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Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai

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In a Fortnight

By L.C. Russell Hsiao

CHINA'S DEMOGRAPHIC IMBALANCES WIDEN

Even as the Chinese economy under the Hu-Wen administration is set to wean through the global financial crisis with a remarkable eight percent growth rate this year, senior officials from the Ministry of Civil Affairs under the jurisdiction of the State Council, which is responsible for social and administrative affairs, revealed that China's aging population—people older than 60 years old—reached 12.79 percent (169 million) of the total population at the end of 2008 (Xinhua News Agency, October 26). Amid a slowdown in its working-age population growth and surplus labor depletion, China's rapidly aging population is placing a serious strain on the sustainability of its current economic growth mode and thus, is of great concern for the Chinese leadership, which has a low tolerance for political instability.

China became an "aging society" in 1999 after the composition of people over 60 years within its entire population broke the 10 percent benchmark. According to the latest statistics released by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in less than 10 years, the aged population increased by 50 million and exceeded the entire population of Jiangxi Province (*China Times* [Taiwan], October 26; Xinhua News Agency, October 26).

In a candid response to reporters, Wang Zhangyao, the secretary for the promotion of social welfare and charity bureau within the ministry, stated that, "China is rushing into an aging society at a speed that is exceeding our imagination." Wang further noted that if current trends persist, by 2050, the old age-population ratio would shrink from the current ratio of nine to one, to three to one (Xinhua News Agency, October 26).

According to Wang Guangzhou, a professor at The Institute of Population and Labor Economics at the government-think tank Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the working-age population in China was estimated at 70 percent (918 million) of the total in 2005. That percentage is expected to increase to 72.14 percent of the country's total and many experts believe it will peak at 997 million by 2016 (National Population and Family Commission of China, August 23, 2006; *China Brief*, December 8, 2008). Cai Fang, director of the institute, added that the decreasing levels of dependency (people not in the labor force on those in the labor force) in China's labor force, which had fueled China's per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is diminishing. In addition, by 2013, the dependence ratio will stop declining and with an aging population, China's dependence ratio will increase (China Economist, July-August).

In spite of its eight percent growth rate—the common assumption among official economists is that a 7 percent growth rate will translate into 25 million to 30 million new jobs per year—China is far from being on the road to a stable economic recovery, and the global economic crisis has exacerbated an already serious unemployment crisis (*China Brief*, February 4). According to some estimates, China's official unemployment rate stands at about 4 percent (Asia Times Online, October 22). Yet the PRC's 150 million migrant laborers that make up a significant portion of China's urban labor market are not accounted for in government unemployment data (*China Brief*, December 19, 2008). Further evidence of this discrepancy in the skills of its imbalanced workforce, which do not match the demand from the current labor market, are reflected by a September report released by CASS, which stated that the earnings of Chinese graduates were now at par and even lower than those of migrant laborers (Asia Times Online, October 22).

There are clear signals that the central authorities in Beijing are concerned about the rapidly aging population problem. In Shanghai, where the old age-population ratio is highest, authorities have been permitted to break away from the country's infamous One-Child policy, and since late July have been actively encouraging “eligible” couples to have a second child. According to Xie Lingli, director of the Shanghai Population and Family Planning Commission, “We advocate eligible couples to have two kids because it can help reduce the proportion of the aging people and alleviate a workforce shortage in the future” (*China Daily*, July 24).

The standing vice president of the China National Committee on Aging, Chen Chuanshu, reportedly stated that the next 25 years will be key for policymakers preparing to deal with

China's aging society, and that strategies must be developed to improve laws and regulations, as well as socio-economic policy adjustments to deal with all the preparations for an aging society (Xinhua News Agency, October 26). Chinese analysts, however, have warned that piecemeal measures will not work and only a holistic approach that takes into account education, health, industrial, financial, and labor will ensure that China's “demographic dividend” does not turn into a “demographic debt” (China Economist, July-August).

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Chongqing's Mafias Expose Grave Woes in China's Legal Apparatus

By Willy Lam

The ongoing campaign against triads, or Chinese-style mafias, in the west-China metropolis of Chongqing is the largest such operation since 1949. Yet what renders this so-called “anti-triad tornado” (*fanbei fengbao*) so disturbing is not simply that close to 3,000 big-time criminals have been nabbed by authorities, the Chongqing disaster has laid bare the full extent of the collusion between organized crime on the one hand, and senior officers in the police and judiciary on the other. Even more shocking is the fact that what the local media calls “dark and evil forces” have become so entrenched and prevalent in this megacity of 34 million people that it required a directive from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Politburo Standing Committee—the highest level decision-making body in the state—before sufficient law-enforcement resources could be mobilized to combat the well-heeled—and well-connected—syndicates (*Guangzhou Daily* [Guangzhou], October 30; The Associated Press, October 21; *Apple Daily* [Hong Kong] August 14).

The scale of Chongqing's triad operations can be gleaned from the fact that 1.7 billion yuan (\$250 million) of ill-gotten gains have so far been uncovered from 24 crime bosses. According to the official China News Service, triads have infiltrated business sectors including finance, transport, construction and engineering, entertainment, restaurants and retailing. More than 200 mid-to-high-ranking officials in the Chongqing police and judicial departments are under investigation for sheltering or otherwise abetting the felons (*People's Daily*, October 24; *Ming Pao* [Hong Kong] October 25). These bad apples include the former head of the Chongqing Judicial Bureau Wen Qiang and the former deputy-head of the Chongqing

Public Security Bureau, Peng Changjian. Wen, who is also a former police chief, has admitted to taking bribes and gifts totaling nearly 100 million yuan (\$14.6 million). The corrupt cadre even threatened interrogators that he would spill the beans on a number of more senior officials if he were given the death sentence. “If you sentence me to death,” he reportedly said. “I’ll reveal everything—then everybody will die together!” (*Chongqing Evening News*, October 25; *Global Times* [Beijing], October 20).

While Wen might have been bluffing, there is now no denying that the triads have been operating in Chongqing for more than two decades—and that they had, for reasons that are coming to light, been tolerated by the municipality’s top party and government leaders. Most of the 24 triad chieftains started their careers in Chongqing, and they have been expanding their empires in the metropolis since the early 1990s. These billionaire thugs include Li Qiang, a well-known business tycoon in transportation and real estate who had been repeatedly appointed a delegate to the Chongqing People’s Congress. Another criminal, Xie Caiping, had run underground casinos—a few of them in five-star downtown hotels—in Chongqing for years (*Chongqing Evening News*, October 24; China News Service, October 31). Since Chongqing gained the status of a municipality (with the same “administrative ranking” as Beijing and Shanghai) in 1997, its party secretaries have included such luminaries as He Guoqiang (now member of the Politburo Standing Committee in charge of fighting corruption) and Wang Yang (Politburo member and Party Secretary of Guangdong). Current party secretary Bo Xilai, who is also a Politburo member, has been in charge of Chongqing for two years. It is well-nigh impossible that He, Wang and Bo had not been knowledgeable about the triad problems in Chongqing (*Apple Daily*, October 27; *Chongqing Evening News*, October 27). The officials’ complicit attitude begs the question, why did the authorities wait until early summer before taking action?

