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**“Maneuver-5” Exercise Focuses on Improving
Distant Seas Combat Capabilities**

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From October 18 to November 1, 2013, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy held a sophisticated, large-scale training exercise that spanned China's near seas and distant seas.[†] The exercise, which official Chinese press referred to as Maneuver-5, marked the first time the PLA Navy has conducted coordinated combat drills in the Western Pacific with elements from all three PLA Navy fleets – the North Sea Fleet, the East Sea Fleet, and the South Sea Fleet.[‡] The PLA Navy most likely used Maneuver-5 to improve operational proficiencies in core warfare competencies; fulfill “proof of concept” training requirements for complex multi-fleet operations far from the Chinese mainland; improve its ability to integrate surface ships, submarines, aircraft, and land-based missile forces in multi-disciplinary warfare; and demonstrate to regional countries China's ability to project naval power in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and Western Pacific.

- The PLA Navy held the first Maneuver exercise in 1991 and subsequent iterations in 1996, 1999, and 2005.¹ Although official Chinese press characterized the Maneuver exercises as “routine,”² the irregular timing of the exercises suggests they probably serve as significant examinations of naval combat power rather than ordinary training.
- Chinese media provided extensive coverage of Maneuver-5, including details on the ships' characteristics and armaments, exercise areas, and training activities. The PLA Navy in 2013 has allowed greater official Chinese press coverage of its exercises, likely in an attempt to shape regional perceptions of China's expanding naval operations and boost national pride in China's growing naval capabilities.
- In 2013, PLA training directives and speeches by Xi Jinping, the new Chinese president and Central Military Commission[§] chairman, have focused on increasing the PLA's combat readiness through realistic training.³ PLA Navy Commander Admiral Wu Shengli said the exercise was designed to “[be] combat-realistic to the maximum extent, set combat-realistic scenarios to the maximum extent, [and test] the maximum performance effects of weaponry and equipment.”⁴

From Near Seas to Distant Seas

On October 18, one flotilla from each of the PLA Navy's three fleets departed its homeport to conduct training in China's near seas. Each fleet flotilla operated in a different exercise area. Official Chinese media coverage on this portion of the exercise was limited, but judging from the composition of the flotillas, PLA training directives, and Office of Naval Intelligence information on PLA training, it likely included antisubmarine warfare, mine field navigation, and naval base defense drills.⁵

After the near seas portion of the exercise concluded, select participants – including at least seven modern surface combatants organized into three flotillas – began to transit to the Western Pacific.

- The South Sea Fleet flotilla traveled on an indirect “U-shaped navigation route” through the South China Sea, allowing it to train with various shore-based aircraft, including four JH-7A

[†] China usually defines its “near seas” as waters within the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Sea. China typically describes its “distant seas” as waters outside of its near seas.

