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# Evaluating China's New Military Transparency and Openness

YANG WANG



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Open Source, Foreign Perspective, Underconsidered/Understudied Topics

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### **Author Background**

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## ABSTRACT

The Chinese official media's sudden and extensive reports on the country's fleet of nuclear submarines last year raised outside concerns about the purpose of this transparency. By displaying a show of force, it seems China is deliberately sending a warning to the region, and to the United States. A growing level of confidence appears to be another reason.

It seems China has an apparent government-wide policy to improve military transparency and openness. Besides nuclear submarines, the Chinese media has disclosed many other military capabilities across different sectors with different levels of transparency. However, the overall transparency of China's military, in comparison to other countries, still seems limited and very selective.

Five main factors appear to be behind China's perceived increased transparency and openness: the need to respond to international demands, the United States in particular, for greater transparency; a desire to showcase China's growing military capabilities and self-confidence; a need to support arms sales; an intent to send deterrent signals to shape regional security environment; and finally, the desire to send a message catering to China's domestic audience.

To what extent China's military transparency and openness evolve depends largely upon how the above-mentioned factors play out, but the bottom line is that China will keep its key military capabilities opaque to maintain deterrence. China's limited and selective military transparency has raised regional countries' concern about its intentions, the underlying thought being, "if the intention is peaceful, why show off the weapons?" These regional countries have had diverse responses to China's coercive messages. At the same time, China seems to be gradually losing the flexibility to avoid displaying its capabilities. At times, China is even put into a situation in which it is forced to use its military might.



# Evaluating China's New Military Transparency and Openness

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## Introduction

The ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu said: “All warfare is based on deception.” “Appear weak when you are strong and strong when you are weak.”<sup>1</sup> This traditional wisdom has guided Chinese military theory and practice for over 2,600 years and still affects the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s strategy today. Based on such principles, the PLA has remained very tight-lipped about its capabilities since its establishment. Transparency and openness on military affairs not only countered this traditional strategic way of thinking, but it was inadvisable because the PLA's real capabilities were limited. Disclosing its capabilities would have equaled exposing its weaknesses to the enemy. Chinese officials also believe that only strong military powers, such as the United States, could benefit from being transparent.<sup>2</sup> For China, keeping its capabilities vague would be more effective in exercising deterrence.



Map Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>

However, as China's overall strength has grown, its foreign policy has been changing. It has gone from "Hide one's capabilities and bide one's time" (韬光养晦)<sup>3</sup> to show "Self-confidence" (自信)<sup>4</sup> in the world stage and "Be proactive" (奋发有为).<sup>5</sup> Over the last four to five years, tension between China and neighboring countries has been escalating as China has become more and more assertive. In addition, Chinese leaders perceive the Obama administration's rebalancing to Asia as a containment strategy. In such context, the country seems more willing to showcase its military capabilities than before. In October 2013, the Chinese official media suddenly buzzed with the news of its nuclear submarine fleet, which had actually existed for 42 years. This is one of the country's top secret weapon systems. It seems that the Chinese military is becoming more transparent, which begs the question: what signal is China trying to send?

The purpose of this paper is to examine if there is an overall growing trend in military transparency and openness, and to explore if there is a government-wide policy of transparency on military capabilities across different sectors. The paper offers possible explanations of why China is becoming more open and transparent and discusses future trends in these endeavors. This topic is closely related to U.S. security interests, and those of its allies, in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as the Obama administration's rebalancing strategy.

To discuss China's military transparency and openness, it is necessary to first define these words. The meaning of openness in Chinese and English are very similar. According to a Chinese Online Dictionary, "open" (公开) in Chinese means to unhide, disclose or make something public.<sup>6</sup> In the United States, openness signifies opening up to the outside, for example, opening up a military vessel to visiting foreign officials. It often goes hand in hand with "transparency." The literal meaning of "transparency" (透明度) in Chinese is "the quality of being easy to understand or know about."<sup>7</sup> It is a concept that originates from the West and is not rooted in traditional Chinese culture. In the United States, transparency is defined as "honest and open" and "not secretive." There is a gap in the perception of military transparency between China and the United States. By U.S. standards, disclosing an old weapon system is not considered as real "transparency." However, from a Chinese vantage point, discussing details of an old weapon system is taken as "transparent."

