

STRATEGIC TRUST: RE-THINKING U.S.-CHINA MILITARY RELATIONS

by

DAVID A. BEITELMAN

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For my parents.

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## Abstract

Due to a historical pattern of conflict between rising and dominant states, China's rise has created fears that it is on an inevitable collision course with the United States. This has inspired a tremendous amount of research, often aimed at proving or disproving the inevitability of conflict between the two. One important aspect of the U.S.-China relationship that remains critically understudied is military-to-military relations. Military-to-military relations (mil-mil) have been characterized by stops and starts and are regarded as the weakest component of the bilateral relationship. The majority of mil-mil analyses come from think tanks or policy journals, often bereft of theoretical analysis. Strategic trust, the ostensible outcome of mil-mil relations, is central to understanding the relationship, and yet the term is used by policymakers, politicians, and analysts without definition or context. This project re-thinks the conventional narrative of U.S.-China military-to-military relations by introducing the concept of strategic trust. While others have offered theories of trust related to interpersonal relationships (Wheeler) or even the role of trust in institutions (Rathbun), a state-centric theory of trust that takes structure and anarchy as its starting points is lacking. Strategic trust is crucial for resolving theoretical ambiguities surrounding the problem of uncertainty in IR. It also clarifies how peaceful power transitions are possible. This project contributes to the burgeoning literature on trust in international relations by theorizing and applying a version of strategic trust appropriate for contemporary great power relations. Specifically, it identifies military-to-military relations as the mechanism through which strategic trust is generated and maintained. Drawing on interviews with 60 current and former U.S. government employees (civilian and military), think tank analysts, and academics, this dissertation provides a much-needed in-depth and theoretically informed analysis of U.S.-China military relations by incorporating strategic trust. In so doing, it serves as a bridge between two analytical islands: academics who ignore mil-mil relations, and mil-mil analysts who ignore IR theory, both of whom often ignore the critical role of trust.



## List of Abbreviations Used

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
ADIZ	Air Defence Identification Zone
ASAT	Anti-satellite
CBM	Confidence Building Measure
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CDE	Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (U.S.)
CMC	Central Military Commission
CNA	Center for Naval Analyses (U.S.)
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations (USN)
COCOM	Committee for Multilateral Export Controls
COLREGS	Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea
CPC	Communist Party of China (alternate name for the CCP)
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSBM	Confidence and Security Building Measure
CUES	Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea
DASD	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (U.S.)
DCL	Direct Communications Link
DCT	Defense Consultative Talks
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency (U.S.)
DMAA	Dangerous Military Activities Agreement
DoD	Department of Defense (U.S.)
DoN	Department of the Navy (U.S.)
DPCT	Defense Policy Coordination Talks
DTL	Defense Telephone Link
DWP	Defense White Paper
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ELN	European Leadership Network
FALG	Foreign Affairs Leading Group (China)
FDSP	Serbian Federal Directorate for Supply and Procurement

GSD-FAO	General Staff's Second Department Foreign Affairs Office
HA/DR	Humanitarian Assistance & Disaster Relief
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IMET	International Military Education & Training Program (U.S.)
INCSEA	Incidents At Sea Agreement
IR	International Relations
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (China)
MMCA	Military Maritime Consultative Agreement
MND	Ministry of National Defense (China)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act (U.S.)
NDU	National Defense University (U.S. or China)
NMOU	Notifications MOU
NSA	National Security Agency (U.S.)
NSC	National Security Council
NTGPR	New Type of Great Power Relations
OSDP	Office of the Secretary of Defense (Policy) (U.S.)
PACOM	Pacific Command (U.S.)
PKO	Peacekeeping Operation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
PTT	Power Transition Theory
RIMPAC	Rim of the Pacific naval exercise
RMOU	Rules MOU
SAR	Search and Rescue
SDA	Syria Deconfliction Agreement
SED	Strategic Economic Dialogue
S&ED	Strategic & Economic Dialogue
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SSD	Strategic Security Dialogue

TRA	Taiwan Relations Act (U.S.)
TSC	Taiwan Strait Crisis
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNODA	United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs
USCC	U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission
U.S.	United States
USAF	United States Air Force
USN	United States Navy
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WPNS	Western Pacific Naval Symposium

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the four decades since the People's Republic of China (PRC) began its process of economic reform under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, the country has taken full advantage of its 'backwardness' to become one of the most powerful states in the world. By traditional metrics (political, economic, military), China is second only to the United States, and the gap is closing. By some measures, it already has surpassed the U.S. as the world's largest economy.<sup>1</sup> China's rise, particularly since the turn of the millennium, has made it a central focus for international relations specialists the world over, including academics, think tank analysts, and government policymakers. A 2012 poll of U.S. academics and policymakers revealed that both rank the "rising power of China" as the top foreign policy problem facing the United States.<sup>2</sup> While China's rise has brought with it great opportunity, it has already caused deep concern. Two underlying questions drive that concern: How will China use its power, and how will the United States respond. Compounding the uncertainty surrounding the answers to these questions, the U.S. – China relationship is riddled with ambiguity. China is neither friend nor foe, and the relationship is marked by both competition and cooperation.

Major changes to the international system, such as the rise and fall of great powers, exacerbate the already prevalent uncertainty inherent to the anarchic character of world politics. Historically, similar periods of power transition have resulted in war. In 2012, Harvard's Graham Allison dubbed this historical pattern the 'Thucydides Trap,' so-named after the ancient Greek historian's characterization of the Peloponnesian War, which he famously described as being caused by the growth of Athenian power and the fear it caused in Sparta, the dominant power at the time.<sup>3</sup> Allison struck a chord, with the 'Thucydides Trap' becoming a widely used catch-all for describing the future of U.S.-

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<sup>1</sup> Noah Smith, "Who Has the World's Largest Economy? Not the U.S.," *Bloomberg* (online), October 18, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Avery, et al., "The Ivory Tower Survey," *Foreign Policy* (online), January/February 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Allison, "Avoiding Thucydides Trap," *Financial Times* (London), August 22, 2012.

China relations. China's President, Xi Jinping, has even referenced the 'trap' in numerous speeches.<sup>4</sup>

Writing about the 'coming conflict' between the U.S. and China has become a cottage industry, spurring books and articles too many to count. Given the structural dynamics in play, it is not surprising that the dominant theoretical lens through which China's rise is viewed is realism. It is the foundational approach for most analyses, as even liberal or constructivist theoretical approaches are derivative of the realist arguments because they all seek to address the basic question: Can China rise peacefully?<sup>5</sup> However, as Aaron Friedberg has noted, there are optimists and pessimists of all theoretical perspectives, including realists.<sup>6</sup>

Though the material capabilities of states and the distribution of power remain central to understanding power transitions, material capabilities alone cannot determine the likelihood of war between rising and dominant powers. And while predicting conflict is likely to sell more books, far less attention has been spent seriously considering how to avoid the 'Thucydides trap'.<sup>7</sup> The historical pattern is well understood, the causal logic well established. What is far more interesting, however, is trying to solve the puzzle of how to avoid what Mearsheimer refers to as the 'tragedy of great power politics'.<sup>8</sup> Most realists readily acknowledge that there are 'outs' – nuclear weapons and mutually assured destruction, for example, may have a pacifying effect on the budding strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China. Gilpin, conversely, leaves the door open for 'systemic accommodation,' a process through which the rising power can be effectively integrated

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<sup>4</sup> Xi Jinping, "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind," Speech at the United Nations Office at Geneva, January 18, 2017; Xi Jinping, "Speech on U.S.-China Relations," delivered in Seattle, Washington, September 22, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Jeffrey W. Legro, "What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power," *Perspectives on Politics* 5:3 (September 2007), 515 – 534; Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010), 5 – 36; G. John Ikenberry, "The Rise of China and the Future of the West," *Foreign Affairs* 87:1 (2008), 23 – 37.

<sup>6</sup> Aaron Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?" *International Security* 30: 2 (Fall 2005), 7 – 45.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Lyle J. Goldstein. *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015); James Steinberg & Michael O'Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Christopher Coker, *The Improbable War: China, the United States and the Logic of Great Power Conflict*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

into the existing system, ensuring both the rising and dominant states are ‘satisfied’.<sup>9</sup> The details of how such an accommodation could be reached, however, remain woefully underspecified in these works.

As China’s power continues to rise, it is inevitable that it will begin pressing against U.S. interests. For at least the past twenty years, China has also undertaken a large-scale military modernization program that aims to see it transform its counter-revolutionary, peasant party army into a modern fighting force capable of defending China’s increasingly global interests. With its newfound military prowess has come an increasingly confident and assertive foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> This is already evident in the South China Sea with China’s land reclamation program. Indeed, China claims it has “indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof.”<sup>11</sup> China is now challenging approximately seventy years of U.S. naval primacy in the region. Further exacerbating these tensions, China has been reluctant to embrace increased transparency regarding its military modernization and strategic intent, believing itself still too weak to expose potential weaknesses to the United States.

Simply put, as the U.S. and China pursue their own interests, they will find themselves increasingly at odds. The challenge then becomes how to avoid and respond to the inevitable crises that will arise as the U.S. and China attempt to navigate the process of accommodation. It is a challenge Hillary Clinton described as “trying to write a new answer to the old question of what happens when an established power and a rising power meet.”<sup>12</sup> China’s former Vice Foreign Minister He Yafei similarly noted that “It is a road that has never before been traversed.”<sup>13</sup> The central argument of this dissertation is that the key to successfully managing the inevitable crises that will emerge as the U.S. and China travel that road is strategic trust. Strategic trust is a term mentioned by both policymakers and analysts alike, though is rarely if ever defined. It is what I call a

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1981). See also:

<sup>10</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2014), viii.

<sup>11</sup> DoD, “Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy,” 8.

<sup>12</sup> Hillary Clinton, “Remarks at FP’s ‘Transformational Trends’ Forum,” *Foreign Policy* (online), November 30, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> He Yafei, “The Trust Deficit: How the U.S. ‘pivot’ to Asia looks from Beijing,” *Foreign Policy* (online), May 13, 2013.



descriptor without description. The lack of attention afforded to this concept is unsurprising, as the general concept of trust in international relations remains critically understudied, and under-valued.

Though it is explained in more detail in the next chapter, strategic trust defines a relationship in which there is a mutual understanding of strategic interest. It is predicated on the exchange of information that enables states to have a measure of predictability regarding the behavior and intentions of other states. It is a context in which cooperation, however limited, may take place. Strategic trust is the knowledge that the signals you are sending will be correctly interpreted. It does not connote positive feelings or friendship, or that the other state will act with your best interests in mind. Those are characteristics of *mutual* trust, or, as Wheeler argues, *bonding* trust – both of which are explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

The conception of strategic trust advanced within this dissertation is one developed to operate within the theoretical confines of mainstream realist theory. It takes structure and anarchy as foundational. It accepts that structure creates the circumstances in which interstate relationships take place, and that the relational context for major powers, particularly those involved in a power transition, is unique. It also accepts that the pressure and pervasive uncertainty generated by that structural context places limitations on the type of trust possible between states. Strategic trust clarifies the relationship between threat identification, intention, and material capabilities by focusing on the relational context in which those factors are interpreted. While it does not remove uncertainty from the equation, its presence can significantly dampen it, relieving some of the pressure and enabling truly security-seeking states to peacefully resolve conflicts and successfully navigate the process of systemic accommodation.

Central to the development of strategic trust is dialogue and interaction. Wang Jisi suggests “The best way to reduce tensions is through candid and comprehensive strategic conversations.”<sup>14</sup> Former Vice President Joe Biden echoed that sentiment, saying, “Candor generates trust. Trust is the basis on which real change, constructive change is

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<sup>14</sup> Wang Jisi, “China’s Search for Stability With America,” *Foreign Affairs* 84:5 (September/October 2005), 47.

made.”<sup>15</sup> This dissertation takes a similar approach, arguing that interaction is central to the development and maintenance of strategic trust. More specifically, I argue that military-to-military relations are the mechanism which facilitates that development and maintenance. To support that argument, I ground military-to-military relations in the wider context of confidence-building measures.

The logic behind strategic trust is quite simple: keep your friends close, but your enemies closer. Given the pervasive uncertainty in the international system, which is further exacerbated by a power transition, the ability of states to accurately interpret the actions of potential rivals becomes paramount. It is what ensures any conflict is a deliberate act, rather than the result of miscalculation or misperception. And given the reality that crises are unavoidable as two strategic rivals bump up against one another, miscalculation and misperception can easily lead to an unwanted escalation of tension or violence. The best way of acquiring information, and the understanding of the other state to put that information into its proper context, is through regular contact. There are those who argue that U.S. military-to-military relations with a potential adversary, like China, are a threat to national security. It reveals too much about how the U.S. operates and what its potential vulnerabilities are. It helps China more than it helps the United States.

Military-to-military relations, however, remains a critically understudied component of the bilateral relationship. The majority of limited works written about the subject come from think tanks and policy journals. Academic analyses tend to focus on quantitative and descriptive approaches, detailing how much a type of activity has taken place and detailing why the relationship has not been more successful. These analyses are divorced from IR theory. Indeed, the military relationship is rarely considered in a wider context, such as confidence-building measures. Most importantly, however, existing analyses of the military-to-military relationship have failed to analyze the relationship based on its supposed desired outcome: strategic trust. And so there is a disconnect, leaving a critical gap of understanding. Academic and theoretical approaches ignore the importance of military-to-military relations. Analyses of military-to-military relations ignore IR theory. Both ignore strategic trust.

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Ben Blanchard & Michael Martina. “Biden calls for trust with China amid airspace dispute,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 4, 2013.

This project offers a first step towards developing the concept of strategic trust and applying it to the dominant realist theoretical frameworks used to analyze U.S.-China relations. Without an understanding of how the U.S. and China are working to develop strategic trust, existing theories will be inadequate for explaining how China can rise peacefully or how the process of accommodation works. I have identified military-to-military relations as a key mechanism used to generate and maintain strategic trust. Incorporating this concept into a theoretically informed analysis of the military-to-military relationship provides a more cautiously optimistic outcome than is usually ascribed.

