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In a Fortnight

By Peter Mattis

CHINESE MILITARY CREATES STRATEGIC PLANNING DEPARTMENT

On November 22, Chinese President Hu Jintao and the Central Military Commission (CMC) issued a directive creating a "Strategic Planning Department" (*zhanlüe guihua bu*). The new department will fall under the People's Liberation Army (PLA) General Staff Department as the twelfth such unit (Xinhua, November 22; *Beijing Evening News*, November 23). CMC Vice Chairman Guo Boxiong stated the new department would improve the quality and effectiveness of the PLA's strategic management (Xinhua, November 24; Caixin, November 23; *PLA Daily*, November 23). Indeed, the department marks a departure from the PLA's previously uncoordinated or personalized efforts at strategic assessment, and it is not clear that those other efforts linked planning to military reforms (*Lianhe Zaobao*, November 25).

The main responsibility of the Strategic Planning Department is planning the future of "army construction" (*jundui jianshe*) development. Additional responsibilities include researching major strategic issues, drawing up development plans and reform programs and raising recommendations for resource allocation to deal with cross-cutting issues for PLA headquarters and the CMC. The department also would have the authority to investigate and assess army construction efforts,

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suggesting it would provide a bridge between PLA strategic thinking and doctrinal innovation or weapon systems development (*Ta Kung Pao*, November 24; *PLA Daily*, November 23; Xinhua, November 22). Shanghai-based military expert, Ni Lexiong, speculated the new department's responsibilities could go well beyond military affairs to include cultural, diplomatic, economic, energy security and trade issues related to national security (*South China Morning Post*, November 24).

PLA spokesmen downplayed the significance of this development, calling it a normal development to deal with the challenges of the times. Chinese international affairs commentators generally concurred. Li Jie, a researcher with the Naval Military Studies Research Institute, complemented the functions of the Operations Department—also known as the GSD First Department—and helped integrate individual strategic planning efforts spread across the PLA's disparate elements (Sohu.com, November 27).

In a widely-reprinted, Chinese-language Hong Kong press article, however, state-run Chinese media drew attention to the department as helping the PLA develop the "self-confidence" to act on the world stage commensurate with China's rise (Xinhua, November 24; *South China Morning Post*, November 24). Taiwanese media guessed the department would focus on the PLA's planning and assessment needs related to the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait—a view contradicted by Chinese talking heads who pointed out this was not the first or the only such department in China or worldwide (*Global Times*, November 26). While the views of such pundits may be suspect, they do suggest the new department will be focused on broader strategic issues than the PLA's immediate interests in Taiwan and should assist senior PLA leaders with shaping a future global role for the Chinese military.

Military commentator Major General Luo Yuan noted China's national security and "army construction" faced many new challenges and situations, including the ongoing revolution in military affairs and an increasingly complex security environment. These challenges require high-level coordination between PLA and government elements, among the PLA services, and with the CMC to ensure forward-looking policy. Luo stated he believed the formation of the Strategic Planning Department signified the PLA already had a clear strategy and the new department would serve an auditing function, helping to keep PLA development focused on the military's goals (People's Net, November 22).

Regardless how this development is read, the creation of the Strategic Planning Department shows senior PLA leaders are acting upon military assessments of the increasing complexity of military affairs (*PLA Daily*, August 4; "The Pentagon-PLA Disconnect: China's Self Assessments of its Military Capabilities," *China Brief*, July 3, 2008). The real question is whether the PLA can break through the challenge of linking strategic thinking with implementation—a challenge that has bedeviled strategic planners in most modern militaries. The best indicator for how well the department is prepared for this challenge probably will be its staffing. To connect weapons development, the non-material aspects of army construction, planning and trends in military affairs, the department will need a diverse mix of personnel from across the PLA that includes both thinkers and do-ers as well as a well-respected leader able to reach the Chief of the General Staff and the CMC.

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Beijing Adopts Multi-Pronged Approach to Parry Washington's Challenge

By Willy Lam

Relations between China and the United States have taken a confrontational turn in the wake of a series of initiatives taken by President Barack Obama in his recent trip to Hawaii and Asia. While taking part for the first time in the East Asia Summit in Bali, Obama and his aides reiterated the U.S. commitment to ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. They stressed that settlement to sovereignty rows in the area must be in accordance with international law, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Obama approved the sale of 24 F16-C/D jetfighters

to Indonesia, which—together with the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan—has disputed China's claims to the entire South China Sea. During a stopover in Australia, Obama announced that up to 2,500 marines would be stationed at Darwin, North Australia. Given that Darwin is a mere 600 miles from the southern tip of the Sea, the move is interpreted as an effort to boost U.S. ability to intervene in the flashpoint zone. Meanwhile, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is scheduled to visit Burma next month in an apparent effort to improve ties with China's long-standing client state. Finally, at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum in Hawaii, Obama made a big push for the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), a potential free trade area for some ten nations that do not include China. All these measures seem to exacerbate what Beijing perceives as an "anti-China containment policy" spearheaded by Washington (*Washington Post*, November 15; Associated Press, November 17; *Wall Street Journal*, November 18).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership has taken multiple steps to counter the fusillades unleashed by the United States' first "Pacific President." At the rhetorical level, commentators in the state media as well as semi-official academics have warned Washington's bid to be "back in Asia" may endanger regional peace and stability in addition to harming Sino-U.S. relations. In a strongly worded commentary, the Xinhua News Agency asserted the Obama administration's maneuvers were geared toward imposing U.S. leadership in Asia for the self-serving goal of rendering the 21st century "America's Pacific century." "If the United States sticks to its Cold War mentality and continues to engage with Asian nations in a self-assertive way, it is doomed to incur repulsion in the region," Xinhua warned. The party mouthpiece added that recent U.S. policies could result in "sparking disputes and encroaching on others' interests," which might in turn jeopardize "the region's stability and prosperity" (Xinhua News Agency, November 19; Agence France-Presse, November 19). According to Renmin University's U.S. specialist Shi Yinhong, Sino-U.S. relations have entered a "very important new stage." "It is very obvious that the United States is aiming to contain and constrain China," he said. Tsinghua University international affairs expert Sun Zhe noted the U.S. gambit in Asia "has gone from the level of slogans to diplomatic action in a speedy and effective manner." He expressed fears that contention between China and the United States "has gone from under the table to center stage" (*Ming Pao* [Hong Kong], November 20; Chinadigitaltimes.net, November 19).

