China as a Military Power 1700-2050, Jeremy Black

Conventionally, this age would be divided into three periods. First, would come the height of Manchu military power in the eighteenth century. Secondly, would come a period of relative and absolute decline in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thirdly, comes the revival of Chinese military power from the 1940s under the Chinese Communist Party. As with most conventional accounts, there is much that it is well-founded in this typology. It draws together themes in global military history, international relations, and Chinese public history. At the same time that there is room to ask some questions about the conventional account, the latter also provides the background for thinking about the present and future situation, for discussion of the past helps frame strategic culture and, therefore, affects views of desirable and necessary future outcomes.

The ultimate persistent failure of the Manchu dynasty to defend Chinese interests in the nineteenth century helped lead to its collapse in the early twentieth century, to the creation of the Chinese republic, and to the background to Chinese Communism which, in part, also drew on a nationalist rejection of foreign intervention. This failure, however, tells us little about the earlier strength of the dynasty once it had acculturated in China. Indeed, between 1660 and 1800, China took a leading role in East Asia, and at a time when there was no comparable power in South Asia. Thus, in terms of the population/space ratio, China was the most powerful state in the world.

It was able to defeat not only non-Western powers but also Western empires. The Dutch were defeated in Taiwan and the Russians in the Amur Valley. The former verdict, one of 1661-2, was never reversed, and Taiwan was not held by a non-Chinese power until conquered by Japan in the late nineteenth century. Having agreed, by the Treaty of Nerchinsk of 1689 to abandon its attempt to establish a presence in the Amur Valley, Russia did not renew its efforts, even though Peter the Great (r. 1689-1725) and his successors were expansionist in intention and aggressive in attitude. This verdict in the Amur valley was not reversed until 1858-60 when the Chinese government suffered multiple attacks.

Also in 1660-1800, the Manchu overcame numerous rebellions as well as greatly expanding the boundaries of the empire. The Zunghars of Xinjiang were heavily defeated in Mongolia in the 1690s and destroyed in Xinjiang in the 1750s. The struggle was linked to that for control over Tibet, which was largely settled with the victorious dispatch of two Chinese armies to Lhasa in 1720.

The Zunghar ruler, Dawaii, was defeated and captured at the Ili river in a night attack on 2 July 1755, an unexpectedly quick success. However, Amursana, a Khoit prince who had

initially helped the Chinese in this campaign, rebelled in August 1755, as he felt that their new arrangements left him little scope. Pan-ti, the Manchu marshal who had commanded the invasion in 1755, was surrounded by Amursana's forces later that year and committed suicide; a response to failure and an alternative to surrender, both of which were humiliations. In 1756, moreover, some of the Khalka Mongols launched a supporting rebellion.

The situation was saved by Zhaohui who held on in the oasis of Urumchi over the winter of 1756-7 until reinforcements from the garrison-town of Barkol could arrive. In 1757, the Chinese forces advanced anew and Amursana fled into Russia, dying there of smallpox in September. The Russians had refused to provide help to Amursana, just as they had earlier turned down Dawaci. There was a mass slaughter of Zunghars that year as well as devastating smallpox. The fragile nature of their Zunghar confederation had contributed to its failure, as Chinese success led to defections by subordinate tribes: there was no longer confidence in the ability of the confederation to produce spoils or tribute. Instead, many tribes switched to being tributaries of the Manchu.

China had solved the logistical problems central in managing steppe warfare, which was considered the supreme strategic threat by all Chinese dynasties. In the 1750s, the Chinese established two chains of magazine posts along the main roads on which they advanced. Supplies were transported for thousands of miles, and the Mongolian homelands controlled by their eastern Mongol allies provided the horses and fodder. These improvements in logistics – partly due to a desire to keep the troops from alienating the populace and partly to the latter's very lack of food – ensured that the Chinese armies did not disintegrate as Napoleon's did in 1812 when he encountered serious problems in invading Russia despite advancing over a shorter distance. Comparisons are difficult, not least because Napoleon faced greater resistance than the Manchu armies had done in 1755, but the contrast in the supply situation was very important.

