IS CHINESE MILITARY MODERNIZATION A THREAT TO THE WORLD?

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International politics over the last few decades have explored new dimensions of security and economic growth. China has seen sustained growth in its economy, and significant progress in technology through which its military has undergone profound technological transformations. This has defined its commitment for being a great power in the region and the world. China’s interest in establishing military strongholds dates to late 20th century when the government started to increase its military expenditure moderately with an objective of homeland security and secure its command in the Asian region which is a natural progression of the country’s ascension to great power status. China being the most populated country and third largest country in the terms of geographical area in the world claims to possess all the attributes of a superpower. These conditions have left some analysts with an opinion that rapid growth of Chinese economy and its military power would be a possible threat to the region and the world. Some analysts also have predicted that China will represent an alternative pole to American global dominance. This article looks into the rise of China and its military modernization fueled by its economic might and whether it would bring dynamic changes or challenge the power balance at global level.

Keywords: China, military modernization, balance of power, power projection, military expenditure, defence acquisition, defence technology, US hegemony

China has acquired power-projection capabilities concurrent to its economic growth which is perceived as a serious threat to the interests of the other powers in the world but till date it has not adopted imperial tactic threatening to control the Asia or the world unilaterally. China’s economic prosperity is providing abundance of financial resources to invest in the defense

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requirements. Since last fifteen years, China’s high economic growth coincides with the high military expenditure. Chinese military modernization is part of their grand strategy which is an amalgamation of internal and external political, military, economic, technological and socio-cultural strategies that China uses to advance its security interests given that China today is much more interdependent on other countries in the international context. This has compelled the western analysts to form an argument on the lines of ‘China Threat Theory’. According to them, the threat assessment includes two stages, intentions and capabilities. And China’s intentions have expanded with its economic rate plus its growing capabilities permit the country to directly confront the regional and global powers.

**Figure 1.1:** shows the GDP figures of China and other Countries

China for long has used the economic instruments to advance its security interests either homeland or regional. Chinese strategic thinkers have clearly

![GDP figures of China and other Countries](source : data from SIPRI Website.)
stated that the country’s strategy of military modernization reflects its geopolitical stand and protecting the energy resources and territorial integrity. It has ambitions to become a global power and embrace world responsibilities. But militarily these ambitions are bounded by Asia, and this has become reality since the 1970s economic reforms and Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. Since then there is a double digit rise in the military budget positioning China as the largest in Asia and second largest in the world. China has always prioritized its national interests and today it is more willing to use force to secure those. We can validate that considering its growing concerns in the south, south-east, East Asian region. In this nuclear age, no country can survive and sustain without a technologically advanced military. And China’s approach is no different, it is restructuring PLA, spending on modern defense equipment, and moving ahead of its obsolete military. Military modernization is a trajectory of all the rising powers to achieve their goals, this phenomenon becoming a threat or not depends on the region and country China is challenging. China stands no military threat to any country or region of the world, but it is a hindrance to the US's priorities in the Asian region, India’s interests in south Asia, Philippines’ concerns, Japan's modernization, and more².

**Inception of Chinese Military Modernization**

China’s military has seen an overhaul over the years and its domestic politics plays an important role. During the decades of 1950 and 1960, Chinese military doctrine was more of ‘Preparation of struggle’ because then it was Maoist radicalism that shaped the ideological training rather than professionalism. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1970s, leaders pushed for bringing professionalism in the structure of the PLA. This brought a bargain between radicalism and modernization which resulted in fundamental changes in china’s strategic thinking. This emphasized more on modernization which further led to economic reforms and securing more economic resources for the restructuring of the armed forces, a step towards professionalism. It is mentioned in a RAND publication that countries with economic growth encourages rise in military expenditure and military capabilities but it does not mean that the defense proliferation is a ‘threat’. In terms of purchasing power parity, China has come out to be the largest economy. Today, its economy is two-third the size of the US economic status. Presence of resources and finances have encouraged China to adopt military modernization. This modernization drive began in post-Mao period, the country stressed on economic development and widening its base to further invest in defense. China is known for its long-term strategic thinking and planning, therefore,
its foreign and defense policies are well adapted to its domestic and sovereign needs since the economic reforms of 1970s. In this era of multipolarity, military competition is safe and sound. Demilitarization instead would damage the capabilities of the states to challenge the potential opponents. It is in every country’s national security interests to expand their military prowess to secure their agendas on the table. A grand strategy can be defined as a coordination and utilization of the government means i.e. military, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and more, to realize goals in peacetime as well as wartime. In times of Cold War, US’s grand strategy was ‘containment policy’ i.e. to contain the spread of communism and state controlled economy. Therefore, the policy of China today is influenced by the past actions of the America. China is transforming from a status-quo country to an expansionist power.

