

SECTION 2: DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINA'S MILITARY EXPEDITIONARY AND FORCE PROJECTION CAPABILITIES

Introduction

Chinese defense and national security white papers highlight multiple military missions that would require the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to conduct operations beyond the territorial boundaries of the People's Republic of China (PRC), to include anti-piracy, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) operations.¹ Chinese military strategic thinkers likewise discuss the need for the PLA to pursue long-distance, or expeditionary, operational capabilities.² The requirements to support these operations include developing long-range naval, air, as well as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to advance and safeguard national interests and conduct military operations at greater distances from China's periphery.³ The term associated with these missions is "non-war"⁴ operations. As China's interests and activities abroad grow, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) asserts the PLA's "military modernization program has become progressively more focused on investments for a range of missions beyond China's periphery, including power projection" operations.⁵

This capability, regardless of whether referred to as "expeditionary" or "long-distance," will boost the PLA's ability to conduct warfighting missions further into the Western Pacific and beyond. Kristen Gunness, chief executive officer of Vantage Point Asia LLC and an adjunct senior international policy analyst at the RAND Corporation, testified to the Commission that "many of the expeditionary capabilities that the PLA is investing in or improving are ... 'overlap' capabilities that are useful across a range of mission sets, including antiaccess/area denial,* cross-border [operations], and expeditionary missions."⁶ Examples of developments within the PLA that enhance these capabilities include the construction of surface warfare and amphibious ships, strike aircraft, and attack submarines; the improvement of air and sealift capacity; and the application of lessons learned from joint training and operational deployments.

This section analyzes the security challenges, evolving missions, joint operational developments, and military modernization efforts associated with China's interest in developing an expeditionary force projection capability throughout and beyond the second island

*According to DOD, "antiaccess" actions are intended to slow deployment of an adversary's forces into a theater or cause them to operate at distances farther from the conflict than they would prefer. "Area denial" actions affect maneuvers within a theater, and are intended to impede an adversary's operations within areas where friendly forces cannot or will not prevent access. U.S. Department of Defense, *Air Sea Battle: Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access & Area Denial Challenges*, May 2013, 2.

chain;* it also examines the implications for the United States and U.S. allies and partners in the Asia Pacific.† This analysis draws from the Commission’s January 2016 hearing on developments in China’s military force projection and expeditionary capabilities, consultations with experts on Chinese military affairs, the Commission’s July 2016 trip to China and India, and open source research and analysis.

Factors Driving China’s Interest in Expeditionary Capabilities

Security Challenges

China’s 2015 defense white paper, entitled “China’s Military Strategy,” identifies a range of Chinese security concerns that include challenges to territorial integrity, security of citizens abroad, terrorism, ongoing border disputes, recurring regional crises, and the potential for local wars.⁷ The strategic military thinking outlined in the white paper highlights expanding military activities that are intended to enhance China’s efforts to defend “core interests,” although it does not indicate a departure from the PLA’s traditional military missions (which include defending the Chinese Communist Party [CCP], defending the homeland, and unifying with Taiwan). However, according to Timothy Heath, a senior international defense research analyst with the RAND Corporation, “The rising importance placed [by the 2015 defense white paper] on the protection of the nation’s expanding interests marks a profound shift in security policy. While continuing to prioritize peaceful means to strengthen control over its core interests and improve its strategic position, China is at the same time preparing for more coercive options short of war.”⁸

China’s Core Interests

Chinese officials began making core interest declarations in 2003 to characterize Beijing’s concern that Taiwan was steadily moving toward de jure independence. In 2011 China issued a white paper titled “China’s Peaceful Development” that defined core interests as “state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China’s political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social de-

*The first island chain refers to a line of islands running through the Kurile Islands, Japan and the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, Borneo, and Natuna Besar. The second island chain is farther east, running through the Kurile Islands, Japan, the Bonin Islands, the Mariana Islands, and the Caroline Islands. PLA strategists and academics have long asserted the United States relies primarily on the first island chain and the second island chain to strategically “encircle” or “contain” China and prevent the PLA Navy from operating freely in the Western Pacific. Hai Tao, “PRC Article Surveys China’s Naval Rivals, Challenges,” *Guoji Xianqu Daobao*, January 6, 2012. Staff translation; Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea (2nd ed.)*, Naval Institute Press, 2010, 174–176.

†Many of the long-range expeditionary capabilities the PLA is pursuing would enable the combat insertion of troops conducting island landing operations during an invasion of Taiwan. However, this section is focused on a range of contingencies or requirements driving the PLA to build an expeditionary capability for operations within and beyond the second island chain or along China’s land borders.

China's Core Interests—Continued

velopment.”⁹ In 2015, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress passed a new National Security Law that expanded the country's authoritative rule over a far greater list of “core interests,” including space and cyberspace.¹⁰ Zheng Shuna, a National People's Congress official, explained at the unveiling of the new National Security Law in Beijing that “the country must defend its sovereignty, security, and development interests. It must also maintain political and social stability. . . . Any government will stand firm and will not leave any room for disputes, compromises, and interference when it comes to protecting core interests. China is no exception.”¹¹ Chinese officials make core interest declarations, especially those focused on national sovereignty and territorial integrity, to advance foreign policy objectives. Occasionally, Chinese officials have indicated Beijing would be willing to use force to protect China's core interests.¹²

Some core interest statements issued by senior Chinese leadership include:

- The first time a Chinese official spoke publicly about core interests in a diplomatic context was in 2003. Tang Jiaquan, then Chinese foreign minister, told then U.S. secretary of State Colin Powell concerning Taiwan that “the Taiwan issue concerns China's core interests [and] proper handling of this issue is key to ensuring the stable development of U.S.-China relations.”¹³
- In November 2008, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson responding to a question about then French president Nicolas Sarkozy's meeting with the Dalai Lama said “the Chinese Government is resolute and clear-cut on issues of major principles, including those involving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, its national core interest, and the feelings of the Chinese people. [China] resolutely oppose[s] [the Dalai Lama's] separatist activities in any country in whatever capacity, and his contact with foreign governments and leaders in whatever form.”¹⁴
- More recently, Chinese President and General Secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping, during a July 2016 meeting with U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice, called upon “China and the United States to effectively manage their differences and respect each other's core interests.”¹⁵ President Xi's statement came after the July 12, 2016, ruling released by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague concerning the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea case on China's claims and activities in the South China Sea.¹⁶

These security concerns are driving China to pursue capabilities that would facilitate PLA operations abroad in defense of Chinese interests. Oriana Skylar Mastro, an assistant professor of Security Studies at Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of

Foreign Service, testified to the Commission that “commercial, economic, and political reasons are pushing China to give greater consideration to global threats and opportunities.”¹⁷ As more Chinese citizens travel abroad and China’s overseas interests expand,* China is becoming increasingly exposed to threats that instability or hostile activity pose to citizens and investments beyond China’s borders.¹⁸ In recent years, anti-China sentiment has led to the targeting of Chinese citizens and economic interests abroad:

- In August 2016, a suicide car bomber attacked the Chinese Embassy in Kyrgyzstan, killing himself and wounding three Kyrgyz employees of the embassy. Following the attack, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that China “will strengthen antiterrorism cooperation with regional countries including Kyrgyzstan under bilateral and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization ... frameworks, clamp down on all forms of terrorism, and take tangible efforts to ensure the safety of Chinese institutions and people in relevant countries and uphold regional peace and stability.”¹⁹
- Also in August 2016, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) conducted a terrorist attack against a hospital in Quetta, Pakistan, that killed 74 people. Lieutenant General Asim Saleem Bajwa, director general of Inter-Services Public Relations for Pakistan’s military, claimed the attack was “specifically targeting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.”²⁰
- In August 2015, three Chinese tourists were killed during a terrorist attack targeting a shrine in Bangkok, Thailand. Although unconfirmed, some analysts and officials have suggested the attack specifically targeted Chinese tourists.²¹
- In July 2015, the Chinese government issued a travel warning in Turkey after Asian tourists were harassed in Istanbul during protests against China’s abuses of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.²²
- In 2015, ISIL—which in 2014 identified China as a country that deprives Muslims of their rights²³—killed a Chinese citizen who had been held hostage for several months.²⁴
- In 2014, three Filipino men angry about Chinese business and environmental practices sought to carry out attacks against Manila’s international airport, the Chinese embassy in Manila, and Chinese workers in the Philippines.²⁵ The plots failed, and Filipino authorities arrested the men.²⁶

