offensive manner, putting an emphasis on controlling the flow of the conflict and maintaining the initiative, as emphasized by Sun Tzu, rather than creating fixed defensive lines and adopting a reactionary stance. People’s War distinguishes three phases to a conflict: First, strategic retreat. During this phase, the enemy is drawn into the interior to take advantage of familiar terrain and to extend the opponents supply line. While People’s War recognizes that material inferiority makes it impossible to resist at the border, this phase is not a mere retreat as the PLA is expected to continue to carry out tactical counter-attacks and guerrilla operations behind enemy lines to disrupt supply lines and break the enemy’s momentum. Second, these activities are expected to culminate in a strategic stalemate when the enemy cannot proceed further. Third, the PLA launches a strategic counter-offensive to drive the exhausted and logistically disarrayed enemy from Chinese territory. In this plan one can observe Sun Tzu’s focus on positional warfare, taking advantage of the terrain, maintaining the initiative and being on the offensive tactically. Where it clearly deviates from Sun Tzu is in People’s War’s focus on total (nuclear) war and fighting a prolonged campaign of attrition, as opposed to seeking a quick decisive victory. However, this can largely be explained by the strategic realities faced by the PRC during the Cold War, most importantly its material weakness compared to potential adversaries such as the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

While People’s War is a pragmatic reflection on the strategic realities of the PRC, it is very much a product of its times, and as the strategic environment surrounding China changed, so did the utility of People’s War diminish. On the one hand, with the winding down of the Cold War, the threat of total nuclear war all but disappeared, giving ground to smaller-scale clashes of interests. On the other hand, as discussed

11 James Lilley and David Shambaugh, eds., China’s Military Faces the Future (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).
earlier, Deng’s economic reforms have drastically changed the defence needs of China. This rendered a strategy reliant on allowing the enemy to capture border provinces and focusing on in-depth defence unrealistic. Thus, after much tribulation, Chinese strategic thinkers moved from People’s War to the contemporary Local/Limited War under High-Tech Conditions (L/LWUHTC) doctrine. The new doctrine affects how China sees the role of military power in its foreign policy toolset, what conflicts the PLA prepares to fight and how it expects to fight those conflicts. The current official doctrine defines the mission of the PLA as follows:

Safeguarding national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity, and supporting the country's peaceful development. […] China's armed forces unswervingly implement the military strategy of active defense, guard against and resist aggression, contain separatist forces, safeguard border, coastal and territorial air security, and protect national maritime rights and interests and national security interests in outer space and cyber space.

Ng argues that doctrine fulfils an important communicative function by allowing an insight into the plans and perceptions of political and military leaders, as well as into key national interests. Thus, examining the doctrinal statements made by the PRC provides insight into what conflicts the PLA prepares to fight: The crucial point at hand within the context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute is that the doctrine specifically emphasizes the PLA’s role in safeguarding maritime rights and interests. If one considers the communicative aspects of doctrine, this shows that Chinese political and military leaders consider the use of force in the context of disputes concerning maritime interests to be permissible. Accordingly, there is no solid evidence in Chinese strategic culture that would suggest that the PRC would be inherently opposed to the direct use of force within the context of a maritime dispute. On the contrary, China has

---


14 Ng, *Interpreting China's Military Power*. 
used military power in such a manner in the past. The key question then is how China would potentially use force under its contemporary doctrine.

First, L/LWUHTC returns to Sun Tzu’s focus on politically-focused, limited conflicts. In these conflicts, the aim is to secure a specific goal, namely control of a specific territory or expelling the enemy from a particular area, rather than the total defeat and unconditional surrender of the enemy. As such, these conflicts are fought without the total mobilization of a nation’s military potential, and within a compressed geographical space and timeframe. Rather than a total nuclear war fought for national survival, the doctrine focuses on small, quick wars fought to resolve conflicts of interests.

Second, the L/LWUHTC continues Chinese strategic culture’s focus on possessing the initiative and being proactive. The current doctrine is based on the principle of ‘active defence’. Active defence has two components: how the PLA fights a conflict and when it employs military force. The former refers to the continuation of the ideas expressed by both Sun Tzu and People’s War that, while the conflict’s strategic goal might be defensive, it still requires the offensive application of force on the tactical level to control the flow of the conflict. The official PLA doctrine refers to this as “the unity of strategic defense and operational and tactical offense.” This means that while the PLA would conduct a campaign that aims to defend China, it will do so through offensive manoeuvres, seeking out the enemy and destroying it. To be able to operate in this manner, the PLA needs to seize the initiative in all conflicts, especially under the conditions of modern joint operations warfare where the enemy can easily steamroll an

---


17 Lilley and Shambaugh, *China's Military Faces the Future*. 
opponent. This puts an emphasis on achieving success during early battles. Winning these battles is crucial to gain the initiative, and thus control the conflict. In the end, this would allow the PLA to push the enemy into a defensive and mostly reactionary position. However, this need affects how a conflict is initiated. Li argues that PLA doctrine emphasizes gaining the initiative by striking first, and thus being able to overrun the enemy and seek a quick resolution. The traditional interpretation of this principle has been that while China will fight only defensive conflicts, it will not sit and wait to take the first hit, in other words once a conflict becomes unavoidable it will act offensively to pacify opposition. However, this raises the question of pre-emptive wars. Howarth argues that “the study of Chinese strategic culture points to the existence of certain features which could incline Chinese decision-makers towards the adoption of a surprise pre-emptive strike.” Similarly, Lee argues that it is not defined what constitute an attack on China and whether it is limited to a military strike. He argued that potentially political or economic ‘attacks’ could also trigger an active defence response.

Third, contemporary doctrine continues Chinese strategic culture’s focus on winning conflicts under an unfavourable balance of power. This has a number of operational aspects: One, the PLA focuses on force concentration to achieve local superiority, even if it is overall inferior to the opponent, numerically or qualitatively. By this, the PLA can create pockets of overwhelming force to annihilate an overall superior opponent one engagement at a time. As Mao argued:

---

19 Lilley and Shambaugh, China's Military Faces the Future.
22 John Lee, "Does China Have a Grand Strategy and What Does It Look Like."
In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force [...], encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly and do not let any escape from the net. [...] In this way, although inferior as a whole (in terms of numbers), we shall be absolutely superior in every par and every specific campaign, and this ensures victory in the campaign. As time goes on, we shall become superior as a whole and eventually wipe out all the enemy.

Two, the PLA doctrine continues the traditional focus on asymmetrical warfare, unorthodox tactics and targeting specific enemy weaknesses. In the Art of War Sun Tzu argues that “in battle one engages with the orthodox and gains victory through the unorthodox”\(^2\). This principle is enacted by the PLA when it comes to both weaponry and tactics. In recent years, the PLA frequently made headlines by the development of asymmetric capabilities in the form of supposed 'trump card' or 'assassin's mace' weapon systems\(^2\), such as anti-satellite (ASAT) missiles, anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) seeking to destroy aircraft carriers from a long distance and advanced cyber-warfare capabilities. The common element in all of these weapons that they specifically target what China sees as exploitable weaknesses in superior enemy's warfighting style. The ASAT missiles would target the U.S.' reliance on satellites for reconnaissance, targeting and fast data transfer. ASBMs would target the U.S. carriers, the linchpins of U.S. battle fleets and one of the most visible expressions of the U.S. military power. Cyber- and electronic-warfare capabilities would target communications, and command and control (C2) capabilities, degrade the U.S.' ability to quickly exchange information and to manage the demanding information environment associated with modern joint-operation warfare. The key logic behind this is that, since China is still catching up to the military capabilities of the developed nations, these weapons can deprive these nations of some of their more advanced systems, tilting the balance in China's favour.

---

\(^2\) Sawyer, The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China, 164.
\(^2\) Ng, Interpreting China's Military Power.
The same can be observed when it comes to the tactics of the PLA which have traditionally emphasized guerrilla tactics to overcome a superior enemy. In countering a possible U.S. or Soviet invasion, the People's War doctrine put an emphasis on military activity behind enemy lines, attacking supply lines and hindering enemy progress, in order to break the momentum of a superior invading force. In the maritime realm, the contemporary strategic orientation is that of the anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) where the goal is not to seek a decisive engagement with the enemy fleet, but to prevent it from either entering strategically important waters or to prevent it from utilizing it offensively.27 This strategic orientation explains China's heavy investment into submarines, missiles, missile armed small patrol crafts and mines – all designed to keep an enemy out – rather than traditional naval assets, such as destroyers which are designed for fleet-on-fleet combat. In a sense, China is preparing to execute guerrilla warfare at sea28, rather than a traditional naval strategy. The heightened U.S. concerns over these weapons and the A2/AD29 capabilities of China, leading to the development of the new Air-Sea Battle concept, are a testament to the effectiveness of this approach. Besides its sheer numbers, this focus on seeking unorthodox warfighting methods is what underpins China's contemporary military threat, despite the recognition that the PLA would need years to catch up to more modern militaries.

Overall, Chinese doctrine is a product of a long strategic tradition, reaching back to Sun Tzu, and the need to accommodate often unfavourable strategic realities. The result is a pro-active military doctrine that recognizes that the PLA cannot afford complacency if it is to have any chance to win and that it needs to think outside the box to make up for its own shortcomings. Beijing is certainly not afraid to use military force

if it's deemed needed, and its inventive and aggressive doctrine is best not underestimated, even by more advanced militaries such as the U.S. or Japan.

3.1.1 Executing an Amphibious Campaign

The first key issue to consider is that how China would apply military power in a manner consistent with Schelling’s definition of direct use of force based on the general strategic principles and the unique characteristics described above within the context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute. This will provide the foundation for the following discussion on what is required for such an operation to be feasible. To analyse a potential (hypothetical) military campaign within the context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, this research will use the methodology and concepts offered in the *Joint Operations Planning* guide (Joint Publication 5-0 / JP 5-0) by the U.S. armed forces.\(^{30}\)

At the core of campaign planning is the need to find an operational approach to resolve the issue at hand. To do this JP 5-0 argues that one has to provide two foundations: One, understand the operational environment.\(^{31}\) This focuses on understanding both the current strategic situation and where one wishes to be at the end of the conflict (i.e. the desired operational environment), as well as the end goals of the opponent. Two, one has to identify the problem, i.e. what is preventing one from moving from the current operational environment to the desired one.\(^{32}\) Based on these two foundations one can develop the operational approach which focuses on overcoming the identified obstacles, allowing the transition between operational environments.

The issue of current and desired operational environments has been largely discussed in Chapter 2, which explored China’s key interests and their connection to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in detail. The current operational environment is characterized

---


\(^{31}\) Ibid, III-5.

\(^{32}\) Ibid, III-12.
by an insecure China vulnerable to potential threats from the maritime domain. Thus, the desired operational environment would be one with increased security in the maritime realm. The key problems faced by China in transitioning from the current to the desired operational environment are its own lack of strong maritime presence and the established presence of potential adversaries in the theatre. Hence, one has to consider how to overcome this, to which one potential solution would be to seek control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, as it would confer various benefits onto China as discussed in Chapter 2.

Thus, on the theatre level, the military end state would be Chinese forces being in control of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which, in the case of direct use of force as per Schelling’s definition, is dependent on the fulfilment of the theatre level objectives of seizing and holding the islands. The achievement of theatre level military end state (and objective) is then based on the achievement of operational level objectives. Based on the general principles of naval combat\(^{33}\), a Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands would have three main operational objectives under this scenario: One, securing command of the sea. This is crucial to allow one’s own forces to utilize the waters in question and is a pre-requisite to conducting amphibious campaigns. Two, executing an amphibious assault on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in order to gain physical control over the islands. Three, transitioning into a defensive posture and prevent opposing forces to re-establish control over the disputed islands, primarily through denying command of the sea.

Table 3.1: Campaign Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Strategic Level</th>
<th>Theatre Strategic Level</th>
<th>Current Operational Environment</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Desired Operational Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insecure China</td>
<td>Vulnerable maritime borders/SLOCs</td>
<td>Regime Legitimacy</td>
<td>Weak maritime presence</td>
<td>More secure China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of control over critical waters</td>
<td>Adverse possession of strategically significant territory</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased control over critical waters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theatre Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After establishing what one wants to achieve through the potential campaign, the critical question is how to achieve that, i.e. what sequence of actions is required to fulfil the set objectives based on the operational environment. To explain this, this research will utilize the phasing model outlined by JP 5-0. Based on this the campaign is broken down to key phases until the termination point, in this case, Chinese control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands is reached. Each phase has a distinct function and is usually related to the achievement of specific end states / objectives.