This project makes several important contributions. First, it contributes to the burgeoning literature on trust in international relations by offering a robust assessment and application of strategic trust as a concept. As argued in the next chapter, existing theoretical approaches that employ a similar concept of trust fall short. I attempt to correct those deficiencies by applying strategic trust to an in-depth case study. The U.S.-China relationship, specifically the military-to-military relationship, is a hard case for strategic trust. Militaries by their nature are suspicious institutions, required to assume the worst of other states as a means of guarding against those potential outcomes. The U.S. and China are in a relationship where they are structurally incentivized to be distrustful of each other. The U.S. and Chinese militaries, by extension, are likely to be particularly suspicious of each other. Indeed, as one observer notes, “The military-to-military relationship is the most sensitive and most fragile part of Sino-U.S. relations. It is also one of the most important bellwethers for overall bilateral relations between the two countries.”<sup>16</sup> Demonstrating the viability of strategic trust in the context of U.S.-China military relations, therefore, is important for establishing its utility in other interstate relations. Furthermore, it contributes to the attempt by trust researchers to illustrate the importance of the concept to IR more generally to an apprehensive and sometimes disinterested ‘mainstream’ theoretical audience.

Second, it adds a much needed in-depth, theoretically informed analysis of U.S.-China military relations. In so doing, it serves as a bridge between the previously

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<sup>16</sup> Yang Yi, “A PLA Navy Perspective on Maritime Security Cooperation,” in *China, the United States, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership*, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, & Nan Li, eds. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 493.

identified analytical ‘islands’: academics who ignore mil-mil relations, and analysts who ignore IR theory. Not only does this enrich the collective understanding of the relationship, it corrects an important misconception: that military-to-military relations between the U.S. and China have not been particularly effective and are therefore not particularly important. As the U.S.-China relationship becomes more tense, the importance of the military-to-military relationship will only grow. As one senior DoD official said of the mil-mil relationship, “There are days when it’s the end-all-be-all because it’s the only thing between us and war.”<sup>17</sup>

To bear this out, the dissertation is organized as follows. First, I provide a more detailed explanation of strategic trust, situating it within the wider context of trust research. This chapter distinguishes between three common approaches to trust: calculative, mutual, and normative. I then demonstrate the importance of adopting a version of trust built with interstate relations in mind and illustrate how strategic trust meets that need.

I then situate the concept of trust within the wider context of confidence-building measures (CBMs). This allows me to introduce the concept of military diplomacy and illustrate its connection with the process of generating and maintaining strategic trust. After a thorough analysis of CBMs, I apply the concept to the Cold War. The in-depth exploration of CBMs and mil-mil relations during the Cold War provides a frame of reference for understanding how the concept has worked in practice in a relationship that is as structurally similar to the U.S.-China case as possible. This analysis then extends into contemporary U.S.-Russian military-to-military relations, illustrating the enduring value of mil-mil relations and the importance of strategic trust. Throughout, I consider both U.S. and Soviet/Russian objectives and approaches to CBMs and mil-mil relations.

With the conceptual side firmly established, the dissertation then begins its in-depth analysis of U.S.-China military relations, beginning with a historical overview that highlights the ebbs and flows of the relationship from its inception in 1979 through to 2016. I break the relationship down into four distinct periods, emphasising the important progress the mil-mil relationship has made. The purpose is to provide background and context for the more specific and in-depth analysis that follows.

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

Chapter 6 provides a thorough analysis of China's approach to military diplomacy, including its bureaucratic oversight process and strategic culture. Taking a closer look at the PLA, its military modernization, views on transparency, and military relations with the U.S., provides a level of insight often missing from contemporary analyses of U.S.-China mil-mil relations. The purpose is to present a Chinese perspective, enabling subsequent criticisms to be made with appropriate consideration and context.

This is followed by an overview of the U.S. approach to military relations with China. I break down its objectives into component pieces, taking a closer look at the policy of 'shaping' an adversary through interaction, Washington's attempts to address the risks of miscommunication and miscalculation, and its views on transparency. This is then followed by a brief overview of the often-conflicting approach the U.S. and China take CBMs and military-to-military relations.

With the theoretical aspects of the relationship firmly established, I then analyze the relationship in practice. This includes an overview of existing U.S.-China CBMs and the various categories of interaction: recurrent exchanges, high-level exchanges, functional exchanges, academic exchanges, and ship visits and exercises. In order to draw out the limitations of mil-mil relations, while simultaneously reinforcing their importance, I provide a detailed analysis of two prominent incidents at sea: the 2001 EP-3 incident, during which a PLA jet collided with a U.S. Navy surveillance plane, and the 2009 USNS *Impeccable* incident, where an unarmed U.S. Navy surveillance ship was harassed by numerous Chinese vessels. I follow this with a brief look at other incidents that have occurred since.

Lastly, I take the information and lessons learned from the preceding chapters and place the mil-mil relationship into context. This includes drawing out often overlooked criticisms of the U.S. approach and demonstrating that when properly considered, and when strategic trust is applied, the military relationship has been more successful than is commonly believed. By 'rethinking' mil-mil relations, I demonstrate the importance of both the mil-mil relationship and strategic trust to the future of U.S.-China relations, where crises and incidents are likely to be more common.

Throughout the dissertation, and particularly in the later chapters, I draw on 60 semi-structured interviews I conducted with current and former U.S. government

employees, both civilian and military, as well as noted China experts at think tanks and universities. These interviews were conducted in-person in and around Washington, D.C., as well as via Skype telephone calls, between February 14 and April 20, 2017. The full list of interview subjects is available as Appendix 1.

### Points of Clarification

Before moving forward, for the purposes of clarity it is important to identify and explain certain omissions, assumptions, and positions. The first and most important assumption is that neither the United States nor China *want/seek* war. While both want to defend, and even expand, their interests and power, there is a broad recognition that the costs of war are extremely high and the benefits negligible. Said another way, I am operating under the assumption that both the United States and China are, fundamentally, *security seeking* states. The question of whether or not China is a status quo power or a revisionist state cannot be dismissed, but these terms mean different things to different theorists.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, China's power has risen to a point where the regional status quo has already been upset; the question of revisionism is in many respects a moot point. While the nuances of these approaches will be discussed in more detail below, a key distinction that can be made is whether China *intends* to violently change the international system, or even the Asia-Pacific region. In the face of a state determined to use force to achieve its aims, war is a foregone conclusion. While consideration will be given to other possibilities, the underlying assumption is that the U.S. and China are fundamentally security seeking states, and any possible war between the United States and China will be of the unintended, or 'tragic', variety. That is to say, rather than a deliberate act, war is more likely to emerge as a result of the unintended escalation of an incident or crisis.

Relatedly, the question of whether or not China *will* rise (that is, will continue to grow economically, politically, and militarily at roughly the same pace it has for the past

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<sup>18</sup> For example, see Alastair Iain Johnston, "Is China a Status Quo Power?" *International Security* 27:4 (Spring 2003), 5 – 56; Randall L. Schweller, "Neorealism's status-quo bias: What security dilemma?" *Security Studies* 5:3 (1996), 90 – 121; Steve Chan, "On States' Status-Quo and Revisionist Dispositions: Discerning Power, Popularity and Satisfaction from Security Council Vetoes," Paper presented at the ISA annual meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, March 2016.

thirty or so years) is of less concern to the question of whether or not it can be peacefully integrated into the existing system. Some, like Steve Chan, have gone to great lengths to dispute the very notion that a power transition is taking place between the U.S. and China.<sup>19</sup> This is, of course, an important question – it makes little sense to talk about U.S.-China relations in the context of a power transition if one is not taking place. However, it is more a question of ‘when’ rather than ‘if’. Even if China’s rise slows – and its economic growth has already begun to taper off – the fact remains that China has grown sufficiently to upset the existing balance of power. Moreover, as Christensen has argued, China does not need to surpass the United States to create instability.<sup>20</sup> In Christensen’s words, it is possible to ‘pose problems without catching up’. “China can pose major problems for American security interests, and especially for Taiwan, without the slightest pretense for catching up with the United States by an overall measure of national military power or technology.”<sup>21</sup> The underlying assumption of this dissertation, that crises and incidents are likely to be more common as China’s power grows, therefore remains intact regardless of whether or not China actually surpasses the United States in all measures of comprehensive power (economic, political, military).

This research project does not include certain aspects of the U.S.-China military relationship. It does not consider the relationship with respect to the nuclear, space, and to a lesser-extent, cyber domains. These are highly nuanced and technical subjects, worthy of dissertation-length analyses on their own. More importantly, they are strategic domains with unique pressures, governance, and logic. They are also particularly sensitive aspects of the relationship, making access to information (especially through interviews) more difficult. I also avoid any in-depth discussion of the U.S.-Taiwan-China relationship, or other bi-or-multilateral relationships in the region (e.g., U.S.-Japan). While these are all important factors in the overall U.S.-China relationship, particularly the issue of Taiwan, incorporating them into an analysis on the bilateral U.S.-China military relationship muddies the waters. Instead, the emphasis is primarily on the

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<sup>19</sup> Steve Chan, *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory: A Critique*, (London: Routledge, 2008); Chan, “Is there a Power Transition between the U.S. and China? The Different Faces of National Power,” *Asian Survey* 45: 5 (September/October 2005), 687 – 701; Chan, “Exploring Puzzles in Power-Transition Theory: Implications for Sino-American Relations,” *Security Studies* 13: 3 (Spring 2004), 103 – 141.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “Posing Problems without Catching Up: China’s Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy,” *International Security* 25: 4 (Spring 2001), 5 – 40.

<sup>21</sup> Christensen, “Posing Problems without Catching Up,” 7.

maritime domain, as interactions between the U.S. and China on, or above, the water are the most frequent.

Maritime power is a “vital element”<sup>22</sup> of the bilateral relationship and is increasingly important both with respect to the power balance between the two directly and regionally, and to their respective ability to pursue their strategic interests. For example, maritime power is becoming increasingly “essential” to the achievement of China’s national goals.<sup>23</sup> Between 2013-2014, China “launched more naval vessels than another other country,” and the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) currently possesses the largest naval fleet in Asia, “with more than 300 surface ships, submarines, amphibious ships, and patrol craft.”<sup>24</sup> By comparison, Japan, with the second largest fleet in the region, has only 67 vessels (though another 78 as part of its maritime law enforcement capacity).<sup>25</sup> The PLAN is the second largest navy in the world “in terms of warship tonnage, behind only the U.S.”<sup>26</sup>

While the United States is in the process of shifting naval resources to the Pacific, aiming to have 60 percent of its naval and overseas air assets home-ported in the Pacific region and increasing the number of ships assigned to Pacific Fleet outside of U.S. territory by 30 percent by 2020,<sup>27</sup> the overall size of the U.S. Navy (USN) remains a point of contention. While the post-World War II average was 740 ships,<sup>28</sup> the USN currently fields 282.<sup>29</sup> President Donald Trump promised an increase to 350 ships during his 2016 election campaign.<sup>30</sup> While the USN remains qualitatively better than the PLAN, including its ability to project power around the world, size still matters.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> Michael McDevitt, *Becoming a Great “Maritime Power”: A Chinese Dream*, Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), June 2016, iii.

<sup>24</sup> United States Department of Defense, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy* (August 21, 2015), 10.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. DoD, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, 12 – 13. China has an additional 205 vessels in its maritime law enforcement fleet. Maritime law enforcement includes branches like the Coast Guard.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Fabey, *Crashback: The Power Clash Between the U.S. and China in the Pacific* (New York: Scribner, 2017), 16.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. DoD, *Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy*, 22.

<sup>28</sup> Jerry Hendrix & Robert C. O’Brien, “How Trump Can Build a 350-Ship Navy,” *Politico* (online), April 13, 2017.

<sup>29</sup> United States Navy, “Status of the Navy,” [http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav\\_legacy.asp?id=146](http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=146).

<sup>30</sup> Ashley Parker & Matthew Rosenberg, “Donald Trump Vows to Bolster Nation’s Military Capacities,” *The New York Times* (online), September 7, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> This was a sentiment echoed in numerous interviews. The ability of the USN to project power, maintain a credible deterrent, and respond in the event of a crisis or conflict depends in large part on its physical presence in the region. Otherwise, the qualitative edge can be overwhelmed by the PLANs sheer numbers



China's Ministry of National Defense (MND) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) responded to the USN's plans to "reposture its forces from today's roughly 50/50 percent split between the Pacific and Atlantic to about a 60/40 split," as "not conducive to security and mutual trust," and "inappropriate."<sup>32</sup>

The maritime domain is also where almost every single incident between the two countries has occurred and where the risk of future incidents is highest.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as Lyle Goldstein puts it, there is a "troubling tendency toward ever-escalating naval rivalry in the Western Pacific."<sup>34</sup> The maritime domain has therefore attracted the most attention as far as agreements, understandings, and other CBM mechanisms between the two states. As one former senior DoD official told me, the maritime domain is where the mil-mil relationship is "closest and most robust."<sup>35</sup> Christopher Yung and Wang Dong similarly note that "The maritime domain is the most mature environment in which China and the U.S. interact and is an area where the two major powers repeatedly discuss key issues of contention and cooperation."<sup>36</sup>

More to the point, if the U.S. and China *were* to ever fight a war, it would primarily be fought at sea. The primary 'triggers' for a conflict are rooted in sovereignty disputes<sup>37</sup> (e.g., Taiwan, disputed territories in the South and East China Seas), which are themselves maritime in nature. This is noteworthy, as "Maritime rivalry may be especially dangerous, and has contributed to the outbreak of several major wars in the past."<sup>38</sup> A 2013 USCC report to Congress noted that "PLA modernization is altering the security balance in the Asia-Pacific, challenging decades of U.S. military preeminence in the region."<sup>39</sup> It is a similar pattern as the one that emerged as the Soviet Union fielded its

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(and increasing technical sophistication). Importantly, the Asia-Pacific is increasingly important for the U.S. for reasons that extend beyond China, including stability on the Korean Peninsula, and rapidly expanding economies throughout the region. For more on this, see Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2012 Report to Congress*, (November 2012), 145.

<sup>33</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Lyle J. Goldstein, "Resetting the US-China Security Relationship," *Survival* 53:2 (April-May 2011), 94.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Yung & Wang Dong. *U.S.-China Relations in the Maritime Security Domain*. NBR Special Report 57, (The National Bureau of Asian Research, April 2016), 2.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Michael D. Swaine, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>38</sup> Goldstein, "Resetting the US-China Security Relationship," 94.

