

China's Naval Build-Up

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Abstract: Since the early 1980s the People's Republic of China has been going through a process of tremendous social and economic transformation. From a state-planned economy to a market-oriented one and from a closed society to a more open one. One of the most visible results of these changes is a tremendous rate of economic growth. China's rapid economic rise is being accompanied by a comprehensive military build-up which is raising more and more concern among China's neighbors. States including Japan and, above all, the USA worry about Beijing's ultimate strategic goals and their underlying rationale. Will the PRC become the preeminent power in the Asia-Pacific Region, replacing the United States as the dominant nation there? Will China attack Taiwan in the near future, seeking to bring it under its control? This paper examines in depth the motives driving China's military modernization, especially the build-up of a blue-water navy. Guaranteeing the vital security of the country and protecting its economic gains are the principal motives for the massive modernization of the military. The PRC is not seeking to dominate other countries or regions but rather to prevent other powers, especially the USA, from dominating China. However, China's comprehensive military modernization, especially the creation of a blue-water navy, could trigger an arms race in the Asia-Pacific region and increase the danger of confrontation. Proposals for avoiding a military clash are therefore essential.

Keywords: VR China, Seerüstung, Ostasien, USA, regionale Sicherheit

1. The Importance of the Oceans

1.1 Economic Use of the Oceans

More than 70% of the surface of our planet is covered by water. Therefore the seas are of crucial importance to the nations. All states use the oceans economically and militarily. Economically the seas are used in three ways. 1) As a source of food: According to the FAO Yearbook Fishery Statistics, global fishery and aquaculture grew rapidly between 1996 and 2005. It is remarkable that China is both the world's leading fishery nation and the number one producer of aquaculture products. 2) As a transport route: Alfred Thayer Mahan noticed in his ground-breaking study »The Influence of Sea Power upon History«, the transport of commodities by sea is the crucial purpose of the seas. He also emphasized the relationship between the wealth of a nation and its maritime activities. The 2005 UNCTAD Review of Maritime Transport shows that Mahan is absolutely right. From 1970 until 2004 the global seaborne trade increased from 2.5 billion t to 6.7 billion t. In the next decades this trade will raise dramatically mainly because of the participation of countries like China and India in the global trade. 3) As a source of supplying raw materials: Due to highly sophisticated technology it is possible to explore and exploit the bottom of the sea. Tremendous amounts of crude oil, natural gas, iron ore, copper, zinc, cobalt, diamonds and gold are located on the seabed. Because of the dramatic jump of prices of raw materials in the last few years, it is now desirable to exploit the seabed resources.

1.2 The Missions of Navies

The oceans not only were used for economic purposes but also for military ones. Nowadays, naval forces have two principal duties, either to conduct sea control or to execute sea denial:

the term sea control is defined as a state's capacity to interrupt all maritime activities both economically and militarily of a hostile country while maintaining its own operations, whereas sea denial is a state's ability to interrupt all activities of an enemy without maintaining its own. For Mahan the ultimate strategic goal of a navy is not sea denial but sea control, which means total domination of the oceans.

England was the country he chose in his study as the ultimate example of how to exercise sea control. From the 16th century on England became the preeminent sea power in the world after defeating Spain, the Netherlands and France. In the midst of the 19th century the Royal Navy was the undisputable master of the oceans.

When Mahan's analysis was published in 1890, the reaction was enormous. Especially in Germany the *Kaiser* and influential members of the government were convinced that only a powerful blue water navy could serve the political and economical interests of the country. But Mahan's German and later Soviet pupils missed the crucial point. Mahan emphasized that naval forces like the Royal Navy are only necessary when the country is fundamentally dependant upon the seas. Mahan stressed that England did not build this navy for political prestige but to guarantee its political and economic survival. Due to its ground-breaking study, Mahan became one of the most acknowledged experts on sea power and naval warfare. Especially in his own country, the USA, his writings were regarded as a guideline for the US navy.

From the 1930s on the United States was in a similar position as Great Britain before. The country is surrounded by oceans and only by sea does it have access to suppliers of raw materials and to its allies. Since the end of World War II the US Navy dominates the oceans as the Royal Navy did in the 19th century.

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union the US remains the world's preeminent superpower. Washington does everything to maintain this comfortable position. Therefore, each US government regards the possi-

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ble rise of other countries to superpower status with utmost suspicion. At presence there is only one other country in the world which has the political will and the economic and demographic capabilities to challenge the US. This country is the People's Republic of China.