While meeting a group of foreign reporters recently, Bo, a former minister of commerce known for his flamboyant lifestyle, had some surprising things to say about the triad scourge. The Politburo member admitted that “it wasn’t [*sic*] us officials who wanted to take the initiative in fighting the triads; the ‘dark and evil’ forces have put so much pressure on us that there is nothing we can do [except combating them].” Bo added: “Chongqing residents often come to the municipal government office, holding photographs that are full of bloody bodies ... The triads are chopping up people, just like butchers killing animals. It is unbearable.” On another occasion, Bo said that cadres “must absolutely not adopt a gentle and tolerant stance toward triads.” “While we may be gentle, the triads will never be gentle,” he said. “Permissiveness

toward the minority means injustice for the majority.” Bo’s extraordinary frank words suggest that there is a well-entrenched practice among cadres to treat crime syndicates with kid gloves. Hong Kong papers have reported that the Chongqing “anti-triad tornado” was made possible only after President Hu Jintao had personally given approval to the unprecedented crackdown. Bo indirectly confirmed this by saying late last month that the “anti-triad operation was handled by the party central leadership” and that it was “not a case of Chongqing trying to set a sensational example” (*Guangzhou Daily*, October 17; China News Service, October 29; *Chongqing Daily*, October 29). While Bo seems to be striking a delicate balance between praising Beijing’s leadership on the one hand and claiming credit for having done the right thing on the other, neither the CCP authorities nor the gung-ho regional “warlord” has been able to reassure the nation about the viability of China’s legal apparatus.

The CCP’s apparently permissive attitude toward triads stands in stark contrast to the “zero tolerance” strategies that the police, state-security agents and the People’s Armed Police have adopted toward other so-called “destabilizing agents” in society. The latter include dissidents, activist lawyers as well as NGO activists, in addition to alleged “splittists” or pro-independence elements in Xinjiang and Tibet. For example, in the run-up to the 60th anniversary of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, several liberal intellectuals have been detained by police and subsequently given hefty prison terms. Their “crime” is nothing more than writing articles urging a faster pace of political reform (*Ming Pao*, October 18; *New York Times*, October 30). So what underpins the authorities’ surprising tolerance for underground criminal gangs? It seems that a sizeable number of cadres consider triads as a useful tool for maintaining socio-political stability. For example, police and state-security units in many cities and counties often employ triads to do “dirty jobs.” Thus, gang members are used extensively in “land grab” cases—whereby corrupt officials who are colluding with real-estate developers force residents of old buildings (or farmers in the villages) to vacate their dwelling places in return for extremely low compensation. When the concerned residents or villagers refuse to budge or hold demonstrations, they are often intimidated and beaten up by triads. No wonder then, that former Minister of Public Security Tao Siju said in 1993 that “the triads are patriotic elements” (*Guangzhou Daily*, October 20; BBC news, November 10, 2006; *The Independent* [London], March 22, 1998).

Irrespective of what individual party cadres may think of the “useful role” of triads, the fact that Beijing had repeatedly procrastinated in tackling organized crime has raised big questions about the CCP leadership’s

willingness and ability to enforce the law. Even after the Chongqing triads became big news in early summer, Politburo Standing Committee member Zhou Yongkang, who heads the Central Commission on Political and Legal Affairs (CCPLA), waited until the end of October before announcing a nationwide crackdown. “We must get to the bottom of the task of wiping out all triad and evil forces,” Zhou said. “And we must nab all those [officials] who provide shelter to the criminals.” Characterizing the anti-triad operation as a *minxin gongcheng*, or “an engineering project to warm the hearts of the people,” Zhou pledged that police departments and bureaus in every province and city would pull out all the stops in exterminating the gangs (China News Service, October 30; *South China Morning Post*, October 31). China’s increasingly vocal Netizens, however, could not help criticizing the cavalier attitude of Zhou and his colleagues. This was evident in many postings in popular chatrooms such as that run by People’s Daily Online. “Fighting triads is the basic responsibility of every policeman,” went one comment. “How come Zhou called this an ‘engineering project?’” Another angry Netizen had this to say about corrupt police officers sheltering triads: “Those who are charged with fighting triads have themselves become triad members. Rice in the granaries will naturally be depleted if you ask mice to guard them” (People’s Daily Online, October 27).

An allied issue is whether senior officials in Chongqing—and leading cadres in units such as the CCPLA and the Ministry of Public Security—have to take administrative or political responsibility for the triad scourge throughout the country. After all, a centerpiece for political reform since the turn of the century has been to enforce “administrative responsibility.” This means that cadres guilty of dereliction of duty or failing to measure up to minimal standards of performance should be sacked, demoted or given warnings. In the past four years, the authorities have investigated some 400,000 cases of civil servants and cadres who are suspected of failing to fulfill administrative responsibilities. A much-cited recent example is Zhang Heping, the Party Secretary in charge of the No. 2 Prison in Huhhot, Inner Mongolia. Zhang was fired last month soon after four felons in the prison escaped after killing a prison guard. (*Ming Pao*, October 25; Xinhua News Agency, October 30).

While the apparent success of Chongqing’s anti-triad crusade might have lifted Bo Xilai’s political fortune, the eldest son of party elder Bo Yibo is careful to be seen as giving all the credits to Beijing. Chongqing authorities have also emphasized that previous party secretaries and mayors of the municipality have played a pivotal role in at least monitoring the activities of the gangs (*Guangzhou Daily*, October 30; Time Asia Edition, October 21). Apart from the age factor—Bo will be 63 by the time the 18th CCP

Congress is held in 2012 and thus may be deemed too old to be inducted into the Politburo Standing Committee—the high-profile princeling has continued to suffer from his tendency to shoot from the hip. For example, his assertion, which suggested that Chongqing authorities were forced into taking action against the triads, has given the impression that the party boss has been lax and weak in the face of serious law-and-order problems. In the final analysis, Bo—together with his Politburo colleagues—has to share the blame for the further erosion of the ruling party’s credibility.

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PLA Exercises March Toward Trans-Regional Joint Training

By Dennis J. Blasko

While elements of units from all services in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) were preparing for the military parade on October 1st, a much larger slice of the PLA was conducting routine unit training. Following several months of individual skill and small unit training, late summer/early fall is the peak season for unit evaluation training, often culminating in relatively large force-on-force exercises and live fire drills. Even as the most modern equipment in the PLA was on display in the parade, units from all over the country were practicing how to deploy, operate and sustain the mix of old and new equipment that is actually found in operational formations.

Adding new equipment and upgrading or retiring older weapons is but one element of the PLA’s long-term modernization program. Training is another keystone of reform. Former Central Military Commission Chairman Jiang Zemin instructed, “We must train qualified personnel first, for we would rather let our qualified personnel wait for equipment than the other way round” [1]. Large amounts of new equipment have entered the PLA inventory over the past decade, but an even greater task is training personnel to properly plan for the employment and maintain and operate the new gear.

