

CHAPTER 2
CHINA'S ACTIVITIES DIRECTLY
AFFECTING U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS
SECTION 1: CHINA'S MILITARY AND
SECURITY ACTIVITIES ABROAD

“... the United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission ... shall investigate and report exclusively on—
...

“REGIONAL ECONOMIC AND SECURITY IMPACTS—The triangular economic and security relationship among the United States, Taipei and the People’s Republic of China (including the military modernization and force deployments of the People’s Republic of China aimed at Taipei), the national budget of the People’s Republic of China, and the fiscal strength of the People’s Republic of China in relation to internal instability in the People’s Republic of China and the likelihood of the externalization of problems arising from such internal instability. ...”

Introduction

The growing strength of China’s economy has permitted it to expend more resources on its military development. Over the past several years, the Chinese military, or People’s Liberation Army (PLA), has experienced a sea change in its approach to national security.* This change follows from Beijing’s interest in ensuring China’s continued economic development: The PLA needs the military capacity to secure China’s expanding overseas interests and respond to nontraditional security issues, such as disaster relief and transnational crime. Therefore, Beijing has mandated the PLA to transition from a territorially focused military that counters traditional military threats, such as invasion or separatism, to a more globally focused military that, in addition to traditional competencies, can handle nontraditional security threats. As a result, the PLA has gradually increased its operational ranges, expanded its participation in international security operations, augmented its global military-to-military relationships, and improved its abilities

*Although this section addresses the overseas role of China’s military and security forces, the term “military,” or “People’s Liberation Army,” will be used throughout, since the PLA conducts the vast majority of China’s overseas military and security activities. In those instances where it is necessary to point out the role of other security forces, this Report will do so.

to conduct noncombat operations. A case in point is the ongoing deployment—now in its third rotation—of PLA Navy vessels to the Gulf of Aden, off the east coast of Africa, to assist a multinational effort to defend from local pirates international sea lanes upon which China is increasingly reliant for economic growth.

The PLA's new capabilities and reach can both positively and negatively affect U.S., regional, and international security. The Chinese military can contribute to global stability if it increasingly supports peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. This effort could lead to greater cooperation between the U.S. military and the PLA when the interests of their respective nations coincide. However, a more capable PLA could also potentially act as a destabilizing force should Beijing seek to employ it to further its regional or global interests to the detriment of the United States or other regional actors.

This section of the Report addresses some of the factors behind China's decision to have its military undertake a more active role on the global stage, identifies examples of the Chinese military and security forces' increased activity around the globe, and examines possible implications for the United States as a result of this outward expansion.

An Expansion of Chinese Views on National Security

China is now a global player, with global interests. According to China's official news agency, Xinhua, when China was less developed, its national interests were confined to concerns within its borders. However, globalization has caused China's national interests to expand, particularly into the maritime, space, and cyberspace (electromagnetic spectrum) environments.¹ The maritime environment is vital to China because of China's increasing reliance upon seaborne trade; overseas oil imports; and maritime resources, such as hydrocarbons, minerals, and fishing.² Expansion into space benefits economic, social, and military development.³ Similarly, China maintains that cyberspace is critical to its future economic and military development.⁴

As China's national interests have expanded into these new areas, Beijing has realized that its interests are increasingly susceptible to new and emerging threats.⁵ Also, as China's overseas economic footprint grows, locals in countries with Chinese investments may perceive the Chinese as neo-imperialists—resulting in greater hostility toward China and its interests. For example, in April 2007, the Ogaden National Liberation Front, Muslim separatists in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, killed nine and kidnapped several more Chinese workers of the Chinese oil company Sinopec.⁶ A few months later, Pakistani fundamentalists in Islamabad kidnapped seven Chinese workers, three of whom were subsequently killed.* In August 2009, angry locals in Algiers, Algeria, attacked Chinese migrant workers, injuring 10 and looting five Chinese shops, over resentment toward the migrants' economic success.⁷ In

*Some observers attribute Pakistan's July 2007 decision to raid an influential mosque in Islamabad that was believed to be responsible for the kidnappings and killings of the Chinese workers to pressure from Beijing. See Howard French, "Letter from China: Mosque Siege Reveals the Chinese Connection," *New York Times*, July 12, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/12/world/asia/12iht-letter.1.6629789.html?_r=1.

that same month, a Uighur independence group, the Turkic Independence Party, called upon Muslims around the globe to attack Chinese interests as retaliation for Beijing's crackdown on Uighur violence in Xinjiang in July.⁸

