

**New Powers, Old Patterns:
Dangers of the Naval Buildup
in the Asia Pacific Region**

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Working Paper

No. 9

March 1995

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of the naval arms buildup in the Asia Pacific region and the frequently-expressed fears that it might turn into an all-out arms race. The authors find that although the naval buildup has not yet turned into a full-scale arms race throughout the region, a) there is a genuine naval arms race already occurring between the PRC and Taiwan; b) the historical precursors of an arms race are now in place throughout Northeast Asia; and, c) there is a clear danger of an inter-ASEAN naval arms race. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need to put in place official mechanisms to enhance cooperative maritime security, consisting of a combination of confidence building and risk reduction measures together with multinational naval cooperation leading toward full-scale maritime security regimes.

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I. Introduction¹

In the last decade or so, and particularly since the end of the Cold War, many nations in East and Southeast Asia have made significant increases in their military capabilities. Although often justified as routine modernization, the acquisition of large, modern capital assets have often represented a major increase in qualitative and in some cases quantitative capability. Large in both relative and absolute terms, this regional buildup is particularly noteworthy for the number of nations that have acquired the most up-to-date high-technology naval and air capabilities, ranging from advanced helicopters and “smart” ordinance all the way up to strike aircraft, guided missile destroyers, and even submarines, aircraft carriers, and medium-range ballistic missiles.²

While security concerns in the region have traditionally revolved around the balance of land-based forces, the burgeoning volume of ocean commerce, the basic geography of the region itself, and, recently, the planned acquisition by many regional nations of highly capable naval platforms has focused ever greater attention on the maritime dimension of the security competition. As Bateman puts it, “a new ‘oceans era’ is emerging with maritime security becoming the fundamental concern of most island and coastal states.”³

What does this buildup mean for stability and peace in the region? Opinion is distributed along a continuum. At the optimistic end, there are those who see this buildup as a normal and unexceptional modernization of forces in the region, spurred on simultaneously by the lessons of the Gulf War and the fear of a gradual American military withdrawal, and facilitated by the enormous revenue made available by the region-wide economic boom.⁴ At the pessimistic end are those who see this buildup as the onset of an all too familiar pattern in which a mutual military buildup leads to increased mutual hostility, inducing a still greater buildup, ending in the tragic “armament-tension spiral” of a classical arms race.⁵ They also worry that the very nature of the newly-acquired high-tech weaponry multiplies the probability of a war beginning as the result of accident or inadvertence.⁶ Taking a middle position are those who concede that

¹ Research for this paper was supported by a contribution provided by the Cooperative Security Competition Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. The authors would like to thank Sam Bateman, Eric Grove, Shannon Selin, Jim Tritten and Stan Weeks for their many helpful comments and suggestions. The contents are, of course, completely the responsibility of the authors. Comments and criticism are welcome.

² See Desmond Ball, “Arms and Affluence: Military Acquisitions in the Asia Pacific Region,” *International Security*, Vol.18 No.3 (Winter 1993/94), 78-112; Shannon Selin, “Asia Pacific Arms Buildups,” *Working Papers No.6&7*, (Institute of International Relations, The University of British Columbia, November 1994); Bates Gill, “Arms Acquisitions in East Asia,” Appendix 13E in *SIPRI Yearbook 1994* (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: Oxford University Press, 1994); Research Institute for Peace and Security (Tokyo), *Asian Security* (London: Brassey’s, 1994), 13-20; J.N. Mak, “Armed, but Ready? ASEAN Conventional Warfare Capabilities,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol.16 No.2 (Spring 1994); Stewart Walters, “Asia Aims Its Sights Underwater,” *Asia Defence Journal*, June 1994, 52-58.

³ Sam Bateman, “Strategic Change and Naval Roles,” in Sam Bateman and Dick Sherwood (eds.), *Strategic Change and Naval Roles: Issues for a Medium Naval Power*, Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence No.102, (Canberra: Australian National University, 1993), 39-40.

⁴ Selin, *Working Paper No.6, op.cit.*, 39-48; Ball, *op.cit.*

⁵ J. David Singer, “Threat-perception and the armament-tension dilemma”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.2 No.1 (March 1958), 90-105; Michael T. Klare, “The Next Great Arms Race,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.72 No.3 (Summer 1993), 136-152. Cf. the remarks of François Heisbourg at the second Asia Pacific Defence Conference in February 1994 as reported by Stephen Ryan, “The Pacific Century - Will the New Century be as Dangerous as the Last?”, *Asian Defence Journal*, March 1994, 66-67. Heisbourg, a Senior Vice-President of the MATRA Corporation, compared the military buildup in Southeast Asia to the European arms race in 1914, and concluded by saying, “do not do as we did.”

⁶ Two excellent general treatments of this problem are Scott D. Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Wim A. Smit, John Grin,

the buildup will generate *some* danger, but that it is not fundamentally connected to underlying regional tensions; it is more of an “arms stroll” than an arms race⁷.

Our view tends toward the pessimistic side, *not*, it must be strongly emphasized, because there is anything different or exotic about the political behaviour or crisis management capabilities of the leadership in the region, but precisely because, subject to the same pressures and incentives, Asian leaders will react in roughly the same way as their Western counterparts. In the West, arms buildups and the introduction of new generations of weaponry have led to spiraling arms races and a greatly increased probability of war for more than a century and a half⁸; what reason do we have to suppose similar conditions in Asia will not produce a similar result?

II. The Arms Race - War Relationship

Since the pioneering work of Richardson in the late 1940s, and its theoretical development by Singer and Rapoport,⁹ arms races have been linked to theories about the origins of war. Initial empirical studies in the 1970s and '80s suggested an extremely strong relationship between the existence of an ongoing arms race between two great powers and the probability that a serious dispute between them would escalate to all-out war. In the most widely cited of these studies, it was found that disputes preceded by an arms race escalated to war 23 out of 28 times, while disputes *not* so preceded resulted in war only 3 out of 71 times.¹⁰ This study was quickly followed by an intense and lengthy controversy in which many claimed that early studies distorted or exaggerated the true importance of arms races, which, in their view, only *sometimes* resulted in the initiation of armed conflict¹¹. Nevertheless, even the most skeptical of these critics have conceded that “*military buildups that occur within a rivalry, where the states are... [close by or] contiguous, are an important step toward war,*” and that “*arms races and military buildups are dangerous in the context of an ongoing... dispute.*”¹²

It is important to understand that this strong linkage between military buildups and war escalation was first established for the period *prior* to the development of modern high-tech weaponry: over 90% of the cases examined in these studies occurred before World War II. Any tendency for modern weapons to increase the likelihood of war is therefore a separate issue, a risk factor which must be added to (or perhaps even multiplied with¹³) an established historical danger of long standing.

and Lev Voronkov (eds.), *Military Technological Innovation and Stability in a Changing World* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1992).