As the PLA transforms itself into a modernized military, the exercises it conducts reflect to some degree its capacity to implement the joint doctrine issued in 1999, which seeks to integrate all services and civilian support into seamless operations. Every year there are a number of “firsts” or “largest” events. This year was no exception and included some significant accomplishments. These advances notwithstanding, the PLA recognizes it is still experimenting to find operational solutions appropriate for its large force with limited funding. It also acknowledges it still has a long way to go before it meets the standards other countries have demonstrated in modern operations.

The following sections address the much-publicized, mainly ground-oriented exercises “Stride-2009,” “Airborne Movement-2009,” and “Vanguard-2009.” These were only a few of many exercises in 2009 from which the PLA seeks to identify shortcomings in order to improve capabilities in future training.

“STRIDE-2009” (*KUAYUE-2009*)

The 2008 Defense White Paper foreshadowed the emphasis on ground force training seen in 2009, stating, “The [PLA] Army has been moving from regional defense to trans-regional mobility. It is gradually making its units small, modular and multi-functional in organization through appropriate downsizing and structural reform...”

“Trans-regional mobility” focuses on moving units within China from one of its seven Military Regions (MR) to another. Multi-mode movements (by ground, rail, water and/or air) have been reported in the PLA press for at least a decade including some cross-MR movements. These exercises do not represent armed invasions of foreign countries, but the lessons learned in trans-regional mobility exercises could be used outside of China if countries permit movement of PLA units through or over their territory.

For several years, “small, modular and multi-functional” unit organization has focused on forming combined arms battalion task forces within both divisions and brigades [2]. “Modularization” (*mokuaihua*), also known in the West as “task organization,” consists of temporarily assigning smaller combat and support units (such as artillery, air defense or engineers) to infantry or armor battalions based on the mission, terrain and enemy. Once organized, however, in many cases combined arms battalions face challenges because most battalion commanders have not been formally trained to command such formations. Moreover, battalion staffs are yet too small to handle all the tasks that come with added units. Some battalions have temporarily brought officers up from companies to work on the headquarters staff (PLA Daily Online, February 6),

but these problems require formal long-term changes to both the organizational structure and professional military education system to properly train and staff for these new responsibilities.

“Stride-2009” was a two-month exercise in which approximately 50,000 troops from four divisions in four different MRs crisscrossed the country moving to four regional combined arms training bases. While there was some Air Force support in moving the troops and providing air cover, the exercise was primarily a ground operation (*China Daily*, August 12). During deployments of approximately five days in length, small reconnaissance, headquarters and communications units were flown on both PLA Air Force and chartered civilian aircraft while larger formations of personnel drove in trucks along highways and heavy equipment was transported via rail.

The four divisions involved in the exercise moved independently of each other as follows:

- o In mid-August, the 61st (“Red Army”) Division of 21st Group Army from the Lanzhou MR moved to the Shenyang MR Taonan Combined Arms Training Base
- o In mid-to late-August, the 162nd Motorized Infantry Division (“Ferocious Tigers”) of the 54th Group Army from Jinan MR traveled to the Guangzhou MR Luzhai Combined Arms Training Base
- o In early September, the 115th Mechanized Infantry Division of the 39th Group Army from the Shenyang MR moved to the Lanzhou MR Qingtongxia Combined Arms Training Base
- o In mid-to late-September, the 121st Motorized Infantry Division of the 41st Group Army moved to the Jinan MR Queshan Combined Arms Training Base [3]

While en route, troop convoys practiced defending against air and chemical attacks and bivouacked along the roads at night. Local military and militia units provided traffic control and logistics support (such as food, water and maintenance) along the way. Once they arrived at their objectives, troops linked up with their heavy equipment and conducted force-on-force drills and live-fire exercises.

While units took 90 percent of their organic “artillery, engineering machinery and other large weapons,” only 50 percent of armored vehicles, such as tanks and armored personnel carriers, were transported. Since tanks provide both mass and firepower, the participating divisions would have lacked a large portion of their combat power in an actual situation.

CCTV reports show that the 162nd Motorized Infantry Division and the 61st Division formed combined arms battalion task forces in exercises [4]. Such task organization was seen in several other exercises conducted by Army divisions and brigades (e.g., the 1st Armored Division and 235th Mechanized Infantry Brigade in Beijing MR and a motorized infantry brigade in Jinan MR) broadcast on CCTV in August and September [5].

With 50,000 personnel involved, most Chinese sources called “Stride-2009” “the army’s largest-ever tactical event, in which they will be mobilized and transported vast distances across the nation” (*China Daily*, August 12). The key to that claim is its reference to the “trans-regional” nature, not the overall size. For example, the amphibious exercise “Liberation 1” on Dongshan Island in 2001 was reported to be “the largest ever joint exercise of the three services (army, navy and air force), involving nearly 100,000 troops” (*China Daily*, July 12, 2004). Yet, troops from either the Nanjing or Guangzhou MRs for “Liberation 1” did not have to cross MR borders to get to the training area, which is located along the boundary between the two MRs.

“AIRBORNE MOVEMENT-2009” (*KONGJIANG JIDONG-2009*)

After “Stride-2009” was completed, the Air Force’s 15th Airborne Corps conducted a similar 20-day, large-scale, multi-modal transportation, trans-regional exercise called “Airborne Movement-2009” beginning in mid-October. “Airborne Movement-2009” paralleled the tasks Army divisions performed in “Stride-2009,” but with the addition of personnel parachute jumps and long-distance foot marches.

Starting on October 18th, elements of all three of the 15th Airborne Corps’ divisions, including “more than 13,000 people, 1,500 vehicles, and 7,000 pieces of equipment,” began moving through Hubei, Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces (Xinhua News Agency, October 18; *PLA Daily*, October 26).

Heavy equipment, including ZBD-03 Airborne Fighting Vehicles, which were seen in the October 1st parade, was transported by rail while other personnel moved by road convoys to the exercise area in “central China.” Airborne infantry battalions performed parachute drops to enter the exercise area and then subsequently linked up with their equipment [6]. After assembling into regimental formations on October 20th the units began opposing force exercises which included evaluation of battalion and company-size elements. Six battalions were selected “by lot” to conduct force-on-force maneuvers “with troops air-landing at the rear of the enemy” as the scenario. Live fire exercises were

also included.

After a week of training, the units moved to northern Jiangsu province to conduct another week of confrontation exercises. In addition to unit evaluations, training focused on duties of regimental staffs and officers at battalion and lower levels. Redeployment was scheduled to take place from November 4th to 6th.

The size and scope of this training probably merits the superlative of “the largest ever Chinese airborne force trans-regional campaign mobility comprehensive training exercise” (Xinhua News Agency, October 18).