In addition, as the Commission frequently heard during its May 2009 trip to China, Chinese security analysts are deeply concerned about sea lane security.⁹ Beijing's growing reliance on overseas trade and foreign oil imports, both of which predominantly rely upon maritime trade routes, makes the nation susceptible to disruptions in its sea lanes. A reported four-fifths of China's oil imports traverse the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia,¹⁰ yet China has at best a minimal ability to patrol and defend this vital maritime lifeline.¹¹

Finally, Beijing understands the importance of actively countering international, nontraditional security threats, such as transnational crime, natural disasters, and global pandemics, which can hinder China's economic development.* China's 2008 defense white paper, for example, points out how overseas, nontraditional security problems could impact China domestically.¹² Susan L. Craig, author of the monograph *Chinese Perceptions of Traditional and Non-Traditional Threats*, told the Commission that China "perceives nontraditional security threats as more challenging than traditional threats." Said Ms. Craig,

*China's elite believe the likelihood of traditional military conflict has decreased through deterrence and diplomatic skill. It is nontraditional threats—those that are unpredictable, nonmilitary in nature, transcend national boundaries, and have both internal and external ramifications—that are more worrisome.*¹³

Representatives from the PLA's National Defense University told the Commission in May 2009 that China has a strong desire to increase its capabilities to deal with international, nontraditional security issues.¹⁴

In December 2004, China's president and Communist Party leader, Hu Jintao, provided the Chinese military with what he characterized as a new set of missions that changed the military's roles and responsibilities to better handle these new threats.¹⁵ These missions, entitled the "*Historic Missions of our Military in the New Period of the New Century*" (hereafter, the *Historic Missions*), contain four tasks:

1. *"To provide an important force for guaranteeing the Party's ruling position;*
2. *To provide a strong security guarantee for safeguarding the important strategic opportunity period for national development;*

*The PLA has historically played a role in handling nontraditional security threats within China. For example, China's 2008 defense white paper states that "[i]n the past two years the [armed forces] have dispatched a total of 600,000 troops/time; employed 630,000 vehicles (or machines)/time of various types; flown over 6,500 sorties/time (including the use of helicopters); mobilized 1.39 million militiamen and reservists/time; participated in over 130 disaster relief operations in cases of floods, earthquakes, snowstorms, typhoons and fires; and rescued or evacuated a total of 10 million people." Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: January 2009).

3. *To provide a powerful strategic support for safeguarding national interests;*
4. *To play a role in upholding world peace and promoting mutual development.”*¹⁶

Each of these tasks will be addressed in turn below.

The first task of the *Historic Missions* calls on the PLA to ensure its support for the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) rule in China in the event of a crisis. It is important to note that this task is not new, since CCP “control over the gun” has been a mantra since the Mao Zedong era. Instead, it seeks to reaffirm the policy of having the Chinese armed forces remain loyal to the CCP, and not necessarily to the state, as in western democracies. Therefore, in the event of another Tiananmen-like incident, the CCP fully expects the PLA to come to its aid again as a means of last resort, according to Daniel M. Hartnett, then a China analyst with the nonprofit research organization CNA.¹⁷ As President Hu stated in his *Historic Missions* speech, “[s]o long as [the CCP] firmly controls the military, there will be no large disturbances in China, and we will be able to face with confidence any dangers that might arise.”¹⁸

Like the first task, the second task reaffirms traditional PLA responsibilities, this time requiring the PLA to continue its focus on defending China from what Beijing feels are its traditional threats. President Hu identified five specific concerns during his *Historic Missions* speech: 1) land and maritime border issues, 2) Taiwan separatism, 3) ethnic separatism in Xinjiang and Tibet, 4) terrorism, and 5) domestic social stability.¹⁹

Unlike the previous two tasks, the third task posits a new requirement for the armed forces, calling on them to protect China’s expanding national interests. This task singles out three areas in particular where the PLA and security forces need to focus: the maritime, space, and cyberspace environments. During his *Historic Missions* speech, President Hu stated that

*[t]he progress of the period and China’s development have caused our national security interests to gradually go beyond the scope of our territorial land, seas, and airspace, and continually expand and stretch into the oceans, space, and [cyberspace]. Maritime, space, and [cyberspace] security have already become important areas of [China’s] national security.*²⁰

The final task of the *Historic Missions* requires the Chinese military to play a larger role in international peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. The impetus behind this requirement is China’s growing integration with the rest of the world, as reflected in a statement from China’s 2008 defense white paper, claiming that “China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can global prosperity and stability do without China.”²¹ Because of this interdependency, the PLA should help handle problems abroad before they can adversely affect China’s economic development.²² One crucial way for the PLA to do this is to participate more actively in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations around the world.²³

The effect of the *Historic Missions* speech on the PLA has already translated into observable changes in China’s military and

security activities abroad. As then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia David S. Sedney stated, the PLA “has embarked on a transformation from a force that focused principally on domestic response and preparing for what it considers local contingencies, into a more expanded set of roles that encompass a wide range of missions and activities.”²⁴

The next part of this section addresses several of these activities in detail—in particular, peacekeeping, counterpiracy, humanitarian operations, combined exercises, military diplomacy, port calls, and maritime patrols.