**Phase 0 – Shape**

This is the pre-conflict phase. The primary objective of this phase is to affect the general operational environment. In the case of a potential Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands campaign, this phase would be dominated by opposing political activities. China would try to influence relevant public opinion in favour of itself while reducing support for Japan’s

---

34 Based on "Joint Operations Planning" (2011).
36 Ibid., III-41-44.
claims, all the while countering similar public relations activities from Japan. Particular examples of this behaviour would be stepping up China’s media efforts to promote its own views, as seen in the case of setting up the official English/Japanese/Chinese language Diaoyu Dao: The Inherent Territory of China website in 2014 or in the case of CCTV’s English-language Diaoyu Islands: China’s Inherent Territory. There are multiple goals to these activities: increase support at home, influence third-party international audiences, sow the seeds of doubt among the Japanese public and decision makers, and to counter Japanese public relations activities, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan’s Senkaku Islands–Japanese Territory, Fact Sheet on the Senkaku Islands, or the online published brochure The Senkaku Islands: Seeking Maritime Peace based on the Rule of Law, not Force or Coercion. Through these publications both China and Japan seeks to establish moral superiority, and to dictate the ‘correct’ reading of the situation in service of their own political and strategic objectives. Furthermore, both China and Japan hopes that foreign news outlets take up the content of their media campaigns and spread it back home. The goal is simple: to shape the operational environment so one’s actions are justified while the opponent’s actions are not. China seeks to establish the narrative of being the victim of aggression, seeking to restore that was taken from it by force, and in the process standing up to a major military power with a past record of ruthless aggression. Japan seeks to establish the narrative that China is merely opportunistic and that it seeks territory it has no right to under a false moral superiority.

On the diplomatic front, both China and Japan would seek to secure allies, garner support, or at the very least disincentive interference through economic and political links. One possible avenue for China is to use its economic clout to initiate large-scale projects in or negotiate economic agreements with countries that could potentially interfere in case of a conflict. In this case, these countries would be less inclined to threaten their economic links to China over a matter they have no direct interest in. Large-scale projects such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank could force states that would possibly support Japan to weigh the potential benefits of the project (and the likelihood of punitive Chinese action) relative to the benefits of actively supporting Japan, imaginably leading to inaction. Similarly, large-scale investment (for example in infrastructure) could incentivize smaller regional states to at the very least maintain neutrality.

This phase would also be characterized by supporting activities for a potential conflict. Both China and Japan would use this phase to build up their military power, to survey the theatre, and to gather intelligence concerning enemy strengths and intentions. Both parties key objective would be to seek a relative advantage in the balance of power that could give its forces an edge in a coming potential combat situation.

Phase 1 – Deter

This phase is characterized by efforts to deter undesirable adversary behaviour through demonstrating one’s own military capabilities and resolve to oppose the adversary’s actions if necessary. This phase would see Beijing stepping up its physical presence in disputed waters to express displeasure over Japanese policies surrounding the dispute. This could potentially lead to stand-offs between opposing naval units. There is existing historical precedent for this:
The 1974 Battle of Paracel Islands was preceded by the deployment of naval assets to patrol disputed waters. On 15 January 1974, South Vietnamese forces intercepted two Chinese fishing vessels. This was followed by both parties stepping up patrolling in disputed waters, and landing troops on various islands.\textsuperscript{42}

The 1988 Battle of South Johnson Reef was similarly preceded by the deployment of both Chinese and Vietnamese forces to patrol the disputed waters. The close proximity of forces during this period led to a number of incidents and accusations of harassment prior to the commencement of actual combat activities.\textsuperscript{43}

The potential execution of Phase 1 can be already observed around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands with Beijing significantly stepping up patrolling in disputed waters. Chinese civilian government vessels enter Japanese-claimed waters with a monthly regularity in order to display China’s resolve in pursuing its claims, and its naval capabilities to enforce said claims.

**Phase 2 – Seize the Initiative**

This phase is characterized by the commencement of combat activities. A number of events could act as the initiating points for a confrontation. It could be a deliberate strategic decision from Beijing, based on the perception of opportune timing, if the world in general, or Japan in particular, is distracted over some other issue. It could be that Beijing is forced to respond to internal instability, using a military campaign as a distraction to protect its legitimacy at home. It could be an unapproved engagement between opposing forces, from which their respective governments cannot back down without suffering unacceptable political costs. During the 2013 radar-locking incident the parties came dangerously close to this possibility. Would the Japanese side

---


\textsuperscript{43} Chang Pao-Min, "A New Scramble for the South China Sea Islands," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 12, no. 1 (1990). See also, Garver, “China’s Push through the South China Sea,” 25.
interpreted it as an imminent attack, and responded in supposed self-defence, it could have conceivably ignited an armed confrontation between the two parties. A confrontation could be initiated by factors beyond the control of the two governments. Non-state activists’ activities affect Sino-Japanese relations. Would an activist drown, as David Chan in 1996, there would be significant pressure on Beijing to respond, especially if it happened to someone with actual cultural or political significance in China. The initiation of a confrontation could be accidental. Under the current tense conditions a mid-air collision between Chinese and Japanese planes, due to conflicting ADIZ claims and close-proximity manoeuvres, would also put pressure on Beijing to escalate the situation.

Once the crisis is ignited, the focus would shift to military matters. The key objective of this phase would be to secure command of the sea, thus to allow the utilization of strategically significant waters for the PLA-N. The established way to achieve command of the sea is to seek a decisive engagement with adversary forces seeking to deny command of the sea.44 It is important to note Corbett’s emphasis on the fact that command of the sea is neither absolute nor permanent.45 During this phase, the PLA would need to defeat the ASDF and MSDF forces defending the theatre, not achieve a decisive victory over the entirety of the JSDF.

During the 1974 Paracel Islands conflict, this phase began on 19 January, when Chinese and South Vietnamese troops encountered each other on Duncan and Palm Islands. The initial shoot-out escalated into a naval battle with the PLA-N destroying or dispersing Vietnamese opposition.46 Similarly, during the 1988 Spratly Islands conflict,

the building up of tension between China and Vietnam led to a brief naval clash. Chinese victory provided temporal command of the sea to China.

During the 1982 Falkland War, Britain declared a 200 nautical miles Maritime Exclusion Zone (later Total Exclusion Zone) surrounding the Falklands, the area where the British task force had sought to establish command of the sea. (Argentina earlier possessed an unopposed command of the sea due to lack of British naval assets in theatre.) The sinking of the Argentinean flagship General Belgrano led to the withdrawal of Argentinean surface vessels\textsuperscript{47}, offering a relative command of the sea to Britain. However, the Falkland Islands’ case illustrates well that command of the sea is not an absolute have or have not concept. While surface opposition was withdrawn, and submarines proved ineffective, Britain suffered heavy casualties from the Argentinean air force and its inability (partially due to political limitations) to pacify it.\textsuperscript{48} As such, Britain only possessed a partial command of the sea, which made the amphibious operations following both more difficult and costly.

**Phase 3 – Dominate**

This phase is characterized by China exploiting its command of the sea to pursue further objectives: establishing a physical presence on the islands through amphibious operations and to achieve termination of the conflict. In case of direct use of force as defined by Schelling, this phase would seek to bring Japan to its culmination point, i.e. to the point beyond which it does not possess the ability to effectively fight, primarily through the defeat mechanisms of attrition (the physical destruction of Japanese forces) and disruption (eliminating the JSDF’s ability to fight as a cohesive force).

The amphibious portion of this phase would be fairly simple. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands possess no fortifications, and, unless Japanese forces managed

\textsuperscript{47} Peter Calvert, *The Falkland Crisis: The Rights and the Wrongs* (London: Frances Pinter, 1982).
to land troops during the previous phase, they are not garrisoned. PLA troops would need to merely execute an administrative landing. While the strategic significance of this manoeuvre is limited, as ground forces, especially amphibious ones, would be largely irrelevant for the predominantly naval and air battles surrounding them, their presence on the islands possesses high symbolic importance: boots on the ground express clearly the establishment of Chinese control over the disputed islands, and them remaining on the islands signifies continued Chinese control over the islands.

The more complicated component of this phase would be to bring Japan to a culmination point. JP 5-0 defines defensive culmination point as the defender losing the ability to go on a counter-offensive or to resist one’s advance. In the case of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands culmination would be reached when the JSDF no longer possesses the ability to launch a counter-offensive, which is achieved by the PLA successfully denying command of the sea to Japan. This would prevent Japanese forces from utilizing strategically significant waterways for their own purposes, primarily to conduct a counter-amphibious operation to disperse Chinese troops from the disputed islands. In the case of direct use of force – which Schelling defines as the reliance on the unilateral application of brute force, rather than seeking to alter the enemy’s behaviour – this would be a highly demanding task. The PLA would need to continue to rely on its anti-access strategies to degrade Japanese forces to the point where Japan either runs out of military forces to mobilize for a counter-offensive or Tokyo decides to stop throwing the JSDF into the meat-grinder based on a rational cost/benefit analysis. Thus, this phase would be characterized with China concentrating its military might into the theatre to persevere through sheer force.

During the 1974 Paracel Islands conflict, Chinese forces exploited the command of the sea gained through their initial victory to go on the offensive. Chinese forces quickly brought Vietnamese forces in theatre to a culmination point through air
superiority and lack of further naval resistance, and vacated all adversary forces from the Paracel Islands, gaining total control over them.\textsuperscript{49} In contrast during the 1988 Spratly Islands conflict, while the PLA gained initial command of the sea, which it exploited to capture a number of islands, it failed to bring Vietnamese forces to culmination, and thus, it did not capture the entire group.

During the Falkland Islands war, Britain used its (sufficient but not absolute) command of the sea to land troops on the islands in order to defeat Argentinean resistance. British ground forces defeated Argentinean forces, which combined with British naval presence led to Argentina reaching culmination, and abandoning further actions.\textsuperscript{50} This scenario saw a race between British forces seeking to bring Argentina to culmination through an amphibious assault, and Argentinean forces seeking to bring Britain to culmination through an air campaign.

On a smaller scale during the 2002 Parsley Island crisis Spanish troops executed a non-lethal amphibious assault to dislodge Moroccan troops from the Spanish-controlled but Moroccan-claimed Parsley Islands.\textsuperscript{51} As Morocco made no attempts to deny command of the sea to Spain, its forces could skip Phase 2 in favour of Phase 3. Following the initial landing Spain reinforced its troops on the islands, making a rational counter-offensive for Morocco impossible, terminating the combat phase of the conflict.

Phase 4 – Stabilize

This phase would follow the military termination of the conflict. China’s key objective during this phase would be to solidify control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. On the one hand, this would have a military component. The PLA would seek to establish a permanent garrison on the islands, and begun militarizing it for defence purposes as


\textsuperscript{50} Calvert, \textit{The Falkland Crisis}.

discussed in Chapter 2. On the other hand, there would also be a significant political/diplomatic component. Beijing would need to try to legitimize its territorial acquisition in the eyes of the international community. Unless this is achieved, the territory is held through mere military might and is at constant risk of Japan launching a campaign to retake it. Time would be an ally in this process. The longer China holds the islands, the higher the potential political penalty for Japan if Tokyo attempts to retake them through military force, as it is seen as an act against international peace.

While the phasing model presents a chain of sequential operations, it does not strictly mean that the beginning of one stage necessarily puts an end to the activities of the previous state. On the contrary, it is possible that certain phases overlap: The political activities discussed under Phase 1 would be carried out throughout the conflict, shaping global perceptions of the conflict. Similarly, would China lose command of the sea during Phase 3, it would need to return to Phase 2 before proceeding with the campaign.

There is one final component to consider. Designing an operational approach has to be mindful of the limitations placed on opposing forces by various conditions, such as rules of engagement. For the purposes of this research, one such limiting factor is rationality: for the use of force to be rational, it has to be proportional to the objective hoped to be achieved. Obviously a major or total war between China and Japan, involving the total mobilization of national military potential, would violate such a principle, especially as its consequences within the context of existing alliances would be devastating. While the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are valuable, at the moment they do not warrant such an undertaking.
Rather, it is likely that any confrontation between China and Japan would be a limited conflict. As the PLA-N Rear Admiral Yin Zhu argued:

The battle to take over the Diaoyu Islands would not be a conventional operation. For either party involved in the war, it would be very difficult to employ their full military capabilities, because there would time for them to fully unfold in the fight.

Yin Zhu continued with stating that a potential confrontation over the disputed islands “would be very short. It is very possible that the war would end in a couple of days or even in a few hours”. This interpretation of the likely nature of a possible conflict is shared on the opposing side, as Captain James Fannell, from U.S. Naval Intelligence, expects a “short, sharp war.”

For this section, the key impact of this would be on culmination. Either China or Japan would reach culmination before their full military potential is expended. A culmination point would be achieved once the cost of continuing the conflict would exceed the benefit of holding onto the islands / pursuing control over the islands.

### 3.1.2 Feasibility

The JP 5-0 argues that the successful execution of a campaign is dependent on friendly forces’ ability to target and neutralize enemy centre(s) of gravity (COG), i.e. the fundamental elements of an opponent’s ability to resist. At the same time, one has to be able to protect one’s own COG(s) in order to avoid a defeat. While JP 5-0 uses the concept as part of operational design, this research will utilize it as part of feasibility testing: this section will determine what would be the COG of a direct use of force.

