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**THE AWAKENING GIANT (CHINA'S EMERGING  
POWER)**

**Robert W. Steele**

**Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania**

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THE AWAKENING GIANT

(China's Emerging Power)

by

Colonel Robert W. Steele  
Infantry

US Army War College  
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## SUMMARY

The purpose of this essay is to determine the threat to world peace posed by current and developing Communist Chinese military power. It investigates the military power and power potential from the conventional and nuclear aspects, and considers the Chinese ability to support wars of national liberation in the "third world." The essay concludes that while the Chinese military threat is ever present, the Chinese will use considerable restraint in the use of that force within the immediate future. It further concludes that Communist China will not hesitate to use military force when she feels her vital interests are at stake.

## THE AWAKENING GIANT

The history of the Chinese civilization, extending over more than four millenia, is one of confusion, conflict and turmoil.<sup>1</sup> A basic understanding of the varied face of China is requisite to any consideration of a potential threat to world peace from this vast and populous country. Developing as it did, in isolation from the Western world, the Chinese saw themselves as the world center of civilization.<sup>2</sup> They envisioned themselves as superior inhabitants of this planet and members of a "Middle Kingdom," between heaven and earth, and a proper recipient of tribute paid them by peripheral nations or peoples.<sup>3</sup> The humiliations inflicted upon the Chinese rulers and people by the European nations during the 19th Century are not easily forgotten. One of the highest goals of the present Chinese Communist regime is to regain for China her "rightful" place in the world community and restore her to great power status.<sup>4</sup> This paper will attempt to examine the threats, if any, to other nations and world peace in her struggle to achieve

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Hamm, *China: Empire of the 700 Million*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup>Dick Wilson, *Asia Awakes: A Continent in Transition*, (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1970), p. 189.

<sup>3</sup>Harrison E. Salisbury, *War Between Russia and China*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969), pp. 46-47.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 47-48.

this great power position.

### CHINA'S OBJECTIVES

Any discussion of the threats posed by the military potential of Communist China must first take into account the basic objectives of this little understood nation. The international objectives of China's policy are considered to be three.<sup>5</sup> The first of these objectives is to re-establish her borders as they existed prior to Western incursions and interference in Chinese Affairs. This involves primarily the liberation of Taiwan, and the consequent elimination of the Chinese Nationalist government. Beyond this, she seeks to restore her borders between India and the Soviet Union, and, as has been seen, is willing to resort to armed force to accomplish this.

The second of China's goals is to expand her influence into international affairs. This she hopes to accomplish by restoration of influence, not necessarily control, over the peripheral states surrounding her. In this manner she hopes to break the encirclement of the Western powers. She hopes, also, to increase her influence within the Communist Bloc and exhalt herself as the champion of the true Communist ideology.

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<sup>5</sup>Wilson, pp. 203-204.

The third objective of Chinese policy is to elevate herself to, and gain recognition of, great power status. Her fanatical determination to acquire a nuclear capability is an indication of her desire for world power greatness. By achieving this status she can more easily accomplish her second objective, that of the extension of her influence in world affairs.

In light of these objectives then, let us consider the military power position, present and developing, of this Asian giant. The following discussion will explore Communist China's capabilities, with perhaps some indication of her intentions, to wage conventional, nuclear, and national liberation or guerrilla wars.

### CONVENTIONAL CAPABILITIES

The People's Liberation Army (PLA), consisting of the Army, Navy, and the Air Force, and numbering approximately three million men<sup>6</sup> is one of the largest standing armies in the world today. Together with a militia estimated at between 7 to 12 million and other special troops,<sup>7</sup> the PLA presents a formidable force to the world, and particularly to the rimland nations. While the PLA cannot be considered to be a modern force,<sup>8</sup> when

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<sup>6</sup>Salisbury, p. 171.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Fred Greene, *US Policy and the Security of Asia*, (New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1968), p. 144.

compared to the United States or Soviet Russia, the sheer size and replenishment potential are enough to require a potential invader to give second thought to any such military endeavors. With an enormous population of 700 to 800 million people,<sup>9</sup> several million eligible males are reaching conscription age each year.<sup>10</sup> This vast reservoir of Chinese youth allows the military services to be extremely selective in their recruitment policies, and enables them to maintain a highly energetic and youthful organization.

One diminution of the combat capabilities of the PLA is the role that the three services are playing in the other facets of Chinese society, particularly since the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.<sup>11</sup> Since that time the PLA, especially the army, has been deeply involved in controlling, and perhaps even operating,

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<sup>9</sup>Lucian W. Pye, "Political Trends in China," *The United States & China: The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Samuel B. Griffith, "Military Capabilities," *US Policy Toward China*, ed. Akira Iriye, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), p. 73.

