

# The Military Dimensions of U.S. – China Security Cooperation:

Retrospective and Future Prospects

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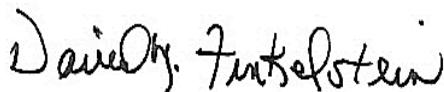
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# **The Military Dimensions of U.S. – China Security Cooperation Retrospective and Future Prospects**

David M. Finkelstein<sup>1</sup>

The challenge of bringing together two societies so estranged by ideology and history was considerable. Conventional wisdom would have counseled the removal of specific causes of tension; but there was one cause of tension — Taiwan — that permitted no rapid solution, while others were too trivial to provide the basis of an enduring relationship. The answer was to discuss fundamentals: our perceptions of global and especially Asian affairs, in a manner that clarified our purposes and perspectives and thereby bridged two decades of mutual ignorance. Precisely because there was little practical business to be done, the element of confidence had to emerge from conceptual discussions. Chou and I spent hours together essentially giving shape to intangibles of mutual understanding.

— Henry Kissinger, on his July 1971 meeting with Zhou Enlai<sup>2</sup>

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## **I. Introduction and Overview**

The United States and China have engaged in security cooperation on a variety of international issues since the normalization of relations in 1979. In fact, security cooperation began even before the formal establishment of state-to-state relations. We recall that during the height of the Cold War the two nations demonstrated that when a pressing and shared security concern (in that case, the former Soviet Union) presented itself, Washington and Beijing were capable of working together, extant differences notwithstanding. Security consultations and sometime security cooperation between the two countries continue today. But as the record of security cooperation is reviewed, one

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<sup>1</sup> The author is a vice president of the Center for Naval Analyses and the director of CNA China Studies. The views and opinions herein are strictly his own.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1979), pp. 745–746.

comes to the conclusion that, for the most part, U.S.-China security cooperation has been mainly of a political nature and operationalized at a high level of strategic policy coordination. Security cooperation between the two nations has been largely the purview of U.S. and Chinese civilian officials and diplomats, not generals and admirals. In other words, over the course of thirty years of relations, security cooperation between the defense-military establishments of the United States and China — the uniformed services — has been the exception rather than the rule. If a serious discussion about future security cooperation between the U.S. Navy and the PLA Navy is to take place — a *leitmotif* of this series of conferences as described by the sponsors — then some of the issues, challenges, and problems from the past need to be confronted even as we look over the horizon.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this paper “security cooperation” is defined as the two militaries working together to achieve a common objective — not high-level visits, exchanges, port calls, or other activities that are mainly symbolic or representational in nature.

This paper offers the following arguments as a basis for further discussion:

- The habits of security cooperation between the defense-military establishments of China and the United States are not well developed, especially between the operational elements of the two militaries, for which the record is near nil.
- Over the course of thirty years of defense relations, only for a period of time during the decade of the 1980s did the two defense-military establishments engage in anything close to security cooperation as defined by this paper — and that was a function of the unique and shared existential threat posed by the Soviet Union.
- Since the end of the Cold War, prospects for security cooperation between the two defense-military establishments have been constrained by the contentious issue of Taiwan, by other strategic- and operational-level issues that have resulted in

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<sup>3</sup> According to the conference organizers, “The fifth annual conference of the China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI) at the Naval War College will serve to continue a dialogue among Chinese and American specialists regarding the development of cooperation in the maritime domain.”

mistrust between defense officials on both sides of the Pacific, by domestic politics in both capitals, and by a recurring cycle of suspensions in military relations.

- Looking to the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the hypothetical prospects for security cooperation between the U.S. and Chinese defense-military establishments are once again on the rise, especially in the maritime domain and in the realm of non-traditional security.
- At bottom, however, the fundamental prerequisite for future security cooperation between the two defense-military establishments is a sound and stable military-to-military relationship. Currently, a sound and stable military-to-military relationship is lacking.

## **II. Three Decades of Defense-Military Relations**

This section presents some larger-order observations about the nature, realities, and challenges of U.S.-China defense relations from the past that must inform discussions about the possibilities of future security cooperation in the maritime domain or elsewhere. The *interpretive* narrative that follows is not intended to be a complete history of the relationship; nor is it a recounting of every contact, initiative, or program the two sides have ever engaged in (or may be engaged in today).

**Over the past three decades, security cooperation between the defense-military establishments of the United States and the PRC has been the exception rather than the rule. The habits of security cooperation between these two institutions, therefore, are not well grounded in practice.**

Of all the elements in the U.S.-China bilateral relationship, none has proven as difficult to manage or as slow to move forward — at times frustrating, subject to being hijacked by political forces, and rewarded with only fleeting moments of hope and accomplishment — as relations between the respective defense and military

establishments of the United States and China. After three decades of defense relations (1980–2010), the record of actual security cooperation between the U.S. armed services and their counterparts in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is minimal.

On the one hand, this is a curious state of affairs given that the original impetus for U.S.-China *rapprochement* in the early 1970s was almost solely a function of shared security concerns. There was no economic impetus — no arguments for renewed contacts or normalization because China had no economy worthy of the name at the time of the Nixon approach. As for the political dimensions of the relationship, the early years of renewed contact focused mostly on the conditions under which state-to-state relations would resume, which also meant dealing with the security issues in contention — most prominently, then as now, Taiwan.

On the other hand, the lack of sustained security cooperation is not surprising, given the differences that have divided the two defense establishments over the years and the institutional asymmetries between the two militaries when they have engaged (more on institutional asymmetries further on). Nevertheless, a certain degree of exasperation is felt when one realizes that after three decades of state-to-state relations the defense and military establishments of the United States and China are still grappling with the fundamental question of what kind of defense-military relationship is possible and appropriate.

**The exception to the rule is the decade of the 1980s. Facing a shared existential threat, the two defense-military establishments engaged in a period of security cooperation that would not be replicated after the Cold War ended.**

In the context of today’s world, it is difficult to adequately capture in a short space the centrality of the Soviet threat to the United States and its allies, as well as to China from the mid 1960s through the mid to late 1980s. For Washington, this was a confrontation playing out on a global stage. For Beijing, the specter of the Soviet threat was right on

its doorstep in the form of “a million troops along the Sino-Soviet border”<sup>4</sup> (and Sino-Mongolian border), a credible Soviet Far East Fleet, and whispers of nuclear threats from the north. Growing Soviet military power and Moscow’s aggressive foreign policies constituted a perceived existential threat that both the United States and China sought to mitigate and contain.

For China, 1969 was a turning point for the worse in relations with the USSR. In that year Moscow and Beijing came to blows, engaging in limited combat on the Ussuri River (*Wusuli Jiang*).<sup>5</sup> In the wake of these clashes, Beijing designated “the three norths” (*san bei diqu*; 三北地区) as the “main strategic direction” (*zhuyao zhanlüe fangxiang*; 主要战略方向) for war preparations, and the PLA was told to be ready for “early war, major war and nuclear war.”<sup>6</sup> The Sino-Soviet confrontation also played out in Africa, in Central Asia, and, especially, in Southeast Asia. While Beijing had had a clear set of bilateral grievances with Hanoi since the mid 1970s (persecution of ethnic Chinese, territorial disputes, and, especially, Hanoi’s invasion of Cambodia), the PRC’s invasion of Vietnam in 1979 also contained an element of “war with Moscow by proxy.” Even though the PLA troops were withdrawn from Vietnam about a month after the invasion, a sporadic but vicious border war between Beijing and Hanoi continued for years, until as late as 1987 — a war of infantry incursions and artillery barrages.<sup>7</sup>

The deteriorating Sino-Soviet situation in 1969, the U.S.’s own concerns about the Russians, and Washington’s desire to extricate itself from Vietnam (which also served

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<sup>4</sup> Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, editors, *The Science of Military Strategy* (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2005 English edition), p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Robinson, “The Sino-Soviet Border Conflicts of 1969: New Evidence Three Decades Later,” in Mark Ryan, David Finkelstein, Michael McDevitt, editors, *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 198–216.