⁷ Selin, *op.cit.*, 48. Mohamed Jawhar, Deputy Director General of Malaysia's Institute of Strategic and International Studies comments: “One cannot discount the fact that we do look at our neighbors as we plan our military modernization. So in that sense, one could label it an arms race, but the term is tremendously misleading.” (Quoted in Gill, *op.cit.*, 562.)

⁸ Michael D. Wallace, “Arms Races and Escalation: Some New Evidence”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol.23 No.1, (March 1979), 3-16, and Wallace, “Racing Redux: The Arms Race - Escalation Debate Revisited” in Charles S. Gochman and Alan Ned Sabrowsky (eds.), *Prisoners of War? Nation-States in the Modern Era* (Lexington, VA: Lexington Books, 1990).

⁹ Lewis Fry Richardson, *Arms and Insecurity* (Pacific Grove, CA: Boxwood Press, 1960). [N.B. this work was actually written in 1948, and only published posthumously]; Anatol Rapoport, “Lewis F. Richardson's Mathematical Theory of War”, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.5 No.1 (September 1957) 249-299; Singer, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ Wallace (1979), *op.cit.*

¹¹ A good summary and analysis of this opposing view is to be found in John A. Vasquez, *The War Puzzle*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 177-184. For a specific rebuttal, see Wallace (1990) *op.cit.*

¹² Vasquez, *op.cit.*, 184. Emphasis added.

¹³ There is of course no *a priori* reason to assume that these two variables are either linear *or* additive with respect to their effect on the probability of war.

III. Modern Weapons and the Risk of War by Accident or Inadvertence

Much has been written about the dangers of accidental war during the superpower Cold War. Particularly during the 1980s, many scientists and strategic specialists concluded that the interactive effects of human and computer-generated errors in the enormously complex nuclear C³I systems seemed to present the very real threat that an unintended or inadvertent escalation resulting in a nuclear exchange could occur during the abnormal stress, information overload, and unfamiliar human and machine protocols that would accompany the crisis of a major military confrontation.¹⁴

But the dangers identified in these studies were not limited to nuclear weapons or nuclear confrontations. The complexity, speed, and lethality of even modern *conventional* weapons so tax human capabilities that even routine peacetime exercises sometimes end in disaster. A tragic case in point was the accidental firing in October 1992 of two missiles from the US aircraft carrier *Saratoga* during a NATO training exercise. One of these hit the Turkish destroyer *Muavenet*, killing five men including the captain.¹⁵ Under conditions of crisis or confrontation these dangers can multiply the chances of an actual armed clash beginning by accident, leading almost inevitably to further worsening of political and diplomatic relations, and perhaps even to further escalation. Here we will mention by way of illustration only two of the most dramatic examples: the shooting down of a civilian Iranian airliner by the USS *Vincennes*, and the recent confrontation between a nuclear submarine of the PRC Navy and the American carrier battle group led by the USS *Kitty Hawk*.

The numerous postmortems and analyses that followed the *Vincennes* incident showed conclusively that key officers in the ship's Combat Information Center (CIC) were under extreme stress, leading to a misidentification of the airliner as a hostile warplane.¹⁶ Despite the attention focused on the *Vincennes*, such mistakes are not uncommon.¹⁷ High levels of stress encountered in situations with high stakes and short decision times (such as in combat or crisis) are known to have a potent impact on an individual's ability to evaluate correctly and react appropriately to a complex and rapidly changing pattern of information.¹⁸

Given that modern weapons systems at the technological cutting edge can magnify the consequences of stress-induced behaviour into a catastrophic tactical outcome in a few minutes or even seconds, the lessons of the *Vincennes* incident extend well beyond the specifics of that engagement and the weapons systems involved. That such errors are relatively commonplace speaks more generally to the ability of contemporary naval and air forces to prevent future accidents. If one of these should occur in

¹⁴ See, *inter alia*, Andrea Demchuk, "The Risk of Accidental Nuclear War," *Proceedings of the Conference on the Risk of Accidental Nuclear War* (Vancouver: May 26-30, 1986); Michael D. Wallace, Brian Crissey, and Lynn Sennott, "Accidental Nuclear War: A Risk Assessment," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.23 No.1 (March 1986); Derek Paul, Michael D. Intrilligator and Paul Smoker (eds.), *Accidental Nuclear War: Proceedings of the Eighteenth Pugwash Workshop on Nuclear Forces* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1990); Bruce G. Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1993); Scott D. Sagan, *op.cit.*

¹⁵ *The New York Times*, October 3 & 5, 1992.

¹⁶ "Investigation Report: Formal Investigation into the Downing of Iran Air Flight 655 on 3 July 1988," *Department of Defense*, July 28, 1988, E-62 & E-66; D.R. Carlson, "The *Vincennes* Incident," letter in *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol.115 No.5 (May 1989), 87-92; John Barry and Roger Charles, "Sea of Lies," *Newsweek*, July 13, 1992, 29-39.

¹⁷ John F. Morton, "The US Navy in 1988," *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol.115 No.5; Les Aspin, "Navy Can't Afford to Stumble and Fumble Its Way into Battle," *The Los Angeles Times*, December 28, 1988.

¹⁸ See R. Hockey and P Hamilton, "The Cognitive Patterning of Stress States," in R. Hockey (ed.), *Stress and Fatigue in Human Performance* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley & Sons, 1983); Alexander George, "The Impact of Crisis-Induced Stress on Decision-Making," paper presented to the *18th Pugwash Workshop on Nuclear Forces* (Halifax, NS: May 17-21, 1989); G. Shouksmith and S. Burrough, "Job Stress Factors for New Zealand and Canadian Air Traffic Controllers," *Applied Psychology*, Vol.37 No.3 (1988), 263-270.

circumstances of crisis or confrontation, it might result in far greater loss of life, escalation to a higher level of conflict, or even all-out war. In the worst possible case, weapons of mass destruction might become involved. The potential for all of these outcomes was present in the second example, the confrontation on October 27-29 in the Yellow Sea between a PRC nuclear submarine and the *Kitty Hawk*'s carrier battle group.

The encounter began when anti-submarine warfare (ASW) aircraft from the *Kitty Hawk* detected the Chinese submarine off Shandong. The sub took action to elude its trackers, and was briefly successful in doing so.¹⁹ The Americans responded by dropping sonobuoys and, after reacquiring the sub, the *Kitty Hawk* and its (allegedly unarmed) aircraft continued to track it. In response, the PRC air force sent (allegedly unarmed) land-based fighter aircraft toward the aircraft from the *Kitty Hawk*. The confrontation ended when the submarine returned to base at Qingdao, but Chinese officials reportedly underlined their concern at what they claimed was a violation of their airspace and territorial waters by informing an American military attaché in Beijing that the next time such a situation arose, Chinese forces would have orders to “take appropriate defensive reactions.”²⁰

Confrontations involving submarines are always among the most ominous because of the difficulty of communication and the opacity of the combat environment,²¹ but this October incident is striking in its similarity to numerous US-Soviet encounters during the Cold War.²² In a paper that went to press before the Yellow Sea incident, we predicted that naval confrontations in the Asia Pacific region will become increasingly likely, that “the very presence of modern submarines [in the region] may attract the interest and attention of great power navies,” and that the Chinese Navy’s “long-term program of growth and modernization... may eventually lead to a clash with its neighbors.”²³

In short, the October incident in the Yellow Sea illustrates perfectly the potential dangers posed by a high-tech arms race in the Asia Pacific region.