Given the top priority that China has attached to relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) bloc as well as an early settlement of South China Sea disputes, much of Chinese leaders' reactions have focused on preventing the United States from "meddling" in the sensitive area. Upon his arrival in Bali, Premier Wen Jiabao noted sovereignty conflicts "should be resolved among directly related sovereign countries through friendly consultation and negotiation in a peaceful way." "Powers outside of the region should not interfere under whatever pretexts," he added (Xinhua News Agency, November 18; Sina.com, November 19). Largely owing to Chinese pressure, the Philippines was unable to raise a motion at Bali calling for the resolution of the South China Sea issue through an international framework. This was despite the fact that during a visit to Manila last week, Secretary Clinton vowed to provide "greater support for [the Philippines'] external defense." Washington also gave the Philippine defense forces another coast-guard vessel. "We are strongly of the opinion that [the dispute that] exists primarily in the West Philippines Sea between the Philippines and China should be resolved peacefully," she said, using the Philippine term for the South China Sea (Voice of America, November 17; *Philippine Star* [Manila], November 19).

Beyond rhetoric, Beijing has adopted a multi-pronged approach to blunt Obama's diplomatic offensive. The first is to reassure ASEAN members that Beijing harbors no hegemonic intentions and that it is willing to abide by the "rules of the game" arrived at with other sovereignty claimants. In his Bali speech, Premier Wen reiterated China's commitment to the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC), which Beijing concluded with ASEAN in 2002. The DOC was a non-binding set of pledges regarding safety of navigation and the peaceful use of the waters. "We hope relevant parties would take into concern the overall situation of regional peace and stability, and do something more conducive to mutual trust and cooperation," Wen said. He added Beijing would continue to stick to the principle of "friendly negotiation and consultation in a peaceful way" to resolve South China Sea issues (China News Agency, November 19; *China Daily*, November 19). Chinese officials however have reiterated Beijing's insistence

on bilateral talks with individual claimants—and not a China-ASEAN dialogue—to settle sovereignty rows. Most ASEAN claimants are convinced that a multilateral approach, possibly involving outside parties including the United States, would strengthen their negotiation positions via-a-vis China.

Secondly, Beijing is wielding the time-tested "economics card" to gain the good will of ASEAN members, especially claimants to the South China Sea. Wen's speech at the Bali summit emphasized the win-win scenarios of enhanced business ties with ASEAN under the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area and other regional arrangements. He put forward a five-point proposal for boosting the regional economy, which included mutual investments, technological transfers and improvement of intra-regional infrastructure. "The Chinese side is willing to enthusiastically expand its investment in ASEAN countries, enhance the transfer of advanced and suitable technology and to jointly raise [our] industrial competitiveness," Wen said. According to Zhang Weiwei, a strategist at the semi-official Chunqiu Composite Research Institute, Beijing should boost its overseas development aid program, including a possible "Southeast Asian version of the Marshall Plan." Professor Zhang added this would not only improve China's economic and political ties with Asian countries but also minimize the damages that the TPP might do to China (Xinhua News Agency, November 19; *Global Times*, November 17).

Indeed, enhancement of economic cooperation under the China-ASEAN FTA has the additional benefit of parrying the threat posed by the TPP, which is viewed by Chinese officials and scholars as a plot by Washington to "exclude" China from a potentially lucrative regional trading arrangement. According to Renmin University politics professor Peng Zhongying, the TPP is but a ploy with which "[a United States] that is in economic decline tries to pry open the markets of economically prosperous Asia-Pacific nations." While American officials have indicated China is in theory able to apply for membership, TPP criteria relating to minimal state interference in the market as well as high labor standards would seem to militate against Chinese participation. Among ASEAN members, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Vietnam have expressed an interest in joining TPP. Other aspiring members include Australia, New Zealand, Chile, Peru, Canada, Mexico and Japan. (*Washington Post*, November 13; *Global Times*, November 19; *Mainichi Daily* [Tokyo] November 13).

While gunning to win the hearts and minds—or at least the wallets—of the majority of Asia-Pacific countries, Beijing is poised to use the time-honored tactic of "killing the chicken to scare the monkey" (*sha ji xia hou*)so as to penalize "troublemakers" such as the Philippines and Vietnam. The strategy was laid out in an editorial of the *Global Times* titled "Cold-shoulder the Philippines: let it pay the price." The provocative state-run tabloid said "In the process of 'penalizing' the Philippines, China must not go overboard, lest the region's fear of China increases." China's punishment of the Philippines however must be "forceful," the editorial added, "so that the Philippines has to pay a substantial price." The mass-circulation paper suggested the best way is to "cold-shoulder the Philippines even as China's cooperation with the entire Southeast Asia becomes more entrenched." According to Renmin University foreign policy expert Jin Canrong, China should "use different tactics toward different Southeast Asian countries." He proposed imposing economic sanctions on countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam, "which have made the most noises" against China. "China can send a message to these countries by decreasing aid to them or temporarily stopping Chinese tourists from visiting them," Professor Jin indicated (*Global Times*, November 19, November 17; BBC News, November 17).

Beijing's potentially most potent weapon to whip ASEAN members into line is its fast-modernizing navy. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is developing a blue-water fleet that boosts sophisticated hardware ranging from nuclear submarines to aircraft carriers. There have been reports the past few months that the PLAN will base its fourth fleet—which eventually may consist of two to three aircraft carrier battle groups—in Sanya, a city in south Hainan Island. Sanya sits on the northern tip of the South China Sea. This armada will complement the Qingdao-based North Sea Fleet, the Ningbo-based East Sea Fleet and the Zhanjiang-based South Sea fleet. China's naval power projection reached a new height last August with the maiden voyage of its first aircraft carrier, the Varyag, which was a refitted version of a Ukrainian vessel that China acquired in the 1990s. PLAN shipyards are believed to be building up to three Chinese-designed state-of-the-art carriers that

could come on stream in the latter half of this decade (Korea Herald [Seoul] September 9; Business Standard [New Delhi], August 16; China Daily, July 29).

The message that Beijing does not rule out a military solution to the South China Sea imbroglio has been sent via the *Global Times*, which is often regarded as a propaganda vehicle for hawkish elements in the Chinese establishment. In a much-noted commentary in late October, *Global Times* warned that aggressive sovereignty claimants to the South China Sea such as Vietnam and the Philippines should "mentally prepare for the sound of cannons." "China should not give pride of place to force and use the military option as its national policy," it pointed out. "Yet China must also not rely solely on negotiations. In times of exigencies, it should 'kill one to scare off the hundred'." More recently, *Global Times* ran an article by National Defense University strategist Fan Jinfa that the authorities should take a pugilistic approach to prevent other nations from grabbing Chinese territories in the South China Sea. "Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines have occupied territories in the Spratly Islands," said Fan, a former naval captain. "We should be more proactive in order to enhance *de facto* occupation and control" of islets in the disputed waters (*Global Times*, November 11, October 25; Reuters, October 25).

