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Patrick Griffio

Bellarmino University, patrick.griffio@gmail.com

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RISING TIDE IN THE GULF:  
THE FIRST GULF WAR AND ITS IMPACT UPON CHINESE STRATEGY

Mr. Patrick Griffo

Bellarmino University Honors Program Senior Thesis

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Timothy Welliver, Associate Professor of History (Advisor)

Dr. Eric Roorda, Associate Professor of History (Reader)

Dr. Elizabeth Bishop, Associate Professor of History (Reader)

Dr. Robert Brown, Dean of Bellarmine University Business School (Reader)

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*Abstract*

Observing Chinese foreign policy means looking through a clouded lens. A foggy image can be made out, yet specific details are left undefined. The Chinese reaction to the 1990s First Gulf War is a case in point. The perspective is opaque, yet we can still gather an understanding of important changes in China's policies. The author provides insights not only into China's foreign and military policy but also on Chinese-Arab relations. In analyzing China's reaction to the war, we can see it was indeed a transformative period for China's strategy in the Arab world. China reacted to the Gulf War in a substantial way, and there has been little scholarship exploring how these changes impacted Chinese ideology. This study will focus on the two decades surrounding the First Gulf War. This was a watershed moment for Chinese military, United Nations involvement, and arms sales, but it further demonstrated a shifting ideology in Chinese government and politics. At the First Gulf War's onset, the "technocratic turnover" in the Communist Party leadership had already begun, and Maoist communism was dying. The war marked the final abandonment of Maoist-era principles in favor of more pragmatic, Technocrat-era principles.

### Introduction

For a country born out of fiery revolution and a message of global liberation, the People's Republic of China has experienced a great deal of change. Despite its comparatively short history as a communist nation, the past sixty-plus years have represented some of the most extreme transformations China endured in its long and ancient history. In public, Chinese officials boast of the nation's 'long history' with the Arab world, dating back to the legacy of the Silk Road and continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> Despite China's explanation of this as 'old friends' once again coming together, this ancient history is of little use when studying modern decision making.

It is difficult to interpret foreign policy when government transparency is opaque at best, and China's history in the Arab world is a prime example. The 'Rise of China'—whether in an economic or political sense—has dominated international news and conversations of foreign policy. When dealing with China's ties to a region such as the Arab world, it is all too easy to draw far-reaching conclusions regarding two regions (China and the Gulf) that many Americans view as furtive and guarded. Doing so overlooks formative experiences in modern Chinese history that could be revealing of Chinese decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> In "China's Arab Policy Paper", published recently by the Chinese government, the English version reads: "Friendship between China and Arab states dates back to ancient times. Over two thousand years ago, land and maritime Silk Roads already linked the Chinese and Arab nations. In the long stretches of history, peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, learning from each other, mutual benefit and win-win results have always been the main theme of exchanges between China and Arab countries;" "China's Arab Policy Paper," *Xinhua Net* (January 13, 2016).

The First Gulf War<sup>2</sup> in 1991 offers a unique window into Chinese diplomacy. For the purposes of this study, the Gulf War period is defined by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the completion of Operation Desert Storm. The event was transformative for China's military, arms sales, and United Nations policies. In the ensuing decade, lessons learned from the Gulf War guided Chinese policy just as it was solidifying its economic foothold in Persian Gulf states.

Corresponding with the Gulf War was an influx of technocratic leaders in the Chinese Communist Party. Dubbed the “technocratic turnover,” this post-Deng Xiaoping era saw the rise of young technocratic elites replacing revolutionary veterans in government positions.<sup>3</sup> The ‘Rise of the Technocrats’ is a common theory in Chinese politics—endorsed by academics studying the period.<sup>4</sup> It supports the claim that this transitional leadership period produced a climate in Chinese politics ripe for change.

Following the First Gulf War in 1990-1991, Chinese military ideology changed drastically. The implementation of airpower and new technology by the U.S. during the Gulf War spurred China's reevaluation of the People's Liberation Army's ability to engage in a new form of warfare. To a degree, it also raised questions regarding the level of economic investment in a region—the Gulf—marred by security risks.

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<sup>2</sup> For brevity, this study uses the terms ‘First Gulf War’ and ‘Gulf War’ interchangeably, both referring to the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the ensuing intervention by U.S.-led coalition forces. Similarly, the terms ‘Persian Gulf’ and ‘Gulf’ both refer to the region surrounding the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula, including Iraq, Iran, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.

<sup>3</sup> Cheng Li, *China's Leaders: The New Generation* (Lanham, Maryland: 2001), 26.

<sup>4</sup> Gongqin Xiao discusses the rise of the technocrats that took place in 1980s China thanks to the decline of leftist and reformist factions. The Tiananmen incident played an important role, citing, “...after Tiananmen, the new technocrats’ air of moderation and competence made them seem like an important force for stability and greatly strengthened their hand.” Gongqin Xiao, “The Rise of the Technocrats,” *Journal of Democracy*, 14 no. 1 (2003): 60-65.

Similarly, the war sparked the reevaluation of arms trade agreements with Gulf countries (especially Iraq). Following the onset of the war, China was positioned to lose economically on its profitable trade relationship with Iraq. Further, China had been willing to supply Iran with weapons simultaneously. Iran was an enemy of Iraq but also an enemy of the Soviet Union, which China (at odds with the Soviet Union strategically in the Middle East until its dissolution in 1991) used to its advantage. While complex, China's principles surrounding arms sales in the Gulf did arguably change as a result of the First Gulf War.

China's approach in the United Nations clearly changed as a result of the Gulf War. For the first time, China was in a unique position of power and capable of stopping UN-approved military intervention in its tracks. With its veto power in the Security Council, it had the ability to halt military intervention, an intervention earlier revolutionary officials would have opposed and derided as imperialist meddling in the developing world. Its abstention from the vote—effectively authorizing military intervention—represented an ideological change in dealing with the Arab world.

To say that China's strategic aims in the Arab world were at any point simple would be false. On multiple occasions, economic interests conflicted with political interests and political interests conflicted with military interests. Realistically, Chinese foreign policy and strategy has neither been strictly interventionist nor non-interventionist. China's approach in the Arab world has been highly nuanced and not always consistent. Yet there is a great deal of research individually suggesting that the Gulf War was a watershed moment for China's military, arms sales, and United Nations policy.<sup>5</sup> In the background, the Party leadership had been primed for

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<sup>5</sup> Andrew Scobell et al., "Chinese Lessons From Other Peoples' Wars," U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (2011); Joel Wuthnow, "Beyond the Veto: Chinese Diplomacy in the

ideological change thanks to the rise of technocratic leaders. The First Gulf War was indeed a turning point but, most importantly, it illustrates the final abandonment of policies based on earlier revolutionary-era principles in favor of principles concentrated on power accumulation and pragmatism.

In a post-Mao China, the late 1980s transition from revolutionary veterans to technocrats was one of the largest peaceful turnovers of authority to elites in Chinese history. The term technocrat is difficult to define, but it generally refers to individuals with non-bureaucratic or non-ideological careers who possess a strong technical background outside of the traditional, revolutionary-minded leadership. Fundamental changes made by Deng Xiaoping beginning in 1980 paved the way for a growing class of engineers-turned-politicians. A growing class of technocrats, benefiting from Deng's economic reforms, assumed leadership roles in the Politburo and other government bodies at a surprisingly fast pace. Cheng Li, in *China's Leaders: The New Generation*, describes Jiang Zemin as China's "top technocrat" and the "core of the third generation of leadership in the CCP".<sup>6</sup> While the idea of becoming a 'scholar official' dates back to Confucian tradition, the massive turnover of Chinese leaders at all levels in the 1980s—with promoted elites being largely technocratic—was unprecedented.