**“There is a gap in the perception of military transparency between China and the United States.”**

The United States has been deeply concerned about China’s lack of military transparency. *The Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2014* (herein referred to as “*The 2014 Pentagon report on China*”) states that “China’s lack of transparency surrounding its growing military capabilities and strategic decision-making” has increased regional concern about China’s intentions.<sup>8</sup> It also criticizes “China’s poor accounting transparency,” which makes it difficult to estimate the PLA’s actual military expenses.<sup>9</sup> However, a Chinese senior military official’s typical argument is that “The extent, method, content and timing of transparency to the outside world should be determined according to each country’s safety situation and no country is absolutely transparent when it comes to military affairs. . . . It could be said that China is very transparent on military affairs.”<sup>10</sup>

According to U.S. military experts Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, “China has distinguished between transparency about intentions and transparency about military capabilities, claiming that transparency about intentions is more important and that China is completely transparent about its peaceful intentions.” On the other hand, the country tends to lack transparency in its descriptions of specific military capabilities.<sup>11</sup> China also believes mutual trust is the foundation for military transparency while western countries believe transparency is the prerequisite of mutual trust.<sup>12</sup>

This research is mainly based on information gathered from official Chinese media sources in Chinese and English (*People Daily, Global Times, Xinhua, PLA Daily, China Daily, CCTV, etc.*), and non-official media sources including social media (*Sina.com, China.com, Tiexue, FYJS, CJDBY, etc.*) published since 2012 to determine if China’s openness and transparency reflect a true improvement of capability or not. It also includes an analysis of Chinese and U.S. government reports, as well as reports from international think-tanks and other media in order to better evaluate the transparency level of the Chinese military.

The research indicates that reports by China's official media about the country's nuclear submarine capabilities demonstrate limited and selective transparency, because the information released is outdated, ambiguous or potentially misleading. However, there is more transparency through China's media in other military areas, although limited and selective as well. China's limited and selective military transparency has raised regional countries' concern about its intentions. These countries have had diverse responses to China's coercive messages. At the same time, China seems to be gradually losing the flexibility to avoid displaying and perhaps using military might when tensions arise as a result. While China's apparent government-wide policy to improve military transparency and openness may reflect the growing confidence in its capabilities, it more clearly demonstrates a use of selective transparency for deterrence to shape regional security environment and for catering to its domestic audience.

*"Photo: U.S. Navy Chief of Naval Operations ADM Greenert boards People's Liberation Army navy Type-39B Submarine at Lushan Naval Base on 17 July 2014.  
Source: Map Source: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ch.html>*



## Perception Versus Reality: China's Use of Selective Transparency

On the morning of October 28th 2013, the front pages of several major Chinese official media (*People's Daily*,<sup>13</sup> *People's Daily Overseas Edition*,<sup>14</sup> *PLA Daily*,<sup>15</sup> *Guang Ming Daily*,<sup>16</sup> *China Youth Daily*,<sup>17</sup> and *Huanqiu Times*<sup>18</sup>) all had lengthy articles highlighting China's nuclear submarine fleet. The night before, *CCTV* had also broadcast a report about this fleet on the evening news program.<sup>19</sup>

Nuclear submarines used to be one of China's top military secrets. Ever since the fleet was established in 1970, except for a few reports on underwater rocket launches and underwater long-distance navigation, the Chinese official media had never disclosed such high-profile cases.<sup>20</sup> The *CCTV* report showed, for the first time, the interiors of Chinese nuclear submarines and showed footage of the fleet participating in drills far out into the ocean. It mentioned that this fleet, which is part of the North Sea Fleet, has a perfect safety record, lasting more than 40 years, since it was established.<sup>21</sup> Per *Huanqiu Times*, pictures of China's first generation of nuclear submarines' control rooms, engine rooms, reactor rooms, and missile launch controls were all exposed through different official media.<sup>22</sup> Along with disclosing nuclear submarine capabilities, reports also claimed that China had successfully "retired the first nuclear submarine (in its fleet) by removing its nuclear reactor."<sup>23</sup>