---


53 Ibid.

campaign, as discussed above, then analyse whether China possesses the necessary capabilities to neutralize Japan’s COG, while protecting its own.

A direct use of force is primarily based on opposing military powers. Schelling argues that a country can resort to direct use of force “if it has enough strength” in which case “enough is dependent on how much the opponent has”\(^5^5\). The goal is to overcome the enemy through the unilateral application of sheer force, rather than utilizing force within the context of bargaining, as discussed later on. In this case, the centre of gravity for both China and Japan are their respective military forces, primarily their naval and air forces due to the specific operational environment. In a direct use of force context, the victor is the one that overcomes the opponent’s military strength.

The JP 5-0 analysis breaks down COGs into further components. ‘Critical capabilities’ are those that are crucial to enable a COG to function. Within the context of Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, such a critical capability would be the opposing military forces ability to secure command of the sea while denying it to the opponent. China requires command of the sea to execute an amphibious campaign and, later on, requires the ability to deny command of the sea to Japan to prevent it from retaking the territory. Japan requires the ability to deny command of the sea to prevent China from taking the islands, or if it fails in the early phase, then it is dependent on its ability to gain command of the sea to push out Chinese forces and retake the islands. There are plans such as Japan retaking the islands by paratroopers. But even if they could displace Chinese troops from the islands, without Japanese command of the sea said troops would be isolated and vulnerable to Chinese attacks from the sea. ‘Critical requirements’ are the conditions and resources that enable critical capabilities to function. Command of the sea is dependent on sufficient\(^5^6\) naval and air superiority, the

---

\(^5^5\) Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 1.

\(^5^6\) As previously argued, command of the sea is never absolute but temporary, and only covers specific
latter evidenced by the Falkland Islands war. The key resource to achieve this is the availability of naval and air units. Said availability is impacted by the limited nature of the conflict: as the conflict remains short of total mobilization, not the full military potential of the opposing forces is available for the conflict. Finally, ‘critical vulnerabilities’ are the components of critical requirements that are open to attack. In the case of a campaign based on Schelling’s interpretation of direct use of force, these would be the actual forces participating in the conflict. The feasibility of the campaign is tied to their vulnerability. Fundamentally, feasibility is dependent on whether China could successfully target and neutralize these critical vulnerabilities (the level of vulnerability will inform the question of risks later on).

To put it simply, within the current context, feasibility comes down to the question whether Chinese forces could defeat Japanese ones in direct combat under the conditions of limited war. The first problem in answering this question is how to measure military power and determine the outcome of military engagements. Predicting the outcome of battles is a surprisingly difficult feat. There have been attempts to offer models for prediction based on a quantitative positivist approach, such as Dupuy's *Numbers, Predictions and War*. Dupuy offers complex statistical models to predict the outcome of land battles. The early measurements in the book are quite straightforward: number of troops, the effective range of weaponry, the rate of fire, calibre, etc. The difficulty of the issue arises when Dupuy needs to quantify the influence of terrain, or the effectiveness of close-air support. Furthermore, there are intangible factors that Dupuy outright ignores. Following a particularly American tradition, he argues that modern warfare is a primarily technical affair, where weapon systems not people are operational areas. The total termination of hostile activity is often not possible. The goal rather is to possess an advantage that allows the friendly utilization of waterways, while denying it to the opponent.

decisive. Thus, he does not make an attempt to quantify issues such as morale. The supposedly material driven nature of modern warfare is subject to heavy criticism. Handel argues that “no modern war has been won by superior technology alone”\textsuperscript{58} while the 27\textsuperscript{th} maxim of Gray is that “there is more to war than firepower”\textsuperscript{59}. Overall, intangible assets can exert a significant influence on the outcome of battles just as factors one could collectively call chance – for example friction, change in weather, technical problems, or miscommunication –, all of which is resistant to quantification. In the end, “war simply cannot be reduced to algebra or to an exact science”\textsuperscript{60}.

This necessitates the adoption of a more flexible and permissive (and thus unfortunately less exact) framework to determine feasibility. In the case of direct use of force, this research adopts a hardware driven analysis, focusing on the hard components of military power (such as platforms and weapons systems) to determine their availability and relative effectiveness. This seeks to establish a balance of power between China and Japan and to determine whether China faces a decisive disadvantage within the military realm which would render this option unfeasible.\textsuperscript{61} This section will also examine the soft elements of military power, focusing on potential issues that could either detrimentally affect military readiness (such as low-quality training or corruption) or that would provide an edge in case of a conflict (e.g. high-quality training). A more nuanced analysis, e.g. accounting for factors such as morale in depth, is beyond the scope of this research. It remains questionable whether such an analysis could be even conducted with any reliability.

\textsuperscript{58} Handel, Masters of War, 9.
\textsuperscript{59} Gray, Fighting Talk, 112.
\textsuperscript{60} Handel, Masters of War, xxiii.
\textsuperscript{61} It is important to remember that feasibility is not equivalent to guaranteed success, it merely states that China could rationally succeed within the conflict. The actual potential for success is discussed under risks.
Surface Warfare

In a potential direct use of force scenario over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, surface warfare, fought between the warships of the opposing forces, would be the core military activity. In this case, the key fighting units would be guided missiles destroyers focusing on ship-to-ship combat. Surface warfare is crucial to establish and maintain command of the sea.

The PLA-N operates six destroyer classes. The *Luhu-class (Type 052)* is a 4600 tons displacement multi-role guided missile destroyer class. The larger *Luhai-class (Type 051B)* is a single ship class of 6000 tons. Both the Luhu – and Luhai-classes were commissioned in the 1990s. The *Luzhou-class (Type 051C)* is the first destroyer class commissioned in the new millennia, and it is a dedicated AAW destroyer to improve fleet air defences, a traditional shortcoming of the PLA-N. The *Luyang I-class (Type 052B)* is a 4500 tons class focused on anti-surface warfare (ASUW). The list of native Chinese destroyer classes is ended by the newest *Luyang II-class (Type 052C)* which is the AAW focused version of the Luyang I-class. These native Chinese destroyers are complimented by *Sovremenny-class* destroyers purchased from Russia, which are 7940 tons dedicated ASUW vessels. The *Luyang III-class (Type 052D)* is China’s newest destroyer class with 7500 tons of displacement. A supposed answer to the American AEGIS destroyers, it is equipped with vertical launch systems (VLS).

In contrast, the MSDF operates no less than 11 destroyer classes. The *Abakuma-class* is the smallest. At 2550 tons Jane's classifies it as a frigate, but the MSDF officially classifies it as an escort destroyer. The *Hatsuyuki-class* offers 3700 tons ships.

---


and it was first commissioned in the 1980s. The *Asagiri-class* was similarly commissioned in the 1980s and it is slightly smaller at 3500 tons. The *Murasame-class* is the first of the post-Cold War classes with a displacement of 4550 tons. The last of the sub-5000 ton classes is the *Takanami-class* commissioned in the early 2000s. The *Hatazake-class* has been in service since the 1980s and offers an intimidating size with a 6400 tons displacement. The *Kongou-class* (7250 tons displacement) has been in service since the 1990s and is Japan's answer to the U.S. Navy's Arleigh Burke Aegis destroyer class. The *Atago-class* (7750 tons) has been in service since 2007 and is Japan's most modern Aegis destroyer class. The 5200 tons *Shirane-class* offers helicopter destroyers. The *Akizuki-class* (5050 tons) is Japan's latest escort destroyer class. The latest class is the *Hyuga-class* (13950 tons), which is a helicopter destroyer class in service since 2009.\(^{64}\)

In total the PLA-N operates 15 destroyers, while the MSDF operates 51 in the following distribution (with the commissioning of new ships and retiring of older classes, the number of ships, especially within the PLA-N, is in constant fluctuation, as well as different sources use different time frames, thus a slight margin of error is to be expected):

---

Japan possesses a meaningful advantage when it comes to the number of destroyers, having a 3.4 to 1 advantage against the PLA-N. This result is somewhat skewed by the classification of the Abakuma-class, which is closer to a frigate than a destroyer. Removal of the class changes the advantage to 3 to 1. However, in a limited war context the total number of ships, while significant, is less relevant as it is unlikely that Japan could/would utilize the full force of its navy against China. Comparing the average tonnage of the two fleets is more favourable for China: 6505 tons to 4271\textsuperscript{66}, even with Japan's operation of super-heavy destroyers such as the 13950 tons Hyuga-class, which is closer to being a small carrier than a destroyer. Larger hulls generally allow more weaponry and equipment to be mounted on the destroyers, providing an advantage.

The PLA-N’s destroyer fleet is complemented by frigates (small coastal patrol crafts will be not discussed as they are not expected to participate in a Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands conflict). Frigates are generally smaller and less capable ships than destroyers, but as they are also armed with cruise missiles, they pose a threat in surface warfare.


\textsuperscript{66} Based on Watts “Jane’s Warship Recognition Guide”.

---

**Table 3.2: Chinese and Japanese Destroyers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLA-N Destroyers</th>
<th>Luhu</th>
<th>Luhai</th>
<th>Luzhou</th>
<th>Luynag I</th>
<th>Luyang II</th>
<th>Sovremenny</th>
<th>Luyang III</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSDF Destroyers</th>
<th>Abakuma</th>
<th>Hatsuyuki</th>
<th>Asagiri</th>
<th>Murasame</th>
<th>Takanami</th>
<th>Hatakaze</th>
<th>Kongou</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSDF Destroyers</th>
<th>Atago</th>
<th>Shirane</th>
<th>Akizuki</th>
<th>Hyuga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total            | 51    |
Their shortcomings are generally in lower electronic, anti-submarine and anti-air capabilities. The PLA-N operates three frigate classes: Jianghu-class (divided into five subclasses), Jiangwei-class (two subclasses), and Jiangkai-class (two subclasses).67

Table 3.3: PLA-N Frigates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLA-N Frigates</th>
<th>Jianghu I</th>
<th>Jianghu II</th>
<th>Jianghu III</th>
<th>Jianghu IV</th>
<th>Jianghu V</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinagwei I</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Jiangkai I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Jiangkai II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 51 frigates operated by the PLA-N change the balance to 65 to 51, or 1.27 to 1 in China’s favour. Accounting for the lower capabilities of frigates, this means a roughly equal strength when it comes to weapons platforms, within the context of a potential Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands conflict.

Besides the number and type of platforms, the key issue in surface warfare is weapon systems. The main armament for both the PLA-N and MSDF are anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs). The PLA operates a confusing array of missiles, with alternate naming conventions, which makes it difficult to determine the exact armament of various ships. The four main types are C-801 (YJ-1/YJ-8), C-802 (YJ-2/YJ-22/Ying Ji-802), C-803 (YJ-83), and C-602 (YJ-62/C-611). The C-801 carries a 165 kg warhead and is semi-armour piercing, relying on the kinetic energy of the missile to penetrate the target. It has a range of 8-42 km (22 nm), approaches the target at minimum-altitude and possesses high anti-jamming capabilities, with a single-shot hit probability of 75 percent.68 The C-802 is the improved version of the C-801, with the same effective

warhead, but a vastly increased range of 120 km (64 nm). The missile approaches at a sea-skimming altitude, has small radar reflectivity and strong anti-jamming capabilities, resulting in a single-shot hit probability of ~98 percent and a very low interception success rate. The C-802 “is considered along with the US "Harpoon" as among the best anti-ship missiles of the present-day world”\(^{69}\). The C-803 is the latest of the Chinese missiles, and thus the least amount of information is available about it, due to China’s ongoing secrecy in military affairs. Improving on the C-802, the C-803 offers a range of 250 km (135 nm) and supersonic speed, further improving the lethality of the missile.\(^{70}\) Finally, the C-602 carries a 300 kg warhead with a range of 280 km (150 nm), approaching the target at a sea-skimming altitude in the terminal phase of its flight.\(^{71}\) The imported Sovremenny-class is equipped with the Russian SS-N-22 Sunburn ASCMs. With Mach 3 flying speed it is the fastest ASCM available today, reducing the theoretical response speed from 120-150 second to a mere 25-30 seconds. With a low flight altitude, a 320 kg warhead, and a 250 km (135 nm) range\(^{72}\), it is often touted as a ‘carrier killer’.\(^{73}\) In contrast, the MSDF operates a fair more standardized missile arsenal. The primary missile for the MSDF is the McDonald Douglass Harpoon. It has a range in excess of 110 km (60 nm), and a 200 kg warhead. It approaches the target at a sea-skimming altitude with an advanced guidance system. It is considered a high-survivability, effective ASCM.\(^{74}\) Japan also operates the native Type 90 missile, which has a 150 km range and a higher speed than the Harpoon.

