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Perspective Four

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The global strategic outlook is changing rapidly. The United States's strategic primacy is likely to continue until 2030, but in the coming decades power will become more contested, especially in the western Pacific. Certainly, the global balance will shift to the Pacific, especially with the rise of China – and it will have many consequences.

The outlook in South-east Asia is generally positive. Indonesia may surprise on the upside, but there are continuing fragilities in parts of the south-west Pacific, with particular concerns in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. A closer strategic partnership with India is possible. International terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will be of continuing global concern. Resource issues will probably become more frequent sources of conflict. The primary troubled regions in 2030 are likely to be in Africa, the Middle East and East Asia.

Dilemmas of dealing with China

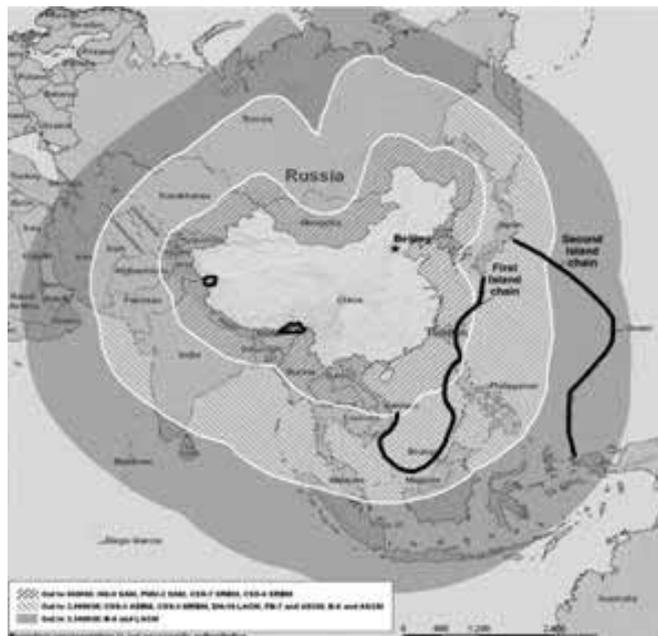
Australia recognises and welcomes the strong growth in the Chinese economy and many developments in Chinese society. Australia and China can, and

should, partner each other in trade, economic initiatives, environmental developments, technology programmes and many other things. All of these aspects are welcome. At the same time, however, the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) is being developed at a pace that has surprised. Moreover, PLA strategy and investments are clearly designed to undermine, if not destroy, the United States and allied presence in the western Pacific. From 1996 to 2009, China's declared military expenditure (in 2009 United States dollars) increased from \$17–70 billion; while its estimated actual expenditure increased from \$42–145 billion.

Development of the PLA

The PLA is developing rapidly in 10 major fields of concern to Western defence planners. First, wide-area surveillance and targeting includes: space-based surveillance; an over-the-horizon radar network; surface wave radars; high altitude, long-range unmanned aerial vehicles; airborne early warning and control aircraft; undersea arrays; and digital systems for quality command and control.

New medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles are also being developed and deployed in large numbers. These systems include air-launched and ground-launched long-range cruise missiles, many of which are supersonic and very stealthy; and a new suite of theatre ballistic missiles. Many land-based missiles are highly protected in deep tunnels and through other means. One particularly disturbing development is the deployment of a medium-range ballistic missile designed specifically to strike moving ships at sea.



China-centric map showing first and second island chains and indicative zones within range of short (600km) medium (2000km) and long (3300km) range Chinese missiles [Source: Secretary of Defense 2010, 32²]

A modernised submarine force now reflects major qualitative changes made in last 15 years. Twelve Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines have been launched among the more than 40 new boats commissioned since 1995. The Peoples' Liberation Army's navy (PLAN) is currently developing or fielding five new classes of submarine and by 2030 may operate 85-100 boats.

A stronger surface combatant force is also emerging. Since 2000, PLAN has commissioned 10 new classes of surface ship. The Sovremenny II-class is probably the most powerful. An aircraft carrier research and design programme has commenced with the *Kuznetsov* upgrade well underway in Dalian. There is strong interest in acquiring the Sukhoi Su-33 (an all-weather, carrier-based air defence fighter aircraft). The PLA is also developing its own indigenously-designed

and developed fighter-bomber aircraft for aircraft carrier operations.

Air defence is being augmented by a new generation of advanced fighter-bombers; a dense radar network over coastal provinces and priority inland areas; many new surface-to-air missiles, including S-300PMU2 with a range of 200km; and a sophisticated, hardened and protected command and control network.