<sup>39</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2013 Report to Congress*, (November 2013), 233.

increasingly modernized navy in the late 1960s, as outlined in **Chapter X**. The primary expression of presence, or ‘showing the flag’, for both states in the region is naval. As several interview subjects noted, China is not particularly concerned about the prospect of a U.S. invasion, nor does the U.S. military consider it a viable, or desirable option. Accordingly, the army-to-army relationship is quite cordial because neither army sees the other as a likely adversary.<sup>40</sup> The army-to-army relationship may be less contentious, but it is also less developed.<sup>41</sup> The maritime domain is therefore central to understanding the wider military-to-military relationship.

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<sup>40</sup> For example: Interview with Bonnie Glaser, Washington, D.C.; Interview with Abraham Denmark, Washington, D.C.

<sup>41</sup> See: Russell D. Howard & Albert S. Willner, “China’s Rise and the U.S. Army: Leaning Forward,” United States Military Academy, May 2002; Jer Donald Get, “What’s With the Relationship Between America’s Army and China’s PLA? An Examination of the Terms of the U.S. Army’s Strategic Peacetime Engagement with the People’s Liberation Army of the People’s Republic of China,” Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, September 15, 1996.

## CHAPTER 2: STRATEGIC TRUST & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis. The central theoretical concept in this dissertation is strategic trust (ST). This chapter will define ST and situate it within the larger context of IR theory. It begins with an overview on general conceptual approaches to trust, including its relationship with cooperation, risk, reciprocity & reassurance, and confidence. It then distinguishes between commonly employed types of trust before situating the concept of trust within realist theory.

### General Approaches to Trust

Trust is the foundation of many, if not all, social relations.<sup>42</sup> Everyday, people must trust one another to varying degrees and in a variety of contexts. Commuters trust that bus and taxi drivers will deliver them safely. Patients trust doctors to provide accurate information and proper care. Spouses trust the fidelity of their partners, and parents trust teachers to watch over their children and help them raise responsible adults. Citizens in democratic countries trust in the rule of law and the fairness of the institutions of government. The situations in which trust plays a central role in interpersonal and societal relations are endless. It is also clear from these examples that there are degrees and types of trust.<sup>43</sup> The trust afforded to a doctor is not the same as the trust placed in a cab driver or family member. Trust is contingent on context. More specifically, trust is largely determined by what is at stake. Low stake interactions require less trust. High stake interactions, like those where life is at risk, requires more trust.

Despite the recognition that trust exists between individuals, between individuals and groups or institutions (e.g., states or corporations), and between non-state groups (e.g. in the business community), when it comes to international relations, it is often said

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<sup>42</sup> Herbert C. Kelman, "Building trust among enemies: The central challenge for international crisis resolution," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (2005), 640; Herbert W. Kee and Robert E. Knox. "Conceptual & Methodological Considerations in the Study of Trust & Suspicion," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 14:3 (September 1970), 357.

<sup>43</sup> Eric Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP; 2002); Russell Hardin, *Trust* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006); Kelman, "Building trust among enemies."

(or implied) that there is little room for trust between states.<sup>44</sup> It is a view many of the current or former government practitioners interviewed for this project echoed. This is because the structural condition of anarchy makes the stakes of trusting too high. When describing a possible version of trust that might exist in international relations, a former senior DoD official contemplated a transactional type of trust, where “maybe after a while you begin to think that when they give their word, they keep it.”<sup>45</sup> However, “Even that is pretty rare in international relations.”<sup>46</sup> “It’s not trust based on familiarity, closeness, sense of common interest – the kinds of things that really would define trust in a human relationship just don’t apply here.”<sup>47</sup> This is how realists tend to describe IR, where every defection can potentially tilt the scales in favor of a competitor and be impossible to recover from. However, as Kugler and Zak have noted, “Exaggerating the effects of anarchy and under-estimating the potential for trust skews our overall view of opportunities for cooperation over conflict.”<sup>48</sup>

Trust is at the core of interstate relations just as it is with other social interactions. And just as with those other interactions, when it comes to trust in IR, there are types and degrees, determined by context and circumstance. As Kelman said, “Trust takes different forms in different relationships.”<sup>49</sup> The most prevalent form of trust in IR is *strategic trust*, a calculative version of trust based primarily around degrees of confidence and predictability in your assessment and understanding of another state’s intentions and interests.<sup>50</sup> Less common, though still present, is *mutual trust*, built around the perception of shared interests and intentions. These concepts, and other types of trust that have been argued as being part of IR, are explored in more detail further below. First, however, it is useful to review common approaches to trust, drawing primarily on literature from other

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<sup>44</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001); John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994/1995), 5 – 49; John J. Mearsheimer, “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War,” *International Security* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1990), 5 – 56.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, April 11, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, April 11, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, April 11, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>48</sup> Jacek Kugler & Paul J. Zak, “Trust, Cooperation, and Conflict: Neuropolitics and International Relations,” in *Advancing Interdisciplinary Approaches to International Relations*, Patrick James & Steve A. Yetiv, eds., (UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 85.

<sup>49</sup> Kelman, “Building trust among enemies,” 646.

<sup>50</sup> As Wheeler (2018: 4) notes, this version of trust has different names. It is sometimes referred to as rationalist trust or calculative trust. I prefer strategic trust, given the context in which I apply the term (international relations).

disciplines where the research is more mature. This is useful for understanding how to frame and think about trust, though as it will demonstrated, directly applying conceptions of trust to IR is problematic.

As Simpson has noted, “trust is a complex, multidimensional construct, making it difficult to operationalize, measure, and interpret.”<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, “trust can be construed in different ways.”<sup>52</sup> The consequence of the “indiscriminate use of the term,” is that we end up with “more confusion rather than comprehension.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, PytlikZillig & Kimbrough have identified at least nine conceptually different definitions of trust (which they describe as ‘essences’ of trust) with no fewer than twenty-two variations of the boundaries which denote the various ‘essences’ (e.g., what is/not included, counted, important).<sup>54</sup> Yet another review identified over eighty definitions.<sup>55</sup>

This provides both opportunities and challenges. By being able to draw on so many disparate uses of the same concept, it is possible to build a comprehensive understanding of the term ‘trust’ and then identify the concepts most appropriate to international relations. Challenges include maintaining cohesion and clarity, particularly when incorporating concepts and theories from outside of IR. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that more often than not, those who employ the concept of trust in international relations do so without explaining how trust is actually developed in a systematic or concrete way. Rather, theorists loosely appeal to interactions, such as dialogue, as being necessary to create ‘mutual trust’ (for example), without specifying the processes through which the mechanism of choice actually generates trust.<sup>56</sup> The process is meant to be self-evident. Where trust *is* explicitly theorized for use in IR, it is

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<sup>51</sup> Jeffrey A. Simpson, “Psychological Foundations of Trust,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16, no. 5 (October 2007), 264.

<sup>52</sup> Simpson, “Psychological Foundations of Trust,” 264.

<sup>53</sup> T. K. Das & Bing-Sheng Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust: A Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 19, no. 1 (Fall 2004), 95.

<sup>54</sup> Lisa M. PytlikZillig, & Christopher D. Kimbrough, “Consensus on Conceptualizations and Definitions of Trust: Are We There Yet?” in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Trust: Towards Theoretical and Methodological Integration*, Ellie Shockley, Tess M.S. Neal, Lisa M. PytlikZillig, & Brian H. Bornstein, editors, (New York: Springer, 2016), 17 – 47.

<sup>55</sup> Fergus Lyon, Guido Mollering, and Mark N.K. Saunders (editors). *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*: 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (UK: Edward Elgar Publishers, 2015), 3.

<sup>56</sup> Richard J. Barnet, “Why Trust the Soviets?” *World Policy Journal* 1:3 (Spring 1984), 461 – 482; Yan Xuetong, “Strategic Cooperation without Mutual Trust: A Path Forward for China and the United States,” *Asia Policy* 15 (January 2013), 4 – 6; Wang Honggang, “How Can the U.S. and China Build a “Cooperative Partnership”?” *Contemporary International Relations* 21:4 (July/August 2011); Yuan Peng, “Sino-U.S. Strategic Mutual Trust,” *Contemporary International Relations* 18:2 (March/April 2008).

inappropriate for explaining great power relations, ignoring or minimizing the effects of structure and anarchy on state behavior. There are, of course, notable exceptions.<sup>57</sup> Given the variance in approach and definition, the following subsections take a closer look at component concepts to trust.

### Trust & Cooperation

While trust is a contested concept, many of the underlying principles supporting the varied approaches are similar. There is, for example, a debate over whether cooperation and trust are mutually exclusive concepts. This distinction becomes important in light of the fact that IR theorists have given a great deal of attention to cooperation while ignoring trust, despite their close relationship. Kydd argues that “cooperation requires a certain degree of trust between states.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, Larson notes that trust is “usually a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for states to cooperate.”<sup>59</sup> Axelrod, conversely, has argued that cooperation does not require trust,<sup>60</sup> a view recently shared by Steve Chan.<sup>61</sup> Yan argues that U.S.-China cooperation need only be based on shared interests rather than “mutual trust.”<sup>62</sup> Many interview subjects similarly tried to disentangle trust from cooperation, with one even telling me it was a “silly question.”<sup>63</sup> “One has to do with action, the other has to do with motive.”<sup>64</sup> The two concepts, however, can not be so easily separated. Cooperation requires a measure of trust and trust - at least insofar as international relations is concerned - is a hollow concept without cooperation.

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Ken Booth & Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997); Andrew Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005); Andrew Kydd, “Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation,” *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (Spring 2000), 325 – 357; Kugler & Zak, “Trust, Cooperation, and Conflict.”

<sup>58</sup> Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Deborah Welch Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” *Political Psychology* 18, no. 3 (September 1997), 704.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>61</sup> Steve Chan, *Trust & Distrust in Sino-American Relations: Challenges & Opportunities* (Amhurst: Cambria Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Yan, “Strategic Cooperation without Mutual Trust.”

<sup>63</sup> Interview with senior U.S. official, March 12, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with senior U.S. official, March 12, 2017, via Skype phone call.

Many of the discrepancies in the conceptual treatment of trust and cooperation boil down to the glut of definitions employed by theorists. Or, as is often the case, from the employment of trust without a definition. Whether they acknowledge it or not, theorists dealing with the concept of cooperation are, invariably, engaging the concept of trust. For example, Kelman advances a concept of ‘working trust’ built on the “other side’s seriousness and sincerity in the quest for peace – in its genuine commitment, largely out of its own interests, to finding a mutually acceptable accommodation.”<sup>65</sup> That is, trust is increased “to the extent each side is convinced the other is moving in a conciliatory direction *out of its own interests*. This contrasts with communal relationships, in which trust is a function of our belief that the other side is acting out of a commitment to protecting and promoting *our* interests.”<sup>66</sup> This is similar to Axelrod’s argument that, “There is no need to assume trust between players: the use of reciprocity can be enough to make defection unproductive.”<sup>67</sup> The role of reciprocity in building trust is addressed in greater detail further below. However, the argument Axelrod is making is that actors can be expected to cooperate out of self-interest, not out of the belief that the ‘other’ has your best interests in mind. Cooperation out of self-interest still requires trust. More to the point, there is nothing about self-interest that makes it incompatible with trust, provided both parties of the trusting relationship are aware of it.

No matter how you approach the relationship between trust and cooperation, they are ultimately inseparable. Trust cannot be discussed outside of the context of cooperation in any meaningful way because trust is an interactive concept. As Simpson argues, “trust is a function of properties of the self (I), the specific partner (you), and the specific goal in the current situation (to do X).”<sup>68</sup> This is the essence of calculative trust, discussed in more detail below. Regardless of whether the actors are motivated by self-interest or some degree of altruism, or bond, towards the other actor in the relationship, each is ‘trusting’ the other to some extent. To say, as Axelrod does, that trust need not be assumed between actors is simply to provide an implicit definition of trust. For Axelrod, as with others like Mearsheimer who dismiss the role of trust in cooperation or interstate

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<sup>65</sup> Kelman, “Building trust among enemies,” 646.

<sup>66</sup> Kelman, “Building trust among enemies,” 646. Original emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 173.

<sup>68</sup> Simpson, “Psychological Foundations of Trust,” 264 – 265.

relations, trust almost seems to connote certainty. However, where certainty is present, trust is not required.

In those instances where self-interest is the sole basis for cooperation, which in international relations is more common than ‘altruistic’ forms of trust, *State A* is placing a measure of trust in the idea that they know what *State B*’s interests are and that they will act accordingly.<sup>69</sup> *State A* is trusting *State B* to behave, or respond, a particular way and makes plans based on those expectations. As Kugler and Zak note, “trust affects the evolution of conflict at all levels.”<sup>70</sup> For example, for a systemic accommodation and peaceful power transition to be possible, the rising and dominant powers must cooperate – they must work together to make mutually acceptable adjustments to the international system to maintain equilibrium.<sup>71</sup> Because of the systemic consequences associated with the uncertainty inherent in power transitions, that cooperation is not possible without a measure of trust precisely because pure self-interest would make cooperation less-likely, if not impossible. Indeed, it is the fear of self-interest above all else that motivates the fear of betrayal. The structural incentives faced by dominant powers with respect to preventing a state from rising to a point where it could become a competitor are great. So, too, are the incentives towards unilateral systemic revision on the part of the rising power. The inclusion of trust into existing theories helps explain why this is not always the case.

In the particular case of U.S.-China relations, for example, we have seen a long history of engagement with China and efforts to successfully integrate it into the U.S.-led international system. China has also pursued the means of further integration, for instance by pursuing membership and leadership positions within dominant international institutions. While both the U.S. and China are acting out of self-interest, they are also acting with a measure of trust in the other to abide by the ‘rules of the game’ and respect the core interests of the other. Similarly, according to some realist theories, after the Cold War the U.S. “should have encouraged further partition of the U.S.S.R. [...] to reduce

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<sup>69</sup> Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*; Hardin, *Trust*.

<sup>70</sup> Kugler & Zak, “Trust, Cooperation, and Conflict,” 87.

