

not suffice to create a Middle East free of WMD. Yet even if this goal is not achieved any time soon, such an exercise would hopefully accomplish one major task: namely, the formulation of more accurate assessments of the *real* causes of the continued lack of progress and

the *real* reasons for regional states' rigid positions. This is the toughest nut to crack. But if these murky issues can be clarified, further discussions around the optimal approach to a WMD-free zone in the Middle East are likely to be much more fruitful.

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## Arms Races and Conferences: Asia's Naval Build-Ups through the Lens of History

Bruno Hellendorff and Thierry Kellner



*A revised version of the 1921 Washington Conference could prove useful in facilitating dialogue in the face of ongoing naval modernisation in the Asia-Pacific.*

Over the last two decades, the rise of China and its quest for status on the international stage has resulted in profound changes to the global balance of power, constituting a source of considerable anxiety in many countries. With Beijing investing heavily in the modernisation and development of its military, especially in the maritime domain, uncertainty over its aims and ambitions has become an existential question for some of its neighbours. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines have much at stake in the face of a rising China beefing up its potential for coercion in this domain. These and other countries in East, Southeast and even South Asia have displayed great creativity in implementing hedging strategies, cautiously welcoming Washington's rebalancing towards Asia, while also nurturing ambitions of their own.

As the American author Mark Twain once commented, 'History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme'. In the first half of the twentieth century, the

rising power of Asia was Japan, whose push for great-power status exacerbated tensions across the region and beyond. Then, defence of the status quo prompted US President Warren G Harding to convene a conference on the limitation of armaments in the region – the Washington Conference – between November 1921 and February 1922.

This was the first time such a conference, held outside the framework of the League of Nations, had taken place in the US. Nine countries attended, most of them – with the notable exception of China – naval and colonial powers of the time. These included Japan, France, the UK, Italy, Holland, Portugal and Belgium. Soviet Russia was not invited, despite its considerable stake in the region.

Negotiations were primarily geared towards naval disarmament in the Pacific, with the aim of capping the construction of capital ships. Their success was a matter of debate. To some, the multiple treaties that resulted effectively curtailed the arms race, and ensured stability in the region

throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. To others, by focusing on capital ships and tonnage, the treaties agreed at the conference were already obsolete upon their signing. Critics also argued that the treaties weakened US and British naval forces while leaving Japan to build up its own forces; when Tokyo denounced the treaties in 1936, its navy was practically second to none in the region.

Despite debates around its success, however, it might be asked whether, almost a century later, a modernised version of such a conference might help to deal with the competing programmes of naval modernisation witnessed in the region today. Certainly, the picture is just as complex now as it was in 1921, if not more so. The rise of China and the modernisation of its military cannot account for the full range of security developments across the vast Asia-Pacific region. Nor can this modernisation be described as intrinsically aggressive: China has legitimate interests to defend. Finally, it is important to remember that the whole of Asia is rising, and its constituent



Soldiers stand guard on Chinese aircraft carrier the *Liaoning*. Courtesy Zhang Kai/Color China Photo/AP Images.

parts all have their own ambitions, including enhanced international status.

However, by its sheer scope and the ambiguity of its aims, China's military modernisation is destabilising. SIPRI data provide a striking picture of Chinese military spending skyrocketing by 325.5 per cent between 2000 and 2012, to a probably still underestimated total of US\$166 billion, an important part of which has been spent on the People's Liberation Army Navy. No other country can match the rate and scope of such modernisation. Flagship programmes, such as the refitting of a former Soviet aircraft carrier (renamed the *Liaoning*); the development of an indigenous class of carriers; the construction of several classes of submarine; and the development of a dedicated naval base in Sanya, in Hainan, are all powerful symbols of China's swelling capabilities and ambitions.

Another telling indication is the merging of Beijing's various maritime and law-enforcement agencies – its so-called 'five dragons' – into a unified Coast Guard commanded by the State Oceanic Administration. Adding to this is the creation, in 2012, of a Central Leading Small Group on the Protection of Maritime Interests to co-ordinate China's maritime policy, reporting to the Politburo and the country's top leaders. Finally, the enhanced capabilities and enlarged mandate of China's Coast Guard, along with Beijing's vigorous assertion of its claims in maritime disputes, contribute to the image of a more assertive China, with significant

consequences in terms its regional and global standing.

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### Japan seems set on a path of military 'normalisation'

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Partly in response to these developments and partly in line with the more specific calculi and strategies of each state, almost all other Asia-Pacific countries are undertaking their own military build-ups. Under returning Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan seems set on a path of military 'normalisation'. Regulations governing dual-use and military-hardware exports have already been relaxed, while, in August 2013, the Japanese navy unveiled its first *Izumo*-class destroyer, the largest ship built in the country since the Second World War.