“VANGUARD-2009” (*QIANFENG 2009*)

Beginning on October 21st, the joint exercise “Vanguard 2009” got underway at the Queshan Combined Arms Training Base. The main participants were the armored brigade of the 20th Group Army, the 1st Army Aviation Regiment, an element of the 15th Airborne Corps, and aircraft from units in the Guangzhou and Jinan MR Air Forces [7].

According to exercise director and deputy commander of the Jinan MR Lieutenant General Feng Zhaoju, “This exercise is the PLA’s first joint operation and joint training activity for basic campaign army groups in the true sense” (China News Service, Oct 11). In other words, the key to “Vanguard-2009” is that a group army headquarters formed the exercise’s joint headquarters incorporating both ground and PLA Air Force officers. Although the doctrinal basis for independent group army campaigns is found in both the 2000 and 2006 versions of *The Science of Campaigns* (*Zhanyi Xue*), evidently all other joint training exercises had been controlled by Military Region headquarters. “Vanguard-2009” thus serves as a good illustration of how long it can take to move from doctrinal guidance to actual implementation of tactical and operational concepts.

In an interview with the official Xinhua News Agency, Major General Xu Jingnian, commander of the 20th Group Army, stated, “We are an experiment unit. We are still in a testing and evaluation stage, in terms of how to organize joint combat operations at the basic campaign group level ... joint training exercise at the basic campaign group level is still in its infancy, leaving issues at many deeper levels to be further resolved” (Xinhua News Agency, October 13).

In the same interview, General Xu pointed out that communications was the biggest challenge for the exercise, saying, “How to achieve mutual connections and real-time intelligence gathering and sharing among various service

branches is the biggest issue ... we are able to resolve issues related to voice command; we are able to partially resolve digital communications issues also. However, we are still unable to achieve seamless [communications] connectivity.”

An important element of “Vanguard-2009” was helicopter and fixed wing air support to ground operations: “We will adopt the method of having planned fire power playing the leading role, supplemented by impromptu requests for fire power; meticulously organize the overall coordination of air, ground, and air defense fire power...” (China News Service, October 11). Listing “planned fire power” first reflects existing PLA doctrine that includes Air Force provision of “battlefield air interdiction” (preplanned attacks against enemy locations not in close proximity to friendly forces). “Impromptu requests for fire power” suggests something approaching “Close Air Support” (also known as CAS—air attacks against enemy locations in close proximity to friendly forces, which are controlled by units in contact with the enemy). PLA procedures for conducting CAS are still in the developmental and experimental stage. At the same time as “Vanguard-2009,” a division of the 14th Group Army and a PLA Air Force aviation division in the Chengdu MR were also experimenting with air support to ground operations (*PLA Daily*, October 28).

The PLA invited over 200 foreign military observers and military students studying in China to attend parts of “Vanguard-2009.”

The 20th Group Army is one of a few group armies organized into an all-brigade structure in which the group army headquarters has no divisions under its command. As demonstrated by “Vanguard-2009,” group armies are only beginning to explore how to conduct independent joint operations.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the pace and scope of PLA training in 2009 is that these exercises are much more costly and complex than the exercise seasons of the mid-1990s. Units now routinely spend weeks in the field often calling on civilian logistics support, which requires the military to reimburse the enterprises that have been mobilized to support operations. Advanced weapons consume more fuel and fire more expensive ammunition than their less technologically complex predecessors. Long distance maneuvers outside of traditional training areas results in “maneuver damage,” which requires the PLA to provide compensation to local entities. Moving even portions of units by air is much more expensive than ground transport. If the PLA continues to

train at recent levels, or increases the pace, the central government must continue to provide adequate funds to support this operations tempo.

Over the past decade, all units, not only those considered as “rapid reaction units,” have trained to assemble and deploy quickly. If “Stride-2009” and “Airborne Movement-2009” are considered successful by higher headquarters, the relatively rapid movement of large units across Military Region borders could portend the need for fewer units. Therefore, MRs may not need as many standing forces if they can count on out-of-area reinforcements to arrive within reasonable timeframes. A more rapidly deployable ground force may not require as many active units as found today. This could set the stage for more personnel cuts and force reductions.

These exercises also reflect the transitional nature of the PLA today. Its leaders recognize they have not yet reached their operational objectives and must continue to motivate their troops to continue to improve their capabilities. Military leaders have a realistic understanding of the capabilities of their forces compared to other modern militaries and the diverse missions the PLA may be called on to perform. Many other senior leaders would agree with 20th Group Army Commander Xu Jingnian: “We are still in a testing and evaluation stage...”

In March the commander of the 38th Group Army (generally considered one of the PLA’s premier units), Major General Wang Xixin, gave an interview noting that despite a “series of achievements” made in his unit, “the modernization level of the PLA is still incommensurate to the demand of winning local war under information-based conditions, the military power is still incommensurate to the demand of performing the historical mission in the new century and the new period and raising the capability of troops in accomplishing diversified military mission is still a historical subject in front of the officers and men” (*PLA Daily*, March 2).

General Wang’s observation is similar to many others found in PLA literature (*China Brief*, July 3, 2008). It indicates the senior leadership’s self-knowledge of the PLA’s level of modernization and the need for many years of hard work in the classroom, on the training field, and in unit maintenance bays. The Chinese expect several more anniversary parades to pass before the PLA reaches its “strategic goal of building informationalized armed forces and being capable of winning informationalized wars by the mid-21st century” [8].

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NOTES

1. Jiang Zemin's Book on Technology, Army Building Viewed CPP20010221000077 Guangzhou *Yangcheng Wanbao* (Internet Version-WWW) in Chinese 13 Feb 01, translated by the Open Source Center (OSC).

2. According to *The Military Balance 1996-1997*, by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in 1996, prior to the two force reductions amounting 700,000 from 1997 to 2005, the PLA had a total of some 90-100 infantry and tank divisions and another 15-20 infantry and tank brigades. The author's current estimate of the Army order-of-battle shows a reduction to approximately 35 infantry and armored divisions and an increase to some 41 infantry and armored brigades. Many of the divisions remaining in the force have been restructured so that they now have only three maneuver regiments instead of the four regiments found in the former Soviet style organization. Divisions in the PLA command regiments, not brigades (as in the U.S. Army model). Despite the growth of the number of brigades in the PLA, the division appears to still be a viable organizational level for some time into the future.

3. *PLA Daily* has a series of reports at <http://tp.chinamil.com.cn/manoeuvre/kuayue2009.htm>. Unit identifications can be derived from information at http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2009-08/10/content_11858323.htm.

The time sequence of movement is found at Xinhua Chart: Locations, Times for PLA's Stride 2009 Series of Exercises CPP20090911540004 Beijing *Xinhua Wang* in Chinese 12 Aug 09, translated by OSC.

4. Video: Jinan MR Motorized Division Holds Drill With Modular Combat, Tactical Units CPM20091015013024 Beijing CCTV-7 in Mandarin 1130 GMT 28 Aug 09 and Video: Lanzhou MR Division in 'Stride 2009' Presents New-Type Combined-Arms Battalion CPM20091015017010 Beijing CCTV-7 in Mandarin 1130 GMT 18 Aug 09, translated by OSC.