<sup>6</sup> Huang Yingxu, “The Development and Revision of China’s ‘Active Defense’ Strategy” (*Zhongguo Jiji Fangyu Zhanlue Fangzhen de Queli yu Tiaozheng*; 中国积极防御战略方针的确立与调整), in *China Military Science (Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*; 中国军事科学), Beijing, Academy of Military Science, vol. 15, issue 1 (2002), pp. 57–64.

<sup>7</sup> For a brief but instructive overview of the Sino-Vietnamese border war, see chapter 8 in Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007).

China's national security interests) provided the common issue sets that impelled Beijing and Washington to move forward in their initial outreach. It was also under these conditions of intense mutual concern about the international security situation that U.S.-China defense and military relations were first formally established, in 1980, when former Defense Secretary Harold Brown visited Beijing, a year after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The decade of the 1980s, therefore, represents the one period in thirty years of defense and military relations in which security cooperation was the hallmark of the defense relationship.

In retrospect, this decade proved to be the exception to the historical record in two regards. First, pressing mutual concerns were of such a magnitude that significant and unresolved security differences of high strategic import between Washington and Beijing were placed on the back burner for the time being. Prominent among these differences, of course, was the issue of Taiwan.<sup>8</sup> Second, throughout the 1980s the defense-military relationship consisted of three fundamental elements, two of which constituted a form of security cooperation.<sup>9</sup> The three elements were: (1) high-level visits, (2) selected transfers from the United States to China of military technologies and end items, and (3) functional exchanges meant to enhance the PLA's institutional capacities.

After the events of June 1989, military technology transfers would cease and functional exchanges as originally conceived would not be replicated. In the context of bilateral military relations in this year of 2010, however, it is remarkable to recall that there was a time when defense technologies were in fact transferred from the U.S. to China and

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<sup>8</sup> But Taiwan was never *too* far in the background. In spite of the 1980 visit by Defense Secretary Brown, military relations did not move forward until the "August Communiqué" of 1982, which addressed the issue of arms sales to Taipei.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin Pollpeter writes that in September 1983 Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger "proposed what became known as the 'three pillars' approach to military relations" while visiting Beijing. Kevin Pollpeter, *U.S. China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2004), p. 12.



Chinese officers were trained on some of those systems in the United States.<sup>10</sup> Journalist James Mann reminds us that beginning in 1984, the Reagan administration adjusted China's status within the U.S. system for governing defense technology transfer and military assistance in order to allow Beijing to be eligible for certain end-item purchases under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program. China also became eligible for direct sales from some U.S. defense manufacturers. To quote Mann:

Over the next half-decade, China acquired a series of American weapons systems. It paid \$22 million for American help in modernizing its factories to produce artillery ammunition and projectiles. China spent an additional \$8 million for American torpedoes, \$62 million for artillery-locating radar and more than \$500 million for American help in modernizing its jet fighters...China also entered into several commercial transactions, in which it bought American hardware directly from U.S. defense firms. The most notable of these was the purchase of 24 Sikorsky S-70C helicopters from United Technologies Corp.<sup>11</sup>

At the end of the day, the actual sales and transfers were probably insignificant in terms of enhancing the actual operational capabilities of the PLA. In retrospect, they were much more important symbolically as a statement of common strategic cause between the United States and China against Soviet predations. The arms sales were also symbolic of what some officials on both sides of the Pacific thought would be a much longer era of Sino-U.S. security cooperation than turned out to be the case.

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<sup>10</sup> Colonel Thomas L. Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China: Analysis and a Proposal* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 25 November 1994). Accessible online at <<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/Pubs/display.cfm?pubid=99>> as of 22 March 2010. On page 5 Colonel Wilborn states that training on the AN/TPQ-37 radar systems sold to the PLA took place at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

<sup>11</sup> James Mann, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, from Nixon to Clinton* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), pp. 141–142. The counter-battery radars were AN/TPQ-37s. The ammunition program was known as LCAMP (Large Caliber Ammunition Program). The “Peace Pearl” program focused on updating the avionics of fifty Chinese fighter jets (F-8-II) at a commercial aircraft facility run by the Grumman Corporation in Bethpage, Long Island. The torpedo in question was the Mark 46 Mod 2. See Pollpeter, *U.S. China Security Management*, pp. 12–13.

Functional exchanges, as originally envisioned in the early 1980s, were intended to enhance institutional capacity through visits and exchanges on the “soft” side of military affairs — issues of professional competence vice weapons and technologies. Typical functional exchanges might include logistics, maintenance, military medical issues, training, doctrinal theory, and issues associated with the management of professional military education. While functional exchanges served as a means for the two militaries to deepen their understanding of each other at a professional level, they were also a form of security cooperation in that they were aimed at exposing the Chinese to how modern military institutions were managed and they served as an assist to the PLA as it went forward with its post-Cultural Revolution defense reforms.<sup>12</sup>

This halcyon period of security cooperation was short lived: it came to an abrupt halt in June 1989. Military technology transfer programs were closed out, and no sales or transfers of military technologies by the U.S. to China have taken place since. Moreover, the United States continues to use what suasion it has, when necessary, to ensure that the European Union does not soften its own policy on the non-transfer of military technologies to the PLA — the “Tiananmen Sanctions” imposed on the PLA by the Europeans back in 1989.<sup>13</sup> While functional exchanges nominally continue to be part of defense-military ties today, the topic areas that they have addressed since 1989 appear to be self-circumscribed (non-sensitive issues) by both parties for different reasons, and they can no longer really be considered a form of security cooperation as defined for this paper.

Even without the events of June 1989, other forces at work in the late 1980s would have caused each military establishment to reconsider the parameters of security

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<sup>12</sup> For a brief overview of the program of functional exchanges, 1980–1989, see Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*. Also, Wilborn (p. 7), Pollpeter (*U.S. China Security Management*, p. 8), and Mann (*About Face*, pp. 65, 98, and 137) all allude to intelligence cooperation that took place between the U.S. and China focused on the USSR during this period.

<sup>13</sup> In late 2003 Beijing began a full-court press on the EU to have the ban lifted. This resulted in strained relations between the EU and Washington as the latter began its own political counter-offensive. See David M. Finkelstein, “The ‘Old Europe’ Dances with the New ‘New China’: The EU and the China Arms Embargo.” Talk delivered at The Nixon Center, Washington, DC, 16 February 2005.

cooperation. The first, of course, was the rapid and unexpected dissipation of the Soviet military threat. Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in the summer of 1989 (even as events at Tiananmen were unfolding) was meant to maintain the momentum in Sino-Soviet fence-mending begun a couple of years earlier. For Beijing in particular this *dénouement* changed the entire context of security relations between itself and the United States. Without the Soviet threat, the Chinese rationale for security cooperation with the U.S. began to evaporate. By the end of the 1980s it was also clear to the United States that security cooperation with China had its limits. The fact that Washington had common cause with China over the USSR did not necessarily mean that China would not act in ways deleterious to other U.S. interests. This became evident in 1987 with sales of Chinese Silkworm anti-ship missiles to the Iranians.