Even if not specifically targeted, Chinese citizens traveling, working, or living abroad face safety and security concerns. For example, in 2011 four Chinese oil workers were among many foreign workers abducted by Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

* Between May 2013 and May 2014, Chinese citizens conducted 98 million overseas trips and 20,000 Chinese companies operated in more than 180 countries. China’s Department of Consular Affairs has assessed that by 2020 Chinese citizens will make 150 million trips overseas per year. Oriana Skylar, “The Foreign Policy Essay: Why China Will Become a Global Military Power,” *Lawfare* (Blog), January 11, 2015; Keira Lu Huang, “‘Not Enough’ Consular Officers to Serve Chinese Nationals, Foreign Ministry Says,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), May 19, 2014.

guerrillas in Colombia and held captive for nearly 18 months before being released.²⁷

Security along China's One Belt, One Road

A potential source of security risks to Chinese citizens and investments abroad is China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative,* which employs economic engagement—primarily through infrastructure investment—to advance China's broader geostrategic goals and economic growth.²⁸ The land route associated with this initiative—the Silk Road Economic Belt—includes projects in unstable portions of South and Central Asia, making it potentially vulnerable to terrorist attacks.†²⁹ Dr. Mastro suggests the "PLA is eager to collect its portion of the political and fiscal patronage that accompanies the One Belt, One Road initiative, and has largely agreed that the PLA should be responsible for protecting Chinese interests along the One Belt and One Road," which observers note "may require China to abandon its long-standing policy of avoiding security entanglements abroad."³⁰ (For an in-depth discussion of China's One Belt, One Road initiative in South Asia, see Chapter 3, Section 1, "China and South Asia.")

Although China may initially rely on local military and security forces ‡ to protect Chinese citizens working on the One Belt, One Road initiative, constituencies within China's security apparatus argue the PLA should have a larger role in protecting the corridor.³¹ China has experience deploying troops abroad while conducting counterterrorism exercises with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),§ and enacted a counterterrorism law that provides the PLA and other Chinese security forces a legal basis to deploy abroad with host country permission.³² The existing military cooperation between SCO members, coupled

*China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative is a culmination of several policies and projects aimed at linking China with its trading partners. The "Silk Road Economic Belt," announced by President Xi in 2013, runs through South and Central Asia, and its maritime corollary, the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road," runs from China's coast through Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean to Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2015 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2015, 23.

†According to Andrew Small, a transatlantic fellow with the German Marshall Fund of the United States, "For several years, notably from 2004 to 2008, Pakistan was the most dangerous overseas location for Chinese nationals, who faced politically-motivated targeting from groups ranging from the Balochistan Liberation Army to the Pakistani Taliban." U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China-South Asia Relations*, written testimony of Andrew Small, March 10, 2016.

‡While Pakistan has pledged to provide a 20,000-strong security force for Chinese workers, including 10,000 police and 10,000 military troops, China is concerned about competency and rampant corruption within the Pakistani police. Chinese scholar, meeting with Commissioners, Beijing, China, June 24, 2016.

§The SCO, established in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, is the primary vehicle for China's security engagement with Central Asia. In addition to the SCO's six member states, it has six observer states (Afghanistan, Belarus, India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan). India and Pakistan are in the process of becoming full SCO members. Counterterrorism is the stated primary focus of the SCO, although the organization ostensibly concerns itself with a wide range of issues, including economic cooperation, energy ties, counternarcotics, tourism, cultural exchanges, and international affairs. Xinhua, "China Voice: SCO Provides New Paradigm for Global Security Cooperation," June 29, 2016; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2015 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2015, 406.

Security along China's One Belt, One Road—Continued

with the new counterterrorism law, could provide the PLA an opportunity to conduct limited expeditionary operations in conjunction with another SCO member should security conditions along the One Belt, One Road corridor deteriorate and Chinese citizens and infrastructure investments be threatened.

The SCO and counterterrorism training: Since 2002, China has participated in 15 SCO exercises that focused primarily on counterterrorism and provided Chinese troops experience operating in overseas locations.³³ China also pursues bilateral counterterrorism cooperation outside the SCO framework, including with Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Thailand, and the United States.³⁴

Counterterrorism and Beijing's principle of noninterference: According to a study prepared for the Commission by CNA, a non-profit research and analysis organization, China's 2015 Counterterrorism Law* suggests "Beijing is considering a more expeditionary approach to countering terrorist threats in the future," and notes that the new law "provides an explicit legal basis for Chinese public security and state security forces to engage in counterterrorism operations overseas, with permission of the host governments† and after reporting to the State Council."³⁵ This would provide Beijing an option for conducting joint counterterrorism operations along portions of the One Belt, One Road corridor and elsewhere.

Evolving PLA Missions

The growing need for Beijing to protect Chinese interests abroad is not entirely new. In 2004, then Chinese president and general secretary of the CCP Hu Jintao introduced the "New Historic Missions," which included guidance for the PLA to "safeguard national interests" and "promote world peace and common development"—a dramatic change in the PLA's mission.³⁶ The 2015 defense white paper, influenced by guidance from the New Historic Missions, outlined eight strategic tasks, or missions, currently assigned to the

*China's counterterrorism law, enacted in January 2016, defines terrorism as "advocacy or behavior aimed at realizing political or ideological objectives through means of violence, destruction, intimidation, or other methods or creating social panic, endangering public safety, violating persons or infringing property, or coercing state organs or international organizations." Murray Scot Tanner and James Bellacqua, "China's Response to Terrorism," CNA (prepared for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission), June 16, 2016, 33–34.

†China is unlikely to conduct expeditionary missions in foreign countries without first obtaining permission from the host country. In her testimony to the Commission, Dr. Mastro writes "China has had a historical aversion to alliances and overseas basing; China argues that its rejection of such 'hegemonic' behaviors is critical evidence that it will be a different, more peaceful, great power. China's policy of not interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries also continues to be an influential principle, in part because of the ongoing need to protect itself from international criticism, separatist movements, and calls for democracy or greater protection of human rights. Pressures for continuity, such as the belief that interference is ineffective, the desire to promote China's leadership in the developing world, and the deep-rooted desire to be a different type of great power than the United States or former colonial powers, affect calculations of costs, benefits, and appropriate responses to its expanding overseas interests." U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on Developments in China's Military Force Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities*, written testimony of Oriana Skylar Mastro, January 21, 2016.

PLA.³⁷ In addition to safeguarding the CCP, the missions outlined and tasked to the PLA in the 2015 white paper are:

- Safeguarding sovereignty and security of China’s territorial land, air, and sea;
- Safeguarding unification of the motherland;
- Safeguarding security and interests in new domains;*
- Safeguarding security of China’s overseas interests;
- Maintaining strategic deterrence and ability to carry out nuclear counterattack;
- Participating in regional and international security cooperation and maintaining regional and world peace;
- Strengthening efforts in operations against infiltration, separatism, and terrorism so as to maintain China’s political security and social stability; and
- Performing emergency rescue and disaster relief, rights and interests protection, guard duties, and support for national economic and social development.³⁸

Several of these missions require some degree of expeditionary capability.³⁹

Of note, to date many of the missions conducted by the PLA that have an expeditionary component have contributed to international efforts to enhance peace, security, and stability. For example, the PLA mobilized medical units and constructed Ebola treatment centers in Liberia during the 2014 outbreak.⁴⁰

- *Noncombatant evacuation operations* † (*NEOs*): Until recently, the PLA had little experience planning and conducting NEOs, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had coordinated the bulk of China’s operations to evacuate Chinese citizens abroad.‡ Al-

* China’s 2015 defense white paper entitled “China’s Military Strategy” discusses PLA “force development in critical security domains” and contains a reference to the PLA being tasked with “safeguarding China’s security and interests in new domains.” The critical domains emphasized in the 2015 white paper are maritime, space, cyberspace, and nuclear deterrence. Discussion of the maritime domain centers on abandoning the “traditional mentality that land outweighs sea” and is an acknowledgement that China must develop a modern maritime force to protect its sea lines of communication and overseas interests. The white paper also states that China must “deal with security threats and challenges in [the space] domain, and secure its space assets . . . and maintain outer space security.” The white paper refers to cyberspace as a new national security domain requiring the PLA to develop the capability to counter threats to China’s cyber infrastructure. Finally, the white paper discusses the nuclear realm as a new domain, emphasizing nuclear deterrence by restating China’s “no first use policy” and noting that “China will optimize its nuclear force structure.” China’s State Council Information Office, *China’s Military Strategy*, May 2015.

