

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODERN CHINESE CONCEPT OF CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

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Достављен: 16. 07. 2022.

Језик рада: Енглески

Кориговано: 11. 10. и 18. 10. 2022.

Тип рада: Прегледни рад

Прихваћен: 04. 11. 2022.

DOI број: 10.5937/vojdela2203015P

Deterrence strategy is an important topic in the field of international relations. The concept that marked the US-Soviet policy during the Cold War has become an important factor in politics and other powers in the world. The Chinese concept of deterrence has certain characteristics that make it different from the “standard” model presented in the Western literature. Namely, in the Chinese model, discouraging the opponent from potential attacks represents a part of deterrence strategy, while the other part is aimed at creating pressure with the goal of forcing the opponent to make concessions. In other words, deterrence can also serve as an offensive tool to achieve political interests. This paper analyses the Chinese concept of deterrence and presents its development in relation to other strategic approaches formulated in previous decades. An effort has been made to show that concepts such as local wars and space control are very close to deterrence strategy, and can be treated as its variations. The objective of the paper is to emphasize potential problems of the Chinese strategy of deterrence in comparison to the evolution of the Chinese Armed Forces and national interests, which, in the last ten years, regional actors have increasingly perceived as a threat.

Key words: deterrence, China, conventional armed forces, conventional deterrence strategy

Introduction

Deterrence strategy can be defined as a method of action that deters or discourages the unwanted actions of other actors. Alexander George and Richard Smoke consider deterrence as the process of convincing the

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adversary that their potential actions will not be profitable.¹ John Mearsheimer believes that deterrence can generally be defined as a manner of persuading the adversary not to initiate certain actions having in mind that the cost will be much higher than any gain.² Thomas Schelling considers deterrence as a defensive strategy that, with the help of a major threat, aims to deter the opponent from taking an action. In this case, Schelling makes a distinction between the strategy of deterrence as passive and the strategy of compellence, which is dynamic, offensive and aims to force the opponent to withdraw.³ Glenn Snyder makes a similar distinction between strategies as Schelling. Namely, compellence is used aggressively, where the goal is to make the opponent give up or make concessions at the expense of their interests. Deterrence is intended to persuade the adversary not to take an action they intended to take.⁴

In Chinese strategic reflection, the term used for deterrence is *weishe*, which can also represent compellence. Namely, the concept of the Chinese deterrence is not only related to discouraging the opponent from initiating unwanted actions, but also involves the use of force in order to force them to certain concessions.⁵ China combines Schelling's and Schneider's ideas of deterrence and compellence into a single concept. In addition to causing translation problems or debates over the use of correct terminology, this definition of deterrence can have consequences to the consideration of the Chinese Armed Forces, the military strategy, the Chinese foreign policy and the manner China seeks to achieve its strategic goals.

China has a complex strategic culture based on principles similar to those implemented by the Western countries, and there are also many differences in relation to them. The rapid development of the Chinese economy, which has reflected on the development of the Armed Forces, has also influenced changes in the Chinese regional policy, which is most noticeable in the last ten years. The Chinese foreign policy, both in the region and to the world, has become more decisive, and the perception of China as the country that does not reach for military power in international politics has also changed.

¹ Alexander George and Richard Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*, Columbia University Press, 1974, p. 11.

² John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 14.

³ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence: With a New Preface and Afterword*, Yale University Press, 2008, pp. 69-72.

⁴ Glenn Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense: Towards a Theory of National Security*, Princeton University Press, 1961, p. 40.

⁵ Dean Cheng, „An Overview of Chinese Thinking About Deterrence”, In: Frans Osinga and Tim Sweijts (eds.) *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020 Deterrence in the 21st Century–Insights from Theory and Practice*, eds, Springer 2021, p. 178.

The Chinese-style deterrence strategy

The Chinese concept of deterrence is similar to the idea of deterrence promoted by the Western authors. The essence of the Chinese strategy is to discourage the adversary, that is, to deter them from the actions they planned to carry out due to the prohibitive cost of such an undertaking. The main difference between the Western and Chinese concept is that China views deterrence as an instrument of compellence or pressure to fulfill political goals. The reflection of the Chinese officers, who view deterrence similarly to war, confirms that this concept has several dimensions for China.⁶ The authors, such as Li Bin, go a step further, stating that the term *weishhe* should not be interpreted as deterrence, but as compellence or pressure.⁷ Viewed in this way, the Chinese deterrence is a relatively broader concept, whose general form can be defined in Schelling's framework of "coercive diplomacy".