In order to wage war with the Zunghars, there was a massive transfer of resources from eastern to western China. As with other instances of Chinese warmaking, this capacity reflected both administrative capability and the extensive resources of well-developed mercantile networks. Alongside the capability of the government system, however, it was also affected by limitations, including the leakage of tax revenue to officials and the extent of illegal tax farming. This situation, nevertheless, also helped in drawing on non-governmental resources. More generally, for both financial and organisational reasons, the extent of commercialisation and market integration in the Chinese economy was important. Economic strength and logistical capability had foci and links in the stability and range of entrepreneurial networks, and in the relative effectiveness of state finances, conspicuously in comparison with all other major Asian states.

The application to military purposes of the great demographic and agricultural expansion of China during the century was also seen, at a smaller scale, in Western warmaking. More specifically, just as the expansion of arable farming in Ukraine and Hungary served as a basis for enhancing and sustaining Russian and Austrian operations against the Turks (without, however, guaranteeing success), so the Chinese benefited from the extension of arable farming in Gansu.

These achievements proved the basis for fresh successes. Having conquered Xinjiang, the Chinese pressed on to advance into eastern Turkestan. This had rebelled against the Zunghars in 1753-4, in part as a Muslim rejection of their rule, only to be captured in 1755 by the Afaqi Makhdumzadas led by the Great and the Little Khojas. In 1758, the Chinese under Chao Huei invaded. Success was initially limited as the towns of Kashgar and Yarkand held out, but, in 1759, reinforcements helped lead to their fall. The Khojas took refuge in the region of Badakhshan in north-east Afghanistan, but the ruler yielded to Chinese pressure and executed them. Subsequently, the Chinese encountered renewed problems in eastern Turkestan. A Muslim rising in 1765 was to be suppressed and tens of thousands of people were then deported.

The establishment in the new conquests, especially the Ili valley south of Lake Balkhash, of a large number of colonists, many enforced, led to a marked increase in agricultural production there, supporting the Chinese military presence. Moreover, there was a change in the type of agriculture and society, with the Chinese shifting the focus from animal husbandry to cultivation. The Chinese also became a major player in the politics of influence among the Kazakhs. From Tibet, the Chinese intervened in Nepal in 1791 in order to counter Gurkha expansionism into Tibet. This expansionism was stopped.

Not all Chinese expansionism was successful. Burma in the 1760s and Vietnam in the 1780s proved to be tasks that were too difficult, in the first case due to the problems of the campaigning region, notably disease, as well as to the strength of the resistance, and in the second case because China's protégés, the exiled Le dynasty, were unpopular. Nevertheless, neither Burma nor Vietnam was able to challenge China's position. The key point was that overall neighbouring powers sought Chinese acceptance, accepted much of China's viewpoint, or were defeated. Moreover, the Chinese did better than other powers. There was no permanent schism in empire comparable to the British loss of thirteen North American colonies in 1775-83, nor anything comparable to the arrival of foreign troops in Beijing seen in such capitals as Berlin in 1760 and 1806, Vienna in 1805, Moscow and Washington in 1812, and Paris in 1814 and 1815.

Thus, to seek for long-term military causes for the successive crises China was to encounter from the Opium War to the Second World War is problematic. The most obvious link was the lack of a significant green water, let alone blue water, navy, as well as the lack of island positions further distant than Taiwan and Hainan. As a result, China was vulnerable to naval pressure and amphibious attack.

To explain something that did not happen is always difficult, not least if blame is to be ascribed. That China did not develop a major naval force in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century can be linked to the origins of the Manchu dynasty and their commitment to steppe warfare. In turn, this can be presented as 'un-Chinese', if the dynasty is to be seen in that light. Alternatively, or in addition, the emphasis can be on the lack of any need for such a force. There was no maritime attack on China during the eighteenth century, and the revival in piracy toward the close of the century did not require a transformation in naval capability. On the other hand, consideration of Russia indicated how it had become a major naval power in the eighteenth century out of nothing, while, from the late 1790s, the USA also developed a navy. China lacked the international naval expertise Russia and the USA drew on, but there was no inherent reason why it should not have developed a navy earlier.