† Noncombatant evacuation operations involve the extraction of civilians from a foreign country amid a dangerous security situation.

‡ China has conducted several evacuation operations over the past decade: In 2006, China evacuated 325 Chinese citizens from the Solomon Islands, 246 from East Timor, 170 from Lebanon, and 300 from Tonga. With the exception of the Lebanon evacuation, China relied on chartered air to extract its citizens. In Lebanon, China evacuated 170 Chinese citizens by coordinating departures through the Syrian, Cypriot, and Israeli embassies. In 2008, China evacuated 212 Chinese citizens from Chad and 3,000 Chinese tourists from Thailand. The Chadian government coordinated the transport of Chinese citizens to Cameroon. In the case of Thailand, Chinese aviation authorities arranged air transport for its citizens from Bangkok. In 2009 and 2010, China sent an aid team to Haiti to assist in earthquake relief and evacuated 48 Chinese citizens with the team upon return. In 2010, China airlifted 1,299 Chinese citizens from Kyrgyzstan. In 2011, Chinese citizens were evacuated from Egypt and Libya. In Egypt, China

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though the PLA Navy did successfully plan and execute the first military-led evacuation* of Chinese citizens from Yemen in 2015,⁴¹ the operation occurred in what DOD would call a permissive environment; the PLA has no experience conducting NEOs in a hostile environment.† The success of the Yemen operation reinforced expectations of Chinese citizens that the PLA will play a greater role in such missions in the future.⁴² The PLA's limited NEO planning experience probably motivated China's participation in a March 2016 tabletop exercise with the United Kingdom focused on noncombatant evacuation operations.⁴³

- *Antipiracy operations:* The PLA Navy began Gulf of Aden antipiracy operations in December 2008. This operation, conducted by 24 consecutive task groups, marks the first time the PLA Navy has engaged in and sustained a mission beyond China's near seas.⁴⁴ The PLA Navy has used these deployments to gain logistical experience by sustaining a persistent three-ship presence off the Horn of Africa to protect Chinese merchant shipping from piracy.⁴⁵
- *Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR):* The PLA conducts HA/DR, both within China and overseas, in the execution of nontraditional security missions.⁴⁶ PLA HA/DR missions to date have consisted of troops deployed to conduct search and rescue, logistics, engineering, medical, and transportation operations, and have provided the PLA opportunities to strengthen overseas operational and mobilization capabilities.⁴⁷
- *Peacekeeping operations:* The PLA supports UN peacekeeping operations; as of September 2016, China maintains approximately 2,639 personnel‡ in 10 operations, largely in sub-Saha-

chartered flights to evacuate 1,848 Chinese citizens. In Libya, China rented cruise liners, cargo ships, and fishing boats to evacuate 35,000 of its citizens and for the first time used PLA Navy ships to provide security for an evacuation operation. In 2014, China evacuated 3,500 Chinese citizens from Vietnam and 1,200 from Iraq. In 2015, China evacuated roughly 600 Chinese citizens from Yemen. The NEO was carried out by two PLA Navy frigates and a replenishment ship conducting antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. The Yemen operation was followed by a NEO in Nepal, where the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized civilian Chinese aircraft to return approximately 2,700 Chinese citizens to China. Jane Perlez and Yufan Huang, "Yemen Evacuation Shows Chinese Navy's Growing Role," *New York Times*, March 31, 2015; Xinhua, "Backgrounder: China's Major Overseas Evacuations in Recent Years," March 30, 2015; and Xinhua, "China Brings Home 2,700 Citizens from Nepal," April 29, 2015; Mathieu Duchâtel and Bates Gill, "Overseas Citizen Protection: A Growing Challenge for China," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, February 12, 2014.

*Although the PLA Air Force and Navy supported the evacuation of Chinese citizens in Libya with four Il-76 transport aircraft and a warship, the operation was coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and relied heavily on commercial transport. Abraham M. Denmark, "PLA Logistics 2004–2011: Lessons Learned in the Field," in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner, *Learning by Doing: The PLA Trains at Home and Abroad*, U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, November 2012, 311–315.

†U.S. defense doctrine identifies three environments—permissive, uncertain, and hostile—as possible during a NEO. Permissive environments exist when there is no resistance and a NEO requires little or no assembly of combat forces. Operations in a permissive environment focus on medical treatment, transportation, and administrative processing involved in an evacuation. An uncertain environment exists when a government lacks control over its territory, requiring troop reinforcement for the operation. A hostile environment exists when noncombatants are evacuated under conditions ranging from civil disorder to full-scale combat, requiring a sizable security force and possibly requiring forcible entry operations. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3–68: Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, November 18, 2015.

‡A total of 13 Chinese troops have been killed to date during peacekeeping operations, with 3 fatalities—1 in Mali and 2 in South Sudan—occurring in 2016. China Military Online, "UN Peacekeeping Chief Hails Great Professionalism of Chinese Peacekeepers," July 28, 2016; Chi-

ran Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁸ In 2012, China deployed its first UN peacekeeping combat forces to the UN Mission in South Sudan to provide security for PLA engineering and medical personnel.⁴⁹ The 2012 deployment to South Sudan was followed in 2015 by the PLA's first deployment of an infantry battalion to support a peacekeeping operation.⁵⁰ Participation in peacekeeping operations has provided the PLA operational experience deploying military observers, engineers, logistics support, and medical personnel to UN missions and, according to DOD, reflects the PLA meeting requirements found in the "New Historic Missions' of taking on roles and generating capabilities for operations far beyond China's borders."⁵¹

- *Indian Ocean far sea deployments:* In early 2014, Chinese surface combatants carried out far sea training, during which they transited through the South China Sea, into the eastern Indian Ocean, and then sailed back to China through the Philippine Sea.⁵² During the 23-day deployment, the PLA Navy conducted training associated with antisubmarine warfare, air defense, electronic warfare, and expeditionary logistics.⁵³ In addition to ongoing antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, China dispatched an intelligence gathering ship to the Indian Ocean in 2012, and has deployed four classes of submarines (both nuclear and conventionally powered) to the Indian Ocean.*⁵⁴ China is likely to continue to build on these developments to further the PLA's capability to conduct nontraditional security missions and to enhance its expeditionary capabilities beyond the first island chain.⁵⁵ (For more on China's recent activities in the Indian Ocean, see Chapter 3, Section 1, "China and South Asia.")

Military Modernization: Implications for Developing an Expeditionary Capability

The force structure and capabilities for supporting and sustaining a PLA expeditionary force (beyond the nascent NEO, antipiracy, and HA/DR operational capabilities currently exhibited) outside the first island chain have yet to fully take shape.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, several features of China's ongoing military modernization

na's Ministry of National Defense, *Official English Transcript of PRC National Defense Ministry's News Conference*, July 28, 2016.

