



In This Issue:

IN A FORTNIGHT
By Peter Mattis.....1

HU JINTAO'S SIXTH GENERATION PROTEGES PLAY SAFE TO ENSURE PROMOTION
By Willy Lam.....3

ASSESSING THE GROWING PLA AIR FORCE FOREIGN RELATIONS PROGRAM
By Kenneth Allen and Emma Kelly.....5

ASEAN AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA: MOVEMENT IN LIEU OF PROGRESS
By Ian Storey.....10

SINO-PHILIPPINE TENSION AND TRADE RISING AMID SCARBOROUGH STANDOFF
By Samantha Hoffman.....13



One of China's Maritime Surveillance Vessels on Patrol

China Brief is a bi-weekly journal of information and analysis covering Greater China in Eurasia.

China Brief is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation, a private non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. and is edited by Peter Mattis.

The opinions expressed in China Brief are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Jamestown Foundation.



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In a Fortnight

By Peter Mattis

THE LIMITS OF REFORM: ASSAULTING THE CASTLE OF THE STATUS QUO

A series of editorials this week in leading official newspapers suggested pressure for reform within the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to build. One of the unsigned commentaries—like Premier Wen Jiabao’s speech about political reform as Bo Xilai was ousted from Chongqing—stated “reform has reached a troubled period akin to assaulting fortified positions” (Xinhua, April 23; chinareform.org.cn, March 22). Outside observers picked up these calls for reform as sign of a coordinated propaganda campaign for cleaning out the CCP corrupted by ambitious politicians and entrenched interests (*South China Morning Post*, April 24; AGIChina.it, April 24). Even as the tocsin of reform sounded, however, the official press also established the acceptable boundaries of reform, limiting it to improving CCP performance and pushing forward on the 12th Five Year Plan.

The propaganda language of “assaulting fortified positions” (*gongjian*) used in Xinhua seemed to highlight the potential importance of these calls for reform (Xinhua, April 23). Indeed, in reference to the policy of reform and opening (*gaige kaifang*), the *gongjian* formulation does not appear to have been used much in official editorials for several years. The urgency surrounding the 12th Five Year Plan and the need to make changes in economic governance last year probably created the largest cluster of such calls (*Procurator’s Daily*, January 18, 2011). The urgency prompted one editorial writer to ask rhetorically “what does assaulting

fortifications require?” and elaborate on the need for the courage to act on reform (*People's Daily*, January 26, 2011).

Premier Wen, however, has been using precisely this formulation for at least three years in his well-publicized if unheeded calls for reform. Last month at the China Development Research Foundation event hosting IMF chief Christine Lagarde, Vice Premier Li Keqiang said “In front of our eyes, Chinese reform has entered a period akin to assaulting fortified positions” (*Dongfang Zaobao*, March 19). Finally, a widely-posted editorial—reprinted as “Reform has reached a troubled period akin to assaulting fortified positions; promote the institutionalization of democratic supervision” (*gaige jinru shenshuiqu he gongjianqi ying cujin minzhu jiandu zhidubua*)—drew attention to the first use of “government reform” in the National People's Congress' *Government Work Report* as part of the call for performance (*People's Daily*, April 9; *Xinhua*, April 9; *Science & Technology Daily*, April 9). If such strong language is not entirely out of character, then the real puzzle of such strong language appearing in *Xinhua* is why the reform advocating editorials of the *People's Daily* and the *China Youth Daily* did not carry this language—or why Wen's latest reform speech given last week also omitted the phrase (*People's Daily*, April 23). The answer, at least in part, is because the limits placed on reform make any progress largely irrelevant.

In parallel with these calls for reform, other commentaries in the official press systematically limited the scope of what Beijing considered acceptable as political and economic reform. An editor's note on Monday stated the positive emphasis on the Chinese people in guiding reforms “does not mean weakening the CCP's leadership,” reflecting the center's assertion that China “will stick to its fundamental political system” (*People's Daily*, April 23; *Global Times*, April 11). The answer is to make the government and its CCP cadre work better and more effectively while rooting out corruption, which Premier Wen recently called “the most crucial threat to the ruling party” (*People's Daily*, April 24; April 23; *China Daily*, March 27).

One of the best examples of these limits is the contrast between the embattled security chief Zhou Yongkang's remarks at the Central Political-Legal Commission's first training session of the year and how the CCP claims the Bo family's investigation will be handled. After Bo's ouster

from the Politburo last month, Chinese press filled the pages with statements about how the investigation into him and his wife's alleged murder of British businessman Neil Heywood would be handled according to the law (*People's Daily*, April 13; *Xinhua*, April 10; *China Daily*, March 27). In contrast, Zhou stated the role of political-legal work was to “consolidate the party's ruling status” and “politics is always the first requirement” for political-legal work (*People's Daily*, April 24).

The focus on improving cadre performance and anti-corruption highlights how the CCP tries to focus attention on non-procedural forms of political legitimacy, i.e. legitimacy not based on democratic elections. Observers should not be surprised that these calls for reform in the last two months heralded a parallel attack on Western democracy and defense of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The same day as the reform editorials, *Xinhua* World Studies Institute researcher Chan Dexiong penned an article questioning how a system that allows a few people to get rich at the expense of the people could be democratic or legitimate (*People's Daily*, April 23). This analysis mirrored an earlier article arguing the Chinese people chose Marxism because it offered a path to national liberation and democratic rights while helping “build a harmonious and equitable society” (*Red Flag*, March 26). Accordingly, foreign hostile forces threatened to divide and manipulate China if Beijing succumbed to Western-style democracy, which one former ambassador suggested might even lead China to resemble the former Yugoslavia (*People's Daily*, April 24; *PLA Daily*, April 1; *Red Flag*, March 26).

The latest calls for reform augur little, if any, change to the status quo, regardless how strong the language or how dire the situation might seem for a scandal-ridden CCP on the cusp of a major leadership transition. The internal tensions between the CCP's primacy and the need for more objective “scientific development” are not new, but reform probably will require tradeoffs involving the CCP's political power. The CCP's rule however has not been opened for negotiation, keeping entrenched interests that the party claims to oppose in place (source). On the positive side, the call for adherence and continuation to the policy of reform and opening is a fairly clear repudiation of the quasi-Maoist policies advocated by Bo.

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Hu Jintao's Sixth Generation Protégés Play Safe to Ensure Promotion

By Willy Lam

The rounds of ritualistic protestation of loyalty to the “Chinese Communist Party (CCP) central authorities with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary” show President Hu Jintao has become the biggest beneficiary of the Bo Xilai scandal. Apart from pulling out all the stops to ensure that more of his Communist Youth League (CYL) faction affiliates from the Fifth Generation—a reference to cadres born in the 1950s—will be inducted into the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) at the 18th Party Congress this autumn, the supremo is boosting the political standing of a few key members of the Sixth Generation leadership. Hu Chunhua (born 1963) and Zhou Qiang (born 1960), Party Secretary of respectively Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Hunan Province, are tipped to be made ordinary Politburo members at the forthcoming congress. The two are also deemed frontrunners for making the PBSC to be established at the 19th CCP Congress in 2017. This means that while Vice President Xi Jinping will succeed Hu as party chief later this year, the 58 year-old princeling may have to yield his post to a CYL Faction stalwart at the 20th Party Congress in 2022.

