

CHAPTER 4

CHINA SEEKING MILITARY INFLUENCE AND ADVANCED CAPABILITIES

SECTION 1: CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH FOREIGN MILITARIES

Abstract

China uses the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) activities and relationships with foreign militaries to promote a positive image of China as an international security partner, undermine U.S. influence, and pursue military, foreign policy, and economic benefits. China's leadership coordinates a range of military activities with foreign security forces, including bilateral and multilateral meetings, functional exchanges, port calls, exercises, and arms sales. It also uses military exchanges to pursue combat-relevant skills, practice power projection capabilities, and collect intelligence. Although China's military diplomacy is expanding, the United States maintains key strengths and advantages in building partner capacity that can help it remain a partner of choice for security cooperation.

Key Findings

- China orients many of its interactions with foreign militaries around undermining U.S. leadership of international security affairs. The PLA's messaging to its foreign counterparts in bilateral and multilateral military engagements aims to enhance China's reputation at the expense of the United States.
- Russia is China's most important military partner, and their relationship serves many of China's interests, such as signaling strategic unity against the United States, undermining U.S. security partnerships, practicing combat-relevant military skills, and obtaining advanced technology. During Russia's unprovoked war in Ukraine, China and Russia have continued to conduct joint exercises both bilaterally and with other partners such as Iran and other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).
- China's military exercises with foreign counterparts align with General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Xi Jinping's requirement for the military to strengthen its combat effectiveness. The PLA uses bilateral and multilateral exercises to carry out increasingly realistic, combat-oriented training such as live fire drills, combat simulations, air defense, and strike operations. The PLA also pursues relevant combat sup-

port capabilities such as communications, logistics, survival skills, military medicine, and other basic military skills. The PLA accrues additional benefits, including practicing skills that support power projection and gathering military intelligence during exchanges.

- China uses ostensibly cooperative engagements with militaries of neighboring states to encourage greater acquiescence to its plans in the region. Nevertheless, China undermines its own efforts in some cases by continuing to engage in aggressive behavior targeted at these same militaries, such as by harassing the vessels of its supposed “partners” in the South China Sea.
- Many of the activities China conducts with foreign militaries, including exercises and international military education and training, do little to develop foreign partner military capacity. The United States maintains strong advantages in these areas due to the quality of its programs and focus on building partner capacity that China struggles to replicate.

Recommendations

The Commission recommends:

- Congress require the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of State to provide to the appropriate committees of Congress within 180 days a classified briefing on China’s efforts to educate and train foreign military personnel. The briefing should address how China’s programs affect U.S. interests, including: (a) foreign military partners’ assessment of the value of China’s security assistance and training programs; and (b) whether the scale and offerings of U.S. military education and training programs are sufficient to maintain the United States’ status as a preferred partner.
- Congress require the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) to submit a report within 180 days that builds upon the restrictions on DOD’s contacts with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) outlined in section 1201 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 by detailing measures DOD is taking to mitigate the risk of the PLA gaining indirect knowledge of U.S. Armed Forces’ equipment and operational tactics, techniques, and procedures through interactions with the militaries of U.S. allies and partners. The report should identify any obstacles to ensuring sufficient partner awareness of these risks and to conducting the necessary follow-up and end-use monitoring to ensure compliance.

Introduction

As China’s foreign policy ambitions and military capabilities have grown, the PLA has expanded its interactions with foreign militaries around the world.* In bilateral and multilateral engagements,

*The Commission consulted the “Chinese Military Diplomacy Database” produced by the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs at the U.S. National Defense University, which tracks military exercises, naval port calls, and senior-level meetings conducted by the PLA. According to available data, the PLA’s engagements with foreign militaries moderately increased over time

the Chinese military increasingly promotes China as a desirable security partner and echoes General Secretary Xi Jinping's pronouncements about China's qualifications to lead the global security order.¹ Through exercises with foreign militaries, especially its "no limits" partner, Russia, the PLA gains opportunities to practice military skills.² At the same time, Beijing seeks to deepen relationships with other countries through arms sales, international military education, and military and paramilitary training programs to serve China's economic and strategic interests.

According to Li Daguang, a professor at the PLA's National Defense University, the broad objectives of China's foreign military relations under Xi's leadership range "from promoting the military relations of major powers to building a favorable surrounding environment, from creating a platform for enhancing combat effectiveness to striving for the initiative in international public opinion struggles."³ This assessment, published in the *People's Daily* in 2014 shortly after Xi's rise to power, provides a snapshot of the many ways China's leadership hopes to use PLA interactions with foreign militaries to its advantage.⁴

This section evaluates China's objectives in its foreign military relations, examines the activities the PLA undertakes with foreign counterparts, and considers their implications for the United States. It first lays out China's general approach to foreign military relations, including its main activities, coordination mechanisms, and primary objectives. The section then explores how China uses foreign military relations to advance its foreign policy goals. It then analyzes how foreign military relations benefit China's operational capabilities, skills, and training. It concludes with a consideration of implications for the United States. The section draws on the Commission's January 2023 hearing on "China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities," consultations with experts, and open source research and analysis.

China's Approach to Foreign Military Relations

China's leadership considers a range of activities as falling within the purview of its foreign military relations. A publication of PLA terminology released by China's authoritative Academy of Military Sciences defines the term "military foreign relations" (also translated as "military diplomacy") as "external relationships pertaining to military and related affairs between countries and groups of countries, including military personnel exchange, military negotiations, arms control negotiations, military aid, military intelligence cooper-

while varying in volume from year to year between 2002 and 2019 and then declined precipitously due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of recorded activities rapidly grew from 122 in 2002 to a peak of 216 in 2010. After a brief decline to 121 by 2012, total activities rose again to 212 by 2015. The years after 2015 show a modest decline to 190 in 2019, which Phillip Saunders, director of the center that maintains this database, attributed to Xi Jinping's military reforms beginning in 2016 and the need for greater attention to internal matters as well as to the declining frequency of U.S.-China military interactions. The proportion of China's engagements with foreign militaries dedicated to military exercises and port calls has increased relative to senior-level meetings over time, but senior-level engagements still constitute the majority of PLA engagements conducted with foreign militaries. Overall activity fell dramatically due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with an average of only 49 interactions per year between 2020 and 2022. (For a graph of the data described above, see Figure 1 in the Appendix.) Phillip C. Saunders, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 4, 6; Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, "Chinese Military Diplomacy Database Version 4.00."

ation, military technology cooperation, international peacekeeping, military alliance activities, etc.”⁵ Subject to the overall guidance of the CCP central leadership, the PLA conducts these activities with counterparts around the world to advance China’s foreign affairs and military goals.

China’s Relations with Foreign Militaries Evolving under Xi

In a high-profile January 2015 speech at the All-Military Foreign Affairs Work Conference,* Xi declared that foreign military relations would play a more important role in China’s global activities.⁶ China’s military and paramilitary forces, including the People’s Armed Police and China’s Coast Guard, use bilateral and multilateral military activities with foreign military counterparts to promote China as a desirable security partner, enhance its soft power, and positively influence foreign media and governments’ perception of the PLA through the following global activities:⁷

- *Bilateral meetings*: China’s security officials frequently interact with senior-level military or civilian defense leaders, either hosted by the PLA in China or conducted abroad.⁸ Senior-level meetings represent a majority of the PLA’s military engagement with foreign partners.[†]⁹
- *Multilateral security fora*: Chinese and foreign defense officials participate in senior-level multilateral dialogues and meetings, such as the Shangri-La Dialogue and other meetings organized by ASEAN, the SCO, and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).¹⁰ China’s participation in multilateral dialogues allows it to convey desired messages to several countries, provides opportunities to shape regional security issues, and elevates its international status.¹¹ China has also launched its own multilateral fora such as the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, the China Africa Peace and Security Forum, and the China-Latin America Senior Defense Forum.¹²
- *Functional exchanges*: PLA and foreign military personnel conduct various professional exchanges, including academic exchanges.¹³ These exchanges offer opportunities for the PLA to build its skills, improve ties, strengthen cooperation, gather intelligence, and also support Chinese diplomatic goals.¹⁴ For example, the PLA Air Force hosted the International Military Flight Training Conference‡ in 2022, during which PLA Air

*The PLA Academy of Military Sciences defines the term “military foreign affairs work” as “the military’s work in conducting foreign exchanges and cooperation within the military domain.” The term refers specifically to the practical and technical actions taken by China’s military personnel to execute tasks relevant to China’s foreign military relations. Timothy R. Heath, “China Maritime Report No. 8: Winning Friends and Influencing People: Naval Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” *U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons, China Maritime Studies Institute*, September 2020, 4.

†According to data from the U.S. National Defense University covering the years 2002 to 2022, PLA senior-level bilateral meetings reached their peak in 2010 at 168 engagements. From 2010, bilateral meetings have been steadily declining to 70 total engagements in 2019 before a steep decline to an average of 26 engagements per year between 2020 and 2022 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on travel. Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, “Chinese Military Diplomacy Database Version 4.00.”