Will Beijing's game plan work? Much depends on the Obama's administration's ability to gain the support of heavyweight countries in the Asia-Pacific theatre to participate in its "pivot-on-Asia" strategy. Indeed, much of the CCP leadership's nervousness stems from the fact that for the first time, India and Japan seem to be joining the alleged U.S. attempt to contain China through "internationalizing" the South China Sea issue. Indian state oil companies have signed agreements with Hanoi to exploit oil and gas close to islets that are also claimed by China. Tokyo recently concluded defense cooperation and intelligence exchange deals with both Vietnam and the Philippines. At Bali, the Japanese delegation inked a separate statement with ASEAN regarding ways and means to ensure unobstructed navigation in the South China Sea. Tokyo also has backed Manila's effort to seek an "international solution" to territorial brawls in the contested waters. Despite problems in the Japanese economy, Tokyo last week pledged $25 billion in infrastructure-related aid and loans to ASEAN members (*Ming Pao*, November 19; Reuters, November 18; China News Service, November 18).

Yu Zhirong, a researcher at the China Oceanic Development Research Institute, asked a highly relevant question regarding the country's run-in with a host of nations over the South China Sea. "China's strength has increased and it should be striking fears [in the hearts of its neighbors]," he wrote in a recent article. "How come it faces enemies at the front and back over efforts to protect its maritime territorial rights?" (Xinhuanet.com, November 9; Sina.com, November 9). One answer to Yu's question could be that China's precipitous rise—coupled with its formidable projection of hard power in Asia—has given the United States an opportunity to stage a "return to Asia" campaign in the capacity of a protector to nations that shudder at the prospect of a fire-spitting dragon. As illustrated by the conversations that Obama had with President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen in respectively Hawaii and Bali, both the United States and China however seem to prefer win-win scenarios to zero-sum games. The outcome of the epic struggle between the world's sole superpower and the fast-rising quasi-superpower depends then, on the give-and-take between the two giants—as well as their ability to influence other stakeholders in the volatile region.

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China and Pakistan: Evolving Focus on Stability within Continuity

By Samantha Hoffman

On November 16th, a two-week joint anti-terrorism exercise, Friendship-2011 (*Youyi*-2011), commenced between China and Pakistan. The exercise was the fourth

instalment of the "Friendship" counter-terrorism series. The initial 2004 exercise took place in Xinjiang, China, near the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and marked the first time a foreign army was on Chinese soil for a military exercise. This year, the exercise took place in Mangla, Pakistan, not far from Islamabad (*People's Daily*, November 21). The anti-terror drills simulated low-intensity conflict scenarios and emphasized cooperation and information sharing (Xinhua, November 14; CNTV, November 15). Friendship-2011 included 260 Chinese soldiers, under deputy commander of the Lanzhou Military Region Zhao Jianzhong, and 230 Pakistani soldiers (Xinhua, November 18; *People's Daily*, November 15). In May this year, Pakistani President Yousaf Raza Gilani visited Beijing to mark the 60th anniversary of the China-Pakistan relations. During the visit, China agreed to give Pakistan an emergency supply of 50 JF-17 multirole fighter jets (Xinhua, May 21). Pakistan currently has 38 indigenously manufactured JF-17s, which first came into service in 2009, but these use a Chinese manufactured avionics system [1]. The new 50 will include a more advanced Italian avionics system (Xinhua, June 7). In a year where questions were often raised about the significance of the Sino-Pakistani "strategic partnership," these neither outstanding nor surprising events once again highlighted the complexities of this relationship. Friendship-2011 demonstrates China's more recent emphasis on counter-terrorism in its relationship with Pakistan, whereas the JF-17 agreement is just one example of China's continuing status as Pakistan's closest friend.

Following the U.S. attack on Osama bin Laden's Abbottabad compound in May, news reports frequently have discussed the U.S.-Pakistan relationship in contrast to the China-Pakistan relationship. Since the attack, Pakistan has attempted to draw China closer. In August, anonymous officials suggested Pakistan allowed China to access wreckage of the downed U.S. stealth helicopter left behind during the Abbottabad attack—a charge China emphatically denied as "groundless and ridiculous" (Xinhua, August 17; *New York Times*, August 15). Whether or not this accusation is true, China has pushed back against Pakistan's efforts—China does not benefit from negative U.S.-Pakistan relations (Xinhua, September 27; Caixun September 28; Xinhua, May 25). At the same time, China has continued to emphasize the strength of its ties with Pakistan. In his May meeting with President Gilani, Chinese President Hu Jintao said China is "willing to work with Pakistan to deepen the all-weather friendship and strengthen all-round cooperation and push bilateral strategic partnership to a new level" (Xinhua, May 21). While it remains reasonably clear why China is important to Pakistan, the reverse remains difficult to explain. Therefore, it is pertinent to pose two basic questions about the Sino-Pakistani relationship: (1) What does China hope to achieve in Pakistan? (2) What tactics does China use to meet these objectives and, in the future, how might circumstances force China to adapt these tactics?

As the counter-terrorism focus of the "Friendship" exercises suggests, China's immediate interests in Pakistan have evolved from the established framework of Sino-Pakistani relations. China has long been a primary supplier of military equipment to Pakistan and has long supported Pakistan on defense and security matters, including collaboration with the Pakistani nuclear program. China's defense-related assistance to Pakistan dates back to the 1960s, following the 1962 Sino-Indian border war and the 1965 Pakistan-India war [2]. India is the historical security issue driving the Sino-Pakistani relationship. Nowadays, regardless of the periodic continuation of inflammatory rhetoric between China and India about the other's military build-up, China does not appear to have an interest in using Pakistan to strategically offset India. Perhaps this is why reports emerged to coincide with Friendship-2011 that China was considering joint military exercises with India in 2012 (*People's Daily*, November 15). Some observers have argued China in the future will seek to use Pakistan as a transportation route for energy resources that would avoid the Strait of Malacca, which is perceived as a risk to China's energy security. After all the $1 billion Pakistani Port of Gwadar, where a pipeline could conceivably originate and cross into China via Xinjiang, was opened in 2007 thanks to substantial Chinese investment amounting to roughly 80 per cent of the project's cost [3]. Nonetheless, these suggestions are predicated on the idea that eventually the region will be stable enough for a pipeline to securely pass through. So at best this goal is secondary.