IV. Is There Really an “Asian Arms Race”?

While demonstrating the putative dangers of an Asia Pacific arms race, we have not yet addressed the arguments of the skeptics who doubt whether the military buildup in the region should really be referred to as a true “arms race” in the proper sense of that term. Let us now turn to a closer look at how arms races are traditionally defined and identified, and examine the types of situations that typically lead to their onset.

¹⁹ An initial public account of this confrontation is in “Faceoff Between US Ship and Chinese Sub Is Revealed,” *The Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1994. According to officials at the American Embassy in Beijing, the reaction of Chinese officials was seriously exaggerated in this report. In fact, when a visiting retired US admiral jokingly “thanked” his Chinese counterparts for providing the *Kitty Hawk* battlegroup with a free ASW exercise opportunity, they responded with unfeigned hilarity. (Discussions held in Beijing and Tokyo, Jan. 21-22, 1995.) Should relations between the US and the PRC continue to deteriorate over trade, human rights, or other issues, the next incident might not have such a benign outcome. Both American and Chinese officials felt that an agreement to prevent incidents at sea was desirable.

²⁰ Barbara Starr, “‘Han Incident’ Proof of China’s Naval Ambition”, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, January 7, 1995, 5.

²¹ See R. Compton-Hall, *Submarine vs. Submarine: The Tactics and Technology of Underwater Confrontation* (New York: Orion Books, 1988).

²² See, for example, the account of the aggressive behavior of the attack submarine USS *La Jolla*, which on several occasions approached encounters with the Soviets in a manner “that would rival John Wayne.” T. Burgess, “Cover-up Aboard Nuclear Sub Alleged,” *The San Diego Union*, August 6, 1989. For a general overview of the problem in the Cold War context, see Michael D. Wallace and Charles A. Meconis, “Naval Rivalry and Command Survivability” in Douglas Ross and Frank Langdon (eds.) *Superpower Maritime Strategy in the Pacific* (London: Routledge, 1990).

²³ Michael D. Wallace and Charles A. Meconis, “Submarine Proliferation and Regional Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.30 No.1, 79-95.

Although the term “arms race” is often used by statesmen and journalists to describe almost any bilateral or multilateral increase either in military expenditure or military hardware, over a generation of applying mathematical analysis to the study of arms races has produced a consensus on a far more strict definition, comprising four key elements. First, an arms race is a buildup of military forces in reaction to or in anticipation of a similar buildup by a military rival; it is *not* an increase in forces driven in the main by domestic pressures or internal factors.²⁴ From this follows the second requirement, that an arms race is a *mutual* buildup. This mutuality does not necessarily imply that it is in lockstep; technical, fiscal and logistic factors may prevent this. But while there may be unilateral arms *buildups*, there is no such thing as a unilateral arms *race*.²⁵ Third, a true arms race is always characterized by an unusually, sometimes spectacularly, rapid rate of mutual buildup; in early studies by the first author demonstrating a link between arms races and war, a military buildup was not considered a true arms race unless both sides’ arms expenditure was not only increasing but *accelerating*, that is, their rates of increase were themselves increasing.²⁶ Finally, and again following from the first point, the purpose of an arms race is to achieve parity or superiority vis-à-vis a military rival, or conversely to *prevent* a rival from doing so. Consequently, the rival nations in an arms race must be, at least to a first approximation, roughly matched with respect to overall military capability. It would no sense, for example, to speak of an arms race between the US and Togo.

When we apply this rather strict definition to the contemporary Asia Pacific arms buildup, it is clear why many are leery of speaking of it as an “arms race”: on the surface, it would seem to fall short on at least some of these criteria. First, with regard to military spending, even the fastest-growing military establishments in the region are building up at a rate considerably less than that observed in such “classic” arms races as the Anglo-German buildup prior to WWII or the US-Soviet race prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis, measured in fiscal terms.²⁷ Moreover, many nations show far smaller rates of growth, well below those that would qualify them as arms race participants by any standard, while still others’ expenditures appear to fluctuate sharply over the last decade and a half.²⁸ When we add to the often confusing picture presented by these expenditure data the enormous differences in size and economic development among nations in the region, it would seem difficult indeed to pinpoint anything that closely resembles the “arms-tension spiral” that strategic analysts have in mind when they use the term “arms race.”

A second rationale for avoiding the arms race label, despite the fact that East Asia’s share of the total global volume of arms imports and production has nearly doubled in the last decade, is that absolute numbers remain low: all of the nations in the region put together have acquired only 155 naval craft of all types in the last 10 years.²⁹ A third argument is that much of the “buildup” is merely the replacement of obsolete equipment: as of 1992, 84% of the region’s combat aircraft were based on pre-1966 designs and, *inter alia*, all of Malaysia’s fast patrol craft were over 25 years old.³⁰ Fourth and finally, “the boom in the regional arms market is caused as much by competition among the suppliers as that among the buyers. It can be said that the real arms race in Southeast Asia is a race among the suppliers, rather than the recipients.”³¹

²⁴ Separating out the domestically-generated and externally-stimulated components of arms growth can be very difficult both conceptually and statistically. See Michael D. Wallace, “Accounting for Superpower Arms Spending” in Pat McGowan and Charles Kegley, Jr., (eds.), *Threats, Weapons, and Foreign Policy*, Sage International Yearbook of Foreign Policy Studies, Vol.5. (London: Sage Publications, 1980).

²⁵ See Michael D. Wallace, “Armaments and Escalation: Two Competing Hypotheses,” *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.26 No.1 (1982) 37-51.

²⁶ Wallace (1979), *op.cit.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Table I, and Gill, *op.cit.*, Table 13E.5.

²⁸ Selin, *op.cit.*, 2-5, and Gill, *loc.cit.* A further complication noted by Selin are the many discrepancies between data sources.

²⁹ Gill. *op.cit.*, Table 13E.2.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 556; Zain Amri, “The Malaysian Naval Force: Towards Blue-Water Capability,” *Asian Defence Journal*, June 1994, 10-20.

³¹ Amitav Acharya, “Why the Rush in Arms Upgrading in Southeast Asia?,” *Asian Defence Journal*, April 1994, 28.