‡The International Military Flight Training Conference was initiated by the PLA Air Force in 2010 and is held biennially. It has convened seven times since 2010. Participants in previous conferences included representatives from Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kuwait, Namibia, Pakistan, Spain, Thailand, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and others. Some participants, such as Botswana and Zambia, participated at the working level, represented by the defense attaché in country; the level of other participants is unclear. In 2021, Pakistan’s chief of air staff was in attendance. Rep-

Force officers met with foreign representatives from 21 other countries to exchange approaches on methods to leverage scientific and technological innovation for the development and training of air forces.¹⁵ China's foreign military education exchanges aim to establish a global network of alumni within other countries' security forces to strengthen China's defense ties.¹⁶ In an effort to appeal to a broad foreign audience, China's military institutions offer courses in English, French, Russian, Spanish, and Chinese.¹⁷

- *Port calls*: The PLA Navy often visits foreign ports or hosts foreign naval vessels in China.¹⁸ Port calls provide opportunities to facilitate combined training and can be used to signal friendly relations.¹⁹ The PLA Navy has conducted port calls as standalone activities and while on training deployments, such as port calls en route to or returning from antipiracy patrol deployments in the Gulf of Aden.²⁰
- *Exercises*: China's military exercises and joint patrols with foreign militaries are carried out by either the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, People's Armed Police, or multiple services and focus on specific training functions, including combined arms exercises,* live-fire combat drills, naval maneuvers, combat support (communications, engineering, resupply, logistics, survival skills), or competitions for specific skills such as sniping.²¹ Military exercises also include participation in a wide variety of nontraditional security activities with foreign partners such as humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR), counterterrorism, and antipiracy.²² From 2002 to 2021, the PLA has gradually increased the foreign and multilateral military exercises it has participated in, reflecting an increase in the PLA's confidence to operate alongside foreign militaries.²³
- *UN peacekeeping operations*: The PLA defines international peacekeeping as a component of its military diplomacy and highlights its ability to be an international security provider through these activities.†²⁴ The PLA derives many benefits from participating in UN peacekeeping operations, such as learning from other troop-contributing countries, developing foreign language and cultural skills, exposing junior and midranking officers to high-risk environments, improving planning skills for expeditionary operations, and providing external validation of unit readiness.²⁵ As of 2021, most of China's roughly 2,500 peacekeepers deployed were engineers and medical staff that conduct combat support roles, but prominent units assigned to the standby force involved infantry and rapid-reaction forces.²⁶

representatives from aviation and aerospace companies and from academia have also participated. CGTN, "Intl. Military Flight Training Conference Held in Guangdong Province," *Global Herald*, November 10, 2022; Liu Jimei and Gao Yujiao, "PLAAF Cultivates Pilots for Intelligentized Air Battle," *China Military Online*, September 28, 2021.

*Participation by multiples branches of a single service is considered a combined arms exercise. Joint exercises involve the participation of multiple services. Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, "Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications," *National Defense University Press*, 2017, 22.

†As of July 31, 2023, China was contributing 2,277 personnel to UN peacekeeping missions and ranked ninth overall in the provision of personnel behind Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Rwanda, Pakistan, Ghana, Indonesia, and Senegal. United Nations, "United Nations Peacekeeping: Troop and Police Contributors," 2023.

- *Military arms and equipment sale and provision:* China's sale and provision of military equipment and technology to foreign counterparts are motivated by both strategic and commercial interests.²⁷ China has long been a competitive international supplier of small arms.²⁸ With regard to larger systems, China has shifted from a “supplier of last resort” to a more competitive defense industry that has upgraded the quality of its arms for exports.²⁹ April Herlevi, senior research scientist at the Center for Naval Analyses, explained in testimony to the Commission that in the 1990s and early 2000s China primarily exported missiles and ground-based platforms such as tanks and artillery, often to countries that could not obtain such defense articles from other suppliers.³⁰ In the decades since, China has both improved the quality of its exports and expanded the range of equipment it provides, with the most notable advances in aircraft and ships.³¹ China has also expanded the range of countries to which it sells weapons globally and is now the fourth-largest exporter of military equipment in the world.³²

Coordination of China's Relations with Foreign Militaries

China's leadership coordinates foreign military relations through the Party's Central Military Commission (CMC) with important roles for China's Ministry of National Defense (MND), the PLA's Joint Staff Department, and certain other ministries.*³³

- The PLA's foreign affairs activities are overseen by the minister of national defense, who is both a member of the CMC and head of the MND.³⁴ The minister of national defense is the sole uniformed representative on the CCP's Central Foreign Affairs Commission, the top coordinating body for foreign policy in China.†³⁵
- The organization primarily responsible for formulating and coordinating relations with foreign militaries is the CMC's Office for International Military Cooperation (OIMC), one of the 15 subordinate entities of the CMC.³⁶ As China's 2019 Defense White Paper explains, OIMC's mission is to manage foreign military exchanges and cooperation and to supervise the foreign affairs work of China's armed forces.‡³⁷

* The CCP's Central National Security Commission (CNSC), which Xi established to manage the Party's increasingly interdisciplinary approach to security, may also play a role in the coordination of military and security diplomacy. As Phillip Saunders testified before the Commission, the representation of foreign policy, military, and public security interests on the CNSC likely means the organization could play some role in coordinating the international activities of China's security forces. For more on the CNSC, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping's Centralization of Authority,” in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022. Phillip Saunders, oral testimony to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 64.

† For more on the Central Foreign Affairs Commission and foreign policy decision-making, see U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Chapter 1, “CCP Decision-Making and Xi Jinping's Centralization of Authority,” in *2022 Annual Report to Congress*, November 2022.

‡ OIMC itself is organized along both regional and functional lines. Known subordinate offices of OIMC include a Security Cooperation Center, an Arms Control and Compliance Affairs Office, a Comprehensive Bureau, and regional bureaus corresponding to Eurasia, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania. It likely has several other regional bureaus in line with the geographic divisions used by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Phillip Saunders, written testimony for U.S.-China

Coordination of China's Relations with Foreign Militaries—Continued

The functions of today's OIMC were previously performed by the MND's Foreign Affairs Office, and their reorganization directly under the CMC in 2016 as part of Xi's PLA reforms demonstrated Xi's increasing emphasis on the importance of military diplomacy.*³⁸

- The PLA's Joint Staff Department also plays a role in the management of China's military diplomacy that it likely inherited from its pre-2015 reform predecessor, the General Staff Department.³⁹ One of the deputy chiefs of the PLA's Joint Staff usually has an important role in coordinating the PLA's military intelligence activities and its foreign affairs activities.
- The primary authorities over China's arms sales are the CMC and the State Council.⁴⁰ The State Administration for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND) and the CMC's Equipment Development Department (EDD) are responsible for formulating regulations on exports of military items and dual-use missiles.⁴¹ They are also primarily responsible for reviewing associated export license applications in consultation with other relevant ministries.†⁴² Any applications deemed to be of a particularly sensitive political or strategic nature must also receive final approval from both the State Council and the CMC, likely at a higher level.‡⁴³

China's Foreign Military Relations Serve Multiple Objectives

Through relations with foreign militaries, China's leaders seek to advance both foreign policy goals and military development goals. In his testimony for the Commission, Phillip Saunders, director of the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs at the U.S. National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, characterized China's foreign military efforts as simultaneously serving strategic goals such as diplomacy and shaping the international se-

Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 6; Chad Sbragia and Kenneth Allen, "Managing the PLA's Military Diplomacy: Key Institutions and Personnel," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, November 18, 2022.

*Some sources continue to reference an "Office for International Military Cooperation" under the MND. This is likely an example of a common pattern within the Chinese political system of one entity with two names, one listed under the Party and the other under the PRC government. A comparable example is the CCP's Central Military Commission itself, which has a nominal state counterpart in the PRC government with identical membership. Chad Sbragia and Kenneth Allen, "Managing the PLA's Military Diplomacy: Key Institutions and Personnel," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, November 18, 2022; Liu Zhen, "What Is China's Central Military Commission and Why Is It So Powerful?" *South China Morning Post*, October 18, 2022.

†According to the State Council's 2021 Export Control White Paper, organizations responsible for reviewing export license applications include the CMC's EDD, SASTIND, the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM), the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), the General Administration of Customs (GAC), and the State Atomic Energy Agency. Institute for Strategic Studies, "Strategic Dossier," 2023, 79.

‡According to analysis by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, given the involvement of SASTIND and the CMC's EDD in the previous stages of the licensing process, this step may indicate higher political approval within the state and Party system. The exact level of this approval remains unknown. Institute for Strategic Studies, "Strategic Dossier," 2023, 80.

curity environment as well as operational goals such as expanding PLA capabilities and comparing them to those of other militaries.⁴⁴ Kristen Gunness, senior policy researcher at the RAND Corporation, highlighted a similar range of objectives in her testimony.⁴⁵ In her assessment, China's foreign military relations serve "foreign policy goals such as shaping the international environment to be more conducive to Chinese interests, building influence with key partners in economically vital locations around the world, advancing and defending China's interests in the U.S.-China competition and building a strong military that can operate overseas."⁴⁶ According to China's state media outlet *Xinhua*, Xi himself stated in 2015 that foreign military relations serve to "promote the country's overall diplomacy, safeguard national security, and promote military construction."⁴⁷ Chinese sources from the PLA's Academy of Military Sciences further emphasize these functions by describing foreign military relations in the context of both "Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy" and "Xi Jinping Thought on a Strong Military," two official formulations representing Xi's policy guidance on foreign affairs and military development, respectively.⁴⁸

China's leadership tailors its objectives for foreign military relations depending on whether the foreign military in question falls into one of three categories: "major powers," "neighboring countries," or "developing countries."⁴⁹ As Dr. Saunders testified, and as DOD similarly noted in its 2022 report to Congress on China's military developments, this division aligns directly with the way China pursues foreign affairs more broadly.⁵⁰ Chinese sources describe "major powers" such as the United States, Russia, and often the EU as having a particularly large influence on the global security environment; as such, although the level and depth of military activities are determined by the nature of the broader relationship, China considers military relations with all three of these powers as "strategic."⁵¹ The label "neighboring countries"[‡] is used to describe countries in the Indo-Pacific region (with the notable exception of Russia) with which China seeks to leverage frequent military in-

* Xi further directed that foreign military relations be harnessed to "make greater contributions to both the country's 'China Dream' and its 'Strong Military Dream.'" *Xinhua*, "Xi Jinping: Further Create a New Situation in China's Foreign Military Relations" (习近平:进一步开创军事外交新局面), January 29, 2015. Translation.