Technocratic leadership was more strongly associated with economic development than political progress, but the beginning of a strong technocratic regime under Jiang primed China for ideological change. It was in this climate—on the eve of the Gulf War—that the Chinese government was growing ever distant from early, revolutionary-era policies. The environment

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United Nations Security Council," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011; and Mahmoud Ghafouri, "China's Policy in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Policy Council* XVI, no. 2 (2009), accessed March 1, 2016, <http://mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/chinas-policy-persian-gulf?print>

<sup>6</sup> Li, 28.

was ripe for the abandonment of China's old ideologies dictating strategy in the Arab world; the First Gulf War would serve as the final catalyst for change, compounding the impact of the Persian Gulf conflict upon China.

China's observation of the Gulf War had received some attention by academics.<sup>7</sup> Less research exists where the history of China's military, arms sales, and United Nations involvement are viewed together in the context of each respective field and the context of ideological change. In previous research studying the First Gulf War and China, there is little to no mention of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) transition to technocratic leaders preceding the War. The First Gulf War illustrates the final abandonment of policies based on earlier revolutionary-era principles in favor of principles concentrated on power accumulation and pragmatism.

### *Methodology*

This is a historical qualitative study, relying on a number of scholarly journals, news articles, published books, and unpublished theses. Concerning military change, this study relies on articles published by RAND National Security Division, the U.S. Army War College, *China Quarterly*, *Pacific Affairs*, *Science Applications International Corporation*, and a number of

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<sup>7</sup> An article by Robert Farley discusses how the Gulf War "...provided Chinese military and civilian decision-makers with a ready example of what modern war looked like, and gave some lessons about how to fight (and how not to fight) in the future." Robert Farley, "What Scares China's Military: The 1991 Gulf War," *The National Interest* (November 24, 2014). An article by Harlan W. Jencks summarizes that the Gulf War allowed China to "escape its post Tiananmen diplomatic isolation." Harlan W. Jencks, "Chinese Evaluations of 'Desert Storm': Implications for PRC Security," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1992): 447. Neither article nor other studies referenced in this essay discusses ideological changes within the Chinese government in the Gulf War context. The predominate focus has been on military outcomes of the war.



other articles, reports, and books addressing Chinese military and international affairs. Furthermore, documents collected by the George Washington National Security Archive shed light on otherwise undisclosed government reports regarding the Chinese military. Concerning arms sales, additional literature exists; however, the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute's (SIPRI) databases on disclosed arms transfers between China and Gulf powers is used primarily in that portion of analysis. Regarding China's approach in the United Nations, this study relies on UN documents as well as articles and unpublished theses. Resolutions from the United Nations and published voting records were used to explain China's response to the Gulf War and subsequent reaction to proposed military intervention. Official government press releases and diplomatic quotes were used as well.

Previous scholarship has already established a strong connection between the Gulf War and some transformative changes in Chinese policies but overlooked the technocratic transition in the context of the war.<sup>8</sup> By emphasizing the transformative nature of the Gulf War upon Chinese policy, comparing different areas of change, and stressing that these changes represented an ideological change in decision-making, this study will argue that early governing principles (which had dictated China's Arab world strategy) were abandoned in favor of principles based on power and pragmatism.

### **Military Reform**

Historically, Chinese diplomacy and military policy were based on the notion of 'operating from the position of the weak.' Asymmetric warfare, or the ability to wage war

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<sup>8</sup> Scobell et al., *passim*.

against an economically or technologically superior enemy, was the type of warfare Mao Zedong mastered during the Chinese communist revolution and beyond. In his work *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao outlined lasting principles of ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’ (4GW)<sup>9</sup> that latter became integrated into the revolutionary culture of the PLA.<sup>10</sup> Mao was neither the first nor the most important theorists of 4GW. Yet, his theories practiced during World War II and China’s Communist Revolution have reemerged globally among groups waging ‘guerrilla warfare’ against asymmetrically powerful enemies (among them, modern terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda).<sup>11</sup> While Mao’s understanding of asymmetric warfare evolved as he pursued war against Japan and subsequently with the Kuomintang (KMT), the idea of ‘using the weak to defeat the strong’ was a central component of early PLA strategy following the establishment of the People’s Republic of China.<sup>12</sup>

After the success of the revolution in 1949, there was a clear divide between Mao’s political philosophy and his actions regarding foreign policy and ‘world revolution.’ Summarizing history in his well-known work *On China*, Henry Kissinger states “Abroad, world revolution was a slogan, perhaps a long-range objective, but China’s leaders were sufficiently realistic to recognize that they lacked the means to challenge the prevailing international order except by ideological means. Within China, Mao recognized few objective limits to his philosophic visions other than the ingrained attitudes of the Chinese people, which he struggled

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<sup>9</sup> Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) is categorized by war with a non-state actor, often a liberation movement or terrorist organization. Fighting is decentralized and relies on guerrilla tactics and counter-insurgency methods to combat them.

<sup>10</sup> Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1961), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria, “Fourth Generation War and Other Myths,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (2005): 12.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Bingham Kennedy, “Can the Weak Defeat the Strong? Mao’s Evolving approach to Asymmetric Warfare in Yan’an,” *The China Quarterly* (2008): 884.

to overwhelm. In the realm of foreign policy, he was substantially more circumspect.”<sup>13</sup> To a degree, this quote is an oversimplification. While China did not engage in intervention comparable to that of the U.S. (e.g., Vietnam War or the First or Second Gulf War) it did attempt to project its authority abroad. Across Africa, the CCP supported African independence movements and aided their liberation from Western or Soviet-aligned authorities. Frequently, like in the case of Chinese support for the anti-Soviet Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, China injected foreign aid into strategically important countries largely to counter the Soviet Union. China had a record of trying to influence third world countries up until Deng Xiaoping’s government, though support was limited.

Chinese political and military thought can be generally categorized. Teufel Dreyer published an outline of the People’s Liberation Army’s response to the Kosovo War, a conflict that illustrates three different schools of PLA military thought.<sup>14</sup> Dreyer defines these as follows: the first group advocated development of military machines and support systems that could rival that of the United States; the second group advocated a more gradual modernization of defense and a continuation of the tradition of winning from the position of the weak; the third advocated the standard principle of ‘people over weapons’ and reliance on China’s massive human resource in lieu of superior technology.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to the First Gulf War—encompassing Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm—Chinese military thought emphasized the second and third schools of thought advocating for slow modernization and ‘people over weapons,’ respectively.<sup>16</sup> With no decisive

<sup>13</sup> Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Publishing, 2011), 113.

<sup>14</sup> June Teufel Dreyer, “The PLA and the Kosovo Conflict,” U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute (2000), 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Scobell et al., 13.

<sup>16</sup> Scobell et al., 14.

victory in the Sino-Vietnam War<sup>17</sup>, China's modern military history was blemished. Further, the Chinese had yet to engage in a high-technology level war. By the 1980s, China was experiencing notable economic growth under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping. Thanks to his reform efforts and structural changes, China's economy began its upward trend.<sup>18</sup> Military advancements, however, did not immediately follow suit. Because the PLA had a noticeable lack of combat experience, the army was in a comparatively weak position globally.

The Chinese government has long paid special attention to the conduct of other nations' wars.<sup>19</sup> Yet, other than a few limited instances where the People's Liberation Army (PLA) exerted its influence upon regional powers (i.e., Vietnam, Burma, Taiwan, etc.), Beijing has not engaged in large-scale military operations. Nevertheless, the PLA and the Chinese Communist Party officials (CCP) have observed and followed military strategy employed in other large-scale conflicts. Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen identify several key examples of foreign military events leaving a deep impression on the PLA, ranging from the Iran-Iraq War to the NATO campaign for Kosovo. In regards to Chinese military observations, the First Gulf War emerged as the most impactful.

The war pushed the PLA into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To claim the First Gulf War was the *only* factor leading to reform of the PLA would be false; the U.K. war with Argentina over the Falklands, the U.S. involvement in the Taiwanese Strait Crisis of 1995, and U.S. intervention in

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<sup>17</sup> The Sino-Vietnam War (beginning in 1979) was a war between the People's Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, then allied with the Soviet Union. Following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, China responded to this projection of Soviet influence by invading northern Vietnam. A series of defeats by both the PLA and the Vietnamese left both countries without a decisive victory. Henry Kissinger, *On China*, 370.