Hu Chunhua (not related to the president) and Zhou Qiang, both former CYL party secretaries, are in terms of party ranking, two of the three most senior Sixth-Generation cadres in the CCP. The third is Party Secretary of Jilin Province Sun Zhengcai (born 1963), a former State Council technocrat who has no obvious factional affiliations. To get a better grasp of the future trajectory of the CYL Faction, it is instructive to study the political traits of Hu and Zhou and their paths to prominence.

A graduate in Chinese language and literature from elite Peking University, Hu served in the Tibet Autonomous Region for 20 years before becoming party boss of the CYL in 2006 and governor of Hebei Province in 2008. He assumed his current post as Inner Mongolia's party chief in 2010, when he was merely 46 years old. The speed of his promotions—his stint at the CYL and in Hebei each lasted merely 18 months—is probably due to the fact that he enjoys the full confidence of President Hu. The younger Hu is tipped to be made Party Secretary of either Guangdong Province or the Beijing municipality at the 18th Party Congress. Since both posts carry Politburo status, this would enable Hu to become the youngest Politburo member at the 18th Party Congress (Reuters, March 12; Deutsche Welle [Berlin], February 8).

In the tradition of Chinese politics, up-and-coming cadres avoid making controversial statements—and initiating overly ambitious projects—so as not to be seen as upstaging their superiors or departing from the line of the central party authorities. The younger Hu obviously caught the eye of President Hu for having acquitted himself well in the rugged terrain of Tibet, where the older Hu was party boss from 1988 to 1992. Chinese media accounts of Hu Chunhua have emphasized his ability to “eat bitterness” in one of the most challenging parts of China. While there is little information about how Hu battled the secessionist movement in the restive Tibet region, his proverbial helicopter ride to the top testifies to the leadership's high assessment of his capacity in two key party tasks for the 21st century: upholding political stability; and ensuring national unity and patriotic pride (Sina.com, April 10; China News Service, March 14).

Despite his relative greenness in the party's high echelons, Hu Chunhua is also an intriguing foil to one of the biggest villains in Chinese politics since the Cultural Revolution: the disgraced and now former Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai. Instead of humbly carrying out the center's orders, the egotistical and ambitious Bo took every opportunity to promote himself while serving in the western Chinese metropolis—to the point of challenging the authority of President Hu and Premier Wen Jiabao (*Wall Street Journal*, March 16; *Apple Daily* [Hong Kong], April 13; Reuters, April 11). Hu, on the other hand, has the reputation of always and unconditionally toeing the Beijing line.

Not surprisingly, Hu Chunhua is one of the regional leaders who are implementing the post-Bo Xilai loyalty drives with extra gusto. At a meeting of senior Inner Mongolian officials earlier this month, Hu swore absolute fealty to the Hu Jintao-led central leadership. “We must self-consciously maintain a high degree of unison with the center with Comrade Hu Jintao as General Secretary,” Party Secretary Hu indicated. Without referring to the Bo incident, Hu noted “we must always maintain a clear-headed and resolute [stance] in politics, and be resolute in following through the decisions and arrangements of party central authorities.” Hu also underscored the imperative of upholding stability and harmony in Inner Mongolia—which witnessed sizable ethnic strife last year—“so as not to complicate the national situation of stability” (People’s Daily Online, April 7; *Inner Mongolia Daily*, April 6).

Contrary to the charismatic, media-savvy Bo, Hu Chunhua is self-effacing to a fault. During the press conference that he gave at the National People’s Congress (NPC) last month, Hu answered only four of the 20 questions raised by the 90 or so Chinese and foreigner reporters covering the rising star. After all, he opened the conference with this caveat: “Today is open day for the Inner Mongolian delegation. Please ask me only questions related to Inner Mongolia.” Hu refused to comment on issues including whether he had ever faced pressure in maintaining stability in his region; how he felt about being one of the youngest provincial party secretaries of China; and whether he had a microblog account (*People’s Daily*, March 6; China News Service, March 6).

Hu’s cautious approach sets him apart from relatively liberal cadres in the CYL camp, including Politburo member and Guangdong Party Secretary Wang Yang. In the past year, Wang (born 1955) has won praise from Chinese and international commentators for his conciliatory approach in handling social unrest. Wang, who has a high chance of making the PBSC at the 18th Party Congress, also has won plaudits for the relatively free rein that he has given the Guangdong media (*Wall Street Journal*, March 7; Bloomberg, February 4). The CYL heavyweight, however, also has incurred the ire of the CCP’s conservative wing for being too close to the liberal thinking of Premier Wen, who is a consistent advocate of political liberalization.

Hu Chunhua, however, has worked hard to avoid being drawn into the CCP’s Byzantine factional intrigue. Most of his policy statements evince a down-to-earth approach to fulfilling key party goals such as upholding socio-political stability (*weihu wending*). In a recent speech on the prospects of preserving stability in Inner Mongolia, Hu admitted “the main reason” behind riots and disturbances in his region was that “we have not done our work to a satisfactory enough level.” Apart from pledging that party and government units would handle “mass incidents” according to law, Hu stuck to patriarchal ways and means of “educating the masses.” The party boss urged his underlings to educate the masses on a correct understanding of the relationship between “personal interests and the interests of the state.” He added “The masses must be taught to understand the boundary separating reasonable aspirations from unreasonable demands—and that even reasonable aspirations must be voiced in a rational and legal manner” (*Legal Daily*, January 18; *People’s Daily*, January 18). While meeting leading local media representatives earlier this year, Hu noted news organizations must “provide correct guidance to public opinion [by] taking the standpoint of the party and government” (*People’s Daily*, January 17; *Inner Mongolia Daily*, January 16).

Zhou Qiang, another key Sixth Generation protégé of President Hu’s, has a legal background. A graduate of the Chongqing-based Southwestern University of Politics and Law, Zhou served in the Ministry of Justice from 1985 to 1995. He then worked in the headquarters of the CYL, which he headed from 1998 to 2006. The Hubei Province native subsequently was transferred to Hunan for him to acquire much-needed experience as a regional administrator. Since Hu became Hunan Party Secretary one year after Hu Chunhua had attained a similar rank, analysts believe he might have lost the race to become the potential “core” of the Sixth Generation leadership to Hu. Nonetheless, Zhou is considered a frontrunner to replace Zhang Dejiang as the Party Secretary of Chongqing—a position that also carries Politburo status—at the 18th Party Congress (*Apple Daily*, April 13; Sina.com, March 11). Zhang, who is also vice premier, took over the job of Chongqing party boss from Bo Xilai after he was sacked by the Hu-Wen leadership on March 15. It is however understood that Zhang would fill the post only until the 18th Party Congress.