Instability in Pakistan probably is the most immediate security concern impacting China's policy toward Pakistan. Pakistan faces many sources of instability, including: terrorism and extremism; ineffective and/or fragmented

government, military and security forces; economic turmoil; and unstable borders. Inside of Pakistan, Chinese citizens have been subject to terrorism and violence, where workers have been kidnapped and killed on several occasions in recent years. More importantly, addressing instability in Pakistan is linked to the Chinese domestic political goal of preventing instability and extremism from penetrating the already volatile Xinjiang province. Xinjiang province has a disputed history, and many of its Muslim Uighur residents do not identify themselves as being part of China. The province is home to the separatist 'East Turkistan Independence Movement' (ETIM), which actively foments unrest and some violence. ETIM and other Uighur dissidents threaten Beijing's declared core interest in territorial integrity and preserving the Chinese Communist Party (*China's Peaceful Development White Paper*, September 2011).

In recent years, China's Uighur problem has grown in importance for the all-weather relationship. Extremists within the ETIM are known to have received training in Pakistan before carrying out attacks in Xinjiang, creating a connection between Pakistani instability and China's ethnic tensions (Xinhua, August 1). Recently, the most substantial unrest was the July 2009 riots, known in China as the "7-5" incident, which left at least 197 dead and 1,700 injured (Xinhua, July 6, 2009; The Guardian [UK], August 24, 2009). A year earlier, just before the Beijing Olympics, 16 police officers were killed in the Xinjiang city Kashgar, which is located close to the Pakistan border. Reports said the ETIM-linked attackers were "all trained overseas" (Sina, August 6, 2008). Observers have since speculated that tension has emerged between China and Pakistan. The issue emerged once again this summer after attacks in the Xinjiang cities of Kashgar and Hotan left 12 dead and 31 injured ("Uighur Unrest in Xinjiang Shakes Sino-Pakistani Relations", *Terrorism Monitor*, August 19). This time Beijing publically stated some of the leaders of the attacks were trained in Pakistan (*Terrorism Monitor*, August 19; *People's Daily*, August 5; Xinhua, August 1). Despite these problems, it is evident that China has not allowed the Uighur issue to challenge its "all-weather" relationship with Pakistan, but rather has used it to drive further engagement.

China's concerns about Uighurs have translated directly into diplomatic action, increasing the number of already frequent exchanges. For Beijing, preventing and responding to Xinjiang's "terrorist" threats requires supporting Islamabad's counter-terrorism efforts. Furthermore, it is seen that working with South Asian countries to "jointly safeguard regional peace and tranquillity" is the best way to ensure stability in Pakistan and, by extension, Xinjiang [4]. In September, following the Kashgar and Hotan attacks, State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Meng Jianzhu made an official visit to Pakistan. In his talks with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, Meng stressed the "'three forces of evil' – terrorism, extremism and separatism, drug trafficking, illegal immigration and transnational crime," and said that these problems are a real threat requiring Pakistan's "mutual support and cooperation" (www.gov.cn, September 27; Xinhua, September 27). Similarly, in May 2011 talks with President Gilani, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stressed the issue of fighting terrorism and instability in Pakistan. He said China's position has been firm and consistent in urging the international community to "understand and support Pakistan in maintaining domestic stability and achieving economic and social development," (Xinhua, May 18).

China's diplomatic strategy in Pakistan partially explains the direct focus of China's current military and economic assistance policy; on the other hand, military and economic aid also simply reflects China's long-term support. China has been and continues to be Islamabad's primary supplier of matériel. Much of this military equipment China provides does not directly serve counter-terrorism goals, but more broadly supports the needs of Pakistan. Beyond the JF-17 agreement, other more recent examples of China's role in providing military equipment to Pakistan includes assistance in the development of the Pakistan Navy's Sword-class (F-22) frigates and a contract for at least 36 CAC J-10 multirole fighter aircraft to Pakistan, first delivery expected in 2012 or 2013 [5]. China's status as the primary supplier of matériel is long-standing, and recent support is an unsurprising product of normal Sino-Pakistani military relations. Other aspects of China's military assistance to Pakistan are reflective of China's deep relationship with Pakistan, and also have a tangible link to China's goal of ensuring conditions of stability. In October the People's Liberation Army (PLA) sent a 50-member medical team on a humanitarian mission to the worst hit areas (*People's Daily*, October 23; Huanqiu, September 12; Xinhua, October 19). With this so-called "Flood Diplomacy" (*kanghong waijiao*), two aspects of China's policy can be understood. First, China has long

offered "unconditional" and "enduring" aid to its "old friend", the Pakistani government, and will continue to do so since this is part of China's responsibility in the relationship [6]. Second, aid "more or less reflects national strategic needs", but for China pursuing long-term, not short-term, interests is the objective [7]. Flood aid to Pakistan, will not only address immediate needs of its long-term friend, but also have the side effect of contributing to long-term stabilization efforts.

For now, China's push for Pakistan's collaboration in efforts to secure the Sino-Pakistani border may be effective, especially so as Islamabad has been forced to look to Beijing for support over the past year. Worsening instability in Pakistan, deteriorating U.S.-Pakistani relations, and an eventual withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan will leave a hole in security enforcement in South Asia. Given these future changes, China may eventually face a more difficult decision regarding how best to manage relations with Pakistan in order to ensure domestic and regional stability. The question is how.

Sometime in late 2009 a policy debate behind closed doors in Beijing questioned whether to change tactics in Pakistan, raising the question of whether China is willing to engage militarily in Pakistan in order to protect its interests [8]. In recent months, journalists have speculated—and China has denied—Beijing might be considering a military presence in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) that border Xinjiang and where Uighurs have received terrorist training (*Asia Times*, October 26). Whatever has been discussed behind closed doors, the Chinese media has picked up the question both this year and in 2009. One commentary in Xinhua concluded "If the violent forces in Xinjiang gain ground, China may be forced to directly intervene militarily in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but this is clearly not the situation China would like to see," (Xinhua, September 27).

For now, China has continued to choose support instead of intervention and Beijing has given little indication that it would be willing to use military force in Pakistan. Events of the past three years however suggest China is increasingly willing to use lmiited force to protect its strategic interests. In 2008, China first deployed PLAN vessels for "humanitarian" anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden off of Somalia. More recently, China has indicated increased willingness to protect strategic interests in its response to the "10-5 incident" in the Mekong River which left 13 Chinese sailors dead. China's efforts following the incident have resulted in a security agreement between China, Burma, Laos and Thailand, and speculation that China may contribute up to 1,000 security personnel to enforce security along the Mekong River ("Mekong Murders Spur Beijing to Push New Security Cooperation", *China Brief*, November 11). Pakistan would require a fundamentally different type of intervention and for the foreseeable future Beijing is highly unlikely to consider or desire to take part in any intervention.