*Since China deployed the SHANG-class nuclear attack submarine to the Gulf of Aden in support of PLA Navy antipiracy operations in December 2013, China has dispatched a total of three additional classes of submarine to the Indian Ocean. The PLA Navy deployed the SONG-class diesel electric submarine and the HAN-class nuclear-powered attack submarine in 2014. In 2015, China deployed the YUAN-class diesel electric submarine equipped with an air-independent power propulsion system. By deploying submarines from each of these classes, China has demonstrated the ability to conduct Indian Ocean deployments with a range of submarines from the PLA Navy's submarine order of battle. U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016*, April 26, 2016, 22; Abhijit Singh, "Deciphering China's Submarine Deployments in the Indian Ocean Region," *Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses*, July 8, 2015; Zachary Keck, "Can China's Nuclear Submarines Blockade India?" *National Interest*, June 5, 2015; Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, "Six Years at Sea ... and Counting: Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's Maritime Commons Presence," *Jamestown Foundation*, June 2015, 100–102; Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, "China's Global Maritime Presence: Hard and Soft Dimensions of PLAN Antipiracy Operations," *Jamestown Foundation*, May 1, 2015; and U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, April 7, 2015, 19.

could enable the PLA to sustain more robust expeditionary operations in the future. The PLA is working to increase its capacity to conduct these externally focused non-war operations, as indicated by the modernization themes identified in the 2015 defense white paper, guidance to the PLA in the form of the New Historic Missions, and reforms within the Central Military Commission with implications for command and control for operational forces overseas.⁵⁷

Although China's expeditionary military capabilities are currently limited, they will increase in coming years, as will the likelihood that Beijing will use increases in capability to protect its citizens and economic interests abroad.⁵⁸ With the exception of conflicts involving Russia and India, the PLA probably can conduct these kinds of operations along China's periphery; however, according to *China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army*, a report prepared for the Commission by the RAND Corporation, the "PLA's ability to conduct effective offensive actions into neighboring countries is impeded by continuing logistics shortfalls ... (such as aerial tankers and airlift)."⁵⁹ Furthermore, to support, sustain, and defend long-range operations, the PLA must continue to develop or procure large amphibious ships, heavy lift aircraft, and logistical support capabilities, as well as continue to improve command and control capabilities.

The following aspects of the PLA's naval and air force modernization efforts will enhance China's ability to conduct expeditionary operations:

Amphibious Ships

Some expeditionary operations require amphibious ships to transport troops and equipment. Chinese analysts have suggested large amphibious ships would contribute to conducting non-war military missions such as NEOs.⁶⁰

- *Amphibious transport dock*: China commissioned its fourth YUZHAO-class amphibious transport dock in February 2016, and additional ships are likely planned for the class.⁶¹ The YUZHAO can carry up to four air cushion landing craft, four helicopters, armored vehicles, and troops for long-distance deployments, which DOD notes "provide[s] a ... greater and more flexible capability for 'far seas' operations than the [PLA Navy's] older landing ships."⁶²
- *Amphibious assault ship*: According to DOD, China seeks to construct a class of amphibious assault ships larger than the YUZHAO class that would include a flight deck for conducting helicopter operations.⁶³ China may produce four to six of these Type 081 ships with the capacity to transport 500 troops and configured for helicopter-based vertical assault.⁶⁴

Aircraft Carriers

Aircraft carriers will likely play a role in China's future military actions, such as providing air and other support for antipiracy operations, NEOs, and far seas defense.⁶⁵ Christopher D. Yung, direc-

tor of East Asian Studies at the U.S. Marine Corps University, states the PLA recognizes “an expeditionary force . . . has to operate in an integrated, self-protected manner ” in order to “create a protective bubble around a task force,” as is called for in China’s 2008 defense white paper.⁶⁶ As large amphibious ships generally lack a defensive capability against an airborne or subsurface threat, any operation occurring beyond the range of land-based aircraft will require ships capable of providing air defense and prosecuting submarines to defend task groups conducting expeditionary operations.

- *Aircraft carrier Liaoning*: The PLA Navy continues to integrate the refurbished KUZNETSOV-class aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, into the fleet.⁶⁷ *Liaoning*’s primary mission is fleet air defense.* It may eventually embark a total of 36 aircraft: 24 J-15 fighters, 6 antisubmarine warfare helicopters, 4 airborne early warning helicopters,† and 2 rescue helicopters.⁶⁸
- *Indigenous aircraft carrier program*: China’s Ministry of Defense confirmed China’s first indigenous aircraft carrier was under construction in December 2015.⁶⁹ The carrier will have a ski jump flight deck design similar to *Liaoning*, which will limit the carrier to air defense and possibly antisubmarine warfare operations.⁷⁰ Although the PLA Navy’s first indigenously produced aircraft carrier will be similar to *Liaoning*, future carriers are likely to be flat deck ships, like U.S. aircraft carriers, that utilize steam or magnetic catapults and would enable the PLA Navy to employ aircraft armed with heavier munitions intended for maritime strike or land attack missions.⁷¹ According to DOD, China could build several aircraft carriers in the next 15 years.⁷² China may ultimately produce five ships—for a total of six carriers—for the PLA Navy.⁷³

Escort Ships

In addition to aircraft carriers, any amphibious ships conducting expeditionary operations in far seas will require escort by multi-mission-capable surface combatants. U.S. Navy Rear Admiral (Ret.) Michael A. McDevitt, a senior fellow with CNA Corporation, testified to the Commission that the

backbone of . . . [far] seas’ forces will be the multi-mission LUYANG II/III (Type 052C and 052D) class destroyers (DDG). They are likely to form the bulk of the warship escorts for Liaoning, any follow-on carriers, and expeditionary amphibious forces. These 8,000 ton destroyers . . . have phased-array radars and a long-range SAM [surface-to-air missile] system which provides the [navy] with its first credible area air-defense capability (the ability to de-

*DOD’s 2015 report on China’s military states *Liaoning*’s “smaller size limits the number of aircraft it can embark, while the ski-jump configuration . . . restricts fuel and ordnance load . . . [and] is therefore best suited to fleet air defense missions, extending air cover over a fleet operating far from land-based coverage.” U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2015*, April 7, 2015, 11.

†Shipborne early warning aircraft provide indications of approaching air threats, threat identification, and positional data to intercept aircraft operating from a carrier. Limited by its ski jump flight deck, *Liaoning* will require the PLA Navy to operate a helicopter, rather than a larger fixed wing aircraft, as an early warning aircraft.

*fend more than just oneself). Because these ships are fitted with a multi-purpose 64-cell vertical launch system, they will also be able to load land-attack cruise missiles.*⁷⁴

Attack Submarines

Nuclear attack submarines, conventional diesel electric attack submarines, or attack submarines that employ air-independent power* are likely to provide security for PLA Navy surface forces conducting expeditionary operations. Since 2014, China has deployed all three types of attack submarines to the Indian Ocean in support of PLA Navy antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁷⁵

- *Nuclear attack submarine:* Nuclear attack submarines are well suited for long-range and endurance operations. Rear Admiral McDevitt testified to the Commission that the PLA Navy has modernized its nuclear attack submarine force to include SHANG-class (Type 093) submarines, “and is expected to introduce a new class that could result in a 2020 inventory of 7–8 ... [submarines], which would exceed the United Kingdom and French ... forces and place China third globally in operational nuclear powered attack submarines, behind the United States and Russia.”⁷⁶
- *Conventional attack submarine:* China’s deployment to the Indian Ocean of diesel-electric submarines (some of which employ air-independent power) suggests the PLA Navy will consider dispatching both conventionally and nuclear-powered attack submarines in support of far sea operations. Conventionally powered submarines lack the speed of nuclear submarines, but with enough lead time, dispatching a diesel-electric submarine may provide the PLA Navy more deployment flexibility with regard to managing the overall operational readiness of the submarine force.