<sup>11</sup>Samuel B. Griffith 2nd, "China and World Security," *The United States & China. The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), pp. 57-58.

industry, education, news media, and other civic activities.<sup>12</sup> This extension of interests and activities outside the scope of purely military functions has resulted in a definite reduction in the combat effectiveness of the military services.

In spite of the apparently inconsistent endeavors of the PLA, there appears to be no diminution of loyalty or morale throughout the armed forces. In fact, even as a result of the Cultural Revolution the People's Liberation Army has emerged as the dominant and major cohesive force in China today.<sup>13</sup> The entire younger generation of Chinese, baptised during the Cultural Revolution in revolutionary fervor and hardship, is imbued with extremely high morale, which must be taken into account by any antagonist.<sup>14</sup> General Samuel B. Griffith, testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearings in 1966, made this statement: "There is no reason to believe that the PLA would not loyally respond to any challenge directed against

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>David Oancia, "Political Trends in China," *The United States & China: The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Salisbury, pp. 173-174.



the Chinese mainland."<sup>15</sup> He further went on to state that "The PLA is, in my opinion, a highly motivated, loyal, and dedicated instrument."<sup>16</sup>

China has shown her willingness to make extreme sacrifices in order to maintain her military power. An estimated 10 per cent of China's gross national product<sup>17</sup> is absorbed in maintaining her military force in a posture of readiness. This extreme effort on the part of the Chinese Communist government is indicative of the extent to which they will go to further their international objectives through military power. This economically unproductive outlay of already scarce resources not only imposes undue hardships upon her people, but also significantly contributes to Asian and world insecurity.<sup>18</sup> Even though she possesses immense conventional military power, for one reason or another China has demonstrated a high degree of discretion in involving itself in military operations.<sup>19</sup> Cases in point are

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<sup>15</sup>Griffith, "Military Capabilities," p. 74.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup>Greene, p. 181.

<sup>18</sup>Wilson, p. 182.

<sup>19</sup>Jacob K. Javits, "Two Senators Speak," *The United States & China: The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, (New York: Praeger Publishers Inc., 1970) p. 139.

Korea, India, and Vietnam. Not until General MacArthur's troops were nearing the Chinese border did she intervene in the Korean War, and only then after repeated warnings.<sup>20</sup> Another example of China's reluctance to employ military force is evident in the Sino-Indian War, where after pushing the Indian Army to the southern foothills of the Himalayas, she withdrew her forces to positions they originally occupied.<sup>21</sup> And in Vietnam she has never intervened with combat troops,<sup>22</sup> although it is highly conceivable that her forces would enter the conflict if North Vietnam were to be invaded by United States and/or Allied ground forces. Some experts on China cite Chinese aggression during the suppression of Tibet as an example of the militant attitude and intentions of Peking.<sup>23</sup> The fact is, however, that Tibet has traditionally been considered to be under Chinese influence as a tributary state.<sup>24</sup> It might be appropriate, therefore, in view of Chinese past actions, to consider these military actions on her periphery as merely a protection and continuation of the

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<sup>20</sup>Chang Hsin-hai, *America and China: A New Approach to Asia*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965) pp. 52-53.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup>Wilson, p. 202.

<sup>23</sup>Greene, p. 185.

<sup>24</sup>Wilson, p. 83.

traditional buffer state<sup>25</sup> theory to thwart invasion and incursion of Chinese territory.

Of the three component arms of the PLA, the army is overwhelmingly the largest. General Griffith, in his previously cited Senate Foreign Relations Committee testimony, while placing the overall strength of the PLA some what below the three million figure mentioned earlier, set army strength at near two million men.<sup>26</sup> For the most part this force is made up of principally infantry units; however, he also estimates four to five formidably equipped armored divisions are included. Basically a foot mobile force, it has serious deficiencies in combat service support type units and personnel which would be at a grave disadvantage when faced with a more mobile opponent in open terrain.<sup>27</sup> Because a large percentage of Chinese equipment was originally furnished them by the Soviet Union, it is questionable to what extent this equipment is being maintained operable.<sup>28</sup> The lack of a modern army, when related to western standards, however, should not be considered to negate their combat capabilities. In fact

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup>Griffith, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid, pp. 70-71.