Figure 1.2: Shows the PRC expenditure

Source: Data collated from China’s Official Defence Website and Department of Defence, US.
With its long-term strategy based on maintaining a peaceful international environment that allows China to build the economic and technological foundations necessary to become rich and a powerful country. This strategy helps in advancement of its economy and living standards.

China also faces its own many internal challenges with the simultaneous rapid socio-economic growth. The international system has seen a more assertive China since the Cold War because the leaders have always worked to substitute the unipolar world order under the US’s control with a multipolar world order. It has been predicted that China will one-day reach parallel to the US not only in terms of economic power but also in social, cultural, and political influence. China might even challenge the US’s military supremacy as the Chinese defense budget is increasing at a high annual growth rate. But China in its nature is not an imperialistic country and still way behind in quality and quantity when comes to defense equipment as compared to the military might of the US or sophistication of other European countries. China after struggling for years has reached to a stage of global economic power\(^2\), an undeniable fact, but just like China threat argument one day we will observe China collapse argument. This is supported by the power transition theory i.e. a rising new power is a revisionist power that will inevitably disrupt the relative power balance of the international system.

In East Asia, American presence or dominance is not reconciled with the China’s growing ambitions fueled by strong economic backup. China will never withdraw from its core interests in the region including Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan Straits, South China Sea, and Diaoyutai Islands. These issues further create uncertainty in the region and in the relations between the two great economies- US and China. Global competition for the scarce natural resources has compelled China to groom its behavior in the international system accordingly. Its dependence on the world oil market is seen as an opportunity for the country’s deeper integration with the international actors, thus contributing stability. For survival China needs to acknowledge its quest for the oil which compels it to strengthen the naval forces and adopt expansionist and confrontationist strategies. Issues in the Diaoyutai Islands, South China Sea, and oil diplomacy in Africa is based on the above premise and further has provoked the West.

Chinese Defense white papers states that Chinese military modernization is mainly to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity. First white paper was released in 1995 under the direction of the Chinese government. Every

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paper suggests and tries to convince the West and others that China rise is a ‘peaceful rise’. These defense papers are a Chinese narrative to be accountable to the other powers of the globe and counter the western allegations of lack of transparency in the defense structure of the country. It also highlights the fact of ‘No First Use’ policy of its nuclear strategy. China encourages military build up to sustain its second-strike capability, but US on the other hand possesses second-strike capability and refuses to withdraw first-strike capability. US and China acquire nuclear weapons, the probability of a direct war between them greatly decreases and the probability of proxy wars increases. It has been a long time that China is modernizing its nuclear arsenals which is a cause of concern for the US. But China claims that this is a key to increase its survivability of the second-strike capability and will enhance mutual vulnerability which in turn will bring stability to the Sino-US crisis. US has military superiority to China, and the former is benefitting from the America’s established economic order.

As the world had recovered from the devastating World Wars and Cold War, new economic prospects were coming forward. In international relations though geopolitical, military security and ideological factors cannot be ignored but the role of economic factors is outstanding along with growing economic interdependence among nations.

With sophisticated weapons taking a stage worldwide process of modernization and procuring modern warfare is also a necessity. With new international security system, there is stress on settlement of disputes through political, economic, diplomatic, and military means and the reinforcement of military strength is an important way to safeguard their own security and national interests. China after humiliation of obsolete military equipment, the history of Opium wars and war with the Japanese, loss of territory, and years of colonialism and subjugation, had always stressed on military spending and defense overhaul. The costs of defense are allocated based on the needs and the country’s financial capacities.