Like Hu Chunhua and other up-and-coming regional leaders, Zhou has emphasized strict adherence to the center's instructions. While he has played no part in the campaign to resuscitate Maoism that is associated with the disgraced Bo, Zhou has used his status as the top official of Mao Zedong's birthplace skillfully to gain the support of conservative cadres who are still enamored of the Great Helmsman. Zhou thus has been a keen supporter of the renewed "Learn from Lei Feng" movement—a reference to the campaign to emulate Lei, whom Mao lionized as a "proletariat paragon" in the 1950s. "The quintessence of the Lei Feng spirit will never become outdated," said Zhou in a recent seminar. Zhou added what Lei advocated—"loving your country and total devotion [to the masses]"—possessed "eternal value" for Chinese (Xinhua, February 17; *Hunan Daily*, February 15). It is significant that in the wake of the Bo scandal, the party leadership has organized numerous educational and propaganda drives to ask civilian and military officials to emulate Lei Feng's spirit of unquestioned loyalty of the party's goals and discipline (*Asia Times Online*, April 5; *People's Daily*, March 22).

Despite his proclivity toward adherence to party dogma, Zhou seems to have more confidence than Hu Chunhua in displaying a personal flair. A case in point was Zhou's support to so-called "officials with personality," a reference to unconventional cadres who sometimes do not follow the norms of bureaucratic politics. For example, several Hunan officials have attracted national media attention through using their personal blogs and microblogs to expose abuses in the province that range from pollution to corruption. When asked at an NPC press conference last month about his views on "cadres with personality," Zhou said "In Hunan, cadres whose behaviors and policies are in accordance with the law and party discipline will enjoy protection." Zhou also was not afraid of touching upon the sensitive question of so-called "naked officials," or cadres whose spouses and relatives have either gone abroad or who possess residence rights in foreign countries. "As for myself, I have filed all my personal data with the [Party] Organization Department," he indicated, "I have no 'naked official' problems" (China News Service, March 11; *Hunan Daily*, March 10).

Despite Bo's downfall—and the dent this may have made to the clout of the Gang of Princelings—the factional distribution of the nine PBSC seats this autumn will

probably reflect a rough balance of power between the CYL Clique on the one hand, and the conjoined Gang of Princelings and the Shanghai Faction on the other. ("Jockeying for Position Intensifies among Candidates for the Politburo Standing Committee," *China Brief*, October 28, 2011). The CYL Faction, however, enjoys a clear-cut advantage ten years down the road. It is to be expected that President Hu, who is noted for his cautious and meticulous approach to Chinese-style power plays, will counsel Sixth Generation CYL protégés led by Hu Chunhua and Zhou Qiang to stick to tried-and-true formulas in their steady but sure ascendancy to the top of the CCP hierarchy.

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Assessing the Growing PLA Air Force Foreign Relations Program

By Kenneth Allen and Emma Kelly

The People's Liberation Army Air Force's (PLAAF) foreign relations program is an increasingly important component of the PLA's overall foreign relations program. As part of China's overall program, it gradually has expanded from merely exchanging delegations to conducting combined exercises with individual countries and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In 2001, the PLAAF Command College created a program for foreign officers that, since 2009, includes PLAAF officers. In addition, the PLAAF has begun to perform military operations other than war (MOOTW) abroad to support national goals. This article addresses how the PLA interacts with the international community and then discusses the ways in which the PLAAF implements its foreign relations program with a focus at the end on

PLAAF relations with the U.S. Air Force (USAF).

How the PLA Interacts with the International Community

The PLA interacts with the international community and foreign militaries through a number of channels. Actual PLA military diplomacy includes, but is not limited to, the following activities:

- Strategic security dialogues;
- The exchange of military attaché offices and the establishment of embassy/consulate websites;
- The establishment of a Ministry of National Defense Information Office and spokesman system;
- High-level military exchanges;
- Functional and educational military exchanges;
- PLA Navy port calls;
- Combined exercises with foreign militaries;
- The opening of military exercises and operational units to foreign observers;
- Peace-keeping, anti-piracy and MOOTW;
- Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) [1].

Air Force Attachés

According to the National Air and Space Intelligence Center's *People's Liberation Army Air Force 2010*, China has established military ties with more than 150 countries since the early 1980s. This expanding program reflects a corresponding increase in PLA military attachés assigned abroad and foreign military attachés assigned to Beijing. Currently, China has 109 military attaché offices in its embassies abroad, and 98 foreign countries have military attachés in China. Note, however, almost all of the PLA's attachés are Army officers. As of early 2009, only nine countries had permanent Air Force attaché billets in Beijing, and China had PLAAF attaché billets in only the United States and United Kingdom. Therefore, the PLAAF has little interaction on a daily basis with most foreign air forces, but it is expanding its education program for foreign military officers as discussed below.

High-Level Exchanges

Overall, the number of high-level exchanges has not

increased over the past decade. Historically, the PLAAF commander has traveled abroad only once per year to one to three countries. His delegation usually consists of about 5-10 people, including personnel from PLAAF Headquarters and Military Region Air Force (MRAF) headquarters. According to *PLAAF 2010*, from 1979-2009, commanders visited 34 different countries, including several countries more than once (Pakistan 8 times and Turkey 6 times). In July 2010, General Xu Qiliang visited Germany and Britain and, in May 2011, he visited France (Chinese Embassy in France, May 27, 2011; Xinhua, July 9, 2010). In comparison, the USAF Chief of Staff (CSAF), General Norman Schwartz, traveled abroad during nine months of 2011 to multiple countries [2]. Currently, the PLAAF commander hosts about five counterparts each year. In November 2009, Xu met with several Air Force delegations that attended the 60th Anniversary of the PLAAF (*PLA Daily*, November 6, 2009). In November 2010, Xu visited the Zhuhai Airshow, where he met with Air Force leaders from seven countries (*PLA Daily*, November 17, 2010).

Meanwhile, the political commissar (PC) has averaged one trip every two years since 1996 and had visited 16 different countries through 2009, including Russia three times, Cuba twice, and finally Switzerland this March (Chinese Embassy in Switzerland, March 8). He has yet to visit any other Asian countries (*PLAAF 2010*).

Several senior PLAAF officers have also had the opportunity to participate in high-level delegation visits abroad led by other senior PLA officers. For example, in July 2006, one of the PLAAF's deputy commanders, Lieutenant General Liu Chengjun, accompanied Central Military Commission (CMC) Vice Chairman General Guo Boxiong to the United States (*China Daily*, July 17, 2006). In October 2009, PLAAF General Ma Xiaotian, who had been one of the Deputy Chiefs of the General Staff (DCGSs) since 2007, accompanied CMC Vice Chairman General Xu Caihou to the United States (*PLA Daily*, October 26, 2009).