---


\(^{73}\) On Chinese missiles also see Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*. and Ronald O’Rourke, "China Naval Modernization."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLA-N Destroyers’ &amp; Frigates’ Missiles</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luhu</td>
<td>Luhai</td>
<td>Luzhou</td>
<td>Luynag I</td>
<td>Luyang II</td>
<td>Sovremenny</td>
<td>Luyang III</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x C-802</td>
<td>16 x C-802</td>
<td>8x C-803</td>
<td>16 x C-803</td>
<td>8 x C-602</td>
<td>8 x Sunburn</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinaghu I</td>
<td>Jinaghu II</td>
<td>Jinaghu III</td>
<td>Jianghu IV</td>
<td>Jianghu V</td>
<td>Jinagwei I</td>
<td>Jiangwei II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x C-201</td>
<td>8 x C-201</td>
<td>8 x C-801</td>
<td>8 x C-802/3</td>
<td>8 x C-802/3</td>
<td>8 x C-802/3</td>
<td>8 x C-802/3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiangkai I</td>
<td>Jiangkai II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x C-802/3</td>
<td>8 x C-802/3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSDF Destroyers’ Missiles</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abakuma</td>
<td>Hatsuyuki</td>
<td>Asagiri</td>
<td>Murasame</td>
<td>Takanami</td>
<td>Hatakaze</td>
<td>Kongou</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atago</td>
<td>Shirane</td>
<td>Akizuki</td>
<td>Hyuga</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 x Harpoon</td>
<td>Helicopter Carrier</td>
<td>Type 90</td>
<td>Helicopter Carrier</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The U.S. Harpoon missiles and the various Chinese ASCMs are all fairly capable missiles, with relatively similar destructive capabilities. Most of both Chinese and Japanese ships carry eight of them, meaning similar endurance at sea, before needing to return to port to reload. One potential advantage for China is that the C-803 missile has a longer theoretical maximum range and that the imported Sunburn missiles offer greater speed and range than the Harpoon. However, these missiles have limited availability for the PLA-N. Furthermore, the exploitation the maximum theoretical range is also dependent on the PLA-N's ability to detect targets at that range.

Judging the electronic and surveillance capabilities of various vessels can be rather difficult, as these have limited distinct physical features that can be recognized from images. Penetrating the secrecy often surrounding the capabilities of warships is thus fairly difficult. Following the DOD’s rating system (1 to 6 indicating increasing effectiveness) to judge the electronic warfare capabilities of Chinese vessels, all of the
destroyers are located in the 4 to 5 range. As the scale goes only to 6, one can expect that China would not be majorly outmatched by Japanese vessels, albeit the exact details are not available for either fleet. PLA-N frigates have a lower (3 to 4) rating.

**Subsurface Warfare**

While submarines are mostly unsuitable for establishing command of the sea, they would play a key supporting role in the context of any naval contingency. Submarines rely on their stealth to patrol strategic areas, hunting for vulnerable targets, rather than seeking decisive battles. This makes them ideal to deny command of the sea to the enemy. This can be observed in the role the HMS Conqueror played during the Falkland Islands war: dispatched early to the area, not to seek command for Britain, but to disrupt Argentinean command. China traditionally maintained a strong interest in submarines as they are ideal weapons for guerrilla warfare at sea and sea-denial operations, both rooted in Chinese strategic traditions. China maintains the largest submarine fleet in East Asia and it continues to be a key service arm of the PLA-N. Not counting ballistic missile submarines, the PLA-N operates five indigenous classes – *Ming-, Song-* and *Yuan-class* conventional attack submarines (SSK), and *Han-* and *Shang-class* nuclear attack submarines (SSN) – as well as Russian *Kilo-class* SSKs. The *Ming-class* is a relic from the Cold War and can only be equipped with torpedoes and mines. While the class has not much use in modern warfare, they can be utilized to covertly mine ports or other areas, so they retain some utility. The other four domestic classes are much more advanced, and can be equipped with the standard C-801 to C-803 missile range. With the exception of the *Han-class*, all of the classes were commissioned after the Cold War and are fairly capable. The PLA-N submarine fleet is rounded out by imported Russian *Kilo-class* submarines, which are considered rather quiet and eight of which can fire the

---

SS-N-27B Klub ASCM. These ASCMS have a range of 300 km (162 nm), approach the target at Mach 3 speed and carry a large warhead, making them a highly dangerous and hard to intercept weapon. With the exception of the non-import version Kilos and the Yuan-class, Chinese submarines are rated as fairly loud, and thus easier to detect.76

Table 3.5: Chinese and Japanese Submarines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLA-N Submarines</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ming-class</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song-class</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuan-class</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilo-class</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han-class</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shang-class</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MSDF Submarines</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harushio-class</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyashio-class</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souryu-class</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The MSDF operates a significantly smaller submarine fleet. There are three main classes: Harushio-, Oyashio- and Souryu-class. All of these vessels entered service after the Cold War and are equipped with torpedoes and Harpoon missiles. Japanese submarines are considered to be generally good, but specific information on their capabilities was not available.

While the PLA-N has a clear 1 to 3.39 numerical advantage in submarines, its underwater warfare capabilities are limited by the relatively old technology used for most of them and by their relatively high noise levels. With the exception of potentially the most modern classes and non-import Russian Kilos, Japanese submarines outperform them. However, ASW operations continue to be very difficult, especially

---

with the context of a larger naval clash, thus, while the advantage goes to the MSDF, one should not discount the PLA-N submarine fleet.

This leads us to the question of ASW capabilities, i.e. the ability to find and destroy submarines. The PLA-N continues to be weak when it comes to ASW. While submarines have been an important part of the PLA-N, it traditionally placed no emphasis on ASW capabilities. Chinese warships lack all but the most rudimentary equipment for ASW warfare while Chinese crews have no technical expertise in executing ASW operations. In contrast, the MSDF is equipped with far more sophisticated equipment both to locate and destroy submarines. While the PLA-N is restricted to hull-mounted sonars, MSDF vessels are equipped with bow-mounted ones, many also carrying towed ones. And while the PLA-N primarily carries torpedoes against submarines, MSDF vessels are equipped with ASW missile systems for protection. ASW capabilities in both fleets are augmented by helicopters carried by the various vessels. The PLA-N relies on the Ka-28 or Z-9 helicopters, the former being the export version of the Russian Ka-27 Helix while the latter is the Chinese licensed version of the Eurocopter Dauphin. With the exception of the Luhu- and Luhai-classes, which carry two, all other PLA-N destroyers carry one of these helicopters. MSDF vessels carry Seahawk helicopters, with the exception of the Abakuma-class. Seahawk ASW helicopters carry advanced sensor systems to detect submarines and are usually armed to engage submarines on their own. The MSDF also employs helicopter carrier destroyers, such as the Shirane-class (3 helicopters) or the Hyuogo-class (18 helicopters) that can greatly aid fleet ASW capabilities.

Overall, despite its numerical advantage, the PLA-N is fairly outmatched in all other areas of subsurface warfare, giving somewhat of an advantage to the MSDF once

77 Michael S. Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)," (RAND National Security Division, 2015), 93.
again, due to better equipment. While both fleets pose a significant submarine threat, the MSDF could more effectively defend against potential submarine attacks while its quieter submarines would be harder for the PLA-N to defend against.

**Air Warfare**

The Falkland Islands war had demonstrated the devastating influence air forces can play in modern naval conflicts. While the Argentinean navy played a minimal role in the conflict, the Argentinean air force caused heavy casualties to the British Task Force. Thus, airpower plays a crucial supporting role in contemporary naval warfare, both in gathering intelligence and destroying enemy forces. Within the context of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands both China and Japan can rely on their shore-based aviation assets to gain control over the air, and utilize it to devastate naval assets. Air forces can be divided into three main categories for the purposes of this section: naval-attack, air-superiority, and surveillance and reconnaissance.

The PLA-N maintains a large naval aviation arm with a multi-role focus. Naval-attack missions are delegated to H-6D bombers, the Chinese version of the Russian Tu-16. These naval bombers are equipped with sea-searching radars and carry C-601 missiles (90-100 km range, 70 percent single shot hit probability). The naval bomber force is complemented by attack jets with naval capabilities: JH-7 fighter/bomber jets with a typical weapons load of two C-801 or C-802 missiles with a range of 485 nm, and J-10 multi-role fighters similarly equipped with C-801 or C-802 missiles with a 550 km combat radius and J-11 and Su-30 jets with unknown load out. The naval attack

---

81 airforce-technology.com. "J-10 (Jian 10) Vigorous Dragon Multirole Tactical Fighter, China."
category is rounded out by the PS-5s amphibious ASW aircraft, equipped with surveillance equipment, C-101 ASMs and other ASW equipment. In contrast, for naval warfare, the MSDF operates the Lockheed Martin Orion P3-Cs and the indigenous Kawasaki P-1s. Despite their age, the P3-Cs are reliable, well-tested aircraft, subjected to numerous modernizations. The Kawasaki P-1 is a new Japanese ASW aircraft and it is equipped with the latest ASW technologies.

To effectively utilize various aircraft, and deny this to the enemy, air superiority has to be achieved, a role delegated to the fighter aircraft of the two militaries. The PLA operates a wide range of fighter jets: The J-7s, the Chinese version of the MiG 21, and the domestically designed J-8s continue to dominate the Chinese air force. The J-8 is considered to be a relatively capable fighter, with electronic equipment and weapon system outperforming the F-16. The PLA-AF also operates more modern J-11 fighter-bombers, the Chinese version of the Su-27, and Russian Su-27 fighter jets. “The highly manoeuvrable Su-27 is one of the most imposing fighters ever built.” Most of the Chinese fighters have not been tested under actual battle conditions. The Air Self-Defence Force relies on battle-tested American fighters. The key fighters of the ASDF are F-15 Eagles and F-2s, an indigenously developed aircraft based on the F-16. The fleet is complemented by older F-4 Phantoms. Both China and Japan possess a capable fighter force, with China having a significant advantage in the sheer number of planes it could potentially commit to a conflict. In case of a confrontation, Japan would face a tough enemy in the air.

Finally, surveillance capability is important for both naval and air combat. The PLA-N naval aviation arm primarily relies on HZ-5 Beagles for surveillance and Y8-Js

[^84]: “C-801 Yj-1 / Yj-8 (Eagle Strike).” Federation of American Scientists.
for airborne early warning and control (AEW&C). The H-5s are old Soviet light bombers with limited effectiveness. The Y8-Js are equipped with either British or Israeli radars and are fairly modern. These planes are complemented by the PLA AF’s KJ-200s and bigger K-2000 AEW&C aircraft, and Y8-T and Boeing 737-200 command and control aircraft, all of which are fairly modern. In contrast, Japanese surveillance and reconnaissance are delegated to specialized RF-4 Phantoms, fairly old aircraft, while AEW&C is done by Boeing E-767s and E-2C aircraft. There is no clear advantage to either side in this regards.

Overall, there is a rough balance when the situation is examined unit to unit, with China possessing a meaningful advantage in the sheer number of available planes. However, in a short, limited conflict, such an advantage would hardly be decisive. Neither air forces have been tested in battle. While Japanese planes have an established combat record in U.S. service, they do not outperform Chinese planes on paper.

Besides the aircraft available, an important consideration for the air component of a potential conflict is the anti-air warfare (AAW) capabilities of the ships deployed. Similarly to ASW, the PLA-N is traditionally considered to be weak when it comes to AAW, although more have been done in recent years to address it. China has two AAW focused destroyer classes: the Luzhou-class, equipped with the Russian SA-N-20/SA-N-6 system, and the Luyang II-class, equipped with the HQ-9 AAW system. The Luyang II-class is the Chinese response to US/Japanese AEGIS air defence destroyers. Other PLA-N destroyers are equipped with less impressive air defence systems: HQ-7 (Luhu and Luhai-classes), SA-N-12 (Luyang I-class) and SA-N-7 (Sovremenny-class).84 China also employs Jiangkai II-class frigates as ‘mini-Aegis’ systems, but even so, fleet air

---

84 For China’s AAW equipment see Cole, The Great Wall at Sea.
defences, especially against missiles, continues to suffer limitations.\textsuperscript{85} In contrast, the MSDF operates two dedicated AEGIS classes, the Kongou- and Atago-classes, with the Atago-class being capable of providing theatre ballistic missile defences as well. The Hatakaze-class is equipped with the SM 1 MR SAM system while the Abakuma-class has no SAM system. All other Japanese destroyers carry the US made Sea Sparrow SAM system. Once again, Japan possesses more modern and capable equipment than China. Japanese AAW capabilities are very sophisticated while China is still in the process of catching up, presenting a clear advantage for the MSDF.

Non-Tangible Factors

As discussed above actual military power is derived from the combination of hard and soft components, i.e. hardware (platforms and weapon systems) and software (training, morale). History provides numerous examples of when a technologically outmatched force defeated a superior one, or when a superior force could not capitalize on its advantages, and an inferior but better-motivated force emerged victorious. While these factors can significantly influence combat performance, it is fairly difficult to measure them, especially in the absence of actual combat demonstration. This section will focus on factors that could potentially influence combat readiness one way or another, with the disclaimer that their actual influence remains to be seen.

