

PRESIDENT'S FORUM



*The China Maritime Studies Institute:
Defining Partnership with China*

ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL ISSUES facing our nation in the new global strategic environment is the rise of China. The scale of Beijing's rapid economic growth is unprecedented, and its military modernization is also progressing apace. There is considerable reason for optimism regarding the emergence of China, since it has benefited in extraordinary ways from the ongoing processes of globalization. Indeed, Chinese leaders appear to have embraced former Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick's prescription for China in which he called for China to become a "responsible stakeholder" among the great nations of the world.

Nevertheless, it would be vastly premature to say that the "China question" confronting the world community has already been resolved. There are a variety of tensions that still impact significantly upon East Asian security, and it is generally agreed among international-relations specialists that the rise of great powers has historically formed a fundamental factor in destabilizing the international system. There is a tendency in Washington for policies concerning China to become quickly politicized. Human rights and environmental protection advocates are highly critical of Beijing, while big business sees endless opportunities in the Middle Kingdom.

A little over three years ago, the Naval War College clearly recognized China's rapid growth as a key factor for understanding the emerging twenty-first-century global order. Navy leadership understood this well and saw the requirement for objective research on China's rise that would be insulated from the various policy agendas driving the debates about China in Washington. With this concern in mind, the China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) was established

in October 2006 at the College. The objective was not to create another China institute—of which many fine examples exist in academia—but rather to create a China *maritime* studies institute. The intention was to give this new institute the focus required to succeed and thereby fill an emerging gap.

In ancient times, the Chinese proved themselves to be bold and capable seafarers, claiming among other inventions the compass, the rudder, and the watertight bulkhead. Under the flag of the Ming dynasty's great Admiral Zheng He, vast Chinese fleets explored the distant reaches of the Indian Ocean. However, in the modern period China has been fundamentally a continental power, with little presence on the high seas—until recently. Nevertheless, the gap in understanding China's maritime development was not simply a result of the novel aspect of this phenomenon. The U.S. Navy also suffered from weakness in regional studies as a result of a relatively limited Foreign Area Officer program over the last few decades. Thus, the impetus to establish CMSI represented both increasing demand for expertise and a supply shortfall.

In supporting the research needs of the U.S. Navy, the main objective of the College's CMSI is to increase knowledge and understanding regarding the maritime dimensions of China's rise. In doing so, CMSI has undertaken research along the following vectors: energy, global commerce, law of the sea, maritime technologies, merchant marine, naval development, naval diplomacy, and shipbuilding. In developing the institute's research areas, we recognized that Chinese naval development is following in the wake of China's clear emergence as a commercial maritime power. Indeed, the most vital foundation of China's maritime development is the export juggernaut that has emerged in the last two decades.

The U.S.-China maritime relationship will form an essential bedrock for maritime security in the twenty-first century. In support of this relationship and also the new U.S. maritime strategy (which is the focus of this issue of the *Review*) CMSI held its annual conference, on 6–7 December 2007, on the theme of "Defining a Maritime Partnership with China."* Despite recent turbulence in U.S.-China military-to-military relations, conference participants reaffirmed that substantial shared interests potentially constitute the basis for extensive U.S.-China maritime security cooperation. The goal of the conference was to foster dialogue between Chinese and American experts in order to generate ideas for potential areas of cooperation between our nations' respective maritime services. Attendees at this conference agreed that a strong foundation for maritime partnership exists in the vitality of the robust commercial relationship but that the

* This event, the third annual conference sponsored by the CMSI, was made possible by a grant to the Naval War College Foundation from Raytheon. Attended by some of the world's leading sinologists and geostrategists, it included participation of flag-level leadership from the Chinese PLA Navy and several prominent experts from Chinese think tanks and academic centers.

military side of the partnership is obviously lagging behind. The conference focused on determining which areas might be fruitful for more extensive U.S.-China maritime partnership, rather than on attempting to characterize the overall nature of such a partnership.