Their participation often presages promotion. According to *PLAAF 2010*, as a PLAAF deputy commander, Lieutenant General Liu Shun Yao accompanied Defense Minister General Chi Haotian to the United States in November 1996 and was appointed the PLAAF commander the following month. In September 1998,

Deputy PC, Lieutenant General Qiao Qingchen, accompanied Vice Chairman of the CMC General Zhang Wannian to the United States. In December, he became the PLAAF PC and later the commander. When the current PLAAF commander, General Xu Qiliang, was a DCGS from 2004 to 2007, he led delegations to Romania, France, Finland, Australia and Tajikistan.

Functional Exchanges

The PLAAF has been sending delegations abroad led by senior colonels or major generals since the late 1980s that include discussions on personnel, training, logistics and maintenance issues.

Since the media generally covers only high-level PLAAF visits, little information is available about the types and total number of functional exchanges. A few articles, however, provide a glimpse at the program. In January 2007, *PLA Daily* reported “In recent years, the PLAAF organized a total of 13 groups of senior- and mid-level officers to visit other countries. It also received air force delegations from 43 foreign countries” (January 8, 2007). Unfortunately, no figures are available for the exchanges since that time.

These visits offer most PLAAF officers their only chance to travel abroad. PLAAF functional delegations visit the host country’s air force headquarters, academic institutions and operational units, where they receive briefings, ask questions, view equipment and sometimes see live demonstrations. In July 2003, Senior Colonel Guo Chengliang, who was the Director of the PLAAF’s Military Affairs Department, led a delegation to France to discuss pilot recruitment and noncommissioned officer (NCO) selection. His delegation visited eight organizations, including the Air Force Schools Command, 721st Base, 217th Base and personnel center (*PLAAF 2010*).

From 2002 through 2010, the PLAAF’s monthly journal, *China Air Force*, published about 20 articles written by PLAAF delegation members who visited foreign countries or by officers who studied abroad including France, Italy, Pakistan, Britain, Australia and Russia. The delegations visited flight schools and operational units, where they focused on pilot recruitment, education and training, including simulators. The articles noted that

pilots visited France in 2004 and 2011 and flew in the back seat of a Mirage-2000 (*China Air Force*, 2011-5, pp. 42–43; 2004-5, pp. 16–17; 2006-1, p. 70; 2005-2, p. 27). In June 2011, another pilot visited Norway, Finland and Sweden, where he flew in a Swedish L-39 trainer (*China Air Force*, 2012-1, pp. 71–73).

Educational Exchanges

The PLAAF Command College forms the foundation for educational exchanges, including sending students and faculty abroad and hosting foreign officers. These exchanges are rapidly expanding to allow PLAAF officers, including pilots, to interact on a wider range of issues with foreign air forces.

Each year, a PLAAF deputy chief of staff leads students from the college’s Campaign Command Course abroad for two weeks to allow them to gain first-hand knowledge of foreign air forces. For example, about 30 students visited the United States in July 1998; 41 students visited Australia and New Zealand in June 1999; and 58 students, including 8 major generals, visited India in November 2003 (*PLA Daily*, November 4, 2003) [3]. The college also has sent faculty members abroad to several countries, including Russia and Italy, to study for one to three years. Other PLAAF officers have studied in military colleges in Britain, Russia, Pakistan, Italy and France (*China Air Force*, 2007-4, p. 17; 2004-5 pp. 16–17; 2003-5, pp. 19–20).

In 2001, the college began providing training for foreign field-grade officers. To date, more than 600 Air Force officers from 75 countries have attended (*China Air Force*, 2010-3, pp. 30–33; China News Service, September 25, 2011; *China Air Force*, 2010-3, pp. 30–33). The courses began with students from only one country, one language or one specialty at a time, but that model was replaced in 2009, whereby students from multiple countries, languages and specialties attend together. The new model also included PLAAF students, including pilots, for the first time (*Global Times*, January 16, 2010). It was reported that 21 foreign students including 11 pilots came from 12 countries—such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, Uganda, Nigeria, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Singapore and Tanzania—attended one course. Each PLAAF officer was paired with a foreign counterpart during the course, and they all spoke English.

From September 2011 to January 2012, the college held a course that included foreign and PLAAF pilots with a focus on tactics, combat methods and simulated training. Besides six PLAAF pilots, a total of 69 officers, including several pilots, from 41 countries participated. The countries included Venezuela, the Philippines, Pakistan, Chile, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. During the training, the pilots simulated various tactics and techniques, including close-in engagements as well as reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance (China News Service, September 25, 2011).

Finally, the college also offers longer courses for foreign students. On July 15, 2005, 88 students from 25 countries graduated from a one-year course with an unidentified curriculum (*Air Force News*, July 19, 2005).

Combined Exercises

Since the mid-2000s, the PLAAF increasingly has become involved in combined exercises with foreign air forces. These exercises have allowed the PLAAF to do the following: demonstrate its improving capabilities to the international community, observe and learn from foreign militaries in an operational environment and serve as a vehicle for building trust and solidifying security cooperation with select countries.

The combined exercises can be divided into two categories: those with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and those with individual, non-SCO countries. The following bullets provide a brief overview of the key exercises to date (*China Air Force*, 2010-11, p. 11-26; Xinhua, March 6, 2011; China Radio International, July 19, 2011; Xinhua, October 16, 2010; *Hurriyet Daily News*, October 11, 2010). All of the deployments have been supported by IL-76 transports, and some of them have involved aerial and/or ground refueling en route.

- Peace Mission 2007: JH-7s and Airborne forces to Russia;
- Peace Mission 2010: H-6s, escorted by J-10s, flew into and out of Kazakhstan, where they dropped bombs;
- Turkey (Anatolian Eagle 2010): Su-27s;
- Pakistan (Shaheen 2011): J-11s;
- Belorussia (2011): Airborne forces.

Shaheen 2011 was conducted in six steps, including “intelligence and information exchange, long range maneuver, establishment of a joint command structure, adaptability training, comprehensive training and theoretical discussions” (*PLA Daily*, November 15, 2011). It should be noted, however, that all of these exercises are highly scripted and the PLAAF trains on the individual components of each exercise for months in advance.

PLAAF and MOOTW

Although the PLAAF always has conducted domestic disaster relief operations, such as the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, it did not begin conducting large-scale international HA/DR efforts until 2011 in response to CMC Chairman Hu Jintao’s four Historic Missions initiated in 2004. In February to March 2011, the PLAAF sent IL-76s to evacuate Chinese civilians from Libya. Altogether, the aircraft flew 1,655 Chinese from Libya to Khartoum, Sudan, and then brought 287 back to China. In September 2011, four IL-76s took supplies to Pakistan following severe flooding and, in October 2011, three IL-76s took supplies to Thailand following flooding there (Xinhua, March 5, 2011; *China Daily*, March 5, 2011; March 2, 2011).

