

possible, this job should be given to the Academy of Military Sciences (軍事科學院) in Beijing, which is a leading institution for formulating doctrine and strategy, because its researchers have been taught Maoist military dialectics since the early 1980s.

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## A Militarily Rising China: Issues of Interpretation and Response

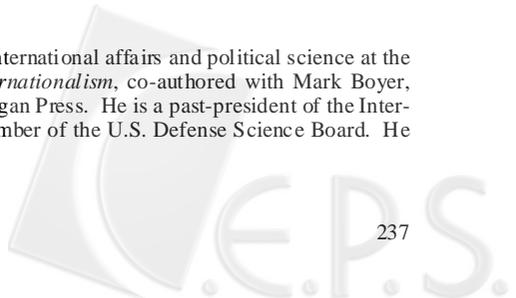
DAVIS B. BOBROW



Shambaugh has given us a notably balanced work appraising the evolution of the Chinese military to date and for the coming years. His treatment combines serious historical depth, a systematic use of pertinent literature, and perceptive treatment of major Chinese sources. He gives substantial attention to the major aspects of the functions, institutional arrangements, and strategic rationales which in combination capture a nation's military capabilities, practices, and goals. He does that in a set of rich chapters about: civil-military relations; doctrine and training; command, control, and force structure; budget and finance; defense industries and weapons procurement; and threat perceptions. Finally, he concludes with a detailed review of the relationships between the U.S. and Chinese military security establishments, and provides recommendations for future ties. Those are major accomplishments in dealing

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with a military which is in a continuing transition, is far from transparent, and is embedded in a China with these same two properties.

Because of the strength of his analysis, the conclusions which emerge should give rise to continuing, serious policy debate in both Beijing and Washington. Such debate seems especially warranted in light of events that have occurred since Shambaugh's book was written: developments in Iraq, Afghanistan, international terrorism, and U.S.-East/South Asian security relations.

Viewed from the Chinese side, the conclusions are in many respects troubling, especially for those political elites and military specialists committed to a modernization program that seeks both to emulate the U.S. military transformation and to eventually allow China to achieve great-power status. Continued and substantial Chinese efforts to close a significant military technological gap with the United States and major countries in the region (Japan and India in particular) have for the most part not been successful—and show little chance of becoming so. What has occurred in terms of absolute modernization in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has not kept up with the improvements made by other militaries. While recognizing new American strategies, doctrines, and capabilities in an increasingly timely manner, China has only adapted to a limited number of them, and has been quite slow to make these responses operational. With the possible exception of ballistic missiles and capacity to threaten Taiwan, greater efforts have not produced improvements in net assessment terms. Rather than improving the odds for inducing changes that China desires, the existing accomplishments only help China block unwanted changes in the status quo.

Recent developments, moreover, are likely to increase concerns that China might have about the effectiveness and efficiency of U.S.-style military modernization/professionalization. There may even exist in China voices in support of a combination of finite ballistic missile deterrent forces and an updated version of Maoist capabilities for broken-back war.

Others in China, however, are likely arguing that the approach of recent years has indeed been working and thus merits neither substantial acceleration nor de-emphasis. Together with economic strides taken by

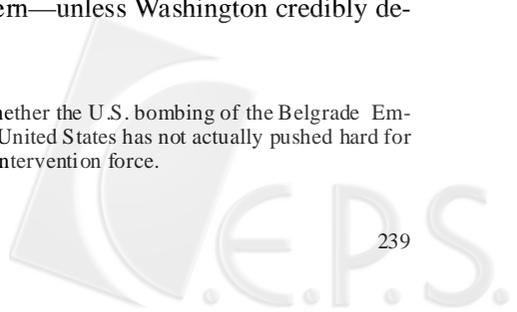
China, the current approach to military modernization has allowed China to avoid becoming the target of either harsh U.S. military actions or a region-wide containment campaign (led by the United States). Indeed, the very limits on actual growth in relative capabilities support a Chinese strategy of patience. Why depart from a course that both is working adequately in broad political-military terms and has not seemed to seriously hinder the improvement of China's bargaining position in global economic or regional security (e.g., North Korean nuclear) matters?