The formal understanding of deterrence is presented in some documents of the Chinese authorities. The 2008 Chinese National Defence White Paper states that it is necessary to have a policy aimed at deterring crises and wars. Such a policy requires the integration of various aspects of society and state, including its economic, diplomatic, military and legal aspects, which can be used for deterrence. In order to achieve the goals of deterrence, it is necessary to have a flexible and well-prepared force that can respond to various challenges. Although China in principle calls for the non-use of force, it emphasizes the importance of well-prepared armed forces that can fulfill their historical role in local wars under the conditions of high-tech combat. In the book *The Science of Military Strategy* from 2013, the Chinese authors also confirm the importance of multi-level deterrence. They believe that deterrence should be carried out by conventional and nuclear weapons, which implies the flexible use of various political instruments. The focus of the Chinese Armed Forces should be on the development of deterrence strategy, as an activity carried out both in peacetime and in a state of war, aimed at convincing the adversary that their actions will not pay off or conquering them by the use of armed or non-armed means. If deterrence is unsuccessful, other measures *on the borderline of war* can be implemented.⁸ Referring to the views of Mao Zedong,

⁶ Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Derek Grossman, Kristen Gunness, Michael S. Chase, Marigold Black, Natalia Simmons-Thomas, *Deciphering Chinese Deterrence Signalling in the New Era*, RAND Australia 2021, p. 18.

⁷ Li Bin, China's Nuclear Strategy, Presentation at Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference Washington DC June 25-26, 2007.

⁸ Taylor M. Fravel, „The Evolution Of China's Military Strategy: Comparing The 1987 and 1999 Editions of Zhanlüexue“, In: James Mulvenon and David M. Finkelstein (eds.), *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, Chinese People Liberation Army, 2002, p. 87.

deterrence as an activity can be continued even in a state of war, in order to bring the situation under control and preserve vital interests.⁹ In the same book, published in 2020, the concept of strategic deterrence is formulated as a method of armed struggle to achieve political goals. Namely, by using various military and non-military means, the opponent should be deterred, forced to compromise or surrender.¹⁰

The conventional forces and their development play an important role in the Chinese concept of deterrence. As Robert Ross notices, the ability to wage a successful conventional war is an important prerequisite for deterrence for the Chinese strategists. In other words, waging war in order to stop war is one of the aspects of deterrence, especially if it limits the further escalation of conflict and moves the adversary away from their goals. In order to implement this strategy, serious military capacities are necessary, which provide a kind of military supremacy.¹¹ Similar observations are made by Dean Cheng, who says that deterrence in itself is not a goal in the Chinese strategy, but rather a means by which certain political goals should be accomplished. Cheng points out that the focus of the strategy is primarily on political pressure and forcing the opponent to make concessions, rather than on discouraging certain behaviour.¹²

The reason why the Chinese Armed Forces consider the concept of deterrence as a part of a broader war strategy can be the historical experience of the Chinese People's Army. Namely, during the Korean War, and later during the Taiwan Crisis in 1954–1955, the Chinese deterrence has essentially had little success. During the Korean War, the Chinese deterrence efforts ended when the United Nations forces crossed the 38th parallel. The decision to intervene with the Chinese forces in Korea was a product of failed deterrence and fears that the United States would establish greater presence on the peninsula. In the case of the Taiwan Crisis, the situation was not much different. The shelling of some islands along the Chinese coast, which were under the jurisdiction of the Taiwanese authorities, was supposed to serve as a warning to the US that establishing an alliance with Taiwan could lead to war with China. On the other hand, Taiwan represented an important territory for the US, that is, the so-called unsinkable aircraft carrier, of importance to the US concept of a forward defensive bulwark. After China's moves, Washington decided that it is necessary to sign a joint security treaty on the defence of Taiwan.¹³

⁹ In Their Own Words: Foreign Military Thought, *Science of Military Strategy*, China Aerospace Studies Institute Project Everest, 2013, pp. 146-147.

¹⁰ China Aerospace Studies Institute 2020, In Their Own Words, *Science of Military Strategy*, p. 126.

¹¹ Robert S. Ross, „Navigating the Taiwan Strait Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and U.S.-China Relations”, *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2002, pp. 62-63.

¹² Dean Cheng, Evolving Chinese Thinking About Deterrence: What the United States Must Understand About China and Space, *Backgrounder* No. 3298, March 2018, The Heritage Foundation, pp. 1-2.