<sup>71</sup> Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (New York: Cambridge UP, 1981), 11.



future challenges.”<sup>72</sup> Instead, the U.S. sought engagement and attempted to bring Russia into the international system. Realist theories have a difficult time explaining this decision in the absence of trust; “Including the variable of trust creates different interpretations – a win-win space created by having a (conditionally) trusted dyadic partner.”<sup>73</sup> That states make these types of decisions out of self-interest is beside the point.

Trust is a variable concept that depends on context. At its core, however, “trust is a three-part relation: *A* trusts *B* to do, or with respect to, *X*.”<sup>74</sup> Relationships are complex, particularly between major powers, and can often be characterized in terms of both cooperation and competition. Trust and distrust, for example, “are independent constructs that can be held in the same relationship for different facets of that relationship.”<sup>75</sup> This is an important point often lost on those who consider trust between the U.S. and China to be an impossibility. Just as their relationship is characterized by cooperation and competition, so too does it contain elements of trust and distrust. In the simpler language of ‘*A* trusts *B* to do *X*,’ it can be said that “*A* will trust *B* but not with respect to every possible *X*.”<sup>76</sup> It is also important to note that distrust is not the same thing as the absence of trust. Trust, as will be demonstrated below, is predicated on the availability of information. Distrust suggests the availability of information required to determine you cannot, or should not, trust another. In the absence of that information, it is possible to be ambivalent until information (positive or negative) presents itself. No matter how limited or contingent the trust between states is, the point remains that trust – of some variety – exists between cooperative states. There are, of course, interstate relationships completely devoid of trust, or rather characterized entirely by distrust, though among major powers in the contemporary international system, this is increasingly rare due to the effects of globalization and economic interdependence, which ensures a modicum of trust is present. Trust is a spectrum. Incorporating trust into theories of cooperation better

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<sup>72</sup> Kugler & Zak, “Trust, Cooperation, and Conflict,” 103; see also Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

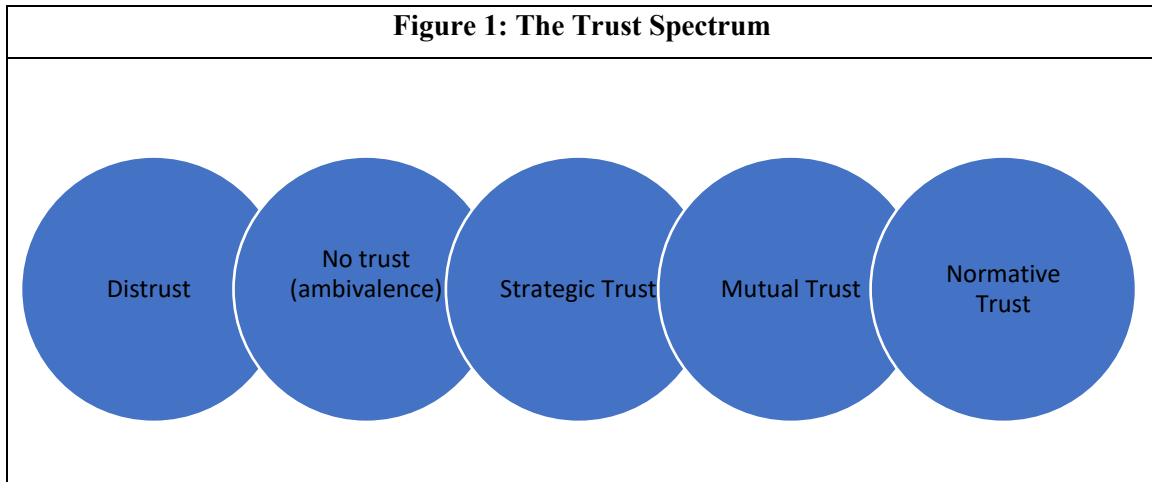
<sup>73</sup> Kugler & Zak, “Trust, Cooperation, and Conflict,” 103.

<sup>74</sup> Hardin, *Trust*, 19.

<sup>75</sup> Lyon, Mollering, & Saunders, *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*, 9; see also Roy J. Lewicki, Daniel J. McAllister, & Robert J. Bies, “Trust and Distrust: New Relationships and Realities,” *Academy of Management Review* 23:3 (1998), 438 – 458.

<sup>76</sup> Hardin, *Trust*, 26; see also Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 98.

enables theorists to explain the evolution of enemy to ally, by situating relationships at various points along that spectrum. Figure 1 illustrates the trust spectrum.



### Trust & Confidence

Confidence is an unavoidable component of trust.<sup>77</sup> Complicating things, as Wheeler notes, is that they are often used interchangeably.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the dictionary definition of confidence is “the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something; firm trust,” or “the state of feeling certain about the truth of something.” The relationship between trust and confidence is contested. Keating and Ruzicka, for instance, define confidence as “a calculation based on an actor’s perceptions that another actor will reciprocate a costly signal or act according to a predetermined agreement or social norm.”<sup>79</sup> It is a “straightforward rational choice calculation.”<sup>80</sup> Trust, conversely, is “an intersubjective social structure that cognitively reduces or eliminates the overall amount of risk and uncertainty that actor[s] face.”<sup>81</sup> “Confidence does not reduce the perception of risk, trust does.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> For example, see: Toshio Yamagishi, Satoshi Kanazawa, Rie Mashima, & Shigeru Terai, “Separating Trust from Cooperation in a Dynamic Relationship: Prisoner’s Dilemma with Variable Dependence,” *Rationality & Society* 17:3 (2005): 275 – 308.

<sup>78</sup> Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, 3.

<sup>79</sup> Vincent Charles Keating & Jan Ruzicka, “Trusting relationships in international politics: No need to hedge,” *Review of International Studies* 40:4 (October 2014): 756.

<sup>80</sup> Keating & Ruzicka, “Trusting relationships in international politics,” 756.

<sup>81</sup> Keating & Ruzicka, “Trusting relationships in international politics,” 756.

<sup>82</sup> Keating & Ruzicka, “Trusting relationships in international politics,” 756.

Conversely, I argue that much like trust itself, confidence is subject to context. In the context of international relations, I do not think confidence is simply a ‘rational choice calculation’. Confidence is based on information, and the amount required to feel ‘confident’ will vary based on what it is at stake. As I argue below, cooperation leads to confidence by confirming through interaction that available information conforms with a pattern of behavior. That is, a state will have a view of another, based on whatever information is currently available to it. Once a decision is made to cooperate, which itself requires a measure of generalized trust, states will be looking for signals or other information to confirm or deny that previously held view. This is how states can overcome initial suspicions and come to accept that the claims of security-seeking intention of another state are, likely, true. Predictability in turn leads to confidence, which in turn leads to trust. That is to say, confidence is informed by predictability. The more predictability in a relationship, the more confidence. Sufficient confidence becomes trust. The degree of sufficiency is context dependent, however the amount of confidence required to reach ‘strategic trust’, as defined below, is far lower than commonly perceived.

### *Trust & Risk*

Another underlying principle of trust is risk. Trust between major powers is, by nature, one that involves a high degree of risk. Das & Teng argue that risk is the basis of trust. “The logic of risk, including uncertainty and probability, occupies an important position in defining trust.”<sup>83</sup> This is important, as uncertainty is central to realist theories of threat perception and security dilemmas. Das & Teng consider uncertainty as part of the “risk construct,” noting that “both trust and risk deal with probability.”<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, however, and reaffirming the opaque nature of trust as a concept, they also note that it is “unclear whether risk is an antecedent to trust, is trust, or is an outcome of trust.”<sup>85</sup>

Cook et al., also note the centrality of risk to the concept of trust, arguing that “a unilateral act of trust by one partner, involving risk taking, is *required* to break the

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<sup>83</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 87.

<sup>84</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 87.

<sup>85</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 95.

deadlock of a mutual lack of trust.”<sup>86</sup> Wheeler, similarly, has produced a compelling account of how such a “leap in the dark” by heads of state enables states to transform and move beyond adversarial relationships.<sup>87</sup> Kydd also places risk at the center of his theory of trust, arguing that security seekers must be willing to send costly signals, which are only credible if accompanied by a sufficient amount of risk to the sender.<sup>88</sup> Larson also includes risk, though less explicitly. For example, she writes that “states have to have at least a minimal degree of trust to enter an agreement when they are uncertain about the other’s motives or intentions and would suffer a loss if the other betrayed their good faith.”<sup>89</sup> That is to say, a state must take the risk that their attempts at cooperation will not be reciprocated, and that they may suffer some form of loss as a consequence. Molm argues that “risk increases integrative bonds by promoting trust,” and so “risk is a necessary condition for proving one’s own trustworthiness, and for judging another’s.”<sup>90</sup> Schultz also highlights the inherent risks involved in making cooperative gestures, saying “ending or reducing conflict often requires governments to take risky actions that leave them vulnerable to exploitation.”<sup>91</sup> “Making peace,” he writes, “is risky business.”<sup>92</sup>

Accompanying the risk are the related concepts of probability and predictability. As Das & Teng note, “both trust and risk deal with probability.”<sup>93</sup> They make an important distinction between types of trust: subjective and behavioral. Both relate to probability. “Subjective trust and perceived risk can be jointly understood within the rubric of probability estimates.”<sup>94</sup> While “subjective trust refers to assessed probability of having desirable action performed by the trustee, perceived risk is assessed probability of not having desirable results. Thus, subjective trust and perceived risk are like mirror images of each other.”<sup>95</sup> Behavioral trust, they argue, is the “manifestation of subjective

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<sup>86</sup> Karen S. Cook, Toshio Yamagishi, Coye Cheshire, Robin Cooper, Masafumi Matsuda, and Rie Mashima, “Trust Building via Risk Taking: A Cross-Societal Experiment,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 68:2 (June, 2005), 122. Original emphasis.

<sup>87</sup> Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*.

<sup>88</sup> Kydd, “Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation,” 326.

<sup>89</sup> Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” 713.

<sup>90</sup> Linda, D. Molm, “The Structure of Reciprocity,” *Social Psychology Quarterly* 73:2 (June 2010), 124.

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth A. Schultz, “The Politics of Risking Peace: Do Hawks or Doves Deliver the Olive Branch?,” *International Organization* 59: 1 (January 2005), 1.

<sup>92</sup> Schultz, “The Politics of Risking Peace,” 13.

<sup>93</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 87.

<sup>94</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 98.

<sup>95</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 98 – 99.

trust – that is, the behavioral results of having subjective trust in someone.”<sup>96</sup> And, relating back to probability, “behavioral trust is relevant only if the element of uncertainty is present.”<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, Das & Teng conclude that

both subjective trust and perceived risk represent the assessment of outcome probabilities of the same event. The crucial difference is that, whereas subjective trust portrays the assessment in a positive light – that is, the probability that the outcome will be what is desired – perceived risk describes the situation in disquieting hues – the probability that the outcome will be what is feared.<sup>98</sup>

Kydd also includes probability in his conception and employment of trust, however it is more implicit. For example, Kydd argues that “to trust someone [...] is to believe it relatively likely that they would prefer to reciprocate cooperation. To mistrust someone is to think it is relatively likely that they prefer to defect even if they think one will cooperate.”<sup>99</sup> To perceive an outcome as ‘likely’ or ‘unlikely’ is an expression of probability, though Kydd does not discuss trust in these terms. It is, however, as Das & Teng have argued, that “a perception of low trust necessarily implies a perception of high risk, and vice versa.”<sup>100</sup> Attenuating a security dilemma, for example, is about altering the perception of probability as it relates to cooperation and defection.

“Defining trust as a probability judgment,” Larson argues, “suggests that trust is not an either-or matter, and that the amount of trust required for an agreement varies.”<sup>101</sup> That is to say, trust is subjective and contextual. This reinforces the elastic nature of the concept of trust. Similarly, Larson discusses the centrality and importance of predictability. “Trust in a psychological sense can refer to any of the three different meanings – predictability, credibility, and good intentions.”<sup>102</sup> Predictability refers to a belief that another actor’s behavior is predictable. Credibility refers to a belief that another actor will fulfill their commitments, promises, or duty. And good intentions refers to a belief that another actor has benevolent intentions and does not seek to exploit you. These are, of course, all probability judgments. It is also entirely subjective, as Larson readily admits. “The likelihood that the other will fulfill her expectations should

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<sup>96</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 103.

<sup>97</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 104.

<sup>98</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 110.

<sup>99</sup> Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 9.

<sup>100</sup> Das & Teng, “The Risk-Based View of Trust,” 99.

<sup>101</sup> Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” 714.

<sup>102</sup> Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” 714.

be above a critical threshold, which is qualitative rather than quantitative, perceptual rather than concrete,”<sup>103</sup> and that “whether states view another’s action as cooperative, hostile, or neutral depends in part on how they construe its motives.”<sup>104</sup> This reinforces the difficulty of operationalizing trust, from an empirical standpoint. Assessments of probability and risk are not universal but contingent and contextual. From a theoretical standpoint, this is problematic though not debilitating.

Avoiding the tautologies associated with a subjective measurement (‘it’s enough when it’s enough’) is of critical importance. In order to measure trust, we must have some knowledge of the expectations of both actors – what is the desired end goal? This is, of course, a limited endeavor. Any information will be limited and subject to continuous revision. That said, broad goals are fairly static. For example, on a ‘macro level,’ the United States wants to maintain its primary position in the international system and its freedom of movement in the Asia-Pacific. China, conversely, wants more power and recognition within the international system (expressed through greater institutional leverage, a larger role in determining international rules and norms, and a leadership role in the Asia-Pacific). Both want to achieve their objectives without resorting to violent conflict with the other. To understand how much trust is ‘enough’, we must look at the ‘micro level’ where states actually build trust and negotiate for power. That is, it is one thing to know what two competing states want, but how they actually act on those ambitions is another. Looking at how effectively rival states manage their disputes and conflicts and how responsive they are to the professed concerns and interests of the other enable analysts to determine the threshold for a stable relationship based on a measure of trust. Said another way, to measure and understand trust between states, we must look for evidence of a trusting relationship, as demonstrated in part by the behavior of states towards each other, such as hedging.<sup>105</sup> Hedging, however, is an imperfect metric for assessing the presence of a trusting relationship. States hedge for a variety of reasons, and often it is unclear whether the target is a specific state or group of states. Similarly, a decision to reduce a hedge is not always easily attributable to a single dyadic relationship. When we look at interstate relations in this way – in terms of complex, ongoing,

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<sup>103</sup> Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” 715.