Despite the number of reports released by the Chinese media, a closer look reveals that the PLA Navy may not be so "transparent" after all. According to *Central News Agency of Taiwan*<sup>24</sup> and an interview with U.S. military expert Richard Fisher, photos released by the Chinese official media appeared to be those of the country's first-generation XIA-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs)(Type 092), which are several decades old.<sup>25</sup> The second-generation JIN-class SSBNs (Type 094) have been deployed, but their capabilities were not introduced in any Chinese media. In addition, China is expected to proceed with its next generation of nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) and SSBN (Type 095/096) over the next decade, according to the statement of an expert from the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence at a Congressional



hearing.<sup>26</sup> Recently released information by some official media<sup>27</sup> showed an image of a possible mockup of the Type 095 SSN. Fisher points out that this is a strong indication that the Type 095 SSN might be in the advanced stages of construction.<sup>28</sup>

In this new round of propaganda, what appears to be most important is to show that China has “preliminary nuclear deterrence and counterattack capability.” *People’s Daily* commented that “the existence of nuclear submarines is itself a means of strategic deterrence. It is the deterrence to those who make deliberate provocations and willfully upset peace.”<sup>29</sup> According to *Huanqiu Times*, “China’s underwater nuclear forces, with the Type 094 SSBNs and JL-2 submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) as the core, formally acquired nuclear deterrence capabilities.”<sup>30</sup> This implies that the PLA Navy’s submarine fleet is currently conducting routine strategic patrols, which means that “China for the first time has acquired the strategic deterrence and second strike capability against the United States.”<sup>31</sup> The Director of the Expert Consultation Committee for the Informationalization of the PLA Navy, Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo also said that compared to other nuclear means, nuclear submarines have the highest survivability, which can reach 85% to 90%. Other land-based means typically have a survivability of 6.5%, or 15-20%, which is clearly much lower than that of nuclear submarines.<sup>32</sup>

Some experts in China tout this perceived new transparency of old equipment as demonstrating more confidence. Yin explained that China is “revealing such information now because the build-up of our nuclear submarine force has already reached a certain stage. Our army has become more confident and transparent.”<sup>33</sup> In a report by the *PLA Daily*, Du Wenlong, a research fellow at the Academy of Military Science, commented that the public disclosure of nuclear submarine capabilities shows that China’s nuclear submarine fleet has already gained solid combat capabilities. It also indicates significant progress has been made in the research and development of new generation nuclear submarines. Overall, this shows self-confidence in the PLA’s military power development.<sup>34</sup>

Alexander Huang, former deputy chief of Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council, called the disclosure by China’s official media on the fleet of nuclear submarines a show of force meant to

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be a warning to countries around the Pacific, especially the United States. Part of the message is that the PLA submarine fleet “could pose a challenge to U.S. forces in the Western Pacific.”<sup>35</sup> For instance, the *Huanqiu Times* article mentioned that the JL-2 has a maximum range of 11,000 kilometers, which could destroy any U.S. city along the West Coast by being launched under China’s coastal water. It also emphasized that “JL-2 SLBMs have become the fourth type of Chinese nuclear missiles that threaten the continental United States, after our DF-31A, DF-5A and DF-5B ICBMs.”<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, China used ambiguous or even potentially misleading information to create concern and confusion about its future capabilities. This past April, China’s official media, in both English and Chinese, released the images of the mockup of a “mysterious submarine” at the PLA’s Qingdao Submarine Academy.<sup>37,38</sup> However no official Chinese source has commented on what it truly represents. Since it is known that China is proceeding with its third generation nuclear submarines, according to Fisher, it is a possible mockup of the SSN (Type 095).<sup>39</sup> Such limited disclosure by the official media is likely a strong hint to foreign militaries of the PLA’s future capabilities. However, it could also be an effort to mislead them. Another example is that in September 2013, Tan Zuojun, Vice Governor of Liaoning Province and former general manager of the China State Shipbuilding Corporation, announced that China’s fourth-generation nuclear submarines and other high-tech weapons and equipment have been completed.<sup>40</sup> Because of the vague wording, some media reports said it implies that China has developed the Type 097 SSN and Type 098 SSBN.<sup>41</sup> However, Yin “clarified” that China only has three generations of nuclear submarines.<sup>42</sup> Neither the 2014 *Pentagon report on China*<sup>43</sup> nor the Office of Naval Intelligence has mentioned the Type 097 SSN and Type 098 SSBN. According to protocol, such important news is supposed to be released by PLA senior officials instead of by local civilian officials. This “new” way of releasing information seems to be another tactic of the PLA to manip-

ulate information, complicating foreign intelligence efforts to evaluate its future capabilities.