¹³ Abram N. Shulsky, *Detterrence Theory and Chinese Behaviour*, RAND 2000, pp. 56-61.

Developing deterrence strategy in this way can have unwanted consequences in the region. Deterrence, which means compellence or pressure, can be interpreted as an offensive policy, which arises from the character of the Chinese security interests that have changed and expanded over the years. In strategic documents, the development of the armed forces was an important aspect of state policy, which is understandable given the regional environment in which China is located. What is interesting is that in all documents, starting from 2000, the focus is increasingly on the development of the Navy, which should be an active component of the Chinese policy. More noticeable changes in this issue could be seen in the 2013 strategy, where it is emphasized that the Navy should continue to develop modern warships and submarines with an emphasis on long-range operations. In other words, in order to protect its interests, it is necessary for China to have the Navy with global reach. In the 2015 strategy, it is emphasized that China has to leave the so-called land-based mentality of strategic reflection and accept the maritime dimension of the development of the armed forces. Power projection in the region is becoming an important aspect of the Chinese strategy, with the Navy and the Air Force as the main instruments for conducting it. It is also emphasized that aviation will be transformed from a defensive tool into a tool that can be used in offensive operations, as well.

Similar views can be seen in the 2019 strategy, which states that the interests of the Chinese authorities are the preservation and protection of overseas interests. The Chinese Navy is said to be committed to maintaining security in the South and East China Sea, as well as the Yellow Sea. Moreover, in order to preserve and protect its overseas interests, it is necessary to continue the development of the Navy of global reach that would be capable of executing intended missions.¹⁴ Although the legitimacy of the Chinese interests cannot be disputed, their defensive character, which is insisted on in almost all Chinese documents, can be questioned. Namely, the development of the great war fleet and the accompanying logistical structure affects the perception of the Chinese policy aimed at power projection. Doubts about China's global aspirations were confirmed by Xi Jinping in his speech at the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, in which he pointed out that China will become the leading country in the world in terms of national power and influence in international politics by the middle of this century.¹⁵

The perception of the Chinese interests can also be reflected in the strategy of deterrence, which has elements of compellence, and whose goals do not have to be exclusively defensive. As some authors point out, the development of the Chinese

¹⁴ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, China's National Defense in the New Era, July 2019, https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html April 2, 2022.

¹⁵ Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 18, 2017, p. 25.

Armed Forces in the past twenty years has not only been directed towards deterrence, but also to exert pressure on the Chinese rivals.¹⁶ Thus, for example, in the case of Taiwan, deterrence is not only aimed at the political leadership giving up the idea of independence of the island, but also at forcing it to concessions, i.e. merging with China.

The development of the Chinese Armed Forces - conceptual perspectives on conventional deterrence

The post-Cold War modernization of the Chinese Armed Forces has been marked by changes in strategic and doctrinal approach that can be roughly divided into three periods. The first period covers the 1990s, the second occurs after China's accession to the WTO, while the third period begins with Xi Jinping coming to power and changes in the Chinese foreign policy.

The changes in the Chinese Armed Forces during the 1990s were conditioned by events such as the Taiwan Crisis in 1994–1995 and the so-called revolution in military affairs that was active in the US. Both events have pointed to the problems that China can expect in the future. Limited by material capacities, China focused on doctrinal and strategic changes aimed at better organization of the Armed Forces.¹⁷ The concept of “waging local wars in the conditions of high-tech combat” that developed in this period represents an upgrade to Mao's idea of active defence. In the new strategy, the focus is on the so-called local wars in the region, which can be waged against a conventional or unconventional enemy and require the use of a joint command system, flexibility in command, the execution of quick actions, the use of information resources and new technology, in order to land decisive blows to the opposing forces.¹⁸ Apart from the immediate benefits in terms of improving the Chinese strategic reflection, this concept also points to other aspects of the Chinese Armed Forces. Firstly, the idea of local wars and high-tech combat became the basis for the further development of the Chinese revolution in military affairs, which could already be seen during the following decade. Secondly, although the Chinese strategists refer to the teachings of Mao Zedong, essentially the strategy is largely modelled after the ideas of the US officers, who emphasize the importance of new technology affecting the speed and course of field operations.¹⁹

¹⁶ Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Derek G., Kristen G., Michael S. C., Marigold B., Natalia Simmons-Thomas, *Deciphering Chinese Deterrence Signalling in the New Era*, gen. quote, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷ David M. Finklestein, „Thinking About The PLA's 'Revolution In Doctrinal Affairs'”, In: James Mulvenon and David M. Finkelstein (eds.), *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, Chinese People Liberation Army, 2002. pp. 1-27.