**Military Modernization and Restructuring of Chinese PLA**

China often make efforts to convince that its defense development is not a threat but beneficial in terms of the subsequent economic benefits of expanding trade and investment. One of the grand strategy can be preservation of the political and territorial status-quo and increase the national prosperity level through diplomatic tools. China asserts a soft power image in the global arena since its reputation is at stake because of the incident of Tiananmen Square in 1979. It advocates new diplomatic concepts such as ‘responsible power’, the
‘good neighbor policy’, and a ‘harmonious world’. Its efforts to engage with the ASEAN countries, to popularize AIIB, SCO, and NDB, and formation of other bilateral trade treaties are evidence of China strengthening relations with the other countries in the international system through economic determinism.

Chinese economic growth is a pre-condition to the massive military modernization program. It has helped China in revamping conventional and asymmetric warfare capabilities inclusive of sea-air-missile-nuclear capabilities. As said by analysts and experts China is committed to be a reformer and not a hardliner military power and proposed a moderate increase in defense spending to fulfil its national foreign and defense policy interests. China started to cooperate and participate in joint military exercises and regional security cooperation's like ‘ASEAN, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Council on Security Cooperation in Asia and Pacific Region (CSCAP), Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD)’ and other activities enforcing that all countries should further mutual understanding and trust by deliberations on security issues through these governmental and non-governmental channels. Chinese philosophies reflect that international relations are not necessary a zero sum game, if the rising power is benevolent in nature then can act as a stabilizing power rather than pose a threat.

The reform in Chinese economy began in 1978 under the leader Deng Xiaoping which further provided space to the PLA to increase its defense spending. Between the periods of 1978 to 1988, the percentage of total production in the defense industry increased from 14.6% to 66% and simultaneously the PLA’s budgetary earnings increased. China was encouraged to acquire a high-technology force after the success of US military operation in Iraq. The country increased its investment in military in 1990s. Additionally, the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1995-56 and US’s power projection in the region reinforced China to develop its military to secure its national interest from external and internal threats. Taiwan has been the pivotal strategic note that China began military modernization explicitly. Therefore, the growth in the economy and confrontation with the US made China to decide in favor of military modernization which is accounted as a counter-move to the former country’s containment policy in the Asian region and its technological advantages. The military modernization in China has always been incremental. Facing decline in the military budget till 1989, defense expenditure experienced a rise after

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3 Quoted in Weixing R. Hu, Gerald Chan, Daojiong Zha China’s International Relations in the 21st Century: Dynamics of Paradigm Shifts, University Press of America, Washington DC, 2000, p.78
that. There came a time when the figures of expenditure were more than GDP growth rate. Over the time, PLA has seen many financial setbacks, therefore, as soon as the economy started booming the leaders announced to prepare China for modern warfare and propagate survival of the ‘second strike capability’. During these years, lack of preparedness in ‘revolution in military affairs (RMA)’ frustrated the Chinese strategic thinking which further created a desire for technological push in PLA structuring. Post-1990s, China underwent huge reformation of military expenditure, establishing its image as an emerging power in the region.

Power politics plays an important role in international political, security and economic arena. Financial and economic risks are increasing, and economic security has become a concern for all countries. As the gap in development and the disparity between rich and poor countries continue to widen all over the world, particularly between the South and North, polarization has become an increasingly serious problem. China has embraced the role of a responsible power as declared by President Xi Jinping in the WEF summit at Davos recently. China taking up a responsive and responsible leadership role plus carrying forward globalization drive even if America is adopting anti-globalization measures under Trump. Ironclad America pulled back from the Paris Agreement, but China stated that it remains committed as before. Another incident is that the newly elected President of South Korea in support to China’s concerns ordered to halt the deployment of THAAD Missile Defense System. Australia, an American ally has embraced China as its largest trading partner. Influence of China has been expanding over the years and reducing the possibilities of China being a military threat to the world. China is securing its interests and ‘peaceful rise’ in the Asian region through its policy of denial, deterrence, dominance, engagement, and coercion. China is pursuing military and economic instruments for counter-containment in peacetime and counter-intervention in a crisis. China pushes economic cooperation such as its recent policy of One Belt One Road to achieve its geo-strategic and security objectives. Therefore, China’s military modernization is not a hard power threat if the international system adopts proper rules of engagement.