Peacekeeping Operations

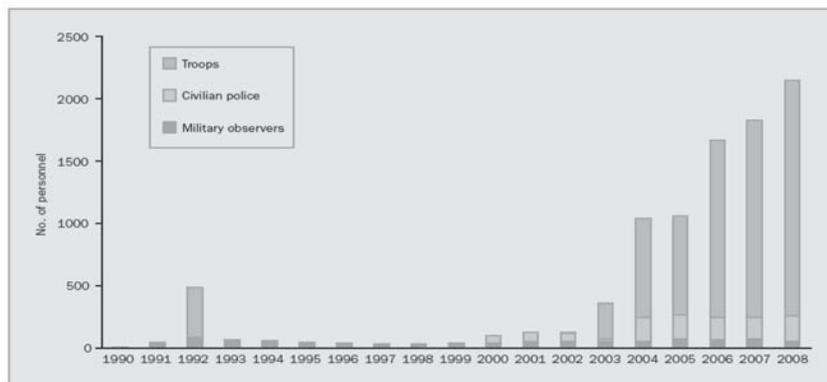
Since its first personnel contribution in 1990, China has become an increasingly active participant in international peacekeeping operations. China’s 2008 defense white paper states that over the past 20 years, China has contributed more than 11,000 individual peacekeepers to 18 United Nations (UN) operations.²⁵ For the month of June 2009, China had 2,153 peacekeepers deployed to UN missions in Haiti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Lebanon, Liberia, Timor-Leste, Côte d’Ivoire, the Western Sahara, and the Middle East.²⁶ Of note, many of the countries and regions in which China is contributing peacekeepers are also places where China has economic interests.

| China’s Participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations (June 2009) | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------|------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| UN Mission | Troops | | Police | | Mil. Observers | | Total | |
| | China | Total | China | Total | China | Total | China | Total |
| UNTSO—Middle East | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 151 | 4 | 151 |
| MINURSO—W. Sahara | 0 | 20 | 0 | 6 | 13 | 201 | 13 | 227 |
| MONUC—DR Congo | 218 | 16,921 | 0 | 1,078 | 16 | 692 | 234 | 18,691 |
| UNMIL—Liberia | 564 | 10,065 | 16 | 1,205 | 2 | 136 | 582 | 11,406 |
| UNOCI—Côte d’Ivoire | 0 | 7,662 | 0 | 1,174 | 7 | 190 | 7 | 9,026 |
| MINUSTAH—Haiti | 0 | 7,030 | 143 | 2,050 | 0 | 0 | 143 | 9,080 |
| UNMIS—Sudan | 444 | 8,479 | 18 | 647 | 12 | 517 | 474 | 9,643 |
| UNIFIL—Lebanon | 343 | 12,030 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 343 | 12,030 |
| UNMIT—Timor-Leste | 0 | 0 | 27 | 1,559 | 2 | 33 | 29 | 1,592 |
| UNAMID—Darfur | 324 | 13,300 | 0 | 2,959 | 0 | 176 | 324 | 16,435 |
| TOTAL | 1,893 | 75,507 | 204 | 10,678 | 56 | 2,096 | 2,153 | 88,281 |

Sources: UN Peacekeeping Operations, “Background Note” (New York: June 30, 2009). <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/bnote.htm>; and The United Nations, “UN Mission’s Summary Detailed by Country” (New York: June 30, 2009), pp. 7–8. http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/2009/june09_3.pdf.

This heightened level of commitment to peacekeeping operations likely follows from several policy considerations. First, the substantial increases in personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping operations demonstrate that China’s military has endeavored to meet the objectives Hu Jintao promulgated in the fourth task of the *Historic Missions*, namely to play a larger role in international peacekeeping and humanitarian operations.²⁷ As figure 1 below shows, since 2004, the year when the *Historic Missions* were first articulated, China has doubled the number of peacekeepers committed to UN missions.

Figure 1: Chinese Personnel Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations, 1990–2008



Source: Bates Gill and Chin-hao Huang, “China’s Expanding Peacekeeping Role: Its significance and the policy implications,” Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), February 2009. <http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRIPB0902.pdf>.

