

February 2, 2007
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Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission
U.S.-China Relationship: Economics and Security in Perspective

Opening Comments

Chairman Bartholomew and commissioners,

For someone who has been involved in the US-China Military Relationship for more than 20 years in both a track 1 and track 2 environment, it is an honor to be invited to present my views on this important topic to the commission.

Rather than answering each question individually, I will address seven issues and provide some recommendations.

Building A Framework

The first issue I would like to address is a positive step DOD and the PLA are doing to build a framework for the military relationship. It is my understanding that the two sides are now classifying exchanges into four categories: high-level, functional, educational, and policy. This framework is used as the foundation when the two sides meet at the end of each year to discuss the exchanges for the following year. The two sides meet at the desk officer level midway through the year to review the progress.

Within this framework, the US side has been pushing for exchanges among officers at lower levels. For example, the US has been sending delegations consisting of O-5s and O-6s to China, but China's reciprocal delegations consist primarily of O-6s and O-7s.

Establishing a Counterpart Chart

The second issue deals with hosting visits. During the negotiations for visits each year, one of the first questions that arises is, "Who will host each visit?"

Therefore, one important aspect of establishing a framework would be to have both sides create a formal comparison chart that shows equivalent organizations and personnel in the US military and PLA.

For example, at the national level, who are the PLA's counterparts to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Chief of Staff of the Army? Are they the senior vice chairman of the Central Military Commission and the Chief of the General Staff, respectively?

This is complicated, because the PLA's four General Departments serve as both the joint staff and the headquarters for the ground forces.

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Who Gets to Visit China and When

The third issue concerns who gets to visit China and when. Most high-level visits between China and the US are reciprocal visits over a two-year period. On the Chinese side, the PLA can host only a couple of high-level US defense leaders each year.

These visits are divided among the Secretary of Defense, the three service secretaries, the four service chiefs, and organizations within the Pacific Command structure. The choice sometimes comes down to a visit by the service chief or a PACOM component commander. As a result, not every high-level visitor gets to visit China.

Furthermore, the timing of the visit is important to maximize the exchange of ideas. Specifically, should the US person visit China during his first, second, or third year? There are advantages and disadvantages to each scenario.

On the other side of the coin, most senior PLA officers are allowed to travel only once a year, so they cannot visit the US more than once, if at all.

Transparency and Creating a Visit Matrix

The fourth issue involves transparency. In my view, the issue of transparency in the US-China military relationship should be viewed from a 25-year perspective, not on a one-year basis. Each visit should be treated as one part of a long-term service-to-service relationship rather than looking at each visit as a separate entity.

For example, USAF delegations do not necessarily need to visit the PLA Air Force's Engineering University in Xian every year, even though it is a convenient stop for seeing the Terra Cotta Warriors.

To accomplish this, I recommend that DOD work with the PLA to produce a matrix that shows every US military and PLA visit for the past decade. The entries should include the date of the visit, the delegation leader, the purpose of the visit, and what locations were visited.

These matrices can then be used as a basis for negotiating the following year's exchange schedule to avoid redundancy and to select new locations.

Pre-Visit Preparation

The fifth issue concerns conducting pre-visit preparations. The US side has two common criticisms concerning their visits to China.

The first criticism is that they are often not given their final agenda until the last minute. As a result, they may not be fully prepared for each stop of the visit.

The second criticism is that, during their visit, many of their questions are not answered as fully as they would like.

To help solve the first issue, perhaps the Secretary of Defense and China's Minister of Defense could sign a formal agreement that each delegation will be given a specified number of days advanced notice, so they can prepare accordingly. This could be incorporated into the overall framework mentioned above.

In my view, one of the ways to at least partially solve the second issue is to have each delegation submit a formal list of questions for each location to be visited in China. These questions should be submitted through the respective military attaché offices as early as possible, so the PLA can staff them properly through the right channels in Beijing.

For example, the PLA's regulations state that organizational structure information is classified and cannot be revealed to foreigners. Therefore, if a US military visitor asks a question about a unit's organization, the PLA officer cannot answer it without first having permission from Beijing.

Focused Delegations

The sixth issue deals with the types of delegations. Most US military delegations that visit China have a broad agenda and travel to two or more cities over several days. In my view, the US side should incorporate more focused delegations in the mix in order to better understand the PLA.

For example, the two sides could have a series of multi-day discussions on each side's national and military strategy and doctrine. This could be a track 1.5 dialogue that includes non-government specialists on each side.

Each side could provide a specific set of questions several months in advance. Each delegation should be led by a flag-rank officer, and the delegation should be composed of people who work doctrine issues on a daily basis.

To prepare for the discussions, the US side should also learn as much as possible about China's doctrine before the meetings begin, so as to be able to ask relevant questions.

Engaging the PLA's Enlisted Force

My final topic concerns engaging the PLA's enlisted force. Since the US-China military relationship began, it is my understanding that only a few enlisted members have been incorporated as formal members of US delegations visiting China. To my knowledge, the US has not sent a delegation composed solely of enlisted personnel to China to engage the PLA on enlisted force issues.

Therefore, I would like to encourage DOD to begin engaging the PLA over a period of time about the significant reforms currently underway in the PLA's enlisted force.

Concluding Remarks

I would be pleased to address any questions you have at this time.

Questions Submitted by the USCC

1. What new security challenges should the U.S. military address in future exchanges with China? What recommendations can be made to improve US.-China military relations in the next five years?
2. How can the US. military more effectively assess Chinese military modernization and technological developments? How can China improve its transparency to allow a more accurate analysis of its modernization program?
3. What effect will Taiwan's approval of any or all components of the U.S.-offered arms package have on U.S.-China military relations?
4. What are the costs and benefits of military- to-military exchanges between the United States and China? What has the U.S. military gained from its exchanges with Chinese counterparts in 2006?
5. How can military-to-military exchanges be designed to ensure a more equitable sharing of information? What are the prospects for improving communication between the U.S. and Chinese military, and for ultimately improving military-to-military relations?