<sup>18</sup> Sai Ding and John Knight, "Why has China grown so fast? The role of structural change," Department of Economics, Oxford University (2008): 1.

<sup>19</sup> Scobell et al., *passim*.

Kosovo in 1999 (and subsequent bombing of a Chinese embassy in Belgrade) were all red flags for the Chinese government that military modernization was necessary.<sup>20</sup> However, the stunning defeat of Saddam Hussain's forces in Operation Desert Storm (Iraq) in 1991 evoked a reaction from the Chinese that ushered in a definitive and irreversible trend.

The U.S. achieved success with a very low number of casualties (148 killed in action) under a relatively short period of time (38 days of aerial bombardment and 100 hours of ground combat).<sup>21</sup> The PLA encyclopedia listed several key lessons of the war: "securing dominance of the electromagnetic spectrum; aerial attacks as a strategic factor; deception, coordinated operations among difference services, and deep attacks in the rapid attainment of campaign objectives; fortifications and minefields; and logistical support to sustain high-technology weapons."<sup>22</sup> The nature of warfare had clearly changed. Unlike previous wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'mass' human resources and weapons equipment could not withstand "High Technology Conditions" such as those observed in the Gulf War.<sup>23</sup> Communications systems belonging to the PLA stood in contrast to those employed by the U.S., whose weapons existed not independently but in an integrated combat system. Thanks to advancements in aviation and communication, wars took place over larger areas.

An important Chinese document from this period is the "Military and Strategic Guidelines for the New Period," released by President Jiang Zemin in 1993.<sup>24</sup> Under the

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<sup>20</sup> Michael S. Chase et al., "China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)," Rand National Security Division (February 2015): 14.

<sup>21</sup> Scobell et al., 156.

<sup>22</sup> Scobell et al., 159.

<sup>23</sup> Scobell et al., 159.

<sup>24</sup> Since an official, original copy of this document was not released by the Chinese government, this study relies on references and secondary source descriptions. Dr. Eric C. Anderson and Mr. Jeffrey G. Engstrom, "Capabilities of the Chinese People's Liberation Army to Carry Out

leadership of Jiang, the limitation of fighting strictly small-scale regional conflicts was reconsidered and a new set of military strategic guidelines were set in place. As elaborated in the SAIC analysis, “Military Strategic Guidelines are the core of military strategy; they are the overall plan and the overall guiding principle of the Party and the nation for guiding the preparations and implementation of warfare within a particular period of time, and they are the driving force and assume the overall responsibility for the construction of national defense and the military.”<sup>25</sup> It further outlined three key assessments: 1) the major change to the international order following the Soviet Union’s demise and the collapse of other communist regimes in Eastern Europe; 2) evolving domestic concerns—specifically China’s continued effort to ‘reform and open up,’ a priority on economic development, Beijing’s requirement for a stable domestic, international, and peripheral environment to succeed, and the PLA’s requirement to modernize within the context of other national objectives; and 3) the changing nature of warfare and the PLA’s acknowledged inadequacies for successfully operating within this new environment.<sup>26</sup>

The document goes on to discuss the historical importance of ‘active defense’ for the Chinese and the need to defend national territory while controlling internal stability. Up until May 2015 when an even more globalized consideration of military strategy emerged in a government document, this “Military and Strategic Guidelines for a New Period” represented a decade-long shift towards technological advancement and concern for information exchange, logistics, long-range attacks, and increased firepower that only high-level technology could achieve.

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Military Action in the Event of a Regional Military Conflict,” *Science Applications International Corporation* (March 2009): 3.

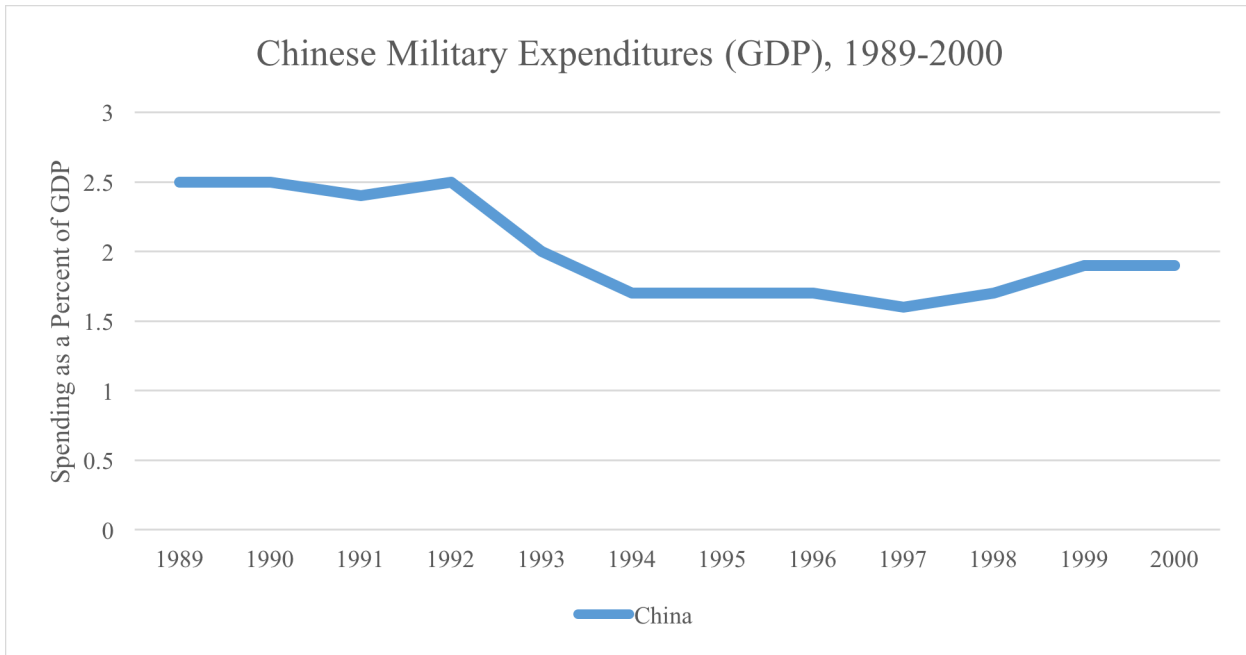
<sup>25</sup> Anderson and Engstrom, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson and Engstrom, 3.