Second, China’s greater involvement in peacekeeping operations is a component of a comprehensive, decades-long effort from Beijing to present China as a responsible international player, thus expanding its international influence. According to Chin-hao Huang, a researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China’s leadership believes that “positive engagement with the outside world helps China to project a more benign and ‘harmonious’ image beyond its borders” and reassures its neighbors that China has peaceful intentions—analysis repeated in the testimony to the Commission by two other expert witnesses.²⁸

In recent years, China’s military has taken several steps to institutionalize its commitment to peacekeeping operations. China has established at least three facilities to provide specialized training to Chinese troops, police officers, and observers prior to participating in peacekeeping operations.²⁹ One of these facilities is in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province; another is in Langfang, Hebei Province; and a third, which became fully operational in mid-2009, is in Beijing. This third facility will help the PLA to “centralize and better coordinate Chinese peacekeeping activities” in anticipation of additional UN peacekeeping commitments.³⁰

Activities Supporting Counterpiracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden

On December 26, 2008, following the fourth UN Security Council resolution that year concerning Somali pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden, China deployed a naval task group to participate alongside a multinational counterpiracy effort in that region. The decision to dispatch PLA Navy vessels was in response to the repeated hijacking attempts that Chinese vessels faced while transiting past the Horn of Africa. According to official Chinese statements, of the 1,265 Chinese commercial vessels or vessels carrying Chinese goods that traversed the region from January to No-

vember 2008,³¹ pirates attacked 20 percent of them, successfully capturing seven.³²

China's task group, currently in its third rotation, is composed of three PLA Navy vessels and crew and about 70 special operations forces. From December 2008 to April 2009, the task group included two guided-missile destroyers (*Haikou* and *Wuhan*) and a replenishment ship (*Weishanhu*). Bernard D. Cole, a professor at the U.S. National War College, called these destroyers "two of China's newest, most capable surface combatants."³³ In April 2009, the destroyers were relieved by another destroyer (*Shenzhen*) and a frigate (*Huangshan*), while the replenishment ship remained.³⁴ All three vessels were replaced in July 2009 with the third deployment, consisting of two frigates (*Zhoushan* and *Xuzhou*) and another replenishment ship (*Qiandaohu*). Although the Chinese task groups are participating in international counterpiracy efforts in the region, they are not official members of the multinational counterpiracy coalition, Combined Task Force 151, established on January 8, 2009.³⁵ The PLA Navy's mission is to escort Chinese ships sailing through the region, as well as non-Chinese ships carrying humanitarian goods, such as items for the UN World Food Program. This mission differs from the Combined Task Force 151's mission, which is to conduct broad counterpiracy operations.³⁶

China's dispatch of naval vessels to the region is significant in several ways. Dr. Cole stated that it is the first time that the PLA Navy is

- conducting combat operations outside of China's territorial waters;
- operating "for an extended period of time at great distance from home port" (more than 3,400 miles from Hainan Island);
- relying on "foreign sources . . . for logistics support for an extended period of time";
- operating "in an environment of international naval forces, other than for a brief naval review"; and
- coordinating with U.S. warships on nonexercise operations.³⁷

Although this is a major step for the PLA, it should be understood that the dispatch of three PLA Navy task groups does not automatically mean the PLA Navy is a "blue water" navy capable of operating around the globe. Each deployment is small in size, consisting of only three vessels. In addition, this is currently China's sole naval deployment. As the Pentagon reports, "China's ability to sustain military power at a distance remains limited."³⁸

Humanitarian Operations

Historically, the PLA has always participated in humanitarian operations (including disaster relief operations) within China, such as after the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province. Abroad, the PLA has contributed to 10 such operations since 2002.³⁹ International agreements and new military platforms intended for such noncombat operations indicate that the PLA will likely participate in more international humanitarian operations in the future.

China has worked to establish channels for international cooperation on humanitarian operations. For example, the Chinese

government proposed and drafted the *General Guidelines for Disaster Relief Cooperation* for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) Regional Forum,* which adopted the protocol at a ministerial meeting in 2007.⁴⁰ In 2008, China hosted a regional workshop with several Southeast Asian nations on military disaster relief.⁴¹ China's focus on international disaster relief coordination led then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia Sedney to state that this sort of cooperation represents much of the recent increase in military engagement between China and Southeast Asia.⁴²