China is propagating many idiosyncratic warfare instead of hard power confrontation such as psychological warfare—undermine enemy’s ability to execute combat operations through activities like espionage and demoralizing enemy military personnel; media warfare— influencing domestic and international public opinions to build support for its national interests; and legal warfare—use international and domestic law to establish strongholds of its own over the other. Therefore, China tends to become a balancer and a
mere challenger but not an aggressive threat. To counter the expansionist powers, China requires to intensify its military power. For the same China is building carrier at home, developing long-range missiles, as well as exporting arms and weapon technology to Iraq, Libya, Iran, and Pakistan. China’s spending comprises of personnel, equipment costs, and cost of maintenance and no category for hard weaponry expenditure. Under its military modernization comes the better wages to the forces, improved social benefits to the personnel, institutional education, R&D, and maintenance and storage of hardware. Another arena where China has been investing is outer space. But it has no full range capabilities in space needed for intelligence and military benefit. China does have equal military space presence as compared to the countries like Russia and the US.

Main concern of China as a rising power is how to maintain a friendly external environment. Deng Xiaoping suggested that China should avoid confrontation and refrain from seeking hegemony while amassing power. China assures change in focus of the foreign policy rhetoric from peaceful rise to peaceful development to avoid linkage between China’s modernizations with its expansionary agenda. China threat premise emerged in 1990s in America and Japan but it gradually dissolved with prosperity that China brought in Asia. This theory is inly based on the external influences and does not consider in the internal factors as well as China’s dependency on the existing global system. The economic and trade interdependency prevent wars in lieu of the higher costs of engaging in a war. Also, the updates version of China’s foreign policy aims to promote economic and cultural cooperation of newly independent states, and oppose colonial ambitions. Since 2005, the main principles followed by China are the need to create a collective security within existing multilateralism where countries should base their relations on mutual trusts, benefits, and equality. China will always want to preserve its economic growth, therefore will not desire to transform the existing system and will not take any offensive actions against other states. With economic and military growth, China is keen to develop its soft power image and use its cultural aspects to mend relations with the other nations of the international system. The country has been successful in successive image-building efforts, which includes hosting mega-events like the Beijing Olympics and Shanghai Expo, broadcasting promotional films abroad, and establishing Confucian Institutes around the world with an aim to disseminate Chinese language and culture.

Chinese security policy and its ambitions

In 2008, China dealt with various complex security situations as that time it overcame a devastating Earthquake in Sichuan province. The same year
China also hosted 29th Olympics and Paralympics. Chinese economy is no less integrated in the world economy. The destiny of China increasingly depends on international community. China cannot develop in isolation with rest of the world nor world can enjoy prosperity and stability without China. Peace and development has been two important themes for Chinese national defense. China has formulated a new military strategic guideline of active defense for the new period. This new guideline focuses on having a close coordination between political, diplomatic, military factors for resolving disputes. China focuses on the regional security and cooperation. During the 14th ASEAN ministerial meeting China stressed on a new security system of cooperation based on diversity and common interests in Asia-Pacific. The meeting encompassed discussions on maritime security issues, drug trafficking and disaster relief cooperation. Countries have reached a consensus to share opportunities for development and ensure joint efforts to deal with challenges.

The most authoritative sources on China’s security policy remain President Xi Jinping speeches on military- and security-related matters and the biannually published defense white papers. Sources explain that while China nominally adheres to a “defensive” policy, the focus has shifted since around 2010 from one of homeland defense to “peaceful expansion.”