<sup>104</sup> Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” 716.

<sup>105</sup> Keating and Ruzicka, “Trusting relationships in international politics, 753 – 770.

continuously evolving relationships where information is constantly being exchanged and gathered – we find abundant evidence of trust relationships.

### Reciprocity and Reassurance

A final element of trust found in various approaches is reciprocity and reassurance. Molm notes that “evolutionary biologists and experimental economists have proposed that we are hard-wired for reciprocity, and have described reciprocity as the evolutionary basis for cooperation in society.”<sup>106</sup> This approach is mirrored in Kugler & Zak’s neuroeconomic approach. Consequentially, Molm argues the following:

1. Reciprocity is structured. It is not just a norm, not just a process, and it is variable across different forms of exchange.
2. The structure of reciprocity has profound consequences for social relationships, not only for relationships, not only for exchange and power but for the emergence of trust and solidarity.
3. Dimensions of reciprocity produce these effects through mechanisms of risk, uncertainty, and conflict.<sup>107</sup>

Cook et al., also note the importance of reciprocity, arguing that the “major obstacle to trust building – the deadlock involved in a mutual lack of trust – can be overcome by engaging in a series of *graduated* and *reciprocated* risk-taking opportunities.”<sup>108</sup> This is similar to the ‘GRIT’ (Graduated Reciprocation in Tension-reduction) approach advocated by Osgood during the Cold War.<sup>109</sup>

Hwang & Burgers argue that the temporal aspects of a relationship play an important role in reciprocity or defection. “The temporal dynamics of cooperation are important because the future casts a shadow back up on the present, thereby affecting current behavior.”<sup>110</sup> This last point is particularly important because in international relations the primary temporal dynamic at play is the short-term, as the persistent uncertainty of the international system makes long-term cooperation difficult to achieve. Even in the case of long-standing alliances, such as NATO, the durability of the partnership is subject to constant short-term assessments states use to gauge the

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<sup>106</sup> Molm, “The Structure of Reciprocity,” 119.

<sup>107</sup> Molm, “The Structure of Reciprocity,” 120.

<sup>108</sup> Cook et al., “Trust Building via Risk Taking,” 123. Original emphasis.

<sup>109</sup> Charles E. Osgood, *An Alternative to War or Surrender* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962).

<sup>110</sup> Peter Hwang & Willem P. Burgers, “Apprehension and Temptation: The Forces against Cooperation,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 43:1 (Feb. 1999), 117 – 130.

commitment of their allies. Funding or operational commitments, as well as official statements by senior officials, are examples of indices states will use as signals of intent. NATO has persisted due the continued short-term commitment of its members.

In this regard, Hwang and Burgers make a similar argument to that advanced by Axelrod and Axelrod and Keohane, though the latter were interested in the role that institutions play in mitigating uncertainty.<sup>111</sup> Axelrod, for example, argues that “without the shadow of the future, cooperation becomes impossible to sustain.”<sup>112</sup> David Edelstein, however, has provided a powerful counter-argument to his idea, suggesting that “how states weigh threats and opportunities in a knowable present as opposed to an uncertain future is a significant and underappreciated influence on the policies that their leaders pursue.”<sup>113</sup> The outcome of this view is that “uncertainty about the future opens the space for cooperation rather than foreclosing it.”<sup>114</sup> “The higher the trust, and/or the longer the time horizon that the decision maker faces in a relationship,” write Hwang and Burgers, “the less the decision maker would be apprehensive about being harmed as well as tempted to make short-term gains.”<sup>115</sup> Though they do not explicitly identify the role of reciprocity, it is central to their argument: the longer the relationship is expected to be, the greater the chances of reciprocation and, by extension, cooperation. Kydd also argues that an extended time horizon has a direct correlation with incentives to cooperate or defect.<sup>116</sup> Kelman also includes reciprocity as part of his argument. “Mutual reassurance at its best is an influence strategy based on responsiveness to the other’s needs and fear’s and on the principle of reciprocity.”<sup>117</sup> One thing that tends to get overlooked, however, is that reciprocity is also often a matter of perspective. As later sections will demonstrate, it is possible for two states to disagree over what constitutes a reciprocal action. For example, while China insists it has reciprocated U.S. acts of transparency, the perception

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<sup>111</sup> Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*; Robert Axelrod, and Robert O. Keohane, “Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions,” *World Politics* 38:1 (October 1985), 226 – 254.

<sup>112</sup> Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 334.

<sup>113</sup> David M. Edelstein, *Over the Horizon: Time, Uncertainty, and the Rise of Great Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>114</sup> Edelstein, *Over the Horizon*, 1.

<sup>115</sup> Hwang & Burgers, “Apprehension and Temptation,” 118.

<sup>116</sup> Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*.

<sup>117</sup> Kelman, “Building trust among enemies,” 649.



among many in Washington is that it has not. The context of the relationship, including the power dynamics between actors, is as important as the act of reciprocation itself.

Reassurance is, in the context of trust and cooperation, closely related with the concept of reciprocity. That is, reassurance needs to be reciprocal for it to generate trust. As Kelman notes, “mutual reassurance is a key element in inducing the parties to come to the table and, once there, to make the concessions necessary to reach an agreement.”<sup>118</sup> Kydd’s theory of costly signaling is similarly rooted in mutual reassurance.<sup>119</sup> Barnett also includes reassurance in his argument about trust building, though in a less formal way; while mutual reassurance is seen as key to ensuring stable relations among superpowers (he was writing in the context of the Cold War), he does not offer a theory of trust building in the same vein as Kelman or Kydd (for example). Wang does the same, including mutual reassurance as being central to trust building but without offering any specifics. Reassurance is an important aspect of confidence building programs undertaken between states, as well as a prominent feature of defensive realist accounts for how security seeking states can avoid triggering a security dilemma.<sup>120</sup> And while there is a close relationship between uncertainty and reassurance in realist theories, neither is considered through the lens of trust.

There is a consensus that trust is defined in a multitude of ways and for a variety of circumstances (be it interpersonal, economic/exchange, or state/societal). It is also widely accepted that trust is subjective and rooted in perceptions. By linking trust to concepts of cooperation, risk assessment, and probability, it is possible to uncover some generalizable principles and identify mechanisms through which states build trust. This is a necessary first step in developing a true ‘theory of trust’ in IR. Similarly, the clear importance of reassurance and reciprocity to trust building and cooperation are also useful additions. Cooperation is a risky proposition for states in an uncertain and anarchic

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<sup>118</sup> Kelman, “Building trust among enemies,” 648.

<sup>119</sup> Kydd, “Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation,”; *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*.

<sup>120</sup> Evan Braden Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma: Realism, Reassurance, and the Problem of Uncertainty,” *International Security* 31:2 (Fall 2006), 151 – 185; James Steinberg & Michael O’Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Michael E. O’Hanlon & James Steinberg, *A Glass Half Full? Rebalance, Reassurance, and Resolve in the U.S.-China Strategic Relationship*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2017).

system. However, so is conflict, especially between nuclear powers. For example, if cooperation is considered in the context of risk aversion/assessment, it is possible to make a compelling argument for why the U.S. and China would seek accommodation rather than fall into the ‘Thucydides’ Trap’. That does not necessitate using rational choice or game theoretic models to explain or operationalize risk assessment, as Schultz and Kydd have done. The underlying logic can be usefully incorporated into realist theories, particularly of the defensive variety, and the central role that signaling, reassurance, and security seeking hold therein. With the overview of some key debates and approaches to trust established, it is possible to take a closer look at how trust functions in the context of IR.

### Trust & IR

Trust has only recently become a serious, sustained, focus of IR, with most debates concerned with how best to define and apply the concept.<sup>121</sup> As outlined above, disagreement persists over the role of confidence, risk, and cooperation (to name but three components) in defining trust, which in turn generates debate over how to identify and measure trusting relationships. A majority of the definitions of trust used in the literature were not designed with states in mind, but rather individuals. While numerous theorists have modified and remodeled varying approaches to trust to apply to states, it is rarely applied to major powers, the dominant focus of realist theories. For example, Rathbun has applied the concept of trust to international institutions, offering a compelling argument for trust preceding the creation of institutions rather than resulting from their creation, as posited by regime theorists like Keohane.<sup>122</sup> Hoffman, similarly, has applied the concept of trust as it applies to overcoming suspicion.<sup>123</sup> His case studies,

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<sup>121</sup> For example, see Aaron M. Hoffman, *Building Trust: Overcoming Suspicion in International Conflict*, (Albany: SUNY UP, 2006); Aaron M. Hoffman, “A Conceptualization of Trust in International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 8:3 (2002), 375 – 401; Aaron M. Hoffman, “The Structural Causes of Trusting Relationships: Why Rivals Do Not Overcome Suspicion Step by Step,” *Political Science Quarterly* 122:2 (Summer 2007), 287 – 312; Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*; Chan, *Trust & Distrust in Sino-American Relations*.

<sup>122</sup> Brian Rathbun, *Trust in International Cooperation: International Security Institutions, Domestic Politics and American Multilateralism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012); Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984).

<sup>123</sup> Hoffman, *Building Trust*.

however, involved the formation of the United States, the European Community, and water scarcity in the Jordan Valley involving Israel and Jordan.

Of course, a few exceptions exist. Kydd's rational choice approach and Larson's social psychological approach both used the Cold War and Soviet-U.S. relations as their focal point. Wheeler has also used the U.S.-Soviet relationship as a case study. Chan has recently released a book applying the concept of trust to U.S.-China relations. And Kugler and Zak apply their neuroeconomic approach to concepts of power transition and major power war. While these alternative approaches to studying trust in IR are useful points of reference, they are inadequate. Trust between major powers operates according to its own logic because the structural pressures (and their systemic consequences) are fundamentally different from those affecting other states. A particularly good IR-centric use of trust as it applies to major power relations – that is, which takes the structural dynamics at play into consideration – comes from Booth and Wheeler. They define trust as follows: “Trust exists when two or more actors, based on the mutual interpretation of each other's attitudes and behavior, believe that the other(s) now and in the future, can be relied upon to desist from acting in ways that will be injurious to their interests and values.”<sup>124</sup> In his most recent work, Wheeler defines trust as simply “the expectation of no harm in contexts where betrayal is always a possibility.”<sup>125</sup> This is not too far off a working definition of trust that accurately reflects the realities of major power relations. It is also useful for highlighting the fundamental problem with how IR theorists conceive of trust. Existing theories fail to adequately consider the structural context of IR and the impact that has on adopting interpersonal theories of trust to interstate relations. Accordingly, it is important to review the three most common ‘types’ of trust employed in IR.

### *Calculative, Normative, & Mutual Trust*

Calculative trust is what Hardin refers to as the “encapsulated interest account” of trust.<sup>126</sup> “It is grounded in an assumption that the potentially trusted person has an interest in maintaining a relationship with the truster, an interest that gives the potentially trust

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<sup>124</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 230.

<sup>125</sup> Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, 2.

<sup>126</sup> Hardin, *Trust*, 17.

person an incentive to be trustworthy.”<sup>127</sup> This is the self-interested version of trust outlined above, and the one which forms the foundation for my own version, strategic trust (explained below). As noted above, expressed in its simplest form calculative trust is ‘*A* trusts *B* to do, or with respect to, *X*’. Calculative trust differs from what some refer to as ‘generalized trust,’ which can be expressed as ‘*A* trusts’.<sup>128</sup> These different types of trust cannot always be entirely divorced from one another, though they are distinct. For example, in order for *A* to trust *B* to do *X*, *A* must first trust *B* (and vice versa). That is, there must be a general disposition towards trust in order for a more specific, contingent type to emerge. Generalized trust therefore forms the starting point of calculative trust. In turn, calculative trust must exist in order for normative trust to emerge.<sup>129</sup> Normative trust, conversely, is rooted in the idea of a bond or emotional connection as the basis for trusting behavior; it is what Wheeler refers to as ‘bonding trust’.<sup>130</sup> A simple expression of normative trust is ‘*A* trusts *B*’. Calculative and normative trust are often framed as being mutual opposites.

Theorizing calculative and normative trust in this way, however, as binary opposites, is a mistake. It ignores the inherent relationship between the two, which should be treated as two points on a spectrum to be applied to different relational contexts. In the specific context of international relations, normative trust rarely, if ever, exists. Wheeler, for instance, writes, “This [bonding trust] is characterized in its fullest development of the theory by trust developing out of a transformation of identities and interests between two actors.”<sup>131</sup> While Wheeler acknowledges bonds and trust can be formed short of this ‘transformation’, the central concept is a situation in which two actors (in this case, state leaders) “come to place a high value on the other’s security and care about that person’s well-being as an end in itself. At this point, two leaders are so secure in their trust with each other that neither calculates the risks of defection.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Hardin, *Trust*, 17.

<sup>128</sup> See Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*; Brian Rathbun, “Before Hegemony: Generalized Trust and the Creation and Design of International Security Organizations,” *International Organization* 65:2 (Spring 2011), 243 – 273.

<sup>129</sup> Wheeler, for example, writes “The calculative element disappears only when a process of bonding leads to identity transformation.” *Trusting Enemies*, 8.

<sup>130</sup> For example, see Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*.

<sup>131</sup> Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, 7 -8.

<sup>132</sup> Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, 9.

While Wheeler provides a compelling account for interpersonal trusting relationships between heads of state, and the transformative effect it can have on altering a state relationship from enmity to amity, it remains just that: an *interpersonal* theory of trust. It minimizes the constraints of anarchy and pervasive uncertainty, which ensures that states remain constantly vigilant for signs of betrayal, even amongst ‘friends’. This is what motivates erstwhile allies like Germany, France, and the U.S. to spy on one another – it is partially to gain advantage, but partially to ensure a state can protect itself against being taken advantage of.<sup>133</sup> At the same time, it is certainly true that some interstate relationships are characterized by a dynamic that might approximate Wheeler’s ‘bonded’ view. For example, while the U.S., Germany, and France may all spy on one another, the fear of being betrayed in a particularly injurious way is minimal. That is, the fear of violence or threat of force is not an active part of those interstate relationships. However, the central characteristic of Wheeler’s bonding trust is where one state places a “high value” on the security and wellbeing of another as an end in itself.