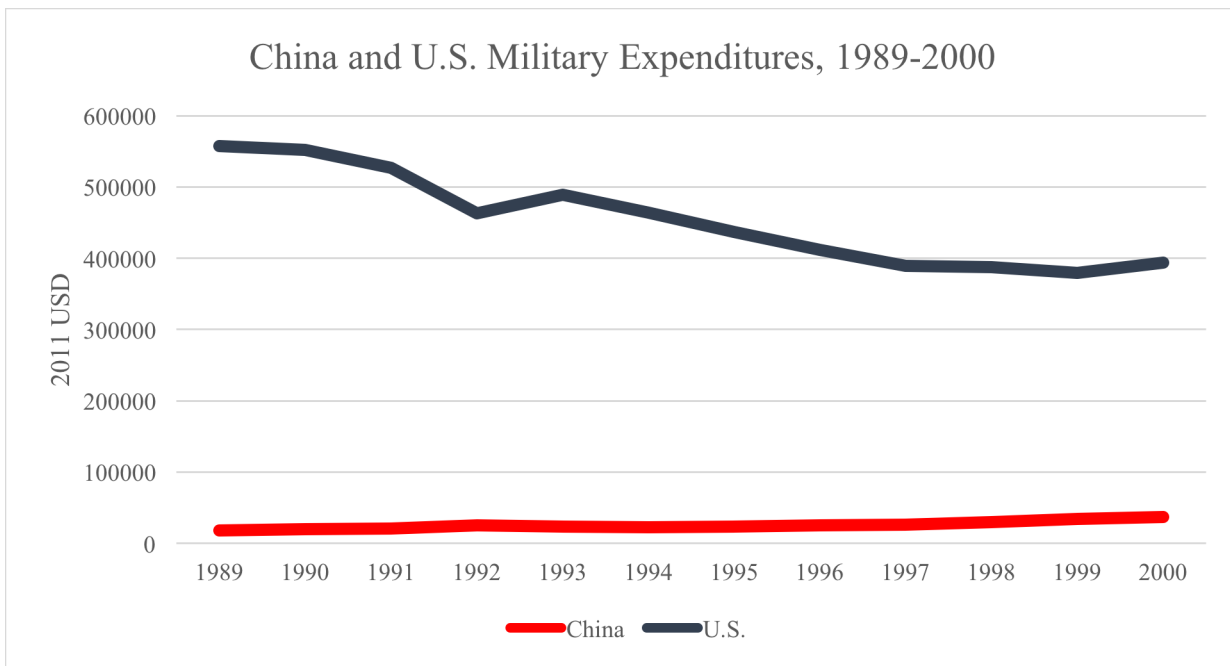


**Figure 1**, China Military Expenditures, 1989-2000. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Military Spending and Armament* (January 2016), distributed by SIPRI Databases, accessed March 30, 2016, <http://www.sipri.org/databases>.

‘China Military Expenditures’ (Figure 1) is a graphical representation of the steady rise of Chinese military expenditures between 1989 and 2000. This information is effective in demonstrating the change in military spending. Unfortunately, SIPRI’s earliest data on Chinese spending begins in 1988, so comparing the previous decade is difficult. The trends in China’s expenditures reflect the general trend towards modernization and increased investments. An additional graph, ‘China and U.S. Military Expenditures’ (Figure 2), is provided for comparative purposes. By comparing the U.S. and Chinese expenditures, it is clear that the Chinese increase in spending was still marginal to their previous spending. Expectedly, in terms of 2011 U.S. dollars (USD) spent, the U.S. dwarfs Chinese military spending. For consistency purposes, 2011 USD is used to measure military spending throughout this study.



**Figure 2,** China and U.S. Military Expenditures, 1989-2000. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2016).



**Figure 3,** China Military Expenditures (GDP), 1989-2000. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2016).



In “Chinese Military Expenditures (GDP)” (Figure 3), spending in USD is represented as a share of Gross Domestic Product. There are advantages and disadvantages to these methods. Change did take place, but again, change reported by SIPRI data was marginal. Between 1989 and 1992, percentages varied by .01%. Even beyond 2000, there have been only marginal fluctuations in spending as a share of GDP, never exceeding the bounds of 1.7% or 2.5%. Analysts suggest that China’s actual military spending is higher than public figures suggest, as SIPRI relies on information that governments disclose. Further, these datasets ignore important categories such as procurement of foreign weapons and technology.<sup>27</sup> A report from 1996 suggests that the true figures could be four to five times the official numbers.

The PLA was well aware of the problems it faced in a changing landscape of war, as displayed by the U.S. military’s outcome in the First Gulf War.<sup>28</sup> Not long before the turn of the 1990s, the PLA was derided as a ‘junkyard army,’ saddled by outdated technology, poor personnel quality, and overall corruption. High-tech wars were a central theme in highlighting the PLA’s greatest area of weakness. China had abandoned the operational belief that it would face major war. The Gulf War was not a fundamentally new type of war to the world, but it served as an illustration of what the future of war would look like for the Chinese. If war breaks out, Chinese officials acknowledged, it would be limited and local.<sup>29</sup>

The early 1990s coincided with an upsurge in China’s economy, and Party leaders promised to reinvest funds back into the PLA, at least to some degree.<sup>30</sup> Even before 1990, then President Jiang Zemin ushered in series of gradual increases to Chinese military funding

<sup>27</sup> Michael S. Chase et al., “China’s Incomplete Military Transformation,” *Rand Corp National Security Research Division* (February 2015): 15.

<sup>28</sup> Chase et al.,” 14.

<sup>29</sup> James C. Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang, “The People’s Liberation Army in the Information Age,” *RAND Corporation* (1999): 38.

<sup>30</sup> Mulvenon and Yang, 32.

beginning in 1988.<sup>31</sup> Despite discrepancies in ‘official’ figures, Jiang saw a steady increase of funds at the PLA’s disposal. Jiang, through a series of moderate policies and alliances (to be discussed later in the study’s foreign policy analysis), was able to consolidate his progress as well as the PLA’s authority.

The ‘position of the weak’ doctrine had lost its luster, and the strategic success of Operation Desert Storm illustrated that the advantage lay with those willing to invest in advanced aircraft, communications tools, and modern machinery. While the war had lasting diplomatic consequences on Chinese foreign policy, the impact upon its military was a less direct but nonetheless significant force pushing for lasting changes within the PLA. The strategic significance of the war—impacting predominately the military and to a degree foreign policy—should not be ignored. The Chinese had been making steps to abandon old military principles of ‘strength in numbers’ and ‘positions of the weak’ both before and after the First Gulf War. However, the Gulf War’s lasting legacy was a final push away from old military ideology of the early PLA towards principles that could build a more powerful army.

The war did not inspire universal change overnight. While the Gulf War did not usher in an immediate new era of ‘globalized’ Chinese thinking regarding foreign policy and military, this period did represent an important and growing awareness of *preparedness* to fight high-level technology wars. The display of U.S. military power in the Gulf War was not the only impetus for modernization, but it was the most significant. The war demonstrated that China’s military was ill-equipped to fight and win wars against modern opponents who embraced the information revolution and, as a result, transformed the capabilities of joint operations.<sup>32</sup> Distancing himself from the infantry army designed to guard against territorial invaders, Jiang ushered in a new

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<sup>31</sup> Mulvenon and Yang, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Chase et al., iii.

period for the PLA, preparing it for a wider spectrum of missions on a larger regional and global level.<sup>33</sup>

The contrast between the U.S. and Chinese military in the First Gulf War highlighted military unpreparedness, as did a series of subsequent events in the Taiwanese Strait and the U.S. bombing campaign in Kosovo. The First Gulf War reintroduced a new perspective on “globalization” and war, influenced further intrigue into ‘multipolarization,’ and influenced Chinese diplomats in the later two decades. Change was still gradual, but the conditions of the First Gulf War revealed a growing awareness of a globalized world. This study’s time frame is limited to the relative Gulf War period, but it is worth recognizing that the legacy of a partially incomplete modernization is still visible. The development of a formidable anti-access force in the Pacific, with potential use against Taiwan and its allies, is now a reality for the Chinese. These anti-access capabilities have been used in the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy efforts between 2009 and mid-2011.<sup>34</sup> These developments, coupled with China’s increasing capabilities in the South China Sea, could theoretically be used for greater power projection in the Middle East and North Africa.

The technocratic government of Jiang had primed the government for a different approach in the Arab world, but it was China’s observation of the U.S. and coalition forces in the Persian Gulf that made ideological change decisive. While different schools of thought existed regarding the future of the PLA, the Gulf War demonstrated an apparent need to abandon old revolutionary-era principles. Following the 1991 military intervention by U.S. and coalition forces, the PLA was aware old principles needed to be abandoned and a more modern approach

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<sup>33</sup> Chase et al., x.

<sup>34</sup> Lt. Colonel Eduardo A. Abisellan, “Centcom’s China Challenges Anti-Access,” *Brookings Institute*, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense Initiative Policy Paper (June 28, 2012): 11.

adopted. Decisions made to modernize the military reflected modern, technocrat-era principles based on power accumulation and pragmatism.