† Writings do not suggest that China's leaders view relations with these very different powers as being the same in all respects but rather that they carry a similar type of strategic importance. For example, even though sources cite "stability" as a general goal for relations with both Russia and the United States, the pursuit of this goal looks vastly different in each case. Descriptions of military relations with Russia tend to emphasize the potential for the two powers to collaborate in shaping the world in an advantageous way, whereas descriptions of military relations with the United States place emphasis on the strategic risk of conflict. U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, November 29, 2022, 163; *Xinhua*, "Head into the World with a More Open and More Confident Attitude—Military Representative Committee Members Discuss the New Atmosphere and New Conduct of New Era Military Diplomacy" (以更加开放更加自信的姿态走向世界——军队代表委员谈新时代军事外交新气象新作为), *Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China*, March 15, 2019. Translation; State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 2019; Chu Yongzheng, "New Ideas and Changes in China's Military Diplomacy" (中国军事外交的新理念新变化), *International Research Reference* 8 (2018), 37. Translation; *People's Daily*, "Li Daguang: The Meaning and Characteristics of Xi Jinping Thought on Military Diplomacy" (李大光:习近平军事外交思想内涵与特色), February 18, 2014. Translation.

‡ A common alternative translation for this category is "periphery" countries. Timothy Heath, Derek Grossman, and Asha Clark, "China's Quest for Global Primacy: An Analysis of Chinese International and Defense Strategies to Outcompete the United States," *RAND*, 2021, 40.

teractions to steer regional security issues to its own benefit.*⁵² “Developing countries” is a category assigned to the many states in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Pacific, and the Middle East, where China seeks to use multifaceted military exchanges to deepen ties and establish itself as a preferred partner in security and other domains.†⁵³

Foreign Military Relations as a Tool of Foreign Policy

Advancing China’s broader foreign policy objectives is a key function of many of China’s foreign military interactions.⁵⁴ In his important 2015 speech to the military leadership, General Secretary Xi emphasized that relations with foreign militaries must support China’s “overall diplomacy.”⁵⁵ Xi’s guiding statement is echoed by Chinese military academics.⁵⁶ For example, in 2022, He Lei, former vice president of the PLA’s Academy of Military Sciences, explained that foreign military relations constitute an important aspect of China’s overall foreign relations.⁵⁷ China’s leadership aims to use interactions with foreign militaries to enhance China’s international image, counter U.S. international influence, and deepen engagements with other countries to serve its own interests.⁵⁸

Promoting China’s Desired International Military Image

Chinese military personnel seek to promote a positive image of China in the eyes of their foreign interlocutors. As Ms. Gunness explained in her testimony, China uses interactions with foreign militaries “to promote certain narratives that are aimed at bolstering China’s image overseas” as an attempt to “shape global perceptions in China’s favor.”⁵⁹ A 2014 *People’s Daily* article illustrates this objective by characterizing the PLA’s foreign relations as a means of “continuously improving military ‘soft power’” and as “a window for broadcasting the military’s image [and] declaring military policy.”⁶⁰ In international meetings, for example, PLA representatives attempt to portray China’s provision of peacekeeping forces, participation in HA/DR, and engagement with international “hotspot issues” as pos-

* In March 2019, OIMC Director at the time, Major General Ci Guowei, and later China’s 2019 Defense White Paper emphasized building a “community of common destiny” with China’s neighboring countries, a phrase China’s leadership uses to describe the construction of a Sinocentric international order. An author affiliated with China’s National Defense University describes the desired end state of military relations in the region as “harmonious,” a term that implies a lack of resistance by outside actors against the Chinese leadership’s objectives. Phillip Saunders, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 6; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 86–87, 113–114; Daniel Tobin, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on a “China Model?” Beijing’s Promotion of Alternative Norms and Standards*, March 13, 2020, 9–12; State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019; *Xinhua*, “Head into the World with a More Open and More Confident Attitude—Military Representative Committee Members Discuss the New Atmosphere and New Conduct of New Era Military Diplomacy” (以更加开放更加自信的姿态走向世界——军队代表委员谈新时代军事外交新气象新作为), *Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China*, March 15, 2019. Translation; *People’s Daily*, “Li Daguang: The Meaning and Characteristics of Xi Jinping Thought on Military Diplomacy” (李大光: 习近平军事外交思想内涵与特色), February 18, 2014. Translation.

† Descriptions of military relations with developing countries often mention China’s provision of security assistance through training and equipment. State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019; *People’s Daily*, “Li Daguang: The Meaning and Characteristics of Xi Jinping Thought on Military Diplomacy” (李大光: 习近平军事外交思想内涵与特色), February 18, 2014. Translation.

itive contributions to the international security order and proof of China's benign intentions.⁶¹ This argument also echoes a common theme found in China's defense white papers, state media, and propaganda from the MND.⁶² PLA personnel participating in meetings with foreign counterparts similarly echo propaganda describing the PLA as a "force for peace" willing to work with other militaries toward a peaceful world.⁶³

PLA personnel also try to defend China's and the PLA's image from perceived attacks.⁶⁴ Ms. Gunness pointed out in her testimony that China views interactions with foreign militaries as a tool to counter "anti-China narratives."⁶⁵ For example, a state media description of the 2022 Shangri-La Dialogue summarizes the PLA delegation's efforts to publicly refute other dialogue participants' allegedly "false" accusations against China.⁶⁶ It describes China's delegation members as "combatants" whose duty to "refute" accusations and "struggle" against opposition justifies a lack of diplomatic decorum.⁶⁷ Like China's aggressive diplomacy in other foreign policy realms,* this confrontational approach appears to be sanctioned from the top.⁶⁸ As early as 2014, the *People's Daily* had attributed the impetus for a combative military diplomatic style—one focused in part on striving to influence public opinion—to the PLA Central Military Commission under Xi's leadership.⁶⁹

Seeking to Undermine U.S. Influence and Challenge U.S. Security Partnerships

China seeks to leverage foreign military interactions to challenge and undermine U.S. influence. Ms. Gunness summarized this trend in her testimony, stating that "the PLA's foreign engagements now play a supporting role in China's broader efforts to build a network of partners that prioritize relations with China over the United States, degrade U.S. influence and partnerships as well as promote its own agenda."⁷⁰ In its 2022 report to Congress, DOD similarly noted that countering U.S. influence is among the goals of China's foreign defense relations in the Indo-Pacific.⁷¹ In his testimony for the Commission, Dr. Saunders argued that China uses foreign military relations in an attempt to undermine U.S. alliances, albeit with limited success to date.⁷² He characterized foreign military relations as an area of U.S.-China competition that is likely to intensify, paralleling a similar assessment from Ms. Gunness' testimony as well as from researchers at the RAND Corporation in 2021.⁷³

China's intention to challenge U.S. leadership is particularly evident in multilateral security dialogues, regardless of which country is hosting the dialogue.

*At the 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue, China's then Defense Minister General Li Shangfu characterized China as a peace-loving country that would nevertheless respond harshly when its interests are challenged, including by a stronger power. To illustrate his point, he quoted a line from a 1950s Chinese propaganda song originally written to eulogize China's conflict against U.S.-led UN forces during the Korean War, saying, "When friends visit us, we welcome them with fine wine. When jackals or wolves come, we will face them with shotguns." The quote recalls a similar statement by China's then ambassador to Sweden Cui Congyu in November of 2019, which analysts strongly associate with China's increasingly aggressive diplomacy. Li Shangfu, *Remarks at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 20th Asia Security Summit Shangri-La Dialogue*, June 4, 2023; Andrew Small and Dhruva Jaishankar, "For Our Enemies We Have Shotguns: Explaining China's New Assertiveness," *War on the Rocks*, July 20, 2020; Matt Schrader, "Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries," *German Marshall Fund Alliance for Securing Democracy*, April 2020; *Economist*, "How Sweden Copes with Chinese Bullying," February 20, 2020.