China's immediate security interest in Pakistan is stability. This interest is limited to Beijing's need to control a small number of Uighur militants who threaten stability on China's far western border. Ensuring stability in Pakistan, particularly in the FATA, will help Beijing control separatism and extremism in Xinjiang province. For now, China's counter-terrorism concerns are directly addressed through goodwill and unconditional support of its long-term friend. If this year is any indication, the stability of Pakistan is worsening, not improving. So the question is how long will China's tactic continue to work if the situation in Pakistan continues to worsen? If China's efforts no longer succeed in the future what is China prepared to do to ensure its, rather limited, strategic interest in Pakistan?

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Chinese Air Force Officer Recruitment, Education and Training

By Kenneth W. Allen

As the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to emphasize the need to raise the quality of its personnel, analyzing the recruitment, education and training of the officer corps becomes all the more important for assessing Chinese military modernization, especially for the technology-dependent PLA Air Force (PLAAF). Based on the available information, it is unclear whether the PLAAF has succeeded in reforming officer recruitment, education and training to build a more highly-educated officer corps capable of commanding, operating and supporting a growing high-tech force in a combined-arms and joint environment. It is clear however that a number of challenges remain, including limited opportunities for joint training in the academy and a lack of centralized management.

PLAAF officers come from military academic institutions, a Defense Student (Reserve Officer) Program and direct recruitment of civilian graduates. The PLAAF, which has multiple officer academic institutions, separates its education and training system at each level (cadet, basic, intermediate and advanced) based on the five officer career tracks: military/command, political, logistics, equipment and special technical. Whereas all PLAAF academic institution graduates receive their specialty training as a cadet, Defense Students and directly recruited graduates must receive their specialty training after graduation. In addition, almost all new officers serve a one-year probationary period and must serve at least eight years before leaving the military.

Finally, as the PLAAF continues to build up the size and education level of its NCO corps with civilian college students and graduates and increases the number of officers from the Defense Student Program, it has greatly reduced the number of enlisted personnel chosen to become officers after attending an officer academic institution.

To address these issues, this article is organized into the following seven sections. Recruitment, education and training for pilot cadets will be covered in a later *China Brief* article.

1. Education and training goals and management
2. Non-aviation cadets
3. PLAAF officers from other PLA academic institutions
4. Direct recruiting of civilian college graduates
5. Defense Student (Reserve Officer) Program
6. Post-graduation assignments, education, training, grades and ranks
7. Party membership

Education and Training Goals and Management

Since the late 1990s, the PLA's overall education and training goal for its officer corps is to train commanding officers for joint operations and high-level support officers in technological innovation (*China's National Defense in 2010*). To help accomplish this, the PLA has reduced the number of officer and noncommissioned officer (NCO) military academic institutions to 67, which are divided into two types: those for academic credentials and those for pre-assignment education. The former offers undergraduate education for pre-commission officers and graduate education for officers. The latter consists of basic-, intermediate- and advanced-level officer institutions and offers pre-assignment training and rotational training for active-duty officers (*China's National Defense in 2006*).

In addition to reorganizing its officer academic institutions, the Central Military Commission (CMC) and State Council also implemented the Defense Student (Reserve Officer) Program in 2000, which currently has programs in 117 civilian universities, including 19 PLAAF programs. In 2006, the PLAAF set the goal of having 60 percent of all new officers come from civilian academic institution graduates, which included 40 percent from the Defense Student Program and 20 percent from direct recruitment of other civilian graduates (*Beijing Kaoshi Bao*, September 1, 2006).

Based on analysis of multiple sources, one of the major problems with this goal is that the PLA and PLAAF academic institutions are managed by the General Staff Department's (GSD's) Military Training and Service Arms Department and the PLAAF Headquarters Department's Military Training Department, respectively, but the Defense Student Program is managed by the General Political Department's (GPD's) Cadre Department and the PLAAF Political Department's Cadre Department. As a result, there is virtually no oversight of the Defense Student Program by the training organizations [1].

Non-Aviation Cadets

Although the PLAAF directly recruits its pilot cadets, it selects its non-aviation cadets based on how well they score on the National Unified College Entrance Examination as well as the results of a political reliability review. These personnel come from high school graduates, two-year enlistees who have served one year, NCOs who have served two to three years, as well as the children of military officers who have served on the border for 20 years and pilots and crew members who have served a full career (*PLAAF Officers Handbook*, 2006).

The PLAAF's non-aviation cadets can attend one of the following academic institutions (*PLAAF Officers Handbook*, 2006):

- PLAAF Command College
- Air Force Engineering University (Natural Science College, Engineering College, Surface-to-Air Missile College and Telecommunications Engineering College)
- Xuzhou (Logistics) College
- Guilin (AAA and Airborne) College
- Early Warning (Radar) College
- 1st Technical (Aircraft Maintenance) College

Although most cadets receive a four-year bachelor's degree, some technical track cadets receive only a three-year senior technical (associate's) degree; however, the PLAAF is aiming to have all cadets receive a bachelor's degree. PLAAF non-aviation officers receive their education and specialty training as cadets and are then assigned directly to their operational unit. Cadets also receive a small monthly stipend for living expenses (*PLAAF Officers Handbook*, 2006).

PLAAF Officers from Other PLA Academic Institutions

The PLAAF occasionally receives officers who served as cadets at non-PLAAF academic institutions, including the CMC's National University of Defense Technology (NUDT) and the General Armament Department's Academy of Equipment and Command Technology (AECT). Most of the PLAAF officers who graduate from NUDT receive their degree from the College of Aerospace and Materials Engineering. AECT educates and trains cadets primarily for Army equipment management, advanced engineering technologies and China's ground-based space facilities. One difference between the two institutions is that all cadets at NUDT wear Army uniforms, while cadets at AECT can wear Air Force uniforms [2].

In addition, some PLAAF officers who have graduated from a PLAAF academic institution, NUDT, or AECT can return to NUDT or AECT for graduate studies [3].

Direct Recruitment of Civilian Graduates

The PLAAF's goal in 2010 was to recruit 20 percent of its new officers from civilian college graduates with bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees, but it is not clear if it met this goal. Since 1998, more than 5,000 civilian graduates have joined the PLAAF. Many of these students were enrolled in the "211 Project," which is a civilian education reform program that was part of China's 9th Five-Year Plan (1996–2000). The stated goal is to raise the research standards of high-level universities and cultivate strategies for socio-economic development (Xinhua, January 19, 2005).

The Political Department accepts applications by all direct recruits in late August. In addition, individual units are allowed to recruit personnel to meet their requirements (*PLAAF Officer Handbook*, 2006). Depending on their career track and specialty, graduates must receive basic military-political and pre-billet specialty training, which includes 3-12 months of military-political training at a PLAAF academic institution followed by 2-3 months of probation, which includes basic specialty and on-the-job training in the billet at their new unit (Xinhua, December 24, 2007).