2. China and the Seas

2.1 The Period of Self-reliance 1949 – 1979

According to Alexander Chieh-cheng Huang, one of the best experts on the Chinese armed forces, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) was established on 23 April 1949, a few months before the official foundation of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949.

From the beginning the naval forces were subordinated to the PLA Army.

Founded already in 1927 by Mao Zedong the paramount leader of the CCP, the PLA ground forces had waged and won a disastrous civil war against the armed forces of the Guomindang (GMD). After his total defeat on the Chinese mainland the GMD leader Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters were forced to flee to Taiwan. The PLA army also conducted a formidable war of resistance against the Japanese armed forces, which invaded China in 1937 and devastated the country until 1945. For these reasons, the Army was the dominant force and its prestige was unparalleled among the PLA.

In the following first two decades of the existence of the People's Republic of China coastal defense was the main task of the PLA Navy. When in the late 1940s the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union started, China due to the nature of its political system allied with Moscow. The gap between Beijing and Washington widened after both nations had waged a total war in Korea.

Thanks to the massive Soviet economic aid in the 1950s the Chinese leadership started to rebuild the industry and agriculture of the country. Moscow also supplied China with modern weaponry, enabling China to build sophisticated weapon systems like airplanes, tanks and warships. Due to this massive aid in the mid-1950s, the PLA Navy operated submarines, destroyers and frigates. Nevertheless, the naval forces remained the maritime arm of the ground forces designed to defend the Chinese coasts against a possible American invasion.

The principal defense of the country had to be carried out by the PLA army and air force.

The alliance with the Soviet Union was of utmost importance for China for two reasons. First, because of its own nuclear weapons the USSR aimed to deter the US from using atomic warheads against China. Second, the USSR provided China with urgently needed raw materials, foremost fossil fuel to feed the economy.

In the late 1950s it became clear that the Soviet-Chinese alliance was at the brink of collapse. The reasons for the split were not differing views about the communist ideology as it was

first assumed among Western experts. In contrast, both Moscow and Beijing accused each other to harm their own respective vital security interests. In 1960 the Soviet Union stopped its economic and military aid to China. That meant not only the withdrawal of the Soviet advisers but also a complete stop of the supply of raw materials. Thanks to the discovery of giant oil and gas reserves in the region of Daqing shortly before the split China had become almost self-sufficient in those resources. This autarky enabled Beijing to conduct a foreign and security policy independent from both superpowers.

In the late 1960s the Soviet-Chinese tensions reached such a degree that even a nuclear war between both communist giants was possible. In this situation China's leadership decided to ally itself with the United States. During the 1970s both the USSR as well as the PRC pushed forward a massive build-up of forces along the common border. China faced the possibility of a total Soviet invasion. Such an attack could only be countered by own massive ground forces and the mobilizing of the own population to carry out a guerilla war. Given this strategic situation and threat, the naval forces only played a minor role.

As shown above, there are two reasons why China's naval forces were subordinated to the ground forces during the first decades of the existence of the PRC. First, the greatest threat to the country's vital security was posed by the possibility of a massive invasion carried out by large hostile ground forces and air forces, including the use of nuclear weapons. China had to build its own massive land forces in order to counter the threat. Second, the country was self-sufficient concerning the supply with raw materials, which were fundamental to feed the economy.

2.2 China Opens to the Outside World

2.2.1. Causes and Effects of the Economic Reform

1978 was probably one of the most important years in the history of modern China. After the death of such paramount leaders as Mao Zedong and Chou Enlai in 1976 and a short struggle for power among their successors in 1978 Deng Xiaoping became the undisputable leader of the CCP. Deng emphasized that the CCP's ultimate task was to start a comprehensive modernization of the economy. Already in 1975 he had pointed out that the strategic goal of the party was the transformation of China into a powerful socialist country. At the Third Plenary Session of the X1th Central Committee, held from 18 – 22 December 1978, Deng again stressed this point. In a speech he held at this meeting he stated that the policy executed by Mao and his followers in the past years had brought China to the brink of collapse. He declared that if the party does not comprehensively reform the economy the gap between China and the most advanced countries will dramatically widen to China's disadvantage. The crucial point in his speech was the statement that unless China will be modernized and the living standard of the population improved, the country's security will be at risk and the power monopoly of the CCP will be threatened. Deng always emphasized the fun-

damental correlation between the efficiency of an economy of the state and its overall power status. Only a highly efficient one could guarantee the political survival of the state and the power monopoly of the CCP. While pushing the party to start a fundamental economic reform, Deng was not interested in carrying out any political reform. In contrast, in his view the economic restructuring was the fundamental condition for the CCP to maintain its absolute power.