China also has developed military platforms to bolster its effectiveness in conducting humanitarian operations. After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the PLA was unable to participate effectively in relief efforts throughout Southeast Asia, demonstrating to China's leadership the need to develop improved hospital ship capabilities⁴³—especially in light of the goodwill the United States received during that crisis from its deployment of USNS *Mercy* to the region.⁴⁴ As a result, in 2008 the PLA Navy built a new hospital ship, the 10,000-ton *Heping Fangzhou*.⁴⁵ While not China's first hospital ship,⁴⁶ it is its most capable and, in addition to its primary role of providing combat support, will allow the PLA Navy to better carry out international humanitarian operations.⁴⁷

Combined Exercises †

In recent years, the Chinese military has placed a greater emphasis on military exercises with foreign countries, or “combined exercises.” The Chinese military's first bilateral military exercise occurred with Kyrgyzstan in 2002. “Exercise 01,” as it was called, took place on the border between the two nations and reportedly involved hundreds of troops from both sides. It focused on counterterrorism operations and was the first bilateral military exercise between member-states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.⁴⁸

Since then, China has participated in at least 33 combined exercises of various kinds. Significantly, more than half of these exercises have occurred outside of Chinese territory.⁴⁹ The Chinese military has increased the number of countries with which it has participated in combined exercises. As of the writing of this Report, the Chinese military has conducted combined exercises with at least 20 different countries.⁵⁰ So far this year, China has conducted exercises with Russia (twice), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Mongolia, Singapore, and Gabon.⁵¹ The combined exercise with Gabon was the first time that China carried out an exercise with an African nation.⁵²

Participating in combined exercises provides the Chinese military with the opportunity to improve its operational capability by learning from other militaries—sometimes even from militaries that

*Current members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Regional Forum include Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, the United States, and Vietnam.

†Throughout this Report, the Commission will use the term “combined exercise” to signify a military exercise between two or more nations.

have had actual combat experience. For example, several recent Chinese articles on “Peace Mission 2009,” a combined counterterrorism exercise between China and Russia, discuss lessons the PLA learned from the Russian military. Examples of lessons learned include counterterrorism tactics, urban combat, helicopter operations, combined and joint operations, command and control, special forces operations, and readiness.⁵³ Even participation in peacekeeping operations yields significant operational benefits for the PLA, such as improving its engineering experience, responsiveness, and command and control capabilities.⁵⁴

As with other PLA activities abroad, however, it should be recognized that there are limits to the extent of China’s participation in combined exercises. For example, the PLA participated in an average of six combined exercises annually from 2007 to 2009 (to date), a comparable number for the Brazilian and Indian militaries.⁵⁵ In contrast, the U.S. Navy’s Seventh Fleet alone conducts three times as many combined exercises every year.⁵⁶ In addition, the size of the PLA combined exercises generally remains small, averaging about 1,000 personnel in total.* Furthermore, although the PLA has participated in more combined exercises over the years, these exercises remain very limited in nature. Most combined maritime exercises have been modeled on search and rescue missions, and almost all combined land exercises have been counterterrorism oriented.⁵⁷ Recent exceptions include the China-Gabon combined exercise and the 2009 China-Mongolia combined exercise, a humanitarian medical rescue and a peacekeeping exercise, respectively.⁵⁸ Finally, despite the greater diversity of these exercises, many of them have been conducted with the same countries. For example, more than a third of China’s combined exercises have been held with Pakistan (five), India (four), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization countries (four).⁵⁹

Military Diplomacy

In recent years—and especially since 2002—China’s military diplomacy with other countries has become more robust. Demonstrating the importance of military exchanges, the PLA Navy commander wrote in an influential CCP journal that

*[In order] to build a powerful navy adapted to the needs for carrying out the [Historic Missions], we must stress the expansion of exchanges with foreign militaries, open up our world view, and expand our strategic field of vision. In the new environment of reform and opening up, we must strengthen the navy’s foreign affairs functions.*⁶⁰

To this extent, the PLA’s foreign activities have “increased in frequency and scope” as China “seeks to enhance its national power by improving foreign relationships, bolstering its international image, and assuaging concerns among other countries about China’s rise.”⁶¹ China has developed stronger military ties with other nations, particularly throughout the developing world. In the Mid-

*An exception to this was the first Peace Mission 2005, held between China and Russia in 2005. According to Chinese sources, about 10,000 troops in total participated in this combined exercise, China’s largest to date.

dle East, Africa, South America, and throughout Asia, China's military relationships are slowly, yet steadily, growing.⁶²