The lack of one exposed China to attack in the First Opium War (1839-42), an attack that was more impressive given Britain's commitments elsewhere at the same time, notably against Egypt (successfully) and in Afghanistan (unsuccessfully). Guangzhou was taken in 1841, at the cost of only light British casualties. In 1842, Chapu, Woosung and Shanghai followed, and China accepted British terms when British forces which had navigated up the Yangzi River were just about to bombard Nanjing and cut the Grand Canal, the major Chinese trade route. Nevertheless, the force threatening Nanjing had been reduced from 12,000 fighting men to about 3,500 fit for action, largely due to disease; and, had China had a ruler of the calibre of the Kangzi emperor of the late seventeenth century, the British would have faced a more difficult situation, especially if that ruler was determined to fight on.

China, moreover, was not alone in experiencing Western pressure. The same process was seen elsewhere, notably with American naval intimidation of Japan in 1853-4, and with a Franco-Spanish expedition against Vietnam in 1858-9. American forces also landed in Shanghai and Guangzhou to protect interests in the 1850s.

Domestically, China itself was affected by serious political problems in the mid-nineteenth century, not least the insufficient control of the central authorities over the provincial viceroys. The crisis of the Taiping rebellion led to a lengthy (1851-66) and debilitating civil war, which lessened any chance that the Chinese would be able to resist Western pressure successfully, let alone to project power. Indeed, in 1860, in the Arrow or

Second Opium War, Anglo-French forces occupied Beijing, a graphic demonstration of the shift in power. At the same time, foreign forces played a role in the defeat of the Taiping, with Taiping attempts to take Shanghai blocked by Anglo-French firepower in 1860 and 1862.

At the same time, China was scarcely a passive recipient of attack. The Taiping rising was crushed, with Nanjing, lost in 1853, recaptured in 1864, and in 1866 the last Taiping force was defeated. After the chaos of the years of the Taiping rebellion, there was a reaffirmation of control over border areas which had also rebelled. The Panthay revolt in Yunnan, which had broken out in 1856 ended in 1873 with the death of its leader and the capture of its capital, Tali. The Shaan-Gan uprising in Chinese Turkestan, which began in 1863, was defeated in 1876-8. As with the Chinese conquest of the regiion in the late 1750s, this was a formidable organisational achievement, as the logistical task of supporting troops was very difficult. The Chinese were helped by divisions among their opponents and by the death of the latter's ablest leader, Ya'qub Beg in 1877. Tso Tsung-t'ang, the victorious general, and a veteran of the suppression of the Taiping rebellion, deserves to be more widely known by global military historians.

There was also an attempt to improve Chinese military equipment as an aspect of modernisation. In China, the Self-Strengthening Enterprises, which began in about 1860, were used by leading provincial officials in an attempt to close the technological gap with the West. They adopted a form of state entrepreneurship sometimes known as 'official supervision, merchant management'. The success of this policy is controversial. Failure is seen in the deficiencies in particular enterprises, notably warship manufacture, in the greater pace of Japanese progress, and because the Japanese defeated the Chinese in 1894-5. It has been argued that options were restricted by efforts to preserve unchanged traditional or Confucian Chinese culture and only bolt-on Western technology. However, at the same time, developments, not least industrialisation in the arsenals, were significant for the emergence of modern science and technology there.

In the war of 1894-5, the Japanese fleet won the battle of the Yalu river (1894) over the less speedy and manoeuvrable Chinese. Despite problems with logistics and transport, Japanese forces advanced speedily through Korea, driving the Chinese before them, and then crossed the Yalu river into Manchuria. International pressure from Russia, Germany and Japan led to a peace in which Japan kept its gains of Taiwan and the Pescadores, but not Korea.

This defeat compelled China to adopt industrial technology as well as a more modern, Western style of military training and ideology. More broad-based than the Self Strengthening movement, the focus of this reform was the so-called New Army of the late 1890s.

Another dramatic demonstration of the ability of foreign powers to intervene in China was provided by the suppression of the Boxer movement in China. This anti-foreign movement began in 1897 and became nationally significant in 1900 when the Manchu Court increasingly aligned with the Boxers against foreign influence. Converts to Christianity were killed, hostilities between Boxers and foreign troops began, the government declared war on the foreign powers, and the foreign legations in Beijing were besieged.

