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Developments in China's Military Force Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities
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Thank you Co-Chairs Commissioners Jeffrey L. Fiedler and Larry M. Wortzel, members of the Commission, and staff. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today and for all the work you do to disseminate knowledge about the critical economic and security impacts of China's rise.

I. Beijing's Security Environment

The Chinese Communist Party's primary objective is maintaining power - domestic stability and protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity are perceived to be fundamental to that objective. Official Chinese sources began to use the term 'core interest' (*hexin liyi*) in 2003-2004 to describe issue areas of great importance to China over which it will not compromise. China has referred to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, foreign leaders' meeting with the Dalai Lama, and other countries' activities related to the South and East China Sea as harming China's core interests.² While not couched as a 'core interest', I would argue that Chinese official statements, white papers, and semi-official writings suggest China increasingly sees U.S. military presence as a destabilizing factor in the region that threatens China's ability to return to its rightful place of regional preeminence. As a regional power, China is expected to be capable of deterring attacks, threats, and other actions deemed contrary to interests; resolve disputes over territory and resources according to its preferences; and persuade or coerce others to accede to its wishes on a range of issues.

Commercial, economic and political reasons are pushing China to give greater consideration to global threats and opportunities. Approximately 20,000 Chinese companies have a presence in more than 180 countries and regions, creating a constant demand for government protection of these assets.³ Furthermore, Chinese overseas investment is growing. At \$60 billion, China's annual OFDI in 2011 was 20 times the 2005 amount.⁴ As Chinese investments increase, threats to those assets will increase in tandem. This is particularly the case in politically unstable countries where nationalization or seizure is always a possibility, or in countries that have ongoing territorial conflicts where anti-China protests have often resulted in damage to Chinese-owned property. While still a fledgling phenomenon, there are recent examples of instances that could drive China to develop limited expeditionary capabilities to augment its response options.⁵

¹ The author would like to thank John Chen and Lynn Lee for their expert research assistance.

² Michael D. Swaine, "China's Assertive Behavior – Part One: On 'Core Interests'" *China Leadership Monitor*, Winter 2011: Issue 34. February 22, 2011.

³ Keira Lu Huang, "Not Enough' Consular Officers to Serve Chinese Nationals, Foreign Ministry Says," *South China Morning Post*, May 19, 2014.

⁴ Daniel H. Rosen, "The Rise in Chinese Overseas Investment and What It Means for American Businesses," *China Business Review*, July 1, 2012.

⁵ Oriana Skylar Mastro. "China's Military is About to Go Global," *The National Interest*, December 18, 2014.

Statements made by Chinese political and military leadership acknowledge that China's need for stable access to natural resources in addition to exploding foreign investment have expanded its interests beyond the region, while China's capabilities lag behind. Wang Yi in his first speech as China's Foreign Minister outlined trends and principles in foreign policy, highlighting the need to align its foreign policy with China's expanding global interests.⁶ China's 2013 Defense White Paper, noted, "security risks to China's overseas interests are on the increase," and included, for the first time, a section on protecting Chinese overseas interests.⁷ In recent months, Xi himself has publicly stressed the critical importance of a strong military to a successful foreign policy and dismissed the option of passivity.⁸

The One Belt, One Road initiative, a multi-faceted national policy meant to spur Chinese economic growth by linking China to Africa, the Middle East and Europe through overland and maritime routes, will only increase China's exposure to the dangers of the world.⁹ The plan's emphasis on infrastructure construction, the creation of new regional institutions, and economic diplomacy has attracted considerable attention both inside and outside China. Though the initiative has become an important component of Xi Jinping's foreign and economic policy, confusion over its implementation and bureaucratic lag have thus far restrained concrete progress. Rhetorical emphasis on infrastructure construction, diplomatic efforts, and the economic benefits of free trade amongst connected countries along the Belt and Road cast the plan as an essential component of Chinese economic reform and development in its western regions.¹⁰ Less authoritative Chinese sources attach a geostrategic interpretation to the plan, describing it as a "response to the US rebalance to Asia, Japan's accelerated steps towards normalization, India's rapid economic growth, and a heightened wariness toward a stronger China amongst neighboring Asian countries."¹¹ Regardless of its impetus, its implementation will no doubt put even more Chinese workers in harm's way. In other words, I think the correct analogy is not that this initiative is a Chinese Trojan horse, a duplicitous strategy to provide cover for hegemonic ambition, but instead a Chinese tripwire – likely to create a greater demand signal for more contingency operations – perhaps inadvertently, but not unforeseeably.

The PLA is eager to collect its portion of the political and fiscal patronage that accompanies the One Belt, One Road initiative, and has largely agreed that the PLA should be responsible for protecting Chinese interests along the One Belt and One Road. One former US official says he was told by senior generals in the PLA that the One Belt, One Road Strategy would have a security component,¹² despite the relative absence of this assertion in authoritative government documents.¹³ Observers note that projects in unstable areas may require China to abandon its long-standing policy

⁶ Kathrin Hille, "China Commits Combat Troops to Mali," *Financial Times*, June 27, 2014.