their demonstrated ability in Korea and during the Sino-Indian conflict present the appearance of a formidable opponent. Perhaps the greatest capability of the Chinese Army is that of mere size. Its very massiveness alone allows it the capacity for employment on many sectors of its frontiers simultaneously.<sup>29</sup>

The air force arm of the PLA is much smaller than that of the army. General Griffith puts its strength at between 150,000 and 175,000 men.<sup>30</sup> Estimates in 1960 placed China's air strength at between 2,500 and 3,000 aircraft, however, since the Sino-Soviet split the Chinese air force has experienced difficult times. Replacements and spare parts shortages have significantly reduced the number of operational aircraft. Cannibalization to maintain others in serviceable condition has reduced aircraft strength to 2,000<sup>31</sup> in 1964, and is probably somewhere near that figure today. There is indication that China does have a limited capability for the renovation and replacement of their existing aircraft, and even the suggestion of a capability to produce more advanced jet fighters

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<sup>29</sup>Greene, pp. 216-217.

<sup>30</sup>Griffith, p. 71.

<sup>31</sup>John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 140-141.

(MIG-21's).<sup>32</sup> Except for approximately 500<sup>33</sup> IL-28 light bombers, and one squadron of TU-4 heavy bombers,<sup>34</sup> inherited from Soviet aid, the Chinese appear to have abandoned development of a manned bomber. It appears that the Chinese are placing more emphasis on missile research and development.<sup>35</sup> If this is indeed true, it would seem to rule out any radical increase in Chicom air power within the foreseeable future; however, Chinese determination to develop a modern air force should not be underestimated.

The Communist Chinese navy, comparable in size to the air force, has perhaps a greater potential capability than its present size would indicate. Chinese emphasis on naval power has, from the first, been directed toward submarines. Prior to the withdrawal and suspension of Soviet aid in 1960, the Chinese acquired some 30 to 40 "G" and "W" class submarines from them. The "G" class boat has the capability of launching a missile from a submerged position.<sup>36</sup> A conventional submarine force of any size at all could seriously

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>33</sup>Griffith, p. 72.

<sup>34</sup>Gittings, p. 140.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup>Griffith, p. 73.

threaten the security of the Pacific, particularly if they were armed with nuclear ballistic missiles.<sup>37</sup> If the Chinese are to realize their avowed goal to "liberate Taiwan," they must possess a sizeable amphibious capability which is not in being at present.<sup>38</sup> Amphibious ships of this type are not too difficult to produce in quantity however, and if the Chinese Communists are sincere in their efforts to destroy the Nationalist government they will undoubtedly undertake an expansion of this force. A 1962 study reported that Chinese destroyer strength was 4 operational ships, and there is no indication that this force has been increased. The Chinese have no ships heavier than destroyers.<sup>39</sup> They also have several hundred small, fast gunboats and motor torpedo boats in their inventory. With the development of additional light surface craft and tactical submarines, the Chicom navy will possess the capability to not only threaten the nationalist strongholds, but also the U.S. 7th Fleet.<sup>40</sup> In spite of this, experts tend to agree that this possibility is remote at the present

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Chester L. Cooper, "China and World Security," *The United States & China: The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 71.

<sup>39</sup>Gittings, pp. 143-144.

<sup>40</sup>Greene, p. 220.

time.<sup>41</sup>

## NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

"Chinese power radiates over the whole of Asia from India to Korea."<sup>42</sup> This statement, published in 1964 before the Chinese exploded their first nuclear device, is explicitly more true today. The Chinese intention to achieve great power status is the fundamental reason behind her desire for the acquisition of nuclear weapons,<sup>43</sup> and she has them! Since the first atomic explosion of 16 October 1964, which was a complete surprise to foreign analysts because it used uranium 235,<sup>44</sup> China has exploded in excess of 10 nuclear weapons.<sup>45</sup> Less than three years later she again surprised the world by exploding a thermonuclear device. These technological achievements are representative of the determination of Communist China to project her image throughout the world. For any nation,

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<sup>41</sup>Cooper, p. 71; Griffith, p. 73; Gittings, p. 143; Greene, p. 220.

<sup>42</sup>Editorial, *New York Times*, June 12, 1964; Chang Hsin-hai, p. 37.

<sup>43</sup>Dr. Morton H. Halpern, "Military Capabilities," *U.S. Policy Toward China*, ed. Akira Iriye, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1968), p. 76.

<sup>44</sup>Greene, p. 249.