Two international relief expeditions were organised. The first was blocked by the Chinese and forced to retreat to Tianjin, which was unsuccessfully besieged by the Boxers, whose swords and spears provided no protection against the firearms of the Western garrison. After Tianjin had been relieved, a second force was sent to Beijing, defeating lacklustre Chinese opposition en route. Beijing's walls were breached and the legations rescued. The alliance of Western and Japanese troops paraded through the Forbidden City, a powerful sign of Chinese loss of face. The subsequent treaty, signed in 1901, decreed very large reparations, as well as twelve foreign garrisons between Beijing and the coast.

China's weakness was demonstrated further in 1904-5 when the Russo-Japanese conflict arose because those two powers were unable to agree on the allocation of dominance over Korea and Manchuria. China was not consulted. Victory enabled the Japanese to create a protectorate over Korea in 1905 and to annex it formally in 1910. The Chinese question was being settled on Japanese terms. Indeed, in January 1905, Sir Ernest Satow, the British envoy in Tokyo, observed, 'The rise of Japan has so completely upset our equilibrium as a new planet the size of Mars would derange the solar system'.

The Manchu dynasty clearly could not cope, and this failure helped focus a demand for change. The role of the military in bringing down the monarchy in 1910-11 underlined the key part which could be played by those who could combine reform ambitions with particular grievances; and could act purposefully accordingly.

Despite efforts to create constitutional government, with and from the establishment of the republic, China was to be under military rule for much of the period until 1949. The warlords were powerful both at the centre, notably with Yüan Shih-k'ai from 1911 to 1916, and Jiang Jieshi from 1928 until 1949, and also in the regions, for example in Manchuria, which was ruled by Zhang Zuolin, the Old Marshal, from 1911 to 1928. The warlords were a result of the role of force in politics, notably in the creation of the republic, and also an echo of longstanding regionalism, especially tensions between north and south, as well as of developments before the Republican uprising of 1911-12 when regional units had gained greater autonomy.

China also witnessed the ideological conflict that was so important to the nature of war during the century. In 1927, the Communists formed the Red Army. Initially, it suffered from a policy of trying to capture and hold towns, which only provided Jiang Jieshi's forces with easy targets. The Red Army proved more successful in resisting attack in rural areas. There it could trade space for time and harry its slower-moving opponent, especially as Jiang Jieshi's forces lacked peasant support.

The situation was transformed by Japanese expansionism. In 1931-2, Japan conquered China's northernmost region and key industrial zone, Manchuria. In Manchuria and, later, China, the Japanese showed that it was not necessary to introduce mass-mechanisation in order to conquer large tracts of territory. Because Japan was technologically behind the Western powers in various aspects of military innovation, such as the use of tanks, there was a greater stress there on 'spirit' over material, for example with an emphasis on the use of bayonets in attack. This stress accorded with the nature of the army's force structure, but also led to a failure to appreciate the fighting quality of those who could be held to lack 'spirit'. Thinking on racial and authoritarian grounds, the Japanese military were apt to think this true of all other peoples.

Helped by the absence of hostile foreign intervention, and (unlike from December 1941) by the lack of other conflicts to absorb their attention, the Japanese expanded their commitment after seizing Manchuria, making further gains in China, until, in 1937, they launched what became an all-out war of conquest, although it was formally termed an incident. Unlike in 1931, the Jiang Jieshi government responded, ensuring that full-scale war broke out. The Japanese made major gains: the important cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing in 1937, and those of Guangzhou and Wuhan in 1938. The island of Hainan followed in 1939.

Despite, however, expanding their army from 408,000 troops in 1937 (from when military expenditure shot up) to 2.08 million in 1941, and stationing over 1.5 million of these troops in China and Manchuria, the Japanese lacked the manpower to seize all of China, and, even within occupied areas, their control outside the cities was limited. Japanese military leaders had failed to appreciate the difficulties of imposing victory. It proved far easier to destroy the Chinese navy in 1937 and to deploy overwhelming force against cities, than it was to fight in rural areas. There, the ratio of strength and space told against the Japanese, particularly when their opponents, most notably the Communists, employed guerrilla tactics and hit Japanese communications.