### Arms Sales

In the ten years following the Gulf War, arms transfers between China and the Gulf were changing. Prior to the war, China had often advocated for a ‘regional solution’ amongst warring states while simultaneously supplying two warring aggressors, as in the case of the Iran-Iraq War. Compared to military reform, a change in arms sales was not quite as principle-based but still reflected a degree of ideological change. If anything, an analysis of arms sales forms an important bridge between this study’s discussions on military reform and foreign policy. Changes in arms sales reflect changes in both military and UN policy, thereby supporting the larger ideological changes taking place. China’s principles surrounding arms sales in the Gulf evolved as a result of the First Gulf War.

Due to the nature of imports and exports of arms, gathering an exact estimation of military equipment transfers can be less than precise. Thanks to the work of the Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (SIPRI), the relative volume and cost of arms trades between nations can be gathered. SIPRI datasets used in this portion of the study consist of the Arms Transfer Database of Trader Registers and the Arms Transfer Database of Exports/Imports’ TIV (trend indicator values).<sup>35</sup>

In an analysis of Sino-Gulf Military Cooperation, author John Calabrese explained the significance of arms exports to China’s modernization efforts.<sup>36</sup> During the Iran-Iraq War, China

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<sup>35</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2016).

<sup>36</sup> John Calabrese, “Peaceful or Dangerous Collaborators? China’s Relations with the Gulf Countries,” *Pacific Affairs* Vol. 65 No. 4 (Winter 1993): 481.

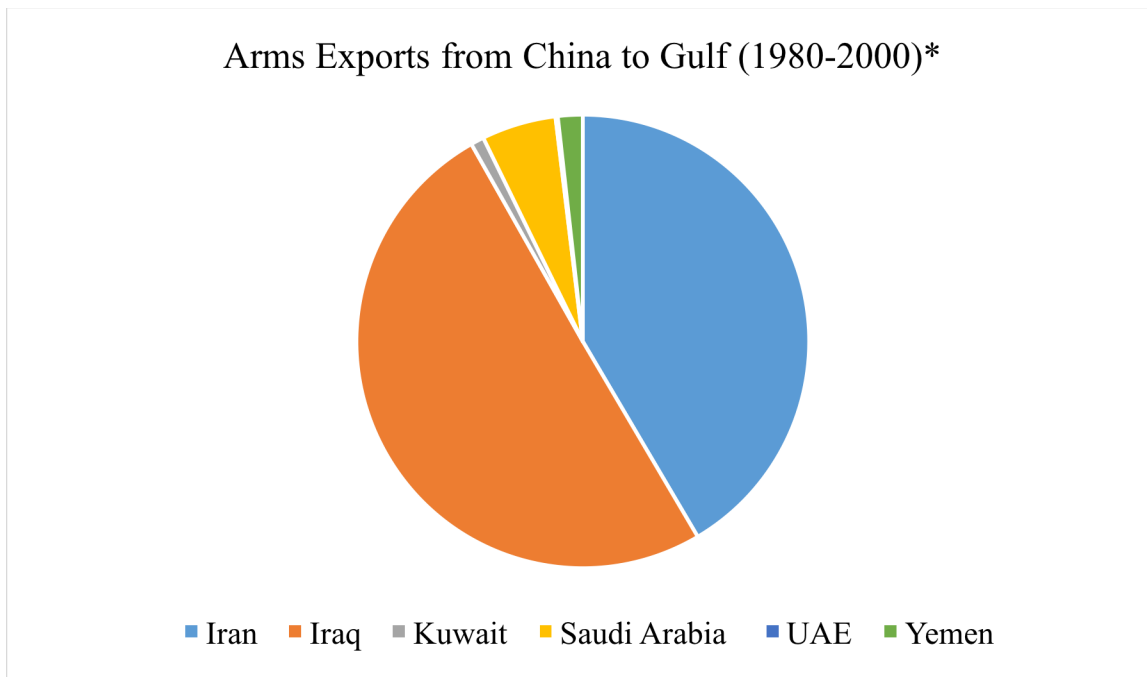
asserted its neutrality publically but privately supplied the Afghan mujahedeen in addition to arming both Iraq and Iran. The war was a significant source of export income for the Chinese, and combined with China's shrinking defense budget and the civilianizing of Chinese defense industries, this income was much needed. Calabrese notes that portions of government profits were being reinvested in military research and development.<sup>37</sup>

A changing arms customer base in the Gulf corresponded with domestic changes in China. This conversion process from government to private industry stressed Chinese government military spending further. Despite its growing pains, the conversion to civilian industry was representative of a modernizing military power. Defense firms increasingly relied upon the selling of arms for income. If the First Gulf War spawned new interest in military technology and other advancements, a changing framework of the military serves to support such a claim.

SIPRI—relying only on disclosed transfers of conventional arms—can reveal a surprising amount of detail regarding the descriptions, numbers, and time periods of weapons transfers. The TIV of Arms Exports from China between 1980 and 2000 (Figure 4) proves particularly illustrative of China's partnerships with the Gulf. The Arms Transfer Database of Trader Registers has additional information regarding both recipients and licensures.

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<sup>37</sup> Calabrese, 481.



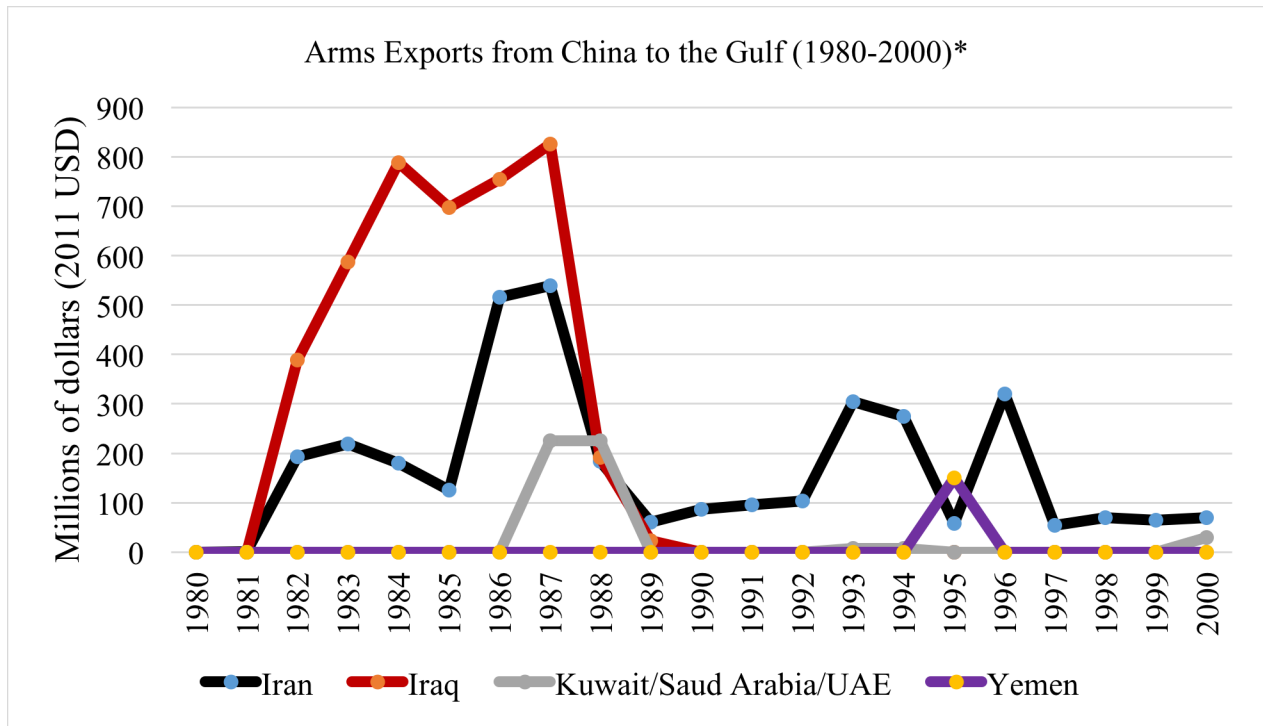
**Figure 4**, Arms Exports from China to Gulf (1980-2000). Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2016).