¹⁸ Taylor M. Fravel, *The Evolution of China's Military Strategy: Comparing the 1987 and 1999 Editions of Zhanlüexue*, gen. quote, pp. 87-95

¹⁹ William A. Owens, „The Emerging U.S. System-of-Systems”, *Strategic Forum* 63, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1996.

The second period of the modernization of the Chinese Armed Forces was marked by the modernization of the Army, Navy, Air Force and artillery. Due to economic progress, China has increased the production of national weapons, as well as the procurement of foreign weapons systems, primarily from Russia.²⁰ Apart from these technical characteristics, the Chinese Armed Forces have also formulated new strategic approaches, such as the so-called *shashoujian*-assassin's mace and anti access/area denial A2/AD. The assassin's mace in the Chinese mythology is a light and lethal weapon that can be used to defeat a stronger opponent.²¹ The essence of this concept is similar to its traditional meaning, which refers to the development of weapons that can land decisive blows to the opposing forces. Although the concept originated in the 1990s, it practically came to life at the beginning of the 21st century, when China started the development of new ballistic missiles, anti-satellite weapons and new naval mines.²² *Shashoujian* can be considered as an upgrade of the Chinese conventional deterrence strategy, which will be developed in the future in the direction of space control strategy.

At the end of the 1980s, when the Soviet threat lost its significance, China shifted its strategic direction from the so-called coastal defence to the concept of active defence of coastal seas (offshore defence).²³ It can be discussed that the idea of controlling space was already relevant then. However, material limitations and intellectual isolation of the Chinese military from the rest of the world dispute that China could implement strategy such as space control in such circumstances. At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the situation changed, with Beijing putting a lot of effort into implementing new strategic concepts. Space control can be defined as a strategy that makes it difficult and impossible for the opposing forces to act, with the ultimate goal being the complete suppression of the opponent from some area.²⁴ This strategy should cover the maritime space up to the first chain of islands, and ideally it should also be implemented up to the second chain of islands. Although it is a legitimate strategy, problems may arise in the manner it is implemented and the character of signals sent to other countries in the region. Namely, space control cannot be exerted by China exclusively by the use of

²⁰ Igor Pejić, „Modernizacija oružanih snaga i promene u percepciji kineske pretnje”, *Međunarodni problemi*, Vol. LXXIII, no. 2, 2021, pp. 316-317.

²¹ Jason E. Bruzdinski, „Demystifying Shashoujian: China's 'Assassin's Mace' Concept”, In: Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel (eds.), *Civil-Military Change In China: Elites, Institutes, And Ideas After The 16th Party Congress*, US Army War College Press, 2004, pp. 313-314.

²² David Hambling, China Looks to Undermine U.S. Power, With 'Assassin's Mace', *The Wired*, July 2009, <https://www.wired.com/2009/07/china-looks-to-undermine-us-power-with-assassins-mace/> April 5, 2022

²³ Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, Oxford University Press 2021, p. 72.

²⁴ Kyle D. Christensen, Strategic Developments In The Western Pacific: Anti-Access/Area Denial And The Airsea Battle Concept, *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2012, p. 2.

asymmetric means, which are a part of the *Shashoujian* doctrine. On the other hand, with the development of the Navy with global reach, China's intentions do not have to be interpreted exclusively in a defensive manner, especially if one takes into account the Chinese approach to deterrence. Moreover, with the development of the concept of operations in distant seas, the development of the Navy with global reach becomes an indispensable element of the Chinese military strategy.

Space control implemented by China has caused resentment by various regional actors. This has led some authors to question the US policy in East Asia, as well as what kind of "rebalancing" is necessary against the Chinese power.²⁵ After 2012, doubts have arisen that the Chinese concept of space control is not a prelude to improving deterrence, but is also aimed at developing a power projection strategy. It also represents the introduction to the third period of the modernization of the Chinese Armed Forces, which has reflected on the strategic, organizational and technical characteristics of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The 2015 military strategy explicitly states that China has to abandon the mentality that the land is more important than the sea and focus on conducting operations that provide command of the seas and oceans.²⁶ The changes in the military strategy have reflected on the organizational changes, whereby special attention has been paid to the importance of joint operations. In accordance with new strategic guidelines, the General Staff of the Chinese Armed Forces has been divided into several staffs, that is, each branch has got its general staff. Following these changes, the Air Force and the Navy have become equal with the Army. The latest reform of the Chinese Armed Forces has fundamentally ended the traditional dominance of the Army within the PLA.²⁷ Organizational changes are more important if one takes into account the way new missions are defined and the development of different branches of the military. The development of the Army is defined in the direction of the formation of mobile troops for rapid operations, characterized by modular and multi-functional units. In this way, the Army units will have the necessary capacities to perform tasks within the framework of joint operations. The Navy is considered as a means of projecting power beyond its territory. Accordingly, the guidelines mandate the development of capacities for defence in coastal seas and protection in international waters with the construction of a combined and multi-functional naval combat structure. The Air Force has received guidance in accordance with the concept of war in high-tech conditions, emphasizing its importance in defensive and offensive operations. The strategy also highlights new Air Force missions, such as airborne operations, strategic power projection, as well as comprehensive support missions. Ivan Zarić

