

Preface

Since the publication of *China Builds the Bomb* in 1988, we have continued our research on the Chinese military. Our main theme then and in most of our subsequent work has dealt with the impact of large military-technical programs on the Chinese political system and broader national development. What continued to elude us was a clear understanding of the process of decisionmaking and operations in the People's Liberation Army as it made the transition from a huge conventional force to a more modern military armed with advanced strategic weapons and electronic systems, and facing a more limited range of imagined enemies.

We wondered whether it would be possible to identify the principal benchmarks in the evolution of Chinese military culture and its incorporation of lessons traceable to ancient wisdom, revolutionary principles, and the legacy of repeated conflicts. Taken together, national culture and battlefield lessons, while permanent residents in the Chinese psyche, seemed to fade, and it became important to weigh the past against the dramatic shift in domestic priorities and the awesome demonstrations of modern weaponry and warfare in faraway lands.

With astonishing speed, China under Deng Xiaoping, its leader for almost two decades after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, resolved or set aside historic boundary disputes and the bitter hostilities with the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet, as the prospect of a nuclear showdown with the two superpowers slowly retreated, the legacy of the civil war remained and grew more threatening. Could a future unwanted struggle against Taiwan and its principal supporter warrant a gradual movement toward increased defense budgets and equipment imports? How would that movement drive the transformation of the national command authority in peace and war and the strengthening of the PLA's command-and-control systems?

Not surprisingly, our labors to answer these and a long list of other questions proved far more daunting and time consuming than we had first estimated. Part of the problem, of course, was that we found ourselves in the middle of a mystery with no clear understanding of the plot or the characters. In the China of Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao, publications proliferated, and it became virtually impossible using established analytical paradigms to sift the informed from the idiotic. Where once the story line of postrevolutionary China was relatively clear cut, now stories blossomed within stories. Who were the experts? Who were the imposters? How gullible were foreigners, when even the best and brightest in China could not discern the reality from imported jargon, promising plans from Party hyperbole? As difficult as our earlier investigations had been into some of the most sensitive security issues, this challenge was new, a mixture of exciting discovery and maddening puzzlement.

More than knowledge and the honing of analytical tools is at stake in the study of war and peace in Asia. So staggering is the potential human cost of conflict that those who study it do so in the hope that we can make a difference in preventing it. One of the authors joined the navy within days after the outbreak of the Korean War, and during much of his career, he has dealt with the threat of a war that could engulf the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. The other author lived in China through the tumultuous decade of the Cultural Revolution and the violence it inflicted on so many millions. There are, of course, things worth fighting for and expending national treasure to protect, but so much of what we have learned in our own lives is that all too often the path to war is marked by amazing stupidity and stubbornness. All too often, war is not the last resort, and the high values of sovereignty and national interest it allegedly protects are lost in far less lofty political purposes.

More than a decade has passed since we began the research on this book. During these years we have made more than fifty trips to mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. We have met several hundred officials and security specialists and used every possible opportunity to develop and test our analysis. The last trip took place just after Chinese New Year 2005, the cutoff date for our manuscript, and several conversations during this visit brought us up short on conclusions that we were certain had stood the test of time.

In completing the research for this book, we received extensive assistance from colleagues here and abroad. Rather than a long list of names, the

references to their writings found in the bibliography at the end of this volume will attest to our gratitude for their contributions to this study and the field as a whole. We do wish to acknowledge the contributions made by two anonymous reviewers, one of whom went far beyond a reviewer's ordinary charge and whose many suggestions, including the addition of the Introduction, have been readily accepted. Kenneth Allen, William J. Perry, and Dean Wilkening helped us rethink Chapter 7 when it was still an article for *International Security*. We wish to thank the holders of the copyright to that article, the President and Fellows of Harvard College and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, for granting us permission to use a revised and expanded version of that article for this book. We also thank the Stanford University Press for its permission to use a section from *China's Strategic Seapower*, chapter 9, in this volume's final chapter.

The photographs in this book came from several Chinese sources, which we acknowledge with thanks. Pictures were purchased from *Junshi Wenzhai* (Military Digest) and Zhongguo Xinwen She (China News Agency) and are used with their permission. Other pictures were generously provided by officers at one of China's military academies, and a confidential copy of their permission is on file at the Stanford University Press. Finally, we wish to acknowledge the generosity of Richard "Rick" Fisher, Jr., for providing selected pictures from his remarkable collection and for identifying the equipment and technologies in many of the photos that we have used.

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When we finished our book *China's Strategic Seapower*, we wrote that it represented the last in a series of books and articles intended to understand the scope and evolution of Chinese security policy. Each of our earlier books on the military built on those that had come before, even though the chronology of their publication did not follow the order of Chinese history. Our study of the origins of the Korean War helped provide the context for our study of the Chinese nuclear program, and the findings from that study helped introduce the development of China's nuclear-powered submarine and its ballistic missile. The latter two studies concentrated on the evolution of the military-industrial system and on the interactions among politics, technology, and security policy during the first forty-four years of the People's Republic.

In the decade that has passed since the *Seapower* book went to press, those interactions have accelerated and have been extensively chronicled. Their extraordinary significance in the rise of China warrants, we believe, the publication of this fourth volume in our study of the Chinese People's Liberation Army.

We bring this effort to a close during a period of great uncertainty. The crises in the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula could still threaten the peace in East Asia, and conflicts in either place could erupt in a war that could escalate and involve the United States. Haunted by imagined enemies nearby and across the Pacific, the Chinese nation reluctantly prepares for uncertain war. Decades from now we will know whether the imagined became real or statesmen could finally reclaim the promise of peace.

J.W.L.

X.L.T.

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