5. Video: Beijing MR Armored Division Adopts New Combat Methods in Training CPM20091015017036 Beijing CCTV-7 in Mandarin 1130 GMT 26 Aug 09; Video: Beijing MR Mechanized Infantry Brigade Holds Confrontation Exercise CPM20091015013006 Beijing CCTV-7 in Mandarin 1130 GMT 05 Aug 09; and Clip: Jinan MR Motorized Infantry Brigade Conducts Exercise in Mountain Area CPM20091015017003 Beijing CCTV-7 in Mandarin 1130 GMT 18 Sep 09, translated by OSC.

6. The exact sizes of the personnel drops were not published. However, the PLA Air Force's capacity to airdrop both personnel and equipment is limited, thus requiring the large-scale ground and rail movement of equipment.

7. *People's Daily* has a webpage that compiles reports

on the exercise at <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/8221/69693/171424/index.html>. Unit identifications are made based on information in PRC: PLA To Conduct 'Vanguard-2009' Exercise in Jinan Theater CPP20091011172003 Beijing *Zhongguo Xinwen She* in Chinese 0914 GMT 11 Oct 09. Some sources say this exercise involves 10,000 personnel, while others claim 5,000. With an armored brigade as its core, the lower number is more likely.

8. "China's National Defense in 2006," at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/China/194332.htm>.

China's 11th Ambassadorial Conference Signals Continuity and Change in Foreign Policy

By Bonnie S. Glaser and Benjamin Dooley

This past July the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) convened the 11th Ambassadorial Conference in Beijing. The foreign policy conclave was attended by hundreds of Chinese ambassadors, diplomats, officials responsible for foreign affairs work from the capital as well as select provinces, regions, and municipalities, and individuals from a small number of state owned enterprises. The conference served as both a working session for Chinese foreign policy professionals and an opportunity for party leaders to discuss the prevailing international environment and the future direction of Chinese foreign relations. As in previous years, the conference provided a venue for announcing new policy directions, as well as adjusting diplomatic strategy. Although widely reported in the Chinese media, the conference has received remarkably little attention from both Western and Chinese scholars.

The conference was jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Foreign Affairs Office under the CCP Central Committee. Key speeches were given by Premier Wen Jiabao and Dai Bingguo, and work reports were provided by Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi, and his vice minister, Wang Guangya. The conference's centerpiece was a keynote speech by President Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Flanked by the other eight members of the Standing Committee of the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee, Hu paid tribute to Deng Xiaoping's legacy, while simultaneously hinting at updates to Deng's long-standing foreign policy guideline discouraging China from assuming an active role in shaping international affairs.

Several of the themes in Hu's speech recalled key ideas presented at the 10th Ambassadorial Conference (held in 2004) and the 2006 Central Work Conference on Foreign Affairs (FAWC), the two most recent major foreign policy gatherings. For example, in keeping with both of these meetings, the 11th Ambassadorial conference cited peaceful development and adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence among the primary objectives of Chinese foreign policy. Hu also emphasized two major themes from the FAWC: (1) the increasing linkages between China's external and internal situation brought about by globalization and (2) the necessity of harmonizing the management of foreign and domestic affairs in pursuing national objectives.

In addition to these continuities, Hu's speech included three modest but significant supplements to his previous remarks on foreign policy. First, the speech demonstrated an increased emphasis on the role of "soft power" in building China's comprehensive national power. Second, it called for foreign policy practitioners to adopt a more active diplomatic posture in select areas of foreign affairs. Third, Hu presented an unusually positive perspective on the international system's progress toward multipolarity and a growing consensus among the party leadership on the importance of multilateralism in promoting China's interests.

THE "FOUR STRENGTHS"

Introducing a notable new formulation, Hu urged diplomatic envoys and foreign policy officials to make efforts to give China "more influential power in politics, more competitiveness in the economic field, more affinity in its image," and "more appealing force in morality" (Xinhua News Agency, July 20). The Chinese media quickly dubbed these four areas the "four strengths" (*sili*) [1], and discussions of the significance of Hu's comments soon appeared in the Chinese blogosphere and the online version of the CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily*. Confirming the importance of this new concept, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, in an August interview with China's official news service, Xinhua News Agency, repeated Hu's call to build the four strengths, accentuating the need for "diplomacy and other work ... [to] promote each other and develop in a coordinated manner" (Xinhua News Agency, August 24).

Three of the four strengths (political influence, image appeal and moral suasion) fall under the category of soft power, which for many Chinese encompasses political factors and thus goes beyond Joseph Nye's definition. This emphasis underscores growing recognition by the party leadership of soft power's importance in promoting China's "peaceful

development" strategy. Hu first publicly stressed the value of soft power in his political report to the CCP's 17th Party Congress, but in that speech he focused solely on its cultural dimensions, stating, "We must . . . enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests..." [2]. Hu's statements at the 11th Ambassadorial Conference, however, were notable for addressing the importance of developing the political and moral aspects of soft power as well.

Hu's reference to the importance of developing political influence and moral suasion suggests Beijing's thinking on the issue of soft power is undergoing a significant shift. Since the 1990s, China's academic discourse on soft power has been dominated by two schools. The first defines soft power exclusively in terms of culture and emphasizes its pull factors—what Joseph Nye has described as the ability of "a country to get other countries to *want* what it wants" as opposed to "*ordering* others to do what it wants" [3]. In contrast, the second school focuses on soft power's push factors, maintaining that its essence resides in exerting political influence [4]. Thus far, observers of Chinese politics have credited the first school with having the strongest influence on Beijing's soft power policies. Yet, the debut of the four strengths formulation suggests the second school has boosted its sway among Chinese leaders.

A MORE PROACTIVE STANCE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS?

Implicit in Hu's discussion of the four strengths is a suggestion that soft power can be used as a means for actively pursuing China's foreign policy goals. This contrasts with prior authoritative statements on soft power, which portrayed its role in Chinese foreign policy as primarily passive [5]. Following the Ambassadorial conference, commentators suggested that this more active stance on soft power signaled a departure from *taoguang yanghui*, *yousuo zuowei* (*keep a low profile and bide our time, while also getting something accomplished*), an important guideline of Chinese foreign policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping in 1989 in reaction to the dissolution of Eastern Europe's socialist bloc [6]. For example, an editorial that appeared in the Canadian newspaper *Xingdao Daily* and republished on the web site of the *People's Daily* claimed that Hu's speech signaled that the *taoguang yanghui* concept would be discarded—this is not the case (*People's Daily Online*, July 24). Following the practice of the 2006 FAWC, Deng's eight-character phrase was included in the internal documents of the 11th Ambassadorial Conference, but excluded from public reporting [7].

There are at least two explanations for the omission of Deng's instructions to keep a low profile from media coverage of key leadership statements on foreign policy.