⁷ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces: I. New Situation, New Challenges, New Missions," *Xinhua News Agency*, April 16, 2013.

⁸ Anonymous, "Xi Jinping: kan dao zhongguo luo hou ai da de bei can shi liao jiu tong che fei fu [Xi Jinping: Pain Surges from the Bottom of My Heart When I See the Bitter Historical Documents of a Backward and Weak China]," *China.com*, June 22 2014.

⁹ Andrew Browne, "Beijing Fears Looking Impotent in the Face of Terror," *Wall Street Journal*, November 23, 2015.

¹⁰ Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative," *China Leadership Monitor*, Summer 2015: Issue 47. July 14, 2015. p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹² Charles Clover and Lucy Hornby. "China's Great Game: Road to A New Empire." *Financial Times*. October 12, 2015.

¹³ Swaine, "Chinese Views and Commentary on the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative," p. 17.

of avoiding security entanglements abroad,¹⁴ and many PLA strategic thinkers work under the assumption that the PLA “should have a role in guaranteeing the protection of the One Belt, One Road.”¹⁵

In the rest of my testimony, I will focus heavily on the drivers, strategic thinking and implications of a global expeditionary PLA. This is not to suggest that global factors are overtaking regional or domestic ones. The new anti-terrorism law passed on December 27, 2015 is a case in point. Instead of creating a legal foundation for overseas operations, it strengthened the government’s hand vis-à-vis dissidents and expanded the government’s authority to regulate the information communications technology (ICT) sector for state security purposes.¹⁶ But as long as China continues its double-digit annual increases in defense spending, and GDP growth continues even at a more conservative pace, China should be able to simultaneously develop traditional war fighting capabilities to address regional challenges, as well as global expeditionary capabilities to confront threats farther from home. Flare-ups or resolutions of persistent regional issues may delay or accelerate this future scenario, but they are unlikely to halt the development of greater PLA expeditionary capabilities.

II. The Central Driver? Overseas Interests and Chinese Citizens

An increasing number of Chinese citizens are going abroad, with many migrating to politically unstable countries as part of an exported labor force or in prospect of financial gain. In the twelve months leading up to May 2014, Chinese nationals recorded 98 million overseas trips - a number that has increased by an average rate of over 10 million a year for the last four years. By 2020, approximately 150 million Chinese citizens will be traveling and living abroad.¹⁷

Domestic public support for the development of expeditionary capabilities is coalescing as more and more Chinese nationals find themselves in situations of danger due to a combination of misfortune and political instability in the host nation. According to the Chinese government’s foreign ministry, its embassies and consulates deal with an average of one hundred incidents a day regarding overseas Chinese nationals in danger.¹⁸ Netizens have begun to complain that the government relies too heavily on enhancing citizen awareness of dangers and diplomatic mechanisms for citizen protection, rather than using military force.¹⁹ A prominent Chinese public intellectual noted in the aftermath of the flight MH370 tragedy that “China’s capacity to engage in security operations outside its national boundary still lags far behind” developed countries and “China has all the reason and right to turn the crisis and challenge into an opportunity to build up its security forces’ capacity to protect overseas interests.”²⁰

More and more, Chinese nationals are being deliberately targeted because of perpetrators’ discontents with Beijing’s policies. In a July 2014 video IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi listed China

¹⁴ Clover and Hornby. “China’s Great Game: Road to A New Empire.”

¹⁵ Andrea Ghiselli, “The Belt, the Road, and the PLA.” *China Brief*, Vol. 15 No. 20. October 19, 2015.

¹⁶ Chris Buckley, “China Passes Antiterrorism Law That Critics Fear May Overreach.” *The New York Times*, December 27, 2015.

¹⁷ Lu Huang, “‘Not Enough’ Consular Officers to Serve Chinese Nationals, Foreign Ministry Says.”

¹⁸ “Multiple-pronged Approach Suggested to Boost Safety of Chinese Nationals Overseas,” *Xinhua*, August 12, 2013.

¹⁹ Jingyuan, Zhu. “Why Are Chinese Workers Often Under Attack?” [Xinwen guancha: zhongguo gongren weihe pin zaoxi] *Shanghai Evening Post*, February 1, 2012.

²⁰ Chen Xiangyang, “Seize the Opportunity to Build Up China’s Capacity to Protect Overseas Interests,” *China-US Focus*, March 21, 2014.

as a country where “Muslim rights are forcibly seized.”²¹ In September 2014, Philippine suspects were arrested in Manila for planning attacks against the Chinese embassy and Chinese workers. The Spratley Island sovereignty dispute allegedly motivated the perpetrators along with resentment over what they considered to be the “monopolistic policies” of Filipino-Chinese businessmen. That same month, a gunman injured a Chinese national and another was kidnapped.²² In July 2015, Beijing was compelled to issue a travel warning after Asian tourists were harassed during anti-China protests in Istanbul sparked by anger over Beijing’s treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang.²³