Large Transport Aircraft

In addition to a sealift capability, expeditionary operations may require heavy lift aircraft. The Y-20 large transport aircraft entered service with the PLA Air Force in July 2016.⁷⁷ The Y-20 is a heavy lift aircraft in the same category as the Russian Il-76 or the U.S. C-17. The Y-20 is estimated to be capable of carrying 140 troops and flying 2,700 miles with a maximum payload capacity of 66 metric tons.⁷⁸ The Y-20 has been accepted by the PLA Air Force, and the aircraft could eventually support or conduct airborne command and control, logistics support, aerial refueling, and HA/DR missions.⁷⁹

In addition to the Y-20, China and Ukraine have agreed to joint licensed production of the Antonov An-225 strategic airlift aircraft in China,⁸⁰ which will greatly improve the PLA Air Force’s strategic lift capacity for conducting expeditionary operations. The An-

*According to the Nuclear Threat Initiative, an air-independent power propulsion system “uses liquid (or compressed) oxygen or hydrogen fuel cells, thereby allowing submarines to stay submerged for longer periods without the need for external sources of oxygen. This increased endurance also increases a submarine’s survivability.” Nuclear Threat Initiative, “Nuclear Threat Initiative Glossary.”

225 is the largest transport aircraft in the world, is powered by six Progress D-18T jet engines, and is capable of lifting a payload of more than 250 tons.⁸¹ China may begin flying the An-225 by 2019.⁸²

Logistics Support

Expeditionary operations require replenishment and access to repair facilities. In addition to access to overseas logistics nodes, any PLA Navy ships conducting or supporting expeditionary operations will likely require underway replenishment ships to replenish surface combatants at sea.⁸³ Sustaining operations in areas where the PLA does not currently have an established presence will require a more robust underway replenishment capability for the PLA Navy, and access to support facilities for both naval and overseas air operations.

- *Fleet replenishment oilers*: Chinese warships, especially those conducting extended overseas deployments, may require continuous resupply at times when they are beyond the near seas and do not have access to a reliable resupply port.⁸⁴ The PLA Navy currently has seven FUCHI-class replenishment oilers, and could have ten replenishment ships by 2020.⁸⁵
- *Overseas supply points*: Although the PLA Navy has improved access to ports overseas, replenishment (and logistics more generally) remains a concern among PLA Navy leadership.*⁸⁶ In February 2016, China's Ministry of Defense announced it was constructing infrastructure for "support facilities" in Djibouti to support PLA Navy antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden.⁸⁷ This announcement may indicate the PLA is pursuing permanent access to facilities with the capabilities to support communications requirements, medical needs, ship and equipment repair, and replenishment and resupply functions along the lines of the United States' "places not bases" concept.†⁸⁸ (For more detail on the PLA's facility in Djibouti, see Chapter 2, Section 1, "Year in Review: Security and Foreign Affairs.") China may also seek to establish military facilities elsewhere in the region—though its ability to do this will depend on host country agreement. China has played a large role in financing and constructing civilian port infrastructure in the Indian Ocean, including the Port of Colombo and Port

*Dr. Mastro highlights some guiding principles the PLA is likely considering regarding operations from an overseas support facility, noting "China's purpose for the base would need to be in line with host countries' interests and neighboring countries' preference and the base must be set up to protect overseas rights and interests, and cannot be used to attack other countries. Also, China's overseas access policies no doubt take into account a desire to minimize [the] 'China Threat Theory' or concerns nations have with how China may use its newfound military power in the future." U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on Developments in China's Military Force Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities*, written testimony of Oriana Skylar Mastro, January 21, 2016.

†The term "places not bases" is used by U.S. officials to distinguish between agreements the United States has with allies, such as Japan, to permanently station forces in a country, and pacts offering temporary and limited access to overseas facilities, such as the agreement the United States has with Singapore. Prashanth Parameswaran, "Beware China's 'Basing' Strategy: Former U.S. Navy Chief," *Diplomat* (Japan), July 29, 2015; U.S. Pacific Air Forces Public Affairs, "Pacific Air Forces Modifies Command Strategy," October 10, 2014; and Emma Chanlett-Avery, "Singapore: Background and U.S. Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, July 26, 2013, 3.

of Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Gwadar Port in Pakistan. (For more on China's port infrastructure investments in South Asia, see Chapter 3, Section 1, "China and South Asia.")

Nonmilitary assets could also contribute to China's logistics capabilities in expeditionary operations. For example, the PLA Navy has relied on Chinese state-owned shipping companies to resupply antipiracy task forces in the Gulf of Aden. According to Chinese security experts Andrew S. Erickson and Austin Strange, China Ocean Shipping (Group) Company, or COSCO, has used its extensive network of regional contacts to facilitate relations between the PLA Navy and local replenishment services suppliers in countries near the Gulf of Aden.*⁸⁹ Rear Admiral McDevitt testified to the Commission that the PLA Navy has

mastered the logistics of sustaining small task groups on distant stations. The advantage of a state-owned enterprise that is in the logistics services business worldwide ([such as] COSCO) means that China enjoys a built-in shore-based support structure at virtually all the major ports along the Pacific and Indian Oceans. When combined with its modern multi-product replenishment ships that have developed significant skill in at sea support, this has become a successful approach to logistic sustainment halfway around the world from Chinese homeports.⁹⁰

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Facilitating Command and Control

The PLA will continue improving intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities for supporting operational troops. Deployed PLA commanders will require a significant amount of ISR to support their missions, and space-based sensors and aircraft will play a vital role in improving commanders' operational situational awareness.⁹¹ For instance, the PLA has increased its ISR coverage in the Asia Pacific with shore-based unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) capable of long-duration reconnaissance operations.⁹² In addition to improving shore- and space-based sensors, surface ships—including intelligence-gathering ships—and aircraft directly supporting an operation would likely require their own ISR capability. The U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence assesses the PLA Navy "will probably emerge as one of China's most prolific UAV users,† employing UAVs to supplement manned ISR aircraft as ... they are ideally suited for this mission ... [due to] their long loiter time,

*According to Dr. Erickson and Mr. Strange, "[A] COSCO subsidiary, COSCO West Africa, Ltd., has become the PLA [Navy's] largest partner in procuring supplies for escort ships. ... According to COSCO's website, at the close of fiscal year 2011 the company operated a fleet of 157 vessels, which were active at 159 ports in 48 countries." Andrew S. Erickson and Austin Strange, "Learning by Doing: PLAN Operational Innovations in the Gulf of Aden," *Jamestown Foundation*, October 24, 2013.

†The PLA Navy has operated UAVs from ships since at least June 2011, when a P-3C maritime surveillance aircraft operated by the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force detected a small UAV operating above a PLA Navy frigate conducting training in the East China Sea. In addition to shipborne UAVs, China is developing long-range high-endurance UAVs such as the "Sacred Eagle" for early warning, targeting, and electronic warfare missions, as well as for satellite communications. Both ship- and land-based UAVs will likely be used in future overseas operations. U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016*, April 26, 2016, 62; James C. Bussert, "Chinese Navy Employs UAV Assets," *SIGNAL Magazine*, April 2012.

slow cruising speed, and ability to provide near real-time information through the use of a variety of onboard sensors.”⁹³

Joint Training and Operational Deployments: Lessons Learned for Developing China’s Expeditionary Capability

Joint Training

While China continues to standardize training across the PLA by focusing on integrated joint training, the PLA has yet to conduct joint exercises specifically focused on preparation for conducting expeditionary operations. To date, the PLA has primarily focused exercises on China’s most important conflict scenarios: a Taiwan contingency or a sovereignty crisis that occurs along China’s periphery.⁹⁴ However, the capabilities being tested during these exercises may also provide the PLA insights for conducting future joint expeditionary operations.⁹⁵ For example, although the PLA’s major recurring joint exercises such as Stride, Mission Action, and Joint Action,* described later, do not specifically focus on expeditionary operations per se, they have elements that would apply to operations in which the PLA is required to deploy a force to protect Chinese citizens abroad or defend against a challenge to a Chinese territorial claim in the East and South China seas. Mark Cozad, a senior international defense policy analyst with the RAND Corporation, underscores this issue by noting that “the skills developed during joint exercises are applicable to a range of potential future expeditionary operations.” He continues, “PLA joint training involving long-range mobility, local logistical procurement, and adapting to new operational environments is translatable to future operations to secure and protect PRC citizens and interests overseas.”⁹⁶ The recurring exercises that provide the best insight into these emerging skills are Stride, Mission Action, and Joint Action.