We drew six major conclusions from this conference's proceedings:

- Economic cooperation forms a durable foundation for enhanced partnership between the United States and China on the world's oceans.
- There has been some impressive success in creating new collaboration in the sphere of search and rescue, as well as in fisheries enforcement.
- China's cautiously positive reaction to the new U.S. maritime strategy suggests that there is hope for expanding cooperation in humanitarian/disaster relief operations, maritime environmental issues, energy security, counterterrorism, and also in the educational and legal spheres.
- Beijing's growing presence on the seas will make maritime collaboration and crisis-management procedures with Washington both more feasible and also more essential.
- The sensitive Taiwan and transparency issues continue to be the fundamental limiting factors on expanded military and maritime cooperation between China and the United States.
- Finally, to realize enhanced maritime cooperation, political leaders in both Washington and Beijing will have to commit themselves to enabling a certain politically independent space, insulated from domestic political agendas, within which maritime and naval professionals can structure cooperation.

The executive summary of this conference has been shared with our naval leadership, as well as the Chinese PLA Navy participants in our conference. With the mission of informing military and civilian leaders in Washington, sailors of the fleet, and academic specialists, as well as the public at large, the comprehensive volume of edited conference papers that resulted from the December 2007 conference will be published as part of a series of books evaluating different aspects of China's maritime development. The first study in this series, titled *China's Future Nuclear Submarine Force* (Naval Institute Press, 2007), was described in the January 2008 edition of *Jane's Navy International* as the "the benchmark unclassified study on the development of the PLAN's sub-surface combat capability." The second book in this series will appear in 2008 and is titled *China's Energy Strategy: The Impact on Beijing's Maritime Policies*.

In addition to the annual conferences and the related book series, CMSI undertakes a variety of other activities to support China research and teaching here at the Naval War College. These other activities include a speaker series, a monograph series, and support for faculty research in China, as well as for relevant U.S. Navy and joint commands. The quality of CMSI research products has been proven, in that these studies have been published in some of the most prestigious national academic journals (both in regional studies and national security strategy)—for example, *International Security* and *Journal of Contemporary China*. At the same time, it is fully recognized that CMSI must also produce research of direct interest to our Navy. Numerous CMSI articles over recent years in this journal, as well as the U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, demonstrate the relevance of ongoing CMSI research to Navy priorities.

Indeed, this issue of *Naval War College Review* features an important article by CMSI staff and faculty affiliates. “No Oil for the Lamps of China?,” by Professor William Murray of the War Gaming Department faculty and CMSI research fellow Gabriel Collins, takes a hard look at Beijing’s anxieties with respect to the “Malacca dilemma” (China’s vulnerability to an energy embargo). The authors conclude that such fears are in fact much overblown, since, according to their detailed analysis, no adversary of China could execute such an embargo in practice.

CMSI’s successful research effort rests, above all, on the potent and committed group of sinologists now resident on the faculty of the Naval War College. The effort to strengthen the faculty’s expertise on East Asia goes back at least to the initiative of Vice Admiral Arthur K. Cebrowski, President of the College from 1998 to 2001. Today the College has twelve faculty and staff members who are proficient in Mandarin. The work of regional specialists in tandem with naval operation and maritime policy experts has been the key to building successful research teams. These teams frequently draw faculty from a variety of different departments within the College (both research and teaching). In addition, superb students have also made an outstanding contribution to the CMSI research effort, producing a succession of papers for the *Naval War College Review* and winning at least one Joint Chiefs of Staff Essay Prize in the process. This faculty is developing an unparalleled library of Chinese maritime writings that serves as the central repository of a unique set of data. In the future, we hope, scholars from around the world will view the CMSI library as the critical enabler for open-source, multidisciplinary research on Chinese maritime development. The result of this intense collaboration among sinologists, maritime policy experts, and naval operators is a dynamic intellectual exchange that showcases the advantages of scholarship in grappling with such complex phenomena as the rise of China and its maritime implications.

There is no question about the value and quality of the extraordinary work now issuing routinely from this new institute within the Naval War College. The genius, expertise, and commitment of the sailors and scholars involved match well with the importance of the CMSI agenda. The Naval War College—in keeping with its century-old reputation of thought leadership—is showing the way when it comes to dealing with profound change in the international strategic environment.

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