Fall 2015 saw an uptick in violence that created great concern in the Chinese government about appearing impotent in its ability and willingness to react to global threats. A Chinese national was injured when gunmen and suicide bombers attacked a number of popular locations in Paris on November 13. A few days later ISIS announced it had kidnapped and executed Chinese national Fan Jinghui. These incidents caused commentators to speculate whether China would be drawn into the Middle East conflict against ISIS.²⁴ While Xi condemned the Paris attack, Chinese officials urged international cooperation against terrorism but continued to be reluctant to offer support.²⁵ The next week, seven Chinese nationals were among the 170 hostages taken in Mali with three Chinese rail executives killed in the hotel siege. Xi promised domestic audiences that China would strengthen international collaboration “to resolutely fight violent terrorist activities that hurt innocent lives” and the Foreign Ministry promised “in light of the new circumstances” to “come up with new proposals to ensure the security of Chinese citizens and institutions overseas.”²⁶

The Chinese government was obviously concerned about the public reaction to Fan’s execution and China’s relatively minimal response. President Xi and the Foreign Ministry made statements condemning terrorism, promising justice and reiterating China’s commitment to protecting its citizens abroad, most likely in an effort to placate domestic audiences.²⁷ The foreign ministry spokesman also claimed that “relevant departments of the Chinese government activated emergency response mechanisms upon learning the kidnapping and made all-out efforts to rescue him,”²⁸ though no public details have been released to provide substance to the statement. One article in the South China Morning Post argues that China was negotiating for Fan’s release, but French and the Russian airstrikes disrupted contacts, resulting in Fan’s death.²⁹ But no official statements have been made to this effect, nor have there been additional reporting to corroborate this story.

Congruently, the government shut down discussions on social media, curtail reporting by news outlets, and blocking searches for his name, as well as the terms “Islamic State,” “hostage,” and

²¹ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China Censors Online Outcry After ISIS Execution.” *Foreign Policy*, November 18, 2015.

²² Shannon Tiezzi. “China Warns Citizens to Stay Away From Philippines.” *The Diplomat*, September 17, 2014.

²³ Ivan Watson and Steven Jiang. “Beijing Issues Travel Warning After Turkey Protests Target Chinese.” *CNN*, July 8, 2015.

²⁴ Shannon Tiezzi. “ISIS: Chinese Hostage Executed.” *The Diplomat*, November 19, 2015.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Browne, “Beijing Fears Looking Impotent in the Face of Terror.”

²⁷ Foreign Ministry of China, “2015 Nian 11 yue 19 ri waijiaobu fayanren Hong Lei zhuchi lixing jizhahui ” [Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei Holds Regular Press Conference on November 19, 2015], Foreign Ministry of China, November 19, 2015; “Xi Jinping biaooshi qianglie qianze” ” [Xi Jinping Expresses Strong Condemnation], *Renmin Ribao*, November 20, 2015.

²⁸ Shannon Tiezzi. “Chinese Citizens Among 170 Hostages Taken in Mali Hotel.” *The Diplomat*, November 20, 2015

²⁹ “Guanmeifang zhuanjia: zhongfang cengzhi Fan Jinghui yue zai anbaer, yingjiu bei e fa xingdong da luan” [Government media expert: China Knew that Fan Jinghui Was Around Anbar. Rescue Mission Was Interrupted by Russian and French activities], *South China Morning Post*, November 20, 2015.

“Muslim.”³⁰ Most of the posts currently on Weibo are official news reports with a few uncensored posts that support China's nonintervention principle and defend the government's actions regarding the hostage incident.³¹ The bloggers whose posts remain visible on social media argue that China should prioritize stability and economic development, that the loss of one life is not worth getting 1.3 billion lives involved in a war, and that the U.S. and Russia are encouraging China to take part in their trouble in the Middle East.³² But a Hong Kong site, Free Weibo, which stores censored content, shows netizens openly calling for military action to retaliate against ISIS and highlighting concerns about Uighurs becoming extremists and being trained by ISIS to commit domestic terrorism.³³

Undoubtedly, a segment of the Chinese public supports more proactive military approach. In one *Huanqiu Shibao* 2009 poll, 89.6% of 18,873 respondents answered ‘yes’ to the question of whether China should establish overseas military bases.³⁴ There was an outcry amongst the Chinese public about Fan’s execution and Beijing’s inability to respond strongly to it. Beijing’s rhetoric was seen in stark contrast to the French declaration of war on ISIS and Russian and U.S. military action against the Islamic State.³⁵ But many censored posts opposed military retaliation, warning China not to get caught up in the troubles of the world. Besides, as many Chinese experts argue that China does not have capabilities to fight terrorists in the Middle East,³⁶ the Chinese government is likely to continue to encourage multilateral counter-terrorism organized under the UN³⁷ and favor plans that do not directly involve the PLA, such as cutting off ISIS' financial sources.³⁸

Even with its expanding overseas interests, China will continue to be cautious and reluctant to involve itself in international conflict outside the framework of UN PKOs. Even though China is unlikely to swing to the opposite extreme, unilaterally using force abroad to enhance protection of its commercial interests and overseas citizens, this does not mean significant changes are not underway. Indeed, China has already been pushed by real time events to allow for overseas operations. China sent its first overseas deployment of combat troops in a peacekeeping role to Mali in late 2013. The Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operations, the first of its kind for China, have been a springboard for China to expand considerably its maritime security operations, from evacuating its citizens from Libya and Yemen to escorting Syrian chemical weapons to their destruction and

³⁰ Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “China Censors Online Outcry After ISIS Execution.” *Foreign Policy*, November 18, 2015.