- *Stride (Kuayue)*: Stride is a long-distance ground force maneuver exercise that the PLA held three times between 2009 and 2015.⁹⁷ The training scenarios have ranged from a generic threat within China to a Taiwan contingency operation.⁹⁸ Some of the skills practiced in this exercise series have included command and control, logistics, civil-military integration, joint campaign planning, long-range firepower strike, deployment of special operational forces, urban combat, reconnaissance, information warfare, and electronic warfare.⁹⁹ The skills tested and evaluated could easily apply to non-war missions such as NEOs.
- *Mission Action (Shiming Xingdong)*: Mission Action, held in 2010 and 2013, was—like Stride—focused on long-range maneuver and could be applicable to a range of externally focused operations beyond a Taiwan contingency.¹⁰⁰
- *Joint Action (Lianhe Xingdong)*: The Joint Action exercise series involves training that could be applied to supporting joint expeditionary operations. Joint Action exercises held in 2014

*The Stride, Mission Action, and Joint Action series of exercises focus on realistic operational conditions, campaign training, and long-distance maneuvers to develop PLA capabilities to conduct large-scale joint operations. For an in-depth discussion of PLA exercises and training in general, see Chapter 2, Section 1, “Year in Review: Security and Foreign Affairs.”

and 2015 included joint operations, theater command and control, reconnaissance, information operations, logistics, ground-air integration, and civil-military integration.¹⁰¹ Joint Action 2015 incorporated sea-air-land integration, information operations, and maritime operations.¹⁰² The training during the 2015 exercise had a strong joint operations focus, and included an amphibious landing component that would be applicable for expeditionary operations, particularly against Taiwan or in the South China Sea.¹⁰³

In addition to the benefit the PLA gains from evaluating its capability to conduct long-range mobility and logistics during these exercises, the PLA also gains experience exercising its joint operational planning and intelligence support. Mr. Cozad testified that a “major point of emphasis for PLA’s joint exercises is . . . improving the ability of commanders and their staffs to plan and direct operations involving forces from multiple services and arms in unfamiliar, complex environments.”¹⁰⁴ This experience would be valuable to PLA commanders executing operations abroad.

Operational Deployments

In addition to conducting joint exercises, the PLA has been studying and applying lessons learned from its own operational deployments regarding planning and logistical challenges that could have applications for future expeditionary operations. Some notable PLA deployments include:

- *PLA Army*: According to the Congressional Research Service, over the past 15 years the PLA Army has been active in conducting operational deployments, sending over “27,000 military personnel to 24 UN peacekeeping operations around the world.”¹⁰⁵ These types of deployments provide the PLA with experience in crowd control, patrolling, operational intelligence gathering, civic affairs, and interoperability with foreign forces.¹⁰⁶ Dr. Yung argues “the deployment of an infantry battalion [to South Sudan] into an austere environment will have provided the PLA with direct experience in expeditionary logistics* and the requirements of preparing a ground combat force to deploy overseas for contingency operations.”¹⁰⁷
- *PLA Air Force*: The PLA Air Force has conducted some notable overseas deployments. In 2010, China sent fighter aircraft to Turkey for the Anatolian Eagle exercise and participated in the Peace Mission exercise with Kazakhstan and Russia.¹⁰⁸ During the Peace Mission deployment, the PLA Air Force flew fighters from China, supported by aerial refueling tanker aircraft, to conduct training strikes against targets in Kazakh-

*The PLA conducts logistics support for deployed Chinese peacekeeping troops. Dennis J. Blasko, an independent consultant who has written extensively about the Chinese military, notes that in 2004 the then General Logistics Department “issued training material entitled ‘Logistics Support for Peacekeeping Forces’ based on UN guidance and the PLA’s own experience.” In addition to the PLA training to support peacekeepers, Beijing is looking to expand the PLA’s capability to preposition material to support peacekeeping operations. China’s planned military facility in Djibouti is expected to enable this capability. U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2016*, April 26, 2016, 6; Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, Routledge, 2006, 179.

stan.¹⁰⁹ In 2014, the PLA Air Force deployed aircraft to Russia to participate in Avidarts, a Russian-held contest that tests combat skills.¹¹⁰ In 2015, the PLA Air Force deployed aircraft to Australia to participate in search and rescue operations for missing Malaysian Airlines Flight 370.¹¹¹ PLA Air Force overseas deployments have not been without their challenges: during the Peace Mission exercise, for example, there were not enough foreign linguists to translate between Russian and Chinese air crews, and the PLA relied on rail rather than air transport to support logistics, which could be a constraining factor in an actual operation.¹¹² The PLA Air Force could use the lessons learned to develop processes—to include identifying requirements and developing plans for mitigating language barriers, and predeployment and logistical requirements for supporting air operations outside China—well in advance of operations.¹¹³

- *PLA Navy*: The PLA Navy has conducted multiple out-of-area deployments, sustained antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008, planned and executed a NEO in Yemen, and provided at-sea security for the UN operation to remove Syrian chemical weapons.¹¹⁴ Some of the lessons learned during these deployments involve addressing the wellbeing of deployed personnel, resolving logistical challenges, and improving communications between Chinese and foreign ships.¹¹⁵

The application of lessons learned from these types of activities should assist the PLA with mission planning in support of future expeditionary operations. However, the PLA may still have to work through additional planning challenges, such as dealing with any new logistical requirements that would come from expanding operations beyond geographic areas to which the PLA is currently deployed.

Indicators for Monitoring Developments Concerning Near- and Long-Term Joint Expeditionary Operations

According to a National Defense University study co-authored by Dr. Yung and Ross Rustici, a researcher with National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, five criteria could be used for monitoring the PLA's potential to further develop expeditionary capabilities:

- *Distance*: Chinese military experts have discussed the problem distance poses to operations in far seas.¹¹⁶ Dr. Yung notes China is working toward addressing the “tyranny of distance in its ‘out of area’ operations,” and “the modernization of China’s surface combatants has allowed China’s [antipiracy] task forces to operate at greater distances.”¹¹⁷ He continues, “A second development in support of China’s ‘distance’ problem is . . . evidence that China is building a more formalized network of facilities . . . for the purposes of

**Indicators for Monitoring Developments Concerning
Near- and Long-Term Joint Expeditionary
Operations—Continued**

servicing and supporting its ... forces.”¹¹⁸ In addition to support facilities enabling maritime operations in far seas, overseas support facilities will likely be required to sustain PLA Air Force strategic lift operations abroad. Mr. Heath and Cristina Garafola, a project associate at the RAND Corporation, note “access to foreign airfields will enable the [PLA Air Force] to better carry out its non-war missions to meet these requirements.”¹¹⁹

- *Duration:* The duration of extended out-of-area or expeditionary operations is likely a concern for the PLA. To address this planning concern, the PLA Navy is working to improve its logistical capability. Dr. Yung states that during the early stage of the antipiracy deployments, “PLA task forces had initially been operating for a 3–4 month duration, [and] this duration has increased to the point that a typical task force is expected to operate for about 170 to 200 days.”¹²⁰ He notes this is in part the “result of improved logistical support networks as well as modernized surface combatants.”¹²¹ As part of the ongoing reorganization of the PLA, in September 2016, the PLA established a “Joint Logistics Support Force” to support “strategic battle support missions,” indicating China is working to improve joint logistics support, which would apply to expeditionary forces operating abroad.¹²²
- *Capacity:* China is demonstrating the ability to sustain antipiracy and other far seas operations while maintaining the capability to conduct operations in the near seas simultaneously. China has been able to achieve this capability because the PLA Navy has produced modern surface ships, such as the LUYANG II/III-class destroyers and FUCHI-class logistics ships. The acquisition of additional replenishment ships brings China’s replenishment force up to seven, and the continued acquisition of modern surface combatants provides China a larger pool of ships for deployments to increase operational capacity.¹²³ Capacity is also a limitation for the PLA Air Force’s nascent air expeditionary capability. The air force, Mr. Heath and Ms. Garafola note, “has focused heavily on developing a small number of elite units to carry out high profile missions abroad.”¹²⁴ Furthermore, the limited number of tanker aircraft will remain a constraint on expeditionary operations until China begins producing a tanker variant of the Y-20 to supplement its fleet of three Il-78 (MIDAS) tanker aircraft (acquired from Ukraine) and 12 H-6U tankers.¹²⁵ Therefore, additional tanker and strategic lift capacity would be a strong indicator the PLA Air Force intends to continue to develop an expeditionary capability.