But while there may be no all-out arms race in the region *now*, thoughtful observers from both Southeast and Northeast Asia are beginning to become concerned about the future. J.N. Mak of Malaysia's Institute of Maritime Affairs has recently concluded: "ASEAN force modernization can lead to an arms spiral.... The result could be a hostile arms race among certain members of the ASEAN grouping."³² Similarly, Kang Choi of the Korean Institute of Defence Analyses states: "I have reviewed the trends in arms trade and the possible consequences in East Asia. Given the regional characteristics of East Asia, we can expect that unrestricted arms and technology transfers are likely to make the regional security environment very unstable and more conflict-prone."³³ He urges that analysts begin to "focus on identifying security problems which will probably be caused by the proliferation of advanced weapons and technologies via an unrestricted arms trade."³⁴ We have determined that numerous factors identified by empirical studies as *precursors* of an arms race would seem to abound in the region.

V. Some Ominous Portents

No fewer than seven factors noted in the empirical literature as arms race precursors would appear to be present to a greater or lesser extent in the Asia Pacific region.

- 1) The existence of *enduring historical rivalries* between military contenders in the region.³⁵
- 2) The existence of significant *territorial disputes* which have led to armed hostilities or military confrontations in the region.³⁶
- 3) The involvement of *two or more military great powers* from inside or outside the region in regional disputes.³⁷
- 4) The acquisition of major military hardware as an *explicit reaction* to a perceived threat from another power.³⁸
- 5) *Militarized domestic elites* in at least some contending nations in the region, such that the military have a dominant influence in setting both political and budgetary priorities.³⁹
- 6) A pattern of military acquisitions in the region that focuses on *increasing offensive capabilities* rather than defensive ones.⁴⁰

³² J.N. Mak, "Confidence and Trust Needed", *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter*, Vol.21 Nos.6/7 (December 1994/January 1995), 24.

³³ Kang Choi, "Technology, Innovation and the Arms Trade: Trends Possible Consequences, and Dilemma", *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, Vol.24 No.3 (Winter 1993), 481.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 482.

³⁵ Erich Weede, "Nation-Environment Relations as Determinants of Hostilities among Nations," *Peace Science Society Papers* Vol.20 (1973), 67-90; F.W. Wayman, "War and Power Transitions during Enduring Rivalries," *Papers of the Institute for the Study of Conflict Theory and International Conflict*, (Champaign-Urbana ILL, 1982); Paul F. Diehl, "Arms Races to War: Testing Some Empirical Linkages," *Sociological Quarterly*, Vol.26 (1985), 331-349.

³⁶ Paul F. Diehl and Gary Goertz, "Territorial Changes and Militarized Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol.32 (1988), 103-122.

³⁷ Frank Wayman, J. David Singer, and Gary Goertz, "Capabilities, Allocations, and Success in Militarized Disputes and Wars," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol.27 (1983), 497-515; Charles S. Gochman and Zeev Maoz, "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-1976: Procedures, Patterns, and Insights," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol.28 (1984), 585-616.

³⁸ S. Plous, "Perceptual Illusions and Military Realities," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol.29 No.3 (Sept. 1985), 363-388.

³⁹ Bruce M. Russett and Harvey Starr, *World Politics: A Menu for Choice* (4th ed.), (New York: Freeman & CO, 1992), 323-324; Arnold Kanter, *Defense Politics: A Budgetary Perspective* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1979).

⁴⁰ John V. Gillespie, Dina A. Zinnes, Philip A. Schrodt, and G.S. Tahim, "Sensitivity Analysis of an Armaments Race Model" in McGowan and Kegley, *op.cit.*, 308-309; Michael D. Wallace, "Reagan and Vegetius: A Systematic Assessment of Some Assumptions of US Defense Policy", in John A. Vasquez (ed.), *Evaluating US*

7) A widely-shared perception that arms acquisitions are being driven by *technological momentum*, that staying militarily competitive requires the acquisition of the latest and most modern hardware.⁴¹

Within the scope of this study, we will limit our documentation to maritime issues and naval weapons, including aircraft. We will also sub-divide the vast “Asia Pacific” region into Northeast and Southeast Asia.

Enduring Historical Rivalries

First, although many characterize the region as being remarkably free of conflict at this time, there is no lack of *enduring historical rivalries*. In Northeast Asia, rivalries between and among Russia, China (and Taiwan), Japan and Korea have existed for centuries and exploded into the cataclysm of World War II. For the last 50 years these rivalries were locked into the Cold War framework, modified only by the US-PRC détente beginning in 1971. Now, however, as in other parts of the world, the older rivalries are beginning to re-emerge.⁴² In Southeast Asia there are historic rivalries involving Vietnam and China, and Indonesia and several of its neighbors, including China. The living memory of Japan’s role in World War II also remains very strong. It is true that these rivalries are relatively dormant now, but that could change quickly. For example, many worry about China after Deng -- and Indonesia after Suharto.

Territorial Disputes

With regard to the second factor, *territorial disputes* that have led to armed hostilities or military confrontations, East Asia is characterized by a long list of them.⁴³ In the maritime sphere, the formal entry into force of the UN Law of the Sea in November 1994 provides an institutional framework for defining and resolving maritime issues. Nevertheless, there persist a wide range of disagreements relating to Exclusive Economic Zones, territorial seas, and vital straits.

In Northeast Asia, the Russo-Japanese sovereignty dispute over the Kuriles or Northern Territories, and the standoff between China and Taiwan are the most obvious maritime issues. However, the naval dimension of the North-South Korea conflict is not insignificant.⁴⁴ In addition, South Korea and Japan have an unresolved dispute over the Liancourt Rocks (Takeshima or Tak-do) in the southern part of the Sea of Japan, as do Japan and China over the Senkaku or Diaoyutai islands in the East China Sea.⁴⁵

Despite improved relations and their announced commitment to the “one China, two systems” solution, the independence movement in Taiwan is causing great concern in Beijing. The People’s Republic of China will not allow Taiwan to break away. “They [Taiwan] can have everything but the flag” is the motto.⁴⁶ While an all-out invasion of Taiwan is an unlikely scenario, a naval blockade by the

Foreign Policy (New York: Praeger, 1986). Of course, we cannot infer offensive *capability* from the mere possession of offensive weapons if these cannot be maintained and integrated into existing force structures. J.N. Mak notes that ASEAN armed forces seem to lack a “maintenance culture,” which may detract substantially from their qualitative effectiveness. Cf. Mak (1994), 20-24.

⁴¹ Wallace, *ibid.*; Anatol Rapoport, “Behavioral Theories and Global Strategies,” in Vasquez (1994), *op.cit.*; Bruce M. Russett and Harvey Starr, *op.cit.*, 325.