In addition, if the wife of a pilot has an appropriate college degree, she can be directly recruited as an officer. Most of these spouses serve in support billets, such as logistics, weather and administration (*Zhongguo Guinü Bao*, September 6, 2006).

Defense Student (Reserve Officer) Program

In 1998, the PLA initiated a Defense Student (*guofangsheng*) Program, which is also called the Reserve Officer (*houbei junguan*) Program, in a few civilian universities. In May 2000, the State Council and CMC issued the "Decision Concerning Establishing a System for Civilian Colleges to Educate and Train Military Officers." To date, the PLA has created programs in 117 civilian universities, including 19 PLAAF programs each of which has its own website (People's Net, September 27, September 19).

Goals: In April 2007, the GPD Cadre Department stated that the PLA's goal was to have 60 percent of all new officers in 2010 come from the Defense Student Program (Xinhua, April 30, 2007). It does not appear, however, that the PLA met this goal. A November 2009 *Jiefangjun Bao* article stated that the PLA's officer corps receives about 100,000 graduates per year, of which 70 percent come from military academic institutions and 30 percent from the Defense Student Program (*PLA Daily*, November 30, 2009).

In September 2006, the PLAAF stated that its goal in 2010 was to have 60 percent of its officers come from civilian college graduates, but two-thirds of this 60 percent (40 percent of all officers) was to come from the Defense Student Program and one-third (20 percent of all officers) from direct recruitment of civilian college graduates (*Beijing Kaoshi Bao*, September 1, 2006). As of September 2011, the PLAAF had recruited 21,000 Defense Students, of which 13,000 had graduated (People's Net, September 19). Accounting for approximately 6,000 students still in the program, this equates to a 90 percent graduation rate. Unfortunately, the PLAAF does not publish figures for the total number of new officers who have graduated from military and civilian academic institutions, so the percentage of Defense Students within this total is not known.

Although the regulations state that at least 70 percent of the graduates must earn a science and engineering degree, it appears that it is closer to 100 percent. Yet another goal is to have at least 70 percent of the graduates assigned to division and lower units [4]. Finally, the number of female students is limited to a maximum of 5 percent (Xinhua, December 24, 2007).

Monetary Assistance: In 2000, Defense Students began receiving 5,000 RMB ($780) per year, of which 3,000 RMB ($470) was for tuition given directly to the university and 2,000 RMB ($310) was for living expenses. In 2009, the amount doubled to 10,000 RMB ($1,560), but it is not clear how it was divided.

Education and Training [5]: Although the goal is to recruit new students for a four-year program, some students do not begin until their third year. During their four-year program, PLAAF students must complete 488 hours of classroom study and 59 days of military skills and physical

training. All students also live in a military dormitory on campus and attend their military classes in a Defense Student building.

All new students receive 15 days of military-political training conducted at the university or a PLAAF organization, which includes wearing the uniform, political instruction, regulations, marching and formations, small arms training and physical training.

During their second- and third-year, students receive summer group training at a site off-campus or at a military unit, which includes physical training, marching, field training, small arms and observation of technical skills. Just before graduation, students must complete a physical training exam. They also deploy to an operational unit for four days of training.

Upon graduation, the Defense Students are assigned to an operational unit, a PLAAF academic institution, or a training unit where they receive their specialty training. In addition, about 40 percent of Defense Students move directly to graduate school.

Post-graduation Assignments, Education, Training, Grades and Ranks

According to the *PRC Active Duty Officer Law*, all graduates from military and civilian academic institutions must serve for a minimum of eight years [6]. Whereas cadets in military academic institution are considered active duty and their student time counts toward total time-in-service, cadets in the Defense Student Program are not considered active duty and their time-in-service does not begin until the day they graduate.

Excluding new officers who are assigned to remote areas, all other new officers must serve their first year on probation (*jianxi*). Depending on their specialty and career track, they receive training in different locations. For example, some Defense Students must receive training at a military academic institution for 3 to 12 months (National Defense Students' Comprehensive Information Net, July 5, 2010). New officers who have graduated from a military academic institution are assigned based on their respective specialty to a company-level unit, where they learn from their peers. Command track officers are first assigned as a squad leader [e.g., an NCO billet] and then as a platoon commander or equivalent billet. After serving their probationary period, they receive the commensurate rank and grade, which is retroactive to the day they graduated.

Depending on their career track and specialty, new officers can be assigned different grades and ranks:

- The grade of platoon leader or technical grade 14 with the rank of second lieutenant
- The grade of company deputy leader or technical grade 13 with the rank of first lieutenant.

As officers move up their career ladder, they receive various types of professional military education (PME), which is divided by career track. Whereas officers in the command track receive their PME at the PLAAF Command College in Beijing, support officers return to their specialty college. PME includes basic, intermediate and advanced programs, which can include a one-year diploma, a two- to three-year master's degree or a doctorate [7]. The Air Force Command College holds multi-national four-month courses as a means to learn about foreign air forces (*Global Times*, January 16, 2010).

Party Membership

Finally, not all PLA officers are Communist Party members, where membership requires two years of preparation and training. Most officers who choose to become Party members begin the process during their first year as a cadet [8]. All officers in the command and political track and any leadership billets must be a Party member to serve on a Party committee. Because many officers in the special technical career track, including almost all Defense Student graduates, do not serve in a leadership role, they do not have to become a Party member. As a result, only 60 percent of Defense Student graduates are Party members [9].

Conclusions

It is unclear whether the PLAAF has been meeting its goal over the past decade of restructuring its officer recruitment, education and training system to build a more highly educated officer corps at all levels capable of commanding, operating and supporting a growing high-tech force in a combined-arms and joint environment.

Although the PLAAF has restructured its education and training system, it still separates undergraduates, as well as officers receiving different levels of PME, by career tracks, which reduces the opportunity for officers in different specialties to interact. Moreover, the PLAAF has almost no joint PME courses with the Army, Navy and Second Artillery until corps-level command track officers attend the National Defense University.

To help prepare new officers to assume their billets immediately after graduation, the PLAAF has begun shifting undergraduate courses in its military academic institutions from education based on theory (*xueli jiaoyu*) to professional education (*renzhi jiaoyu*) with more hands-on training. Whether this has been successful cannot yet be determined.

The PLAAF's 19 Defense Student Programs are designed to bring in more support officers with science and engineering degrees, but coordination and focus is lacking because they are run by the Political Department not the Training Department. With an approximate 90 percent graduation rate, the PLAAF is meeting its goals in terms of numbers and a high percentage of these students remain in school to obtain a graduate degree. Upon graduation, they then receive their specialty training at a PLAAF academic institution or an operational unit below the division level.