To improve the industrial performance the Chinese leadership introduced four important measures after 1978. First, a market system was created to enable a genuine competition between the factories. Second, the responsibility for the administration of the companies was shifted from the ministries and other state authorities to the management of the plants. Third, the price system was reformed so that the prices reflected the real value of goods and the relationship between supply and demand. Fourth, the country was opened to the outside world to attract sophisticated technology and foreign investment. Deng himself had stressed the need for China's opening.

To facilitate the inflow of foreign exchange and goods and also to enable foreign investors to build their own factories the government established special economic zones along the coast, foremost in the southeastern part of the country. The decision of creating such exclusive economic regions proved to be highly successful. Many of the early investors who spent money in China were overseas Chinese who foremost lived in South East Asia where they represent the economic elite. Their ancestors had left South China during the 19th century. Now their descendants returned to their native country to carry on business.

Soon, not only people of Chinese origin but countries like the US, Japan and many European ones maintained close economic relations with the PRC. The consequences for the overall economic and social performance of the country were tremendous. According to World Bank Statistics, China's Gross Domestic Product jumped from 256 billion dollars in 1980 to almost 1.6 trillion dollars in 2004. In the same period also China's foreign trade grew enormously. From 1984, the value of export goods grew from 26.1 billion dollars to 593.3 billion dollars in 2004, while during the same period the value of import of commodities increased from 20 billion dollars to 225 billion dollars.

The negative effect of China's tremendous economic success was the growing dependence from the import of raw materials from other countries. The other result of the countries opening to the outside world was that the coastal regions became the centre of the economic and social development. These regions were the powerhouse of China's economy and therefore of crucial strategic importance for the country.

2.2.2. China and its Maritime Interests

The year 1985 saw a major shift in the threat perception of the Chinese leadership. Until then the country's defense policy was based on the assumption of a large-scale invasion by massive Soviet forces, including the use of weapons of mass

destruction in an early stage of such a conflict. At an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission in 1985 after a careful analysis of the international situation, Deng Xiaoping and other political and military leaders concluded that the danger of such a major war had diminished. Instead of a great war the threat of smaller local wars at China's periphery had risen significantly. The PLA forces had to prepare to counter those new challenges. Under the new security conditions the navy played a more important role. Given the long distance range of modern weapon systems and the fact that the loss of the coastal regions would cause disastrous effects for China's vital security, the navy had to expand the range of its operations toward the open sea.

The years 1989-1991 marked a decisive turning point for the whole country. The communist regimes in Eastern Europe collapsed and the Soviet Union itself disintegrated. From the Chinese point of view these events had two major consequences. First, with the collapse of the USSR the biggest military threat to China's security simply no longer existed. Second, the disintegration of the Soviet Union left the US as the sole superpower.

As the Soviet Union vanished overnight so did the foundation of the PRC-US alliance. This alliance was never a love marriage but a rational cooperation between both states to counter the Soviet military might. When the common enemy stopped to exist, the fundamental differences between the two powers arose again. The most important topics of conflict between Washington and Beijing are their totally different political systems and their different views about the political future of Taiwan. After his defeat on the Chinese mainland against the CCP, Chiang Kai-shek retreated to Taiwan where he established his own regime with American support. In the 1972 Shanghai declaration between the PRC and the US the Chinese government stressed the point that Taiwan is an integral part of China and Beijing the only legitimate government of the whole Chinese people. Beijing also mentioned that it has the right to use military force in order to unite the island and the mainland. Washington emphasized that it will only tolerate a unification if this would happen peacefully and all Chinese on both sides of the Taiwan Strait would agree.

In the late 1980s and 1990s Taiwan itself developed from a harsh one-party dictatorship to a democracy. Among the Chinese leaders concern grew that Taiwan ultimately would shift away from unification with the mainland towards independence. The relationship between Beijing and Washington also cooled down. In contrast the political and military leaders both in the US and in the PRC regarded the other country as a strategic rival. While the relationship between the existing superpower and the possible challenger became more and more complicated, China became ever more dependent upon the oceans. In order to fuel its economy it started to explore and exploit the mineral resources located on the seabed in front of its coasts.