International security situation has become complex with increasing competition among the countries in both economic and military aspects. Regarding tensions in the Asian region China has stressed on collective cooperation. Modernization efforts to be continued in the pace of time and adapting itself into world military development. China released another white paper in the year 2015, a period of South China Sea crisis, which highlights three new strategies. First, focusing on “open seas protection” rather than continuing with ‘active offshore defense’. Second, a shift in air operations from territorial air defense to both ‘defense and offence’. Third, an increase in the PLA’s mobility. Lastly, strengthening the Chinese nuclear forces for “medium and long-range precision strikes”. These strategies suggest that China is focusing on its eastern coast maritime security as well as its economic development but the western scholars on the other hand predict that this militarization might increase tension in the Asia-Pacific region. Chinese leaders have reconfirmed their stand to peaceful rise of the military and for the sole purpose of protection of its sovereignty and maintain regional security. The white paper published in 2015 highlighted its evolving military strategy, upheld the “defensive nature” of the country’s national defense policy and stated China will “never seek hegemony or expansion.” However, it also acknowledged that China’s evolving situation has set “new requirements” for the military to help build a “favorable strategic posture” and “guarantee
the country’s peaceful development.” The paper stated the need to protect
the country’s “growing strategic interests.” To shape the international order,
the paper outlined requirements to “actively expand military and security
cooporation” and “promote the establishment of a regional framework for
security and cooperation.” These directives evoke an ambition to build a stable,
peaceful Asian security environment in which China plays a leading role and
in which countries lack the ability or motivation to militarily challenge China
over its “core” interests. 4

**Figure 1.3 : Shows expenditure comparison with regional countries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015 Defense Budget Comparison (Adjusted for Inflation)</th>
<th>Billion (USD)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China (Official Budget)</td>
<td>$144</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia (National Defense Budget)</td>
<td>$54.4t</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>$40.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>$39.0</td>
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<td>Republic of Korea</td>
<td>$33.43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>$9.9</td>
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*Source-Data Complied from Official websites*

The vision of the security policy has expanded including domains like
ocean, space and cyber space. This has in turn resulted in policy of military
restructuring and modernizing the Chinese army. The shift has increased the
importance of crisis management and deterrence. These policy changes are
the reflection of the Chinese leadership. Xi Jinping has undoubtedly played
an important role in directing the policies, the principal drivers of the policy
changes lies with the changing requirements for national development within
favorable domestic and international conditions of the first two decades of
the 21st century. Militarization and policy changes is focused on ensuring
the nation’s revival as a great power and continued elevation of the living
standard of the people. China’s pursuit of peaceful expansion does not seek to invade and subjugate people in the manner of classical imperialists.
Nor has China signaled a desire to contest U.S. global leadership which is
an infeasible ambition. Beijing’s aim is to reshape elements of the regional
and international order and to expand control over core national interests
in the least-destabilizing manner possible while ensuring preparation for
contingencies. These new requirements have driven important changes to
military strategy, military missions, and tasks including the growing focus on
expeditionary activities.

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In consideration of China’s national security strategy, China needs to improve its national strength and ensure domestic security then only it will be able to influence the international and contribute to peaceful development of the system. To fulfil this objective China desires to modernize its military in terms of numbers and representation. Due to few external threats, China is pursuing ways to preserve national security. First, China’s expanding interests are against the traditional interests of the western powers. Second, regional powers like India intensified its relations with Japan and the US which brought negative impact on China. Both India and China initial development with the military supply from Russia and later Israel. Gradually difference between them developed due to the varied pace of economic shifts and India’s proximity to the US. America has been helping India to modernize its military which seems unacceptable to China. This resulted in its inclination towards India’s adversary Pakistan, and providing military aid. India and China have a history of territorial disputes which still prolongs. Third, another pressure to China’s priorities is maritime security. China is in dispute with Japan over the Diaoyutai Islands; share a scarred relation with Philippines after the dispute over constructing artificial islands and infringe the sovereignty of the other; and quasi-alliances are formed against China in the south-east region because of which the space for strategic development has been compromised. Fourth, Beijing and Taipei share a fragile relation, the former considers Taiwan as an inalienable part of itself. China has deployed missiles along the Taiwan Strait and increasing investment in the military capabilities consistently. The consequence of the same is aggression of Taiwan and establishing military dependence on the US. In the region of Asia-Pacific, disputes over sovereignty and the right to exploit natural resources are the trends of the international order. These external forces are trying to infiltrate into China ideologically and politically threatening its national security.