First, Chinese leaders are concerned that western nations have misconstrued the essence of the phrase to the detriment of Chinese interests. Some observers in the West have interpreted the phrase to mean China is “amassing its power and hiding its true intention to dominate the world” [8]. To avoid fueling the “China threat theory,” the expression has been excluded from publicly circulated Chinese policy documents. Second, to many in China the *taoguang yanghui* formulation implies a passive role for China in world affairs, a position that increasingly meets disapproval from a Chinese public eager for Beijing to assert itself globally. As China’s power has grown, nationalism has risen apace, and a growing number of Chinese are disenchanted with the leadership’s unwillingness to flex its newfound muscle. According to Chinese scholars, references to Deng’s dictum are excluded from the media to limit pressure on the leadership to more aggressively protect Chinese interests around the world.

Despite its absence from public reports, Chinese sources insist that *taoguang yanghui*, *yousuo zuowei* remains a fixture of intraparty discussions and internal documents and that there is a consensus to preserve it for the foreseeable future [9]. Yet, at the same time, the leadership has decided to slightly modify Deng’s axiom, signaling an emphasis on the last four characters—the importance of getting something accomplished in Chinese foreign policy. According to leading Chinese scholars, Deng’s eight-character guideline was expanded to ten characters at the 11th Ambassadorial Conference. The new version calls on China to “*uphold (jianchi)* keeping a low profile and bide its time, while *actively (jiji)* getting something accomplished.” Although the difference may seem negligible, it was reported to be the subject of heated dispute. Apparently, other formulations were proposed and rejected. In the end, the decision to add the word “actively” was made by Hu Jintao himself [10].

Specifically, Hu called for China to “actively participate in dealing with the impact of the global financial crisis” (Xinhua News Agency, July 20). There is a growing interest in re-shaping international financial institutions to strengthen the global economy and to provide China with a bigger voice in those institutions. Other possible areas where Beijing may seek to be more assertive were hinted at by Premier Wen, who stated that China should “extensively participate in international cooperation in the nontraditional security area and ... dealing with climate change” (Xinhua News Agency, July 20). This reflects the higher priority China is assigning to transnational issues, especially those resulting from globalization, such as the financial crisis, energy security and climate change. Foreign Minister Yang has referred to this new component of Chinese foreign policy as “functional diplomacy” (*lingyu*

waijiao), which, he said, would receive greater attention as China’s comprehensive national power grows [11].

Even as Chinese leaders agreed to stress the importance of making achievements in China’s foreign policy, they cautioned that China should eschew adopting a leadership role on international issues. The 11th Ambassadorial conference apparently reiterated admonishments to “not take the lead” and “not raise banners,” which Premier Wen Jiabao had made at the FAWC, echoing language Deng used in 1989 (Xinhua News Agency, February 26, 2007). The leadership remains wary of being entangled in overseas predicaments that could divert the country from its main task of development. Indeed, President Hu Jintao placed even greater weight than in the past on the importance of China’s interest in domestic development and the essential need for foreign policy to serve the interests of that development, stating:

The relations between diplomatic work and national development have become closer. We must rely on development, serve development, promote development, and earnestly safeguard China’s development interests (Xinhua News Agency, July 20).

A MULTIPOLAR INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IS EMERGING, BUT HASN’T ARRIVED

In addition to introducing the four strengths, the 11th Ambassadorial Conference was also notable for Hu’s positive assessment of the international system’s progress towards multipolarity. In his speech, Hu suggested that damage to U.S. reputation might help move the international system closer to ‘true’ multipolarity, a situation that most Chinese believe will benefit their national interests. “The prospect of global multipolarization has become clearer (*minglang*),” Hu remarked, a formulation that significantly differed from his statements at the FAWC, where he described the path toward multipolarity as “tortuous” (Xinhua News Agency, July 16; August 23, 2006). This assessment reflects a general trend in China’s perception of the international system that was signaled earlier in the year in China’s 2008 defense white paper, which referred to multipolarity as “gaining momentum (*shenru fazhan*)” [12].

In accordance with this positive outlook, Hu emphasized the increased importance of multilateral diplomacy, stating, China must “actively advocate multilateralism [and] promote democratization of international relations” (Xinhua News Agency, July 20). This change is indicative of the positive lessons Beijing has drawn from its participation in multilateral diplomacy in recent years and demonstrates

an increased willingness to enhance China's role in international organizations. Nevertheless, multilateralism remains positioned in fourth place in China's diplomacy, after relations with the major powers, the neighboring countries and developing countries, unchanged from the 10th Ambassadorial Conference (Xinhua News Agency, August 29, 2004).

Although the Chinese view the process of multipolarization as more conspicuous, they are not ready to declare an end to the unipolar world dominated by the United States. Considerable controversy persists in Chinese debates over whether U.S. power is, in fact, in decline (*China Brief*, July 9). While a growing number of Chinese experts have taken this position, no such official judgment has been made, and financial decision makers are reputed to believe reports of the U.S.'s demise are greatly exaggerated [13].

IMPLICATIONS FOR CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Rather than indicating a sea change in China's foreign policy, as suggested by some commentators, the 11th Ambassadorial Conference is best described as an adjustment (*tiaozheng*) that affirms the trend toward China's more active involvement in select issues that are crucial to the country's national interests.

It is notable that the leadership rejected a proposal by the foreign ministry to hold another large-scale FAWC this year instead of the ambassadorial conference. According to several sources, Chinese leaders concluded that the international situation had not changed dramatically in the three years since the last FAWC, and therefore a more extensive review of Chinese foreign policy was unnecessary [14].

China's foreign policy continues to serve domestic interests. Yet it is no longer sufficient for foreign policy to create a stable external environment to support China's internal reforms, as Deng instructed three decades ago. Now, foreign policy must actively aid in the development of Chinese comprehensive national power. Domestic growth, for example, requires a more pro-active diplomacy to secure resources, markets, and technology.

The decisions taken at the 11th Ambassadorial Conference demonstrate the party leadership's increased interest in building and actively implementing Chinese soft power, as well as desire to deepen involvement in multilateral institutions. The new focus on functional diplomacy recognizes that China's expanding interests require going beyond its traditional emphasis on bilateral relations. The Conference also signals an intention to use China's economic weight, financial resources and growing

geopolitical influence to expand its say in designing any future international and economic system. This suggests a new assertiveness in areas where the Chinese see a close internal-external linkage.

Given the conference's emphasis on the four strengths, soft power can be expected to play a more prominent role in China's foreign policy. Although soft power has long been a hot topic in Chinese intellectual and policy circles, Beijing has not yet articulated a comprehensive strategy for its development and use. Thus far, the development of China's soft power has depended less on the central government than on such disparate actors as state owned enterprises and provincial-level governments. Hu's call to build the four strengths is a natural extension of the FAWC's emphasis on coordinating the activities of Chinese actors overseas to ensure that they serve domestic interests; there are concrete indications that efforts to develop a more comprehensive approach to managing China's soft power are already underway. Xinhua's recent plans to increase the presence of its foreign language networks overseas highlight Beijing's determination to improve its image abroad (The Malaysian Insider, July 23). Wen Jiabao has also called for an expansion of China's "going out" (*zouchuqu*) strategy, which encourages Chinese firms to expand overseas with the explicit, albeit secondary, purpose of strengthening ties with other nations.