⁴² Cf., for example, Douglas M. Johnston, “Anticipating Instability in the Asia-Pacific Region,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.15 No.3 (Summer 1992), 103-106.

⁴³ See Ball, *op.cit.*, Table 1, 88.

⁴⁴ The Ministry of National Defense, The Republic of Korea, *Defense White Paper 1993-1994*, 88-89. The South Koreans state that “North Korea has frequently penetrated the Northern Limit Line [in the Yellow Sea] near our five northernmost islands.”

⁴⁵ Ball, *op.cit.* Table 1.

⁴⁶ Conversations with Chinese officials and naval officers in Beijing, January 20, 1995; Cf. Dennis Van Vranken Hickney, “Interview with Sun Chen, Taiwan’s Defence Minister,” *Asian Defence Journal*, February 1994, 30-35;

PLA Navy is now seen as a greater threat. The first truly democratic elections scheduled for Taiwan in 1996 are reportedly contributing to a crisis atmosphere in Beijing.⁴⁷ Potential political instability in both nations makes the Taiwan-PRC situation the most likely maritime conflict in Northeast Asia.

In Southeast Asia, there are several very serious maritime territorial disputes and a host of minor ones. The most serious disputes are centred in the increasingly important South China Sea. China and Vietnam dispute possession of the Paracel (Hsisha/Hoang Sa) Islands, 165 nautical miles southeast of Hainan Island, and fought a brief but bloody battle over them in January of 1974. China and Vietnam are only two of the six claimants to the Spratly Islands (Nansha/Truong Sa) further south and fought another brief naval engagement there in March of 1988.⁴⁸

The increasing probability that the South China Seabed contains major deposits of oil, natural gas, and valuable minerals has greatly increased the likelihood of armed conflict over those resources despite rhetoric about co-development. The fact that China is now a net importer of oil is another critical factor.⁴⁹ At least two significant incidents have already occurred that may foreshadow greater violence to come. The first took place in July 1994, when, according to oil industry executives, two Chinese warships turned back at least one Vietnamese vessel attempting to resupply an oil rig in an area claimed by both countries. The Foreign Ministry in Beijing later confirmed that report in writing to Bloomberg Business News.⁵⁰ Although no shots were fired, the incident was a serious escalation.

The second incident occurred on February 8, 1995, when the Philippines discovered that China had occupied the aptly-named Mischief Reef in the Spratlys, just 200 km from the mainland island of Palawan. Both countries claim sovereignty over this reef. Eight PRC ships, some of them armed, backed up the occupation. China claims the structures erected on what it calls the Meiji Reef were only to provide shelter for fishing. Western intelligence officials say they are a guard post, complete with a satellite dish.⁵¹

There are at least four lesser maritime disputes: Indonesia and Vietnam dispute the demarcation line of the continental shelf between them, as do Vietnam and Malaysia. Malaysia and Singapore dispute the island of Pulau Baut Putih (Pedra Branca) some 55 km east of Singapore, and Malaysia and Indonesia have had armed confrontations over the islands of Sipidan, Sebatik, and Ligatan in the Celebes Sea.⁵²

Involvement of Military Great Powers

The third factor, the *involvement of two or more military great powers* in regional disputes, is also evident. Even if one uses the Cold War definition limiting “military great power” to confirmed nuclear

Peter Lewis Young, “Will Taiwanese Independence Become an Asia Pacific Security Issue?,” *Asian Defence Journal*, January 1994, 24-28,

⁴⁷ Ryoichi Hamamoto, “Suppressing Taiwan’s Independence Drive, China Increases Naval and Air Fighting Strength, Complete Encirclement Possible, Threats to Japan’s and South Korea’s Sea Lanes Too,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, January 24, 1995, 6. As early as June of 1992, the Republic of China Navy conducted its first sea control exercise codenamed “Light of China Number 8” in which there was a simulated attempt by the PLA Navy to cut off Taiwan’s seaborne trade. Afterwards the Taiwanese Defence minister Chen Li-an reportedly said that the likelihood of a Chinese blockade was now greater than the chance of an invasion. Prasun Sengupta, “Southeast Asian Naval Programmes, Part III,” *Naval Forces* Vol.14 No.1 (1993), 33.

⁴⁸ David Miller, “The Maritime Importance of the South China Sea”, *Naval Forces* Vol.14 No.2 (1993) 32-33. The other four claimants are Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Taiwan.

⁴⁹ Clare Hollingworth, “PLA fears Japan,” *Asia-Pacific Defense Reporter*, Vol. 21 Nos.6/7 (December 1994/January 1995), 31.

⁵⁰ Michael Richardson, “South China Sea: Strategic Signpost for Asia,” *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter* Vol.21 Nos.6/7 (December 1994/January 1994), 49-50.

⁵¹ Mitsuyuma Toshiyuki, “Spratlys China’s Structures Confirmed,” *Yomiuri Shinbun*, February 10, 1995; Nayan Chanda, Rigoberto Tiglao, and John McBeth, “Territorial Imperative,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, February 23, 1995, 14-16

⁵² Ball, *loc. cit.*

weapons states, Northeast Asia includes Russia, China, the United States (because of its major naval and air bases in Japan and South Korea) and, in a more limited way, North Korea. In the near to mid-term, it is unlikely that Russia will become militarily involved in the region, but the current debacle in Chechnya serves as a reminder that it is not impossible. Russia, the United States, and China all deploy submarine-launched ballistic missiles. Fortunately, both Russia and the United States have removed all tactical naval nuclear weapons from their navies.⁵³ While it is probable that China possesses tactical nuclear warheads, it is not known if they actually *deploy* any tactical naval nuclear weapons. The Sea Eagle missiles carried on some Chinese warships are thought to have that capability.⁵⁴

By the nuclear yardstick, the departure of the US military from its Philippines bases and of nearly all Russian presence from Vietnam leaves China as the only military great power directly involved in Southeast Asia. Despite the loss of the Philippines bases, however, it is clear that US naval forces will maintain a significant level of forward presence, with the assistance of several countries by means of “access” agreements -- including the Philippines. While the US has clearly indicated its intention to stay out of local disputes such as the Spratlys sovereignty imbroglio, the US has stated that “our strategic interest in maintaining the lines of communication linking Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean make it essential that we resist any maritime claims beyond those permitted by the Law of the Sea Convention.”⁵⁵

In the new multipolar world, it may no longer be appropriate to limit the category of “military great power” to nuclear nations, especially in regional terms. For example, in terms of conventional naval and air forces, and despite their largely “defensive” nature, Japan could easily be seen as a “military great power” in the region, and indeed *is* seen as such by some.

Acquisition as Reaction

The fourth factor contributing to a true arms race is the *acquisition of major weapons systems as an explicit reaction to a perceived threat* from another power. There are two clear cases in Northeast Asia.