\*Percent of China exports per country: Iran: 43%; Iraq: 50%; Kuwait: 0.6%; Saudi Arabia: 5.0%; UAE: 0.4%; Yemen: 2.0%.

#### Arms Exports from China to the Gulf (1980-2000) [per country]

Country	Arms exports (in millions of USD)
Iran	3516
Iraq	4258
Kuwait	30
Saudi Arabia	450
UAE	14
Yemen	150

**Table 1**, Arms Exports from China to the Gulf (1980-2000), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2016).



**Figure 5,** Arms Exports from China to the Gulf (1980-2000), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (January 2016).

\* For the purposes of this study, future Gulf Cooperation Council countries Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates were combined into one measurement because their individual imports were so small by comparison.

As demonstrated by ‘Arms Exports from China to the Gulf’ (Figure 5), exports fluctuated greatly between 1980 and 2000. In the midst of the Iran-Iraq War, China was still openly engaged in arms deals with both nations. Figure 5 illustrates the dramatic decline in arms exports to Iraq beginning in 1988—which marked the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War—and then a complete elimination of trade with Iraq in 1990—a result of UN sanctions with which China cooperated.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Security Council (SC), Resolution 661, “Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait,” August 6, 1990, <https://fas.org/news/un/iraq/sres/sres0661.htm>

Iran's opposition to Moscow was viewed as an asset, and China was swift to extend relations with Iran following the 1979 revolution.<sup>39</sup> Iraq, likewise, was consistent in their military investments and served as a chief customer of the Chinese from the 1970s well into the 1980s. Iraq had been a lucrative partner up until the end of the Iran-Iraq War but this ended entirely after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Between 1980 and 1990 Iraq outspent all other countries in the Gulf in terms of Chinese arms exports. After 1990, this relationship disappeared. As the 1990s came to a close, China's military exports to Gulf states remained intermittent, with sporadic exports to Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait ranging from 3 to 33 million USD worth of equipment per year. No country in the region except Iran got close to Iraq's import levels, and it still represents one of China's historically most profitable arms trading relationships in the Gulf.

Additional information indicates the degree of military partnership between China and Iraq leading up to the Gulf War. When Saddam invaded in 1990, the Iraqi share in China's arms deliveries had become almost one-third (\$4.2 billion).<sup>40</sup> There is further evidence to suggest the Chinese had attempted to supply Iraq with materials capable of producing chemical or nuclear weapons. China's support of nuclear programs in the Middle East is not unheard of, as released State Department documents indicate the degree to which China was suspected of ignoring non-proliferation agreements and supporting Pakistan's development of a nuclear bomb.<sup>41</sup> China's response to these and similar accusations was silence.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Scobell and Larry M. Wortzel, "Chinese National Security Decision Making Under Stress," *Strategic Studies Institute* (September 2005): 194.

<sup>40</sup> Scobell and Wortzel," 200.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *U.S. Interactions with the PRC Concerning the PRC's Nuclear Relationship with Pakistan*, (Pentagon: December 5, 1989), George Washing National Security Archive, Washington, D.C.: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB114/chipak-18.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> William Burr, "Declassified Documents Show that, For Over Fifteen Years, Beijing Rebuffed U.S. Queries on Chinese Aid to Pakistani Nuclear Program," George Washington University



Chinese arms exports in the Gulf, up until the 1990s, showed Iraq and Iran as major customers. Diplomatically, it is difficult to pin responsibility for these or other transfers on one specific cause; exports could reflect change in security concerns, an effort to counter an enemy by supporting its other enemies, or simply a chance to profit. Up until the Gulf War, China's partnerships with Iran and Iraq were dictated by a combination of factors, but most significant is the international pressure (applied to China) that halted arms sales to Iraq. China could have easily ignored calls for ceasing arms sales, as they had done in the Iran-Iraq War when the U.S. called on them to cease military support for either regime. For reasons later discussed in the United Nations portion of this study, China stopped enforcing its long held belief that Arab states—such as Iraq and Kuwait—should resolve their own problems and that picking sides was unnecessary. China's immediate end to arming Iraqi forces (post-Kuwaiti invasion) reflects China's willingness to concede to change.

While less strong an indicator of changing principles in Chinese policy, the analysis of arms sales does support the idea that military change and foreign policy change were deeply intertwined. China could have ignored international pressure to halt arms sales, but this time they listened. By recognizing the arms sale changes taking place, the changes in United Nations and military reform becomes more apparent. Arms sales analyses serve as a bridge uniting the discussion on foreign policy change and military reform.

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National Security Archive, entry posted March 5, 2005,  
<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAE/NSAE114/press.htm> (accessed on March 20, 2016).

### United Nations

The recognition of the People's Republic of China as the official Chinese seat at the United Nations set an important tone that would endure decades of Chinese foreign policy. By 1971, the U.S. would no longer forestall a motion to welcome communist China to the UN and provide a permanent seat on the Security Council.<sup>43</sup> Immediately following China's welcome, a delegation led by Vice Foreign Minister Qiao Guanhua was formed. When Qiao was questioned by a journalist as to China's foremost strategy moving forward in the UN, he replied: "To tell the truth, we're quite unfamiliar with this institution... We need to honestly study and become familiar...so that China can carry out its duties as a permanent member of the Security Council."<sup>44</sup> Without hesitation, Qiao reinforced the larger sentiment of Chinese diplomats at the time: in order to act pragmatically, one must meticulously consider the issues at hand.<sup>45</sup> One may have assumed that Chinese diplomacy would purely reflect domestic politics and fiery rhetoric of the Cultural Revolution period, but it did not.

The 1970s saw a China that supported non-participation and later abstention to disassociate itself from peacekeeping operations. Voting reaction was somewhat irregular; China remarked that sending peacekeepers in response to the 1973 Yom Kippur War was an example of the West installing an 'area of international control' in a sovereign Arab states.<sup>46</sup> While China's voting trend did not see absolute alignment with the West, it still lacked obstructionist qualities. China was reluctant to block measures led by the United States, but it was also

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<sup>43</sup> Joel Wuthnow, "Beyond the Veto: Chinese Diplomacy in the United Nations Security Council" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2011): 27.

<sup>44</sup> Wuthnow, 27.

<sup>45</sup> Wuthnow, 27.

<sup>46</sup> Wuthnow, 30.

cognizant to avoid alienating ‘third world’ powers that were considered important to China’s larger global interests. Such an approach—one lasting from the 1970s to 1980s—could be classified as meticulous pragmatism. The Chinese, as former Ambassador Charles Freeman stated, were willing to make “tactical sacrifices in order to avoid giving offense in the interest of achieving longer-term strategic gains in relations with other member states.”<sup>47</sup> China was willing to make concessions based on a desire to preserve positive relations with states it saw as a future partner, whether Western-aligned or not.

The Chinese delegation made gradual movement toward supporting peacekeeping missions in the 1980s, later evolving into moderate participation by the early 1990s. As acknowledged by Susan Tieh, in 1988 Chinese Ambassador Yu Mengjia declared that the UN peacekeeping missions were an “effective mechanism” for politically resolving regional conflicts.<sup>48</sup> Subsequent missions in 1989 saw the addition of Chinese troops to the UN Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East, which meshed with China’s desire to be seen as a ‘responsible’ champion of the Third World. The character of Chinese participation in UN peacekeeping is somewhat disputed; some academics argue the onset of the 1990s and a ‘new generation’ of peacekeeping in the UN discouraged China from upping its peacekeeping commitments. Regardless, it’s still widely accepted that China’s tone on the eve of the First Gulf War was one that shared a historic willingness towards international collaboration.

Scholars note China’s mixed history regarding military intervention. As quoted earlier, world affairs expert Henry Kissinger stated, “Mao recognized few objective limits to his philosophic visions other than the ingrained attitudes of the Chinese people, which he struggled

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<sup>47</sup> Chase Freeman, “Chinese Negotiating Behavior Revisited,” in *Chinese Negotiating Behavior: Pursuing Interests Through ‘Old Friends’*, (DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1999): 190-1.