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Notes:

1. He Zongfa, Dong Jinhai and Wang Zhanhe, "Dui jin yi bu tigao guofangsheng xuanba peiyang zheliang de jidian sikao" [A few thoughts on improving the selection and training of national defense students], *Jiaoxue yanjiu* [Education research], Vol. 3, No. 3, 2008 http://www.ylhxjx.com/ebook/jxyj/jayy2008/jayy20080307-1.html.
2. Based on author's observations and an amateur documentary about the schools, http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XODg1NjQyMTI=.html.
3. See, for example, Senior Colonel Yu Nong, www.cqwzez.com/Article/1533.html
4. National Defense Student website for Southwest University http://gfs.swu.edu.cn/inforView.do?method=content&id=225
5. The information in this section comes from a survey of PLAAF Defense Student websites.
6. The information in this section comes from *A Guide for Applicants to Military Academic Institutions and Civilian College National Defense Student Program*, Beijing: PLA Press, January 2005, as well as multiple websites
7. Yuan Wei, Zhang Zhuo, ed. *History of the Development of Chinese Military Academies and Schools*, Beijing: NDU Press, July 2001, p. 914-915.
8. Multiple sources, including author's interviews with PLA officers
9. PLA General Political Department, *China's Defense Student Program*, PLA Press, 2008, p. 69.

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Burma and China: The Beginning of the End of Business as Usual?

By Ian Storey

The introduction of a slew of economic reforms and political initiatives by the Burmese government in the second half of 2011 have significant implications for the carriage of Burmese foreign policy. Indeed, the surprise announcement in September suspending construction of a major Chinese-funded hydroelectric dam is an indication that China's privileged place in the hierarchy of Burma's foreign relations—a position it has greatly benefited from since the West shunned Burma in 1988—can no longer be taken for granted. Nevertheless, even as these changes unfold, the two neighbors will seek to maintain close and cordial relations in recognition of inescapable geographical realities and to protect important shared interests.

On November 7, 2010, Burma held nationwide elections for the first time since 1990. Boycotted by the main opposition party, the National League for Democracy

(NLD), as well as armed ethnic minority groups along the country's periphery, the international community dismissed the elections as fatally flawed and undemocratic. On February 4, the newly convened parliament elected retired general Thein Sein as the country's first civilian president in nearly five decades.

Thein Sein appointed an administration composed almost entirely of retired generals from the previous military government. In his inaugural address to parliament, the new president highlighted the need to reform the economy, reduce poverty and corruption, end conflict between ethnic groups and the central government and achieve political reconciliation. Widely perceived as lacking a strong power base, few expected Thein Sein to enact anything more than cosmetic changes. Yet since April, his government has followed through on many of these reforms and reached out to Nobel Peace Prize winner and leader of the NLD, Aung Sang Suu Kyi, who was released from house arrest late last year. While no Arab Spring, Thein Sein's reforms are increasingly being viewed as a genuine attempt to increase political plurality and end the country's international isolation. While it remains to be seen whether the reform process is durable, it is clear that after 49 years of authoritarian rule the political landscape of Burma is shifting in a positive direction.

Initially, China viewed the political transition from military to quasi-civilian rule with satisfaction. For several years prior to the election, senior Chinese officials had privately and publically pressed the ruling junta to implement the stalled "roadmap to democracy." China encouraged Burma to draw up a new constitution that would pave the way for elections, after which the generals could swap their uniforms for civilian garb ("Emerging Fault Lines in Sino-Burmese Relations: The Kokang Incident," *China Brief*, September 10, 2009).

China was never really interested in seeing Burma transformed into a genuine multiparty democracy. Above all else, Beijing values stability in its Southeast Asian neighbor. Particularly, China's interests are to protect its massive investments; secure uninterrupted access to the country's rich natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals and lumber; ensure the safety of an estimated one to two million Chinese nationals living and working in Burma; and preserve peace and stability along their border, where ethnic armies maintain uneasy ceasefires with the Burmese central government.

During the first six months of the new government, it was business as usual in Sino-Burmese relations. China continued to pour money into infrastructure projects aimed at binding the two economies closer together. In April, for instance, an agreement was inked between the two countries for China to construct a railway from the western seaport of Kyaukphyu to Yunnan Province (*The Irrawaddy*, April 28). The railway will run parallel to twin oil and gas pipelines funded by China at a cost of approximately $2.5 billion. Once completed in 2013, the pipelines will transport natural gas from the Shwe off-shore field—for which China obtained sole purchasing rights in 2007— and crude oil from the Middle East and Africa [1]. The pipelines will not only bolster the economic development prospects of China's landlocked southwestern provinces, but also will mitigate China's dependence on the Strait of Malacca and other strategic chokepoints in Southeast Asia, which Chinese security analysts regard as a strategic vulnerability ("China's 'Malacca Dilemma'," *China Brief*, April 12, 2006).

In another indication that all was well in bilateral relations, Thein Sein paid his first state visit, and only his second overseas trip as president, to China in May. The president was accompanied by a large delegation of ministers, senior military officers and businessmen. As is customary on such occasions, Thein Sein lauded the Sino-Burmese *paukphaw* (fraternal) relationship, noting ties with China were its "closest and most important diplomatic relationship" (Xinhua, May 28). In a joint statement issued on May 28, the two governments upgraded their relationship to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership," and agreed to maintain close high-level contacts, expand trade and investment links and maintain "peace, tranquility and stability" along their 1,300 mile border. In keeping with its two-decade long position as Burma's principal financial backer, the China Development Bank agreed to provide the Burmese government with a $756 million line of credit (*Global Times*, May 28).

There was speculation that in return for continued economic aid, Chinese leaders had requested greater access to Burma's ports in the Bay of Bengal for the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) (*The Irrawaddy*,

May 25). Although China has been the primary supplier of military equipment to the Burmese armed forces since 1988, the PLAN did not call at a Burmese port until August 2010. China undoubtedly would like to increase the number of naval ship visits to Southeast Asian ports so PLAN vessels can take on supplies more easily on their way to and from counter-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden. China also may be interested in an expanded naval presence in Burma to protect its oil and gas interests in Kyaukphyu and enhance sea lane security in the Indian Ocean. It is not known how Burma responded to the reported Chinese request.