First, training is crucially important for contemporary warfare. Soldiers have to be able to effectively use their complex weaponry and be able to partake in demanding joint operation warfare. Traditionally the PLA had problems when it comes to training. During the Maoist period being ‘red’ was emphasized over being ‘expert’, which coupled with the PLA’s engagement in economic and community projects led to

\textsuperscript{85} Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA),” 88.

relatively low levels of training. Even the PLA admits that training continues to be insufficient.\textsuperscript{86} The 2015 RAND assessment of PLA weaknesses, including for the PLA-N, highlights training as one of the crucial areas where the PLA continues to lag behind.\textsuperscript{87} However, the PLA is in the process of addressing these shortcomings, through increasing training as well as creating new facilities offering virtual training systems to overcome this issue. The recognition for the importance of increasing training is shown within the latest Chinese defence policy:\textsuperscript{88}

It will constantly innovate operational and training methods, improve military training criteria and regulations, and work to build large-scale comprehensive training bases in an effort to provide real-combat environments for training. The PLA will continue to conduct live-setting training, IT-based simulated training, and face-on-face confrontation training in line with real-combat criteria, and strengthen command post training and joint and combined training.

As the JSDF is not subject to the same scrutiny as the PLA, it is hard to find comprehensive open-source assessments on training standards. In general, Japanese troops often train with the US military, and no mention of specific weaknesses in training has been found during the course of this research. The common opinion on the subject is that the JSDF offers a relatively high level of training with no obvious shortcomings. The difference in training can be illustrated by the fact that, despite the roughly equal size of the two fleets, Japan maintains eight training vessels while the PLA-N only two.

Second, both the PLA and JSDF finds it increasingly difficult to attract high-quality personnel. The Chinese economy continues to expand rapidly with an ever growing

\textsuperscript{87} Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA),” 48.
need for highly trained workers in the private sector. This makes it difficult for the PLA to attract the same graduates to military service, which offers a generally harsher and more demanding life relative to the civilian sector. The PLA also continues to find it difficult to offer competitive pay to the civilian sector, and to create the facilities and organizational structure to be an attractive employer. Furthermore, lifestyle changes within China’s youth, such as the growing problem of internet addiction and the effects of the one-child policy, further decreases the attractiveness of demanding military service and increasingly limits the pool of candidates that would be fit for military service to begin with. The JSDF faces similar problems. Traditionally military service in the anti-militarist society of Japan has enjoyed little prestige compared to the corporate sector or the civil service. While efforts are made to raise the status of servicemen, Japanese society continues to be resistant. Similarly to the PLA, the JSDF also suffers from a lack of good quality facilities and benefits for the servicemen that further reduce the attractiveness of joining the military. And while the Chinese recruit pool shrinks due to lifestyle changes, the Japanese recruit pool shrinks due to the general ageing of Japanese society, putting even more competition on the JSDF for high-quality graduates.

Third, there is a meaningful difference in the level of civilian control and general integration into the state between the PLA and the JSDF. The PLA is an influential player in Chinese politics as the CCP continues to consider the loyalty of the military key to their continued power. The Central Military Commission (CMC) is one of the highest bodies of the CCP. The PLA essentially faces no civilian oversight: there is a single civilian in the entire PLA chain of command, Xi Jinping, and budgetary requests are rubber-stamped while the Ministry of Defence has no actual command and control

89 Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA),” 49-50.
capabilities over the PLA. The PLA also pursues a high level of integration with the civilian sector, utilizing civilian capabilities to make up for material weaknesses.

Following the guiding principle of integrating military with civilian purposes and combining military efforts with civilian support, China will forge further ahead with CMI by constantly bettering the mechanisms, diversifying the forms, expanding the scope and elevating the level of the integration, so as to endeavour to bring into place an all-element, multi-domain and cost-efficient pattern of CMI.

The JSDF faces the complete opposite situation. It has limited influence in the political environment and has traditionally been subjected to occasionally crushing civilian oversight. Prior to 2007, there was no Ministry of Defence in Japan, the organization only had an agency status. Many key positions have traditionally been occupied by staff from other ministries, and the Ministry of Finance maintains a strict control over the military budget. However, steps are made to improve the effectiveness of military administration, such as the aforementioned elevation to ministry status and the creation of the National Security Council.

Fourth, corruption within the PLA is highlighted as a crucial weakness with the potential to hollow out the organization. Corruption ranges from the misappropriation and misuse of equipment to the selling of promotions and commissions. This serves to reduce combat effectiveness and reduces morale. At the moment, no less than 14 high-ranking PLA officers are under investigation for corruption, with some others already dismissed.

---

91 Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)," 46-47.
93 Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)," 48-49.
Finally, the logistical capabilities of the opposing combatants. An effective military needs effective supporting services. Logistical support continues to be a key obstacle to effective PLA-N operations. Fleet replenishment ships continue to be in a short supply, as well as effective port facilities. And while the PLA-N practiced resupplying in smaller civilian ports, the sustainability of a potentially prolonged conflict remains questionable. The PLA-N would face difficulties in maintaining a large presence under combat conditions around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, especially when it comes to supplies and munitions. The JSDF similarly continues to face logistical issues, such as the availability of facilities and low munition reserves that would affect their ability to fight a sustained conflict. The issue of at-sea replenishing is especially important as the PLA-N would need to maintain a sustained presence on and around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands if it chooses to pursue the direct use of force.

Overall, one can observe that both the PLA and JSDF faces significant issues when it comes to the non-material side of military power. While Japan has an advantage in training, without actual verification under combat conditions it is hard to determine whether the JSDF has a significant advantage or not. Besides training, both militaries face personnel and logistical problems that affect their respective combat readiness.

**Allied Forces**

One final component to military power is the potential involvement of friendly forces in supporting one's own, usually within the context of an alliance or collective self-defence agreement. While China is not part of any alliance system, Japan has important security ties to the United States. Under the Japanese-American security treaty, U.S. forces could assist the JSDF in the defence of Japanese territory, including the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

---

95 Chase et al., "China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)," 80.
For the contingency at hand, the most important of the forward deployed forces are the 7th Fleet naval vessels deployed to Japan. Two guided missile cruisers, seven guided missile destroyers and the USS George Washington aircraft carrier are deployed to the Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan.

The forward deployed fleet consists from the Ticonderoga-class Aegis cruisers and the Arleigh Burke-class Aegis destroyers. Both classes are in the 9000+ tons displacement category, significantly larger than most Chinese or Japanese destroyers. Their main anti-ship armament consists from eight Harpoon missiles, similar to that of MSDF destroyers. Both classes are capable, multi-role vessels, possessing strong AAW and ASW capabilities, as well as land-strike abilities through Tomahawk cruise missiles. While the USS George Washington is an impressive piece of military hardware, it is unlikely that it would play a strong role in a Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands battle as the islands are within the range of shore-based aviation. The 7th Fleet could also utilize Los Angeles-class attack submarines based on Guam. The U.S. vessels outperform both Chinese and Japanese warships, and their Aegis systems make them more resilient against anti-ship missiles. If deployed, they would certainly tilt the balance of power in Japan's favour (whether they would be deployed is discussed under risks).


97 Watts, Jane's Warship Recognition Guide.
Assessment of Feasibility

As stated above, the key determinant of feasibility is whether China can successfully attack Japan’s COG while defending its own. In the case of direct use of force this primarily means whether China can overcome Japanese efforts to maintain control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands through sheer force. At this point it is important to remember that this assessment is tentative: the analysis focuses on whether China could conceivably achieve this. This does not provide any guarantees that it will do so in real life. As Gray argues, direct combat demonstration is the only reliable way to establish relative combat prowess.  

Furthermore, before proceeding with the assessment it is important to remember that the conflict is expected to be a limited one, thus the total military might of opposing countries is less relevant compared to unit-against-unit performance.

Japan possesses significant naval strength due to the larger number of destroyers. At the same time, while China faces a disadvantage in the terms of total naval power, its strength is growing, potentially at a faster rate than Japan’s. On a unit to unit level, the Chinese navy has achieved significant modernization. MSDF vessels are generally considered good and they are based on tested American technology. While traditionally PLA-N vessels have been less sophisticated, newer classes such as the Type 052 variants are comparable to that of Japanese vessels, equipped with effective ASCMs. In a limited war context, where only a small number of ships participate, China could conceivably defeat Japanese forces as there is no obvious disadvantage when it comes

---

98 Gray, Fighting Talk, 101-04.
99 In case of the Paracel Islands crisis only 4 ships participated on each sides. Even in the case of the Falkland Islands War only 8 destroyers and 2 carriers participated in the task force.
to unit-to-unit engagement, especially as China has improved its fleet air defences. This is reflected by Yoshihara and Holmes:100

Plainly, then, thorny strategic questions lie before Tokyo. Already inferior in numbers, the SDF is losing its edge in quality over adversaries in the main theatre, East Asia […] Japan still boasts a world class military, but its combat effectiveness is limited primarily to defending airspace and sea areas around the home islands. And the SDF arguably falls short even by such narrow standards. […] Doubts linger today about Japan’s ability to defend outlying islands independently against concerted Chinese efforts to seize them.

Thus, one could reasonably argue that China could potentially secure initial command of the sea. Whether it can maintain it, or at the very least deny it to Japan, is a different question. After establishing control over the islands, the roles would reverse, putting China into a defensive position. Maintaining a purely offensive focus at this point would be counterproductive: such an approach would require China to try to pacify Japanese opposition beyond the disputed waters that would cause escalation and likely lead to a major war between the two. A more likely scenario is that the PLA would extend its A2/AD umbrella to cover the islands. The key goal would be to deny command of the sea to Japan and to disincentivize entry into the waters surrounding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

The PLA is fairly experienced when it comes to anti-access warfare. The PLA-N possesses a significant number of submarines101 to establish a kill-zone in surrounding waters where these units could hunt for Japanese targets. While Japan has submarines of its own and fairly capable ASW equipment, ASW operations are always difficult, especially in littoral waters. Furthermore, China possesses a large and capable air force, with a clear numerical advantage over Japan. This makes it likely that China would

101 See tables above.
dominate the air, if not by technology, then by sheer numbers (Japanese planes are not that much better to be able to turn the situation into a one-sided massacre\textsuperscript{102}). This again would make Japan’s efforts to regain command of the sea complicated, as air forces can play a devastating role in sea denial as seen in the case of the Falkland Islands.\textsuperscript{103} With its current forces and A2/AD training, China could conceivably erect defences that would prevent Japan from recovering the islands within a limited war context.

Overall, based on the data above, this research argues that direct use of force meets the basic requirements of feasibility. It is important to remember that this only considers whether it can be done, not whether it should be.

3.1.3 Benefits and Costs

In analysing the attractiveness of an option, three factors have to be considered: benefits, costs and risks. Benefits refer to how a particular course of action contributes to the achievement of national objectives. Within the context of this research, benefits mean how an option contributes to China achieving the various objectives outlined in Chapter 2.

Pursuing direct use of force would allow China to establish solid \textit{de facto} control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, effectively unilaterally. Such a control would place little to no limits on how China can utilize the islands (extreme activities such as building a nuclear base on the islands could trigger Japan to resort to the use of force, or even to seek major war, to rectify the situation). \textit{De facto} control over the islands would allow China to pursue all of the interests discussed in Chapter 2:

\textsuperscript{102} The ASDF forces are primarily based on F-15 and F-16 (local variant) 4\textsuperscript{th} generation fighter aircraft, which are comparable to China’s 4\textsuperscript{th} generation force. The Su-27 is a major threat to Cold War era US fighters. While Japan has been purchasing 5\textsuperscript{th} generation F-35As (which have a large kill ration against 4\textsuperscript{th} generation aircraft, Japan’s F-35 fleet remains non-operational at the moment).

\textsuperscript{103} Most British casualties were caused by the Argentinean Air Force.
In the strategic realm it would allow the full militarization of the islands – actually, the need to defend the islands militarily would likely necessitate it. As such, it would allow China to bolster its control over the waters of the East China Sea, creating the desired maritime buffer zone deemed necessary for the territorial security of China. Control over the islands would also allow China to bolster its control over SLOCs passing by the islands, including SLOCs reaching the eastern side of Taiwan, which could be valuable if China ever decides to impose a blockade against the breakaway island. *De facto* control over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands would also transform the islands into a launching pad for China to break through the first island chain.

In the economic realm, the situation is less ideal. *De facto* control is not equivalent to *de jure* sovereignty. It is likely that, even if Japan decides not to militarily contest the occupation of the islands, Tokyo would maintain that the islands belong to Japan and that China's occupation is contrary to international law. As such, it is unlikely that China could use direct use of force to settle the legal disputes of maritime delimitation based on UNCLOS.\(^{104}\) At the same time, its physical control over the islands and surrounding waters would allow China to proceed with the exploitation of surrounding resources without the consent of Japan.