The internal debate over the modest reformulation of Deng Xiaoping's *taoguang yanghui* dictum suggests that even though China is willing to become more involved on the global stage, it will do so cautiously and selectively. Although Beijing appears to now be willing to "actively get something accomplished" in certain areas that directly impact domestic stability and development, it is not prepared to abandon its policy of avoiding excessive involvement in overseas commitments. China is not merely paying lip service to Deng's guidance to "keep a low profile;" it remains a central part of China's approach to foreign affairs. Despite calls by Obama administration officials for China to assume a leadership role on critical regional and global security issues, Beijing is likely to remain reluctant to heed this call.

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NOTES

1. Depending on the publication, the four strengths have also been referred to as *si ge li* and *si ge geng youli*.
2. Report to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China, October 15, 2007, <http://>

www.china.org.cn/english/congress/229611.htm

3. J. S Nye Jr, "Soft power," *Foreign Policy* (1990): 153–171.

4. Glaser, Bonnie and Melissa E. Murphy in Carola McGiffert, *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States* (CSIS, 2009), 13.

5. Li Mingjiang, "Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity, Parameter, and Prospect," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* (2008).

6. Four of the eight characters are from a longer 24-character expression that is attributed to Deng Xiaoping. The original phrase called for China to "Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capabilities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership." See, for example, Ding Guangen "Speech at the Third Chinese National Deng Xiaoping Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics Theory Research Conference" (zai quanguo disanci Deng Xiaoping jianshe you zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi lilun yantaohui shang de jianghua), *People's Daily*, December 24, 1996.

7. Interviews with PRC officials and scholars in Beijing and Washington. August, September, and October 2009.

8. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2007* (Department of Defense, 2007), 7.

9. For a dissenting view, see Shulong Chu and Yuli Guo, "China's "Peaceful Development" Strategy and Model (Zhongguo "Heping Fazhan" Zhanlue Ji Moshi), no. 002 (2008): 1–9.

10. Interviews with PRC officials and scholars in Beijing and Washington. August, September, October, 2009.

11. Yang Jiechi, "Safeguard World Peace, Promote Common Development – Commemorate the 60th Anniversary of New China's Diplomacy," *Qiushi Online*, no. 19, Oct. 1, 2009, Open Source Center, CPP20091005710001.

12. Beijing, "China's National Defense in 2008," January 2009.

13. Interview with leading Chinese scholar August 29, 2009, Beijing.

14. Interviews with PRC officials and scholars in Beijing and Washington. August, September, and October 2009.

Maritime Multilateralism: China's Strategy for the Indian Ocean

By Vijay Sakhuja

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been tirelessly working to dispel the 'China threat' perception, which appears to be increasing concomitantly with the country's rapid economic and military rise.

Beijing argues that China's growing initiatives in the Indian Ocean are for 'peaceful purposes' (China.org.cn., June 3). Yet, in recent years, many China watchers in India have captured another side of Beijing's foray that depicts China carving into the Indian Ocean's security architecture by regular incursions into the region and the recent naval deployment in the Gulf of Aden to fight piracy. These initiatives appear based on a strategy that pivots on energy sea-lane security, which can be broadly characterized by the 'string of pearls' theory, 'Malacca dilemma', sale of military hardware at friendly prices to Indian Ocean littorals, maritime infrastructure developments in Pakistan (Gwadar), Sri Lanka (Hambantota), Bangladesh (Chittagong), road/energy pipeline networks and electronic surveillance installations in Myanmar (Burma). The thrust of these traditional security and economic initiatives are complemented by naval diplomacy involving maritime multilateralism with Indian Ocean littorals, which Chinese leaders believe can facilitate the regional perceptions that China's intent in the region is benign. Indeed, these goodwill visits and naval exercises by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) are an important tool to further China's attempts to portray its presence in the Indian Ocean as benign. It has effectively created conditions to develop a broad and substantive agenda for building relations with other nations. In some cases, these initiatives have the potential to translate into strategic partnerships that would consolidate its presence and expand its engagements with the Indian Ocean littorals.

MULTINATIONAL NAVAL EXERCISES

China's forays in the Indian Ocean date back to 1985 when the PLAN made port calls to South Asian ports in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka [1]. Pakistan emerged as an important partner in South Asia for China and today their cooperation covers a wide spectrum of political, economic and strategic issues including the sale and joint development of military hardware and nuclear cooperation. Both sides have also engaged in bilateral/multilateral naval exercises. Commenting on the first ever joint exercise with the Pakistani Navy held off the coast of Shanghai in 2003, Rear Admiral Xiu Ji, a Chinese navy official observed that the exercises were 'the first [for China] with any foreign country' (Defencetalk.com, October 21, 2003). Two years later, the second bilateral exercise was held in the Arabian Sea in November 2005 (Voanews.com, November 24, 2005). In 2007, Pakistan hosted a multinational naval exercise, Aman 2007 (Peace 2007), off Karachi and invited the PLAN to join the exercises. Beside the Pakistani Navy ships, warships from Bangladesh, China, France, Italy, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States engaged in maneuvers in the Arabian Sea (Xinhua News Agency, March 9, 2007). Interestingly, the Commander

of the Chinese flotilla Luo Xianlin was designated as the tactical commander for the joint maritime rescue exercise and the PLAN missile frigate 'Lianyungang' was entrusted with the coordination of the exercise (Chinaview.cn, March 10, 2007). The exercises were significant since it provided the PLAN with the opportunity to coordinate complex maneuvers with other naval forces. In 2009, the PLAN once again participated in Aman 2009, which was held in the Arabian Sea, and this time it carried out exercises along with 19 foreign naval ships (Theasiandefence.com, March 17).

Although the PLAN has engaged in bilateral and multinational naval exercises, it is important to point out that deployments for multinational operations are relatively different and more complex. Conducting multinational operations involves structured communication procedures, synergy among different operational doctrines, establishing mutually agreed rules of engagement (RoE), helicopter controlling actions, and common search and rescue procedures, which the PLAN is still developing.

SHIFTING GEOGRAPHY OF PEACE MISSION

A close partnership between China and Russia is evident in the maritime domain and rests on joint naval exercises, Chinese acquisition of Russian naval hardware including ships, submarines and aircraft and high-level naval exchanges [2]. In 1999, the two navies conducted a joint naval exercise that involved the Russian Pacific Fleet and the PLAN's Eastern Fleet (*China Daily*, July 8, 2004) and the 2001 joint exercises included Russian strategic bombers. Peace Mission 2005, another naval exercise involving the PLA Navy and the Russian Navy was conducted under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the six-nation security group. The exercises were conducted off the East Russian coast-Shandong Peninsula in northeastern China (News.bbc.co.uk, August 18, 2005). Peace Mission 2007 focused on counter-terrorism and was conducted on land (En.rian.ru July 24, 2007).