Sino-U.S. Military Relations

Since the United States and China initiated military exchanges in the 1980s, the relationship has had its highs and lows. Each side has certain core issues that have affected a more robust relationship. The U.S. side consistently cites a lack of reciprocity (places visited and issues discussed) and transparency (personnel, order of battle and doctrine) [4]. Since 2000, the PLA has focused on “building trust” and the “three obstacles”: Arms sales to Taiwan, reconnaissance missions near China’s border and Congressional restrictions imposed in 2000 (Xinhua, May 12, 2011).

PLAAF-USAF Relations

The PLAAF and USAF have only a limited military relationship. Concerning the three types of exchanges, although Xu Qiliang planned to visit the United States in 2008, the trip was cancelled because of the Sichuan earthquake. As a result, the last PLAAF commander and

CSAF visits were 1995 and 1998, respectively [5]. The last high-level exchanges occurred in 2007 and 2008 when the U.S. Pacific Air Force commander General Paul Hester and Nanjing MRAF commander Major General Jiang Jianzeng, respectively, exchanged visits (*Air Force Times*, December 11, 2008) [6]. While there have not been any functional exchanges for several years, the 13th Air Force commander Lieutenant General Hawk Carlisle did attend the PLAAF's 60th Anniversary in 2009 (13af.pacaf.af.mil, November 12, 2009).

Meanwhile, other U.S. military leaders, such as Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs General Peter Pace and Admiral Michael Mullen, visited PLAAF units in 2007 and 2001, respectively. In addition, Chief Master Sergeant James Roy, who was serving as the Senior Enlisted Leader at U.S. Pacific Command, led the first and only enlisted force delegation to China in 2008 [7].

The only active component today involves educational exchanges. Whereas the last visit to the United States by PLAAF Command College students was in 2007, the USAF War College has sent students to China every year since 2005 except for 2009 and 2010 because of the Taiwan arms sales issue [8]. The delegations have visited PLAAF Headquarters, colleges and operational units [9]. Of note, although USAF officers have attended the PLA National Defense University's foreign officer program, none have participated in the PLAAF Command College's foreign student program. Additionally, the U.S. Air Force Academy sends students to China for various programs on an annual basis and has hosted PLAAF cadets (*PLAAF 2010*).

Conclusions

Over the past decade, the PLAAF has expanded its relationship with current and future air force leaders and pilots, including high-level visits, functional exchanges, combined exercises and educational programs. These exchanges allow the PLAAF to evaluate itself and to identify how foreign air forces, including the USAF's friends and allies, operate. Meanwhile, the relationship with the USAF has stagnated. In order for the PLAAF-USAF relationship to move forward and prosper, it must include a wide variety of exchanges at all levels, which allow for a true reciprocal relationship to be formed and sustained.

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Notes:

1. Heidi Holz and Kenneth Allen, "Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics: The People's Liberation Army Experience with Military Relations," in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Andrew Scobell, eds., *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military*, Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College Press, June 2010.
2. Correspondence with CSAF Office of Staff Integration in March 2012.
3. *World Military Yearbook*, Beijing, PLA Press, November 2000, p. 706
4. Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, February 10, 2012.
5. Interviews with USAF and PLAAF officials.
6. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts*.
7. Ibid.
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9. Correspondence with Professor Zhang Xiaoming at the USAF Air War College.

ASEAN and the South China Sea: Movement in Lieu of Progress

By Ian Storey

After a period of relative calm during the second half of 2011, tensions in the South China Sea began to ramp up again in the first quarter of 2012. In particular a tense standoff in April between a Philippine Navy ship and three Chinese patrol boats over illegal fishing near the disputed Scarborough Shoal highlighted the increasing frequency of incidents at sea which, in the absence of conflict prevention mechanisms among the claimant countries' armed forces, could escalate into more dangerous confrontations. Meanwhile, a meeting of ASEAN leaders earlier in the month revealed sharp divisions within the organization on how to proceed with an ASEAN-China code of conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea.

To quickly summarize the last year in the South China Sea, during the first six months of 2011, tensions generated by contested territorial and maritime boundary claims in the South China Sea arguably reached their highest point since the end of the Cold War. Particularly alarming for the Southeast Asian claimants was the use of aggressive tactics by China's maritime law enforcement agencies against Philippine and Vietnamese survey ships between March and June. On the plus side, however, these incidents helped focus minds on the need to break the impasse on guidelines to implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DoC), the non-binding conflict management agreement signed by ASEAN and China in 2002. Talks on the implementation guidelines had been stymied for several years on a minor point of procedure: Beijing had objected to a formal clause in the guidelines stating that ASEAN would meet as a group prior to discussions with China.

Rising tensions and the failure to reach agreement on the guidelines had called into question ASEAN's credibility as the custodian of Southeast Asian security. In order to move the process forward, therefore, ASEAN finally conceded to China's objection in July and the offending clause was dropped. Although Beijing had made no concessions, it too was probably keen to finalize the guidelines to deflect criticism from its assertive behavior in the South China Sea during 2010-2011. The new

guidelines were issued last July.

The guidelines themselves lack specifics and do not go beyond existing clauses in the DoC. They simply reiterate the parties' commitment to promote peace and stability in the South China Sea and pursue a peaceful resolution of the dispute; that the implementation of the DoC be conducted in a "step-by-step" manner; that participation in cooperative projects be voluntary; and that confidence-building measures (CBMs) be decided by consensus. Manila, which had pushed for a more detailed set of guidelines, could barely conceal its disappointment. Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario bemoaned that without a more robust set of guidelines the DoC still "lacked teeth" (*Straits Times*, July 21, 2011).

In the months to come, the Philippine government was to face more disappointment vis-à-vis ASEAN's position on the South China Sea. Earlier in the year, the administration of President Benigno Aquino had issued a proposal to transform the disputed area into a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship and Cooperation" (ZoPFFC). Unlike the DoC and CoC, the ZoPFFC is designed to resolve the dispute rather than just manage tensions. The ZoPFFC envisages a two-step process. The first is to "segregate" disputed from non-disputed areas. Essentially, this means declaring coastal waters, exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and continental shelves as "non-disputed" as these areas are governed by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Only the Spratly Islands is a truly disputed area and should be "enclaved" accordingly. The second step calls for the demilitarization of the Spratlys and the establishment of a joint agency to manage seabed resources and fisheries.

Despite the merits of the Philippine proposal, it quickly ran into strong headwinds. Beijing rejected calls by the Philippines to submit their overlapping maritime boundary claims to the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea as the first step toward segregating disputed from non-disputed areas (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, July 13, 2011). China's state-run media derided the ZoPFFC as a "trick" designed to encourage U.S. "meddling" in the South China Sea (*Xinhua*, November 15, 2011).