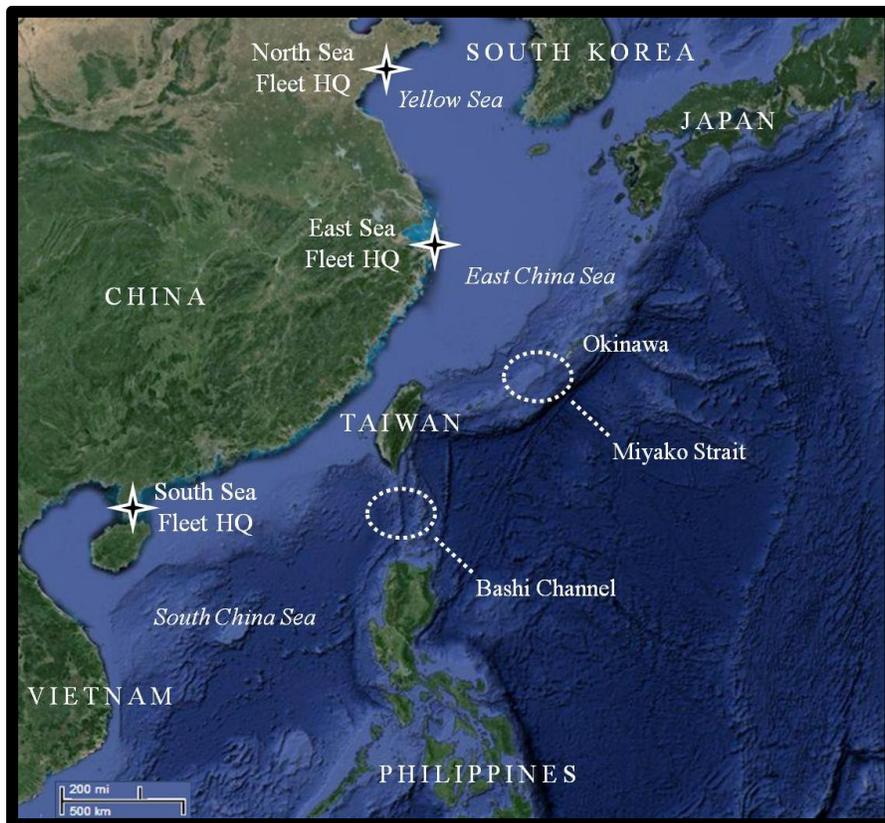
[‡] The PLA Navy's principal operational and administrative command entities are its three fleets. The North Sea Fleet, headquartered in Qingdao, is responsible for the Yellow Sea and the Bohai. The East Sea Fleet, headquartered in Ningbo, is responsible for the East China Sea, including the Taiwan Strait. The South Sea Fleet, headquartered in Zhanjiang, is responsible for the South China Sea, including the contested Spratly and Paracel Islands.

[§] The Central Military Commission is China's highest military decision-making body. Its main responsibilities are to set military policy and strategy, interpret Chinese Communist Party guidance for the military, and oversee the PLA's senior staff and service arms.

fighter bombers, and mobile missile units.⁶ This training may have consisted of long-range antisurface warfare and target tracking drills.

- Official Chinese press and the locations of the near seas exercise areas indicate the South Sea Fleet flotilla then sailed to the Western Pacific through the Bashi Channel, while both the North Sea Fleet and the East Sea Fleet flotillas transited through the Miyako Strait.⁷ Chinese media claimed this “marks the first time the three PLA [Navy] fleets simultaneously [passed] through the First Island Chain^{**} to carry out a joint exercise in the Western Pacific.”⁸ PLA Senior Colonel Du Wenlong said, “The [PLA Navy] has cut up the whole island chain into multiple sections so that the so-called island chains are no longer existent.”⁹ PLA strategists and academics have long asserted that the United States relies primarily on the “First Island Chain” and the “Second Island Chain”^{††} to strategically “encircle” or “contain” China and prevent the PLA Navy from operating freely in the Western Pacific.¹⁰

Figure 1: PLA Navy Fleet Headquarters and Transit Corridors to the Western Pacific



Source: Google Maps, “South China Sea,” December 4, 2013. Adapted by the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Locations of various features are not exact.

After rendezvousing in the Western Pacific, the flotillas on October 25 began a three-day combat drill featuring coordinated antisubmarine, antiship, and anti-air training. Multiple land-based bombers, at least

^{**} The First Island Chain refers to a line of islands running from Japan, the Senkaku Islands, Taiwan, and the west coast of Borneo to Vietnam.

^{††} The Second Island Chain refers to a line that stretches from the Kurile Islands through Japan, the Bonin Islands, the Mariana Islands, the Caroline Islands, and Indonesia.

one reconnaissance aircraft, one FUCHI-class replenishment ship, and two additional surface combatants also participated in various aspects of the combat drill.¹¹