**Indicators for Monitoring Developments Concerning
Near- and Long-Term Joint Expeditionary
Operations—Continued**

- *Coordination:* Coordination between ships escorting amphibious transports and ships providing logistical support during any future expeditionary operation will be essential to the success of that operation. The PLA Navy appears to be making progress here as well. Dr. Yung highlights that PLA Navy “exercises in the Western Pacific have been increasingly more complex, suggesting a process of improved command and control at the task force level. Additionally, there is some evidence of improved ability of the PLA Navy to coordinate and control vessels being escorted [in the Gulf of Aden] through an effective use of VHF [very high frequency communications] with foreign flagged vessels. This is furthermore manifested in coordinating rendezvous, managing ships of varying speeds and duration, and working out optimal formations for the protection of the escorted vessels.”¹²⁶
- *Environments:* China is building military capabilities to deal with hostile air, surface, and subsurface operational environments in the far seas. The PLA Navy is working to incorporate the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier into the fleet, has begun construction of its first indigenous aircraft carrier, and likely is constructing a Type 081 amphibious assault ship, all of which would increase the anti-air and anti-surface warfare capabilities to support future anti-piracy operations.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the PLA Navy is equipping surface combatants with hangars to shelter anti-submarine helicopters and towed sonar arrays, which are expected to improve anti-submarine warfare capabilities.¹²⁸ However, Dr. Yung notes the PLA still requires “dedicated anti-missile ships capable of providing protection to its task forces like [U.S. Navy] cruisers do for the U.S. carrier strike groups.”¹²⁹ He surmises that “China’s [anti-air warfare] and missile defense systems are still in their infancy, so it is safe to say that for the foreseeable future [PLA Navy] ‘far seas’ operations would still be vulnerable to a concerted missile attack from land-based aircraft and other seaborne aircraft.”¹³⁰

Implications for the United States and U.S. Allies and Partners

Implications for U.S. Defense Policy

Although China’s current expeditionary capabilities are limited in comparison to those of the United States, they will improve over the next 10 to 20 years and likely will be on par with second-tier powers.*¹³¹ As the PLA develops a more robust expeditionary capability, it will likely increase its capacity to conduct the types of

*Dr. Mastro notes that second-tier military powers—such as Russia, France or the United Kingdom—have the capacity to project limited but meaningful force outside their immediate regions. Oriana Skylar Mastro, “China’s Military Is about to Go Global,” *National Interest*, December 18, 2014.

previously noted deployments in the Gulf of Aden, intercept training in the South China Sea, HA/DR operations in Southeast Asia, and naval deployments in the Indian Ocean. These capabilities, however, could also be used in combat scenarios with potential implications for U.S. interests. For example, training for visit, board, search, and seizure operations* in conjunction with at-sea intercept training could easily be applied to a blockade operation against Taiwan and pose a threat to merchant shipping. Increased sea and airlift capacity would improve the PLA's capability to conduct combat insertion of troops during an island landing campaign.¹³² And PLA Navy submarines operating in the Indian Ocean could delay U.S. ships headed for the South China Sea from transiting through the Indian Ocean.¹³³

Expeditionary Capabilities and China as a Responsible Stakeholder

Since the 2005 address given by Robert Zoellick, then deputy secretary of State, to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations calling for China to become a “responsible stakeholder,” the West had hoped China would play a larger role in maintaining the global order.¹³⁴ China has indicated an interest in working to solve pressing global problems and cooperating with the United States, to some extent, to address common threats such as climate change, piracy, terrorism, and natural disasters.¹³⁵ Mr. Heath notes that “the logic underpinning the argument for China to become a ‘responsible stakeholder’ . . . assumes that if Beijing contributed more to combating commonly shared threats, such as nuclear proliferation, North Korean provocations, terrorism in the Middle East, and climate change, the world would benefit—and China and the United States would enjoy healthier, more cooperative relations.”¹³⁶ China's development of an expeditionary capability could facilitate cooperation, particularly in the areas of HA/DR and antipiracy operations. The United States and its allies in Asia face a conundrum, however: the same expeditionary capabilities that would enable China to embrace the role of “responsible stakeholder” and contribute to regional security could enable the PLA to pose a military threat and spur greater military competition.¹³⁷ This reality will likely be a great concern to U.S. allies in Asia and will require the United States to reassure allies that the United States will remain present in the region.¹³⁸

While China's development of an expeditionary capability could make China a useful partner for cooperation on nontraditional security issues in the region, the United States will need to engage both Beijing and U.S. allies concerning how this emerging capability could be employed to improve regional security.¹³⁹ Gabe Collins, a private researcher focused on Chinese security issues, suggests “any engagement [between the U.S. and Chinese militaries] needs to incorporate discussions to assess how China intends to use its growing power projection abilities and also explore ways to de-

*The PLA Navy during predeployment training for Gulf of Aden antipiracy operations conducts simulations of rescue operations and participates in live fire exercises; the special operations units take part in training involving rappelling off of shipborne helicopters and visit, board, search, and seizure techniques. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on Developments in China's Military Force Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities*, written testimony of Christopher D. Yung, January 21, 2016.

conflict Chinese expeditionary operations and those of other militaries in strategic regions like Africa and the Middle East.”¹⁴⁰ Mr. Collins goes on to state, “China’s developing expeditionary capabilities make it a more useful partner for cooperation on nontraditional security issues and the United States should try to increase discussions on this topic with its Chinese partners, both bilaterally and in multilateral for[a].”¹⁴¹

Increased Potential for U.S. and Chinese Forces to Operate in Close Contact

China is concerned about U.S. military presence in the Asia Pacific region.¹⁴² Any development of PLA expeditionary capabilities expands Beijing’s military options for responding to perceived threats along China’s periphery, within the region beyond the first island chain, or beyond the region to defend Chinese interests and citizens abroad. This expanding presence could result in U.S. and Chinese forces conducting missions within the same operational space. PLA Navy and Air Force patrols in and beyond the South China Sea put U.S. and Chinese forces in closer operating proximity and raise the risk of miscalculation or escalation should an incident at sea occur.¹⁴³ This concern is reinforced by more than a decade of aggressive maneuvers by Chinese military and maritime militia forces operating close to U.S. surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, survey ships, and naval ships conducting routine operations in and around the East and South China seas.¹⁴⁴

Aggressive Chinese Military or Maritime Militia Encounters

Examples of aggressive Chinese military or maritime militia encounters include the following:

- In May 2016, two PLA Air Force fighters conducted an unsafe intercept of a U.S. EP-3 aircraft, causing the EP-3 to dive away to avoid a collision.¹⁴⁵
- In 2013, a PLA Navy ship crossed the U.S. guided missile cruiser *Cowpens*’ bow, causing the ship to alter course to avoid a collision.¹⁴⁶
- In 2009, the U.S. Navy ship *Impeccable* was harassed by maritime militia boats in the South China Sea.¹⁴⁷
- In 2001, a PLA Navy fighter collided with a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft over the South China Sea.¹⁴⁸

Expeditionary Force and Chinese Core Interests

While China’s nontraditional security concerns may be driving the PLA’s pursuit of an expeditionary force, the increased capabilities will provide Beijing additional tools to address traditional regional security objectives.¹⁴⁹ Mrs. Gunness highlights this concern, testifying that a recent policy shift involving Chinese leadership in