Much to Manila's disappointment, its ASEAN partners were less than full-throated in their support for the ZoPFFC. The lack of support stems from the fact that

ASEAN does not take a position on the territorial claims of its four members in the South China Sea—Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam—nor those of China. If ASEAN endorsed the ZoPFFC, it would require the organization to take a position on China's claims so that the South China Sea could be “segregated” into disputed and non-disputed areas. This makes some ASEAN members uncomfortable, especially those with close economic and political links to China.

In July 2011, ASEAN agreed to consider the Philippine proposal. At a meeting of ASEAN legal experts in Manila in September, Cambodia and Laos did not send representatives, allegedly under pressure from China [1]. With only 8 of the 10 members present, consensus on the ZoPFFC was impossible to achieve. Undeterred, the Philippines attempted to forge a consensus at a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers in Bali in November but to no avail. According to Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, some members felt the proposal would “interrupt the momentum” of the DoC/CoC process (Kyodo, November 15, 2011). Del Rosario, however, implied that China had used its influence with certain ASEAN members to scupper the ZoPFFC: “We have been given the impression that political and economic considerations had hindered a fruitful and mutually acceptable outcome on the discussions” (*Wall Street Journal*, November 16).

At the East Asia Summit that followed the ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting, the Philippines attempted to spark discussion on the ZoPFFC but without success. So far, the only other ASEAN member to endorse the Philippine proposal publicly is fellow claimant Vietnam (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, November 20, 2011). ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan has promised the Philippine initiative “remains to be discussed further” (Kyodo, November 15, 2011). In fact, the ZoPFFC has been shunted off to the ASEAN Maritime Forum where it will be quietly forgotten. Due to Chinese opposition and the lack of consensus within ASEAN, the ZoPFFC is, for all intents and purposes, dead in the water.

Action and Reaction in 2012

The first four months of 2012 were characterized by the usual pattern of claim and counterclaim between the Philippines and China, and Vietnam and China. In

January, Manila accused Chinese warships of intruding into its waters a month earlier—an accusation Beijing rejected (*Straits Times*, January 8). In the same month, Vietnam protested China's announcement that it would impose its annual unilateral fishing ban in the northern part of the South China Sea between May 16 and August 1 as a violation of Vietnamese sovereignty (DPA, January 20). In March, Hanoi and Beijing exchanged sharp words over the detention of 21 Vietnamese fishermen by China near the Paracel Islands (Agence France Presse [AFP], March 21). The fishermen were eventually released on April 20.

Although the DoC does not explicitly prohibit development projects in and around the disputed atolls, the claimants continue to protest each other's activities. Vietnam has objected to plans by China to develop the tourism industry on the Paracels, while Beijing has protested Manila's plans to construct a wharf on Philippine-occupied Paga-asa Island in the Spratlys (*Nhan Dan*, February 24; *Philippine Star*, March 27).

By far the most serious set of disagreements in the South China Sea in 2012 has been between the Philippines and China over energy and fishery resources. At the end of February, 36 foreign energy companies submitted bids to the Philippine Department of Energy for licenses to explore for oil and gas in 11 offshore blocs—three of which lie close to the Reed Bank scene of a skirmish between two Chinese patrol boats and a Philippine-chartered survey vessel in March last year. The Aquino administration has rejected suggestions by Chinese officials that the two countries jointly develop hydrocarbon resources at Reed Bank on the grounds that the area falls within its EEZ (*Philippine Daily Inquirer*, February 27). China's Foreign Ministry described the bidding process as “illegal” (*China Daily*, March 1).

In April, tensions between the Philippines and China took a more serious turn. On April 10, the BRP Gregorio Del Pilar—the ex-U.S. Coast Guard cutter transferred to the Philippine Navy last August—tried to detain eight Chinese fishing vessels anchored at Scarborough Shoal, 130 nautical miles west of Luzon and within the Philippines' claimed EEZ. Scarborough Shoal does not belong to the Spratly archipelago, but both the Philippines and China contest its sovereignty. The Philippine Navy was prevented from detaining the fishermen by two

China Marine Surveillance (CMS) vessels and a tense standoff ensued. In an effort to deescalate the crisis the Philippines withdrew its warship and replaced it with a coast guard vessel even as China sent another CMS ship into the area. The Chinese fishermen, together with their catch that Manila maintains was obtained illegally, were subsequently escorted back to China by two CMS vessels. On April 20, China upped the ante by sending its largest patrol boat, the Yuzheng 310, to Scarborough Shoal.

ASEAN, China and the DoC/CoC Process

Although the implementation guidelines were disappointing, agreement made possible progress on two fronts: the negotiation of CBMs and the framing of a formal and binding CoC.

In January senior officials from ASEAN and China met in Beijing to discuss the DoC. They agreed to establish working groups to examine joint projects in four areas: marine environmental protection, marine scientific research, search and rescue, and combating transnational threats (MindaNews, January 13). Future joint projects will be financed from a \$476 million fund set up by China in November 2011 [2]. Whether these joint projects can be effectively implemented, and whether they will help reduce tensions, remains to be seen.

As talks on joint projects proceed, ASEAN also has begun internal discussions on a CoC. Progress, however, has been slowed by internal divisions within the organization, particularly between claimant and non-claimant members.

This year the ASEAN Chair is occupied by Cambodia. Since 1997 Cambodia has forged close political and economic ties with China, and the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen has been particularly supportive of Beijing on sensitive issues such as Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. At the same time, however, Hun Sen also has been careful to maintain cordial ties with Vietnam, the country's nearest neighbor. Accordingly, as ASEAN Chair Cambodia has tried to accommodate both Chinese and Vietnamese interests in the South China Sea.

In January, Hun Sen declared Cambodia would adopt a “neutral” stance on the South China Sea (VOA, January 24). Prior to the ASEAN Summit in April, however, Cambodia seemed eager to curry favor with China. Just

days before the summit was held, Chinese President Hu Jintao paid a 4-day state visit to Cambodia. During Hu's visit, ten bilateral agreements were inked—mostly covering Chinese concessional loans for agricultural and infrastructure projects in Cambodia. The two sides also agreed to double annual bilateral trade from \$2.5 billion to \$5 billion by 2017 [3]. Press reports suggested the two leaders had agreed that the South China Sea dispute should be settled bilaterally and not “internationalized”—both long standing Chinese positions (AFP, April 3; Reuters, March 31).

At the ASEAN Summit, Cambodia initially said the dispute would not appear on the formal agenda. Phnom Penh was forced to reverse this decision at the insistence of Vietnam and the Philippines. When the proposed CoC was raised, however, sharp differences of opinion emerged. Manila, backed by Hanoi, argued the ASEAN members should agree amongst themselves the draft text of the CoC before presenting it to China because, in President Aquino's view, “it is important we maintain ASEAN centrality” (*Washington Post*, April 3). Cambodia, however, argued Beijing should be involved in the drafting process from the start. Other ASEAN members feared that if China was not consulted on the contents of the draft code it may reject the final document.