Figure 2: Surface Ships Participating in the Western Pacific Combat Drill

Ship Name	Fleet	Class	Type	Year Commissioned
<i>Guangzhou</i>	South Sea	LUYANG I	Guided-Missile Destroyer	2004
<i>Huangshan</i>	South Sea	JIANGKAI II	Guided-Missile Frigate	2008
<i>Weishanhu</i>	South Sea	FUCHI	Replenishment Oiler	2004
<i>Zhoushan</i>	East Sea	JIANGKAI II	Guided-Missile Frigate	2008
<i>Xuzhou</i>	East Sea	JIANGKAI II	Guided-Missile Frigate	2008
<i>Shijiazhuang</i>	North Sea	LUZHOU	Guided-Missile Destroyer	2007
<i>Shenyang</i>	North Sea	LUZHOU	Guided-Missile Destroyer	2006
<i>Qingdao</i>	North Sea	LUHU	Guided-Missile Destroyer	1996
<i>Linyi</i>	North Sea	JIANGKAI II	Guided-Missile Frigate	2012
<i>Yantai</i>	North Sea	JIANGKAI II	Guided-Missile Frigate	2011

Sources: CCTV, “PLA Navy Fleets Taking Part in ‘Maneuver-5’ Exercise Hold 72-Hour Drill in West Pacific,” October 29, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013111234243238. <http://www.opensource.gov>; CCTV, “PLA Navy North Sea Fleet ‘Maneuver-5’ Formation Conducts Nighttime Drill,” October 30, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013110622348505. <http://www.opensource.gov>; Stephen Saunders, ed., *Jane’s Fighting Ships 2012-2013* (Englewood, Colorado: IHS Inc., 2013). <http://www.ihs.com/products/janes/defence/det-products/fighting-ships.aspx>; Qiandaohu (Fuchi) Class Auxiliary Oiler Replenishment Ship, Sinodefence.com, February 24, 2009. <http://www.sinodefence.com/navy/support/qiandaohu.asp>.

Maneuver-5 Highlights

The central feature of Maneuver-5 was the use of “back-to-back” confrontation drills in which opposing forces “had no idea of each other’s position, navigation factors, and operational intentions,” according to a senior PLA Navy official.¹² This innovation forces shipboard commanders to react to events as they occur. Traditionally, shipboard commanders during exercises have relied on a predetermined exercise script, strict rules of engagement, or explicit orders from higher echelons to guide their actions.¹³ Official Chinese media indicate back-to-back combat drills will become a standard feature of future PLA training.¹⁴

- As PLA Navy tactical commanders improve readiness and capabilities in more realistic combat conditions, they likely will become more flexible and responsive to changing conditions at sea and better prepared to carry out their missions even if they lose communications with higher echelons.

Furthermore, the exercise showcased the PLA Navy’s growing ability to operate in distant seas. By operating farther from the Chinese mainland, the PLA Navy is able to field-test equipment and obtain hands-on experience operating in unfamiliar waters and addressing expeditionary logistics requirements. Beijing almost certainly views its familiarity with and ability to operate in the Western Pacific as key to interdicting U.S. forces in a potential regional conflict involving China and the United States.

- The PLA Navy since the mid-2000s has conducted long-distance surface training deployments with greater frequency, from two in 2008 to eight in 2013 (as of November).¹⁵ However, the increased sophistication of the Maneuver-5 exercise compared to previous surface deployments to distant seas demonstrates China’s growing ability to project forces farther from shore for longer and more complicated missions. According to a senior PLA Navy official, Maneuver-5 was the navy’s “first real taste of open-sea combat [drills].”¹⁶ Chinese military press assert PLA Navy

training deployments to the Western Pacific have become “normalized” and will be a standard feature of future exercises.¹⁷

Finally, Maneuver-5 highlighted the PLA Navy’s increasing ability to coordinate air, sea, and underwater elements from all three PLA Navy fleets.¹⁸ As a PLA Navy official said, “The greatest test we face is whether or not we can organically combine various kinds of combat operations platforms to form up comprehensive ‘system of systems’ †† operations capabilities.”¹⁹ Chinese press explains greater coordination among the fleets is necessary to protect against emerging “maritime threats from distant [seas]” and to ensure potential adversaries “will be facing the [counterattacks] and strikes from the main mobile forces of the three fleets [joined] together as a clenched fist.”²⁰ Multi-fleet training also helps build experience evenly among ships and crews.