In contrast, the U.S.-China military relationship experienced a setback in October 2008, when Beijing abruptly suspended military contacts after a U.S. notification of impending arms sales to Taiwan. In practice, however, some interaction has occurred. For example, U.S. naval forces conducting counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden have coordinated with their Chinese counterparts,⁶³ while U.S. defense officials met with high-level Chinese officials for the Defense Policy Coordination Talks in February 2009.⁶⁴ In April, the chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, traveled to China to observe the fleet review held for the PLA Navy's 60th anniversary, during which he met with the PLA Navy commander, Admiral Wu Shengli.⁶⁵ Further military-to-military contact occurred during the 10th U.S.-China Defense Consultative Talks in June. These talks reportedly resulted in an agreement to hold a Military Maritime Consultative Agreement session in late summer or fall of 2009, which, from China's perspective, would mark the full resumption of military-to-military relations with the United States.⁶⁶ Since then, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy and Admiral Timothy Keating, then commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, met with a PLA Navy rear admiral on the sidelines of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue in July 2009.⁶⁷

With the notable exception of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, China's military engagement typically takes place on a bilateral basis.⁶⁸ Chinese military forces send and receive high-level delegations, defense attachés, and students to study in foreign professional military education exchanges. In these efforts, China focuses on South America⁶⁹ and Africa,⁷⁰ in particular.

International exchanges are not confined to the PLA. According to China's 2008 defense white paper, China's paramilitary security force responsible for domestic security, the People's Armed Police

*has sent delegations to over 30 countries for bilateral or multilateral counterterrorism exchanges, including France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Australia, Israel, Brazil, Cuba, South Africa, Russia and Pakistan, and hosted delegations from 17 countries, such as Russia, Romania, France, Italy, Hungary, South Africa, Egypt, Australia and Belarus.*⁷¹

China has a range of motivations to increase its military's contacts. The U.S. Department of Defense's 2009 *Military Power of the People's Republic of China* report states that these military exchanges

*provide China with opportunities to increase military officers' international exposure, communicate China's positions to foreign audiences, better understand alternative world views, and advance foreign relations through interpersonal contacts and military assistance programs.*⁷²

Furthermore, familiarity with foreign militaries gives Chinese military personnel a better understanding of alternative forms of operational doctrine.⁷³

Though China's military engagement with other nations is increasing, this activity typically does not drive China's overall bilateral relationships. According to then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia Sedney, all of China's military ties are secondary to its economic relationships and generally are used as a means to further its economic interests.⁷⁴

Port Calls

PLA Navy port calls serve as a visible reminder of China's growing diplomatic and military presence abroad. Over the past few years, both the frequency and range of PLA Navy port calls have increased. For example, the PLA Navy conducted more port calls in 2007 than in the preceding three years combined.⁷⁵ Although 2008 saw a decrease in the number of Chinese port calls to foreign countries (likely due to the PLA's focus on hosting the Beijing Olympics and to supporting disaster relief efforts after the Sichuan earthquake), 2009 port calls to date have already reached 2007's level.⁷⁶

The range of PLA Navy port calls has also expanded. According to testimony by Michael R. Auslin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, PLA naval vessels "now make port calls throughout the world, not just in Asia," demonstrating the PLA Navy's "ability to undertake extended, transoceanic voyages."⁷⁷ In 2007, for example, after visiting St. Petersburg, Russia, for the launch of the "Year of China" public relations event in Russia, two Chinese vessels then made port calls to England, Spain, and France before returning to China.⁷⁸ In 2009, PLA Navy vessels supporting counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden visited Yemen (Port of Aden), three times and Oman (Port Salalah) once.⁷⁹

Although China's port calls have increased in range and number, they are still limited. First, the overall number of PLA Navy port calls is small—only 21 in 2007, 2008, and 2009 combined.⁸⁰ By comparison, the U.S. Seventh Fleet (Western Pacific and Indian Ocean) on average conducts "more than 250 port visits every year."⁸¹ Second, China's port calls generally involve at most two vessels. For example, of the 21 port calls made in the past three years, only one, the June 2009 visit to Oman, involved three vessels; the rest were either made by one or two vessels.⁸² Finally, the PLA Navy does not truly have a global presence, as there appears to be no record of any port calls to either Latin America or Africa since 2002.*

Maritime Patrols

According to testimony submitted to the Commission by Senator Jim Webb, China's maritime forces have demonstrated a "growing assertiveness" in enforcing Beijing's maritime claims. For example,

*The last apparent visit to either Latin America or Africa was during China's first-ever circumnavigation of the globe, in 2002, when the PLA Navy visited Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Egypt, among other nations. *People's Daily*, "PLA Fleet Starts First Round-the-World Voyage," May 16, 2002. http://english.people.com.cn/200205/15/eng20020515_95767.shtml; Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2004* (Beijing: December 2004); Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2006* (Beijing: December 2006); and Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: January 2009).