In the political realm, a military victory against Japan would be a valuable achievement as would be the capture of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Domestically it would fit well with Chinese nationalism: the recovery of lost territories is a central theme in wiping away the century of humiliation and dealing a military defeat against China's main antagonist would be welcomed by nationalists. Successful execution of a direct use of force campaign would certainly boost the legitimacy of the Chinese

\(^{104}\) The UN Charter prohibits the use of force to settle international disputes. As such, China’s occupation of the islands would be considered illegal under international law. That said, China could exploit resources by merely maintaining control over the waters in question.
Communist Party (CCP) back home and could be a valuable distraction from other domestic problems. Internationally it would elevate China's status as a military power and as a major regional power. One, a victory against a major regional power such as Japan would enhance further Chinese attempts at coercion against smaller regional power, such as those on the South China Sea. Two, it would be a visible milestone for the emergence of China as a major military power. A well-executed successful campaign could demonstrate the development of the PLA. Being recognized as a major military power is a significant asset when it comes to international politics. It enhances one's ability for coercion, as weaker states are more likely to seek appeasement and makes one more resistant to attempts of coercion. Three, successfully altering the territorial status quo would signal a transition of influence from the U.S. towards China over East Asia. This once again would enhance China's ability to pursue its interests.

While direct use of force could offer significant benefits, its attractiveness is hindered by simultaneously imposing significant costs. From a strategic perspective, this option is rather expensive. From a purely material perspective, fighting a modern naval war is not cheap. The acquisition cost of a Harpoon missile block is over 1.2 million USD. While there are no open source information on the cost of Chinese missiles, even if it is somewhat cheaper, it is a substantial material investment to fire at the enemy. Similarly, a Luyang I-class destroyer costs approximately USD400 million to manufacture, not to mention the time it takes to build one. Thus, both fighting and replenishing losses would cost China heavily. Furthermore, replenishing lost or repairing damaged destroyers would take a long time, during which China's weakened

106 Krista E Wiegand, "Militarized Territorial Disputes States’ Attempts to Transfer Reputation for Resolve," *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 1 (2011), 104.: ‘challenger states’ attempt to transfer their reputation earned during one dispute to another one as a tool of compellence.
to control key waters. If it comes to the protracted defence of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands through military means, then China needs to divert assets from other missions. This commitment would mean that there are fewer forces available for other missions, including the defence of the Chinese coast.

From an economic perspective, resorting to the direct use of force would have a negative impact on the Chinese economy. First, an armed clash with Japan would obviously damage mutual economic ties. While economic ties are already in decline, in 2013 Japan was still responsible for 8.3 percent of Chinese imports and 6.7 percent of exports.\(^\text{108}\) If it comes to a short, limited conflict one should not expect a total severance of economic ties. Despite hostilities, Russia continues to be one of Ukraine's biggest trading partners.\(^\text{109}\) But it would certainly damage mutual economic ties, whether it is trade, investment or tourism. Besides the damage to Sino-Japanese economic ties, China might face further economic damage. The international community often expresses its displeasure with states committing belligerent acts through economic punishment. A contemporary example would be Russia: both the U.S.\(^\text{110}\) and the EU\(^\text{111}\) enacted sanctions to punish Russia for its actions in Crimea and Ukraine. The sanctions restrict cooperation with Russia, freeze overseas assets and enact travel bans on selected individuals, and enact targeted economic sanctions against the Russian energy sector. China has personal experience with Western sanctions after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident. However, how effective such sanctions can be against China is questionable. Unlike Russia, which is highly dependent on its energy sector, China is a global


manufacturing hub. Enacting targeted sanctions would not only be difficult, but it would hurt Western companies that are dependent on Chinese manufacturing. Enacting sanction on defence cooperation would also have little effect: after 1989 China was forced to develop its own independent defence industry. Most of the PLA is armed with domestically manufactured or Russian imported weaponry, thus, the sanctions would have limited effect. Even if targeted sanctions could be put in place, it is questionable whether Western states would be willing to do so. Europe has been reluctant to do so in the case of Russia. And with its economic troubles, it is unlikely that the EU would be willing to get tough on a major economic partner like China. Even Washington would face significant opposition from its business lobby to do so. Regardless, some economic damage would be inevitable.

From a political perspective, China would be probably labelled as a rogue state. In the immediate regional environment, direct use of force would heighten the sense of 'China threat'. While this can lead to states seeking appeasement, it could also lead to the formation of balancing coalitions to counter China. Acting belligerently might also affect political contacts. States might choose to cancel high-level diplomatic meetings, or not to invite China to the meetings of regional groupings. Russia has been kicked out of the G8 due to its belligerent behaviour. Overall, direct use of force would undermine China's arguments of being a 'good neighbour', and would rather give credence to the various China threat theories Beijing expanded significant energies to counter.
3.1.4 Risk

Feasibility determines whether a course of action could be conceivably carried out while benefits and costs focus on the consequences of successful execution. But feasibility does not guarantee success, especially when it comes to warfare. As Gray argues:\textsuperscript{112}

It is in the very nature of war for chance to rule. The fundamental reason why this has to be so is because of war's complexity. It has too many diverse, yet interacting, to be controlled reliably by the strategic gambler striving to reduce the risks. […] Risk free warfare is not an option.

Whether a military operation is successful or not is dependent on a number of factors that are impossible to predict prior to the actual engagement, including but not limited to weather, the commanders’ behaviour and potential tactical errors, equipment failure, or simple friction in execution. As JP 5-0 argues, there will be always gaps in one’s understanding of the operational environment, especially when it comes to the effects of actions and enemy responses to it.\textsuperscript{113} After all, the enemy has a vote too\textsuperscript{114}, which on its own makes predicting the outcome of military engagements difficult. This requires the incorporation of ‘risk’ into the analytical framework, i.e. the possibility and likelihood of failure to achieve the objectives, despite meeting the feasibility criterion.

As an analytical rule, this research argues that the higher the advantage one enjoys, the less influence chance can exert, although it will never be none. To illustrate this: If an enemy possesses an overwhelming advantage, it is more likely to win, as it can use this advantage to power through acts of chance, such as tactical mistakes or other elements of friction, such as equipment failure. This does not guarantees success but reduces the risk of failure. In contrast, if the balance of power between combatants is relatively equal, then chance plays a more prominent role, and skill and ingenuity become more important in overcoming the enemy. Similarly, if one suffers a

\textsuperscript{112} Gray, \textit{Fighting Talk: 40 Maxims on War, Peace and Strategy}, 40.

\textsuperscript{113} “Joint Operations Planning,” III-22.

\textsuperscript{114} Gray, \textit{Fighting Talk: 40 Maxims on War, Peace and Strategy}, 66.
disadvantage, the risk of failure is going to be even higher, albeit success is not inherently impossible. But in this situation the negative influence of chance can be devastating on one’s own forces, while the enemy can power through more of such events. Thus, for the purposes of this research risk is determined based on the balance of power between the opposing parties. The balance of power, in turn, is determined within the context of the relevant COGs to reflect the different demands of the various options. In the case of direct use of force, the following factors need to be considered when determining risks: the balance of power between China and Japan in the military realm and potential friendly force behaviour which could affect said balance.

As discussed above, the balance of power between Chinese and Japanese forces within a limited war context is fairly equal. Japan has a numerical advantage in the number of destroyers and a technological advantage when it comes to ASW and AAW. At the same time, China has a total numerical advantage at sea, in the air and underwater. It has also improved AAW capabilities, thus, it is not severely outmatched in the case of a smaller task force. On this basis, the basic risks of direct use of force are moderate: acts of chance could significantly impact the success of China’s campaign, and the PLA might not have the reserves to power through them. But at the same time, the JSDF faces similar conditions. At its core direct use of force would be a gamble, the result of which can go both ways as neither side is favoured.

One factor that affects the risks associated with the direct use of force is Japan’s security ties to the United States. The level and nature of U.S. involvement could significantly alter the balance of power between China and Japan. Besides being the pre-eminent security guarantor in the Asia-Pacific, Japan maintains strong security ties to the United States. Before proceeding to review how potential U.S. involvement affects Chinese use of force, there are two key issues to consider: the nature of the Japanese-American alliance and the U.S. stance on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute.
Japanese-American defence cooperation is based on the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America (1960). Following its defeat during the Pacific War, Japan has been incorporated into the U.S.-led alliance system and become one of the key U.S. strongholds in Asia for the Cold War. The treaty has two key provisions:

[Article V states that] each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

[Article VI states that] for the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan. The use of these facilities and areas as well as the status of United States armed forces in Japan shall be governed by a separate agreement, replacing the Administrative Agreement under Article III of the Security Treaty between Japan and the United States of America, signed at Tokyo on February 28, 1952, as amended, and by such other arrangements as may be agreed upon.

As these articles reveal, the treaty is essentially a one-sided collective security agreement between Japan and the United States. Washington pledges to assist Japan in case of a security threat materializing against the country, and in return Tokyo agrees to allow U.S. troops to be station within its borders. In language the treaty is similar to that of the treaty establishing NATO.\footnote{Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America," Accessed on 31/03/2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html.}

defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

One important point to note is that the treaty between Japan and the United States does not automatically determine the conduct of the United States in case of a security threat and allows significant room to Washington and Tokyo to determine the appropriate course of action. In other words, the mere existence of the treaty does not automatically mean that the U.S. will commit troops to directly engage in combat operations on behalf of Japan.

The extent of potential U.S. involvement is further affected by Washington’s traditionally ambivalent stance towards the disputed islands. While the United States has returned the islands to Japan, it officially takes no stance on the sovereignty issue. Although Washington handed control over the islands to Japan as part of the Okinawa reversion treaty, the U.S.’s official stance has been that it merely passed on ‘administrative rights’ and this is in no way a statement on the sovereignty of the disputed islands.\footnote{Smith, \textit{A Crisis Postponed}} The U.S.’s neutrality stance raised questions on whether the islands are covered by the Japanese-American security treaty. However, since then the Obama Administration clarified it on multiple occasions that it considers the islands to fall under the treaty.\footnote{Justin McCurry, Tania Branigan, “Obama says US will defend Japan in Island Dispute with China”, \textit{The Guardian}, 24 April 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/obama-in-japan-backs-status-quo-in-island-dispute-with-china> (accessed on 28/10/2014); Ankit Panda, “Obama: Senkakus covered under US-Japan Security Treaty”, \textit{The Diplomat}, April 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/04/obama-senkakus-covered-under-us-japan-security-treaty/> (accessed}
In light of the U.S.’s commitment towards Japan and its traditionally neutral stance on the issue, it is important to consider how the U.S. might react to potential Chinese use of force. Being the strongest military power in the world, strong American involvement could significantly influence the odds against China if the conflict comes to a military confrontation. Not surprisingly, the U.S. has avoided to state clearly its action plan for the dispute, relying on broad appeals for calm and peace. Thus a rational choice approach once again proves useful in gaining insight into the potential plans of a military power. The key question to consider is whether the U.S. would intervene in case a military engagement between China and Japan and if so, to what extent.

On the one side, there are a number of reasons for the U.S. to militarily support Japan. Would Washington refuse to provide the assistance requested by Japan, it would undermine the long-standing relationship of the two countries. This on its own would negatively impact U.S. interests as Japan is a key regional ally and a crucial component of the United States’ Asia-Pacific strategy. However, more troublingly it could start a ripple effect that could seriously hinder U.S. strategic interests on the region. First, it would negatively impact the U.S.’s image as a credible security guarantor in the region. Refusing to provide assistance to one of America’s most important allies in the region would send the message to other regional states that they cannot depend on American security guarantees, especially when it comes to dealing with China. This would reduce their willingness to support U.S. interests if they conflict with China, as Washington’s commitment to protect them from Beijing would no longer be credible. Second, the status of American troops in Japan is tenuous. There is significant pressure on Tokyo from its own citizens to remove U.S. troops, especially from Okinawa. Failure to heed Japanese requests for assistance would give political ammunition to the forces

seeking to reduce or eliminate U.S. presence in Japan. Loss of access to Japanese bases would deprive Washington from its most important forward bastion in the region. This would significantly hinder the U.S.'s ability to project power into the region to secure U.S. interests and protect U.S. allies.

An American refusal to provide assistance to Japan, if requested by Tokyo, would also not make sense from an offensive realist theoretical perspective. As stated in Chapter 1, the theory argues that existing hegemons, such as the United States, are expected to seek to counter the rise of potential hegemons, such as China, to protect their security advantages. This is achieved by introducing a direct military threat into the emerging hegemon’s home region to prevent it from achieving the level of security necessary to project power freely beyond its home region. An outright U.S. refusal to provide assistance would violate the fundamental ontological assumptions presented in the theoretical framework.