In 1992 the Chinese nominal parliament, the National Peoples Congress, passed the Law of the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone and formalized the country's maritime territorial claims. Furthermore, China's maritime expansion was

enhanced when in 1994 the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Seas entered into force. According to that law, each coastal state was given the right to exercise unrestricted jurisdiction over a coastal zone stretching to 12 nautical miles. The law also created so-called Exclusive Economic Zones with an extension of 200 nautical miles which included the 12 nautical miles zone. To secure China's strategic maritime interests in such large sea regions the navy had to develop the required capability, meaning that instead of fast patrol boats and other small units it needs ocean-going destroyers, frigates and submarines.

China's dependence on overseas imports deepened when in 1993 the country after more than 25 years of autarky again became a net importer of crude oil. In the year 1995 political developments in Taiwan nearly led to a military confrontation between the PRC and the US. In 1996 for the first time in Taiwanese history the head of state was elected freely. Lee Teng-hui the candidate for the presidency, was the successor of Chiang Ching-kuo, the son of Chiang Kai-shek. The younger Chiang had come to power in 1978 after the death of his father. When he died himself in 1988 he was followed by Lee Teng-hui. Unlike his predecessors Lee is a native Taiwanese and not a descendant of mainland Chinese who fled to Taiwan in 1949 and erected a brutal dictatorship over the native population. Although a member of the ruling Guomindang, Lee was the most important architect of the democratization of the island state.

Beijing regarded Lee as a leader who wanted to separate the island from the mainland. In 1995 the PLA started a series of maneuvers to intimidate the Taiwanese population to influence the outcome of the presidential election. When the election neared, the maneuvers were widened. To prevent China to manipulate the presidential election to its advantage US President Clinton ordered two aircraft carrier groups to the Taiwan Straits. Only five years after the end of the Cold War a serious confrontation took place between the two most important countries in the world.

The distrust between Beijing and Washington deepened. On both sides there were groups of highly influential political and military officials who regarded the other nation as a potential threat to the security of their country. In Washington powerful members of the government and Congress distrusted the PRC because of its harsh political system and the abuse of human rights which took place in the PRC. On the other side, Chinese political and military leaders assumed that the US pursued a grand strategy to prevent China's rise to a superpower. The China-US relationship became even more complicated when in 2001 George W. Bush was elected president of the US. Inside the Republican Party there is a powerful group who regard China as a strategic rival and a threat to the preeminent power position of the USA. This faction demands that the US government should do anything to prevent China from becoming a superpower.

Before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 another incident concerned the US government. On April that year a US spy plane and a Chinese combat aircraft collided over the South China Sea. The Chinese fighter pilot died in that crash

while due to its damage the US plane was forced to land on a Chinese military base. Many observers believed that this was the ignition for a new Cold War. The conflict was solved diplomatically. The whole incident nearly was forgotten when the civil airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center and into the Pentagon. But the US reaction to the terrorist attacks again fueled the suspicion among the Chinese leadership.

The stationing of US troops in some Central Asian states like Uzbekistan and others raised the suspicion of the Chinese leadership to be encircled by the US. The war the US conducted in Afghanistan was reasonable because that country was the base of the terrorist organization which had launched the attacks against the US. On the contrary, in the author's opinion, the invasion of Iraq had nothing to do with Washington's war against terrorism but was the attempt to dominate the Persian Gulf, the region which includes the world's largest crude oil and natural gas reserves.

Over the past years, the countries of this region, foremost the Iran, have become the most important energy suppliers of China's booming and thirsty economy. Given the fundamental dependence on foreign supply of raw materials, especially fossil energy, the possibility of their energy suppliers being under American military control clearly unnerved the Chinese leadership.

The current situation is not comfortable for China, because the US has an overwhelming military presence in the most important energy producing region and the US navy dominates the oceans and thereby controls the sea lanes where China's imports and exports are transported. Given China's crucial dependence upon the oceans for its economic well-being and its mere political survival and the fact that the US is a potential military threat to China's vital security interests, Beijing has to create a blue water navy of its own to secure its own maritime interests.