in early March 2009, five Chinese vessels harassed an unarmed U.S. ocean surveillance vessel, USNS *Impeccable*, while it was conducting operations in international waters about 75 miles south of Hainan Island in the South China Sea.⁸³ At approximately the same time, another Chinese government vessel used a high-intensity spotlight to illuminate the bridge of the U.S. surveillance ship *Victorious* in the Yellow Sea, endangering the ship by potentially blinding her operators.⁸⁴ In addition, Chinese aircraft conducted numerous provocative fly-bys during both incidents.⁸⁵ According to former Senator John W. Warner's testimony to the Commission, the various activities of the Chinese vessels were quite dangerous and could have resulted in a collision had the U.S. vessels not reacted quickly.⁸⁶

These incidents displayed a high level of coordination between military and civilian entities involved on the Chinese side, likely demonstrating that they were planned and supported by Beijing. For example, five Chinese vessels from various entities took part in the USNS *Impeccable* incident: a PLA Navy intelligence collection vessel; a Bureau of Maritime Fisheries patrol vessel; a State Oceanic Administration patrol vessel; and two small, Chinese-flagged fishing vessels.⁸⁷ Furthermore, six months earlier, China held a large, high-profile interagency training event that presaged the *Impeccable* incident. During the training event, observed by two members of China's supreme military body, the Central Military Commission, more than 30 ships, airplanes, and helicopters participated. These vessels and aircraft belonged to four different organizations: the PLA Navy and naval reserve; the State Oceanic Administration's China Marine Surveillance Force; the Ministry of Commerce's Rescue and Salvage Bureau; and the maritime militia.⁸⁸ During this interagency training exercise, one of the training tasks was to "jointly control a maritime area."⁸⁹ Therefore, as Senator Webb pointed out, the *Impeccable* and *Victorious* incidents should be interpreted "not as singular, tactical events, but as a concerted, calculated effort" of the Chinese government."⁹⁰

Maritime incidents between the United States and China arise in part from Beijing's unique perspective on rights associated with the exclusive economic zone—an area that extends 200 nautical miles from a nation's coastal baseline. The Chinese government asserts a level of control over this area that is inconsistent with generally accepted interpretations of the international laws that govern the issue.⁹¹ This divergence of views about what constitutes acceptable behavior in the zone and, crucially, China's sometimes belligerent practices, has led to serious naval standoffs. Aside from freedom of navigation rights, China's exclusive economic zone disputes involve exploitation rights for hydrocarbons and undersea minerals, as well as fishing rights, with several of China's maritime neighbors.

Implications for the United States

As then Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia Sedney told the Commission, the "expansion of [the PLA's] military and security activities abroad poses both challenges and opportunities" for the United States.⁹² The Chinese armed forces' increas-

ingly outward orientation could allow the military to contribute more to multinational operations aimed at ensuring global stability, such as peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and counterpiracy operations—areas where Washington and Beijing’s interests align.⁹³ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs John J. Norris Jr. identified additional areas where China’s growing military influence could help the United States, such as addressing the North Korean and Iranian nuclear issues.⁹⁴ In addition, the U.S. and Chinese militaries could possibly cooperate on counterterrorism efforts.⁹⁵

As the PLA increases its overseas presence, there will be more opportunities for the U.S. military to interact and hold dialogues with the Chinese military on a variety of issues, thus furthering the overall bilateral relationship. Rear Admiral Eric A. McVadon, U.S. Navy (Ret.), told the Commission that frequent setbacks in the U.S. military-PLA relationship make “it difficult for either side to develop trust and confidence in the other and to play a positive role in influencing the other in mutually desirable ways.”⁹⁶ However, opportunities to maintain and improve the dialogue would help to build trust and understanding between the two, thus minimizing the potential for inadvertent crises.⁹⁷ Through increased dialogues and contacts, it also might be possible to “identify additional areas of common understanding and interest.”⁹⁸

However, as the PLA acquires experience from its overseas activities, it will further improve its military capacity to conduct a variety of operations, some of which are contrary to U.S. interests. Many military capabilities are fungible and are suited to both peacetime and wartime usage. For example, while pointing out the global benefits that the PLA’s increased capabilities could provide, the Department of Defense also stated that “some of these capabilities . . . could allow China to project power to ensure access to resources or enforce claims to disputed territories.”⁹⁹ Frederic Vellucci Jr., a China analyst at CNA, testified to the Commission that the same capabilities used to conduct counterpiracy operations around the Gulf of Aden could also be used to “interfere with the lawful activities of foreign vessels in China’s exclusive economic zones.”¹⁰⁰ Supporting this statement, Dr. Cole indicated how China’s counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden provide the PLA Navy with “increased expertise and experience in operations, logistics, command and control, and interagency cooperation.”¹⁰¹