The political strategy, which drew heavily on racist attitudes towards the Chinese, was also inappropriate. The Japanese won some support from local élites but not enough: the

support they did obtain was useful, but this also highlighted how limited it was. Japanese policies, such as the 'kill all, loot all, burn all' campaign launched in 1941, also showed that brutality did not work. Earlier, the massacre by Japanese forces of large numbers of civilians after the capture of Nanjing in 1937, including using people for bayonet practice, did not break Chinese morale and, instead, testified to an emerging immoral and callous attitude within the Japanese military. Imbued with racist attitudes, the Germans were to match this during World War Two, especially in Eastern Europe, and with similar consequences in terms of a failure to win over local support.

The Jiang Jieshi government was gravely weakened by the long war with Japan, being particularly hard hit by Japanese advances in 1944 and 1945, and, despite American support, was totally defeated on the Chinese mainland by the Communists after World War Two. This defeat would have been less likely bar for the war: prior to the Japanese attack on China in 1937, the Chinese Communists had been in a vulnerable position in their conflict with the Kuomintang, but, following that attack, the Communists benefited from having become, during the 1930s and early 1940s, the dominant anti-Japanese force in northern China.

In the Chinese Civil War in 1946-9, technology and the quantity of *matériel* did not triumph, as the victorious Communists were inferior in weaponry, and, in particular, lacked air and sea power. Their strategic conceptions, operational planning and execution, army morale, and political leadership, however, proved superior, and they were able to make the transfer from guerrilla warfare to large-scale conventional operations; from denying their opponents control over territory, to seizing and securing it. The Kuomintang cause was weakened by poor leadership, inept strategy, and, as the war went badly, poor morale, while corruption and inflation affected civilian support. Indeed, the *China White Paper* published by the American State Department in 1950 blamed the Kuomintang failure on their own incompetence and corruption. Nevertheless, the conventional treatment of the war, as a Communist victory of 'hearts and minds', that indicated the superior virtues of Communism over the Kuomintang, as well as the strength of the People's Liberation Army and its brave peasant fighters, has been qualified by a greater emphasis on the importance of what actually happened in the fighting.

Until 1948, the Kuomintang largely held their own. When the American use of atomic bombs led to Japan's sudden surrender in August 1945, the Communists liberated much of the north of China from Japanese forces, capturing large quantities of weapony. Negotiations with the Kuomintang, actively sponsored by the USA, which sought a unity government for China, broke down, as the Communists were determined to retain control of the north. In 1946, Kuomintang troops transported north by the American navy, occupied the

major cities in Manchuria, China's industrial heartland, but most of the rest of the region was held by the Communists. The following year, Communist guerrilla tactics had an increasing impact in isolating Kuomintang garrisons in the north. Despite pressure in the USA to intervene militarily on the Kuomintang side, particularly from the Republican opposition, which raised the charge of weakness toward Communism, the Truman government wisely decided not to do so. The American military had scant regard for the Kuomintang army and little faith that it could win anything, no matter how much help the US provided.

In 1948, as the Communists switched to conventional, but mobile, operations, the Kuomintang forces in Manchuria were isolated and then destroyed, and the Communists conquered much of China north of the Yellow River. Communist victory in Manchuria led to a crucial shift in advantage, and was followed by the rapid collapse of the Kuomintang the following year. The Communists made major gains of *matérial* in Manchuria, and it also served as a crucial base for raising supplies for operations elsewhere.

After overrunning Manchuria, the Communists focused on the large Kuomintang concentration in the Suchow-Kaifeng region. In the Huai Hai campaign, beginning on 6 November 1948, each side committed about 600,000 men. The Kuomintang suffered from maladroit generalship, including inadequate coordination of units, and poor use of air support, and were also hit by defections, an important factor in many civil wars. Much of the Kuomintang force was encircled thanks to effective Communist envelopment methods, and, in December 1948 and January 1949, it collapsed due to defections and combat losses.