The reason behind China’s successful economy is the act of prioritizing economic development since the beginning. Because of this it has hindered comprehensive strategic planning. Its security strategy, strategic culture, and national strategy have never been formalized until now. Therefore, present formalization should not be considered a threat to the international powers of the 21st century. After years of economic growth, China is now capable of firm military modernization which should be encouraged and accepted by existing powers.

China is a key player in East Asia, but its ambitions is not constrained to the region. The US, Japan, India, ASEAN, and China all have a great influence in East Asia. These countries regard China as their major strategic competitor in the region and further are using soft power strategy to control the increasing
presence of China. Because of China’s national interest in every nook and
corner of world, it needs military back up to protect them. And if China
aspires to become a global power it needs to pursue and expand its national
interests, maintain national security, and lastly, participate in safeguarding
international peace. As mentioned in its white paper and official records that
China has domestic as well as international objectives to fulfill the bigger goal.
Domestically, it requires to safeguard its interests both on land and territorial
waters. China is compelled to adopt a combination of contestation and
cooperation. It needs to actively use military deterrence to combat Xinjiang
independence and Tibetan independence. China needs to acquire defense
mechanism to control political riots to reach out to other countries and turn
them against China. Internationally, China acts as a negotiator and mediator.
It should shape and maintain a friendly international environment for its own
peaceful development. It should keep away from the hostilities to itself and
prevent rifts between the neighbors. With its flagship programmes such as
Belt and Road initiative; expanding Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a
security and economic organization to counter America dominated NATO;
and increasing investments through AIIB and NDB, the developing countries
banks to challenge the hegemony of Bretton Woods institutions i.e. IMF and
World Bank. To accomplish all these goals China is required to maintain and
expand the scope of its national strategic interests. If China yearns to be a
leading power in the international system, then it should enhance multilateral
security cooperation with other countries even taking chances with the US.
To be more engrossed internationally it must necessitate a greater military
power and should maintain the steady rise in the military spending to achieve
an effective strategic deterrence.

China as a ‘threat’ is a biased and an Americanized concept because the former
has shared various partnerships with 57 different countries over the period
of 1993 to 2014 and successfully promoted ‘partnership diplomacy’. China’s
development will have an impact on the existing world order and the strategy
of making allies is advantageous to China in safeguarding its position in the
world and institutionalize channels to expand its national interests. China’s
modernization is a cause of concern for the great powers that have larger
vested interests in the events around the world and in response they create
obstacles to its rise. China knows its aggressive actions will have an indirect
impact upon itself, therefore, it is wise to promote various multiform, and
multilevel communities of common interest at both the regional and global
levels.

Chinese military modernization and its defense policy suggests that military responsibilities have expanded from homeland defense to defending the international system for a peaceful existence of humanity. PLA missions are concerned to counter the external threats that China faces. The US intervention in any contingency remain the single most important threat to realization of Chinese objectives but it seeks cooperation with the US to address international concerns such as counterpiracy, international peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance. PLA peacetime missions remain focused on deterrence of any separatist activity and prepare itself to any possibility of cyber threat and intervention by a foreign power in its territorial matters. South China Sea and East China Sea are area of strategic importance to China. They serve as a vital region in which nuclear ballistic missiles and submarines are placed. The waters hold rich fishing grounds and potentially lucrative mineral deposits. Moreover, over 85 percent of the country’s oil imports passed through the South China Sea and the Malacca Straits. The establishment of artificial islands is to support the Chinese coast guard to protect the region from any external threat. This expansion of military into this sea is not an offensive but a defensive step. The announcement of the “Silk Road” initiative in 2014 has coincided with growing Chinese economic and political interests in Central Asia. China has invested billions of dollars in the energy sector and contracts with Kazakhstan alone total $30 billion. The main threat posed concerns are terrorism and political instability in bordering Central Asian countries. The PLA has sought to deepen military relations with partner countries through exercises under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Contingencies could include bilateral or multilateral counterterrorism operations against cross-border groups. Another potential driver might be the opening of promising but vulnerable economic and strategic interests. Global warming has reportedly resulted in the reduction of 40 percent of the summer ice cap in the Arctic region, raising the possibility of a northern shipping lane that could cut shipping times to European markets by 30 percent. PLA Navy vessels could escort merchant ships to ensure safe passage. Potential drivers that accelerated Chinese investment and its modernization are the strategic value that China has in the international forum. Major factor was the increase in threats from terrorists or insurgent forces in countries featuring Chinese personnel or important economic assets.