Interestingly, the two sides utilized their presence in the Gulf of Aden and conducted Blue Peace Shield 2009, a joint exercise involving counter piracy operations, replenishment-at-sea, and live firing (Defencetalk.com, September 18; Taiwan News, September 17). The exercise showcased Chinese intention to be more transparent in its deployment, test interoperability with foreign navies and the PLAN's ability to engage in a range of operations in distant waters.

ENGAGING STRAITS OF MALACCA LITTORALS

China has adopted diplomacy as a tool to ally apprehensions

among the Straits of Malacca littorals thus setting aside their fears that Beijing may deploy its navy in times of crisis to escort Chinese flagged vessels transiting through the Strait. Further, China is averse to any extra regional attempts to deploy naval vessels in the Strait for the safety of merchant traffic transiting. For instance, in 2000, it strongly objected to Japanese attempts to deploy vessels to patrol the Straits of Malacca where shipping had been threatened by piracy (Sspconline.org, April 11, 2005). Instead, it has offered financial and technological assistance to improve the safety and security of merchant traffic transiting the Strait of Malacca. In 2005, during the International Maritime Organization (IMO) meeting in Jakarta, China reiterated its position of supporting the littoral states in enhancing safety and security in the Strait (Xinhua News Agency, September 7, 2005; *China Brief*, April 12, 2006). In 2005, China offered to finance the project for the replacement of navigational aids damaged during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the estimated cost for the project is pegged at \$276,000 [3].

BENEFITS OF MULTINATIONAL EXERCISES FOR PLAN

Multinational naval operations are fast gaining higher priority in the PLAN's strategic thinking. There are at least three reasons. The first relates to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the international disaster relief operations in Southeast Asia-South Asia. PLAN's conspicuous absence in the operations had exposed the limitation of a rising power and its navy. As a result, China was excluded from the core group comprising the United States, Australia and India who quickly deployed their ships for relief efforts. The Chinese Navy's absence might also be attributed to its lack of experience in working with multinational forces.

The second reason for participation in multinational exercises is prospects for interoperability with international navies. Further, these operations assist the PLAN in identifying international trends in naval weaponry, gathering information on operating procedures and gaining a better understanding of the changing nature of naval warfare. The third reason is that multinational exercises help China showcase to the international naval community its military industrial prowess and PLAN technological sophistication.

Yet, China embraces selective maritime multilateralism. For instance, China did not participate in the U.S. Naval War College's International Sea Power Symposium in Newport (Bernama [Malaysia], October 1). This year's event is the 40th anniversary and provides an occasion for the heads of the world's navies and coast guards to discuss issues of mutual interest (Navy.mil, October 8). The 2009 Symposium focused on common maritime challenges

and explored prospects for enhancing maritime security cooperation, including combating piracy.

IMPEDIMENTS TO CHINESE MARITIME MULTILATERALISM

Several Chinese initiatives in the Indian Ocean have stirred considerable unease among some regional powers, particularly India, which has a tendency to perceive every Chinese move in the region as a step toward its 'strategic encirclement.' Indian strategists have often argued that China's naval capability is fast growing and would soon be capable of conducting sustained operations in the Indian Ocean supported by the maritime infrastructure being built in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma). Indian fears are accentuated by a suggestion by a Chinese admiral to Admiral Timothy J. Keating, then-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) of dividing the Indo-Pacific region into two areas of responsibility between the United States and China (Navyseals.com, May 6, 2007).

According to the Indian press, the Chinese naval officer stated, "You, the United States, take Hawaii East and we, China, will take Hawaii West and the Indian Ocean. Then you will not need to come to the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean and we will not need to go to the Eastern Pacific. If anything happens there, you can let us know and if something happens here, we will let you know" (*Indian Express*, May 15).

New Delhi has not been receptive to Chinese requests to join Indian Ocean multilateral maritime security initiatives such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the trilateral grouping of India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), which has a significant maritime component in its interactions. IONS is an initiative by 33 Indian Ocean littorals wherein their navies or the principal maritime security agencies discuss issues of maritime security, including Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster-Relief (HADR) throughout the Indian Ocean Region (Indiannavy.nic.in, February 15, 2008). The PLAN had approached the Indian Navy to 'explore ways to accommodate Beijing as either an observer or associate member'; however, New Delhi turned down the request because, in its perspective, there was 'no strategic rationale to let China be associated with IONS as it was strictly restricted to littoral states of the Indian Ocean' (*Indian Express*, April 21).

The IBSA trilateral grouping is an offshoot of the broader South-South cooperation started in 2003. Although cooperation in the security domain was not envisaged at its inception, maritime security issues (sailing regatta, trilateral naval exercises IBSAMAR, and high-level naval exchanges) have gradually gained momentum in the discussions. China has been exploring the possibility of

joining IBSA, but the fact that "IBSA's common identity is based on values such as democracy, personal freedoms and human rights" preclude its membership (*The Wall Street Journal*, April 7).

In response, China craftily has attempted to dent the IBSA architecture and wean some of the actors away through bilateral political-military engagements much to the consternation of other partners. Beijing has adopted a sophisticated strategy to build-up bilateral military relations with Brazil, and Brasilia has offered to help train Chinese naval pilots on NAe São Paulo, which is a Clemenceau class aircraft carrier (*China Brief*, June 12). According to discussions (August 2009) that this author had with some Indian naval analysts, there are fears that the above collaboration could well be the springboard for reciprocity involving the training of Brazilian naval officers in nuclear submarine operations by the PLAN and joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean. Further, these initiatives would add to China's power projection capability and could be the catalyst for frequent forays in the Indian Ocean.

Although the Chinese strategy of maritime multilateralism is premised on cooperative engagements, Beijing is leveraging its naval power for strategic purposes. The development of military maritime infrastructure in the Indian Ocean would provide China access and a basing facility for conducting sustained operations and emerge as a stakeholder in Indian Ocean security architecture. Maritime multilateralism has so far produced positive gains for China and would be the preferred strategy for conduct of its international relations in the future, particularly with the Indian Ocean littorals.

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[The views expressed in the above article are the author's own and do not reflect the policy or position of the Indian Council of World Affairs.]

NOTES

1. John W. Garver, "China's Approaches to South Asia and the Former Soviet States" U.S.- China Economic and Security Review Commission, available at http://www.uscc.gov/hearings/2005hearings/written_testimonies/05_07_21_22wrts/garver_john_wrts.pdf.
2. Richard Weitz, "China-Russia Security Relations: Strategic Parallelism without Partnership or Passion?" available at <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>.
3. Hasjim Djalal, "The Development of Cooperation on the Straits of Malacca and Singapore," available at

http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/eng/current/malacca_sympo/6.doc.

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