Beijing indicates China is taking an increasingly harder stance on defending issues that have been defined as core interests:

For example, in 2013, Xi Jinping pledged that China would not ‘compromise an inch’ of any of its territorial and sovereignty claims. In June 2015, China enacted a sweeping security law intended to protect its core interests, including defending sovereignty claims and territorial integrity. Beijing also has demonstrated a growing willingness to ‘impose costs’ to deter countries from impinging on PRC core interests. Examples include the PRC restriction on imports of Philippine bananas in response to the Scarborough Reef crisis and the freezing of high-level diplomatic activity for a year in response to British Prime Minister David Cameron’s meeting with the Dalai Lama. These activities have so far been primarily nonmilitary in nature and are seen by China as efforts to manage crises and deter further escalation into the military realm. However, the development of PLA expeditionary capabilities, particularly the “overlap” capabilities that also can be used for anti-access/area denial missions, adds greater tools for potential coercive force.¹⁵⁰

Implications for U.S. Allies

China’s pursuit of an expeditionary capability is a concern among U.S. allies and partners in Asia. The expeditionary capabilities sought by the PLA provide Beijing a wider range of options for using force to resolve territorial disputes in the future.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, many of the capabilities required for HA/DR, NEOs, and peacekeeping operations are dual-use capabilities that can be employed in traditional war-fighting missions against weaker regional opponents.¹⁵² Thus far, China has sought to manage its security interests in the Asia Pacific in part through economic engagement and military-to-military cooperation to burnish its “peaceful rise” or “peaceful development”^{*} image and enhance its security environment by seeking to mitigate the security concerns of its neighbors.¹⁵³ However, recent developments, particularly concerning China’s island-building campaign in the South China Sea and the militarization of those reclaimed features, suggest Beijing is willing to risk criticism by the United States, the region, and the wider international community for eroding the Asian security environment.¹⁵⁴

- *South China Sea land reclamation:* In the South China Sea’s Spratly Islands, China has reclaimed more than 3,200 acres of land.¹⁵⁵ Although DOD states these “artificial islands do not provide China additional territorial or maritime rights within

^{*} Established in the 1990s, China’s “peaceful rise” strategy, later renamed “peaceful development,” emphasized Chinese modernization and sought to downplay fears of Chinese regional hegemonic ambitions, often referred to in Beijing as the “China threat theory.” Beijing continues to reassure its neighbors of China’s peaceful rise; however, Chinese actions to enforce its territorial and jurisdictional claims in the East and South China seas have resulted in contradiction between Beijing’s words and deeds. Robert G. Sutter, Michael E. Brown, and Timothy J. A. Adamson, “Balancing Acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Stability,” *Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University*, August 2013, 7; Ian Storey, “The South China Sea Dispute (Part 2): Friction to Remain the Status Quo,” *Jamestown Foundation*, June 21, 2013.

the South China Sea, China will be able to use them as persistent civil-military bases to enhance its long-term presence in the South China Sea significantly.”¹⁵⁶ Because of these activities, some countries in the region—such as Vietnam and the Philippines—have increased military modernization efforts and support for U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea.¹⁵⁷

- *Chinese South China Sea presence operations and coercion:* China is using coercion to enhance its presence and control in disputed areas in the South China Sea. Beijing continues to employ China Coast Guard and PLA Navy ships to enforce claims by maintaining presence in disputed areas.¹⁵⁸ The land reclamation in the South China Sea will support China’s ability to sustain these presence operations.¹⁵⁹ The Congressional Research Service reports that South China Sea territorial disputes have “intensified in the past few years, leading to numerous confrontations and incidents involving fishing vessels, oil exploration vessels and oil rigs, coast guard ships, naval ships, and military aircraft. The intensification of the disputes ... has substantially heightened tensions between China and other countries in the region, particularly ... the Philippines ... and Vietnam.”¹⁶⁰ As with its land reclamation activities, China’s military and law enforcement coercion operations have had a similar effect. For example, Vietnam is seeking U.S. defense equipment to improve the capability of the Vietnamese military to monitor and respond to Chinese challenges in the South China Sea.¹⁶¹

According to an interlocutor with whom the Commission met during its June 2016 trip to China and India, India is concerned about China’s expanding presence in the Indian Ocean.¹⁶²

- *Submarine deployments:* Abhijit Singh, an analyst with the Institute for Defense Studies in India, notes that since a “Yuan-class submarine visited Karachi [in 2015], New Delhi has been worried over the possibility of a Chinese takeover of its maritime neighborhood. In the [guise] of antipiracy operations, Indian observers believe, Chinese submarines have been performing specific standalone missions—a process meant to lay the groundwork for a rotating but permanent deployment in the Indian Ocean.”¹⁶³
- *PLA Navy surface combatant deployments:* In 2014 the PLA Navy conducted its first far seas deployment in the Indian Ocean, and carried out exercises first in the South China Sea and then in the eastern Indian Ocean with a three-ship task force.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, PLA Navy antipiracy deployments in the Indian Ocean have included the Type-71 class amphibious ship, suggesting interest in a greater PLA Navy littoral presence beyond the first island chain.¹⁶⁵

Regardless of Beijing’s ultimate intention, many countries in the region, including India, view any expansion in PLA expeditionary capabilities as a security concern. Dr. Mastro suggests:

In terms of regional stability, while the Chinese leadership may only plan on building expeditionary forces to address

non-traditional threats, the increased capabilities may shape Chinese interests and preferred methods of achieving traditional regional security objectives. The implications for the United States and its regional allies and partners are uncertain. China's increased military role in global affairs and enhanced expeditionary capabilities could create a balancing backlash among its Asian neighbors and contribute to instability in the region, as incentives for preventive war increase with the rapid shifts in the regional balance of power. China could become confident in its ability to achieve its objectives by brute force alone, especially with domestic support. However, a global expeditionary PLA could also create a more assertive China that is positioned to provide international public goods, further enmeshing Beijing into the current world order and reducing the incentives for it to use force to resolve disputes.¹⁶⁶

The dual-use nature of expeditionary capabilities, therefore, is resulting in China's neighbors remaining interested in the United States being politically, economically, and militarily engaged in the Asia Pacific as a counter to an aggressive China if necessary.

Conclusions

- The military capabilities China is developing will expand or improve the ability of the People's Liberation Army to conduct a range of externally focused operations, to include combat insertion, island landing operations, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations, noncombatant evacuation operations, and peacekeeping missions. Improvements in these areas can also strengthen China's traditional warfighting capabilities against weaker neighbors. Given its enhanced strategic lift capability, strengthened employment of special operations forces, increasing capabilities of surface vessels and aircraft, and more frequent and sophisticated experience operating abroad, China may also be more inclined to use force to protect its interests.
- China's pursuit of expeditionary capabilities, coupled with the aggressive trends that have been displayed in both the East and South China seas, are compounding existing concerns about China's rise among U.S. allies and partners in the greater Asia. This also is driving additional increases in defense acquisitions throughout the region.
- The People's Liberation Army will continue to modernize in the area of logistics, with implications for expeditionary operations. The air force will continue to see additional strategic airlift aircraft incorporated into the air order of battle, particularly once the Y-20 heavy lift aircraft enters serial production. Furthermore, China is likely to continue to seek opportunities to secure military facilities abroad, such as the one it has begun constructing in Djibouti, to facilitate a range of operations.
- Regardless of China's interest in developing a more robust expeditionary capability, regional contingencies, such as a conflict with Taiwan or concerning maritime disputes in the East or South China seas, will remain the focus of Chinese war planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Developments in China's Military Expeditionary and Force Projection Capabilities

The Commission recommends:

- Congress require the U.S. Department of Defense to conduct a study identifying the risks and gains associated with the United States pursuing a burden sharing strategy that utilizes emerging People's Liberation Army expeditionary capabilities to help stabilize the Asia Pacific region during a crisis or to counter a shared threat such as the spread of terrorism in Southeast Asia.

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