³¹ “#Zhongguo rendun bei IS shahai,” [Chinese Hostage Killed by IS], last accessed on Jan. 14, 2016, http://www.weibo.com/p/100808b58d65f6131100b6811b644ed92ce9c2?k=中国人质被IS杀害&from=501&from=huati_topic

³² “#Zhongguo rendun bei IS shahai,” [Chinese Hostage Killed by IS] last accessed on Jan. 14, 2016, http://www.weibo.com/p/100808b58d65f6131100b6811b644ed92ce9c2?k=中国人质被IS杀害&from=501&from=huati_topic

³³ “#Yisilangguo” [Islamic State] last accessed on Jan. 14, 2016, <https://freeweibo.com/weibo/伊斯兰国>

³⁴ For more on the domestic public’s view, see Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici. “Not An Idea We Have to Shun”: *Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century*. China Strategic Perspectives, Vol. 7. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2014. p. 53.

³⁵ Browne, “Beijing Fears Looking Impotent in the Face of Terror.”

³⁶ “Guanmeifang zhuanjia: zhongfang cengzhi Fan Jinghui yue zai anbaer, yingjiu bei e fa xingdong da luan” [Government media expert: China Knew that Fan Jinghui Was Around Anbar. Rescue Mission Was Interrupted by Russian and French activities], *South China Morning Post*, November 20, 2015.

³⁷ Foreign Ministry of China. “2015 Nian 12 yue 3 ri waijiaobu fayanren Hua Chunying zhuchi lixing jizhehui” [Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chun Ying Holds Regular Press Conference on December 3, 2015], Foreign Ministry of China, December 3, 2015.

³⁸ Foreign Ministry of China. “2015 Nian 12 yue 3 ri waijiaobu fayanren Hua Chunying zhuchi lixing jizhehui.”

participating in the search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370.³⁹ In the Yemen operation conducted in late March and early April 2015, Chinese navy evacuated 570 Chinese citizens and 225 foreign nationals from the volatile country.⁴⁰ All official statements and news articles praised the operation for successfully protecting Chinese citizens overseas, the caliber of the military operation, China's good diplomatic relations with Yemen that facilitated the evacuation, and China's commitment to humanitarian assistance.⁴¹

It has not been lost on the Chinese leadership that these types of operations can help substantiate the Party's line that a stronger China militarily would contribute to global peace and stability. A Chinese military with the ability to project power globally, even if only for a short period of time in relatively permissive environments, could contribute more to peacekeeping missions and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. A proclaimed desire to contribute more to the global good could provide a legitimate and nonthreatening rationale for the development of power projection capabilities.

III. Chinese Thinking on the Development of Expeditionary Capabilities

China has already demonstrated a projected willingness to engage to a degree in overseas operations. In a May white paper, China said its army would "adapt itself to tasks in different regions, develop the capacity of its combat forces for different purposes, and construct a combat force structure for joint operations." This official strategy document proclaimed that the PLA Navy (PLAN) would gradually add "open seas protection" to its current focus "offshore waters defense." Similarly, the Chinese Air Force will boost its capabilities for strategic early warning, air strike, air and missile defense, information countermeasures, airborne operations, strategic projection and comprehensive support.⁴²

But the exact shape and capabilities of a future global expeditionary PLA remains uncertain, and contingent on regional developments, domestic political factors, and the international security environment. Given the likely mission of protecting Chinese citizens and Chinese property and assets, the PLA will need to be able to conduct noncombatant evacuation operations, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, training and building partner capacity, special operations ashore, riverine operations, military criminal investigation functions, physical security/force protection, presence operations and military diplomacy.⁴³

Chinese writings can give us some insight into thinking about the development of expeditionary capabilities, but content is quite limited given the relatively new and sensitive nature of the issue. China has had a historical aversion to alliances and overseas basing; China argues that its rejection of such 'hegemonic' behaviors is critical evidence that it will be a different, more peaceful, great power. China's policy of not interfering in the domestic affairs of other countries also continues to be an influential principle, in part because of the ongoing need to protect itself from international

³⁹ Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, "Six Years at Sea... and Counting: Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's Maritime Commons Presence" Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation, 2015.

⁴⁰ Eddie Linczer. "Yemen Evacuation Demonstrates China's Growing Far-Seas Naval Capabilities. *American Enterprise Institute*, April 3, 2015.

⁴¹ Zhao Cheng, "Yemen cheqiao jianzheng daguo nengli yu dandang" " [Evacuation of Chinese in Yemen Testifies to the Capabilities and Duties of a Powerful State], *Renin Ribao*, April 10, 2015.

⁴² The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, "China's Military Strategy 2014" May 2015.