3. Implications

3.1 Implications for the USA

As stated, the motives of the Chinese leadership for building a modern sophisticated military apparatus, especially a blue water navy capable to operate on the open seas, are defensive by nature. However, a blue water navy is by its very magnitude and its capabilities a powerful offensive instrument in itself, because it can not only protect the sea lanes for the own nation's maritime activities but can also interrupt the maritime operations of other states. China's leaders are convinced that the US and at a lesser extend also Japan are the country's most likely adversaries. The problem is that the creation of a Chinese blue water navy jeopardizes the vital security interests of these two nations. Both Washington and Tokyo are already concerned about the real ultimate strategic goals Beijing pursues with its military build-up.

Although the US and the Japanese government will ask why Beijing modernizes its armed forces the way it does, they will ask foremost what Beijing can really do with its armed forces.

The US will analyze in which way a potential Chinese blue water navy will harm its interests. To answer this, three key questions regarding the US must be answered: 1) What are the US strategic goals? 2) What role do the high seas play in achieving these goals? 3) What are the functions of the US navy in achieving these goals?

The answers to these questions were formulated in a 1996 report by President Clinton, published by the White House under the title »A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement«. The report specified three topics of utmost strategic importance for the country: to enhance the security of the nation, to safeguard its political values and political system and to promote prosperity. It is important to understand what kind of engagement is meant to achieve these goals. First, the US must have the military power to fight and win two simultaneous major regional wars. Second, the nation must have an effective economic policy to maintain its economic performance and promote free-market practices at the international level. Third, it is in the fundamental interest of the US to promote democracy around the world. To achieve these goals, the US needs to maintain a global presence and its role as the leader in international politics.

Which functions does the US Navy have to carry out in the context of this strategy? The answer to this question is laid out in the Naval Doctrine published in 1994. According to it, the US is fundamentally dependent upon commercial and military transoceanic links for two principal reasons. First, the country imports and exports goods via the oceans. 90% of the world trade and 99% of all US imports and exports are transported by sea. Although the US economy is one of the most advanced in the world, it is not self-sufficient but depends upon raw materials to function. The raw materials have to be imported from other countries and parts of the world far away from the US. Second, the country must have access to its allies in Europe, Asia and other regions of the world. Both in the Second World War and the Cold War it was of crucial importance for the US and their allies to control the seas. Otherwise both conflicts could not have been won. Therefore, to execute these missions the US navy has to dominate the oceans. To carry out the tasks the US navy is composed of aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, nuclear submarines and other vessels, which allows to operate on the high seas far away from the domestic shores.

A Chinese blue water navy composed of similar units as the US navy would gravely affect the strategic US interests. Such a naval force could interrupt Washington's access to its allies in the Far East like Japan or South Korea and also Taiwan. It also could stop the flow of goods to and from the US. Therefore, such a Chinese naval build-up would pose a serious danger to vital US interests and would trigger a massive American response.

3.2 The Consequences for Japan

If the build-up of a Chinese deep sea fleet represents a grave impairment for the US on its power and vital security inter-

ests, for Japan it would immediately be an existential problem. To start with the Japanese economy, Japan is the industrialized country without raw materials. Thus, the economy and survival of the country is vitally dependent upon the uninterrupted import of mineral resources and the export of finished goods. Japan knows first hand which catastrophic effects a stop of this flow would have. In a brilliant study, »The Coming War with Japan« published in 1991, two American scientists, George Friedman and Meredith Lebard, described which disastrous consequences the confrontation between the US and Japan during the Second World War had for Tokyo. Japan lost this war not because of the use of atomic weapons by the US but because Washington managed to cut Japan from all sea lanes of communication where the country transported the goods it needed to wage the war.

After the end of the Second World War the political situation in the Asia pacific region changed completely. Japan changed from the enemy to the closest ally of the US while China now becomes more and more the greatest challenger for the US security interests. The Chinese leaders perceive Japan besides the US as the gravest danger to its own security. This perception is based mostly on the tragic common history of both nations. From 1937 until 1945 Japan waged a ruthless war against China, which was weak and torn apart by the civil war between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party. Some 30-40 million people died in this period. The atrocities of this war are not forgotten in China.

The relationship between the two countries is marked by mutual suspicion on the political level although they are cooperating closely in the economic sector. The creation of a Chinese blue water navy would alarm the Japanese government and might lead to a massive build-up of the Japanese naval forces. Unlike China, Japan is one of the most sophisticated industrialized countries in the world. Japan has the technological capability to build aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines and other ocean-going warships at once. Furthermore, Japan is able to build very quick nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Thus, a Chinese naval build-up might cause a massive Japanese reaction and trigger a dangerous naval arms race between the two Asian giants.