- *Shangri-La Dialogue*: China does not hesitate to use existing security dialogues widely attended by the United States and its allies to criticize the United States.⁷⁴ Hosted in Singapore by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the Shangri-La Dialogue is the Indo-Pacific region’s premier defense summit attended by national leaders, ministers, and policymakers from across the Asia Pacific, North America, Europe, and the Middle East to discuss pressing regional security issues.⁷⁵ At the 19th Shangri-La Dialogue in 2022, China’s military delegation appears to have dedicated significant effort to refuting the points made by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III, while the *PLA Daily* described the so-called “Western-led” event as a “tough military-diplomatic battle.”⁷⁶ At the 20th Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2023, China’s then Defense Minister General Li Shangfu* delivered a roughly 30-minute speech contrasting the ostensibly peaceful and cooperative behavior he ascribed to China in the Indo-Pacific with harsh criticism—both open and thinly veiled—of the United States for its security activities in the region.⁷⁷
- *Moscow Conference on International Security*: China’s military representatives also regularly attend and speak at Russia’s Moscow Conference on International Security.⁷⁸ The conference was originally conceived as a Russian alternative to the Munich Security Conference and has evolved into a high-profile, senior-level defense-military forum mainly used for facilitating military-to-military engagements between the Russian military and the militaries with which Russia has relations.⁷⁹ According to Russian state media, the 2023 meeting was attended by representatives from 76 countries, including China, India, South Africa, Israel, Turkey, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and North Korea, as well as the African Union, the Arab League, ASEAN, the Collective Security Treaty Organization,† and the SCO.⁸⁰ According to former U.S. officials who have attended, even several years before Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine, an enduring theme of the conference was Russian grievances and vitriol against the United States, in particular accusations of the United States “mess[ing] up the world order.”⁸¹ At the 2022 meeting, then China’s Minister of National Defense Wei Fenghe took the opportunity to criticize the United States for then Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan as well as other perceived offenses such as “act[s] of hegemony, highhandedness, and bullying.”⁸²
- *Beijing Xiangshan Forum*: Ms. Guinness explained in her testimony that Beijing has used China-established venues such as the Xiangshan Forum, to which “it invites military lead-

* Beijing has regularly sent its minister of national defense to participate in the Shangri-La Dialogue since 2019. Prior to 2019, China had last sent its defense minister in 2011. The decision to once again participate at a senior level was likely motivated by the leadership’s desire to defend China’s position and counter U.S. messaging at a time when Beijing perceived the U.S. government to be conducting a public campaign to “slander and smear” China. Eleanor Albert, “Why Is China Sending Top Military Brass to Shangri-La 2019?” *Diplomat*, May 29, 2019.

† The Collective Security Treaty Organization is a mutual defense alliance between Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan. Global Security, “Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).” <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/csto.htm>.

ers from around the world, to criticize U.S. policies and push back on perceived U.S. hegemony.”⁸³ The Xiangshan Forum, which China established in 2006, is attended by senior government and military officials as well as scholarly representatives from a range of countries.*⁸⁴ According to comments recorded in state media from past iterations of the conference, China’s representatives have used the forum to raise grievances over U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea and have also employed similar language used by China’s nonmilitary diplomats to attempt to discredit the United States and its allies, such as by accusing them of having a “Cold War mentality.”⁸⁵

China Promotes the Global Security Initiative to Foreign Militaries

Since Xi’s introduction of the Global Security Initiative in April 2022, the concept has become a favored framing device for China’s ongoing interactions with foreign militaries, especially within multilateral dialogue fora. In May 2022, China held a special topic video seminar on regional maritime security with African countries on the Gulf of Guinea, which China’s MND framed as a step toward implementing the Global Security Initiative.⁸⁶ In June 2022, China’s delegation, led by then Minister Wei, promoted the concept at the Shangri-La Dialogue.⁸⁷ In July 2022, then Minister Wei suggested to the gathered China-Africa Peace and Security Forum that the Global Security Initiative was a necessary component of China-Africa cooperation against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and other unspecified security threats.⁸⁸ In August 2022, he told attendees of the Moscow Conference on International Security that China seeks to coordinate with “militaries of various countries” to implement the Global Security Initiative.⁸⁹ Three months later, in November 2022, he urged the represented defense departments at the ASEAN Defense Ministers Plus Meeting in Cambodia to implement the Global Security Initiative in light of the regional security environment he described as “stable, but with worrying factors.”⁹⁰ In June 2023, then Minister Li’s remarks at the 20th Shangri-La Dialogue included a lengthy description of how China views the applicability of the Global Security Initiative in the Indo-Pacific.⁹¹ (For more on the Global Security Initiative and efforts toward its implementation in 2023, see Chapter, 1 Section 2, “U.S.-China Security and Foreign Affairs.”)

*The first Xiangshan Forum in 2006 was attended by PLA personnel and by experts from research institutions from China, France, India, Japan, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Romania, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, the United States, the UK, and Uzbekistan. In 2014, the forum transitioned to being a Track 1.5 event including both senior government officials and scholars. The ninth meeting of the forum in 2019 was reportedly attended by 23 defense ministers, representatives from 76 official delegations and eight international organizations, and other experts and observers. *Xinhua*, “9th Xiangshan Forum Formally Opens in Beijing,” October 21, 2019; Zhou Bo, “The Importance of Xiangshan Forum for Beijing,” *China-US Focus*, October 21, 2019; Xiangshan Forum, “The 9th Beijing Xiangshan Forum,” 2019; Beijing Xiangshan Forum, “Introduction”; Xiangshan Forum, “The 1st Beijing Xiangshan Forum.”

Political Signaling and Control of China's Immediate Environment

China's participation in bilateral and multilateral military exercises can be used as a political signal to demonstrate the PLA's increasing military strength and deepening security ties with foreign partners.⁹² In testimony to the Commission, Dr. Saunders noted that Chinese and Russian joint naval and joint air patrols over the past three years were conducted to signal the two militaries' willingness to cooperate and were not necessarily focused on building interoperability.⁹³ For example, in May 2022, on the last day of President Joe Biden's visit to Japan and South Korea, Russian and Chinese bombers flew a joint patrol near Japan and South Korea's air defense zone where Tokyo hosted the Quad Leader's summit.⁹⁴ This was the first joint military exercise conducted by China and Russia since Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine; it was likely planned in advance and was probably intended to signal displeasure with the Quad summit.⁹⁵ U.S. Department of State Spokesman Ned Price noted the exercise demonstrated that the "no-limits" strategic partnership between Beijing and Moscow was "quite alive and well," and Japan's Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi viewed the timing of the exercise as provocative.⁹⁶ Signs of increased military cooperation between the two countries include China and Russia's second joint air patrol held in December 2022 as well as a joint naval patrol held in August 2023 in the Sea of Japan, the Sea of Okhotsk, and near the Aleutians off Alaska.⁹⁷ Dr. Saunders noted to the Commission that the message China and Russia are trying to send is that the two "can work together to thwart specific U.S. interests."⁹⁸

Many of China's military activities with countries in the Indo-Pacific aim to leverage ostensibly "cooperative" engagements to discourage counterparts from pushing back on China's aggressive pursuit of its own interests.⁹⁹ According to writings by authors affiliated with the PLA's Academy of Military Sciences and China's National Defense University, China's approach to military relations with "neighboring countries" in the Indo-Pacific puts particular stress on maintaining close contacts and frequent exchanges in order to "deepen" partnerships and strengthen so-called "mutual trust."¹⁰⁰ Military and paramilitary forces from China and Vietnam, for example, participate in a range of joint activities, including bilateral military exercises, port calls, high-level meetings, joint patrols, and other exchanges.^{*101} China's military representatives in bilateral and multilateral meetings with ASEAN countries have consistently characterized their exchange activities as contributing to regional stability.¹⁰² Melodie Ha, former management analyst at Aeyon's Defense Sector for DOD, explained in her testimony that "as military exercises play a symbolic role in demonstrating friendly political relations, we can see the PLA utilizing exercises as a means of manag-

*Vietnam and China participate in a bilateral joint medical exercise called Peace Rescue, last held in 2021. The China Coast Guard signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Vietnam Coast Guard in 2016 to strengthen maritime law enforcement cooperation through high-level meetings, exchanges, mutual ship visits, and joint exercises and training. The two forces also maintain routine meetings of a senior-level working group to discuss maritime enforcement cooperation. *China Military Online*, "China, Vietnam Coast Guards Hold Sixth High-Level Work Meeting," December 8, 2022; *China Military Online*, "China, Vietnam Coast Guards to Conduct Second Joint Patrol in Beibu Gulf," November 2, 2022; *China Military Online*, "China, Vietnam Round Off 'Peace Rescue 2021' Joint Medical Exercise," December 13, 2021.

ing bilateral relationships with other countries, including U.S. allies and partners.”¹⁰³ Yet analysts assess that in many cases, activities occurring under this banner are “limited in scope” and no more than “token expressions of friendship” by China.*¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, it is difficult for such joint activities and rosy statements to counterbalance China’s consistent record of aggressive behavior against those same partners. As a representative of the Philippines Coast Guard expressed in a rebuttal to then Minister Li at the 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue, “While China is talking about dialogue, China’s actions show confrontation.”¹⁰⁵ (For more on China’s aggressive behavior in the South China Sea, see Chapter 1, Section 2, “U.S.-China Security and Foreign Affairs.”)

Supporting Expansion of China’s Overseas Economic Interests and Broader Influence Efforts

China’s military exchanges with foreign countries support its objectives to build influence with key partners near key economic locations.¹⁰⁶ According to Ms. Gunness, the evolution of China’s economic and security interests may motivate further development of its security partnerships and access in developing countries.¹⁰⁷ For example, the PLAN’s counterpiracy activities in the Middle East and Africa, where China is increasingly depending on oil and natural gas imports, have played a role in supporting China’s energy security.¹⁰⁸ In Africa, China’s participation in UN peacekeeping operations has coincided with greater Chinese presence in countries where it invests heavily in energy and precious minerals.†¹⁰⁹ After 2015, a significant portion of PLA UN peacekeepers in South Sudan were forward deployed in proximity to strategic oil deposits in which the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation had significant investments.¹¹⁰ According to Thomas Dyrenforth, a U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer serving at the U.S. Africa Command, China’s security presence and involvement in UN peacekeeping operations deployed to eastern Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and central Mali support Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments.¹¹¹ In South Sudan, China has a vested interest in using its UN peacekeeping presence to prevent the conflict from spilling over into neighboring countries that host signature BRI investments, such as Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.¹¹² China’s UN peacekeeping presence in Mali supports its future economic interests, presenting a gateway for its efforts to extend BRI across West Africa.¹¹³

China’s military academic exchanges‡ also play a role in promoting its governance model and building influence with countries of

*In her testimony for the Commission, Ms. Ha, pointed out that countries that have territorial-maritime disputes with China, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines, or are otherwise suspicious about Chinese intentions, like South Korea, still participate in exercises with China. She argued that U.S. allies and partners also choose to use military diplomacy in an effort to balance out tensions in their relationships with China, even while continuing to engage in more substantive security cooperation with the United States. Melodie Ha, oral testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 98; Melodie Ha, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 5.