Another kind of manipulating tactic used by China is sending different messages to different audiences through different languages. For example, in English-language media reports, China tried to emphasize the disclosure of nuclear submarines as an improvement on military transparency. It is obviously an attempt to target an international audience. *China Daily* said “But the truth is that the ‘display’ of the submarines is not a show of China’s military might, but rather another step in China’s increasing military transparency.”<sup>44</sup> At the same time, the report accused some countries of trying to exaggerate the capabilities of Chinese nuclear submarines. “The U.S. and Russia have the most advanced nuclear submarines, while the UK and France have the second best; China’s nuclear submarine technology lags behind all of them, especially in their information and power systems. So it is ridiculous to talk about an inferior member of the nuclear submarine club being a threat.”<sup>45</sup> However, in the Chinese-language reports, official media played up China’s capabilities, which seems to cater to its domestic audience. For example, *Huanqiu Times* quoted Yin as saying, “China’s nuclear submarine technology still lags far behind that of the U.S. and Russia, but it is more advanced than that of India, and about the same level with British and French.”<sup>46</sup>

There was a lot of discussion about nuclear submarine capabilities in non-official media sources, including social media as well. However, many articles were copied from official media sources or translated from foreign media or think-tank reports offering little information of value, and leaving readers to guess. The only exception is the picture of the JIN-class SSBNs (Type 094) which was first disclosed on Chinese social media back in November, 2007.<sup>47</sup> Though these pictures were not published by the official media, the PLA must acquiesce to the release since all the media in China, including internet-based media, is tightly controlled by the government. Anything related to national security is under strict censorship, less than the country’s top secret strategic weapons system.

## **Targeting Different Audiences: Achieving Different Objectives**

At the national level, China has used its Defense White Papers as an important vehicle to showcase its improvement on military transparency. China has been releasing these documents, which serve as authoritative statements on the country's defense and security policies, every two years since 1998. China has also released Defense White Papers on specific topics aperiodically. Military expert Dean Cheng said, "With each edition of the Chinese defense white paper, a little more is revealed about the Chinese military."<sup>48</sup> For example, in China's 2013 Defense White Paper, "the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for the first time reveals the actual number of army, navy, and air force servicemen; designations of its army combined corps; and the main missile lineup."<sup>49</sup> In addition, Guan Youfei, the director general of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Ministry of National Defense (MND) stated, "In recent years, the Chinese military has adopted a series of measures to open itself to the world, such as establishing a news spokesperson system for the Ministry of National Defense, opening a website of the Ministry of National Defense, inviting foreign correspondents to visit and interview, and others, all of which were unimaginable ten years ago."<sup>50</sup>

In the last two years, the Chinese media has disclosed many military capabilities across different sectors with different levels of openness and transparency. For example, China's first aircraft carrier the *Liaoning*, which belongs to the country's North Sea Fleet, has been widely covered by the media and regarded as one example of China's military openness and transparency.

China formally announced its aircraft carrier program in June 2011. On September 25, 2012, the *Liaoning* was formally delivered and commissioned. There were extensive media reports about the *Liaoning*'s strategic significance and capabilities. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao said that it is "of great significance in enhancing national defense power and the country's comprehensive strength."<sup>51</sup> Since the commissioning of the *Liaoning*, the Chinese media have continued disclosing more details about its exercise and the jet fighter J-15's takeoff and landing test held on the aircraft carrier.<sup>52</sup> *People's Daily* quoted an expert's comments regarding the capabilities of the J-15. Later, the *Liaoning* participated in a series of drills, including a 37-day drill in the South



China Sea at the end of 2013.<sup>53</sup> Xinhua news agency reported that the carrier “underwent a comprehensive test of its combat system and conducted a formation practice” during the training.<sup>54</sup>

In April 2014, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel became the first foreigner to visit the *Liaoning*. In their English version, the Chinese official media highlighted this tour as “a genuine gesture showing China’s transparency, and its growing confidence,” and the PLA “showed great sincerity to its U.S. counterpart.”<sup>55</sup> Although Pentagon officials also praised this tour as “a significant step in China’s attempts to be transparent and open,”<sup>56</sup> Secretary Hagel pointed out the next day that the United States would like China to be more transparent in areas such as cyber security.<sup>57</sup> Security expert Ian Storey commented that, by showing Secretary Hagel the *Liaoning*, which was still a training platform and not fully operational, the Chinese kept him away from their more sensitive capabilities, such as their missile programs or submarine fleets.<sup>58</sup>

*Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Deputy Chief of General Staff for the People’s Liberation Army Gen. Qi Jianguo in Singapore, 31 May 2013..*

*Source: <http://www.defense.gov>*



The unveiling of China's fifth-generation stealth fighters, the J-20 and J-31, by netizens through non-state media outlets represents China's other way of strategic communication with limited and selective transparency. On January 11, 2011, during Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' visit in Beijing, the trial flight of the J-20 gave the world a big surprise and embarrassed the U.S. delegation.<sup>59</sup> The photos and videos of the trial flight posted online were not released by the Chinese official media, but by some Chinese enthusiastic onlookers who watched the test from outside the airfield's fence. Since the Internet is tightly controlled by the government, this means that the Chinese government acquiesced to this disclosure. Later on, the Chinese media continued to release more information about the J-20. This might indicate that the PLA has a higher degree of confidence in its technology. The J-31 was disclosed in a similar way. Photos of the J-31 appeared online first during Secretary Panetta's visit to China in September 2012.<sup>60</sup> More photos and videos were posted online by enthusiastic onlookers when the J-31 was put on a taxi run and underwent its first light test.<sup>61</sup> According to its chief architect, the improved version of the J-31 is expected to become China's next generation of carrier-based aircraft.<sup>62</sup> However, how stealthy these fighters actually are remains a question.

These are just a few of the many examples of China's transparency across different sectors. China has also disclosed information about other military capabilities through its media, such as test flights of the large military transport aircraft, Y-20<sup>63</sup> and its new stealth drone - the Lijian,<sup>64</sup> the development of BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS),<sup>65</sup> and the PLA's major exercises and joint drills, such as "Maneuver 5,"<sup>66</sup> and the "Joint Sea" exercise with Russia.<sup>67</sup>

Although some progress has been made in military transparency, China remains tight-lipped about its key capabilities even under international pressure. One example is the country's cyber force capabilities. *The 2014 Pentagon report on China* pointed out that China is using its cyber capability to "support intelligence collection efforts against the U.S. diplomatic, economic, and defense industrial base sectors that support U.S. national defense programs."<sup>68</sup> However, China has bluntly denied such accusations and rebuffed U.S. efforts to gain more clarity on China's cyber operations. In May 2014, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) indicted five Chinese military officials for stealing American companies' trade secrets.<sup>69</sup> China immediately denied

any involvement by either the PLA or the Chinese government, claiming it was “based on pure fabrications,” and tried to retaliate.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Five Key Factors Driving China’s Levels of Transparency and Openness**

Five main factors appear to be behind China’s perceived increased transparency and openness: the need to respond to international demands, the United States in particular, for greater transparency; a desire to showcase China’s growing military capabilities and self-confidence; a need to support arms sales; an intent to send deterrent signals to shape regional security environment; and finally, the desire to send a message catering to China’s domestic audience. The sequence of the above factors does not indicate their order of importance, because each revelation of the PLA’s capabilities could be motivated by one or more factors. It could be very hard to determine which one is the key driver of each revelation. While all of the factors will be discussed below, the last two factors above seem more closely related to China’s new military transparency through its media.

First, the international community, in particular the United States, has been calling on China to improve its military transparency. China has to respond to this call under the pressure. For example, China allowed U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel to visit its first aircraft carrier (the *Liaoning*) in April 2014. Actually, this tour of the *Liaoning* was per the Pentagon’s request. This is also reciprocity to the goodwill gesture by the U.S. military, because in August 2013, Chinese Defense Minister Chang Wanquan was permitted to visit the North American Aerospace Defense and U.S. Northern Commands, both headquartered in Colorado.<sup>71</sup> However, there was little coverage of this reciprocal arrangement in the Chinese media. Perhaps, China wants to leave an impression that this move of transparency is its initiative rather than a response to the U.S. request.

Second, as its military technology improves, China has more desire to showcase its growing military capabilities and self-confidence. In recent years, China has developed many advanced

**“...China remains tight-lipped about its key capabilities even under international pressure.”**

weapons systems, such as stealth fighters, cruise and ballistic missiles, and surface combatant ships. Frank Kendall, the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense openly stated that the U.S. military's technological superiority is being "challenged in ways that I have not seen for decades," particularly by China.<sup>72</sup> Under the foreign policy principles of showing "Self-confidence" and "Be proactive," China seems to have much stronger political motivation to disclose its military capabilities. In most cases, the Chinese official media would attribute its growing military transparency to increased self-confidence.