<sup>48</sup> Susan Tieh, “China in the UN: United with Other Nations?,” *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 4, No. 1 (2004): 23.

to overwhelm. In the realm of foreign policy, he was substantially more circumspect...<sup>49</sup>

However, examples in the Middle East counter this claim.

China did intervene in the Gulf before the war, largely to counter the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup> A regional example of counter-Soviet strategy can be found in Oman. Of all eventual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Oman likely had the most politically-inspired relationship with China on the eve of the Gulf War. Unlike Oman's Arab neighbors who saw China's economy as the main partnership incentive, Oman had used the Chinese as a counterbalance to Soviet aggression. In 1962, the Soviet Union had supported the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman, but the failed Socialist Revolution (supported by Oman's Marxist neighbors in Aden) left a deep scar on the surviving Omani monarchy.<sup>51</sup> Soviet-Omani relations never fully recovered, despite eventual recognition in the mid-1980s. China, seeing an opportunity to block Soviet entrenchment in the Middle East, was granted diplomatic recognition by Oman in 1978, making it the second Gulf country to do so.<sup>52</sup>

Additional examples exist on the Arabian Peninsula. The Marxist regime in Aden (South Yemen) was initially supported by the Chinese, specifically through economic partnership and diplomatic missions. The Chinese had loaned upwards of \$30 million for the completion of a highway project in South Yemen.<sup>53</sup> However, China was simultaneously engaging with non-

<sup>49</sup> Kissinger, *On China*, 113.

<sup>50</sup> What began as an opposition to the Soviet Union's adoption of 'Marxist-revisionism' and Mao's opposition to capitalist countries grew into a larger political divide between China and the Soviet Union, now referred to as the Sino-Soviet Split.

<sup>51</sup> Lt. John McKeown, "Britain and Oman: The Dhofar War and its Significance" (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 1981): 35.

<sup>52</sup> Mahmoud Ghafouri, "China's Policy in the Persian Gulf," *Middle East Policy Council* XVI, no. 2 (2009), accessed March 1, 2016, <http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/chinas-policy-persian-gulf?print>

<sup>53</sup> Mohamed Bin Huwaidin, *Chinese Relations with Arabia and the Gulf 1949-1999* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002): 222.

aligned North Yemen in the mid-1980s. Then President Li Xianxian stated "...the Chinese government admires the Yemen Arab Republic's foreign policy. The Yemen Arab Republic has followed a policy of neutrality, nonalignment and good-neighborliness and made an active contribution to strengthening the unity among Arab countries..." Due to South Yemen's continued ties with the Soviet Union, China's support drifted closer to North Yemen than South Yemen up until Yemen's unification in 1990.

In the 1980s, China's policies generated goodwill among both moderate Gulf states and their enemies in Iran and Iraq by showing restraint on politically salient issues. They were sensitive to the dynamics of non-aligned, Western-aligned, and anti-Western powers but were still able to engage in a moderate level of trade and diplomacy among these states.<sup>54</sup> China was able to achieve this by removing itself from U.S. Middle East policy, made clear in China's consistently mild language on foreign policy.<sup>55</sup> For example, on the Arab-Israeli conflict, China's diplomatic language would embrace a spirit of negotiation but purposely *not* rule out the possibility for armed struggles.

Largely because of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, Chinese investments abroad slowed under international sanctions imposed by the United States and European countries.<sup>56</sup> Chinese trade between the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf had already entered a slight downturn before June 1989, although not as a direct result of political unrest.<sup>57</sup> China's slump in trade with Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Oman was noticeable but not crippling. Yet, not

<sup>54</sup> While Saudi Arabia did not recognize the People's Republic of China until July 1990, the two nations had already been engaged in a series of energy and commerce agreements up until this point. Huwaidin, 272.

<sup>55</sup> Calabrese, 472

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *China: Economic Sanctions*, by Dianne E. Rennack, RL31910 (2006).

<sup>57</sup> Calabrese, 475.

a single one of China's Persian Gulf partners heeded the call to invoke sanctions against China as a result of Tiananmen. No government leader among GCC member states nor Iran condemned the actions of the Chinese government during Tiananmen Square and other related protests. Saudi Arabia, in particular, had little room to criticize China given its own record of human rights abuses. Poor timing—including the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq war and its lucrative arms sales, changes in China's economic policy, and declining oil revenue—ushered in a period of economic uncertainty for China. Still, political unrest surrounding Tiananmen had little impact on China's foreign policy among its Arab partners.<sup>58</sup> With international outrage bubbling over Tiananmen, Saudi Arabia normalized relations with the People's Republic of China in 1990.

Kuwait's fledgling relationship with China at the time of the war—while not a main impetus for intervention—is important for context. Kuwait was the first Arab country in the Gulf to officially recognize communist China.<sup>59</sup> In 1971 during the debate on UN voting resolution 2758, Kuwait voted in favor of China's admission to the UN as the sole representative of the Chinese people, a blow to its older partner Taiwan.<sup>60</sup> In 1987, China vehemently opposed the U.S. Kuwaiti oil tanker reflagging program (putting American flags on Kuwaiti ships so as to protect them during the Iran-Iraq War).<sup>61</sup> The U.S. pressed China to halt the exchange of weapons to Iran and Iraq, but China persisted. Prior to the 1990 Iraqi invasion, China had thousands of contract laborers in the Gulf, both in Iraq and Kuwait.<sup>62</sup> Foreign workers within

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<sup>58</sup> Calabrese, 476.

<sup>59</sup> Ghafouri, 200.

<sup>60</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 2758, "Restoration of the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations," October 25, 1971.

<sup>61</sup> Calabrese, 474.

<sup>62</sup> Calabrese, 472.

Kuwait were able to escape while those in Iraq had greater difficulty escaping after war erupted.<sup>63</sup>

Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 as a perceived attempt at annexation, and the UN Security Council responded by establishing immediate sanctions against Iraq. Under the terms of the UN Charter's Chapter VII, the Council demanded a complete withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and later seeing none, passed Resolution 661, which imposed comprehensive sanctions on Iraq and occupied Kuwait.<sup>64</sup> U.S. Secretary of State James Baker believed the immediate and collective action by the Security Council was reflective of the ushering in of a 'post cold war' period.<sup>65</sup>

This phase of the Security Council overlapped with a shift in tone of Chinese foreign policy, advocating "greater moderation, engagement, and integration" in the Arab world.<sup>66</sup> Chinese diplomats were forced to pivot from defending non-interference to rationalizing intervention.<sup>67</sup> As noted previously, there was no universal 'Chinese consciousness' that defined changes in policy; however, with the Chinese largely supporting UN sanctions and refraining from killing UN intervention with its veto power, it's clear China placed a premium on long-term strategic decision making. China's desire to form long-term partnerships with the West and West-aligned Gulf Countries guided their voting decision; an approach opposed to UN

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<sup>63</sup> Scobell and Wortzel, 200.

<sup>64</sup> Poorvi Chitalkar and David M. Malone, "The UN Security Council and Iraq," *United Nations University, Working Paper Series No. 1* (November 2013): 2.

<sup>65</sup> Chitalkar and Malone, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy Since the Cold War* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 2.

<sup>67</sup> Christopher Holland, "Chinese Attitudes to International Law: China, the Security Council, Sovereignty, and Intervention," *New York University: Journal of International Law and Politics, Online Forum* (July 2012): 5.

intervention would not have served China's desire to build its international credibility in the wake of post-Tiananmen sanctions.