Within U.S. defense circles, what was even more disquieting than the Silkworm missile sales was China's sale of CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) to Saudi Arabia in 1988.<sup>14</sup> The Silkworm missile sale was an operational- and tactical-level problem for the United States at a time of tensions with Iran and U.S. Navy operations in the Persian Gulf. The sale of the CSS-2 missiles had the potential to be regionally destabilizing — a strategic-level issue of concern to the United States.<sup>15</sup> Finally, beginning in the late 1980s (and definitely by the early 1990s), the tentative emergence of democracy on Taiwan provided a new and compellingly positive prism through which some U.S. observers began to see the island, previously ruled by a semi-authoritarian regime with a poor human rights record. As the 1980s ended, therefore, so did a brief period of security cooperation between the two defense-military establishments.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael A. Levi, "Would the Saudis Go Nuclear?" (2 June 2003), Brookings Institution website, <[http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2003/0602middleeast\\_levi.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2003/0602middleeast_levi.aspx)>, accessed 31 March 2010. "In the late 1980s, Riyadh secretly purchased between fifty and sixty CSS-2 missiles from China. The missiles were advanced, each with a range of up to 3,500 kilometers and a payload capacity of up to 2,500 kilograms."

<sup>15</sup> The mid to late 1980s began a period in which global Chinese arms sales by PLA subsidiaries and other PRC State Owned Enterprises were starting to cause discomfort in some quarters of the U.S. defense-security community. This was the heyday of Polytechnologies (*Baoli*), China North Industries (NORINCO), and others.

**The larger context for U.S.-China defense-military relations throughout the decade of the 1990s was dominated by the re-emergence of Taiwan as a divisive issue. This made the prospects for security cooperation extremely unlikely.**

Most of the 1990s was a difficult time for U.S.-China military relations, let alone security cooperation between the two defense-military establishments. The hiatus in military contacts initiated by the United States in 1989 lasted almost five years. It was not until then-Assistant Secretary of Defense Chas W. Freeman, Jr., was quietly dispatched to Beijing in November 1993 that the United States and China once again began to rebuild a program of military contacts.<sup>16</sup> By the time the two institutions were re-approaching each other in the mid 1990s, the larger international security context had changed greatly.

Various issues initially made the Chinese military wary of re-engaging too deeply with its U.S. counterparts. For one thing, the PLA's ill will toward the United States as a result of the 1989 suspensions was profound (and still resonates today in some circles of the PLA). The dissolution of the Soviet Union and improved Sino-Russian relations removed China's most serious security challenge; however, the end of the Cold War did not usher in a multi-polar world order, as China had greatly hoped it would. Instead, the United States was left as the remaining "sole superpower" (as the Chinese were wont to say), not an entirely positive outcome from China's perspective.

Some U.S. security policies during this period were viewed by Beijing as indirectly inimical to Chinese interests. For example, in the 1990s Beijing watched with unease as the United States engaged in military interventions around the world: during the first war with Iraq; in Haiti; in Somalia; and, especially, in the Balkans. Other U.S. security policies were viewed as more directly tied to Chinese security interests. These included the strengthening of Washington's various military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, in

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<sup>16</sup> Email exchanges with Ambassador Freeman (6 May 2010) and extracts from his oral history interview at <[www.http://www.adst.org/Oral\\_history.htm](http://www.adst.org/Oral_history.htm)>.

particular, and the momentum the Pentagon's missile defense program garnered throughout the decade.

For its part, the U.S. defense establishment was becoming increasingly uncomfortable with Chinese military modernization programs and especially the opacity associated with those programs. There were growing concerns about the types of weapons systems that the Russians were providing to the PLA — advanced fighter aircraft, naval surface vessels and submarines, air defense systems, et cetera. By a happy stroke of luck for China, during the 1990s the economically supine Russian defense industries were more than willing to fill the void left after the U.S. technology transfers halted. In this regard, Sino-Soviet *rapprochement* was a major windfall for the PLA, for it is difficult to imagine the United States being willing to sell the types of weapon systems to China that the Russians began to provide, even if the Sino-U.S. defense relationship had continued uninterrupted.

But more than any other development during the 1990s, the re-emergence of Taiwan as a divisive issue between the United States and China made military relations difficult, rendering the prospects for security cooperation between the two militaries unlikely. As Taiwan's incipient democracy began to take root and develop, the question of "Taiwan identity" and Taiwan's future relationship to the mainland became part of a fractious domestic debate on the island that continues today. Worried about political trends on Taiwan, concerned about the seemingly poor prospects for near-term reunification, and alarmed about arms sales to Taipei by the United States and France in the early 1990s, Chinese military planners once again made the island a focal point of their attention.<sup>17</sup>

The PLA's renewed focus on Taiwan was endorsed, if not driven, by the top leadership of the CCP. On 13 January 1993, Jiang Zemin made an important speech, "The International Situation and the Military Strategic Guidelines," to an expanded meeting of

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<sup>17</sup> In 1992, during his presidential campaign, George H. W. Bush announced the sale of one hundred fifty F-16 A/B aircraft to Taiwan. Also in that year France agreed to sell Taipei sixty Dassault Mirage 2000-5 fighters.

the Central Military Commission. In it, Jiang declared, “At present and for a period in the future, our priority in terms of military struggle is preventing Taiwan from fomenting any great ‘Taiwan independence’ incidents...”<sup>18</sup>

Two years later — in response to Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui’s speech at Cornell University, the U.S.’s maladroitness handling of the Lee visit with Beijing, and the impending Taiwan presidential elections of 1996 — China’s leaders decided to employ the PLA in significant demonstrations of force in July 1995 and again in March 1996. Those demonstrations included large-scale military exercises off the mainland coast and, most worrisome, missile launches (“tests”) in and around the Taiwan Strait.

By the mid 1990s, therefore, the Taiwan issue was re-militarized to a degree it had not been since the late 1950s. During the 1980s, the “Taiwan question” had been mostly a political problem with a military component. By the mid 1990s it had become mostly a military problem with a political component — an unwelcome and dangerous shift. This remained the case throughout the presidency of Lee Teng-hui (1990–2000), and it continued during the presidency of Chen Shui-bian (2000–2008). Since the election in 2008 of Ma Ying-jeou, cross-Strait political and economic relations have improved considerably and these dimensions of relations between Beijing and Taipei, especially economic relations, have dominated the cross-Strait dynamic.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the military dimensions of the issue are not gone; they merely reside in the background and could re-emerge.

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<sup>18</sup> Jiang Zemin, “The International Situation and the Military Strategic Guidelines” (13 January 1993 speech), in *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin* [*Jiang Zemin Wenxuan*; 江泽民文选], (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, August 2006), pp. 278–294. This is the speech in which Jiang promulgated the “Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period,” which gave the PLA a new focus for military modernization and contingency planning.

<sup>19</sup> In November 2008 Beijing and Taipei restored the “three links” (*san tong*; 三通) of direct postal links, transportation links, and trade links for the first time since 1949. In July 2010 the two signed off on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), reducing or eliminating tariffs on certain goods in cross-Strait trade.