Third, with its arms exports growing over the past decade, China has an increased need to support its arms sales by disclosing more advanced weapons systems. According to the *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, China has become the fourth largest country of arms sales in the world by supplying major supplies to 35 states worldwide. "Chinese exports of major arms increased by 212 per cent between 2004–2008 and 2009–13, and China's share of global arms exports increased from two to six per cent."<sup>73</sup> China's rapidly developing military technology partly explains its expansion as an arms supplier competing directly with Russia, the United States, and European states. To support these exports, China has a need to improve its military transparency by showing off some of its advanced weapons systems, especially at the individual company level, which need to generate more profits to compensate for research and development costs. For example, Norinco Group (中国北方工业公司) recently disclosed many weapons systems for export, including advanced main battle tanks.<sup>74</sup>

Fourth, China intends to send deterrent signals to shape region security environment. The deterrent signals are targeted primarily at neighboring countries involved in the South China Sea and East China Sea disputes and at the United States. As China's overall strength grows, it has begun to regard itself as a great power in the world, capable of competing with the United States. Its national interest has expanded in the region as well as the world. China has an increasing need to protect its expanded national interest such as its sea lines and territorial water, which have great potential of oil and gas reserves. For one thing China's economy is heavily dependent on international trade, especially in the imports of natural resources, such as oil.



It seems China has selectively disclosed information through both official and non-official media on weapons systems related to the following three capabilities.

- **Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) Capabilities:** disclosure of DF-21D / DF31A / DF-41 ballistic missiles; Anti-Satellite (ASAT) missiles; fifth-generation of stealth fighters (J-20, J-31); guided missile destroyers (DDG)(Type 052B/052C/052D); and guided missile frigates (FFG)(Type 054A), etc.
- **Systems and capabilities enabling power projection:** disclosure of large military transport aircraft (Y-20), etc.
- **Capabilities to realize a “Blue Water” Navy:** disclosure of submarines (SONG-class SS, Type 039 and YUAN-class SSP, Type 039A); guided missile destroyers (DDG)(Type 052B/052C/052D); guided missile frigates (FFG)(Type 054A); aircraft carrier (the *Liaoning*); and naval exercises (“Joint Sea” exercise with Russia), etc.

*Officers and Soldiers of the Liaoning Aircraft Carrier Standing in Formation on the Deck Forming the Words - “The China Dream, the Dream of A Strong Military” (辽宁舰官兵甲板上排字 “中国梦 强军梦”). Sina News Online. 20 Nov. 2013. Web. Apr. 2014. Source: [http://slide.mil.news.sina.com.cn/slide\\_8\\_33676\\_26828.html#p=2](http://slide.mil.news.sina.com.cn/slide_8_33676_26828.html#p=2)*



By developing advanced weapons systems to strengthen the above mentioned capabilities, China is intentionally sending deterrent signals to the United States and to regional countries. It seems that China's strategy is to use military threats to isolate its potential adversaries, forcing them to accommodate Chinese territorial interests and to counteract U.S. influence in the Asia Pacific region. A recent report by the Center of *New American Security (CNAS)* called China's strategy in the region "tailored coercion."<sup>75</sup> It said that China's behavior is "textbook coercive diplomacy which is backed by the threat of force. The overall intent is to achieve national goals without precipitating wider conflict or war."

Fifth, China's military transparency is partially meant to send a message to its domestic audience to bolster national pride. Since Xi Jinping took over the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s leadership position in November 2012, he has been trying to assert himself as a strongman, able to lead a Chinese renaissance, to realize the "China Dream."<sup>76</sup> In addition, Xi Jinping is quite different from his predecessor Hu Jintao because Xi's father was part of the first generation senior CCP leadership, and Xi himself used to work in the military as a secretary to the Minister of Defense Geng Biao. This experience definitely influenced his view in handling military affairs. Tightly controlling military power and boasting the country's military capabilities through propaganda machines seems to be Xi's strategy for bolstering the legitimacy of the Party, winning domestic support, and consolidating power. On November 20, 2013, the Chinese official media published an image of naval officers standing in formation on the deck of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier, where they formed the words "the Chinese dream, the dream of a strong military." The CCP is obviously using this to achieve a psychological impact, promoting nationalism, and winning over domestic support. The large amount of enthusiastic feedback throughout China's online forums proved its effectiveness.