If the steadiness with which Burma and China maintained their relationship seemed normal, it only served to highlight the abrupt shift that came at the end of September. Thein Sein sent a note on September 30 to parliament announcing the construction of the Myitsone dam in Kachin State had been suspended until 2016 because it was "contrary to the will of the people." The dam, one of seven being financed by China in Kachin at a cost of $20 billion, would have been the largest in Burma with a reservoir the size of Singapore. The project, valued at $3.6 billion and scheduled for completion in 2019, was designed to generate 4,000-6,000 MW of electricity, of which more than 90 percent would have been exported to China.

In the months leading up to the announcement, the Myitsone development had generated a groundswell of opposition from the armed Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and intellectuals in Rangoon. Located at the confluence of the Maykha and Malikha rivers, the area is considered to be the birthplace of Kachin culture. It is also the source of the iconic Irrawaddy River, which plays a critical role in the transportation and agricultural life of the country.

The announcement blindsided China. In an interview with Xinhua, Lu Qizhou—the president of China Power Investment Corporation, which was building the dam in partnership with Burma's Ministry of Electric Power and the well-connected Burmese private company Asia World—revealed he had been "totally astonished" by the decision and warned of possible legal consequences (*China Daily*, October 4).

In the weeks following the announcement, the Burmese government sought to limit the fallout. The state-run press declared that the suspension would not harm bilateral ties, and that China would be adequately compensated (*Wall Street Journal*, November 16). In early October, Vice President Tin Aung Myint Oo was dispatched to Nanning in an attempt to smooth China's ruffled feathers. China's reaction was, rather muted. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on Burma to "protect the legal and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies" (*Washington Post*, October 4). Meanwhile. Premier Wen Jiabao told Tin Aung Myint Oo that the two sides should "fulfill their promises…and guarantee the healthy development of China-Myanmar cooperation" (*Straits Times*, October 22). These comments however belie the distress felt by the Chinese government at the abruptness of Burma's unilateral decision.

Why had Thein Sein decided to suspend the Myitsone project in a move guaranteed to upset Burma's closest ally? At least four factors influenced his decision.

First, as noted, the dam had generated widespread opposition, which had been fanned due to loosened controls on the print media and Internet. By ordering a halt to the dam's construction, the government was attempting to show, unlike its predecessors, it was responsive to public opinion. Perhaps more importantly, the government was conscious of the need to pre-empt public demonstrations, which could so easily have turned into anti-government protests, like the September 2007 Rangoon protests that the security forces violently suppressed.

Second, the Myitsone dam site is located near KIO-controlled territory and is in an area of great cultural significance to the Kachin people. The project would have displaced 15,000-20,000 Kachins from their ancestral homeland. In March, the KIO wrote a formal letter to President Hu Jintao calling for the project to be cancelled, citing the risk of conflict should construction continue (*The Irrawaddy*, June 24). These warnings proved prescient: in June armed clashes erupted between KIO forces and the Burmese military, after the former had tried to prevent materials from China reaching the construction site. As part of the government's policy of fostering peace with the ethnic insurgents, the suspension of the dam may have been designed to placate the KIO.

In this respect the decision may have paid off: fighting between the two sides has since ended, and in mid-November the KIO participated in informal talks with the government regarding a renewal of their ceasefire.

Third, Burma is attempting to repair relations with the West, particularly the United States. It is keen to demonstrate it is not a client state of China and is capable of making decisions in its own national interest, even if these decisions are inimical to Chinese interests. Moreover, Burma—which will assume the rotating chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2014—wants to show its ASEAN partners that it is not beholden to China and that membership of the organization is the cornerstone of its foreign policy. In another signal to ASEAN, this year Burma has pointedly refused to toe Beijing's line on the South China Sea dispute. China intensively lobbied Burma not to send representatives to a September meeting of ASEAN legal experts in Manila, which was for the purpose of discussing the Philippine proposal to transform the South China Sea into a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship and Cooperation" [2]. Despite China's wishes, Burma sent a representative—only Cambodia and Laos did not.

Fourth, the decision was also motivated by a desire to reduce China's influence in Burma. Even though the two countries forged a close partnership after 1988, Burma's generals have always been uneasy about their dependence on China. Over the years, they have tried to reduce this dependence with only mixed success [3]. The Myitsone decision clearly marks the beginning of a concerted effort to lessen China's political and economic influence. Furthermore, the government also seems to be reacting to increasing Burmese public anti-China sentiment, provoked by concerns over Chinese dominance of the economy and the social and environmental impact of its infrastructure projects, such as the Myitsone dam.

Is Burma in the process of reverting to its pre-1988 policy of neutralism and equidistance from its two giant neighbors China and India?

While this might be the government's long-term aim, it is important to keep the Myitsone episode in perspective. The project has been suspended, not cancelled, and work could resume in 2016, possibly on two smaller hydroelectric dams that could supply Yunnan with electricity. China remains Burma's most important economic partner. Bilateral trade reached $4.4 billion in 2010, up 53 percent on 2010, second only to Thailand (Xinhua, May 28). China is also the primary source of foreign investment in Burma, which amounted to $9.6 billion between 1988 and 2010 (*Straits Times*, February 23). The two governments have shared interests in border stability. China still exerts some influence over ethnic armies in northeast Burma, including the Wa and Kachin, and has played a behind the scenes role in brokering peace talks. China needs Burma's cooperation to stem the flow of illegal drugs into Yunnan, and to address trans-boundary crime, an issue highlighted by the murder of 13 Chinese nationals on the Mekong River in October.

Aung San Suu Kyi recently highlighted the important place China occupies in Burma's foreign relations when she said that despite "bumps and kinks" in the relationship she was "particularly anxious" for good relations with Beijing (*South China Morning Post*, November 15). This suggests that even if the NLD is given a greater voice in the country's political affairs, relations with China will still be accorded an important priority.

In view of the tyranny of geography, even as Burma moves to diversify its foreign relations and have Western economic sanctions eased, it will want to keep China on its side and ensure its interests are protected. Bolstered by the Myitsone decision, Burmese environmentalists have called for work on the oil and gas pipelines to Yunnan to be suspended, but such a move is highly unlikely given the economic and strategic importance of the pipelines to China. Yet even as this and other Chinese-funded projects remain untouched, China must surely be anxious that the days of its political and economic primacy may be numbered. When U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's makes her two-day visit to Burma later this week, Beijing will likely be watching closely and judging its implications for Sino-Burmese relations.

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Notes:

1. Shwe Gas Movement, "Corridor of Power: China's Trans-Burma Oil and Gas Pipelines," September 2009, available at <http://www.narinjara.com/PDF/CorridorofPower.pdf>.
2. Barry Wain, "Towards Peace and Prosperity in the South China Sea: Pathways for Regional Cooperation," Paper presented at Forum on the South China Sea, Manila, October 17, 2011.
3. Ian Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security*, Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2011, pp. 154-158.

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