On the other side, not only does the U.S. have strong incentives to encourage Japan to limit its requests for assistance, but so does Tokyo. From an American perspective the two key issues are limiting escalation and avoiding economic damage. As stated above, this research expect a potential military engagement between China and Japan to be a limited war. However, strong U.S. intervention would be a critical factor in escalation. U.S. troops intervening on behalf of Japan would realize some of China’s worst strategic fears of containment. The conflict would likely escalate beyond a limited conflict as China’s strategic calculations would shift to involve breaking U.S. containment, standing up to an external ‘imperialist’ power seeking to influence Asia and an even heightened sense of national pride. U.S. involvement could potentially cause more harm than good, both for Japan in particular and regional security in

120 Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.
121 Interview (via email) with Tetsuo Kotani on 15 March 2015.
general. Furthermore, the U.S. has significant economic interests in China and Beijing has demonstrated in the past that it is not afraid to weaponize its economy (see 2010 fishing captain incident). And even if Beijing does not purposefully exploits its economic ties, Chinese consumers have proven to be highly nationalistic and willing to punish transgressions against their country (see attacks on Japanese businesses and Japanese manufactured cars). For example, Apple's 2015 results were significantly boosted by sales in China, and the company is considering to double its outlets within the PRC. An American intervention would hurt U.S. based companies’ access to China and their bottom line in the Chinese market. With the dispute having no popular significance in the U.S., Washington would be expected to face strong pressure from various business lobbies to protect their interests in China.

At the same time, the current Abe Administration in Japan is pursuing ambitious defence reforms, seeking to turn Japan into a major player in the regional security arena. While a Chinese attack on the islands would confirm Abe’s insistence that Japan needs stronger defence, a high reliance on U.S. forces would prove the legislations already in place to be ineffective and the higher defence budgets to be insufficient. Not being able to defend the country after several years of controversial reforms and significantly increased defence budgets would be a major embarrassment for the nationalist and hawkish Abe government. It would also undermine Japan’s credibility as a regional leader, especially in the security realm. This would sink Abe’s vision for the future of Japan outlined in the new National Security Strategy (2012).

Based on these factors, this research argues that the most likely scenario is that U.S. would limit its involvement to providing intelligence and logistical support, while

---


123 The Office of the Prime Minister of Japan, National Security Strategy, 2012.
avoiding a direct involvement in the conflict. This would allow the U.S. to fulfil its obligations to Japan, without risking further escalation or a highly embarrassing political outcome for the Abe administration. After all, Japan possesses the military might to resist Chinese troops on fair grounds.

Would Japan suffer a critical defeat, the situation would become more delicate. The military engagement is expected to be very short by all concerned parties. Furthermore, Chinese doctrine emphasizes the quick termination of the military phase to transition into a political phase. And at this point likely there would be significant international call to terminate the conflict and seek a peaceful resolution. Within this atmosphere the U.S. is expected to try to non-militarily pressure China into giving up the islands, rather than deploying the 7th Fleet to retake it. And as time progresses the political environment would become less and less conducive to Washington resuming combat operations.

It is extremely difficult to judge U.S. reactions to a potential crisis as Washington has kept its stance purposefully vague. Opinions within the academic community are divided. Tetsuo Kotani from the Japan Institute for International Affairs stated for this research that in his view Japan would take the front-line role, with the U.S. limiting itself to provide assistance.124 In contrast, Michael Barr from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne adopted a more pessimistic tone, stating that U.S. involvement would be influenced by the Washington’s own political considerations.125 Looking at contemporary American conduct on the South China Sea, Washington seems to be eager to deter China from taking actions from which there is no return from, even if such deterrence requires a more active military posture. However, Washington is by no means seeking an actual confrontation with China. Over the Senkaku/Diaoyu

124 Interview (via email) with Tetsuo Kotani on 15 March 2015.
125 Interview (via email) with Micheal Barr on 17 November 2014.
Islands dispute the U.S. policy seems to be ensuring that they never have to make the actual strategic decision whether to intervene on the side of Japan, by dissuading China from attempting direct use of force in the first place. Washington continues to rely on the hope that over time China will moderate its conduct and will subordinate itself to the established status quo.

Overall, the direct use of force is a fairly risky proposition. For the purposes of later analysis the risk assessment for this option is as follows:

- For seizing the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the risks associated with direct use of force are moderate. The balance of power is relatively equal in a limited war context, and China has a good chance of seizing the islands, especially if it can execute strategic surprise.

- For holding the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands the risks associated are high. The total balance of forces favour Japan at sea, and the low numbers of Chinese destroyers mean that the PLA-N could exhaust its reserves quicker than the MSDF. Potential US involvement also increases the power available to Japan to rectify the situation, leading to an overall unfavourable balance of power.

The final factor to determine is whether failure would confer any specific significant additional costs, which could further reduce the attractiveness of the option. Failure to execute direct use of force would not impact the legitimacy of China’s claims, Beijing would be free to continue to pursue sovereignty over the islands. However, it would impact China’s ability to do so. A military defeat would alter the perception of the balance of power as it would provide a tangible demonstration on the weaknesses of the PLA. Japan would be less likely to offer concessions if Tokyo is confident that it can demonstrably resist Chinese military power.
3.2 Potential Course of Action 2: Indirect Use of Force

As mentioned above, Schelling distinguishes two primary uses of military power: The unilateral application of military force, i.e. direct use of force, has been discussed above, where the objective is to bypass the opponent and directly seize and hold an objective. In contrast, military power can also be applied as part of the bargaining process. In this case, the point is not to bypass the opponent, but to affect its decision-making through actual and potential destruction. As Schelling argues:\textsuperscript{126}

There is something else, though, that force can do. It is less military, less heroic, less impersonal, and less unilateral; it is uglier and has received less attention in Western military strategy. […] Military force can be used to hurt. In addition to taking and protecting things of value it can destroy value.

This is a more nuanced application of military power, more dependent on psychology than brute force. Power is not necessarily directed against the object desired, albeit it might be, but rather against the weak points of the opponent’s will, targeting something it treasures. To illustrate this with a simplified example, direct use of force would be going in someone’s house, punching the owner in the face, and then leaving with their valuables. Indirect use of force, or diplomacy of violence, would be taking the owner’s family hostage, threatening to execute them unless he hands over the valuable desired.

The idea of such (potentially) indirect application of military force is not alien to Chinese strategic thinking. One of the central tenets of Sun Tzu’s strategic philosophy is that the true pinnacle of skill is to defeat the enemy without meeting it on the battlefield,

\textsuperscript{126} Schelling, \textit{Arms and Influence}, 2.
through manoeuvring it into a position from which victory is impossible. *The Art of War* references the diplomacy of violence directly when Sun Tzu asks: 127

If I dare ask, if the enemy is numerous, disciplined, and about to advance, how should we respond to them? I would say, first seize something that they love for then they will listen to you.

The core idea is that rather than pursuing one’s objective directly under an unfavourable balance of power, one should direct one’s power against something the enemy treasures, i.e. its psychological weak point, thus forcing the enemy to modify its behaviour, and achieving the objective indirectly.

The importance of psychological warfare is recognized by Kissinger as one of the unique characteristics of Chinese strategic philosophy. As Kissinger remarks, “Chinese thinkers developed a strategic thought that placed a premium on victory through psychological advantage and preached the avoidance of direct conflict.” 128 The concept of indirect use of force is applied through threats or limited use of force to force an opponent to modify its behaviour Beijing finds strategically objectionable, i.e. to force an enemy to decide to desist, rather than to expel its forces and make it physically impossible for him to continue. Kissinger further argues that “The offensive deterrence concept involves the use of a pre-emptive strategy not so much to defeat the adversary militarily as to deal him a psychological blow to cause him to desist.” 129 This behaviour could be observed during the 1953 Korean War: Chinese troops crossed the border not so much to hold Korean territory or to forcibly evict the U.S. troops, but to deal a psychological blow that would force the U.S. to withdraw from the Yalu River, and thus to cease threatening Chinese security interests. Similarly, Kissinger argues that the common pattern of many Chinese military engagements, such as 1954-58 Taiwan Strait

129 Ibid., 217.
Crisis, the 1962 Sino-Indian border clash, the 1969-71 Sino-Soviet border clash, and the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War, has been the PLA delivering a quick blow to the enemy militarily, followed by a political phase. Kissinger’s view is shared by Ng, as he argues that the transition from People’s War to L/LWUHTC is characterised by the growing importance of compellence as an objective within the limited war context. Furthermore, Ng states that Chinese strategic thinkers consider a small military clash as an opportunity to deter an opponent from fighting a larger war or escalating the situation. Thus Chinese concepts of deterrence are closer to coercion and compellence than what naval strategy would term fleet-in-being, i.e. where the mere existence of military forces is expected to act as a deterrent. The latter is more typical in Western strategic thinking where deterrence and limited confrontations are divorced, as the former meant to prevent the latter.\(^{130}\)

Chinese psychological warfare efforts can be observed in concrete terms within contemporary PLA doctrine. One, the publicized development of ‘trump card’ weapon systems serve to reduce the opponent’s willingness to attack: Showcasing weapons such as DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile aims to target the pride and critical component of U.S. military power, aircraft carriers, in order to dissuade the U.S. from their potential use in Chinese-controlled waters. From a direct use of force perspective, there would be benefits to keeping such a system secret: one the one hand, it would lower the urgency of developing countermeasures, while, on the other hand, it would contribute to strategic surprise. In an operational context, the symbolic destruction of aircraft carriers, and demonstrating the ability to further do so, would aim to persuade the U.S. to abandon the conflict.

Besides ‘trump card’ systems, following the traditions of Sun Tzu, Beijing devotes significant efforts to manoeuvre the enemy into a position of weakness prior to the

\(^{130}\) Ng, *Interpreting China's Military Power*. 165
conflict through the concept of ‘three warfares’, an “information warfare concept aimed at preconditioning key areas of competition in its favour”\(^\text{131}\), in order to facilitate its ability to conduct psychological warfare under contemporary conditions. The concept focuses on three key areas or ‘warfares’:\(^\text{132}\)

- Psychological warfare aims to disrupt decision making through demoralizing and deceiving the opponent’s military and civilian population in general.
- Legal warfare aims to utilize domestic and international laws to either legalize China’s military actions or to restrict an opponent’s operational freedom. Legal warfare is important to foster an advantageous political environment.
- Media warfare aims to support both psychological and legal warfare through promoting China’s views in the opponent’s and various neutral countries through mass media products such as movies, television programs, news reports and cultural institutions.

When carried out against an opponent the goal is to reduce its will to fight. Showcasing images of the destructive capabilities of the PLA during exercises aims to strike fear into the heart of the opponent’s politicians, and, more importantly, the domestic audience, by displaying the destruction and suffering the PLA could unleash. Promoting China’s narrative also aims to sow doubt within the enemy population on whether they are in the right. When carried out against a third party, these psychological efforts aim to isolate the opponent: break down alliances, increase hostile sentiments towards the opponent nation, e.g. through citing violent history, and to convert third parties to China’s narrative. In the end, the goal is to strike at the enemy’s will to fight, rather than its ability to do so.


The idea of intimidation and coercion can be observed in China’s strategic conduct on many occasions and some these are discussed as follows:

During the 1995 Mischief Reef incident, China captured the reef from the Philippines without a single shot fired. Filipino aerial surveillance, following reports from fishermen, revealed that China has built a number of structures on the reefs and that PLA-N warships are patrolling the area. While China claimed that the structures are a shelter for fishermen, and invited the Philippines to share them, Manila did not accept this explanation. In the end, despite the objections of Manila, the reef remains under Chinese control as the Philippines does not possess the military might to retake them, and China indirectly exercised its influence to disincentivize ASEAN from providing support, leaving no alternative but acceptance to Manila.\(^{133}\) In 2012, the PRC repeated this over the Scarborough Shoal. Filipino efforts to confront Chinese fishing vessels led to a standoff when Chinese vessels intervened. Manila was forced to withdraw or risk a confrontation with China, effectively handing *de facto* control over the islands to China.\(^{134}\)

In 2009, Chinese vessels confronted the USNS Impeccable surveillance vessel 75 nautical miles off the coast of Hainan. First the ship was approach by a PLA-N warship at close proximity, which was followed up by low-altitude overflights by Chinese surveillance aircraft. The USNS impeccable was informed that it is violating Chinese law and Chinese vessels demanded that it leaves. The next day the USNS Impeccable was approached by five Chinese vessels, closing in less than 10 meters, prompting the U.S. crew to use water cannons to discourage any further advance. As the USNS

---

\(^{133}\) Ross Marlay, "China, the Philippines, and the Spratly Islands," *Asian Affairs* 23, no. 4 (1997), Passim.

Impeccable proceeded, Chinese ships threw debris in its way, as well as stopping in its path, forcing emergency evasive manoeuvres.\(^\text{135}\)

In 1995 and 1996, the PLA conducted live-fire exercises and missile tests to intimidate Taiwanese voters and to undermine President Lee’s support and to express dissatisfaction with the U.S. allowing him to visit Cornell University.

In all of this cases, Beijing’s goal was to target the enemy’s will: limited demonstration of force and the threat of escalation aimed to persuade the opponent that compliance is preferable to continued resistance, as that would lead to escalation and major destruction. During the Taiwan Strait Crisis, Beijing demonstrated what would happen if Taiwan would pursue independence, i.e. mass destruction, as a deterrent. In 2009 the PLA was banking on the U.S.’s desire to avoid an incident similar to the 2001 mid-air collision, and that thus it will withdraw a ship rather than suffer the consequences. In the case of the Philippines, the threat is more implicit, derived from the military superiority of China, and the knowledge that Manila cannot count on the assistance of other powers. Thus, would it risk a war with China, it would lose, potentially much more than a reef.