South Korea is also investing significantly in the modernisation of its military and the development of its defence industry. Its navy recently acquired thirteen diesel-electric submarines, as well as Aegis destroyers and large amphibious ships; capabilities which far outweigh those required to respond to the North Korean threat. South Korea is also building a naval base on Jeju, one of its southernmost islands, far from Pyongyang but strategically located between Japan and China.

In Southeast Asia, arms build-ups are also a key part of the current strategic landscape, with military spending increasing by 62 per cent between 2002

and 2012, according to SIPRI estimates. Part of this increase can be attributed to the growing frequency of incidents in the South China Sea. Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as Australia, Taiwan and India, have all either embarked on reinforcements of their existing submarine fleets or explicitly considered the idea of developing such fleets.

There is, however, no clear-cut answer to the question of whether this constitutes an arms race across the wider region. Much of the increase in military spending is primarily related to high growth rates in the various regional economies, while specific domestic contexts also play an important part. Yet the drivers of the region's various military modernisation programmes are nevertheless overlapping and interconnected. In particular, China's move towards the possession of a blue-water navy and its expansion towards what is referred to as the 'second island chain' appear clearly politicised. This is confirmed by media hype surrounding the *Liaoning's* sea trials; China's *Global Times* even released pictures of officers standing on deck forming the words 'The Chinese dream, the dream of a powerful army'. The ambiguities of this slogan and its nationalistic tone are disturbingly reminiscent of the *Weltpolitik* of Wilhelmine Germany.

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### Diplomacy has a key role to play today

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While historians now largely agree that *Weltpolitik* was primarily designed to satisfy domestic constituencies, it had a strong impact on great-power relations at the time, exacerbating fears, misperceptions and rivalry, with all too familiar consequences. As such, diplomacy today has a key role to play in creating the international safeguards that limit the possibility of tensions spiralling out of control. The pertinent question concerns the best means for it to do so. Collective-security frameworks provide a number of options. Regional multilateral fora, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

and its offshoots – the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus, for example – do as well.

However, much like in 1921, existing collective-security mechanisms may not be the way to go. As with the League of Nations then, the UN today appears poorly adapted to addressing the destabilising effects of concomitant and potentially concurrent naval build-ups, especially those undertaken by great powers. So far, ASEAN-centred fora have also revealed an uneven commitment by regional states to institution-building and to the multilateral management of such issues.

In this context, it might be asked whether a standalone initiative, in the form of a revised version of the Washington Conference, would be useful; and if so, which states, groups of states or foreign facilitators could provide the platform for such a project. Certainly, if the US were to promote the idea of a new Washington Conference, it would be met with strong resistance from China. Not only would such an initiative probably be interpreted as yet another unwelcome attempt to balance against China, it would also invoke unhappy memories of a time when China was at the mercy of external

powers. Attaining sponsorship of the conference by other regional players would also be problematic, insofar as they all have their own interests to defend and very little incentive to antagonise either China, an indispensable trading partner, or the US, an indispensable security partner.

While bearing these issues in mind, however, there are two possible roadmaps to reach the objectives of such a conference. The first is that China chooses to address the vital issues of trust, conflict management and escalation control multilaterally by initiating and accepting the establishment of a single conference, rather than a broader disarmament process, that builds on initiatives already being pursued in the region. These include discussions around a code of conduct in the South China Sea and the East China Sea Peace Initiative, promoted by Taiwan. The second option is that external players, such as European states and institutions, act as facilitators of such a discussion, intervening as mediators and go-betweens. The EU has long fought to be considered an important security actor in East Asia and the Pacific, and it recently stepped up its engagement with ASEAN and a number of states in the region. In order

to enhance its own credibility, it could well be keen to take on an initiative of this kind.

However, any such conference could still be impeded by a number of the same obstacles encountered in the 1920s, and a consideration of these issues is essential. The first lesson to emerge from this period is the fact that disarmament cannot work without trust and control. Second, it is clear that addressing the symptoms without paying attention to the root causes will not prevent war from breaking out. Third, it is important to acknowledge that if political will at the domestic level is not mobilised in favour of disarmament, then diplomacy is of little assistance. Today, what is therefore required from all involved is a bit of common sense, historical awareness and, above all, a genuine intention, at the very least, to talk.

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## The Shadow of Chinese Cyber-Operations

Duncan Rogers



*The proliferation of cyber-attacks and the inability to prove their source beyond doubt suggest that the cybersphere will remain a heavily contested strategic domain – with China considered a major player in this regard.*

The last twelve months have witnessed a significant, and very public, discussion on China in cyberspace. In February 2013, for the first time, a report promulgated by US

private security company Mandiant attributed a series of cyber-intrusions to a Chinese military body, Unit 61398 of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Ensuing Sino-US commentary reached

new extremes, with Chairman of the US House Intelligence Committee Mike Rogers equating Chinese cyber-attacks to 'cyberterrorism that makes 9/11 pale in comparison', and estimating the total