²⁵ Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, „Future Warfare in the Western Pacific Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia”, *International Security*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Summer 2016), pp. 7–48.

²⁶ Ivan Zarić, *Talasokratska dimenzija savremene kineske geopolitike*, doktorska disertacija, Fakultet političkih nauka, Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2018, pp. 198-199.

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 200-203.

notices that the strategic guidelines for the development of the Air Force, primarily those concerning power projection and comprehensive support, unequivocally indicate that China is striving for the evolution of a land power into a naval one.²⁸

In addition to organizational changes, in the past ten years China has also increased its flotilla of large warships from 77 to 86. The number of destroyers compared to the number of frigates is striking (in 2012, China had 14 destroyers and 62 frigates, and in 2021 36 destroyers and 45 frigates), and three new cruisers and two aircraft carriers are in operational use.²⁹ Aircraft carriers are probably the most effective aspect of the modernization of the PLA, as they can have serious implications for the regional balance of power. The first *Liaoning* aircraft carrier entered into operational use in 2012, and the second - *Shandong* in 2019. China has completed the construction of the third *Fujian* aircraft carrier, which should enter into operational use in the following period. The construction of modern aircraft carriers is an important element of the Chinese military strategy and the manner it will develop in the future. The militarization of islands in the South and East China Sea, as well as indications of the construction of other naval bases in the world, have further influenced the perception of the Chinese interests.³⁰ All these activities have also influenced the policy of regional states, which have decided to increase military budgets, accelerate the modernization of the armed forces, as well as to demand a greater presence of the US Armed Forces.³¹

Concluding considerations

Deterrence strategy is an important aspect of international relations that presented the backbone of the policy of the great powers during the Cold War. Although this strategy is often identified with the use of nuclear weapons,³² deterrence in contemporary international relations also relies on the use of conventional armed capacities. In theory, deterrence is categorized as a defensive strategy. Nevertheless, apart from implying the process of “discouraging” the opponent, deterrence can also imply “compellence”, as Schelling points out. Theoretical considerations of deterrence strategy, although they are of a universal character, have their specifics depending on the strategic culture of a state, historical events and the way in which the armed forces are organized.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 222-223.

²⁹ The data were compared from the book IISS, *The Military Balance*, Routledge, 2013 and 2022 edition.

³⁰ Igor Pejić, „Modernizacija oružanih snaga i promene u percepciji kineske pretnje”, gen. quote, pp. 320-321.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 321-327.

³² Željko Jović, Značaj nuklearnog oružja u kinesko-američkim odnosima u azijsko-pacifičkom regionu, *Vojno delo*, no. 6, yr. 2018, pp. 70-81; Hatidža Beriša, Mile Rakić, *Vojna moć vodećih svetskih zemalja i deficit resursa*, *Vojno delo*, no. 3, yr. 2018, pp. 21-37.

In the case of the PLA, the strategy of deterrence is not interpreted exclusively in the defensive - traditional framework of this concept. The Chinese deterrence strategy includes the so-called active dimension that suggests the use of armed forces not only to deter the opponent, but also to force them to certain concessions. As some Chinese authors state, deterrence can be viewed as the extension of war. Although this is a legitimate way of considering this strategy, it can also raise doubts among other actors in international politics about the sincerity of the Chinese political intentions.