3.2.1 Executing a Campaign Targeting the Enemy’s Will

When it comes to execution, one has to return to the principles presented in JP 5-0. The current and desired operational environments, and the national strategic objectives are the same as discussed under direct use of force. The key difference is the theatre level objective: Rather than seeking to seize and hold the disputed islands through sheer force, the goal is to either force Japan to give it to China or at the least not to contest Chinese occupation of them. This translates into different operational objectives: the focus shifts from securing command of the sea, which would allow Beijing to bypass

Tokyo, to formulating a credible threat, which would force Tokyo to comply. As Schelling argues “coercion requires finding a bargain, arranging for [the opponent] to be better off doing what we want – worse off not doing what we want – when he takes the threatened penalty into account”\textsuperscript{136}. Adopting the phasing model tentative execution might look as follows:

**Phase 0 – Shape**

Phase 0 would be similar to that discussed under direct use of force: building up military might and influencing the political environment. All of the activities that have been discussed under direct use of force would take place, albeit the political processes aiming to influence the will of the enemy would obviously gain added importance (moving from being ‘merely’ a force modifier to the raison d'être of the campaign).

**Phase 1 – Deter**

As the initial stage of the coercive campaign, this phase would focus on communicating to the opponent what China wants and what is likely to happen in the case of non-compliance. On the government level, this would be done in various statements and communiques. On a broader level, China would broadcast programs promoting the Chinese narrative of the desired operational environment, as well as programs demonstrating the military might of the PLA. China would also intensify military exercises, as well as make them more visible. These exercises could potentially be held near the opponent, or follow particular scenarios reflecting the crisis imagined. Potentially the government could allow exaggerated claims to spread through unofficial / semi-official channels, such as claims to the Ryukyu Islands. The goal is to affect Japanese decision makers by making mass destruction and open warfare a conceivable reality in their minds.

\textsuperscript{136} Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 4.
This phase would see limited actual military activity. Small scale operations would be carried out to intimidate and to raise concerns, but these would not involve actual engagements, and are likely to be carried out by China’s civilian law enforcement vessels. One pragmatic example would be executing intrusions into Japanese waters and airspace in the name of patrolling.

**Phase 2 – Seize the Initiative**

If Tokyo resists initial intimidation, Beijing needs to escalate to maintain/improve the credibility of the threat. China would increase patrolling, as well as its deployed vessels adopting an increasingly assertive stance. Law enforcement vessels would be complimented increasingly by PLA-N warships to heighten threat perception. These vessels would aim to provoke small, non-lethal clashes, such as standoffs or close proximity manoeuvres. One example would be the 2013 radar locking incident\(^\text{137}\), where Chinese ships threatened JCG vessels with the possibility of opening fire. The objective would be to demonstrate a commitment to the threat outlined in Phase 1 by showing that Beijing is not only not going to back down in the face of Japanese resistance, but rather it is willing to raise the stakes.

**Phase 3 – Dominate**

During this phase, the conflict escalates from non-lethal to lethal. Japanese resistance to coercion necessitates further demonstrative actions.\(^\text{138}\) The objective during this phase is to demonstrate that Beijing is committed to executing its threats of violence if pushed. Demonstrative action can take many forms. It can be a hard to trace cyber-attack against critical Japanese infrastructure or other acts of sabotage. It can be a small-scale naval

---


\(^\text{138}\) Krista E Wiegand, "Militarized Territorial Disputes States’ Attempts to Transfer Reputation for Resolve,” 105.: “deployment of troops, mobilization of armed forces, threats of military force and limited war all act as costly signals of resolve”
clash with shots fired. It can be the interdiction of Japanese fishing and coast guard vessels in disputed waters by PLA-N warships. Similarly, it can be the positioning of military forces in striking range for example off the coast of the Ryukyu Islands. It even could be a surprise attack against the disputed islands, capturing them (this differs from direct use of force during the next phase). Overall, Beijing needs to take limited action that expresses the seriousness of the threat in question by targeting the perceived psychological weak points of Tokyo.

**Phase 4 – Stabilize**

This phase is characterised by giving a political way out for the opponent to avoid the execution of the threat. (Depending on the level of resistance displayed by Japan, the campaign could jump to this phase from anywhere between Phase 1 and 3.) If initial coercion has been successful, then China can proceed to occupy the islands unopposed. The situation would likely resemble the 1995 Mischief Reef Incident: while Japan is unlikely to openly accept the outcome, it could withdraw and abandon resistance due to fears of escalation. If China needed to capture the islands as a demonstrative action, the goal would be to psychologically deter Japan from taking military action to retake it. This potentially requires further demonstrative action, the extent of which is dependent on the contemporary balance of power. If China has managed to gain the upper hand, it could go as far as to threaten other remote islands, such as Yonaguni Island, to affect Japan. The psychological deterrence would also involve force concentration and erecting A2/AD defences to raise the perceived costs of any military action seeking to retake the islands.

On the political front, China would seek to openly and visibly engage Japan in demonstrating a desire to terminate the conflict. If China has captured territory beyond its immediate operational objectives or is in possession of prisoners of war or Japanese
equipment, it might offer to return it. The objective is to signal to the international community that China is willing to terminate hostilities, and thus increase the perceived political penalty for Tokyo for continuing hostilities. By diverting the conflict from the military to the political realm, China gains time to solidify control over the islands. And such a process would also constrain Japan as the international community would regard Japanese efforts to reopen a military phase unfavourably.

3.2.2 Feasibility

While both in the case of direct and indirect use of force Japan’s centre of gravity is its armed forces, in the case of indirect use of force the critical capability is Tokyo’s willingness to use them, rather than their physical availability as seen in the case of direct use of force. Beijing doesn’t as much has to overcome the JSDF, as Japan’s will to resist. To achieve this Beijing has to create a credible threat (which would act as the critical capability). Maintaining the credibility of the threat would be the critical requirement for China. Credibility in this context has a number of components: The threat has to target something that Japan values, or it will not work. The cost implied by the threat has to exceed the benefit of resistance. And the threat has to be rationally proportional to the potential benefits China hopes to gain (China could threaten total nuclear war over the dispute, but it is unlikely to be successful as Japan would be fairly certain that China would not be willing to actually carry it out).

China possesses the theoretical capability to attack a target that Japan values. A combination of naval, missile, cyber and other capabilities Beijing could conceivably attack a wide range of targets, civilian or military. China could execute cyber-attacks against Japanese corporations, the stock market or the power grid. Similarly, it could target Japanese bases with long-range missiles, or execute naval raids on remote territories. Furthermore, China possesses the theoretical capability to attack a target that is of more value to Japan than the disputed islands. As discussed in Chapter 2 the
Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands hold limited value beyond symbolic to Japan. This combined with anti-militarist and casualty averse domestic attitudes (which is a critical vulnerability for Japan) would mean that China can conceivably offer a threat where resistance would be irrational. Finally, China has the theoretical capability to issue such a threat while remaining within the confines of the rational criterion. As demonstrated in Chapter 2 the disputed islands have immense value for China, which allows significant leeway for the cost/benefit analysis.

Overall, indirect use of force meets basic feasibility requirements. It is conceivable for China to successfully pursue such a campaign. Whether it is likely to succeed will be discussed below.

**3.2.3 Benefits and Costs**

At its core, the benefits of indirect use of force would be the same as direct use of force: establishing *de facto* control over the islands, which would allow China to pursue all of the objectives discussed in Chapter 2. The key additional benefit of indirect use of force over direct use of force is its potentially lower costs. On a simple material investment front, indirect use of force could allow China to achieve its objective with a much lower investment, potentially without ever having to fire a shot. And if China can achieve its objective with little to no bloodshed, then the international political and economic costs would be similarly lower. Overall, China did not suffer significant costs for the Mischief Reef or the Scarborough Shoal incidents. On the other hand, Russia is suffering consequences far short of what would have occurred if it invaded Ukraine, and many countries have been reluctant to institute even the existing sanctions.
3.2.4 Risk

The key risk factor in indirect use of force is maintaining credibility. This is subject to a number of forces, many of which are beyond the control of Beijing, or are even unknowable to Beijing (for example Tokyo’s own views on what would and what would not be rational for China). China would need to carefully balance demonstrative elements of using force against the potential escalation into a situation where to conflict breaks free of rationality and escalation becomes self-sustaining.

At the moment, Japan has proven to be resilient to lower-level forms of coercion. Tokyo has not been sufficiently intimidated neither by the increasing of patrolling nor by Beijing stepping up its own rhetoric and media campaign. On the contrary, these efforts increased the Japanese government’s commitment to resistance, with the Abe administration pursuing significant defence reforms, both in the legal and hardware realms. Assertive Chinese behaviour provided a needed political legitimacy for these steps in Japan. Thus, so far the threat posed by China has not been sufficiently credible. It is naturally a concern for Japan, but resistance remains the better alternative. This means that China would need to pursue more ambitious demonstrative actions to improve the credibility of its threat.

Ngeow makes an important point when arguing that Japan has demonstrated that it is not reluctant to respond militarily if pushed, a point shared by Tomoharu Washio. At this point, it is fairly unlikely that coercion could succeed during Phase 1

---


140 Interview with Ngeow Chow Bing at University Malaya in Kuala Lumpur on 15 October, 2015.

141 Interview (via email) with Tomoharu Washio on 17 March, 2015.
to 2, as Japan has demonstrated a high resistance to such efforts. As Ngeow further states, the Japanese-American alliances play an important role, as Japan’s defence ties to the U.S. reduces the credibility of any threat as they reduce the necessity for Tokyo to negotiate, even in the presence of mounting pressure. At this point, as has been stated by this research, it is unlikely that coercion without significant demonstrative action, i.e. based on a threat alone, could be successful. Japan just possesses too high of a resistance, which results in high risks for such a strategy to fail.

While the credibility problem could be resolved by pursuing demonstrative actions to show commitment, this would, in turn, impose high risks of escalation. Coercion is an imprecise art open to unintended consequences. Tokyo could easily interpret the demonstrative action as a sign of direct use of force, or even as the prelude to a major war, and thus overreact, which could cause uncontrollable escalation. Schelling argues that “pure violence [upon which coercion is based], like fire, can be harnessed to a purpose”\(^\text{142}\), but just like fire it can also spread beyond control and cause a wildfire that rages beyond reason. Pursuing such a strategy would be a highly risky proposition for China as the potential military consequences could go beyond that expected of direct use of force. Pursuing this course of action would be a similar to walking the tightrope blindfolded: China would need to continue to balance between escalation and restraint while having no direct information on how Japanese decision makers perceive the situation.

There is a lot that can go wrong: China could underestimate the value of something it aims to threaten. This could escalate an operation meant to be demonstrative to be perceived as a survival threat, leading to an all-out war. Worse this could potentially drag the U.S. into the conflict deeper than direct use of force would. A demonstrative action could go wrong causing more damage than intended, pushing

\(^{142}\) Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 9.
Japan once again to view it as a threat to survival. Coercion is based on keeping one’s own willingness to engage in the conflict opaque (after all the goal is to achieve results without having to execute the threat) while trying to perceive the ambiguous will of an opponent. This will always be a highly risky proposition that can fail at many stages and in many ways.

3.3 Assessment

Chapter 3 has discussed two potential options based on military power, namely on the direct use of force and coercion. Direct use of force focuses on seizing and holding objectives through military might, bypassing any negotiations with the enemy. Indirect use of force emphasizes the destructive power of military might, utilizing violence to psychologically affect the enemy and thus secure its compliance.

Both direct use of force and coercion have survived feasibility testing. The military balance between China and Japan is relatively equal. Within a limited war context, that is expected for direct use of force, this is sufficient for China to be conceivably able to seize and hold the islands. At the same time, China possesses sufficient capacity for destruction to potentially inflict damages on Japan in excess of what it would be worth for Tokyo to maintain control over the disputed islands, creating a sufficient threat for coercion.

When it comes to utility, direct use of force is a high cost – high reward approach. Direct use of force would establish de facto control over the islands, as well as increase China’s prestige as a major regional military power. The key benefit of coercion would be that it could deliver the same benefits as direct use of force at significantly lower costs as potentially no actual military engagement would take place.
Both direct use of force and indirect use of force are risky propositions. While direct use could capture the islands with moderate risks, it suffers from high risks when it comes to maintaining control through force alone. At the same time, indirect use of force would have difficulty achieving its objective through threats alone, bringing it closer to direct use of force. Under the current conditions, China could not intimidate Japan without significant demonstration, potentially by taking the islands. Once sufficient demonstration is made, the odds are better due to Japan’s anti-militarist, casualty-averse domestic environment, which could reduce its willingness to fight an expensive conflict any further.