<sup>45</sup>Editorial, *Anchorage (Alaska) Daily Times*, October 15, 1970.

particularly one such as China with her limited ability to mobilize its resources,<sup>46</sup> to compete with the more advanced, industrialized nations of the west in the nuclear field is extremely expensive. The Chinese, however, have opted to make great sacrifices to add this powerful capability to their arsenal. The consequences of this acquisition of nuclear power are many and varied. It provides China with the capacity to influence world affairs. With her developing missile capability, the nuclear power of this great nation by 1980 will be one to be reckoned with.<sup>47</sup>

Based upon China's phenomenal technological achievements in the nuclear and missile fields, it is logical to assume that within the next decade she will be in possession of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM), and a submarine launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capability. The missile nuclear shot of 27 October 1966 supports this theory and portends their capability.<sup>48</sup> Insofar as there is no evidence that the Chinese are developing a

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<sup>46</sup>Paul H. Kreisberg, "Political Trends in China," *The United States & China: The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 47

<sup>47</sup>Griffith 2nd, p. 59.

<sup>48</sup>Greene, p. 249-250.



long range bomber force, it would appear that emphasis will be given to the development and construction of improved missile systems and submarine forces capable of missile delivery.

### WARS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION

Perhaps because of the success of the Chinese Communists during their long revolutionary struggle, they have an abiding obsession for the promotion and support of "wars of national liberation" or "people's wars." They have attempted to apply the concept of surrounding and taking over the cities from the countryside to the world scene.<sup>49</sup> They view the industrialized nations as the cities of the world, with the countryside being the undeveloped nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. While the rhetoric and theories of Mao Tse-tung and Lin Piao are widely read by revolutionaries throughout the world,<sup>50</sup> there is little to indicate that the Chinese are willing to actively support by military force the wars they advocate.<sup>51</sup> In Thailand, named in 1965 as the "next target for liberation" by the

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<sup>49</sup>John K. Fairbank, "Goals and Motives of Chinese Policy, *U.S. Policy Toward China*, ed. Akira Iriye, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1968), p. 85.

<sup>50</sup>A. Doak Barnett, *China After Mao*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 64.

<sup>51</sup>Wilson, p. 202.

Chinese foreign minister, very few supplies have been furnished the Thai guerrillas.<sup>52</sup> It can be expected that the Chinese will continue, as in the past,<sup>53</sup> to supply revolutionary movements throughout the "third world;" however, China's resources lack the capacity to support such activities on a grand scale.

Undoubtedly, with the increased capability and influence of her developing nuclear arsenal, she will exert greater pressure on the peripheral states to eject foreign influence and presence from those areas.<sup>54</sup> If this happens, it will afford her the opportunity to offer these smaller nations the "carrot or the stick"<sup>55</sup> and increase the potential for sponsoring revolution.

The overseas Chinese, particularly in southeast Asia, constitute a further potential through which the Communist Chinese could export their revolutionary zeal.<sup>56</sup> The continued ties and affinities of the overseas Chinese with the mainland offer a fruitful opportunity for

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid, p. 262.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, pp. 201-202.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid, p. 278.

<sup>55</sup>Abraham M. Halpern, "China's Fortunes in Asia," *Sino Soviet Rivalry: Implications for U.S. Policy*, ed. Congressman Clement J. Zablocki, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), p. 107.

<sup>56</sup>Wilson, pp. 203-204.

subversion and the establishment of liberation movements in those countries wherein they reside. Asian countries are ripe for the appealing spirit of Chinese liberation movements, primarily because, in Asian eyes, she represents a once poor and backward country that is succeeding over the forces which held her back for so long.<sup>57</sup>

In Africa and the Mid-East, China has taken advantage of the Sino-Soviet dispute to extend her activities. In fact, a certain amount of success has been achieved, and the Chinese have gained footholds in Africa from which they can extend their operations.<sup>58</sup> The newly independent nations of Africa are highly receptive to certain appeals of Communism, principally by its one party organizational aspects and by state ownership and control of the economy.<sup>59</sup> In the Middle East, China has promised support to the Palestinian

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<sup>57</sup>Lucian Pye, "The Communist Parties of Japan and India," *Sino-Soviet Rivalry: Implications for U.S. Policy*, ed. Congressman Clement J. Zablocki, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), p. 111.

<sup>58</sup>George A. Martelli & Richard V. Allen, "Sino-Soviet Rivalry and Southern Africa," *Sino-Soviet Rivalry: Implications for U.S. Policy*, ed. Congressman Clement J. Zablocki, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), p. 131.