I do not believe states can reach that level of trust. Even in relationships that characterize the archetype of a trusting interstate relationship, such as that between Canada and the U.S. or the U.S. and the U.K., each state pursues its self-interest. That doing so may come at the expense, however minimal, of another state, however friendly, is simply ‘part of the game’. We see examples of this in trade negotiations or in decisions to support the use of force, such as Canada’s decision not to participate in the 2003 invasion of Iraq despite Washington’s request for support. The limitations on ‘bonding trust’ are also clear when one considers the power dynamic between actors. Weaker states will always calculate risk and be cautious with respect to their relationships with more powerful states. Rather than bonding trust as an alternative to calculative trust, I posit another type of trust, which I refer to as ‘mutual trust’.

Mutual trust carries with it the assumption that betrayal is possible, though improbable. It also does not dismiss the constant process of assessing the probability of

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<sup>133</sup> For example, see: *The Economist* (online), “I spy, you spy: The French are ‘shocked, shocked’ by American spying – but not their own,” June 27, 2015; Maik Baumgartner, Martin Knobbe, & Jorg Schindler, “German Intelligence Also Snooped on White House,” *Spiegel* (online), June 22, 2017; Jake Tapper, “Obama administration spied on German media as well as its government,” *CNN* (online), July 4, 2015; Christopher J. Murphy, “Why would the U.S. spy on its allies? Because everyone does,” June 24, 2015.

betrayal, as found in the calculative trust upon which it is based. Mutual trust can be said to exist in relationships in which expectations of major revisions to existing policies would be collaborative and done with advanced notice, to minimize disruption and maintain the mutual beneficial nature of the relationship. That is, positive expectations of future intention and action. This is why, for example, when President Trump makes sudden declarations about withdrawing from long-standing alliances or dramatically, and unilaterally, altering the terms of a relationship, it can be said to undermine mutual trust.<sup>134</sup>

The relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, for example, can be described in terms of mutual trust. There are cultural and historical bonds, developed over a long period of time, and characterized by *A* trusting *B* to do *X* many times over, which influence probability and risk assessments, similar to the emotive bonds in normative trust. The two countries are likely to enter into cooperative endeavors with the assumption that the other is trustworthy in-part because of those bonds. But to believe the U.S. and U.K. trust each other blindly and do not continue to seek signals that point to continued trustworthiness is naïve. States are constantly exchanging information to reassure others of their trustworthiness. This is done in the form of information sharing, cooperative endeavors, support in international institutions (i.e., voting), and other routine forms of interaction.

As acknowledged above, even allies spy on one another, and so to some extent we may say that all states are, to some extent, *untrustworthy*. In the context of IR, mutual trust refers to the positive assumption of future intentions of another vis-à-vis oneself. That is to say, mutual trust relates to long-term intentions and interests in large part because the states in these relationships *share* those interests. More than that, it is about having a shared perception on how those interests are conceived and implemented. However, due to the structural condition of anarchy, these relationships are subject to constant monitoring and possible revision. The positive assumptions of future intentions are premised on the success of short-term interactions. In that respect, calculative trust remains the foundation of trust in IR. However, calculative trust, as it has been theorized,

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<sup>134</sup> For example, see Trump's comments on NATO: *BBC News* (online), "Trump worries NATO with 'obsolete' comment," January 16, 2017; or NAFTA: *The Economist* (online), "The pitfalls of renegotiating NAFTA," February 11, 2017.

remains insufficient. Accordingly, I offer a revised version, developed with international relations and major powers in mind.

### Strategic Trust

Strategic trust is a concept that is regularly employed but rarely explained or carefully considered. It is a descriptor without description. For instance, in his book *On China*, Henry Kissinger asks “Can China and the United States develop genuine strategic trust?”;<sup>135</sup> “Can strategic trust replace a system of strategic threats?”<sup>136</sup> Chinese scholars Yan Xuetong and Qi Haixia write, “as long as the United States and China bolster strategic trust they can prevent their bilateral relationship from slipping into a Cold War scenario.”<sup>137</sup> Phillip Saunders writes about the “ways in which the United States and China can reduce differences, increase strategic trust, and manage areas of strategic competition.”<sup>138</sup> Christensen similarly mentions “a persistent lack of strategic trust across the Pacific.”<sup>139</sup> Mastro argues that “If China provided greater access, the United States would be quickly reassured that China had no desire to supplant its regional role, building strategic trust and regional stability as a result.”<sup>140</sup> In all of these examples, strategic trust has an assumed meaning.

Statesmen and policymakers on both sides of the Pacific are similarly prone to employing strategic trust as a concept with an assumed meaning. In a 2001 op-ed in *The New York Times*, Admiral Mike Mullen, then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, wrote that “we need to make the [U.S.-China] relationship better by seeking strategic trust.”<sup>141</sup> In his address at the 11<sup>th</sup> Shangri-La Dialogue in 2012, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told the audience that “Our aim is to continue to improve the strategic trust

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<sup>135</sup> Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 411.

<sup>136</sup> Henry Kissinger, *On China*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011), 412.

<sup>137</sup> Yan Xuetong & Qi Haixia. “Football Game Rather Than Boxing Match: China-US Intensifying Rivalry Does not Amount to Cold War,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 5 (2012), 107.

<sup>138</sup> Phillip C. Saunders, “Increasing Strategic Trust between the United States and China in the Political, Diplomatic and Security Realms,” National Committee on US-China Relations (2008), 1.

<sup>139</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “The Meaning of Nuclear Evolution: China’s Strategic Modernization and US-China Security Relations,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 35:4 (August 2012), 482.

<sup>140</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, “Why China Does (and Should) Shun Military Transparency,” ISA conference paper (2014), 6.

<sup>141</sup> Mike Mullen, “A Step Toward Trust With China,” *The New York Times* (online), July 25, 2011.

that we must have between our two countries.”<sup>142</sup> During testimony before the House Armed Services Committee in 2013, the Chairman of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC), William Reinsch, urged Congress to “strengthen strategic trust,” by allowing the Department of Defense (DoD) to enhance the U.S.-China maritime security relationship.<sup>143</sup> In testimony given at the same hearing, Vice Chairman Dennis Shea similarly spoke of “The need to deepen strategic trust between the United States and China.”<sup>144</sup> Kevin Rudd, the former Australian Prime Minister, has frequently invoked strategic trust as a concept, though has never bothered to explain what it actually means.<sup>145</sup>

On the other side of the Pacific, the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Tan Dung, presented a speech entitled “Building Strategic Trust for Peace, Cooperation and Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific Region,” at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Shangri-La Dialogue in 2013. During the speech, he said, “To have peace, development, and prosperity, it is a must to build and consolidate strategic trust.”<sup>146</sup> In a February 2012 address, China’s President, Xi Jinping, similarly spoke of a need to “steadily increase mutual understanding and strategic trust,” as one of the four cornerstones of a “new type of great power relationship” with the United States. This was an echo of the 2009 U.S.-China Joint Statement, the first joint statement in twelve years, wherein it states that “The two countries believe that to nurture and deepen bilateral strategic trust is essential to U.S.-China relations in the new era.”

In none of these examples was the concept of strategic trust defined or outlined in even the broadest of terms. The reader, or audience, was simply expected to know what it

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<sup>142</sup> Leon Panetta “Remarks by Secretary Panetta at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore,” June 2, 2012.

<sup>143</sup> William A. Reinsch, Testimony before the Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Hearing on “2013 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission,” November 20, 2013.

<sup>144</sup> Dennis C. Shea, Testimony before the Armed Services Committee, U.S. House of Representatives, Hearing on “2013 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission,” November 20, 2013.

<sup>145</sup> Kevin Rudd, “The Price of Mistrust,” *Foreign Policy* (online), May 7, 2015; Rudd, “U.S.-China 21: The Future of U.S.-China Relations Under Xi Jinping: Toward a New Framework of Constructive Realism for a Common Purpose,” Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, April 2015; Rudd, “Building Strategic Trust Between China and the United States: Do Chinese and US strategic concepts and interests provide sufficient common foundation to build long term strategic trust?” Address to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., April 3, 2013.

<sup>146</sup> Nguyen Tan Dung, “Building Strategic Trust for Peace, Cooperation and Prosperity in the Asia-Pacific Region,” Keynote Address, 12<sup>th</sup> IISS Asia Security Summit, The Shangri-La Dialogue, May 31, 2013.



meant. Indeed, examples where authors bother to offer some insight into what they mean by ‘strategic trust’ are few and far between. In a 2012 address to the U.S. Naval War College entitled “Strategic Trust and Cooperation,” Canadian Vice Admiral Paul Maddison proved to be an exception when he said strategic trust is “that sense of cooperation and confidence that permits naval leaders to see past issues that may divide us as the instruments of national policy that our navies must always be, to work together on issues of common interest, which in this globalized era have become crucial to our collective prosperity and security.”<sup>147</sup>

The closest thing to an academic example comes from a widely read 2012 Brookings Institute monograph by Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi. Lieberthal and Wang offer a definition of ‘strategic distrust,’ which refers to the “distrust of ultimate intentions in the bilateral relationship.”<sup>148</sup> They write, “Here, ‘strategic’ means expectations about the nature of the bilateral relationship over the long run; it is not a synonym for ‘military’.”<sup>149</sup> “‘Strategic distrust’ therefore means a perception that the other side will seek to achieve its key long-term goals at concerted cost to your own side’s core prospects and interests.”<sup>150</sup> Strategic *trust*, therefore, can be inferred as meaning the opposite – that *State A* will not seek advantage at the expense of *State B*’s core prospects and interests. This gets us closer to a working definition of strategic trust appropriate for great power relations, however it is still lacking. It does not consider the structural context in which great power relations occur. This is explained in more detail further below. It also speaks more to the more fundamental issue with strategic trust: not only is the concept being used without explanation, but there is no common usage, much less a clear definition.

Variouly referred to as “strategic distrust”, “strategic suspicion,”<sup>151</sup> or “strategic mutual trust,”<sup>152</sup> the basic underlying concept remains the same. However, just as there is

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<sup>147</sup> Paul, A. Maddison, “Strategic Trust and Cooperation,” *Naval War College Review* (Autumn 2012), 7.

<sup>148</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal & Wang Jisi, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series 4, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, March 2012), 5.

<sup>149</sup> Lieberthal & Wang, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” 5.

<sup>150</sup> Lieberthal & Wang, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” 5.

<sup>151</sup> Zheng Wang, “American Conspiracy: Strategic Suspicion and U.S. Re-engagement in Asia,” *Asia Policy* 12 (July 2011): 27 – 31.

<sup>152</sup> Yuan, “Sino-U.S. Strategic Mutual Trust.”

no single working definition of trust, “There is no single definition of strategic trust.”<sup>153</sup> Uslaner’s definition is an appropriate starting point for a ‘realist’ conception of trust because it is based on intentions, rooted in uncertainty, and is a function of structural context.<sup>154</sup> It is also the definition most commonly cited by the few others who formally employ the concept.<sup>155</sup> This is the ‘*A trusts B to do X*’ equation described above. However, it must be modified to be suitable to international relations.

The  $A+B=X$  equation is designed to explain trust in a cooperative context. The U.S. can trust China to do, or not do,  $X$  (and vice versa). Cooperation is only part of a relationship. That is, interstate relations are not defined solely by cooperation. Cooperation takes place in a larger context of interaction, which is where strategic trust is most appropriately applied. For example, it is possible for two rival states, suspicious of each other’s motives, to cooperate to achieve a common goal. The U.S.-Soviet relationship during WWII would be an example of this. The problem with the  $A+B=X$  equation is that it does not actually explain what strategic trust *is*. It does nothing to clarify the meaning of trust in this context, only how it works in a cooperative instance. In that regard, the  $A+B=X$  equation that describes the calculative approach is useful for describing strategic trust in practice.

Strategic trust is based on uncertainty and reducing the costs associated with it (e.g., risk), “by gaining additional information, be is positive or negative.”<sup>156</sup> It is “fragile,” built slowly through the accumulation of information, and is subject to constant revision as “new experiences can change one’s view of another’s trustworthiness.”<sup>157</sup> It is a “knowledge-based” type of trust which “presupposes risk.”<sup>158</sup> Strategic trust reflects one state’s expectations of how another will behave, based in large part by its understanding of that other state. It is a probability judgment, based on an assessment of risk that is based on information and experience, but is fundamentally subjective. It is a limited, contingent type of trust which is constrained by the structural situation in which the interstate relationship exists. For example, the character and limitations of strategic

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<sup>153</sup> Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*, 22.

<sup>154</sup> Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*, 22.

<sup>155</sup> Rathbun, “Before Hegemony,” 244.

<sup>156</sup> Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*, 22.

<sup>157</sup> Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*, 24.

<sup>158</sup> Uslaner, *The Foundations of Trust*, 17.

trust in the U.S.-China relationship are circumscribed not only by the fact that they are great powers, but that they are the two principal actors in a power transition. Its relationship, and the content of its 'trusting' relationship will be different from that between India and Pakistan, or even the U.S. and Russia.

Strategic trust is concerned primarily with short-term intentions and interactions as a means of acquiring the information necessary to make predictions of long-term intentions. States' take the information accrued through on-going cooperative interactions to create an understanding of as an indicator of another's interests and long-term goals. A hesitancy to cooperate or be transparent, for example, might make other state's suspicious. Strategic trust is about understanding what motivates another state and developing a measure of predictability of its actions based on that understanding. Given its attention to uncertainty, risk, and structural context, it is the most prevalent type of trust found in international relations.

To begin, the persistent uncertainty inherent in an anarchic system creates what James refers to as "genuine vulnerability."<sup>159</sup> Genuine vulnerability means "there are 'systematic hazards' of opportunism that are not, or cannot be, mitigated through appropriately designed safeguards."<sup>160</sup> Uncertainty is an unavoidable condition in international relations; It can be dampened but not eliminated. Any theory of trust in IR, strategic or otherwise, must account for anarchy and the pervasive uncertainty it creates. Booth and Wheeler did this to great effect, making the security dilemma a focal point for their conception of trust.<sup>161</sup> Kydd has also done this with his theory of Bayesian Realism, which incorporates uncertainty into game theory. However, Kydd's version of trust, which is strategic, is but one possible version of it.