During the summit, del Rosario revealed that the role of China in the CoC process had led to a “big disagreement” within ASEAN, though it was only Cambodia that had sought China's participation (*Cambodia Daily*, April 4). Later Hun Sen angrily denied that his government had been pressured or bribed by China into taking this position (*Wall Street Journal*, April 4). Suspicions remained, however, that financial aid promised by Hu had been a quid pro quo for Cambodian support on the South China Sea. As happened during negotiations on the DoC, China will be eager to influence the contents of the draft code so it can reject or water down clauses inimical to its interests without using proxies.

The divisions within ASEAN were not reflected in the final communiqué. The issue will be taken up again by ASEAN and Chinese officials in late April.

Given the difficult issues that need to be addressed in a CoC—such as the geographical scope of the agreement, what kinds of activities will be prohibited and, most

importantly, how it will be enforced—it seems highly unlikely that a draft code will be ready by July, the deadline set by ASEAN Secretary General Pitsuwan. Meanwhile, with the monsoon season over, fishing trawlers and survey ships have returned to the South China Sea, raising tensions and also the prospects of more confrontation at sea that could escalate into more serious diplomatic or military crises.

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Note:

1. 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.
2. Taylor M. Fravel, “All Quiet in the South China Sea,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 22, 2012.
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Sino-Philippine Tension and Trade Rising amid Scarborough Standoff

By Samantha Hoffman

Tensions are once again on the rise in the South China Sea. On April 10, a standoff began when two Chinese surveillance vessels blocked a Philippine warship from detaining Chinese fishermen suspected of poaching near the contested Scarborough Shoal. There has been a tense deadlock since. Both sides claim they seek a peaceful resolution, but there is still no indication that the incident is drawing to a close. There is reason to be concerned about the possibility of the standoff escalating to armed conflict, but there is also reason to be hopeful that both countries have a threshold they will choose not to cross. China’s Defense Minister Liang Guanglie said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is handling the confrontation for now, and any military action would be “according to the needs of diplomacy” He further

expressed confidence that the dispute will be resolved through diplomatic measures. (Sina, April 25).

By contrast, on March 20, the two countries celebrated the launch of the “Sino-Philippine Friendship and Exchange Year” (Phoenix Net, March 22). Despite mounting tension that led to the standoff, the notion of a friendship year did not appear to be all talk. China is currently the Philippine’s third largest trading partner, and in 2011 bilateral trade reached an all-time high, exceeding \$30 billion (The China and Philippines Portal, February 2). Last year, the two countries announced plans to double their bilateral trade to \$60 billion by 2016 (Xinhua, September 1, 2011). Even with the South China Sea dispute unresolved, this goal is attainable. Such contradictions demonstrate the complexity of the Sino-Philippine relationship and make understanding the development of bilateral relations difficult. What factors have caused tensions to again increase? Will the dispute be resolved or is armed conflict between China and the Philippines in the future?

The standoff is not exactly a shocking development, but it is the most serious escalation of the territorial dispute in recent years. Sino-Philippine relations were characterized by bellicosity during the 1990s. In 1995, it was discovered that China had built military structures at the Philippine-claimed Mischief Reef located 135 miles west of the Philippines’ Palawan Island (*New York Times*, February 18, 1995). Through 1998, tensions ran high as numerous incidents occurred in the disputed area, which also included other claimants.

In the 2000s, relations improved and it seemed the two countries might move past the dispute. There were indications that the idea of joint exploration was being seriously considered. In 2004, the Philippine National Oil Company and Chinese National Offshore Oil Company signed an agreement to conduct joint seismic studies in the South China Sea. Also by 2004, Beijing and Manila began to strengthen security ties in the disaster relief and humanitarian realms (“China and the Philippines: Moving Beyond the South China Seas Dispute,” *China Brief*, August 16, 2006; *Asia Times*, September 20, 2007). During a 2007 goodwill visit, former Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan pledged an initial \$6.6 million grant to the Philippine army for non-lethal military equipment as a confidence-building measure (*Asia Times*, September 20,

2007). Trade also improved dramatically—by 433 percent between 2000 and 2005 (“China and the Philippines,” *China Brief*, August 16, 2006; *China Daily* January 16, 2006). These developments indicated the two countries were moving toward a cooperative relationship.

Economic ties have continued to improve, but the impact this has on overall relations seems negligible. Philippine President Benigno Aquino III made his first state visit to China from August 30 to September 3, 2011. During the visit, both sides emphasized cooperation by focusing on economic relations rather than on their territorial dispute. So far this year, trade and investment are expanding. In January, China represented the highest percentage of the Philippines’ imports, which increased by 13.9 percent year-on-year to \$535.63 million. Philippine exports to China totalled \$591.23 million, giving it a trade surplus of \$55.6 million (GMA News, March 27). In February, the Philippines’ second largest telecommunications firm, Globe Telecom Inc., signed a \$700 million deal with China’s Huawei Technologies Co. and Alcatel-Lucent to upgrade its infrastructure (Xinhua, February 18). Despite continued bilateral trade and investment growth, this month’s standoff indicates economic cooperation has failed to diminish the South China Sea friction.

At the core of the South China Sea dispute are the Spratly Islands, which lie south of the Scarborough Shoal. They are a group of several hundred reefs and islets, located across some of the world’s most vital sea lanes. Manila’s claims are based on its 200-nautical mile exclusive economic zone, and on the country’s extended continental shelf, as defined by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (*Manila Bulletin*, April 20). China claims most of the South China Sea. Beijing also draws on the UNCLOS to argue historical claims over the waters (*People’s Daily*, April 18).

China’s greater assertiveness over territorial claims probably is the source of renewed tensions between the two. Chinese surveillance vessels increasingly patrol the contested area. They often harass foreign vessels, enforce fishing bans and detain crews. Chinese fishermen operating in the area have complained of increased policing by other countries and called for more Chinese patrols (*People’s Daily*, February 22). China uses such claims to justify its assertiveness. These surveillance vessels also harass foreign businesses operating in the region. One

such vessel recently reported it discovered 30 so-called “illegal” foreign oil wells in the South China Sea (Phoenix Net, March 21).

To China’s dismay, Manila has resisted these assertions. President Aquino recently accused China of expanding its claims over the disputed territory. He, admittedly a bit flippantly, asked: “If you don’t say ‘oops we have a 200-mile economic zone, you’re already claiming something from our coastline,’ What’s the next thing they’ll claim? The other side of Palawan [Island]?” (*Philippine Star*, April 8). The Philippines consistently has been firm with China. For instance, in March 2011, two Chinese surveillance vessels forced a survey ship contracted by the Philippines to conduct seismic studies in the Sampaguita gas field at Reed Bank 80 miles west of Palawan Island. Manila responded by flying two warplanes over the location (VOA News, March 5, 2011).