⁴³ Yung et al, *Not An Idea We Have to Shun*, p. 53

criticism, separatist movements, and calls for democracy or greater protection of human rights.⁴⁴ Pressures for continuity, such as the belief that interference is ineffective, the desire to promote China's leadership in the developing world, and the deep-rooted desire to be a different type of great power than the United States or former colonial powers, affect calculations of costs, benefits, and appropriate responses to its expanding overseas interests.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that in this early stage of consideration, Chinese writings often fail to address global power projection directly and have yet to settle on effective and positive models for China to emulate. Though in some cases, writers will gently suggest the need for overseas basing to be able to project power outside its immediate region.⁴⁵ The discussions that do emerge focus on naval strategies, suggesting that at this stage the Chinese are largely focused on projecting naval power, and less on the necessities for projecting ground and air power.⁴⁶ It seems that instead of forging the path, frameworks are being created to understand actions and narrow the gap between policy and practice.

But faced with an operational imperative, thinking may shift - just as it did with peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. Xi Jinping has already made a number of unexpected and significant organizational reforms to enhance the professionalization of the force, reduce corruption, and create a command structure more conducive to joint operations.⁴⁷ Admittedly, China is unlikely to seek military alliances or to establish permanent boots-on-the-ground military bases overseas over the next decade, and perhaps ever. Chinese thinkers consider the US basing model to be ideological anathema and strategically imprudent. But restrictions on Chinese military presence overseas are loosening with much debate about establishing areas from which to stage operations. For this, a few principles are emerging - China's purpose for the base would need to be in line with host country's interests and neighboring countries preference and the base must set up to protect overseas rights and interests, and cannot be used to attack other countries.⁴⁸ Also, China's overseas access policies no doubt take into account a desire to minimize 'China Threat Theory' or concerns nations have with how China may use its newfound military power in the future.⁴⁹ To manage risk and its image, Chinese thinkers still refer to noninterference, suggesting that Beijing exploit international institutions such as the UN, SCO or ASEAN regional forum to protect its overseas interests or build a better multilateral framework for such protections.⁵⁰ If Chinese overseas missions expand to include NEOs, HADR, and protection of citizens, "the PLA over the long run might attempt to establish permanent basic access to a facility with communications, housing for sailors, medical

⁴⁴ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Noninterference in Contemporary Chinese Foreign Policy: Fact or Fiction?" in Donovan Chau and Thomas Kane (eds), *China and International Security: History, Strategy, and 21st Century Policy, Vol. 2*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014. pp. 95-114.

⁴⁵ Ma Jianguang, Li Youren "Buzhen dizhonghai, eluosi poju xin silu" [Embattle Mediterranean, Russia's new thought to break the dilemma] *PLA Daily*, March 27, 2015. p.7.

⁴⁶ Luo Zheng, "Zhongguo haijun tuijin zhanlve zhuanxing" [The Change of China's Navy Strategies], *PLA Daily*, May 27, 2015.

⁴⁷ "Military Reform: Xi's New Model Army," *The Economist*, January 16, 2016.

⁴⁸ Shen Dingli, "Don't Shun the Idea of Setting Up Overseas Military Bases," *China.org*, January 28, 2010, available at www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-01/28/content_19324522.htm

⁴⁹ Feng Chunmei "Junshi zhuanjia jiedu zhongguo junshi zhanlve" [Military Experts Explain Chinese Military Strategy] *People's Daily*, May 27, 2015, p.4.

⁵⁰ Wang Falong, "Zhongguo haiwai liyi wei hu lujing yanjiu" [Approaches of Safeguarding China's Overseas Interests] *guoji zhanwang*, May 2014; Su Changhe, "Lun zhongguo haiwai liyi" [On China's Overseas Interest] *Shijie jingji yu zhexue* August 2009.

facilities, rudimentary ship and equipment repair, and replenishment and resupply functions”⁵¹ along the lines of the U.S. concept of ‘places not bases.’ But given current trends, one model may adopt according to an NDU study is the dual use logistics facility model, which would involve “a mixture of access to overseas commercial facilities and a limited number of military bases.”⁵² One area of concern is that China may be building up a network of commercial ports, a string of pearls, such as those in Gwadar, Pakistan or Hambantota, Sri Lanka – which they can surreptitiously convert to use for military operations at a later date. I agreed with the NDU study that current PLA operational patterns current lend little support to this thesis – regardless, China would have to make significant changes to those ports to make them fit for military operations, and therefore there will be clear indicators if China moves in that direction.

While a far cry from the US global basing model, permanent Chinese access and corresponding increase in Chinese military presence outside its immediate region would be a huge leap, not only in capabilities, but also in Chinese thinking. But China is also no stranger to throwing principles out the window when they are obsolete and undergoing tough reforms. In November 2015, after decades-long debate, the Party is going against entrenched PLA interests and attempting to move through a reform to its military regional (MR) system. While successful implementation is far from certain, these changes would enhance PLA mobility and facilitate joint operations by weakening the army’s dominance of the PLA - both necessary for effective power projection. The shift from seven military regions to four strategic zones is partly inspired by China’s contemporary need for a strong blue-water navy to protect China’s maritime lifelines and its expanding overseas interests, and the previous command structure centered on land forces could not meet those needs.⁵³ It is only a matter of time before the same logic is applied to Chinese foreign policy principles, creating more flexibility for Beijing to establish strategic partnerships and access points.