The assumption of rational egoism does not necessarily mean defection for short-term gains or when an opportunity arises, as is commonly argued. These decisions must be considered in a wider context. There is routine signaling that occurs between self-interested, utility maximizing states all the time. And there are efforts to verify these signals and be on-guard for sudden changes that may portend betrayal. To assume that

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<sup>159</sup> Harvey James, "You can have your trust and calculativeness, too: Uncertainty, trustworthiness and the Williamson thesis," *Journal of Trust Research* 4:1 (2014), 58.

<sup>160</sup> James, "You can have your trust and calculativeness, too," 58.

<sup>161</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*.

actors have ‘unchanged interests’, as approaches to strategic trust like Kydd’s often do, is limiting. For example, Wheeler writes, “A world where actors are rational egoists is one where the only brake on them exiting relationships of trust is calculations of self-interest; this is not a world where trust and trusting behaviour can flourish.”<sup>162</sup> This is certainly not so. Glaser’s “cooperation as self-help” argument, for instance, is one possible rebuttal.<sup>163</sup> However, there are costs of defection weighed against long-term gains and stability, and so refraining from taking a short-term gain at another’s expense is still rational, utility maximizing behavior. It is also consistent in a world in which strategic trust can flourish, but bonding trust is rare because actors must always worry about defection or betrayal. All that is to say, strategic trust simply assumes self-interest actors are making decisions based on assessments of risk, which are informed by the context of the relationship and the associated confidence one state has in the other.

Uncertainty “makes it difficult if not impossible for principals to erect fully effective safeguards against opportunism,” which in turn “changes the calculus of trust.”<sup>164</sup> This is particularly true of major power relations. Institutions may help attenuate the negative effects of anarchy, however great powers like the United States, Russia, and China routinely demonstrate the limitations of international institutions and conventions. In that respect, states are unable to protect themselves against opportunism. Sanctions and other penalties are only effective when states choose to implement and uphold them, and even then their success depends on the presence of a dominant power. Other states in the international system, for example, are ill-equipped to sanction or levy penalties against the United States or China due to their being central pillars of the international economic and military system.

Cooperation between states necessarily involves strategic trust. As Hardin notes, “It is pointless to say you trust someone unless there is some risk of your suffering a loss if that someone does not fulfill your trust after you have acted on that trust to their initial benefit.”<sup>165</sup> Cooperation between states at all levels comes with the possibility of betrayal. What varies is the impact of that betrayal. It is precisely this possibility that

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<sup>162</sup> Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, 272.

<sup>163</sup> Charles Glaser, “Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help,” *International Security*, 19:3 (Winter 1994/95), 50 – 90.

<sup>164</sup> James, “You can have your trust and calculativeness, too,” 59.

<sup>165</sup> Hardin, *Trust*, 28.

leads theorists like Mearsheimer to write that “There is little room for trust among states.”<sup>166</sup> It was a sentiment he echoed during his interview for this project, telling me “There’s no way that the United States can trust China.”<sup>167</sup> For Mearsheimer, trust can be fatal, which is far too great a risk for a head of state to take. Axelrod similarly writes that “The foundation of cooperation is not really trust, but the durability of the relationship.”<sup>168</sup>

Implicit in both Mearsheimer and Axelrod’s comments is a definition of trust. Mearsheimer, for example, argues that states can never have a “high degree of certainty” of the intentions of other states. However, as noted above, where certainty exists trust is not required. By creating a separation between cooperation and trust, Axelrod is implicitly defining trust as something more long-term and comprehensive than a limited exchange relationship rooted in self-interest. Similarly, when Mearsheimer says there is no room for trust in major power relations, he is not saying there is no room for cooperation (which is demonstrably false), but rather that normative trust is not possible. For Axelrod and Mearsheimer perceive trust in the normative sense – a bond that assumes the other actor has your best interests at heart, much in the way a parent does for their child.

The trust in these relationships is said to emanate from the emotional bond or feeling between actors, rather than from a risk assessment, as in strategic trust. This view of trust came through in several interviews. Robert Ross, for example, said “I don’t like the word ‘trust’, because trust has a sense of emotional content. I prefer the term ‘confidence’. Confidence is the opposite of uncertainty.”<sup>169</sup> “I think the word ‘trust’ has a certain interpersonal characteristic to it – you *trust* someone else, you *trust* in a friend. You develop a personal relationship based on trust. Whereas I think confidence is based on situational conditions.”<sup>170</sup> The notion that trust is somehow an emotional response but confidence is not is misplaced. They are both, technically, ‘feelings’. There is no objective measure of confidence. It is an assessment based on information used to make a

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<sup>166</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 32.

<sup>167</sup> Interview with John Mearsheimer, March 23, 2017, Baltimore, Maryland.

<sup>168</sup> Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, 334.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Robert Ross, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Robert Ross, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

risk assessment on the probability that another actor will behave as you predict. This is, effectively, strategic trust.

The root of these errors in perception are twofold. The first is that the majority of IR theorists have simply not spent much time really thinking about what trust *is* or how it might work. They dismiss the need to do so because trust is a concept with an inherently understood meaning. For the majority of people, that meaning is understood as the normative type described above, something you would share with your family and close friends. Axelrod, Mearsheimer, and Ross, for example, are thinking of trust much in the way they think about trust between individuals, which is precisely why they dismiss the value or presence of it in international relations. The second root of the misperception of what trust is and how it relates to IR is that, as mentioned above, the majority of theories of trust in IR are informed by an understanding of interpersonal trust and are generally based on research done in other fields (e.g., business management, economics, sociology, psychology). The context is completely skewed. In these conceptions of trust, there is comparable state of anarchy. Individuals or businesses can appeal to the state to protect them in the event of a betrayal. Indeed, as Tyler argues, one of the primary features of society is to enable individuals to engage in trusting behavior beyond their immediate self-interest.<sup>171</sup> There is no parallel in international relations, no arbiter to appeal to in the event of a betrayal. In international relations, power is the final arbiter. That weaker states are able to exact concessions from stronger ones in the event of a dispute is entirely dependent upon the stronger state's willingness to abide by the rules, or its own fear of penalty by an even stronger state (or group of states). Accordingly, trying to adopt theories of trust used to describe interpersonal relations to interstate relations is a mistake. While strategic trust, as it has been commonly employed, lends itself well to realist expectations of state behavior, it is not quite how IR scholars and analysts seem to use the term. Where Uslaner's definition is narrow and contingent, the popular use of the term is general and comprehensive.

Strategic trust, as it is popularly used, refers to positive expectations of long-term strategic interests and intentions. It is what James Steinberg and Michael O'Hanlon

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<sup>171</sup> Tom R. Tyler, "Trust in the Twenty-First Century," in Shockley et al., *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Trust*, 212.

described as “a way of interacting, and of thinking, as much as it is any specific set of policies or accords,”<sup>172</sup> or what Kissinger refers to as a “pattern of continuous cooperation.”<sup>173</sup> To be clear, neither Steinberg and O’Hanlon nor Kissinger were referring specifically to strategic trust. In his capacity as Deputy Secretary of State, however, Steinberg has described strategic trust as “an unshakable foundation of mutual trust and instinctive cultural understanding of the kind that has underpinned Washington’s relationship with its European allies.”<sup>174</sup> Therein lies the problem. Theorists and analysts speak of strategic trust in the abstract, using it as a general descriptor for positive relations between states.

If we consider the *A trusts B to do X* equation, it becomes clear that in Steinberg’s definition, there is no *X*, just *A* trusting *B*. This is not a description of strategic trust, but rather mutual trust. This is an inappropriate form of trust to aspire to in the U.S.-China relationship, and one which fails to incorporate, or consider, the key components identified above, namely uncertainty and risk. The nature of the ‘mistrust’ between the U.S. and China is largely driven by structural factors: there is a disruption in the balance of power between the two and China is gaining sufficient material power to be capable of challenging U.S. primacy, particularly in the Asia-Pacific. Strategic trust is about improving the mutual capacity of both states to manage the competition and tension that structural pressure creates. If China fails to rise – that is, if the relationship were more ‘static’ – then mutual trust could come into play. The relationship would be more about improving the basis of trust between two states to ensure overall stability and prosperity – seeking to develop the ‘bonds of trust’ Wheeler has described. However, this is not the type of trust that must be developed between a rising and a dominant power. For that, there must be strategic trust.

To have strategic trust in a relationship between states is to have a common understanding, or expectation, that routine conflicts of interest will, or can, be resolved peacefully and that each state, ultimately, does not seek to exploit the other with malicious intent. Said another way, it is a mutual recognition of security-seeking status or

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<sup>172</sup> James Steinberg & Michael O’Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve: U.S.-China Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 14.

<sup>173</sup> Katrin Bennhold, “Mutual Trust Called Crucial to U.S.-China Relations,” *The New York Times* (online), September 12, 2010.

<sup>174</sup> Bennhold, “Mutual Trust Called Crucial to U.S.-China Relations.”

behavior. Malicious intent, furthermore, does not imply that one state will not seek advantage for another, or do so directly at their expense. Rather, it simply means that the actions taken are not taken with the explicit purpose of causing harm. Hacking state secrets (corporate or public), is one thing, disrupting another state's electrical grid is another. As noted above, there are behaviors, like spying, that are expected, particularly by major powers. It is premised on the reciprocal exchange of information, which itself involves a measure of transparency. This is what creates the predictive confidence that characterizes strategic trust.

In this respect, strategic trust is similar to Booth and Wheeler's concept of 'security dilemma sensibility', which they define as "an actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear."<sup>175</sup> This does not require the kinds of positive bonds commonly associated with trust, in which each actor has the other's best interests in mind. It does, however, describe a context in which *A* might trust *B* to do *X*. It is simply relational. The fact that it was designed with the security dilemma in mind is particularly appropriate, as it addresses the structural uncertainty facing competing great powers, particularly during a power transition.

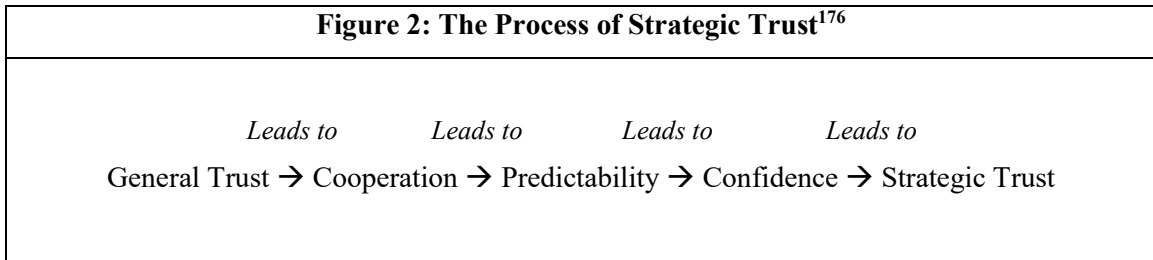
Strategic trust is central to both *avoiding* conflict, through routine dialogues, interactions, and agreed upon rules of engagement, and *responding* to conflict, by enhancing crisis management capabilities. It dampens the uncertainty inherent in an anarchic system to facilitate cooperative and stable relations between major powers. This dampening effect is particularly relevant during power transitions, when the ever-present uncertainty of the international system is exacerbated by the destabilizing effects of systemic recalibration – the period of adjustment where a new great power is 'accommodated' into the existing system. Said another way, strategic trust reduces the prospects of unwanted security dilemma escalation, or spiraling. When strategic trust exists between a rising and a dominant state, a peaceful rise is both more possible and more likely; where it is absent, or lacking, war is more likely.

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<sup>175</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 7.



Strategic trust is not about altering the foundational dimensions of the relationship as much as it is about controlling the negative consequences of it. It is about providing each state with the information required to dampen some of the uncertainty the structural context of the relationship creates. The information required to make the assessment of confidence is derived from cooperation. Figure 2 illustrates the process. To have strategic trust in a relationship does not imply the positive feelings that are used to describe mutual trust. It is simply about shared understandings that allow states to be confident in their ability to predict the behavior or response of another state, minimizing the uncertainty and instability in the relationship.



Strategic trust, like all trust, should be conceptualized as being a question of degree. Trust is a spectrum, rather than an absolute. It is not a question of ‘is there trust’ but rather ‘how much’ and ‘what type’. At a minimum, it increases predictability and reduces the possibility of accidental crises during routine interactions in shared operational environments. It helps institutionalize mechanisms for conflict avoidance and management, and provides a measure of control over the inevitable strategic competition between states. At best, it can lead to the mutual trust Steinberg and others have described. This is why careful attention must be paid to both strategic trust as a concept, as well as the mechanisms states use to develop and maintain it. Rather than treat strategic trust as a catchall descriptor for a positive-sum relationship, it should be used as the more precise and specific concept described above.

There is, of course, the important question of measurement. Measuring trust is inherently problematic.<sup>177</sup> In the context of international relations, it is important to look

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<sup>176</sup> The format of this chart borrows from David M. Finkelstein & John Unangst, *Engaging DoD: Chinese Perspectives on Military Relations with the United States*, (CNA: October 1999), 4.

for evidence of trust. For example, as noted above, Keating and Ruzicka consider the absence of hedging to be a sign of a trusting relationship. With strategic trust, particularly in the context of U.S.-China relations, the evidence lies in the stability of the mechanisms through which that trust is generated (in this case, military-to-military relations), and the outcomes generated by those mechanisms (e.g., confidence-building measures, memorandums of understanding). More to the point, CBMs and mil-mil relations are designed to facilitate and maintain the mutual ‘sensitivity’ described above. These are imperfect metrics, as quantity does not guarantee quality. However, important insights can be drawn by considering these factors. Indeed, it is the central argument of this dissertation that doing so provides a different, more positive outcome than is commonly ascribed to the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship.