†For more on China’s use of peacekeeping operations to defend economic interests, see Chapter 1, Section 3, “China’s Strategic Aims in Africa,” in U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020, 136, 168.

‡The PLA’s international military academic and functional exchanges offer PLA officers exposure to foreign militaries and a venue to present China’s worldview and strategic culture.

strategic interest.¹¹⁴ China's international military education and training exchanges aim to establish a global network of alumni within other countries' security forces to strengthen China's defense ties.¹¹⁵ Paul Nantulya, research associate at the Africa Center for Strategic Studies at the U.S. National Defense University, notes that the PLA views its professional military education with foreign militaries as a form of military political work that aims to advance the CCP's political and ideological goals.¹¹⁶ China's military education fosters and strengthens ties not only with foreign military personnel but also with policymakers.¹¹⁷ Mr. Nantulya found that in many African countries, Chinese-trained alumni have reached influential positions within their respective countries' defense hierarchies.¹¹⁸ The relationships between PLA academic institutions and the Tanzania, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Uganda militaries afforded the PLA an opportunity to nurture personal ties.¹¹⁹

Comparison of Chinese and U.S. International Military Education and Training

Although China's training and education of foreign military officers is conducted through programs similar to the United States' own International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs, there are several substantial differences.¹²⁰ Expert analysis and anecdotal evidence from participants in China's programs point to a difference in perceived accessibility, particularly in terms of the scale* and affordability of offerings to certain partner countries. In his testimony, Dr. Saunders assessed that China competes with U.S. programs by "counter[ing] with lower prices and the ability to train large numbers of foreign students."¹²¹ As an analysis from the U.S. Army War college notes, the PLA has leveraged its low prices and ability to train a large number of officers to attract and invite foreign military officers from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Central Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe,† and the Middle East to attend China's military

According to John S. Van Oudenaren and Benjamin E. Fisher, the PLA may have developed its own National Defense University's International Symposium Course framework for foreign military exchanges following its experience participating in international symposiums and seminars hosted by the U.S. Asia Pacific Center for Strategic Studies. John S. Van Oudenaren and Benjamin E. Fisher, "Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power," *U.S. Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 46:4 (2016): 110.

*It is difficult to gauge from publicly reported data how the overall scale of China's foreign military education and training programs compares to that of the United States. According to a Foreign Military Training Report jointly produced by DOD and the Department of State, DOD conducts "professional military education" and "technical training" for more than 5,000 international military and civilian officials annually at approximately 150 military schools and installations. According to a separate assessment from the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation agency, the United States' IMET program trains approximately 78,000 foreign military students annually, with approximately 22,000 of those individuals receiving their training within the United States. China's 2019 defense white paper reported that a total of over 10,000 foreign military personnel from over 130 countries had studied specifically in China's military universities and colleges by 2019, but it did not provide annualized figures, data on training programs more broadly defined, or any indication of how many individuals were trained or educated outside of China. U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency, *International Military Training & Education Programs*; U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Military Training Report: Fiscal Years 2019 and 2020: Joint Report to Congress: Volume I, II-2*; State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, July 24, 2019.

†Although the ultimate impact on China's foreign military education programs in Europe remains unclear, China's ties with many countries in Central and Eastern Europe have become increasingly strained in the past two years as a result of Beijing's support for Russia's war in Ukraine. For more on China's relations with Central and Eastern European countries and the

Comparison of Chinese and U.S. International Military Education and Training—Continued

academies.¹²² In a report for the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on China's military education engagements with African militaries,* Mr. Nantulya reports that knowledgeable officers from the continent characterize China's professional military education programs for foreign military officers as being "on a scale and scope that is unmatched by other foreign partners."[†]¹²³ According to testimony from Cynthia Watson, dean of faculty and academic programs at U.S. National War College, Chinese military education programs in Latin America and the Caribbean are also perceived as a more widely accessible alternative to U.S. programs.[‡]¹²⁴

The United States' and China's foreign military training programs differ in several key measures of program quality, with the United States maintaining a decisive advantage in this area. First, U.S. and Chinese programs differ greatly in their integration of foreign students.¹²⁵ In his testimony for the Commission, Dr. Saunders described China's foreign military training as "essentially... a stage managed set of education done specifically for foreigners," wherein foreign students studying in China have a separate program and even a separate campus from regular PLA students.¹²⁶ The United States, by contrast, integrates foreign students into classrooms with U.S. students at every level of professional military education, allowing them to learn the same curriculum and come away with much deeper relationships with their U.S. counterparts.¹²⁷ Second, as Dr. Saunders testified, the United States is "in general much more focused on building partner capacity and interoperability than the PLA."¹²⁸ As an example, Chinese programs are significantly more limited in their coverage of joint warfighting skills than U.S. programs.¹²⁹ Finally, while U.S. degrees are accredited by civilian accreditation associ-

impact of China's position on the war in Ukraine on China-Europe relations, see Chapter 5, Section 1, "Europe-China Relations; Convergence and Divergence in Transatlantic Cooperation."

*Foreign military education and training programs are a particularly important component of China's engagements with the militaries of African countries. China has responded to increasing demand for its programs from African militaries and engaged in a concerted marketing campaign to increase enrollment of officers from African militaries traveling to study at China's military schools. Despite a high proportion of officers from African militaries attending military education programs in China, however, China still lags behind the United States and other powers, including India, in running programs on African soil. Paul Nantulya, "Special Report: Chinese Professional Military Education for Africa: Key Influence and Strategy," *United States Institute of Peace*, July 2023, 8.

†As one officer from South Africa described in an interview for a USIP report, "China has a very generous and attractive package. They can give you as many slots [for your military officers in their schools] as necessary, and they have a wide pool of [Chinese] funded slots to choose from. No one else does it like this." Paul Nantulya, "Special Report: Chinese Professional Military Education for Africa: Key Influence and Strategy," *United States Institute of Peace*, July 5, 2023, 10.

‡Dr. Watson argued that China has engaged in a concerted effort to expand its programs in Latin America and the Caribbean that has not been matched by the U.S. side. Although U.S. National Defense University is increasing the overall number of international officers invited to the United States in response to a directive from the secretary of defense, Dr. Watson reported that these expansions have applied unevenly across combatant commands and resulted in comparatively little increase for officers from Latin America and the Caribbean. In the absence of opportunity to participate in U.S. programs, which are viewed as higher quality, growing numbers of Latin American and Caribbean officials take advantage of the more accessible opportunities offered by Beijing. Cynthia Watson, oral testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China in Latin America and the Caribbean*, May 20, 2021, 201.

Comparison of Chinese and U.S. International Military Education and Training—*Continued*

ations and are thus broadly transferrable, Chinese degrees often lack international accreditation and are mostly confined to the Chinese military academic system.¹³⁰

A third difference between China's programs and U.S. IMET programs is the values and norms they promote. Instruction in military education systems generally reflects the national values, norms, and identity of the hosting country.¹³¹ Programs from countries like the United States emphasize civilian control of the military, allegiance to the constitution, and political neutrality, principles the UN and other international organizations have also accepted as international standards for military professionalism.¹³² China's programs, by contrast, teach principles that align with the CCP's authoritarian one-party system, including the Party's absolute leadership of the military.¹³³ The promotion of China's governance model through foreign military training programs reflects an effort not only to foster a more favorable view of the CCP internationally but also to discredit other systems and undermine the principles supporting democratic governance and universal political values more generally.¹³⁴

China's share of global arms exports is in a position to grow, expanding China's political influence and economic benefits.¹³⁵ John Parachini, senior international and defense researcher at RAND Corporation, noted that arms exports work as a means of influence because arms exports negotiations can create the conditions for other diplomatic and commercial interactions.¹³⁶ In light of Russia's poor performance in Ukraine, Mississippi State University scholars Vasabjit Banerjee and Benjamin Tkach assert that China has the opportunity to gain a deeper foothold in the value arms* market with radars, missiles, armored vehicles, and other relatively affordable equipment.¹³⁷ In Central Asia, China's arms sales are growing quickly and could be part of a broader strategy to undermine Russia's influence in the region.¹³⁸ For example, China's arms sales to Central Asia include more advanced technologies such as communications technology and unmanned vehicles, compared to Russia's sales of basic hardware and military platforms such as small arms and vehicles.¹³⁹ In the Middle Eastern arms market, China's competitive edge is with its advanced drone technology, with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) including the Wing Loong II and CH-4 selling to countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE.¹⁴⁰ In some cases, China has sold arms in exchange for fossil fuels, which serves China's economic interest in pursuing energy security by expanding access to foreign energy markets.¹⁴¹ For example, Venezuela reportedly received articles including a ground-based air-defense radar

*Dr. Banerjee and Dr. Tkach explain in an August 2022 *Diplomat* article that value arms typically consist of "smaller transaction values of new and refurbished equipment." The scholars note that some countries exclusively purchase within the value market, while others prefer to buy high-end equipment but also obtain some equipment within the value market. Vasabjit Banerjee and Benjamin Tkach, "Amid Russia-Ukraine War, China Could Dominate the Value Arms Market," *Diplomat*, August 8, 2022.

