



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

IN THE NEWS

China's Naval Aspirations: A 'Blue-Water' Force

June 25, 2013 | *Stars and Stripes*

Related Expert: Natalya Anfilofyeva

Today, fueled by a booming economy, Chinese naval power is on the rise again.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy has been producing frigates, destroyers, submarines and missile boats at an unprecedented rate. In September, it commissioned its first aircraft carrier, the 74,406-ton Liaoning.

U.S. naval commanders, ordered to move the bulk of their fleet to the Pacific theater, say it's clear that China is building a "blue-water navy," capable of sustained operations across oceans and able to project power far from the home country.

The U.S. has denied its "Pacific pivot" is directed at China but has called for "transparency" from the PLA.

"They are not making clear why they require these sorts of forces," said Jan Van Tol (<http://www.csbaonline.org/about/people/jvantol/>), a retired U.S. Navy captain who is a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments in Washington. He noted that China wouldn't need an aircraft carrier to seize Taiwan since the island, which China regards as rebellious province, is well within range of mainland air fields.

One reason for a blue-water navy could be for China to protect its trade routes, rather than relying on the U.S. to guarantee freedom of navigation, Van Tol said.

The Chinese government reported imports and exports worth \$3.87 trillion in 2012, surpassing, for the first time, those of the U.S. — valued at \$3.82 trillion by the U.S. Commerce Department.

China also could be seeking to emulate the U.S. ability to project naval power and build influence, Van Tol added.

“The Chinese now want to do whatever the Americans can do and say: ‘We are here in the region,’” he said.