The militarization of the Taiwan issue throughout the 1990s further complicated U.S.-China defense and military relations. Over the years, some Chinese interlocutors have argued that the missile launches in 1995 and 1996 were successful because Washington and Taipei (and Tokyo) were put on notice that Beijing was serious about the Taiwan issue. That is a legitimate point of view and correct as far as it goes. However, it is also the case that the PRC missile launches in 1995 and 1996 — in conjunction with the DPRK's missile and nuclear programs — ultimately had a deleterious impact on other Chinese security interests. For one thing, they galvanized the U.S.-Japan military alliance and in part expedited closure on the revised “U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation” (1997) — another unhappy outcome from a Chinese perspective. The missile launches and exercises of the 1990s, in conjunction with PRC military modernization programs, were also at the root of growing regional concerns about China's intentions. Beijing was left with a significant public diplomacy problem with which it still grapples today (the “so-called China threat theory,” as the Chinese refer to it).<sup>20</sup> Needless to say, the missile launches also did little to reassure the U.S. defense, military, and security establishments. They especially caused concern within the U.S. legislative branch.

By the decade's end, with concerns mounting over PLA missile deployments across from Taiwan and other security issues in contention, U.S.-China military relations became embroiled in U.S. domestic politics. As a result, Congress enacted legislation placing strictures on Department of Defense interactions with the PLA. It also put into force of law the requirement for the Pentagon to produce the *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China*, which remains a point of contention in military relations to this day.<sup>21</sup>

None of this is to say that progress in military relations was nil in this decade. To the contrary, the close of the 1990s witnessed a spike in the *quantity* of military-to-military

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<sup>20</sup> In 1998, the PRC published its first comprehensive defense white paper amid growing concerns by some Southeast Asian nations about China's regional security intentions.

<sup>21</sup> Strictures on contacts with the PLA and the requirement for annual reports to Congress were written into the Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000.

exchanges. This was a result of the positive outcomes of the two summits between President William J. Clinton and President Jiang Zemin in 1997 and 1998, in which they agreed to work towards a U.S.-China “constructive strategic partnership” for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> It was also the result of a conscious attempt by both nations to mitigate the sense of crisis that had overtaken security relations since 1996 due to the situation in the Taiwan Strait. Significantly, it was during the close of the 1990s that first-time programs for confidence building were initiated in the military relationship. These included the Defense Consultative Talks (DCT) and the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA). But little of what took place could be considered to constitute security cooperation as defined for this essay.

Overall then, the decade of the 1990s ended in a better place than the decade of the 1980s. The 1980s ended with no military contacts. The 1990s ended with expansive military contacts. *Nevertheless, actual security cooperation was still minimal.*

**In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, issues in contention between the two defense-military establishments began to move beyond the singular issue of Taiwan and into the broader arena of strategic intentions, further delimiting the prospects for security cooperation.**

Throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the overall trend in U.S.-China relations was quite positive. Although the relationship was marked by various disagreements, Washington and Beijing began to strengthen their habits of consultation and coordination on political and economic issues of mutual interest and concern. During this period, the United States supported China’s entry into the WTO (2001) and high-level consultative dialogues, such as the “Senior Dialogue” (2005) and the “Strategic Economic Dialogue” (2006), were established.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, beginning in 2003, important security consultation and coordination between U.S. and Chinese government

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<sup>22</sup> David M. Finkelstein and John Unangst, *Engaging DoD: Chinese Perspectives on Military Relations with the United States* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, October 1999).

<sup>23</sup> In 2009, the United States and China agreed to merge these two dialogues into what is now referred to as the “Strategic and Economic Dialogue.”



officials also took place in the form of the Six Party Talks, which focused on the DPRK nuclear weapons issue.

The prospects for security cooperation between the two defense-military establishments were less promising. The decade started off badly for military relations. Having barely recovered from the errant U.S. bombing of the PRC Embassy in Belgrade in 1999, the military relationship entered another downturn on 1 April 2001, as a result of the “EP-3 Incident.” Incidents aside, deeper currents of concern were flowing on both sides of the Pacific — concerns that went beyond the Taiwan issue and spoke to the larger issue of mutual mistrust over strategic intentions.

Chinese military and civilian security analysts had convinced themselves that the U.S. defense establishment always needed an enemy to plan against for programmatic purposes; as the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century began, they assessed that the Pentagon had settled on China. This analysis was almost immediately reinforced at the very beginning of the decade, when the administration of President George W. Bush came into office with the mantra of “China as a strategic competitor.”<sup>24</sup> Throughout the decade, this viewpoint was also substantiated in the minds of Chinese analysts who read reports in the public domain issued by the U.S. Government, such as the various versions of the *Quadrennial Defense Review* (2001, 2006), the annual reports to Congress on Chinese military power, and the White House’s *National Security Strategy* (2002, 2006). As Michael McDevitt has pointed out, these documents clearly identified China as a potential long-range strategic problem to be hedged against in out-year

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<sup>24</sup> Beijing’s concerns about “China as the next enemy” lessened a bit in the wake of September 11th (9/11) and the inception of Washington’s “Global War on Terrorism.” The attacks of 9/11 also made possible a certain degree of security cooperation. As usual, however, that security cooperation was more political than military. For example, the U.S. State Department labeled the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in Xinjiang a terrorist group and the Chinese agreed to the establishment of an FBI Legal Attaché office in Beijing. (See Shirley Kan, *U.S.-China Counter-Terrorism Cooperation: Issues for U.S. Policy*, Congressional Research Service, Order Code RS21995, Updated 12 May 2005.) The public domain is bereft of any indication of security cooperation between the two military establishments in the wake of 9/11.

planning.<sup>25</sup> This point was not lost upon Chinese military analysts. But whereas U.S. defense planners speculated about the *potential* for China to become a military challenger over the *long term* (a possibility), some Chinese analysts made the leap to concluding that it meant the United States already viewed China as an “enemy” in the here and now. As the decade proceeded, Chinese defense officials also became increasingly concerned about other issues: U.S. military deployments in Asia (especially the new emphasis on Guam as a base for U.S. naval and air assets); the emerging U.S.-Indian defense relationship; the footprint of the U.S. Armed Forces in Central Asia; and U.S. military activities on the high seas, especially those within China’s Exclusive Economic Zone.

Due to these issues and others, some Chinese military and civilian security analysts concluded that, in addition to keeping Taiwan “split from the Motherland,” the United States was determined to contain China, to encircle China, and generally to retard the “rise of China” — that is, they believed that the United States had never really abandoned a long-term strategy to “split China and Westernize China” (分化中华, 西化中华).<sup>26</sup>

On the U.S. side, concerns were also mounting about China’s strategic and military intentions beyond the issue of Taiwan. With the promulgation of the “Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period” in 1993, the Chinese military began one of its most significant periods of modernization since the establishment of the PRC in 1949 — a process that continues to this day.<sup>27</sup> By the year 2000, the start of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (and the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, 1996–2000), this modernization

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<sup>25</sup> Michael A. McDevitt, “The China Factor in Future U.S Defense Planning,” in Jonathan D. Pollack, editor, *Strategic Surprise?* (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2003), pp. 149–157.

<sup>26</sup> In the 2008 edition of the Chinese defense white paper (the most recent edition as of this writing), an official PRC government assessment states that China “faces strategic maneuvers and containment from the outside.” See *China’s National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council).