In the last thirty years, China has made record economic development, which has also enabled the rapid development of the armed forces. The development of the PLA has been accompanied by changes in the way of developing military strategy and organization, as well as the improvement of its material capacities. In three periods of the PLA development, the Chinese Armed Forces have been transformed from a relatively outdated land force to a modern naval force. The introduction of new strategic guidelines after the Cold War has also been aimed at strengthening deterrence capacity. The idea of the so-called assassin's mace, as well as space control strategy, are probably two most notable aspects of the Chinese deterrence-focused strategy. Moreover, the armament that the PLA received in the meantime has greatly contributed to real deterrence capacities. The other branches of the armed forces, which have also gone through the modernization process, are competent in a way that enables their effective use within strategic concepts, such as waging local wars in high-tech conditions, as well as conducting operations within space control strategy. The further development of the *Shashoujian* doctrine, primarily of weapons, which accompanies this concept, greatly complements space control strategy, as well as the overall deterrence capacities.

Although all the mentioned concepts, as well as the entire process of the modernization of the PLA, strengthen defensive capacities, they also call into question the Chinese offensive intentions. When it comes to conventional weapons, it is difficult to draw a line that separates defensive weapons from offensive ones. In this sense, the development of the Chinese Air Force and Navy, which play a key role in conducting operations within space control strategy, often cause concern among other regional actors. The third period of the development of the Chinese Armed Forces pays a lot of attention exactly to these branches of the military, which also represent a key factor in the strategy of power projection. Observing the Chinese concept of deterrence, which does not fit into "standard" framework of this strategy, it becomes clear why the modernization of the PLA can also be interpreted as a means of compellence in order to accomplish offensive intentions.

This is also the essence of the problem of the Chinese deterrence strategy, as it raises the question of the extent to which the Chinese intentions are sincere and whether they are perceived by its rivals in the same way. If we consider the Chinese deterrence in Schelling's way, one could certainly conclude that it is not exclusively deterrence strategy, especially if we follow the development of the Chinese foreign policy and the gradual expansion of the Chinese interests. In the latest documents and statements by officials, attitudes can be noticed that indicate that Beijing is striving to expand the sphere of influence that would allow China to change the balance of power in the foreseeable future, both in the region and the world. Such political circumstances are also reflected in the

objectives of deterrence strategy - whether the concept aims to “discourage” or “compel” the opponent in order to make political concessions. Nevertheless, such Chinese projections should be taken with a certain amount of reserve, considering events in international politics. Due to the war in Ukraine, China has found itself in an awkward position towards other actors in the region, since its political and military moves will be watched with much more attention. Although it may sound paradoxical, the situation in Ukraine has probably made it difficult to further expand the Chinese influence in East Asia, so in the following period, a more defensive strategy of Beijing in the world politics and a potential redefinition of some approaches in foreign policy can be expected.

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Summary

Deterrence strategy has always been an interesting topic for many international relations scholars. The concept was the hallmark of the US-Soviet politics during the Cold War and rightly became an important aspect of other countries' politics, as well. The Chinese idea of deterrence is somewhat unique

compared to the “standard” model of deterrence, which is often seen in the Western literature. In the Chinese case deterring the enemy from attacking you is a part of the strategy, while the other part can be focused on accomplishing political goals using coercive approaches. In other words, deterrence can be used as an offensive-active strategy, in Schelling terms, that strives for compellence among adversaries. In the following paper we shall analyze the Chinese idea of deterrence and how it was developed with other strategic approaches in the past three decades. The PLA strategies such as winning local wars based on information, assassin’s mace and anti-access/area denial to a larger extent are intertwined with the idea of deterrence. Our goal is to explain these strategies and how they correlate with deterrence, as well as to point out some potential problems or misperceptions that can occur due to the ambiguous character of the Chinese deterrence and regional interests. This, in essence, represents the crux of the problem. The changes in the Chinese politics that have been ongoing in the last ten years influence the perceptions of its intentions among other regional actors and the Chinese idea of deterrence. If we consider the Chinese deterrence in broader theoretical framework that implies compellence as well, we can easily understand that growing concern among regional actors is not unfounded. Growing geopolitical ambitions among the Chinese policymakers are a reflection of the state’s growing military capabilities. In recent policy papers we could see that the Chinese regional interests imply some kind of a change in the regional balance of power that could, over time, reflect on the global balance of power, as well. In such geopolitical environment the primary goals of deterrence could be put in question, in terms of whether the strategy is deterring a rival or trying to compel him in order to gain political concessions. During the last ten years the Chinese Armed Forces have been transformed from a strong land power to a growing sea power, whose capabilities imply the development of the blue-water Navy that can contest other regional powers, primarily the US. Such military developments inevitably change the perception of threat among regional actors, as well as their perception of the Chinese concept of deterrence.

Key words: *deterrence, China, conventional armed forces, conventional deterrence strategy*

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