South Korea has stated that “[i]n order to prevent North Korean submarines from cutting off our sea lines of communication, we have since the late 1980s pushed ahead with our plan to launch our own submarines, and succeeded in launching *Ichonham* and *Choimoosonham* in the 1,200-ton class in October 1992 and August 1993, respectively.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the current transformation of South Korea’s Navy toward a modern, three dimensional (sub-surface, surface, air) blue-water capability is said to be “focused on securing a qualitative superiority to counterbalance the North’s numerical edge....”⁵⁷ In addition to its first-ever deployment of German type 209 design submarines, South Korea is now building its first indigenous frigate, the 3900-ton KDX, with modern anti-air and anti-surface missiles, and adding new model helicopters and P-3C maritime patrol planes to its order of battle. There are design plans for a 7000+-ton anti-air war destroyer, presumably with an Aegis-like system.⁵⁸ For its part, North Korea continues to build about one obsolete *Romeo*-class submarine every two years and currently operates about 20 of that type. In a similar vein, South Korea states that the main purpose of its Korean Fighter

⁵³ *Jane’s Fighting Ships, 1994-1995* (Alexandria, VA: Jane’s Information Group).

⁵⁴ Robert S. Norris, Andrew S. Burrows, Richard W. Fieldhouse, *Nuclear Weapons Databook Volume 5: British, French, and Chinese Nuclear Weapons* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 370-372; Lt. Col. Larry M. Wortzel, US Army, “China Pursues Traditional Great-Power Status,” *Orbis*, Vol. 38 No.2 (Spring 1994), 163.

⁵⁵ Department of Defense, Office of International Security Affairs, *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia Pacific Region*, February 1995, 19-20.

⁵⁶ *Defense White Paper 1993-1994*, 103

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* This is of course not the whole story, and the sentence goes on to include “preparing for future changes in our security environment” to explain the modernization.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 103-194; *Jane’s Fighting Ships, 1994-1995*; Antony Preston, “Seeing the Big Picture: New Horizons for Command and Control Systems,” *Naval Forces*, Vol.15 No.6 (1994), 16.

Program acquisition of 120 F-16s is “to help compensate for North Korea’s numerical advantage in advanced fighters....”⁵⁹

It is clear that China and Taiwan are acquiring new weapons systems because of a mutual perceived threat, despite apparently improving relations.⁶⁰ While the old Kuomintang commitment to “retake the mainland” is obviously unrealistic today (albeit still manifested in the size of the ROC’s amphibious forces), a Chinese naval and air blockade of Taiwan in the event of a formal declaration of independence is all too likely. Consequently, in our estimation, a classic action-reaction arms race spiral is *already* occurring between China and Taiwan with regard to air and naval forces. As China modernizes its submarine force with nuclear attack submarines and state-of-the art Russian *Kilo*-class submarines, Taiwan is acquiring modern anti-submarine warfare surface ships and attempting to acquire (thus far without success) new conventional submarines. In response to China’s acquisition of third generation Russian SU-27s and MiG-31s, Taiwan is obtaining F-16s from the US and Mirages from France.⁶¹

In the case of China, of course, the modernization of her naval and air forces have *much* wider purposes and implications than the rivalry with Taiwan.⁶² This becomes quite apparent when the issue of the Southeast Asian region is taken into consideration. *At the level of official public rhetoric*, at this time no nation in Southeast Asia perceives a threat from any other, in the near-term.⁶³ Therefore, no one is officially acquiring weapons *against* anyone else. At the unofficial, off-the-record level, the truth is rather more troubling when the mid to long-term is taken into account. All the small countries of the region fear that the perceived withdrawal of Russia and the US will eventually encourage India, China or Japan to aspire to regional hegemony. The three potential hegemonies are suspicious of each other.⁶⁴

Moreover, it now appears that old rivalries among the nations of ASEAN may be resurfacing. While no one in the region will officially admit that they are arming against anyone else, the cycle of “contingency planning” against “uncertainty” may amount to the same thing in the end.⁶⁵

Dominant Military Elites

The fifth factor, the *presence of dominant military elites*, is obviously extant in the region. In Northeast Asia, the military wields enormous influence in China and North Korea. Moves toward democracy in Russia, South Korea and Taiwan have lessened the military’s influence in those nations, but it remains strong.

⁵⁹ *Defense White Paper 1993-1994*, 104-105.

⁶⁰ Hinkney, *op.cit.*

⁶¹ Anthony Leung, “Taiwan’s Shipbuilding Programmes”, *Naval Forces*, Vol.13 No.3 (1992); Hamamoto, *op. cit.*; Sengupta, *loc. cit.*; “Russia Confirms Mainland Sub Deal,” *China Post*, February 11, 1995. The \$US 1 billion dollar deal is for four submarines, one of which has already been delivered.

⁶² For a wider perspective on the transformation of China’s navy from a brown water coastal defence force to a green water navy with blue water aspirations see the following: Tai Ming Cheung, *Growth of Chinese Naval Power: Priorities, Goals, Missions, and Regional Implications* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1990); Jim Bussert, “The Chinese Navy -- A Pacific Wild Card,” *Defense Electronics*, July 1992, 48-53; Marion Rae, “China’s Navy: Tomorrow’s Threat or a Paper Tiger,” *Australian Defence Force Journal*, No.103 (November/December 1993), 53-58; Stephen L. Ryan, “The PLA Navy’s Search for a Blue Water Capability,” *Asian Defence Journal*, May 1994, 28-32; Wortzel, *op.cit.*; You Ji, “The PLA Navy in the Changing World Order: The South China Sea Theatre” in Dick Sherwood (ed.), *Maritime Power in the China Seas: Capabilities and Rationale* (Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1994).

⁶³ For example, Indonesia has stated that it faces no “immediate outside threat.” “Indonesia Content to Stay Military Dwarf,” *Business Times*, February 7, 1994.

⁶⁴ The authors gained this perception during multilateral dialogues on Asia Pacific maritime security and confidence-building measures in Seattle, WA in September of 1992, Bandung, Indonesia in June 1993, and Nakorn Pathom, Thailand in August 1994.

⁶⁵ Mak (1994), *op.cit.*

Economics is the dominant factor throughout Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, military elites continue to exercise great, if not dominant, influence in Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.

Increasing Offensive Capabilities

The sixth arms race precursor is also the most controversial: *a pattern of acquisitions which focuses on increasing offensive capabilities*. Of course, regional military and political leaders offer plausible and exclusively “defensive” rationales for the current naval arms buildup.⁶⁶ Debates about the “offensive” or “defensive” nature of naval strategy, doctrine, operations, tactics, weapons platforms, and systems have gone on for decades without any prospect of resolution.