<sup>27</sup> For the details of the “Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period” issued in 1993, see David M. Finkelstein, “China’s National Military Strategy: An Overview of the ‘Military Strategic Guidelines,’” in Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, editors, *Right-Sizing the People’s Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China’s Military* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007), pp. 69–140.

program was showing results. By the near-end of the decade (2010), foreign analysts generally assessed that the PLA had made impressive strides towards becoming a more operationally capable and institutionally professional force than it had ever been. The types of platforms the PLA was fielding, the supporting technologies it was developing, its demonstrated or theoretical interests in disruptive capabilities (such as anti-satellite missiles and cyber warfare), and the operational doctrines it was generating convinced analysts in U.S. defense circles that Chinese military modernization was geared toward enabling a strategy aimed at denying the U.S. military access to parts of Asia — a Chinese “anti-access strategy.”<sup>28</sup> Historically, U.S. security strategy for Asia had been anchored in the ability to maintain access for commercial or operational purposes. Thus, China’s military modernization programs became perceived as a direct challenge to the U.S. objective of access to Asia — the first challenge since the demise of the Soviet Union. This view persists today in some security policy and analysis circles in the United States.

In light of these inherently suspicious assessments that each country made about the other, it is not surprising that security cooperation between the defense-military establishments of China and the United States did not take root during the 2000–2010 timeframe.

### **III. Systemic Challenges to Military Relations and Security Cooperation**

For over twenty years now, the absence of a significant and shared strategic threat is one factor that has constrained security cooperation between the U.S. and Chinese defense-military establishments. A second is the perennial issue of Taiwan. A third constraint is a certain degree of strategic mistrust over issues other than Taiwan. A fourth inhibitor is what one might refer to as systemic challenges in defense-military relations — especially discontinuities in the relationship and institutional asymmetries.

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<sup>28</sup> See the various versions of DoD’s *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People’s Republic of China*.

**Relations between the defense-military establishments of United States and China have proven to be the most fragile element of the overall bilateral relationship.**

By now it has become axiomatic to state that when overall U.S.-China relations are going well the defense and military dimensions lag behind; when there is a problem or crisis in the relationship, military relations are usually the first to be sacrificed. This has proven to be the case so often over the past twenty years (1989–2010) that one would not be surprised if military officials on both sides of the Pacific were near-numb to the on-again-off-again nature of the military relationship. Since 1989 military relations have been suspended, curtailed, or placed on life-support (barely alive at times) on at least six occasions.

- As mentioned earlier, military and defense relations were suspended by the U.S. side in the wake of the events of June 1989. Technology transfers were halted (not to resume again) and most (if not almost all) contacts and elements of the defense-military relationship remained in suspension until 1994 — a period of almost five years.
- In March 1996 both countries pulled back from military relations in the wake of the PLA's demonstrations of force in the Taiwan Strait (exercises and missile tests) and the United States' response (the dispatch of two aircraft carrier battle groups, as a show of force).<sup>29</sup> It was not until after the Clinton-Jiang presidential summits in 1997 and 1998 that military relations began moving forward again.
- The Chinese side suspended military-to-military activities in 1999 after the errant U.S. bombing of the PRC Embassy in Belgrade, capital of the former Yugoslavia, as

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<sup>29</sup> The U.S. Navy officially refers to this operation as a "Freedom of Navigation, Regional Stability" mission. See appendix A (p. 183), "Navy-Marine Corps Crisis Response and Combat Actions," in *2007 Program Guide to the U.S. Navy: Sea Power for a New Era* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy). The USS *Independence* (CV 62) Battle Group and the USS *Nimitz* (CVN 68) Battle Group were dispatched.

part of NATO's intervention in the Balkans. Three Chinese citizens were killed in the attack.

- For an extended period after the EP-3 incident on 1 April 2001, it was the United States that appeared to keep military relations on a bare-bones footing. Anecdotes suggest that the anger in the Rumsfeld Pentagon burned hot and long due to the eleven-day detention of the U.S. aircrew by the Chinese and the long, difficult process of repatriating the aircraft (which finally occurred on 3 July 2001, about ninety days after the accident).<sup>30</sup>
- In October 2008, on the eve of leaving office, the Bush administration announced its intent to offer an arms sales package to Taiwan. The Chinese promptly stepped back from the defense-military relationship.
- Military contacts had barely been restored, in 2009, when on 29 January 2010 the Obama administration announced its own Taiwan arms sale package.<sup>31</sup> On 30 January, per *Xinhua*, the PRC made public its decision “to partially halt the exchange programs between the militaries of the two countries, as well as the vice-ministerial consultation on strategic security, arms control and anti-proliferation, which was originally scheduled to be held soon.”<sup>32</sup>

In the past, both governments have used the defense-military relationship to signal displeasure with the other's policies and actions or as a response to “incidents.” The

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<sup>30</sup> For details of this incident from an American perspective, see John Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, January 2002).

<sup>31</sup> The U.S. side heralded the late February 2009 Defense Policy Coordination Talks in Beijing as the first step in resuming military *contacts*. (See Secretary of State Clinton's February 2009 Asia Society speech.) The Chinese see the October 2009 visit to the United States by CMC Vice Chairman General Xu Caihou as the moment at which military *relations* resumed after the October 2008 break. (See "Xu Caihou's Visit to the United States Will Further Advance the Development of China-U.S. Military Relations," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 24 October 2009.)

<sup>32</sup> *Xinhua*, 30 January 2010.

defense-military relationship is probably the only element of the bilateral relationship that has been suspended, sometimes for years. One certainly cannot imagine suspending economic or political contacts over disagreements, no matter how significant.

Why, then, has the defense-military relationship been subjected to this on-again-off-again cycle? One reason is that both sides have perceived the costs of suspending military contacts as near-negligible: suspending military contacts has not placed at risk valued cooperative initiatives between the two defense-military establishments. As discussed in the first section of this essay, not since the 1980s has there been a common security imperative impelling cooperation between the two defense-military establishments that has transcended bilateral security differences.

Second, breaks in defense-military relations have usually been linked to significant differences over defense-related issues, military incidents, or the issue of Taiwan. Military relations have not been suspended over general political or economic differences. The one possible exception to this is the U.S. suspension of military relations in June 1989 on symbolic political grounds given the role of the PLA at Tiananmen. When military ties have been in hiatus, the two countries have been able to continue with the other dimensions of the overall relationship. It would appear then that both sides have used the military relationship as a means to register serious disagreements in defense matters, isolating those differences from the higher-order shared equities in the relationship.

This latter point suggests a third observation: the U.S.-China relationship presents something of an anomaly to both sides. The relationship has strong economic and political dimensions that impel cooperation or coordination on those fronts out of selfish national interest. However, the relationship has a weak basis in defense and military affairs — it is a realm in which each party's defense establishment views the other as a potential long-term competitor. This may explain why security cooperation between the two countries mostly takes the form of political cooperation or policy coordination and

usually is between Chinese and American civilian officials and diplomats, not between generals and admirals.

One school of thought argues that using the military relationship as a “pressure release valve” to be turned on and off is a good thing — the cost is low, the impact on other dimensions of the relationship is presumed near-nil, and each side can posture “safely” over security and defense differences. Others argue against this view, suggesting that without sustainable and predictable defense ties, the possibilities of security cooperation between the two militaries when it does serve the national interests of both countries will be that much harder to enable (not to mention the worrisome effect of strained Sino-U.S. defense-military relations on other countries in the Asia-Pacific). Either way, the defense-military dimension of U.S.-China relations has proven unstable, and this is one reason (among others) why the habits of security cooperation between the uniformed services have never really developed and taken root. The fragile nature of military ties has not been lost on leaders from both nations. One notes that the joint statement issued by President Obama and President Hu during the former’s visit to China in November 2009 called for “*sustained* and reliable military-to-military relations” (emphasis added).<sup>33</sup>

**In the past, institutional asymmetries have made defense-military relations difficult — even during the best of times. These institutional asymmetries have implications for potential security cooperation.**<sup>34</sup>

Even during the most active and amicable periods of contacts (1983–1989 and 1997–1999), the differences between the Chinese and U.S. defense-military establishments in their respective approaches to military relations have resulted in a certain degree of friction when negotiating, planning, or executing activities. One could discuss many

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<sup>33</sup> See “U.S.-China Joint Statement,” 17 November 2009, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-china-joint-statement>>.