system, transport aircraft, amphibious infantry fighting vehicles, and large surface ships from China in return for partial payment in oil, and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan purchased Chinese long-range air-defense missile systems in exchange for natural gas.*¹⁴² In 2018, Chinese state media touted this strategy as an example of “flexible payment terms” making China’s arms sales competitive internationally; however, less than a year later, the agreement with Turkmenistan broke down when the Central Asian state struggled to pay back its debt to Beijing following a fall in gas production.¹⁴³

China’s Arms Sales Show No Consideration for Human Rights

China is known to provide arms to authoritarian regimes and perpetrators of human rights abuses. As Dr. Banerjee and Dr. Tkach note, China is “unencumbered by concerns about human rights or regime stability” and views arms sales as “transactional.”†¹⁴⁴ Recipients of China’s arms sales include at least four countries with active mandatory UN embargoes placed upon them at the time of the arms transfers, including the Central African Republic, Iran, Somalia, and Sudan.¹⁴⁵ Although it is difficult to prove from aggregate open source data whether the transactions China conducted in these countries violated the specific terms of the applicable UN embargo, China nevertheless demonstrates a willingness to sell arms in locations where Chinese military equipment could be used in internal conflicts or to perpetrate abuses of human rights. China also sells arms in other countries where the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) regulations prohibit military exports from the United States.¹⁴⁶ A comparison of OFAC records with data on arms transfers from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reveals that Belarus and Burma (Myanmar) received arms from China during the same years they were subject to OFAC sanctions on the U.S. side.¹⁴⁷

China’s Military Seeks Operational Skills and Capabilities

China’s military exchanges with foreign counterparts adhere to General Secretary Xi’s requirements for the military to strengthen its combat effectiveness.¹⁴⁸ To align with this objective, the PLA’s relations with foreign militaries expanded from activities such as high-level visits and dialogues to also include exchanges in areas such as military technology and exercises that allow the PLA to learn from the advanced technology, operational methods, and management experience of foreign militaries.¹⁴⁹ In 2020, during a CMC meeting on military training, Xi urged the faster establishment of a

* Gas from Turkmenistan and pipe infrastructure through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan supply the West-East Pipeline Project aimed at developing western China. Hydrocarbons Technology, “West-East Gas Pipeline Project.”

† Other recipients of Chinese arms, including Algeria, Pakistan, Thailand, and others, are noted on indices by both Freedom House and the Cato Institute as ranking low in metrics including civil liberties and personal freedom. Freedom House, “Global Freedom Status”; Ian Vasquez et al., “The Human Freedom Index 2022,” *Cato Institute*, 2022.

new type of training system and to carry out real-combat-oriented training.¹⁵⁰ *PLA Daily* articles published before and after the meeting highlighted enhancing training, war gaming, and joint exercises with foreign countries to improve the PLA's joint operations training methods.¹⁵¹ Ms. Ha testified before the Commission that the PLA's efforts to seek combat and combat support exercises have focused on advanced militaries and militaries that have extensive combat experience.*¹⁵² Over time, China's military has learned combat-relevant skills, practiced power projection, and collected intelligence on foreign tactics, techniques, and procedures while conducting military exercises and exchanges with foreign militaries.

China Practices Combat-Relevant Skills

The PLA participates in military exercises that practice a variety of combat-related activities, such as live-fire drills and exercises conducted in environments that simulate combat scenarios.¹⁵³ Most of the PLA's combat and combat support training exercises are conducted with the Russian military in both bilateral and multilateral settings.†¹⁵⁴ Military exchanges are beneficial for the PLA to gain practical experience that involves the integration of multiple combat arms and services, including the following:¹⁵⁵

- *Ground force exercises:*
 - Chinese and Russian ground forces have conducted complex drills during bilateral and multilateral exercises, such as rehearsed counterterrorism activities where units practice fighting insurgent movements, interdicting guerrillas, and liberating hostages.¹⁵⁶
 - The PLA Army also conducts a joint counterterrorism training with Pakistan known as the Warrior series.¹⁵⁷ The seventh iteration of the Warrior series was held in 2019 and involved drills with live ammunition.¹⁵⁸ The exercise has involved multidimensional reconnaissance, three-dimensional deployment and maneuver, comprehensive fire assault, and air-ground coordinated attack, all of which offer the PLA the opportunity to practice combat skills.‡¹⁵⁹
- *Naval joint exercises:*
 - The Russian and Chinese navies have conducted joint exercises on anti-submarine warfare, maritime air defense, ship-to-sea gunnery, maritime search and rescue, escorting civilian vessels, launching amphibious assaults, liberating ships

* Examples of advanced militaries with extensive combat experience that China has exercised with include Russia, the United States, and Australia. According to the U.S. National Defense University database, the PLA's top five most frequent military diplomatic partners with whom they have conducted military exercises from 2002 to 2022 are: Russia, Pakistan, Thailand, Australia, and the United States. Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, "Chinese Military Diplomacy Database Version 4.00."

† The PLA gains tangible operational experience through the observation of alternative tactics, techniques, and procedures that can be applied to PLA doctrine, such as helicopter flight training in low altitudes and lessons learned for the use of armored assets during the urban phase of a counterterrorism exercise. Wilson Chun Hei Chau, "Explaining China's Participation in Bilateral and Multilateral Military Exercises," *Institute for Regional Security* 7:3 (2011): 63.

‡ In 2018, the sixth iteration, Warrior-VI 2018, included participation from Special Operations Forces of the Pakistan Army and the PLA Army Xinjiang Military Command special operations brigade. *China Military Online*, "Chinese, Pakistani Armies Conduct Joint Counter-Terrorism Training," January 7, 2019.

seized by pirates, and providing underway cargo replenishment.¹⁶⁰ Since 2012, Russia and China have also conducted annual bilateral joint naval exercises known as Joint Sea, which have been held in the Mediterranean Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the East China Sea.¹⁶¹ In December 2022, the two navies conducted joint operations covering maneuvers such as blockade and control, rescue, anti-submarine drills, and air defense in the East China Sea.*¹⁶² In July 2023, the Russian and Chinese navies continued to practice combat capabilities in the high seas by conducting training that included maritime and air escort, maneuvers that deter and expel an opposing force, and anchorage defense to secure strategic maritime passages during the China-Russia Northern/Interaction-2023 exercise.¹⁶³

- In January 2020, China and Pakistan held their first biannual Sea Guardians joint maritime exercise in the Arabian Sea.¹⁶⁴ The second iteration, Sea Guardians-2, was hosted by the PLA in July 2022 at a military port in Wusong, Shanghai, and consisted of onshore and maritime components.¹⁶⁵ Onshore activities included operational planning and professional military education exchanges.†¹⁶⁶ The maritime component of Sea Guardians-2 included joint drills focused on attacking maritime targets, tactical maneuver, anti-submarine operations, replenishment at sea, reinforcing damaged ships, and anti-aircraft and antimissile operations.¹⁶⁷
- *Air Force exercises and patrols:*
 - China and Russia have conducted six joint strategic air patrols since 2019 and over time have displayed a gradual level of interoperability.¹⁶⁸ The patrols have evolved over time in both scale and scope. In 2020 and 2021, PLA Air Force H-6K strategic bombers and Russian Tu-95MC strategic bombers flew in formations together while conducting joint patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea.¹⁶⁹ In 2022, China and Russia conducted two joint patrols over the Sea of Japan, East China Sea, and the western Pacific Ocean.¹⁷⁰ The first featured Chinese H-6K and Russian Tu-95 strategic bombers accompanied by a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance plane and Su-30SM fighters, while the second featured Chinese H-6K strategic bombers, a Russian Tu-95MS strategic missile-carrying bomber, YU-20 tanker aircraft, and an escort of Chinese J-16 fighters.¹⁷¹

*These exercises included a Russian cruiser, destroyer, and two corvettes along with two PLA Navy destroyers, two frigates, a diesel submarine, and an airborne early warning and control aircraft and maritime patrol aircraft. Melodie Ha, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 9; Dzirhan Mahadzir, "Russian, Chinese Naval Exercise Wraps in East China Sea," *USNI News*, December 28, 2022.

†According to the PRC Ministry of National Defense, PLA Navy participants were mainly from PLA Eastern Theater Command and included two guided-missile frigates *Xiangtan* (Hull No. 531) and *Shouzhou* (Hull No. 610), one FUCHI Class (Type 903) supply ship *Qiandaohu* (Hull No. 886), one submarine, one early warning aircraft, two fighter jets, and one helicopter, while the Pakistan Navy sent the frigate *Taimur*. China's Ministry of National Defense, "China, Pakistan Kick Off Joint Naval Exercise Sea Guardians-2 in Shanghai," July 10, 2022; *Global Security*, "Type 903 AOR Fuchi / Qiandaohu Replenishment Oiler."