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**Capability planning and Defence expenditure**

China embraces defensive measures against other countries instead of being offensive as that would cause damage in a longer run. Establishing cooperative frameworks would help China defend its transportation channels in Taiwan Straits, South China Sea, Indian Ocean, and more. It must strengthen its naval forces to protect its maritime lifelines and marine resources. For China peace comes through national strength, its alliance making includes equal emphasis on cooperation as well as building its own defence capabilities. Sovereignty is the highest value according to the Chinese leaders, and they use both diplomatic and military means to achieve their security objectives. The military expenditure is increasing moderately with an objective of homeland security and secure its command in the Asian region which is a natural phenomenon of the country’s ascension to great power status. China’s economic prosperity is providing abundance of financial resources to invest in the defense requirements. Since last fifteen years, China’s high economic growth coincides with the high military expenditure. This marriage between defense and development is lesson which other countries can learn from China. From 1998 to 2007, the average growth of China’s GDP was 12.5% and military expenditure grew at an average of 15.9% and total state expenditures increased at the rate of 18.4%. Chinese leadership claims that the increase in military spending is a chance to modernize and endow better services to the military sector and personnel. The defense budget announced by China in March 2017 shows an increase by 7% and it is the second year in a row that China has kept its spending to a single digit percentage growth, in contrast to plans of defense spending by the US which is double digit boost. In the previous year, in 2016 the defense spending was at an increase of 7.6% which is the lowest in the six years record and was the first single digit hike since 2010. The reason behind the gradual drop in the figures is a slowdown in Chinese economy post-devaluation. China’s military modernization is to create pressure on the great powers and keep a check on their increasing dominance. It embraces hard power to counter the forceful military intervention by the US in South China Sea and Taiwan Straits. China increased its military spending to deal with the Taiwan Straits and fulfil its interests of expansion including long-range land attack and anti-ship cruise missiles, counter-space weapons, and offensive cyber capabilities. China began with increase in economic power but now it has expanded to military and political spheres. The ascribed role is in regard of China being a mediator in politics of ASEAN and North Korea;

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8 Data Sourced from Chinese Ministry of Defence website
declaratory role is China’s peaceful rise which is a strategy to diminish fears amongst the neighbors and other powers such as the US; operational role is its military improvement and expansionist foreign policy; and structural role is the growth in PPP and nominal GDP since its economic reforms. Outcome of these four pillars of the power cycle theory is that China surely is experiencing a rise which is not an immediate threat to the world powers.