China had been primed to abandon its advocacy for non-intervention in the UN. Following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, Chinese officials were willing to take a more conciliatory position toward the West in an effort to ease sanctions and international condemnation for its targeting of civilian protestors. Following the August invasion, the Chinese government quickly issued a statement "opposing Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait, demanding Iraq's immediate and unconditional withdrawal... and maintaining that the disputes between the two countries be resolved through peaceful political means..."<sup>68</sup> China then voted for a U.S.-sponsored resolution that condemned the invasion and urged for Iraq's immediate withdrawal. This is significant due to China's potential for economic loss. By supporting Resolution 661 and other resolutions applying trade sanctions against Iraq and occupied Kuwait territory, China would lose economically in the short term.<sup>69</sup> At the time, Iraq was one China's most lucrative arms buyers. The sanctions would be responsible for an eventual \$2 billion dollar loss in trade for China.

Chinese public opinion sided overwhelmingly with Kuwait. Media outlets reported that when the first U.S. bombing raids were announced in college classrooms in Beijing, students erupted in cheers.<sup>70</sup> Donations made by average Chinese citizens for the war effort began flooding U.S. and Kuwaiti embassies. To a degree, it reportedly incited citizens to draw parallels between Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the WWII invasion of China by the Japanese. It is

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<sup>68</sup> Tieh, 26.

<sup>69</sup> Tieh, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Benjamin, "Beijing neutral but many Chinese applaud War in the Gulf," *The Baltimore Sun*, February 12, 1991, accessed March 1, 2016, [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-02-12/news/1991043071\\_1\\_gulf-war-chinese-china](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1991-02-12/news/1991043071_1_gulf-war-chinese-china)



impossible to say with whether Chinese diplomats shared these beliefs or took them into consideration, but clearly China's historical resistance to intervention would be hard to sell at home.

Ultimately, China was in a unique position of power; with a deciding veto-authority on the United Nations Security Council, the Chinese could end UN-approved military intervention in its tracks. While a veto would not have ruled out military intervention altogether, it would have sent a resoundingly different message than China was hoping to convey. After voting yes for all preceding resolutions, China abstained on its vote for Resolution 678.<sup>71</sup> This resolution, later used to authorize military force against Iraq, authorized "Member States co-operating with the Government of Kuwait...to use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution 660 (1990) and all subsequent relevant resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area."<sup>72</sup> China had already ceased all economic ties with Iraq, but choosing to abstain put them in a special position. Described by some scholars as "China's Great Power Debut" in the post-Cold War era, China's position determined a "deciding action on an issue of global significance."<sup>73</sup>

The choice to abstain on the vote conveyed two main points: 1) a desire to reenter the international economic community, which imposed sanctions following the 1989 political unrest; and 2) a commitment to a 'Peaceful Arab solution,' which China continued to reiterate even after the U.S. strikes against Iraq. A day after the war began, Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang outlined three main goals in handling the conflict: "...1) the conflict would be settled peacefully through

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<sup>71</sup> Huwaidin, 198.

<sup>72</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 660, "Condemning Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait," August 2, 1990, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/575/10/IMG/NR057510.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>73</sup> Calabrese, 476

negotiations...2) that it would remain free of superpower intervention...[and] 3) that these efforts would not deteriorate.”<sup>74</sup> It is clear that none of these objectives were achieved, but the Chinese were hoping to avoid further escalation of the conflict as well as devastation against its economic interests in the Gulf. Further, cooperation with the West and Japan could potentially conclude post-Tiananmen sanctions.<sup>75</sup> Alongside a series of high-profile visits from Kuwaiti Emir Jaber al-Ahmad al-Sabah to Beijing, China affirmed it would not change its position on the Iraqi invasion and that it would not supply arms to Iraq.

China was forced to weigh its strategic risks of cooperation (the chance intervention would directly harm Chinese interest in the region) with the political ramifications of intervention (the costs to Chinese relations with the U.S. and others with great influence in the Gulf).<sup>76</sup> Some scholarship indicates that Chinese diplomats wanted to move towards a more interventionist approach, one supporting additional UN Peacekeeping missions and buttressing China’s characterization as a “responsible great power.”<sup>77</sup> The idea of using goodwill as a tactic is nothing new to Chinese foreign policy, but it is difficult to say that this philosophy prompted China’s ultimate response to Iraq’s invasion.

The Chinese public believed the war was a worthy fight, but again, it is impossible to confirm that this was a determining factor in China’s decision-making, especially in the wake of 1989 political suppression. Kuwait and China still had a fledging relationship, and there is simply insufficient evidence to support the idea that China’s vote was anything but blunt

<sup>74</sup> Scobell and Wortzel, 194.

<sup>75</sup> Huwaidin, 198.

<sup>76</sup> Wuthnow, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Wuthnow, 64.

pragmatism. With the war unfolding and relationships changing, there was still a great deal to gain economically, even in the face of short-term losses.

China's economic investments in Iraq and its de-facto approval of intervention against Iraq highlighted areas where China's strategic interests were conflicting. Li Junhua's estimated that the \$2 billion loss in arms export earnings from Iraq was not taken lightly.<sup>78</sup> China continued to push for unconditional withdraw of Iraqi forces from Kuwait *without* military force. There were clear incentives to avoid a permanent rupture of Iraqi relations, but this was marginal in comparison to the elimination of economic sanctions applied against China in 1989. Outside of UN voting procedure, there was little China could do to influence the course and duration of the conflict. China did campaign for the easing of sanctions against Iraq to permit entry of food and medical supplies. Despite conflicting interests, China tried to maintain its image as a responsible world power while also accepting that Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other moderate, West-aligned Arab states would be crucial to the expanding of Sino-Gulf relations.<sup>79</sup>

By the 1980s and the ascension of Jiang's government, China had largely retired any residual pro-liberation rhetoric from its foreign policy. Jiang, a technocratic leader, had come from a different background than his predecessors Deng Xiaoping and especially Mao Zedong, both of whom were PLA veterans. As a result of the Gulf War, China's previously non-interventionist attitude changed alongside its evolving principles in the UN. China recognized the potential to regain economic strength in the wake of Tiananmen sanctions. Foreign policy decisions based on earlier revolutionary-era principles had lost support from rising technocratic leaders. In the process, China made a decisive turn towards power accumulation and pragmatism.

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<sup>78</sup> Wuthnow, *passim*.

<sup>79</sup> Wuthnow, 479.

### Conclusion

Power, whether through military or economic means, is the end goal of realist strategy. Historic principles, however, rely heavily on a nation's politics and commitment to certain values. When observing Chinese reaction to the Gulf War, Chinese military and diplomats were willing to sacrifice historic principles for a modern set of principles based on power. In reviewing the change of military, arms sales, and UN policies, the Gulf War was incremental for China's transition to power-based principles.

Previous studies have noted the significance of the Gulf War but have avoided investigating the resulting change in Chinese principles. With regard to military change, China made a decisive move away from earlier PLA doctrine promoting 'people over weapons' and Maoist principles of asymmetric warfare. In the context of change in arms sales, the transition of principles was less clear. Nonetheless, arms sales illustrated significant change and linked together analysis on military reform and foreign policy. China's immediate end to arming Iraqi forces reflected a willingness to concede to change. Finally, historical rejection of UN military intervention was abandoned, fueled by a new set of principles that acknowledge the need to regain economic strength by appealing to the international community (specifically states imposing Tiananmen sanctions). Within the context of China's technocratic transition, the government was positioned to make a final push away from policies dictated by old principles, and the Gulf War was the main catalyst.

Furthermore, one aspect of China's complex strategy in the Gulf cannot be ignored. One of the greatest feats of the Chinese is also a potential source of contention: its ability to manage multiple, supposedly conflicting partnerships in the Persian Gulf. To imply China was engaging

in a great balancing act downplays the comparable shallowness of its diplomacy. Unlike the U.S., who served as the central security figure among West-aligned Gulf partners (especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union), China's investment in the Gulf was less binding. During this period, China rarely made decisions that dramatically upset the balance of power in the Persian Gulf. The transition from principles based on revolutionary thought to principles based on power was a necessary pivot for the Chinese during such a formative period for diplomatic relations.

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