<sup>34</sup> There are many other systemic and institutional challenges that one could write about other than the ones chosen below. In the interests of brevity, only four of the most obvious or important have been chosen.

systemic disconnects, such as the difficulty of merely identifying appropriate counterparts for high-level visits. It is the *conceptual* differences, however, that have been the most difficult for both sides to deal with. What follows are but four examples.

### **Open Versus Closed**

As a general proposition, U.S. defense officials assert that the Department of Defense (DoD) is relatively open. All of the key data about DoD — its budgets, its soldiers and its leaders, and the basic facts and figures about it — are an open book. Until the events of 9/11, goes the argument, almost all U.S. military facilities were open to the public within certain parameters. In past years, DoD has viewed the PLA's relative lack of transparency as inhibiting both the military relationship and security cooperation. U.S. defense officials traditionally bemoan the fact that even the most fundamental issues associated with the Chinese military, such as its defense budget or the number of personnel in each service, are cloaked in unnecessary secrecy. On the other side of the argument, Chinese military officials readily acknowledge that the PLA is not as open as the U.S. military and that, by tradition, it is the least open sector of the Chinese government. The PLA is relatively closed not only to foreigners but to the average Chinese citizen as well. Therefore, the Chinese argue, the U.S. concepts of transparency in military relations do not transfer to the Chinese system. The PLA also counter-argues that the U.S. military establishment is not as open as it claims to be, and that the "real reason" for past U.S. openness to the PLA was deterrence. In any event, the PLA maintains that it continues to increase its transparency through the publication of white papers and the newly created (in May 2008) Ministry of National Defense spokesman system.

### **Highly Centralized Control Versus Relatively Decentralized Authority**

PLA contacts, activities, and programs with foreigners are carefully controlled, supervised, and monitored centrally. The PLA ground forces, Navy, Air Force, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Artillery Corps have no apparent independent authority to conduct programs of military



relations or security cooperation. Moreover, for some types of military exchanges, even the Central Military Commission (CMC) may have to coordinate key decisions with other entities within the Party-State. Anecdotes suggest that some high-profile military-to-military programs must be coordinated within such venues as the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (*waishi lingdao xiaozu*; 外事领导小组) of the Central Committee of the CCP. In the United States, the Department of Defense certainly coordinates important security cooperation programs and foreign military relations within the interagency, and it stays within the strictures of higher guidance and legislation. That said, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) has a certain degree of latitude to act on both the general and specific nature of military relations with most countries. The same goes for the Unified Commands and services, which take their cues from OSD but which have exponentially more latitude than their PLA Military Region and service counterparts in crafting military engagement programs.

### **“The Weak and the Strong” Versus “Allies, Friends, Others”**

PRC foreign policy officials think in terms of “neighboring countries, developing countries, and big powers” when deciding where countries “fit” into their larger foreign policy schema and how to deal with them. In defense affairs, China’s most forthcoming foreign military relations and defense-security cooperation activities have traditionally been with those nations that are smaller and weaker than itself and that are non-threatening to Chinese national interests — generally, nations in the developing world and key countries on China’s periphery. Because the PLA considers itself the weaker party vis-à-vis the U.S. military, and because of extant strategic-level mistrust, the PLA approach toward the U.S. military in the past has been to resist activities that might reveal gaps in operational capabilities or pockets of real capacity. “The weak do not expose themselves to the strong,” as the PLA would say.

For its part, the U.S. defense establishment has traditionally conducted security cooperation with counterpart militaries based on whether they are allies or non-allied friendly countries. Security cooperation usually does not take place with militaries

considered antagonists. The “ally-friend-antagonist” paradigm has proven problematic for the United States vis-à-vis China. China is not an ally but it is not considered an enemy. China has sometimes been treated as a non-allied friendly country (1980s) but mostly not. China falls into no category — it is an “other.” Consequently, plans to engage with the PLA have been developed almost entirely on a by-exception basis, possibly making long-term strategic planning difficult.

**“Principles First, Activities Later” Versus “Activities First, Big Issues Later”**

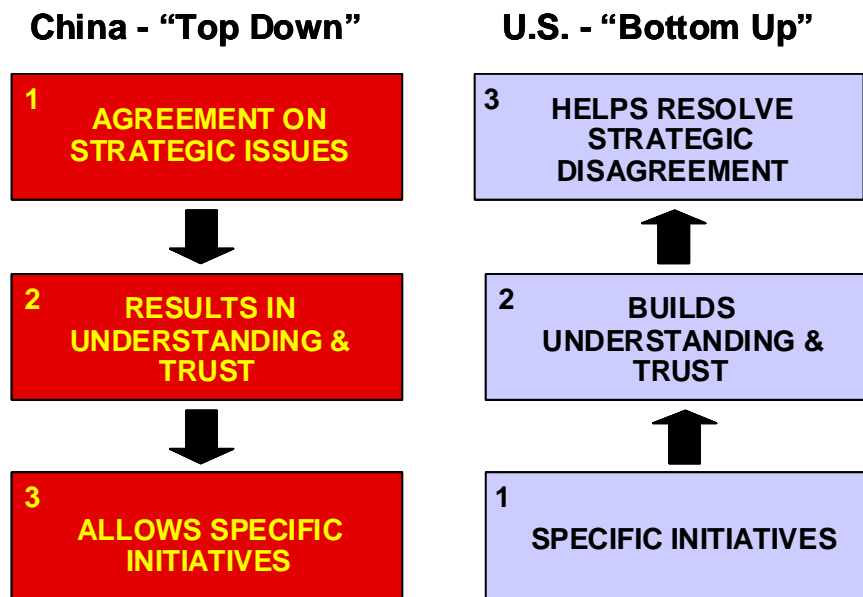
Traditionally, the PLA has been reluctant to engage in functional or operational activities with a foreign military counterpart until they have achieved agreement on important strategic-level principles — “the big issues.” Once there is basic agreement on the big issues, the details of future activities or cooperation can be worked out. Reaching agreement on major strategic issues is usually seen by the PLA (and other Chinese foreign policy officials) as a *pre-condition* for engaging in substantive military activities. This could be called a “Top Down” approach.

In the past, the U.S. defense establishment’s approach to military engagement and security cooperation with China has been the one traditionally applied to most countries — but it is “Bottom Up” approach, which turns the PLA paradigm on its head. (See the figure below.)<sup>35</sup> The United States takes an action-oriented approach that attempts to disaggregate security differences from the imperatives of security cooperation in the hopes that the habits of cooperation will lead to trust, which will act as a more solid foundation for dealing with differences. This American approach to security cooperation in the face of fundamental security differences was echoed by Secretary of State Clinton in her March 2010 discussions with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, when

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<sup>35</sup> Obviously, this diagram is an over-simplification. It represents conceptual approaches, not the actual processes of enabling military-to-military relations.

she stated, “If we continue to work together, we can move beyond the problems to greater opportunities.”<sup>36</sup>



To review then, the PLA approach sees strategic agreement as a *precondition* for security cooperation. In the past, the U.S. approach has been to see security cooperation (specific initiatives) as a potential path to achieving strategic agreement. Alternately stated, for the PLA, “doing” should take place after the establishment of trust. For the United States, trust can sometimes result from first “doing.”