As for Washington, Shambaugh persuasively emphasizes that China's interpretations of U.S. capabilities and intentions play a central role in Chinese military developments. This does not necessarily imply, however, that China is not concerned with other threat sources. Alternatively, Beijing's relative silence about others may be the result of beliefs by China's experts that: (1) Japan is and will remain reliably compliant with U.S. military preferences; (2) being able to respond to the threat from the United States would inherently enable China to manage those from any one else; or even (3) there exist diplomatic and domestic political incentives to focus on the United States, rather than others, as a threat source. In any event, that China focuses on threats from America raises important issues for U.S. foreign policy—issues that deserve attention whether or not one agrees with Shambaugh that China's specialists have over-estimated the extent of U.S. ambitions for dominance, propensity to use force, and commitment to deny first-class international standing to China.<sup>1</sup>

Shambaugh holds that U.S. policy should strive to bring Chinese threat perceptions more in line with what he holds to be reality. This prescription is perhaps less persuasive than his treatment of other matters. He also argues that "the United States should recognize that China has the legitimate right to modernize its military and protect its national security, if it does not threaten others" (p. 328). What exact Chinese behavior would constitute such action is hard to discern—unless Washington credibly de-

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<sup>1</sup>For example, one could reasonably debate whether the U.S. bombing of the Belgrade Embassy was purely inadvertent, or whether the United States has not actually pushed hard for NATO to be transformed into an out-of-area intervention force.



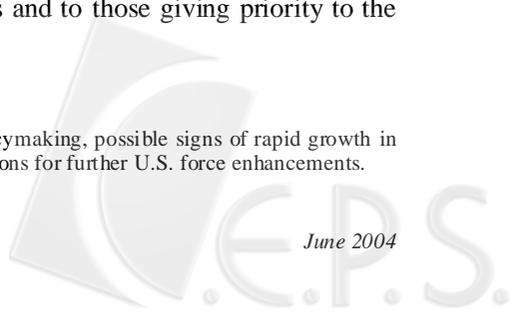
parts from the ideology of unipolarity, preeminence, and prevention of the emergence of even a regional peer competitor. A credible departure would, as Shambaugh perceptively notes, depend on the totality of sustained signals from Washington—especially those from the Congress, the Department of Defense (DOD), and DOD's associated think tanks. His analysis also suggests that the pertinent signals would not only be those specific to China but would have to encompass the global range of U.S. military behavior. Even a declared doctrine of "conengagement," such as that adopted by the Clinton administration, probably would not provide the necessary signals.

Unless and until U.S. military and defense industrial cooperation policies fundamentally change, it seems somewhat optimistic to expect substantial increases in China's military transparency. This is because such a change would probably expose the PLA's weaknesses and vulnerabilities more than strengths. On the U.S. side, there is little sign of a willingness to do anything but grow America's force projection capabilities; nor does it appear that Washington will recognize the rights of others to any independent security posture that includes some serious capacity to deter the United States.<sup>2</sup> In any event, acceptance in American policy circles of Shambaugh's findings about the limitations of Chinese military power may even work against any sense of urgency to take more than minor steps to reduce Chinese perceptions of threats from the United States. The pre-occupations in America with both the conduct of the war on terrorism and the Iraq adventure further depress the likelihood that U.S. efforts to make major changes in military relations with China will be adequate.

In sum, the patterns and trends that Shambaugh delineates about the Chinese military seem likely to continue. These developments are less than ideal from the point of view of China's military professionalizers and modernizers, but they do represent a set of compromises relatively acceptable both to military institutions and to those giving priority to the

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<sup>2</sup>Indeed, for some players in U.S. security policymaking, possible signs of rapid growth in Chinese military power are welcome justifications for further U.S. force enhancements.



more comprehensive development of China. Nor do recent American problems and domestic divisions suggest that time will be unavailable for China's military transition to come to fruition (with the possible exception of the Taiwan issue) before the PLA might be subjected to a critical test.

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***Author's Response:***  
**The Soldier, the State, and the Future  
of PLA Studies—Breaking  
down the Barriers**

DAVID SHAMBAUGH



It is an honor to have *Issues & Studies* host this roundtable review of my recent study of China's military, and I am most grateful for the flattering words offered by most of the distinguished contributors to this roundtable. This book consumed a decade of my professional life, and receiving such positive feedback for these efforts is therefore very gratifying.

Despite a decade of work, this was a very difficult study to undertake given: both the limits on the available empirical data and the sensitivity of working on this subject in China; the complexities of military weapons

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