<sup>59</sup>William E. Griffith, "Background on Communism In Africa," *Sino-Soviet Rivalry: Implications for U.S. Policy*, ed. Congressman Clement J. Zablocki, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966), pp. 120-121.

guerrillas with which to continue the conflict.<sup>60</sup>  
While the Chinese feel that the support they lend to any conflict makes it appear that they are the champion of revolution,<sup>61</sup> they are actually limited in their ability to provide material support.<sup>62</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

What then, considering her aspirations and power, is the threat to world peace and security posed by Red China? Opinions differ widely, not only among non-communist countries but in the United States as well.<sup>63</sup> Some see her as a revolutionary, expansionist power that is willing to involve the world in nuclear holocaust and rebuilding a communist world on its ashes. Others view China as a developing country concerned with only her own security, and rightfully suspicious of United States policy toward her. There are probably elements of truth and justification on both sides. In any event, somewhere in between these two extreme views probably lies the true face of China.

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<sup>60</sup>"China: The Lights Go On Again," *Time*, September 7, 1970, p. 23.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>Martelli & Allen, p. 130.

<sup>63</sup>Greene, p. 175.

That China has the potential to realize expansionist tendencies, particularly in Southeast Asia, should not be questioned. But China has exercised great prudence in the past which would indicate that she does not intend to take over the countries on her periphery, only to insure the continuity of neighboring governments friendly to her. This is particularly true when applied to other communist regimes, as in the case of North Korea and North Vietnam. China desires security from invasion by other nations and ideologies, hence their modern version of buffer states must be protected. The Chinese Communists have not hesitated in the past to use conventional military power when they considered that their vital interests were at stake,<sup>64</sup> and we cannot expect them to do otherwise in the future.

The Chinese use of force in support of people's wars will probably be restricted to limited aid and support forces where they can be utilized, as in the case of service support troops and anti-aircraft forces in North Vietnam.<sup>65</sup> It would be extremely difficult for the

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<sup>64</sup>Allen S. Whiting, "China and World Security," *The United States & China: The Next Decade*, ed. A. Doak Barnett & Edwin O. Reischauer, New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1960), p. 63.

<sup>65</sup>Wilson, p. 202, Griffith, p. 72.

Chinese to introduce conventional military forces in South Africa, for example.<sup>66</sup> In the "third world" the Chinese will attempt to exert influence to encourage people's wars, and where successful hope to tie down non-communist resources, particularly those of the United States, in several areas of the world simultaneously.<sup>67</sup>

In the case of their own civil war, neither they nor the Nationalist Chinese will consent to two Chinas. If the protection of the 7th Fleet were to be removed, there is little doubt that the Communists would attempt to eliminate this long standing rival. Even with the U.S. Naval presence it is not without reason to suppose that the Communists might test their force against the Nationalists during the 1970's<sup>68</sup>

China's unsettled border disputes with India and the Russians, especially the latter, threaten to embroil the world in a conflict of gigantic proportions. Even if such a war were to be limited to the countries of China and the Soviet Union, the consequences for all of

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<sup>66</sup>Martelli and Allen, p. 134.

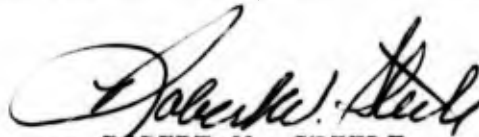
<sup>67</sup>Donald S. Zagoria, "A Strange Triangle: China, Soviet Union, United States," *Sino-Soviet Rivalry: Implications for U.S. Policy*, ed. Congressman Clement J. Zablocki, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), p. 45.

<sup>68</sup>Whiting, p. 63

mankind are forboding, for it is unthinkable that such a conflict would not be a nuclear one. Hardly a nation on earth would be immune from the radioactive fallout resulting from such an exchange.

The Chinese nuclear threat at present is small, but it is real. We can be certain that the Chinese will do all in their power to increase and improve their already awesome nuclear capability. With it they can threaten and influence policy in all of Asia. She can intimidate her neighbors. She will have the capacity to expel western influence and presence from her sphere of interest. And in the long run, she can threaten the very shores of the United States with a nuclear armed long range submarine capability.

No one in the western world can be confident of the direction and paths that Chinese Communist leaders will elect to walk. China is struggling to attain an industrialized society and be recognized as a great power in the world arena. She has made a significant start in a short span of time, but she has a long way to go to attain the goals she so laboriously seeks. This great Communist Chinese giant is no longer asleep; nor is she merely turning in her sleep; the giant is awakening.



ROBERT W. STEELE  
COL, GS, AK ARNG

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