IV: Implications for U.S. Interests

If trends in Chinese overseas access arrangements are any indication, this may already be underway. In November, Beijing reached an agreement with Djibouti to establish a naval logistics hub there, which would be China’s first overseas outpost.⁵⁴ The same month, a Chinese company linked to the PLA acquired a 99-yr lease of part of Darwin port in Australia.⁵⁵ Malaysia also agreed to allow Chinese navy to use a port strategically located close to the Spratly Islands – allegedly to strengthen defense ties between the two sides and signal neutrality over the ongoing power competition between China and the United States.⁵⁶

The bottom line is the development of Chinese expeditionary capabilities could potentially threaten regional stability and peace. At the very least, a more active and globally present PLA will complicate U.S. foreign policy and elevate risk for U.S. operations overseas. It is possible that a capable global PLA would shape Chinese interests in a positive direction, with Beijing taking on greater

⁵¹ Yung et al, *Not An Idea We Have to Shun*, p. 42.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵³ Minnie Chan, “China Hits the Launch Button for Massive PLA Shake-Up to Create a Modern, Nimble Force.” *South China Morning Post*, November 25, 2015.

⁵⁴ Jane Perlez and Chris Buckley. “China Retools Its Military with a First Overseas Outpost in Djibouti.” *The New York Times*, November 26, 2015.

⁵⁵ Michael Forsythe. “Australia Defends Port Lease to Chinese Company with Military Ties.” *The New York Times*, November 14, 2015.

⁵⁶ Teoh, Shannon. “Malaysia to Allow PLA Navy Use of Strategic Port.” *The Straits Times*, November 22, 2015.

international responsibility to promote peace in conflict-prone areas. But given the current focus on domestic stability and regional security issues and maritime disputes, and China's historical tendency to define international interests in narrow domestic terms, it's unlikely.

China's Increasingly Interventionist Policies

Once the PLA has the capabilities to intervene abroad, and ideological barriers to global operations have been loosened, the Chinese leadership may become more interventionist. To date, China has been more willing to deviate from its policy of noninterference in other countries' internal affairs if China were doing so in a multilateral and permissive environment. A more assertive China may be a positive development for the United States - a global expeditionary PLA could also create a more assertive China that is positioned to provide international public goods, further enmeshing Beijing into the current world order, and reducing the incentives for it to use force to resolve disputes.

One possible future scenario is that China relaxes its noninterference principle as its global interests expand and overlap with those of the United States, leading to coordination between the two countries on global issues. But there are three reasons to question the feasibility of this ideal outcome. First, as the North Korean nuclear issue has demonstrated, even when Chinese and American interests overlap, divergence in their preferred tactics can inhibit progress on the issue at hand. Second, China defines its core interests narrowly in domestic terms while the U.S. is more likely to view issues from the perspective of maintaining the current global order. The United States has historically attempted to influence the outside world to ensure its safety, but Chinese leaders believe that strengthening the country internally enhances its national security. This difference in strategic thinking can lead to different preference rankings for the types of international issues that need to be addressed, and which aspect of an issue is the most disconcerting. For example, China prioritizes stability in the DPRK over denuclearization, while the United States considers denuclearization to be of greater importance.

Lastly, abandonment of the nonintervention principle to facilitate its new global expeditionary mission would mean the potential for Chinese interference in issues in which the United States may prefer China's traditional hands-off approach.⁵⁷ China's interests are unlikely to align perfectly with those of the United States – and adding China's military presence to the myriad of complex factors U.S. policy must take into account in the midst of a conflict may make it more difficult for the United States to accomplish its foreign policy goals. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been accustomed to acting as the leader of coalitions in interventions; Syria shows the complications that arise when the US has to manage another power's simultaneous and uncoordinated intervention, which is designed to achieve goals other than what the US seeks. Interests could even be diametrically opposed - the United States might face the problem of managing rival and hostile actions, even if only thru proxy actors, like in the case of an apt analogy is Iranian activity throughout the Middle East.

An effective PLA could make matters worse on the ground, which would also be detrimental to the United States. More frequent PLA expeditionary operations means the U.S. military will be operating even more frequently in close proximity with the PLA. This could increase competitive dynamics between the two countries, increase concerns about operational security, or even increase

⁵⁷ For more on the evolution and drivers of China's noninterference principle, see Mastro, "Noninterference in Contemporary Chinese Foreign Policy: Fact or Fiction?"

the possibility of accidents. Just as increased Chinese assertiveness has affected U.S. alliances regionally, a globally Chinese military presence could affect U.S. alliance and partner management in other areas of the world, complicating already difficult relationships with countries such as Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. In cases where China operates in combination with other militaries, including that of the United States, there remain concerns that China is gaining critical operational experience and foreign know-how that it could apply to contentious regional issues to gain an upper hand.