The white papers released over the period of 2000 to 2016 reflects the aspirations of China i.e. peace, cooperation, and military modernization. China worked to reduce the disparity between rich and poor countries by cooperating with other developing economies. The country through economic development, technological innovation, resolving Taiwan straits issue, and regional establishments like ASEAN wanted to bring development in Asia-Pacific region. China proposed consolidation national defense, defending state sovereignty, resisting aggression. China has been defensive in its policies, even its nuclear modernization is for national defense. It does not support an armed conflict with other nations, but if it comes to national prestige it never deters to use force. China popularized defense expenditure under strict control and management and downsizing the military personnel by 5 lakh personnel. It believed in nuclear disarmament, no use of chemical and biological weapons, and prevention of arms in outer space. Security, sovereignty, economic development, reform and innovation were the fundamental driving forces for the advancement of the armed forces. China’s economy was integrated into the global economy. China always propagated a peaceful economic development pathway, focusing on issues such as environment, disaster management, epidemics, transnational terrorism, rather than hegemonic aspirations. This shows China intentions of global peace. China started investing more in the UN peace keeping forces and promoting regional cooperation for stable Asia. China pitched for economic and social development since 2008. The focus was agricultural sector and how military personnel can provide aid when required. China talks about deployment of increased maritime equipment. Communication, coordination and cooperation became the mainstream elements in maintaining peace and stability. Economic interdependence was key to China’s peaceful rise. China confronted complex internal security challenges such as Taiwan, Tibet, and East Turkestan independence issues which compelled China to grow its military capability. China also began holding military exercises which exhibits military cooperation among the regional partners. The internal challenges of China prolonged. And another conflict piled up i.e. the South China
Sea issue. Regional plus international security challenges had serious impact on its military spending. Protecting its territorial integrity was the main concern for which China built a defense mechanism. For the first-time China declared to optimize its nuclear force structure and to improve strategic early warning command and control, missile penetration, rapid reaction and protection. This was done to deter other countries to use nuclear force. International peace keeping and humanitarian assistance conducted by China conferred international responsibility and obligation upon the country. Therefore, China portrays itself a peaceful nation in its official documents, and just a mere challenger with a limited possibility to create de-stability in the world.

**Figure 1.4: Chinese Official Defence Spending**

![Graph showing Chinese Official Defence Spending from 2003 to 2015](source: Data sourced from SIPRI website and China's Official Defence Ministry website)

Military modernization and subsequent increase in the defense budget additional to the recent tensions in the region has resulted in apprehension of China a ‘military threat’. Some scholars argue that since China has adopted a different political system from the liberal western democracies the western school of thought comprehends China’s rise as violent and a political threat. The rapid economic growth that China underwent from 1990’s has resulted in expanding its military to protect its sovereignty and energy requirements. Kenneth Waltz (1993) rightly said, “Economic competition is often as keen as military competition, and since nuclear weapons limit the use of force among great powers at the
strategic level, we may expect economic and technological competition among them to become more intense”. Nationalist sentiment drives China’s rise which has caused some tensions regarding the borders with the neighboring countries in the region. Possibility of war is low in consideration to the present status of China and the international system. The cost of modern war is higher than ever in history due to the web of relations that exists in the contemporary world among states and powers. China’s energy dependency as well as economic growth will play an important role in any decision on planning a military conflict. Chinese policy revolves around and focuses on to create a collective security, peaceful coexistence, cooperation and bringing harmony by maintaining peaceful relations with the international community.

Chinese defense policy is the fundamental norm for planning the defense development and expansion plan of forces. It is also an important component of Chinese National Policy. From the defense white papers released it shows that China pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature. China opposes any form of hegemony or power politics, and does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. China will never seek hegemony or behave in a hegemonic manner, nor will it engage in military expansion. China’s new security concept highlight the fact of mutual benefit, equality, and coordination to achieve regional security through cooperative manner. The increase in defense expenditure and diversified employment of armed forces adheres to the fundamental principles of safeguarding national sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and supporting country’s peaceful development.

**CONCLUSION**

China’s peaceful rise and its economic growth is not a threat to any country. China has managed to reach to the rank of developing power from under-developed. Soon it will be at parallel to the other great powers because the course China has embraced is of a great power. To preserve the economic growth and its power status, China will not be changing the international system and hence will not take any offensive action in relation to other states. The economic growth has improved the living conditions of majority of the population that does expect this development to persist. China’s behavior is no different from the other countries that has acquired the position of world power. The sensitivities

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Ibid.
of Chinese neighbors to its actions is natural, however Chinese leaders are very well-aware what any military conflict would do to the economy. China’s peaceful development has already proved its increasing role as an indispensable growth engine for world development. Transitions in power cycle from west to east and from industrialized countries to emerging market evaluates China’s international and regional rise plus creating shifts to bring more stability in the Asian region which will further contribute to the stability of the world\textsuperscript{11}.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.