- In one instance, a shipboard helicopter provided over-the-horizon targeting information to a destroyer to enable simulated long-range strikes against a target ship.²¹
- Throughout Maneuver-5, the PLA Navy used China’s regional satellite navigation system, Beidou-2, to facilitate communication and provide guidance and tracking data to participating units.²² Continued improvements to Beidou and accumulated experience using the system will further strengthen the PLA Navy’s ability to coordinate and conduct complex operations. Beidou-2 became operational in December 2012.²³

†† “System-of-systems” refers to the “integration and fusion of a joint command organization with an integrated command network to allow for rapid combat decision and execution.” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on China’s Active Defense Strategy and its Regional Impact*, written testimony of Cortez A. Cooper, January 27, 2011.

¹ *Hubei Ribao* (Hubei Daily), “‘Maneuver-5’ Joint Exercise is Carried Out on Largest Scale; Three Fleets of the PLA Navy Jointly Forge Combat Power in Distant Sea,” October 22, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013102240143629. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

² *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily), “Rear Admiral: ‘Maneuver-5’ Exercise Is the First High-Sea Confrontation Training in Real Sense,” November 4, 2013. OSC ID: CHL2013110432823503. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

³ *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily), “GSH Plans PLA’s Military Training in 2013,” January 14, 2013.

http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2013-01/14/content_5181037.htm; Cary Huang, “Xi Jinping orders PLA to step up its ‘real combat’ awareness,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), December 13, 2012. <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1103957/xi-jinping-orders-pla-step-its-real-combat-awareness>.

⁴ Zhou Yuan and Mo Xiaoliang, “PLA Navy ‘Maneuver-5’ Live Force Exercise Concludes; Wu Shengli Makes Summing-up Speech,” *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily), November 2, 2013. OSC ID: CHL2013110226670300. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁵ CCTV, “PLA Navy ‘Maneuver-5’ Exercise Enters Phase of Drills with Real Troops,” October 25, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013103134216157. <http://www.opensource.gov>; CCTV, “PLAN SSF Formation Drills on Way to West Pacific for ‘Maneuver-5,’” October 21, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013103026671565. <http://www.opensource.gov>; U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence, *The People’s Liberation Army: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics* (Suitland, MD: 2009), pp. 34-42.

⁶ Xu Guang, Li Gaojian, and Gao Yi, “The U-Shaped Route of Navigation Brought About a Series of Battles – Scenes in the ‘Maneuver-5’ Distant Sea Live Force Combat Exercise,” *Renmin Haijun* (PLA Navy News), October 22, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013112165584766. <http://www.opensource.gov>; CCTV, “PLAN South Sea Fleet Ships Fight with JH-7 Bombers in ‘Maneuver-5’ Drill in South China Sea,” October 20, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013102227858984. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁷ CCTV, “PLA Navy ‘Maneuver-5’ Exercise Enters Phase of Drills with Real Troops,” October 25, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013103134216157. <http://www.opensource.gov>; Xinhua, “Navy’s ‘Maneuver-5’ Exercise Begins Confrontation Drill in Western Pacific,” October 25, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013102545784617. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁸ *Hubei Ribao* (Hubei Daily), “‘Maneuver-5’ Joint Exercise is Carried Out on Largest Scale; Three Fleets of the PLA Navy Jointly Forge Combat Power in Distant Sea,” October 22, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013102240143629. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

⁹ David Lague, “Special Report: China’s navy breaks out to the high seas,” Reuters, November 27, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/27/us-china-navy-specialreport-idUSBRE9A004220131127>.

¹⁰ For example, see Hai Tao, “The Chinese Navy has a Long Way to Go to Get to the Far Seas,” *Guiji Xianqu Daobao* (International Herald Leader), January 6, 2012. OSC ID: CPP2012010967100. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

¹¹ Ni Guanghui, Bai Ruixue, and Sun Rui, “Three Fleets of the PLA Navy Carry Out Distant Sea Joint Exercise for the First Time,” *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), October 31, 2013. OSC ID: CHL2013103130464142.