- The PLA Air Force and the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) conduct an annual bilateral exercise called Falcon Strike that began in 2015.¹⁷² According to a statement from China's Ministry of National Defense, the 2022 iteration focused on building combat capabilities such as air support, strikes on ground targets, and small- and large-scale troop deployments.¹⁷³ Falcon Strike-2022 consisted of PLA Air Force fighter jets, fighter-bombers, and airborne early warning (AEW) aircraft as well as RTAF fighter jets and AEW aircraft.¹⁷⁴ Falcon Strike-2023 included PLA Air Force fighters, bombers, AEW aircraft, and a surface-to-air missile unit and was held at Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base on July 9, 2023.¹⁷⁵
- *Multi-service exercises:*
 - Since 2018, the PLA has participated in Russia's annual strategic command staff exercises* simulating major power conflict.¹⁷⁶ For example, Vostok-2018 reportedly tested the effectiveness of the PLA's reform and joint combat capabilities under combat conditions, and Zapad-2021, the first strategic-level multilateral exercise held in China's territory, utilized new PLA equipment.¹⁷⁷ Vostok-2022, which took place in Russia's Eastern Military District in 2022, marked the first time China sent units from the army, navy, and air force as PLA Navy and Russian warships conducted joint exercises, including a live-fire anti-aircraft drill in the Sea of Japan.¹⁷⁸ Chinese sources claimed these exercises provided an important platform for improving the PLA's military capabilities.¹⁷⁹
 - The PLA also gains combat-relevant skills in multilateral exercises such as the SCO biennial Peace Mission exercises, which have involved large units conducting conventional combat operations such as air defense and strike operations.¹⁸⁰ The SCO last held the Peace Mission exercise in 2021 in Russia, where participating PLA forces conducted live-fire drills using infantry assault vehicles to attack targets.[†]¹⁸¹

The PLA has also practiced combat support activities, such as communications, survival skills, logistics, and other basic military skills through exercises with foreign militaries.¹⁸² These exercises offer PLA soldiers exposure to foreign environments and the experience of operating with foreign troops.¹⁸³

*These strategic exercises have rotated through each of Russia's military regions: Vostok-2018 in the east, Tsentri-2019 in central Russia, Kavkaz-2020 in the Caucasus, and Zapad-2021 in the western part of Russia. Gianguseppe Pili and Fabrizio Minniti, "Understanding Russia's Great Games: From Zapad 2013 to Zapad 2021," *Royal United Services Institute*, June 7, 2022; Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, "Zapad/Interaction Military Exercise 2021: Growing China-Russia Bonhomie?" *Diplomat*, August 6, 2021; *CGTN*, "Chinese Military to Participate in Kavkaz-2020 Multinational Anti-Terror Drills," September 10, 2020.

†According to the joint communiqué of the SCO Defense Ministers' Meeting in August 2022, plans for Peace Mission-2023 included exercises to practice "responding to new tactics used by international terrorists" such as "countering [UAVs], ensuring information security, and preventing terrorist attacks using chemical and biological weapons." The joint communiqué did not identify a date for the exercise. Russian state media reporting from December 2022 later indicated that Peace Mission-2023 would take place at a military training ground of Russia's Central Military District in the Chelyabinsk Region in late August 2023. As of the time of writing, the exercise does not appear to have taken place yet. *Russian News Agency*, "SCO to Hold Peace Mission Counter-Terror Drills in Urals Next Year—Military Command," December 13, 2022; Shanghai Cooperation Organization, "Joint Communiqué of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Defense Ministers' Meeting (24 August 2022, Tashkent)," August 26, 2022.

- *Military medicine*: In 2019, China and Germany held their second joint military exercise* called Combined Aid, where the Chinese military practiced medical services under live-fire combat conditions, such as scenarios focused on treating mass casualty events as well as the outbreak of infectious diseases.¹⁸⁴ The Logistics Support Department of China's CMC described the Combined Aid-2019 exercise as “the first time for China to dispatch a complete unit of medical service forces with real combat equipment to conduct joint exercise in Europe.”¹⁸⁵ Commenting on a senior-level meeting between then CMC Vice-Chairman General Xu Qiliang and then German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen in 2018, Zheng Chunrong, director of the Institute of German Studies at Tongji University in Shanghai, noted to the Chinese state media that “the German military is very capable in medical logistics, postwar reconstruction, and managing civic emergencies and conflicts—all fields China can learn much from.”¹⁸⁶ Exercises like this could help the PLA prepare its military medical teams for a conflict, such as a war over a Taiwan contingency.
- *Logistics*: China's armed forces are incorporating logistics units into joint exercises and training with foreign militaries as a means to build a combat-oriented logistics system.¹⁸⁷ The PLA is able to practice information support command and control, helicopter operations logistics to project and sustain forces abroad, and other activities relevant to combat support during HA/DR exercises.†¹⁸⁸ For example, the PLA Navy participated in the June 2023 Komodo multilateral naval exercise hosted by the Indonesian Navy with 36 other countries—including the United States, the UK, Japan, Russia, and South Korea—and focused on HA/DR drills.¹⁸⁹ During previous Komodo exercises, China has taken part in exercises that practice key competencies applicable to a Taiwan contingency such as aerial reconnaissance, underway replenishment, cross-deck helicopter landing, and maritime interdiction.¹⁹⁰
- *Soft skills*: China's military have participated in noncombat activities that develop survival skills, practice navigation drills, and engage in team-building exercises such as the bilateral exercise with Australia called Pandaroo and the multilateral exercise with the United States and Australia called Kowari.‡¹⁹¹

*China and Germany's first joint military exercise was held in 2016, where Chinese and German military medical services carried out an exercise based on an earthquake scenario in Chongqing, China. Zhang Yuan and Lian Zhen, “China-German Joint Exercise Provides References for International Joint Humanitarian Medical Rescue,” *China Military Online*, July 10, 2023; Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, “Chinese Military Diplomacy Database Version 4.00.”

†HA/DR missions require operational flexibility; the transport of troops, equipment, and material; and the sustainment of a deployed force with similar skills needed to support combat operations abroad. For more on how the PLA views HA/DR as a means to test and enhance its operational proficiency, see Matthew Southerland, “The Chinese Military's Role in Overseas Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief,” *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, July 11, 2019.

‡The Pandaroo annual exercise was first held in 2015 and last held in 2019. The annual adventure training exercises aims to build people-to-people ties between junior officers and non-commissioned officers between Australia's army and the PLA Army. Pandaroo adventure training consists of orienteering, a survival exercise, and a sea kayak journey. Kowari was first held in 2014 as an annual exercise that encourages participating military personnel to work together and build survival skills through a series of training activities, including hiking, sea kayaking, mountaineering, and canyoning. *Xinhua*, “China-Australia Joint Military Exercise Starts in South China,” October 10, 2019; Australian Government Department of Defense, *Exercise PANDAROO*

The PLA's increased participation in international military competitions, often hosted by Russia, is another venue for it to learn new skills and compare its capabilities against others.¹⁹²

China's Military Practices Power Projection Capabilities

The PLA's participation in military exercises and operations abroad supports the development of its expeditionary capabilities.¹⁹³ Military exercises and port calls provide means for the PLA to operate further from its shores and practice and test its power projection capabilities.¹⁹⁴

- *Naval antipiracy escort task force*: In an effort to become a blue-water navy, the PLA Navy practices its naval power projection and expeditionary capabilities by deploying its antipiracy escort task force* in the Gulf of Aden, which develops the PLA's capabilities to protect sea lines of communication.¹⁹⁵ In 2022, the 41st Chinese Naval Escort Task force concluded a 182-day mission covering 90,000 nautical miles and escorting 38 Chinese and foreign ships.¹⁹⁶
- *Multilateral naval exercises*: Joint naval exercises also offer the PLA Navy the opportunity to practice far-sea deployments and close operations with foreign partners. In March 2023, China, Russia, and Iran conducted a joint naval exercise where the navies practiced aerial search operations, sea rescue, and fleet formation exercises in the Gulf of Oman.¹⁹⁷ In addition, the PLA is able to practice its ability to marshal, deploy, and sustain unit size deployment of forces and equipment in transit to and from various exercises. China has used multilateral exercises with the SCO to build its capacity to project military power and practice more robust force deployment within the region.[†]¹⁹⁸ SCO Peace Mission-2007 marked the first deployment of a PLA brigade-sized composite unit‡ abroad and entailed the long-distance transport of eight fighter bombers; 32 helicopters; fixed-wing transport aircraft; and army, air force, and integrated support groups to Russia by air and rail.¹⁹⁹ During Peace Mission-2021, the PLA Northern Theater Command sent more than 550 service members and 130 vehicles and equipment via rail and airlift, and for the first time it deployed its Y-20 transport aircraft to the Peace Mission exercise.²⁰⁰

Commences in China, October 9, 2019; Australian Government Department of Defense, *Exercise Kowari Starts in North Queensland*, August 28, 2019.

*The 43rd Chinese Naval Escort Task force is a antipiracy mission the PLA Navy has deployed to the Gulf of Aden since 2009. On June 2, 2023, the 43rd Naval Escort Taskforce completed its duties and handed off its mission to the 44th Naval Escort Task force consisting of destroyer *Zibo*, frigate *Jingzhou*, and fleet oiler *Qiandaohu*. Dzirhan Mahadzir, "Russian, Chinese Warships in East China Sea after Sailing near Alaska," *USNI News*, August 17, 2023.

†SCO exercises have offered the PLA opportunities to practice power projection skills such as transporting multiservice units by rail and air, conducting cross-border airstrikes, and executing air assault operations from foreign airfields. Matthew Southerland, Will Green, and Sierra Janik, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Testbed for Chinese Power Projection," *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, November 12, 2020, 5–6, 9–13.

‡The ground combat unit that formed the basis of the PLA-deployed force was a temporary task-organized composite unit referred to alternately as a battle group and a cavalry brigade. The brigade-sized unit was composed of a mechanized infantry battalion with Type 92 wheeled infantry fighting vehicles and PTL-02 wheeled assault guns; an attack helicopter battalion; a transport helicopter battalion; and supporting engineers, artillery, and other combat support and combat service support units. Martin Andrew, "The PLA's Evolving Operational Doctrine: Experiments in Modularity," *Jamestown Foundation, China Brief* 8:5 (March 6, 2008).