Tensions are on the rise, but why is China aggressively asserting sovereignty in lieu of a peaceful settlement? There are many issues at stake, but there are two issues that stand out: access to energy resources and strategic concerns.

The South China Sea is believed to be resource rich. Estimates of its potential oil and gas reserves vary widely. One Chinese estimate placed oil resources as high as 213 billion barrels of oil (bbl), whereas a U.S Geological Survey from 1993/1994 estimated about 28 bbl (U.S. Energy Information Administration, March 2008). As the world’s largest consumer of energy, and second largest consumer of oil, China has an insatiable and growing demand for energy resources (U.S. Energy Information Administration, May 2011; International Energy Agency, July 20, 2010). On the other side, the Philippines hopes to expand its domestic production so as to improve self-sufficiency [1].

In the buildup to the Scarborough Shoal standoff, debate over oil and gas exploration was a key irritant. On February 27, Energy Secretary Jose Almendras announced the administration decided to go forward with plans to open 15 offshore drilling blocks, including two claimed by China in waters northwest of Palawan Island, for bidding by petroleum companies (*The Guardian*, February 29). The offer was open to any investor, including Chinese, willing to be governed under Philippine law (*Philippine*

Star, March 18; *Global Nation*, February 27). China's foreign ministry strongly protested the move, stating any country or company engaging in oil and gas exploration activity without China's permission was acting illegally (Sina, February 29). As the disputed drilling blocks are explored, confrontation is liable to increase. For example, Forum Energy Plc has just announced it found larger-than-expected gas reserves at Sampaguita gas field (GMA News, April 24). Given the incident over the gas field in 2011, there is reason to be concerned over what the political impact of this discovery could be. Standing alone, access to energy resources still does not explain China's assertiveness because China has demonstrated that it can use cooperation to gain advantage in energy markets in places such as Central Asia.

The South China Sea is also one of the world's most vital shipping lanes. Approximately 80 per cent of China's energy imports must pass through the South China Sea before reaching China. The PLA Navy's expanding capability and the assertiveness of surveillance vessels can serve to protect such interests. As China's capacity to protect these and other strategic interests has expanded, distrust from other countries also has grown.

The U.S. "pivot" toward Asia has played a role in increasing Sino-Philippine tensions. In January, the Pentagon announced it was holding a bilateral strategic dialogue with Manila, where a spokesperson said the United States would discuss "how our enhanced posture in Asia can be useful to them as we expand our cooperation" (Reuters, January 26). Indeed, U.S.-Philippine military relations are broadening, and the United States clearly is showing greater interest in the territorial dispute. From April 16-27, the United States and the Philippines conducted an annual joint military exercise off the Palawan coast near the contested Spratly Islands. One drill involved retaking an offshore oil platform at the hands of terrorists in the South China Sea (VOA News, April 16). Normally, the exercise takes place near Luzon, which is a less sensitive location (*Sun Star*, March 8). Philippine and U.S. officials have stressed that the exercise is not meant to provoke China (GMA News, April 15; VOA News, April 16). Regardless, Beijing thought the exercise was provocative, so it encouraged wariness of Washington and Manila's intentions (Xinhua, April 17).

Changing military relations with the United States have perhaps made the Philippines feel more comfortable asserting its claims. For example, on March 30, Manila announced it would "exercise territorial sovereignty" by building a pier in the disputed islands (*Global Nation*, March 30). This unsurprisingly was rejected by China as a challenge to its sovereignty (Sina, March 30). Also last month, the Philippine and Vietnamese navies signed a memorandum of understanding to hold joint naval patrols along the contested South China Sea territory. There also was talk of a potential joint exercise (*Global Nation*, March 28). These actions possibly have prompted China escalate its assertions.

With the standoff continuing, the status Sino-Philippine relationship remains in question. How can we expect bilateral ties to develop?

The South China Sea dispute has overshadowed positive elements of bilateral ties—specifically, the rapid development of trade and investment. So far, the dispute seemingly has not affected the positive direction of economic relations. While economic relations might help restrain behavior in the South China Sea, they are unlikely to help lead to a resolution.

Potential to resolve the dispute peacefully is harmed by China's inflexibility in both bilateral and multilateral settings. Manila has proposed to bring the current dispute to the International Tribunal on the Law of Sea, but China refused on the grounds that the Scarborough Shoal is China's territory (*Huanqiu*, April 19; GMA News, April 17). Manila also has attempted to use ASEAN as a vehicle for resolving the dispute. Last year, President Aquino proposed a "Zone of Peace, Freedom, Friendship and Cooperation" (ZoPFFC) as a way to solve territorial questions, but idea was rejected quickly by China and has received little support from ASEAN ("The South China Sea Dispute: Movement in Lieu of Progress," *China Brief*, April 26).

The lack of progress toward a peaceful resolution inevitably raises the potential for armed conflict. This is a real possibility, and the current standoff balances precariously. This possibility is small and if armed conflict does occur it would likely be limited. On the surface China's navy has a huge advantage compared to

the Philippine Navy. The U.S.-Philippine mutual defense treaty however guarantees the two countries would come to each other's defense if an external party attacks either. This arrangement is a double-edged sword. On one hand, if Beijing presses the Philippines to the brink of armed conflict, Manila would have Washington's support. On the other, if Manila is in fact emboldened by its renewed military relationship with Washington, it potentially could prod China too far. The Philippines is not likely to receive U.S. support if it has provoked conflict. Also, it is Manila's best interest to ensure China's naval superiority does not come into play. If the premise that Beijing prefers to avoid conflict is accepted, then China probably will continue to assert its claims using the indirect military arm of surveillance vessels for "law enforcement," instead of further escalating the situation by directly involving the PLA Navy. In any case, there is reason to believe that there are enough incentives on all sides to keep any confrontation low-level.

Still, there are uncertain factors about Beijing's decision making that could impact Sino-Philippine relations. How much authority has the PLA been granted to enforce Chinese territorial claims, and how far might it push this authority while remaining within the limits? The communist party is obsessed with staying in power, and one way it has accomplished staying in power is by promoting nationalism in place of communism [2]. The risk this runs is that the government may find itself in a situation where foreign policy constructed to legitimize the CCP domestically is in severe conflict with China's best, or even Beijing's desired, interests. This does not mean Sino-Philippine tensions will lead to armed conflict—both China and the Philippines claim to seek a peaceful resolution of the dispute. It does, however, make matters far more complicated than bilateral negotiations between China and the Philippines might be able to resolve. Ultimately, there is no certainty as to where the threshold lies and whether both countries can ensure it remains uncrossed.

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Notes:

1. Leszek Buszynski, "The South China Sea: Oil, Maritime Claims, and U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2012, pp. 139–156.
2. Steve Tsang, "Consultative Leninism: China's New Political Framework," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 18, No. 62, November 2009, pp. 865–880; Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