Regional Balance of Military Power

Even if China develops a more robust global expeditionary capability, regional contingencies will still be the focus of Chinese war planning. However, the breadth of capabilities the PLA will acquire to conduct expeditionary operations could endow it with other options it presently lacks regionally, and therefore may tempt China to expand the scope of those operations over time. The capabilities required for HADR, PKOs, NEOs, and personnel recovery missions are dual-use - that is, they will also strengthen China's traditional war fighting capabilities. Augmented sea and airlift, advanced SOF capabilities, a greater number of surface vessels and aircraft, and most significant, operational experience for its forces, could encourage China to expand the scope of its interests and willingness to use force to protect those interests. China could become more forceful, confident in its ability to achieve its objectives by force alone, with the backing of its people.

Even if this future scenario spurs a growth in traditional power projection capabilities or increased use of force abroad, the implications for the United States and its regional allies and partners are uncertain. China's increased military role in global affairs and enhanced expeditionary capabilities could create a balancing backlash among its Asian neighbors and contribute to instability in the region, as incentives for preventive war increase with the rapid shifts in regional balance of power. China could become confident in its ability to achieve its objectives by brute force alone, especially with domestic support. Or more confident in its military capabilities, Chinese policy may mature, becoming less sensitive and reactive to perceived slights to its core interests.

Creation of Global Ambition

While the Chinese leadership may only plan on building expeditionary forces to address non-traditional threats, the increased capabilities may shape Chinese interests and preferred methods of achieving traditional security objectives. Chinese strategists and netizens have already launched a debate about whether China should aspire to become a global military power. Currently, those debates are couched in discussions about how China should approach its territorial disputes, especially in the East and South China Seas.⁵⁸ But influential thinkers such as Col. Liu Mingfu, a former professor at the PLA National Defense University and author of *China Dream*, believe that China should aim to surpass the U.S. as the world's top military power.⁵⁹ Additionally, in a March 2010 newspaper poll, 80% of respondents responded positively to the question "Do you think China should strive to be the world's strongest country militarily?" However, less than half of

⁵⁸ For example, one TV show discusses whether the aircraft carrier would be useful in dealing with the Japanese in the island dispute: <http://v.ifeng.com/mil/mainland/201210/fdf13f3a-8f39-4168-bdbc-2ef0067db861.shtml>. "Will Carrier Help Resolve Chinese Maritime Disputes? [Hangmu fuyi shifou you zhu yu jie jue zhongguo haishi zhengduan?]." [v.ifeng.com video](http://v.ifeng.com/video), October 20, 2012.

⁵⁹ For an interview with Col Liu on the topic, see Cheng Gang, "PLA Colonel Advocates for China to Become World's Top Military Power [Jiefangjun dajiang zhuzhang zhongguo zhengzuo shijie diyi junshi qianguo] *Global Times*, March 2nd, 2010.

respondents approved of a policy to publicly announce such an objective.⁶⁰ While there is little evidence of China's desire to displace the United States as the world's superpower, Beijing's global ambitions could snowball as if China indeed because more involved militarily all around the world.

V. Recommendations to Congress

The greatest question for Congress is how to encourage China to promote greater transparency as the PLA develops expeditionary capabilities. I would argue that transparency in the military realm is best understood as consisting of two separate dimensions: intent transparency, regarding strategic plans and preferences; and capability transparency, regarding the factors that comprise military power. In these terms, most US analyses of China's military transparency are actually critical about its lack of *capability* transparency, rather than its *intent* transparency; while Beijing claims to be transparent because it offers a degree of *intent* transparency.

A broad sweep of Chinese articles show that Chinese thinkers recognize there are tradeoffs associated with transparency and secrecy - transparency can improve trust and reduce accidents. But this openness can also bring danger, national disaster and can even threaten a country's existence.⁶¹ As the PLA Secrecy Committee (*jiefangjun baomi weiyuanhui*) affirms, external criticism will not drive China's position on military transparency; the military situation will determine what to reveal, when and to whom.⁶² The minimal prerequisites for capability transparency are that the United States will not endanger China's security or attempt to reduce its combat effectiveness.⁶³

At the same time, leading Chinese academics, military strategists, and state-sponsored media providers demonstrate a deep recognition and understanding that this choice leads to heightened anxiety about Chinese intentions, hurts its image, and provokes misunderstandings and miscalculations.⁶⁴ Consequently, many hope China can partly achieve the benefits of military transparency through corresponding increases in intent transparency.⁶⁵ To that end, China has incrementally expanded its military exchanges and participation in joint exercises, established crisis hotlines, routinized public announcements of strategic intentions, boosted involvement in multilateral frameworks, expanded military exchanges and has begun issuing notifications of its military activities and exercises.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Select examples include: Wu Xiaoming and Xu Weidi, "Junshi touming yu anquan huxin" [Military Transparency and Mutual Trust in the Security Realm], *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], No. 12 (2005), pp. 49-56; Luo Yuan, "Zhongguo junshi 'yangguanghua'" [The Sunnyization of Chinese Military Affairs], *Guancha* [Outlook], No. 37 (2007), pp. 42-43.

⁶² Xu Chen, "Baofang jiehe tuchu zhongdian: 2013 nian guofang baipishu toushe jundui baomi gongzuo xin dongxiang" [2013 Defense White Paper Reflects New Trends of Military Secret Service], *Baomi gongzuo*, No. 4 (2013).