Historical Note: Incidents at Sea with Soviet Vessels

China is not the first nation with which the U.S. Navy has had maritime run-ins. In June 2009, former Senator John W. Warner, who served as undersecretary of the Navy (1969–1972) and secretary of the Navy (1972–1974), testified to the Commission that the harassment of USNS *Impeccable* is reminiscent of similar incidents between U.S. and Soviet vessels in the late 1960s and early 1970s. According to Senator Warner, both the United States and the Soviet Union realized they needed to “determine a common basis by which [they] could recognize a nation’s right over international waters to operate on the surface and in the air, but at the same time to do so in a way that does not bring about physical or property damage to the other.”¹⁰² Eventual negotiations between a U.S. delegation, led by Senator Warner, and a Soviet delegation resulted in the *Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas*, in 1972.¹⁰³

At its core, this agreement is a rules-based approach to safety on the high seas. According to one expert on this accord, the agreement “served to moderate the behavior of the naval surface and air forces of the two sides through the end of the Cold War,” despite other problems in the relationship.¹⁰⁴ In his testimony, Senator Warner stated that

*[the agreement] almost totally was successful in avoiding any incidents of a magnitude of seriousness that could have been a tripwire to starting a more serious confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States.*¹⁰⁵

Currently the United States has a mechanism for discussing maritime issues with China, the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement. Unlike the high seas agreement, however, the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement did not contain an “agreement on communication during crises or rules of engagement.”¹⁰⁶ As Senator Warner described to the Commission, the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement lacks the strength necessary to avoid incidents at sea that the high seas agreement contained.¹⁰⁷ A more robust agreement, or a reinforced Military Maritime Consultative Agreement, particularly one which—like the high seas agreement—included “formal rules of interaction,” could “reduce both the likelihood of inadvertent clashes, as well as promote understanding and reduce the long-term likelihood of conflict” on the sea.¹⁰⁸

Finally, a more active PLA will likely increase China’s security influence around the globe. China’s recent global security activities strengthen China’s diplomatic relationships, enhance its global image and influence, and promote its economic development.¹⁰⁹ Some of China’s increased influence could come at the expense of the United States. For example, when Uzbekistan demanded in July 2005 that the United States close its Karshi-Khanabad airbase—a crucial supply base for U.S. operations in Afghanistan—

General Richard Myers, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that the demand was partially due to China's influence.¹¹⁰ Similarly, China's increased participation in peacekeeping operations could adversely impact the United States by "gradually counterbalanc[ing] U.S. influence and more actively shap[ing]—in ways consistent with Chinese foreign policy principles and national interests—the norms guiding UN peacekeeping operations."¹¹¹ In addition, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Norris told the Commission that China's continued military support for states that pursue policies contrary to global norms, such as Burma, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, is also troubling.¹¹²

Conclusions

- Beijing has begun to broaden its national security concerns beyond a potential contingency across the Taiwan Strait and around its immediate periphery.
- Chinese leaders place a growing emphasis on militarily safeguarding China's expanding national interests. Hu Jintao codified this trend in 2004 when he declared a new set of guiding principles for the armed forces called the *Historic Missions*.
- China's leadership has a growing appreciation for the seriousness of overseas, nontraditional threats that could adversely affect China's economic and other interests, as evidenced by the military's increasing allocation of resources toward missions such as peacekeeping, counterpiracy, and disaster relief.
- These geographical and functional changes in China's military missions correlate with an increase in China's military, security, and economic activities abroad.
- China's expanded claim over freedom of navigation in what it considers to be its exclusive economic zone could lead to further incidents involving the U.S. military.
- At the same time, however, the expansion of China's military and security activities abroad are more *evolutionary* than *revolutionary* in nature. Although the PLA is operating more frequently abroad, it should not yet be considered a global military or a military with a global reach.
- PLA activities abroad will improve the PLA's military capabilities—such as command, control, communications, and logistics—in ways that will contribute to PLA competence in a broad range of operations.
- The Chinese military's more international orientation is not a fundamentally negative development. A more activist PLA could in some circumstances provide a "public good" by contributing more to global stability. Other nations, including the United States, may benefit from Chinese peacekeeping operations and counterpiracy efforts.
- The Chinese military's more international orientation—combined with its improved military capacity—could, however, adversely affect U.S. national security. Of particular import will be whether a militarily confident China will take a more confrontational stance toward the United States or its allies.