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¹² *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily), “Rear Admiral: ‘Maneuver-5’ Exercise Is the First High-Sea Confrontation Training in Real Sense,” November 4, 2013. OSC ID: CHL2013110432823503. <http://www.opensource.gov>; *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily), “*Gaoqing zu tu: Haijun kongqian da guimo ‘Jidong-5 hao’ yanxi jingcai shunjian huifang*” (HD Photo: Navy unprecedented scale ‘Maneuver-5’ exercise moments playback), October 18, 2013. http://news.southcn.com/z/2013-11/13/content_84468959.htm.

¹³ Li Yunqiang and Shen Shu, “Command Confrontations Are No Longer ‘Scripted Performance.’” *Renmin Haijun* (PLA Navy News), May 27, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013073051135318. <http://www.opensource.gov>; CCTV, “PLAN South Sea Fleet Ships Fight with JH-7 Bombers in ‘Maneuver-5’ Drill in South China Sea,” October 20, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013102227858984. <http://www.opensource.gov>; Bai Ruixue and Gao Yi, “‘Jidong-5 hao’ can yan jianting juxing zhu bodi fangyu zhandou yanlian ‘beikaobei’ shizhan chengwei haijun yanxi changtai” (‘Maneuver-5’ Participating Vessels Hold Anchored Defensive Battle Drills ‘Back to Back.’ Combat Naval Exercises Have

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¹⁴ Bai Ruixue, Gao Yi, and Wang Dong, "Overview of Live Opposing-Forces Exercise 'Maneuver-5,'" *Zhongguo Haijun Wang* (PLA Navy Network), October 30, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013103145528464. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

¹⁵ *Hubei Ribao* (Hubei Daily), "'Maneuver-5' Joint Exercise is Carried Out on Largest Scale; Three Fleets of the PLA Navy Jointly Forge Combat Power in Distant Sea," October 22, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013102240143629. <http://www.opensource.gov>; *Want China Times*, "Mobile 5 naval exercise hints at future PLA carrier battle group," October 23, 2013. <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20131023000133&cid=1101>; Rear Admiral Umio Otsuka, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, briefing to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Washington, DC, November 8, 2013.

¹⁶ *People's Daily*, "'Maneuver-5' is Chinese Navy's First Real Taste of Open-Sea Combat Drill," November 8, 2013. OSC ID: CHN2013110832564495. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

¹⁷ Zhou Yuan and Mo Xiaoliang, "PLA Navy 'Maneuver-5' Live Force Exercise Concludes; Wu Shengli Makes Summing-up Speech," *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily), November 2, 2013. OSC ID: CHL2013110226670300. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

¹⁸ Bai Ruixue and Gao Yi, "'Si Da Guanjian Ci Jiedu Haijun 'Jidong-5 Hao' Shi Bing Yanxi'" (Interpretation of Four Big Keywords for Navy 'Maneuver-5' Military Exercise), Xinhua, October 23, 2013. http://chn.chinamil.com.cn/jwjj/2013-10/23/content_5604605.htm.

¹⁹ Bai Ruixue, Gao Yi, and Wang Dong, "Overview of Live Opposing-Forces Exercise 'Maneuver-5,'" *Zhongguo Haijun Wang* (PLA Navy Network), October 30, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013103145528464. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

²⁰ Chen Hu, "View the Development Tendency of the Chinese Navy from the Combined Live Force Exercise of the Three Fleets," Xinhua, October 25, 2013. OSC ID: CHR2013103149537680. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

²¹ CCTV, "PLA Navy's 'Maneuver-5' Exercise Holds Beyond-Visual-Range Guided Attack Drill," October 22, 2013. OSC ID: CHO20131020328677998. <http://www.opensource.gov>; CCTV, "PLAN South Sea Fleet Ships Fight with JH-7 Bombers in 'Maneuver-5' Drill in South China Sea," October 20, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013102227858984. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

²² CCTV, "History of PLA's Satellite Navigation, Positioning Main Station Reviewed," November 9, 2013. OSC ID: CHO2013112128648867. <http://www.opensource.gov>.

²³ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2013 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2012), p. 220.