Growing capabilities for space warfare are emerging, aiming to exploit the West's asymmetrical dependence. There was an anti-satellite missile test in January 2007 and a geosynchronous interception capability is likely by 2020, together with ground-based laser and other anti-satellite systems.

Strong cyber capabilities are being developed that are able to cripple the 'Western way of warfare'. Since 2005, cyber operations have routinely been built into major PLA exercises and President Hu announced cyber as a high priority in the 2011-2015 Five-Year Plan. Extensive Chinese cyber probing, intelligence gathering and attacks are now common, with the United States recording over a million attacks each day.

Command and control infrastructure is being hardened and protected. Continental and interior lines advantages are being exploited. A highly-resilient command and control system is being built, incorporating an extensive dedicated fibre-optic network, coupled with extensive deep tunnelling and many hardened, land-based nodes.

Strategic nuclear forces are being modernised with solid-fuel DF-31, DF-31A and JL-2 ballistic missiles, which bring with them numerous advantages, including transportability and responsiveness. Thousands of kilometres of deep road tunnels are being built primarily to protect the missile force.

Chinese strategy

China's evolving theatre strategy now appears to comprise blinding the United States's surveillance and reconnaissance systems and disrupting its command and control, coupled with heavy pre-emptive strikes on forward facilities and forces, multiple strikes on major naval vessels at sea, especially within the second island chain, and attacks on more distant supporting and follow-on forces.

China's strategic behaviour during the last two years has been characterised by further growth in defence expenditure as already noted; extensive cyber operations; assertive behaviour and the declaration of 'core' interests in the South China Sea; the USS *Impeccable* and USS *McCain* incidents; a confrontation in the Yellow Sea in July 2010; and a clash with Japan in the East China Sea. There followed very severe restrictions on the export of rare earth minerals – which are essential to many television, computer, defence and similar components – of which China currently produces some 97 per cent of the world supply. Other developments include: very active intelligence operations against the West; very assertive behaviour

²Secretary of Defense (2010). *Military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China 2010*. A report to Congress pursuant to the *National Defense Authorization Act* for fiscal year 2010, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington DC, 2010.

in political dealings with neighbours and with the United States; and moves to establish a forward maritime base on the Arabian Sea at Gwadar in Pakistan.

It would appear that the primary features of the PLA in 2030 are likely to be: further expanded, modernised and hardened strategic nuclear forces; a new generation of medium-range ballistic and cruise missiles, many of which will be based underground; a submarine fleet of 80-100 boats; probably some 800 fourth-generation and 50-100 fifth-generation fighter bombers; a modernised PLAN surface force, with possibly one-to-three aircraft carrier battle groups; modernised and expanded air defences; anti-satellite missile capabilities to geo-stationary orbits; and cyber capabilities vying for world leadership.

The key imponderable, however, is how the PLA will behave in this timeframe. Certainly, China is challenging several key strategic assumptions in the western Pacific such as that: the Allies will enjoy operational sanctuary in space; United States forward operational bases will be secure; allied surface-vessel security is assured in the western Pacific; western Pacific airspace will be uncontested; allied C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) systems will remain inviolate; and, in a crisis, western Pacific allies will have access to speedy resupply. Most of these long-held assumptions may not apply in 2030 and there are very serious implications for Australia's security.

Future Australian Strategy

Given all this, I propose four principles upon which future Australian strategy should be based. Australia

should not confront China directly, except in extreme circumstances. Rather, Australia should seek to balance/offset the rising capabilities of the PLA, aim to deter adventurism, and work to restore and reinforce regional confidence. In order to do the above, Australia needs to change its national security investment priorities – a modernised version of Australia's 1970 force structure will not be effective. Lastly, Australia needs to invest heavily in capabilities that have the potential to deter the PLA from threatening Australia and its vital interests.

The Author: Professor Babbage is managing director of Strategy International (ACT) Pty Ltd, a national security consulting and education service organisation; and Founder of the Kokoda Foundation, a not-for-profit research corporation that works closely with government on Australia's future security challenges. He was a special advisor to the minister for defence during the preparation of the 2009 Australian defence white paper; and recently served on the Council of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, for six years. Previously, he was variously a senior official in the Office of National Assessments and the Department of Defence, a senior executive in the corporate world and a senior academic. He was appointed a member in the General Division of the Order of Australia in January 2011. [Photo of Professor Babbage: Colonel J M Hutcheson, MC]³

³The matters addressed in this paper are described in more detail in: Ross Babbage (2011). *Australia's strategic edge in 2030*. Kokoda Paper No. 15. It may be downloaded free from the Kokoda Foundation website.