### **Implications of These Conceptual Differences**

What implications do these basic conceptual differences have for U.S.-China defense-military security cooperation?

- ***Transparency.*** Security cooperation requires a certain amount of institutional and operational transparency between the two partners. Past experience in U.S.-China defense-military relations suggests that this could be a major problem for one or both parties.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Beth Sheridan, “Putin Lectures U.S. on Trade, Clinton Stays Positive, Russians Urge Caution on Iran Sanctions,” *The Washington Post*, March 20, 2010, p. A8.

- Staffing. Initiatives in military relations are processed at different places, and especially at different *paces*, in the PRC and U.S. systems. Therefore, each side will likely have its own expectations for how long it will take to reach closure and decisions on potential security cooperation initiatives.
- Fit. The place where China and the United States fit in each other's security cooperation schema may be problematic for future initiatives. For the United States, China is not an ally, not a non-allied friend, and not an enemy. It is an "other," and because defense relations with China are sometimes embroiled in domestic politics, security cooperation initiatives will also be subject to scrutiny by the media as well as by Congress. In the Chinese system, security cooperation with the United States may be constrained by virtue of the fact that the PLA will consider itself the weaker partner, and its concerns about exposing its strengths and weaknesses may be more compelling than the imperatives for cooperation. Therefore, the type of security cooperation being considered will matter to both sides for different reasons.
- Timing. The "Top Down, Bottom Up" paradigm suggests that the United States and China would view security cooperation between their defense-military establishments as being possible or appropriate at different points in the military relationship. In the past, at least, the U.S. would have been willing to contemplate cooperation sooner than the PLA.
- Politics. A second implication of the "Top Down, Bottom Up" paradigm suggests that the PLA views the military relationship primarily as a means to pursue a strategic-level political agenda, not necessarily as a venue for security cooperation (until other criteria are met). In other words, for the PLA, engaging in the military relationship is as much a political act as it is a professional military endeavor. This is probably why high-level PLA visitors coming to the United States are concerned with *whom* they will see, while in the past U.S. visitors to Beijing have focused on *what* they would see.

#### IV. Prospects for the Second Decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The foregoing discussion suggests that the prospects for security cooperation between the American and Chinese defense-military establishments are as constrained today as they were at the end of the Cold War. Principally, this is because most of the same fundamental inhibitors remain in play.

- There is no shared *existential* military threat to impel the Chinese and American defense-military establishments to work together toward a common strategic objective. Nor is there a common challenge that would allow the two to paper over extant security differences as an expedient to enable cooperation on larger issues.
- The Taiwan issue is still a major irritant in defense-military relations. A near-term political resolution remains elusive, as the PRC is unlikely to renounce its right to use force *in extremis*, and U.S. arms sales and other activities in support of Taiwan's self-defense will remain on Washington's table as policy options. Consequently, a certain level of tension between the two military establishments will persist.
- Disagreements will also persist over regional defense issues other than Taiwan. These include Beijing's and Washington's concerns about each other's military deployments, postures, operations, defense policies, and strategic intentions in East Asia. The fundamental tension between the United States' vital interest in access to Asia and the PLA's presumed "anti-access strategy" will also bedevil perceptions in the relationship.<sup>37</sup> This source of tension is not likely to dissipate anytime soon, as each military establishment is acting in the service of larger national interests handed to it by its respective national command authority.

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<sup>37</sup> For the views of a large cross-section of U.S. specialists of Asian security affairs on the issue of "access" versus "anti-access," see Ralph Cossa, Michael McDevitt, Brad Glosserman, Nirav Patel, James Przystup, and Brad Roberts, *The United States and the Asia-Pacific Region: Security Strategy for the Obama Administration: A Cooperative Project by CNA, Pacific Forum CSIS, NDU/INSS, IDA, and CNAS* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, March 2009), pp. 19–20. Close to one hundred specialists, including this author, participated in this project.

- Despite the best intentions expressed in the November 2009 Obama-Hu joint statement calling for “sustained” military relations, the historical record suggests that the military relationship will likely remain vulnerable to future disruptions.
- Finally, systemic disconnects will not go away. However, as an inhibitor to future security cooperation, they are negligible compared to some of the larger issues at play, such as strategic mistrust and the unpleasant realities attendant to the Taiwan situation.

Having spun a less than optimistic narrative, I present another possibility to consider: In the future there could in fact be opportunities for the two militaries to engage in meaningful security cooperation in certain circumstances and specific scenarios, despite the problems between them. Perhaps, to borrow a phrase from Kissinger’s quote at the beginning of this paper, there is in fact “practical business to be done.”

While none of the persistent and gnawing inhibitors listed above are about to vanish, there are new forces at work in international security, and especially within China, that argue for the possibility of security cooperation between the two defense-military establishments as the current decade unfolds. The most significant development behind this line of thought is the combination of the increasing globalization of China’s national security interests with the diversification of non-traditional security threats which China also faces as a result of its emergence as a global political and economic actor.

Beijing is beginning to acknowledge a new reality: a China with global economic interests is a China with global political interests and, increasingly, a China with global security interests. The 2006 version of the PRC defense white paper proclaimed (almost nervously), “Never before has China been so closely bound up with the rest of the world as it is today,” and a causal connection was made between economic globalization and national security interests. Chinese leaders also acknowledge that securing China’s globalized security interests will require cooperation between the PRC and other

nations. This concept was hinted at in the work report of the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress (2007), which declared, “China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can the world enjoy prosperity or stability without China.”<sup>38</sup>

These new realities are affecting expectations of the PLA by China’s leaders. In 2004, Hu Jintao issued to the PLA the “Historic Missions for Our Military in the New Phase of the New Century,” which revisited and adjusted the military’s basic tasks in securing China’s national security.<sup>39</sup> The PLA must still focus on developing the capacity to fight conventional “Local Wars Under Modern Informatized Conditions” — a “core” operational requirement. However, the “new missions” also direct the PLA to be able to cope with emerging and expanding non-traditional security threats, and they raise the importance of conducting what the PLA refers to as “Military Operations Other Than War” — MOOTW (*fei zhanzheng junshi xingdong*; 非战争军事行动).<sup>40</sup>

Without question, the most significant aspect of the “new missions” is that, for the first time in the history of the PLA, the Chinese Armed Forces are beginning to focus on requirements that are not tied solely to the defense of China proper or its proximate territorial claims. As articulated by a Chinese military officer, “The PLA is shifting from its previous near sole focus on defense of Chinese territory to the protection of Chinese interests.”<sup>41</sup> The former is bound by the geography of China (or its claims); the latter is

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<sup>38</sup> See “Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China on October 15, 2007,” in *Documents of the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2007), p. 62, and the preamble to *China’s National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: State Council Information Office, January 2009). This phrase is also in the preface of the 2008 edition of the PRC defense white paper.

<sup>39</sup> For an excellent overview of the background and details of the “new missions,” see Daniel M. Hartnett, *Towards a Globally Focused Chinese Military: The “Historic Missions” of the Chinese Armed Forces* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, June 2008).

<sup>40</sup> The PLA has actually taken the term “MOOTW” directly from U.S. doctrine from the 1990s, when it was in vogue in American military circles. See U.S. Joint Pub 3-07, *Joint Doctrine for Military Operations Other Than War* (June 1995). To the best that this student can tell, the term is no longer in use in the U.S. military lexicon.