Eric Grove has pointed out that a basic philosophical divide now exists between two schools of thought in maritime strategy. On the one side are those who argue that the “defence is superior” position of Clausewitz is reversed at sea, and thus the offensive is the stronger form of war in the naval environment. On the other side are those who, following the British maritime strategist Corbett, maintain the opposite and warn against confusing the “offensive” with the “initiative.” Grove concludes that virtually all naval platforms and weapons are *inherently ambiguous* in terms of their offensiveness and defensiveness at the strategic or operational level.⁶⁷

Going beyond “ambiguity,” there are strong arguments in favour of the position that naval forces are in fact *basically stabilizing*. Chief among these arguments are the following:

- 1) The largely international nature of the ocean environment usually allows naval deployment without raising issues of sovereignty;
- 2) The three-dimensional vastness of the ocean environment allows naval forces to be deployed out of sight and to be easily withdrawn;
- 3) The difficulty of locating warships (especially submarines) makes them less prone to preemptive attack;
- 4) Unless they are armed with nuclear weapons, navies cannot inflict decisive damage on a state by bombardment; amphibious forces are generally only able to take limited objectives on their own.⁶⁸

The overall validity of these arguments seems unassailable. However, we hold that *in the East Asian maritime environment* (and, for that matter, in what the Italian Navy calls the “Enlarged Med” including the Persian Gulf) *most of these arguments are considerably weakened*.

To begin with, the geography of the region, combined with the impact of the UN Law of the Sea, means that a large portion of the ocean environment consists of territorial waters (and conflicting claims of territorial waters), resource-rich exclusive economic zones with *their* conflicting claims, and vital straits which constitute a rare exception to the rule that there are no such things as “sea lanes.” Consequently, *naval deployments in this region, especially in Southeast Asia, frequently raise issues of sovereignty*, however spurious some of them may be from one party’s viewpoint. The October 1994 Yellow Sea incident is an example: while the PRC did not object to harassment of their submarine at sea, they claimed a violation of their territorial airspace and waters.⁶⁹

Second, the many constricted and shallow waters of the region also render warships both more visible from nearby coasts and often more locatable than in an open ocean environment.

Third, the relatively limited number of high value naval assets in the region, including submarines, increases the *incentive* to attack preemptively, however difficult that remains in practice.

Finally, the small size (for example, Singapore) and the island nature (from Japan down to Indonesia) of many nations in the region renders them vulnerable to “decisive” attack from the sea, especially to blockade.

⁶⁶ Cf. Sherwood, *op.cit.*, for an overview.

⁶⁷ Eric Grove, “Naval Technology and Stability,” in Smit, Grin, and Voronkov (eds.), *op.cit.*

⁶⁸ Grove, *ibid.*; J.R. Hill, *Arms Control at Sea* (Annapolis, IN: Naval Institute Press, 1989), 155.

⁶⁹ Starr, *op.cit.*

Within this context, the introduction of certain types of naval and air platforms and weapons *is* causing concern in the region, and *these weapons are likely to be destabilizing*, not only in our opinion, but, far more significantly, in the view of a growing number of analysts from within the region.

Third generation fighter aircraft (MiG-29s and 31s, SU-27s, F-16s and F/A-18s) are being acquired by many countries in the region. Many of these aircraft have the ability to launch anti-ship missiles, and are thus “naval” weapons even where operated by “air” forces.⁷⁰

There are two means of greatly extending the range of strike aircraft: *in-flight refueling and aircraft carriers*. Japan has acquired in-flight refueling capabilities, and there are reports that China is approaching that capability.⁷¹

At present, the United States Navy is the only force that routinely operates aircraft carriers in the region, given the demise of the Russian Pacific Fleet’s capability. That is about to change, and the change is causing anxiety. Thailand’s navy has laid down the keel of its first carrier, the 11,485-ton *Chakri Nareubet*, which will be capable of deploying up to 12 vertical/short takeoff and landing (V/STOL) fighters.⁷² Why the concern over the introduction of a single small V/STOL aircraft carrier? Friedman explains:

In a region of small navies, the one regional power that has the ability to concentrate forces may well have an overwhelming advantage. Even small carriers launching V/STOL aircraft may provide just that edge, simply because they can launch air attacks from beyond the defensive range of existing surface ships.⁷³

Grove concurs: “Only the USN can think of taking on a first-class land-based air force but there are not many of those about. Even a few V/STOL fighters, equipped with the right weapons, can make all the difference in an area of more limited threat.”⁷⁴

Concern over Thailand’s carrier is greatly overshadowed by persistent reports that the PLA Navy intends to acquire one or more aircraft carriers. In 1992, rumors (since proven false) indicated that China would acquire the second, mostly finished *Kuznetsov* class aircraft carrier from Ukraine. According to one report, feasibility studies began in the early 1980s, catapult launch tests in 1987 and a visit to a US carrier in 1988 spurred the effort. In November 1990 PRC engineers reportedly briefed officials on a plan for a carrier of some 40,000 to 50,000 tons, with a 70 metre long deck, that could hold a total of 20 conventional fixed wing planes on deck and another 20 in the hangar. In 1993, Vice Admiral Zhang Yuanhai made public that a 1.2 billion yuan research and development program was underway for a carrier, but that no production had actually begun.⁷⁵ Most recently two confirming reports, one citing anonymous sources and the other a Chinese analyst now living in Canada, have appeared in the Japanese press. These reports state that the China’s Central Military Commission has decided to build two 40,000-ton conventional aircraft carriers in a 10 year plan beginning in 1996, and as part of their overall Fifty Year Plan.⁷⁶ While the details remain a matter of controversy, You Ji has concluded that “it is no longer a question of whether China will have a carrier, but what will be its characteristics and when will it enter service.”⁷⁷

⁷⁰ *Asian Security 1994-1995*, 14-17.

⁷¹ Wortzel, *op.cit.*, 169.

⁷² *Jane’s Fighting Ships 1994-1994*, 684; Antony Preston, “The Naval Balance 1994,” *Naval Forces*, Vol.15 No.2 (1994), 19. The Thai Navy wants a second carrier, but funds are probably lacking.

⁷³ Norman Friedman, “Naval Aviation for Pacific Navies” in Hugh Smith and Anthony Bergin (eds.), *Naval Power in the Pacific: Toward the Year 2000* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993), 118.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; Eric Grove, “Navies in Future Conflicts”, 168.

⁷⁵ Ryan, *op.cit.*, 31; You Ji, *op.cit.*, 93-95.

⁷⁶ Toshiaki Arai, “China Plans to Build Two Aircraft Carriers”, *Daily Yomiuri*, January 16, 1995; Hamamoto, *op.cit.* The cost of this project is reportedly estimated at 10 billion yuan (approx \$1.2 billion US) and will, of course, rise. Some doubt China’s ability to afford such a project. Others note that similar economic sacrifices were made to support the nuclear submarine program. Cf. John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China’s Strategic Seapower: The Politics of Force Modernization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁷⁷ You Ji, *op.cit.*, 93.