Communist victories that winter opened the way to advances further south, not least by enabling the Red Army to build up resources. The Communists crossed the Yangzi river on 20 April 1949, and the rapid overrunning of much of southern China over the following six months testified not only to the potential speed of operations in this campaigning, but also to the impact of military success in winning over popular, political and military support and in weakening opponents. The weakness of the Kuomintang regime was also shown by the rapid way in which it unravelled. Nanjing fell on 22 April, and Shanghai on 27 May, and the Communists pressed on to overrun rapidly the other major centres.

Jiang Jieshi took refuge on the island of Formosa (Taiwan). It was protected by the extent to which limited aerial and naval capability of the Communists made it difficult for them to mount an invasion and, eventually, by American naval power. In 1949, a Communist amphibious attack on the island of Quesmoy had been defeated while the island of Hainan had only fallen in April 1950 after heavy casualties. As a result of these problems, Mao Zedong postponed his plan for an invasion of Formosa. Overland the situation was different: in 1950-1, Tibet were conquered by the Communists, their larger and battle-hardened forces

overcoming resistance in the frontier region, before negotiating a peaceful advance to the capital of Tibet, Lhasa, which was occupied in October 1950.

The new strategic order in Asia was underlined in January 1950 when China and the Soviet Union signed a mutual security agreement. However, this agreement masked serious ideological and strategic disagreements, largely arising from Soviet attempts to direct China, disagreements, largely arising from Soviet attempts to direct China, which became overt in the Sino-Soviet split a decade later. Communism was far from monolithic.

The Communists had won in the Chinese Civil War, but the Americans were determined that they should not be allowed further gains in East Asia. At the close of World War Two in 1945, in a partition of Korea, a hitherto united territory that had been conquered and ruled by Japan, northern Korea had been occupied by Soviet forces and southern Korea by the Americans. In the context of the difficulties posed by Korean political divisions, and growing American-Soviet distrust, both of which sapped attempts to create a united Korea, they each, in 1948, established authoritarian regimes: under Syngman Rhee in South Korea and Kim Il-sung in North Korea. There was no historical foundation for this division, while each regime had supporters across Korea, and both wished to govern the entire peninsula. The regime in North Korea invaded the south in 1950, but American-led UN forces intervened successfully. The North Koreans were driven back into their own half of the peninsula and north toward the Chinese frontier, the UN forces advancing across a broad front against only limited resistance.

The UN advance, however, was not welcome to the Chinese, who, encouraged by the Soviets, suddenly intervened in October 1950, exploiting American overconfidence. General Douglas MacArthur, the American commander of the forces, had been confident that the Chinese would not act, but Mao Zedong felt that UN support for Korean unification was a threat. Moreover, success in the Chinese Civil War had encouraged him to believe that American technological advantages, especially in airpower, could be countered, not least by determination. As with the Japanese in World War Two, American resilience, resources and fighting quality were under-estimated, in this the sole war between any of the world's leading military powers since 1945.

Attacking in force from 20 November 1950, the Chinese drove the outnumbered UN forces out of North Korea in late 1950, capturing Seoul in January 1951. The UN forces were over-extended and, because of an advance on different axes, poorly-coordinated. The Chinese, nominally Chinese People's Volunteers, not regulars, proved better able to take advantage of the terrain, and outmanoeuvred the UN forces, who were more closely tied to their road links.

The fighting quality and heroism of some retreating units limited the scale of the defeat, but, nevertheless, it was a serious one.

In response, MacArthur requested an expansion of the war to include a blockade of China, which the American navy was able to mount, as well as permission to pursue opposing aircraft into Manchuria and to attack their bases, and, in addition, to employ Nationalist Chinese troops against the Chinese coast (as a second front) or in Korea. These proposals were rejected by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff as likely to lead to an escalation of the war, with the possibility of direct Soviet entry. American restraint therefore helped ensure that the conflict did not become World War Three, or a nuclear war; and the Korean War served as an important introduction for American politicians to the complexities of limited warfare, and the difficulties of calibrating it. In turn, having pressed China to participate, Stalin did not wish to take the risk of formal Soviet entry into the conflict.