⁶³ Luo, "Zhongguo junshi 'yangguanghua,'" Xu Chen, "Baofang jiehe tuchu zhongdian."

⁶⁴ Chen Zhou, *Junshi Touming Lun*, pp. 101, 137, 310; Su Yincheng, "Zhongguo jundui: geng kaifang, geng touming, geng zixin" [Chinese Military: More Open, More Transparent, More Confident], *Qishi lilun wang*, October 24, 2012; Yan Yongchun, "Huxin rang shijie geng anquan - 'junshi touming lun' pingjie" [Mutual-trust Makes the World More Secure - A Review on 'The Theory of Military Transparency'], *Jingying wenhua tiandi*, No. 4 (2013), pp. 43-44.

⁶⁵ Guo Rui, "Xifang guojia zhuliu meiti 'Zhongguo guofang touming du' baodao yanjiu" [A Study on Western Mainstream Media's Reports on 'China's National Defense Transparency'], *Dangdai Yatai* (Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies), No. 2 (2012), p. 47; Wang and Wang, "Lengzhan hou Zhongmei junshi," p. 92; For more on the difference between intent transparency and military (capabilities) transparency, see Wu and Xu, "Junshi touming yu anquan huxin."

⁶⁶ Xu Hui and Han Xiaofeng, "Meiguo junshi touming zhengce jiqi dui Zhongguo de yingxiang" [The Impact of American Military Transparency Policy on China], *Wajiao Pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review), No. 2, (2014), pp. 91-92; Chen Ce, "Renmin Ribao: Zhongguo junshi toumingdu dabu maijin, xiang shijie zhan heping chengyi" [People's Daily: Great Leaps in Chinese Military Transparency, A Peaceful Gesture to the World], *Xinhua*, July 5, 2011; Chen Zhou,

This suggests the current US policy of pressuring China to be more transparent about its military affairs has severe limitations. China has made some improvements in its military transparency due to US pressure, but mostly in the low risk realm of intent transparency by releasing white papers or expanding military exchanges. While such progress should be lauded and further promoted, China will only embrace capability transparency when its leadership is confident its ability to fight is so great that the United States would be sufficiently deterred from action in any future contingency. This does not mean the United States should stop shaming Beijing on this score – maintaining the talking points about the need for greater transparency about its military budget, personnel management and training, military hardware RD&A and order of battle may have public diplomacy benefits. Also, such complaints may be a way to express concern about Chinese military modernization without portraying US strategy as one of containment. But the current focus in US-China military exchanges on increasing Chinese military transparency and building strategic trust is misplaced, causing key military figures and academics to be overly confident in the potential impact of dialogue.⁶⁷ Moreover, concessions should not be made with hopes of inspiring reciprocity, a practice often used in agenda setting for high-level military exchanges with the Chinese. Instead, the goal of military-to-military relations should be to enhance predictability, to understand each other's standard operating procedures and expand routine communication to manage the risk of accidents associated with frequent operational encounters.

However, if the United States maintains its talking points on military transparency in spite of the limitations, which may be politically necessary, interlocutors should at least distinguish between capability transparency and intent transparency to put more direct pressure on China to reveal specific elements of military power. Chinese thinkers demonstrate a belief that China can build strategic trust, control and manage risk, avoid miscalculation and reduce suspicions sufficiently by continuing bilateral activities such as exchange visits, high-level meetings, strategic consultations as well as ship visits and joint exercises without the risks associated with embracing greater transparency about capabilities.⁶⁸ This increase in intent transparency is a positive step, but does little to inform the United States about the nature, purpose and trajectory of Chinese military capabilities – the fundamental aim of the transparency push. If the United States continues to emphasize transparency in its messaging without the distinction, it may grant political rewards to China disproportional to the actual concessions made, which could further weaken the impact of US political pressure.

“Junkeyuan zhuanjia: Zhongguo junshi touming zhiduhua jianshe chengxiao xianzhu” [Expert at the Academy of Military Science: Great Success has Been Achieved in Institutionalization of Military Transparency], *Zhongxin wang* [China News], January 17, 2012; Sun Xianghua, “Zhongguo xin waijiao: yige lingdaoli de jieshi moxing” [China’s New Diplomacy: an Explanatory Model of Leadership], *Waijiao Pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review), No. 2 (2010), p. 110.

⁶⁷ Mike Mullen, “A Step Toward Trust with China,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2011. For the objectives of military relations with China, see Shirley Kan, “U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, Washington D.C., November 20, 2013.

⁶⁸ This position is found in dozens of writings. Some examples include Qiu Yuanping, “Zhongguo de heping fazhan yu gonggong waijiao” [China’s Peaceful Development and Public Diplomacy], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* (Journal of International Studies), No. 6 (2010), pp. 1-3; Yang Kai, “Zhongmei junshi jiaoliu,” pp. 60-62; Zhang Ping, “Zhongguo waijiao de xinqidian’ gaoduan luntan zongshu” [A Summary of High-end Forum ‘A New Beginning of Chinese Diplomacy’], *Waijiao Pinglun* (Foreign Affairs Review), No. 3 (2014), p. 156.