China Gathers Intelligence on Foreign Military Tactics

The PLA's military activities with foreign partners also present opportunities to collect intelligence.²⁰¹ Personnel from the CMC Joint Staff Department, which coordinates foreign affairs with military intelligence activities, participate in many foreign meetings.²⁰² While any contact with a foreign military is an opportunity for the PLA to gain knowledge (such as knowledge of foreign leaders' policy preferences or technical intelligence), activities involving deeper operational contact likely have more intelligence value.²⁰³ According to DOD, China could use its military presence in UN peacekeeping operations to collect intelligence on other UN units.²⁰⁴ For example, it is likely that units engaged in more combat-relevant activities, such as those participating in naval exercises with Russia, seek technical intelligence on the capabilities and operational proficiency of Russian weapons systems and forces.²⁰⁵

Commercial Ports: PLA's Access and Opportunities for Intelligence Collection

China's overseas basing model leverages both military facilities and commercial ports operated by Chinese firms that could serve as dual-use logistics facilities for PLA Navy forces and complicate U.S. force movements.*²⁰⁶ According to the 2020 *Science of Military Strategy*, published by the PLA's Academy of Military Science, China's overseas military operations require greater overseas support capabilities, including intelligence information support, communications support, meteorological and hydrological support, and logistics equipment support.²⁰⁷ Since the PLA has yet to establish significant international military infrastructure, it relies on and leverages commercial infrastructure to support its military operations abroad.†²⁰⁸ Isaac Kardon, senior fellow for China Studies at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Wendy Leutert, assistant professor at the Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies at Indiana University, found that Chinese firms own or operate one or more terminals at 96 foreign ports.²⁰⁹ In his statement for the record for the Commission, Dr. Kardon noted that PLA Navy warships have conducted port calls at over one-third of these facilities.²¹⁰ In peacetime, these commercial port facilities support the PLA's military logistics; for example, Chinese state-owned enterprises like China Ocean Shipping Company and China Merchants Group have provided the PLA Navy with specialized technical repairs and maintenance operations from various ports in Djibouti, Egypt, Greece, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka,

*For more on the PLA's basing model, see U.S.-China Security and Economic Review Commission, Chapter 3, Section 2, "China's Growing Power Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities," in *2020 Annual Report to Congress*, December 2020.

†The PLA Navy's use of commercial ports and facilities is not uncommon among militaries operating internationally. Other blue-water navies rely on foreign commercial ports to conduct basic refuel and resupply operations. Port terminals offer routine services for commercial and military ships alike, such as refueling petroleum, oil, and lubricant stores, and other husbanding services, such as critical consumables like water, food, and power. Isaac Kardon, written statement for the record for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 1; Jeffrey Becker, written testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China's Military Diplomacy and Overseas Security Activities*, January 26, 2023, 3.

Commercial Ports: PLA's Access and Opportunities for Intelligence Collection—*Continued*

and Tanzania.²¹¹ In addition, commercial port facilities could enable China's intelligence capabilities.²¹² Dr. Kardon noted in his statement to the Commission that the network of ports owned or operated by Chinese firms offer a platform for intelligence collection, including collecting and processing "huge volumes of proprietary information about vessels and their various fuel and supply requirements, routes and destinations, cargos, personnel, and other salient details."²¹³

Implications for the United States

China views expanded leadership in international security affairs as a priority for the opportunities it provides Beijing to expressly offer itself as an alternative to the United States. Given the premium Beijing places here, the United States should anticipate increasing competition for influence from China using military diplomacy. The CCP views its military as a tool that not only serves warfighting objectives but can also influence diplomatic, economic, and security conditions in peacetime, and the PLA has direction from the top to leverage itself more and more. Whether seeking to influence the behavior of its neighbors, burnish China's image, or build relationships that could lead to future economic or political gains, China's leadership will continue expanding avenues for interaction between the PLA and other security forces in support of a wide range of foreign policy goals. At the same time, as the PLA continues to seek improvement of its capabilities through international exercises and exchanges, its overseas presence is likely to continue to increase.

Through all these interactions, China's military leadership demonstrates its perception of China's growing influence in security affairs as coming at the expense of the United States. In disregard for its own purported standard of not targeting defense relations against any third party—as well as claims of seeking win-win cooperation—China continues to use international military interactions to shape other countries' views of U.S. intentions and strategy. For example, it frequently advances false claims that the United States is pursuing hegemony and that U.S. actions are a source of international instability. As competition in this realm intensifies, U.S. policymakers will increasingly need to consider how to best respond, both in practice and in rhetoric.

As China's military activities with foreign partners expand to more places with more countries, a greater number of PLA forces will be operating within proximity of U.S. forces, especially outside of the Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility, necessitating greater communication and operational security with both China and, more importantly, U.S. allies and partners. China's military leaders' continued refusal to engage in transparent communication with their U.S. counterparts makes clear China's lack of due regard to reduce risk of miscalculation and conflict. While China may choose not to engage with its U.S. counterparts, U.S. military personnel, diplomats, and leaders have an opportunity to coordinate closely with

U.S. allies and partners regarding the risks of China's international military activities and to protect military capabilities and knowhow.

The greater emphasis China has placed on building military relations with foreign counterparts may also lead to increasing opportunities for the PLA to gather intelligence; observe tactics, techniques, and procedures; and practice combat-relevant skills. The risk of the PLA improving its combat capabilities and learning U.S. operational tactics and procedures through U.S. allies and partners remains high, particularly as the PLA engages in further multilateral exercises and operations focused on HA/DR, search and rescue, maritime security, counterterrorism, and antipiracy, where the United States may be present. China's growing involvement in such multilateral exercises may temper future U.S. participation given current statutory requirements in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000.*

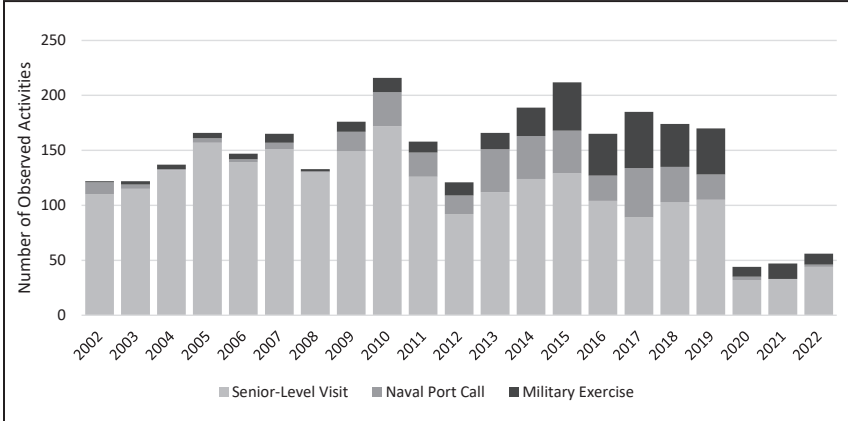
It will be important for the United States to mitigate risk by coordinating with allies and partners before, during, and after a multilateral exercise where China may be a participant. U.S. allies and partners routinely engage in effective military exchanges that build interoperability, capability, and transparency. Such interactions with China's military need to be carried out in different ways for different purposes. There is a risk that China may benefit from the level of transparency U.S. and allied militaries are used to offering in exchanges, which is not reciprocated by PLA units. To account for instances of actual search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, or other lifesaving operations, it may not be in the U.S. interest to fully isolate or avoid the PLA's participation in certain multilateral exercises, but effective controls and barriers must be placed on certain activities.

Although China's activities in several categories of military diplomacy continue to expand, the United States maintains key strengths and advantages. China's foreign military education and training programs and its exercises and training with other militaries often prioritize political objectives over substance and are thus limited in their contribution to partner capacity building. The United States, by contrast, is a leader in developing partner capacity through bilateral and multilateral exercises, and the quality of U.S. training and educational courses outpaces their Chinese competitors. In addition, the relationships the United States maintains with its allies and the security guarantees it provides are much more substantive than most superficial promises of "cooperation" the PLA may offer while continuing to undermine those same partners' security through aggressive behavior. The United States and its allies and partners can continue relying on these strengths as they seek to manage the problematic aspects of the PLA's behavior.

*The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 set parameters on DOD's contacts with the PLA, to include 12 operational areas (with exception to active search and rescue or humanitarian operations) where inappropriate exposure would create national security risk. The 12 operational areas include force projection operations; nuclear operations; advanced combined-arms and joint combat operations; advanced logistical operations; chemical and biological defense and other capabilities related to weapons of mass destruction; surveillance and reconnaissance operations; joint warfighting experiments and other activities related to transformations in warfare; military space operations; other advanced capabilities; arms sales or military-related technology transfers; release of classified or restricted information; and access to a DOD laboratory. Caitlin Campbell, "China Primer: U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations," *Congressional Research Service*, CRS IF 11712, January 4, 2021, 2.

Appendix

Figure 1: PLA Senior-Level Visits, Naval Port Calls, and Military Exercises, 2002–2022



Note: This figure displays the number of observed PLA senior-level visits, naval port calls, and military exercises between 2002 and 2022 captured in the “Chinese Military Diplomacy Database” produced by the Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs at the U.S. National Defense University. “Senior-level visits” are defined as bilateral or multilateral meetings in which PLA officers at the CMC Vice Chairman, CMC member-grade, and Theater Command grade levels met with high-level foreign military leaders, either abroad, hosted in China, or virtually. “Military exercises” include bilateral and multilateral exercises that the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, People’s Armed Police, or multiple services conducted with foreign militaries. “Port calls” refer to visits by PLA ships at the ports of other countries and do not include visits by foreign military ships to ports in China.

Source: Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, “Chinese Military Diplomacy Database Version 4.00.”

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