<sup>41</sup> See David M. Finkelstein, “Commentary on China’s External Grand Strategy,” Paper delivered at the Brookings Institution’s 38<sup>th</sup> Taiwan-U.S. Conference on Contemporary China, 14–15 July 2009. Available online at <[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2009/0714\\_china/](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/events/2009/0714_china/)

not. This emergent outward focus of the Chinese Armed Forces is epitomized by the PLA Navy's unprecedented deployments to the Horn of Africa since December 2008 to conduct anti-piracy operations.<sup>42</sup>

But beyond the very significant Horn of Africa anti-piracy naval deployments, the past decade of PLA activities has presented other evidence to suggest that an incipient expeditionary PLA is taking shape (a *yuan zheng jun*, 远征军, as some Chinese analysts have suggested). More than at any time in its history, the PLA is going places and doing things. It is participating in UN operations, in combined exercises with foreign militaries, and in MOOTW.

PLA participation in UN-mandated operations or observer missions is not new; it goes back to the early 1990s. Over the past decade, however, the PLA claims that its participation has increased: it has taken on an additional thirteen UN missions on top of the ten it has been involved in since the early 1990s, and is committing an additional 5,000-odd personnel. Its new involvement includes a commitment to the African Union-UN Hybrid Force in Darfur.<sup>43</sup> A development in the past few years that *is* new is PLA participation in combined exercises with foreign militaries. In October 2002 the PLA conducted with Kyrgyzstan its first-ever combined exercise with a neighbor in which Chinese troops crossed over the Chinese border. The PLA claims that since then (through the end of 2008), it has conducted twenty-three combined exercises of various types with a total of more than a dozen foreign militaries.<sup>44</sup> Some of these operations have been small *pro forma* affairs, while others have been large and operationally significant. Regardless, these events get the PLA deployed and engaged and involved with foreign counterparts in an operational context, and this is a new development.

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<sup>42</sup> Conference report by Alison A. Kaufman, *China's Participation in Anti-Piracy Operations off the Horn of Africa: Drivers and Implications* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, July 2009). The word "unprecedented" is chosen because this is the probably the first time in the history of the PLA Navy that it has been deployed outside of Asia for *operational* reasons.

<sup>43</sup> See the appendices of the 2002, 2004, 2006, and 2008 editions of *China's National Defense*.

<sup>44</sup> See the various editions of *China's National Defense*.



What these new realities suggest is that even without a shared existential threat the *potential* for security cooperation between the United States and Chinese defense-military establishments may be greater today than it has been for many years, and may become greater in the future.

- At times and in certain circumstances it could turn out that both the United States and China have a stake in preserving stability or providing safety and security to local nationals or to their own citizens in some of the world's troubled regions. This is why both Chinese and U.S. naval forces are operating off the Horn of Africa alongside other countries.
- As a general proposition, *both* militaries can now operate with foreign militaries, bilaterally as well as multilaterally. Chinese apologies from the 1990s that the PLA has no experience operating with foreign militaries no longer hold true, especially given its combined military activities with the various members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The PLA is likely to be getting better at operating with other militaries and certainly will get even better over time if current trends hold.
- Both military establishments recognize the importance of non-traditional security threats in today's world, and both are expected by their respective governments to be able to field the capacity to deal with such threats.
- Both militaries see humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations (HA/DR) as a legitimate military mission. The U.S. Armed Forces have a long legacy of *expeditionary* HA/DR operations. The PLA has a long tradition of *domestic* HA/DR operations. However, with the launch in December 2008 of the 300-bed hospital ship *Peace Ark* (*Heping Fangzhou*; 和平方舟), it appears that the PLA Navy is poised to

be able to engage in international medical operations as part of HA/DR missions or, potentially, even in support of non-combatant evacuations.<sup>45</sup>

There are various operational domains in which security cooperation between the U.S. and Chinese defense-military establishments may be possible. Considering some of the factors above, however, the maritime domain may offer the greatest possibilities, for a couple of reasons.

First, the maritime domain presents a wide array of the type of non-traditional security challenges that both militaries are charged to deal with. In addition to anti-piracy and HA/DR operations, the global maritime commons is used by state and non-state malefactors to engage in a host of activities inimical to the national interests of both China and the United States. As discussed at a 2009 conference at the Center for Naval Analyses, these problem activities include the following:

- Illegal immigration
- Narcotics trafficking
- Oil bunkering and smuggling
- Human trafficking and smuggling
- Environmental degradation (such as dumping of toxic waste at sea)
- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing
- Arms trafficking
- Maritime incidents
- Movement of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)
- Disputes over maritime borders between coastal nations
- Maritime terrorism.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> According to Peter MacKenzie (“China’s Hospital Ships,” unpublished CNA working paper), the PLA Navy refers to *Peace Ark* as a “Type 920 hospital ship,” and it is also referred to by the Chinese as either Hospital Ship 866 (866 *Yiyuan Chuan*: 医院船) or *Daishandao* (岱山岛).

<sup>46</sup> Julia Voelker McQuaid, *Maritime Security: Strengthening International and Interagency Cooperation — Conference Report* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, August 2009), pp. 1–2. This list is taken verbatim from the conference report.

Second, cooperative security activities in the maritime domain can take place on the high seas or in littoral locations outside of those areas that are the source of tensions between the United States and Chinese defense-military establishments (e.g., the Taiwan Strait, China's EEZ, the South China Sea, and, most recently, the Yellow Sea).

Third, security cooperation among the world's navies is on the rise. The maritime domain, therefore, may offer the opportunity for the United States and China to first develop the habits of security cooperation in a multilateral setting even before bilateral options are considered. Multilateral security cooperation might be more palatable politically, certainly for the Chinese if not for the Americans.

Fourth, the United States and China have already recognized the need to cooperate, and in fact *do* cooperate, extensively in *civil* maritime security affairs. One of the little-known successes in U.S.-China security cooperation is the relationship between the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and its multiple counterparts in China. Technically, this is *non-military* security cooperation, but in many cases it has a very paramilitary flavor. A former U.S. Coast Guard Liaison Officer to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing has written that since 2005 “the civil maritime relationship has expanded in every front, with bilateral and multilateral efforts in port security, search and rescue, fisheries law enforcement and other areas.”<sup>47</sup>

Overall, then, in theory, one can posit the potential for the U.S. Navy and the PLA Navy to engage in security cooperation in a certain set of circumstances: (1) in non-traditional security operations; (2) in non-controversial locales; (3) in a multilateral context first, to develop the habits of operational cooperation; and (4) *eventually* on a bilateral basis *if* larger political-military issues can either be resolved or, as in the past, be temporarily shelved if the need for cooperation is great enough.

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<sup>47</sup> Captain Bernard Moreland, USCG, “U.S./China Civil Maritime Operational Engagement.” Draft version of a paper submitted to the 6 December 2007 conference at the U.S. Naval War College hosted by the China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI). Cited with permission of the author.

All of this, however, is hypothetical. At the end of the day, security cooperation between the military establishments of any two countries has three requirements: (1) a common shared objective, (2) the actual institutional or operational capacity to cooperate, and (3) and a political context that makes such cooperation feasible bilaterally and palatable domestically. In the case of China and the United States, what remains in question is the political context. It is uncertain whether they can seriously consider security cooperation before their military relationship is placed on a sounder footing than it has been on in the past or than it is on today. Without the two sides first determining for themselves, and with each other, what a feasible and appropriate military relationship looks like, any discussions of future security cooperation between the two armed forces will be relegated to academic exercises such as this paper represents, not serious discussions of policy options between government officials. Getting the military relationship “right” must be the starting point, and that is a subject that deserves its own paper.

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