During the war, the Chinese made a full transition to a conventional army, with tanks, heavy artillery, and aircraft, continuing the process started during the Chinese Civil War. The UN forces, however, were now a more formidable opponent than when the war started. The advancing Chinese were fought to a standstill in mid-February and late May 1951, as UN supply lines shortened, and as Chinese human-wave frontal attacks fell victim to American firepower, notably artillery. Thereafter, the war became far more static. Attritional conflict prevailed leading eventually to a compromise peace in 1953

China's role as a major power was shown not only in its development of a nuclear capability, but also in conflict with India in 1962. India's military build-up was directed not only against internal problems and Pakistan, but also against China, which was regarded as a threat not only on their common border, but also because of Chinese support for India's neighbours, Pakistan and Burma. The geo-strategic tension between the two powers was an important aspect of the struggle for regional dominance in South Asia that was seen during the Cold War and that became more important thereafter.

China, was successful in 1962 against India, whose forces were poorly-prepared for high-altitude operations, but, to a much lesser extent, in 1979 against Vietnam. In 1962, the Chinese heavily outnumbered the Indians, and benefited, as a result of roadbuilding, from superior logistics, at least in the zone of conflict. The struggle arose from a longstanding dispute over the mountainous frontier, which dated back to colonial days, and that was exacerbated by a regional struggle for predominance. The Indians began the war, on 10 October, with an unsuccessful attempt to seize the Thag La Ridge, and the Chinese then responded with an offensive launched on 20 October, defeating and driving back the Indians.

An Indian counter-offensive on 14 November was defeated and, on the next day, the Chinese outmanoeuvred the Indian defensive positions near Se La, inflicting heavy casualties.

Having revealed that the Indians would be unable to defend the frontier province of Assam, the Chinese declared a unilateral ceasefire on 21 November, and withdrew their troops. Theirs was a limited operation in which prospects for exploitation were gravely restricted by logistical factors. In total, the Indians had lost 6,100 men, dead, wounded or prisoners.

In 1979, the Chinese sent eventually about 420,000 troops across a frontier in which it was far easier to operate, to confront an equal number of Vietnamese, in response to Vietnam's attack on China's ally, Cambodia, the previous year. This attack had accentuated the long-term, indeed pre-colonial, tension between China and Vietnam, a tension then exacerbated by China's rapprochement with the USA earlier in the decade. The Chinese captured three provincial capitals, but were knocked off balance by the Vietnamese decision to turn to guerrilla tactics.

The Vietnamese benefited from their extensive recent experience of conflict with the USA and South Vietnamese, while the Chinese military lacked such experience and suffered from a dated army and flawed doctrine. Affected by poor logistics, inadequate equipment and failures in command and control, the Chinese withdrew, with maybe 63,000 casualties, and without forcing Vietnamese forces to leave Cambodia. Nevertheless, in a powerful display of geopolitical independence, China had shown that they would not be deterred by Soviet-Vietnamese links.

Since 1979, China has not been involved in war, but has become one of the most prominent military powers in the world. In particular, alongside its strength on land, China has become far more significant as a power across the full spectrum of military capability, not only sea and air, but also the developing fields of space and cyber warfare. The intentions underlying this power have become a matter of much speculation, and concerns about China, whether justified or not, have encouraged military investment by a range of states, which itself has contributed greatly to a regional arms race.

This piece seeks to show that China's military history does not point in any clear direction. This is scarcely surprising, and similar observations can be made about other major states. China, like other states, is in an environment made dynamic not only by its own development but also by rapid change in the world. The likely tensions focused on resource availability in a world facing unprecedented population growth will greatly contribute to a sense of instability that will encourage a determination to possess key military capabilities and advantages. The skill required, from both China and other powers, is to advance and

maintain sustainable patterns of national advantage without the need to a recourse to war that will both use resources and lead to dangerous levels of domestic and international unpredictability. China's significant military history is part of its strategic culture and memory, but, as with other states, it is best in the context of the modern world to have, rather than to use, force in order to advance interests.