3.3 The Consequences for Taiwan

Taiwan is a special topic. For most countries of the world Taiwan is not an independent state but a part of China. Beijing managed successfully to isolate the island in the international system. Nevertheless, all developed countries maintain close political and economic relations with Taiwan. Washington maintains a special relationship with the island state. Taiwan is an old ally of the US in the Asia Pacific region since the rule of Chiang Kai-shek. Since the end of the Cold War and the democratization of the island the bilateral relationship again became closer. The US opposes any unification between Taiwan and China where Beijing uses military force.

On the other side, the Chinese leadership repeats that it will use military force if Taiwan declares formal independence. A military clash between Taiwan and China could trigger a

confrontation between China and the US. The build-up of a Chinese blue water navy would pose a fundamental threat to Taiwan. In contrast to the US and Japan, which China's leaders perceive as possible adversaries but whom they would not attack, Beijing openly declares that Taiwan must be united with the Chinese motherland even by using military force. A Chinese blue water navy would either attack the island or with its overwhelming superiority it could intimidate the Taiwanese government and population to a point where Taiwan will have no other option than to capitulate. Therefore, the Chinese naval build-up could increase dramatically the tensions in the Taiwan Straits and even cause a major confrontation between China and the US.

4. Conclusion

4.1 China's Problems

As analyzed, China's naval build-up is caused by Beijing's intention to secure its sea lanes to guarantee the flow of goods from and to the country. The People's Republic of China is fundamentally dependent upon the ocean for its economic and social well-being and its political survival. Nevertheless, a blue water navy itself is a mighty instrument of power projection, which not only is able to execute defensive tasks but also carry out offensive missions.

For these reasons China's naval build-up is observed by its neighbor states with suspicion.

What can be done to prevent a major naval arms race in the Asia Pacific region and to decrease the tensions between the major countries of the region? To sustain the economic and social transformation of the country the Chinese leadership needs a stable and peaceful international environment. Beijing does not have any interest in causing tensions or even trigger a military confrontation. The Chinese leaders know exactly that the country is dependent upon foreign raw materials, technology and investment for its comprehensive transformation. Although the country had tremendous success in reforming the economy, there is still a long way to go before the transformation of the country will be finished.

While most foreign observers look upon the enormous progress, the country also has tremendous problems. The UN China Human Development Report published in 2005 listed three main obstacles the Chinese government has to deal with. First, from about 1.3 billion people only 400 million participate in the economic change until now. Second, there is a massive corruption among the political cadres on all levels from the village to the Politburo. If this corruption cannot be stopped it might undermine the legitimacy and the power monopoly of the CCP. Third, the country's environment is in a catastrophic condition.

China is one of the largest air and water polluters in the world. Hundreds of millions of Chinese do not have access to clean and fresh water and have to live in cities with incredible air pollution. Hundreds of thousands of people die each year because of these conditions. If this massive pollution will not

be stopped, it will stop China's economic growth and will become a challenge for the political system. China needs the help of other countries to solve its domestic problems. The cooperation on topics like environmental protection should be strengthened. Countries like Germany can supply the technology China needs to deal with its enormous environmental problems.

4.2 Recommendations

China is an important actor in the international system. Some conflicts like the nuclear armament of North Korea can only be solved with Chinese support. Instead of trying to isolate China, the US and other Western countries should help Beijing to integrate into the world community and to cooperate in international organizations. Washington and Beijing have some common security interests. Beside preventing North Korea from becoming a nuclear power both sides are regarding the Islamic fundamentalism as their enemy. A Chinese-American cooperation on this topic can help to prevent the repetition of terrorist attacks like those of September 11, 2001. A cooperation between the US and the PRC is also desirable to solve the problem of Iran's nuclear program. If Beijing and Washington would cooperate in this field the international community could exercise much more pressure upon the Iranian regime.

However, should the US-China relationship not improve or become even worse, not only will the bilateral relations suffer, but the whole Asia Pacific region will turn into a highly unstable area. In that case, China's neighbors will perceive Beijing's naval build-up as a threat to their own vital interests, and the whole Asia Pacific region might turn into a highly unstable and dangerous zone.

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