Many nations in the region are acquiring *modern conventional submarines*, some for the first time. We have argued at length elsewhere that submarines are destabilizing because of their ability to launch devastating surprise attacks, and because of the great difficulty of retaining command and control of them under crisis conditions.⁷⁸ It is true that in the strategic nuclear context, their relative invulnerability (only while at sea and underwater) has been judged to be a stabilizing factor -- although that did not prevent NATO plans for a strategic ASW campaign against Soviet subs. It is much less so in a conventional conflict/crisis, especially if small numbers are usually involved. During an escalating crisis, preemptive attacks against submarines in port, on the surface, or unlucky enough to be found and fixed at a critical moment are highly likely. The US destroyer *Ward* fired the first shot at Pearl Harbor, over an hour before Japanese aircraft began their attack -- and sank a Japanese submarine.⁷⁹ *The critical point is that potentially offensive capabilities are increasing throughout the region, and that once these capabilities are in place, a subsequent change of intentions could transform the strategic environment.*⁸⁰

Technological Momentum

The seventh and last arms precursor factor, the widely-shared perception that *arms acquisitions are being driven by technological momentum* that requires obtaining the best to stay even, is clearly evident throughout the region and is even officially acknowledged. For example, Thailand's first Defence White Paper states:

The Persian Gulf War is an example of modern war resulting from the accumulation of weapons of high capability and technology. Iraq had stockpiled a large quantity of weapons for a long time before it invaded Kuwait. Asia Pacific countries have begun to accumulate high technology offensive weapons, such as aircraft, ships and submarines, increased the mobility of their land forces, and improved the capability of defensive weapons such as surveillance equipment and anti-aircraft missiles. Even though at present there are no clear threats, activities or incidents involving the use of force, the stockpiling of such weapons by each country in the region has increased their capability to wage war. Therefore Thailand has to maintain Armed Forces which can safeguard the country and protect national interests, while ensuring the confidence of the people and allies.⁸¹

There are other factors involved, of course. The dual-use nature of high technology means that weapons acquisition also provides access to civilian technology. The desire for prestige and the presence of corruption among government and business agents are also involved. The point remains that the technological momentum of weapons development is an important factor in the current buildup.

VI. Conclusion

Based on these findings, we conclude that while there is not now, in the full and formal sense, a "naval arms race" throughout the Asia Pacific region, there *is* a naval arms race occurring between the PRC and Taiwan, and *the "precursors" of such an arms race are now fully in place in Northeast Asia. In*

⁷⁸ Wallace and Meconis (1995), *op.cit.*

⁷⁹ Theodore Roscoe, *United States Destroyer Operations in World War II* (Abridged Edition) (New York: Bantam Books, 1960.), 29-31. Under the circumstances this attack was hardly "destabilizing" of course. In fact the tragedy was that word of the incident apparently never reached headquarters in Pearl Harbor. But it *might* have been. Suffice it to say, for example, that any conflict between the US and Iran would almost certainly entail early attacks on any of Iran's *Kilo*-class submarines unlucky enough to be located.

⁸⁰ Acharya, *op.cit.*, 30.

⁸¹ Ministry of Defence, *The Defence of Thailand 1994*, 38.

Southeast Asia, there is a clear danger of an intra-ASEAN naval arms race which could have a negative impact within that region, even if it had no wider consequences.

There is no cause for alarm, but there *is* cause for concern, careful monitoring -- and action. Fortunately, it takes a long time to design, build and deploy naval and air weapons and, even more important, to train personnel to operate and maintain them. A “20-20” vision of the region, however, might be troubling indeed. In addition, a sudden increase in political tensions within the region could speed things up.

What needs to be done? What is feasible? Those are two very different questions. One regional observer has concluded that

the necessity to introduce some forms of arms and technology transfer control into the region exists. However, necessity does not equal feasibility. In the absence of immediate danger of armed conflict, the discriminatory nature of arms trade control, the dependency argument, the problems on the supply side, and the problem of defining weapons and technologies under restriction are the stumbling blocks.... East Asia is not ready for arms trade control.⁸²

Over the last five years a procession of regional conferences and dialogues, both official and “track two,” have arrived at a consensus: what is both needed *and* feasible (at least in the medium term) is a combination of maritime security and confidence building measures (CSBMs) or “risk reduction” measures, and new forms of multinational naval cooperation leading toward cooperative maritime security regimes.⁸³

Among the CSBMs, the most promising involve building on and modifying existing agreements to prevent incidents at sea and dangerous military activities, and establishing or expanding measures of transparency such as compliance with and improving the UN or regional arms registers and the regular issue of truthful official Defence White Papers.

With regard to constructing cooperative maritime security regimes, navigation safety measures and joint search and rescue operations are cited as the two most feasible forms of cooperation. In the much longer term, more formal procedures such as joint exercises or the formation of multinational naval forces might be considered.

The inauguration of an official security forum (ARF) last year under the auspices of ASEAN was a hopeful step, if insufficient. The unofficial multilateral Council on Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the Western Pacific Naval Symposium series (WPNS) are other important mechanisms for dialogue. Western observers who note that “talk is cheap” run into the Asian conviction that “process is paramount” and consensus more important than reaching a decision. If time is not “short” in this matter, neither is there any time to waste. Now is the time to begin constructing official mechanisms that put some of these excellent proposals *into practice*. Otherwise, as Malaysia’s Mak puts it “we can all go over the edge before we know it.”⁸⁴

⁸² Kang Choi, *op.cit.*, 481-482.

⁸³ For two recent summaries of this activity see Andrew Mack and Pauline Kerr, “The Evolving Security Discourse in the Asia-Pacific,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.18 No.1 (Winter 1995), 123-140; Charles A. Meconis, “Naval Arms Control in the Asia-Pacific Region After the Cold War” in Elisabeth Mann Borgheese, Norton Ginsburg and Joseph R. Morgan (eds.), *Ocean Yearbook 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 351-367. For an in-depth treatment of the CSBM issue, see Desmond Ball, *Building Blocks for Regional Security: An Australian Perspective on Confidence and Security Building Mechanisms (CSBMs) in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1991); Andrew Mack (ed.), *A Peaceful Ocean? Maritime Security in the Pacific in the Post-Cold War Era* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1993); Stanley B. Weeks, “Risk Reduction and Maritime Security in Asia and the Pacific,” Paper prepared for the *Seventh United Nations Regional Disarmament Meeting in the Asia Pacific Region* (Kathmandu, Nepal: February 13-15, 1995). On the topic of naval cooperation see Captain Alexander S. Skaridov, RFN, Commander David D. Thompson, USN and Lt. Commander Yang Zhiquan, PLA(N), *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security: New Possibilities for Naval Cooperation?* (Stanford University: Center for International Security and Arms Control, February 1994).

⁸⁴ Mak (1994/5), *op.cit.*, 23.