## **Conclusions and Future trends**

Based on the above analysis, the extent to which China's military openness and transparency evolve depends largely upon how the five above-mentioned factors play out. As long as international pressure and domestic needs persist, selective transparency remains a necessary and useful tool for China to respond to the ever changing environment and pursue its own interests. For example, if China feels that its maritime security situation keeps deteriorating, it may more openly display certain naval capabilities to deter potential threats. However, if Chinese economic growth demands a more supportive international environment, it may choose to improve overall military transparency in both the areas of intention and general capabilities in order to build up mutual trust with other countries.

At the same time, no matter how these five factors play out, China will keep its key military capabilities opaque to maintain deterrence. For example, China remains very tight-lipped about its cyber capabilities even though the United States has been pressing it on this for a long time. China's cyber capabilities are a major threat to U.S. national security due to its extensive espionage activities across the critical U.S. private and public sectors. Another example is China's disclosure on its nuclear submarines capabilities last year. What China has shown to the outside world is not actually something up-to-date, but rather something already known to the foreign intelligence community. China would be very unlikely to disclose the true capabilities of its most advanced nuclear submarines because it would lose its strategic deterrent capabilities.

Although China claims that transparency about military intentions is more important than capabilities, and it is completely transparent about its peaceful intentions, the strong deterrent signals sent by China through selective military transparency make it increasingly difficult for foreign countries to believe that China has genuine peaceful intentions. Regional countries have had diverse responses to China's coercive messages. For example, Japan, the Philippines, India, and Vietnam have opted to strengthen their own military power, deepen military cooperation with the United States, and may even try to form some kind of loose coalition to counteract China. Other countries, such as members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, have chosen to strength-

en military ties with China to counteract the influence of other major powers. Yet other countries, such as Malaysia and Burma, have not taken a clear stance. Unless China decides to change its strategy by improving overall transparency and showing true peaceful intentions, more regional countries might be forced to make a tough decision between China and the United States. However, this may also be an ideal opportunity for the United States to deepen its military ties with the regional countries and exercise more power and influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

As China continues to use selective military transparency as a tool, it also builds up an “assertive” image in the international community, and its domestic audience has much higher expectations of the PLA. China seems to gradually be losing its flexibility to avoid displaying and perhaps using military might when tensions arise. As a result, if China chooses to reconcile or avoid using force in a conflict situation, it might face a backlash effect because its image of “assertiveness” in the world would collapse, and it might lose domestic support as well. This is a very dangerous trend as incidents are likely to occur in situations of high tension. Two recent incidents that occurred in May and June between Chinese and Japanese aircrafts, which resulted in a near-collision situation in the East China Sea, are good indications of this dangerous trend. In April this year, when Commander in Chief of the PLA Navy, Wu Shengli, talked about the current situation in the East China Sea, he clearly said that there is a possibility of mishaps arising between the Chinese and Japanese navies. Therefore, there is a need to study how to “fight without fire.”<sup>77</sup> To protect the United States and its allies’ interests in this region, the U.S. military also needs to consider ways to avoid mishaps from taking place, because that might force the United States into a regional conflict situation.

If China cannot avoid using its military might, it could create a situation that results in a loss of life. To China this would be a win-win proposition because the Communist Party could easily leverage the situation to build a propaganda campaign, which would strengthen its rule. If China declares a “victory” in the incident, then the loss of life is justified; if China miscalculates and a loss of life results from a response by either neighboring countries or the United States, then the dead could be perceived as martyrs. Under either scenario, Beijing can rally the support from most Chinese citizens by running anti-American or anti-West campaigns. The Chinese Navy



fighter jet's collision with the U.S. EP-3 in April 2001, which caused the death of a Chinese pilot, is one example.

Military-related incidents could also escalate, resulting in a loss of ships over disputed areas, such as the Senkaku/Daioyu Islands or Scarborough Shoal. This would be unfavorable to China because it might compel neighboring countries' to unite their military strength against it. Further, the United States could potentially intervene to support its allies. Even if the Communist Party convinced most Chinese citizens that its actions are correct and the adversaries are wrong, the country would not want a regional war. First, its economy, which depends heavily on its neighbors and the United States, would suffer from further slowdown; second, a war would complicate China's already intensified internal power struggles and impact the Party's ruling status. Therefore, the best option for China would be a peaceful one going forward.

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