Furthermore, as noted above, trust should be conceived as operating along a spectrum. To say there is ‘more’ or ‘less’ strategic trust (for example) is a judgement that should be based on some empirical evidence. For example, with the U.S.-U.K. relationship, we can say there is a high degree of strategic trust based on the fact that they are members of an intelligence sharing alliance (The Five Eyes, with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand), members of a military alliance (NATO), have a well-developed understanding of each other’s strategic outlooks and not only can resolve conflicts easily, but they rarely have them. The U.S.-China relationship, conversely, has low-to-medium strategic trust. As the following sections will demonstrate, they still struggle with mutual understanding of strategic intentions, are reticent to be transparent, and have a very nascent institutionalized capacity to resolve conflicts.

To provide more context, the following section situates the concept of strategic trust within common realist approaches to IR. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, approaching strategic trust through a realist lens is important as realism is the dominant theoretical approach applied to U.S.-China relations. This is particularly true in the context of their military relations. The goal is to demonstrate that a concept of trust can operate according to, and within, the structural boundaries set out in realist theories.

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<sup>177</sup> For example, see: Roy J. Lewicki & Chad Brinsfield, “Measuring trust beliefs and behaviors,” in *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust*, Fergus Lyon, Guido Mollering, Mark N.K. Saunders, editors, (Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc., 2012), 29 – 39; Paul C. Bauer & Markus Freitag, “Measuring Trust,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust*, Eric M. Uslaner, editor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 15 – 36.

### Strategic Trust and Realism

Two of the major works on power transition theory (PTT), Gilpin's *War and Change in World Politics* (1981) and Organski & Kugler's *The War Ledger* (1980), leave the door open for peaceful power transitions. For example, Gilpin notes that "the passage of time makes peaceful coexistence among major competitors easier,"<sup>178</sup> with states learning from long-term interaction, leading to the creation and evolution of governing rules "that facilitate control and management of competition."<sup>179</sup> What is this if not a description of strategic trust? Gilpin further identifies the possibility for systemic accommodation and its ability to maintain the stability of an existing system.<sup>180</sup> Organski and Kugler similarly note that "the powerful and satisfied do not start wars."<sup>181</sup> As Steve Chan has observed, "a rising state's satisfaction with the status quo rather than its status as a contender in the central system is determinative of whether a power transition will be peaceful."<sup>182</sup>

The specifics of how such perceptions of intent, or satisfaction, are interpreted by the dominant power (or others) is not adequately explained in the PTT literature. Accordingly, while caveats are made to allow for the possibility of peaceful power transitions via systemic accommodation (for example), explanations of how such accommodations are reached are missing. This is an acknowledged limitation of the PTT framework. For example, Gilpin notes that "Despite the insight that it provides in understanding and explaining the great wars of history, the theory of hegemonic war is a limited and incomplete theory. It cannot easily handle perceptions that affect behavior and predict who will initiate a hegemonic war. Nor can it forecast when a hegemonic war will occur and what the consequences will be."<sup>183</sup> Organski and Kugler, along with Levy and others, have offered theories to better explain who will initiate a hegemonic war (and

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<sup>178</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 40.

<sup>179</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 42.

<sup>180</sup> For example, see *War and Change in World Politics*, pages 13 and 45.

<sup>181</sup> A.F.K. Organski & Jacek Kugler. *The War Ledger*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 23.

<sup>182</sup> Steve Chan, "Exploring Puzzles in Power-Transition Theory: Implications for Sino-American Relations," *Security Studies* 13:3 (Spring 2004), 107 - 108.

<sup>183</sup> Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* xviii: 4 (Spring 1988), 605.

under what conditions), however Gilpin's acknowledgement is an important one.<sup>184</sup> Perceptions that affect behavior is, after all, essential to the expected outcome of a power transition. The importance given to whether or not a great power is satisfied is bound with the concepts of threat perception and intent. For example, Organski and Kugler note that "changes in the power structure will not, in and of themselves, bring war about. Satisfied great powers are not likely to interpret advantages gained by satisfied lesser powers as threatening."<sup>185</sup> Said another way, whether a rising power's gains are seen as threatening by the dominant power is a matter of perception, through which intent is inferred. An unsatisfied rising power can be expected to use its increasing power to alter the status quo, and therefore its intent can be interpreted by others as threatening, prompting a balancing effort or full-on war. Being able to properly identify whether a state is, or is not, a status quo power is based in part on the presence, and quality, of strategic trust between states.

By making allowances for peaceful transitions, power transition theorists are acknowledging that material gains, and the systemic shifts they cause, are not causal; it is *necessary but not sufficient* to explain war as an outcome.<sup>186</sup> Perception of intent then becomes the most important variable. This important distinction is often overlooked, or outright dismissed, by many engaged in the China debate. For example, as outline above, offensive realists like Mearsheimer rely on a purely systemic explanation rooted in material capabilities. China, like any rising power, is incentivized to expand its power and regional influence because it can, and the only way for China to feel 'secure' is to become the most dominant power in the region – the hegemon.<sup>187</sup> This points to a logical contradiction in Mearsheimer's work. In a 2010 article, for example, he argues that "no amount of good will can ameliorate the intense security competition that sets in when an aspiring hegemon appears in Eurasia."<sup>188</sup> The systemic imperatives compel China to expand and the U.S. to resist those efforts. Conversely, Mearsheimer also argues that

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<sup>184</sup> Jack S. Levy, "Power Transition Theory & the Rise of China," in *China's Ascent*, Robert S. Ross & Zhu Feng, eds., (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008), 11 – 33.

<sup>185</sup> Organski & Kugler. *The War Ledger*, 22.

<sup>186</sup> Organski & Kugler. *The War Ledger*, 206.

<sup>187</sup> For example, see John J. Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010), 381 – 396; Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*.

<sup>188</sup> Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm," 396.

“states can never be certain about each other’s intentions,” and thus can never be sure “with a high degree of certainty” whether China is a revisionist or status quo power.<sup>189</sup> “Even if one could determine China’s intentions today, there is no way to know what they will be in the future.”<sup>190</sup> Uncertainty is as inescapable a feature of the international system as anarchy itself.

If we subscribe to the causal logic that uncertainty and anarchy will compel China to expand and attempt to dominate the region, however, then we *can* know what China’s future intentions will be. Therefore, other states, like the U.S., can be sure, with a high degree of certainty, that China is a revisionist power. And, because talk is cheap and the security dilemma between the U.S. and China is unavoidable, there is little China (or the U.S.) can do to alter their tragic destiny. This position is even more problematic when the offensive realist conception of a revisionist state is applied. Wang, referencing Mearsheimer, notes that “For offensive realism, revisionism refers to intentions, not behavior. A revisionist state is one that harbors malign intentions and is ‘inclined to look for opportunities to gain more power.’”<sup>191</sup> While the link between looking for opportunities to gain more power and ‘malign intentions’ is perhaps overemphasized in offensive realism, the underlying logic that power begets expansion is an important point that is not easily dismissed. And, to be fair, there is nothing in Mearsheimer’s offensive realism that suggests that all states will behave according to the theory’s predictions, at all times, simply that behaving “according to the dictates of offensive realism...outlines the best way to survive in a dangerous world.”<sup>192</sup> Mearsheimer is quite open about the theoretical limitations of offensive realism and its accordant predictive capabilities.<sup>193</sup>

Though the causal logic applied by offensive realists like Mearsheimer differs from that used by Gilpin and Organski & Kugler, the important variable is intent rather than material capabilities, which are necessary but not sufficient. The difference between the two approaches then lies in the ability of states (including China) to affect intent – Mearsheimer believes it is (mostly) inalterable, and that where there is a way (material

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<sup>189</sup> Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” 382.

<sup>190</sup> Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm,” 383.

<sup>191</sup> Yuan-Kang Wang, “Offensive Realism and the Rise of China,” *Issues & Studies* 40:1 (March 2004), 182.

<sup>192</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 11.

<sup>193</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 8.

capabilities) there is the will to expand because all great powers have malign intent and a desire to expand. Gilpin and Organski & Kugler, conversely, believe intentions can be altered through sufficient accommodations (though again, these aspects of their arguments are underspecified). Even in offensive realism, however, intent is central to outcome. For instance, Mearsheimer notes that “States might also have the capability to gain advantage over a rival power but nevertheless decide that the perceived costs of offense are too high and do not justify the expected benefits.”<sup>194</sup> This is similar to the argument made by Gilpin and Organski & Kugler identified above – a state must not only have the capacity to alter the status quo, but also the *willingness* (that is, the intent) to do so. This of course reinforces the contradiction in Mearsheimer’s logic outlined earlier. Why China and the U.S. are destined to clash, as Mearsheimer predicts, when the costs of such a war would almost certainly exceed the benefits is unclear. This is especially true if the conflict were to go nuclear, which Mearsheimer also argues is more likely in a war between the U.S. and China than between the USSR and U.S.<sup>195</sup>

If intent, in conjunction with material capabilities, determines whether a power transition will be peaceful or violent, then the central theoretical issue becomes clarifying how states identify/perceive threats. If a state perceives another as a threat, it is because it believes there is some actual, or latent, intent on the part of the other. Actual threat could be deciphered through behavior, contrary to Mearsheimer’s earlier claim. “A state does not necessarily exhibit revisionist behavior because it may not have the capacity to do so, even though it still harbors revisionist intentions.”<sup>196</sup> That is certainly true, however behavior is also a clear display of intent, at least in the near-term. Latent intent is based simply on material capacity to challenge another state – simply by having such a capacity, in terms of military capability, states will always be aware of the possibility that malign intent may become malign action. The role of near-term and long-term intent is the crux of the issue. While Mearsheimer argues that intentions can never be deciphered with a “high degree of certainty,” he ignores the fact that powers do not rise in a vacuum. Gilpin and Organski & Kugler implicitly acknowledge this by allowing for the possibility

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<sup>194</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 37.

<sup>195</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Mearsheimer, “Can China Rise Peacefully?” *The National Interest* (online), April 8, 2014.

<sup>196</sup> Wang, “Offensive Realism and the Rise of China,” 182.

of accommodation between a rising and a dominant power. Mearsheimer is right to note that how China behaves as a fully capable great power is likely to be different than how a weak China would behave. However, the process of going from a weak to a great power is interactive. The U.S. has directly facilitated China's rise through its efforts to integrate China into the liberal world order the U.S. established after WWII. A relationship exists both between the U.S. and China and China and the international system, relationships which bear directly on China's revisionist cost/benefit calculus and its intention to alter the status quo.

Because all states depend, to varying degrees, on the system for their prosperity, none can escape being influenced by its interactions with other states. This is essentially the basis for the concept of status quo or revisionist states. Status quo states wish to uphold the existing system because they benefit from it; revisionist states believe they would benefit from a significant restructuring of the system. What, precisely, determines a 'significant' change is unclear. By definition, as a rising power keen on reshaping the international system to reflect its newfound capabilities and interests, China *is* a de facto revisionist state. This is entirely consistent with PTT expectations. For example, Gilpin asserts that as a rising state's relative power increases, it will attempt to change the rules governing the international system, the division of the spheres of influence, and the distribution of territory.<sup>197</sup> The dominant power then attempts to adjust its policies in a bid to restore equilibrium to the existing system, with failure to do so often leading to war.<sup>198</sup> "Territorial, political, and economic adjustments among states in response to conflicting interests and shifting power relationships function to relieve pressure on the system," allowing for its preservation.<sup>199</sup> The specific nature of these adjustments, or how many minor changes can be made before they collectively constitute a major change and become resisted by the dominant power, is unclear. Importantly, however, (and contrary to popular interpretations of his work) Gilpin is optimistic at the prospect of states' capability to make these adjustments peacefully. It is here that strategic trust becomes useful for enhancing Gilpin's argument.

"Whereas the contemporary world displays some of the preconditions for

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<sup>197</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 187.

<sup>198</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 187.

<sup>199</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 46.

hegemonic conflict,” he writes, “other preconditions appear to be totally or partially lacking. An evaluation of the current international situation reinforces the hope that a gradual process of peaceful change, rather than war, may characterize the present era of world politics.”<sup>200</sup> Strategic trust is what makes this peaceful change, or accommodation, possible, while still operating according to the underlying logic and assumptions of realism. Furthermore, it helps to clarify why a dominant power would allow for the minor changes mentioned above. Indeed, strategic trust is implicit in Gilpin’s argument for why peaceful accommodation is possible, noting that “States can learn to be more enlightened in their definitions of their interests and can learn to be more cooperative in their behavior.”<sup>201</sup> If strategic trust is present in a relationship between a rising and a dominant state, the dominant state will not be as inclined to resist enhancing the role and status of the rising power. Similarly, the rising power would not be compelled to attempt to use force to bring about such changes. Cooperative relations rooted in a modicum of trust of mutual long-term strategic intentions is, after all, central to the concept of strategic trust. As Gilpin puts it, “international political change takes places through the process of peaceful accommodation and limited conflicts at the level of interstate interactions.”<sup>202</sup> Strategic trust helps ensure the limited conflicts which arise as a natural function of interstate interactions, particularly between great powers, are resolved peacefully. In keeping with realist assumptions of state behavior, the dominant state, attempting to maintain its position, will use its power to shape the strategic environment in a way that is conducive to the development of trust.

As Gilpin rightly notes, “any development that increases the power and enlarges the opportunity of a state to increase its revenues will encourage political or economic expansion.”<sup>203</sup> That political or economic expansion, however, does not necessitate military confrontation. The U.S. encouraging China to assume responsibilities commensurate with the great power status it desires is further proof of this. The United States encourages China to play a larger global role, gladly offering more prestige in exchange for China’s willingness to shoulder greater responsibilities. “Prestige at a

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<sup>200</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 234.

<sup>201</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 227.

<sup>202</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 46.

<sup>203</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 53.



price,” as Schweller and Pu call it.<sup>204</sup> The U.S. does not view China’s increased global influence as a threat to its hegemony or interests, so long as China meets its end of the bargain. The challenge is in offering the right incentives to compel China to agree to America’s terms. Strategic trust, while crucial to alleviating mutual fears and uncertainty, cannot be imposed. While Gilpin was not writing specifically with the U.S. and China in mind, it is clear that he is optimistic about the ability of dominant states to integrate rising powers into the existing system without military confrontation.

How a state benefits from the system is determined by the type of relationship it has with the dominant actor(s) within it and its material parity with those dominant states. That is to say, great powers can be expected to derive more benefits from the system than weaker ones. For a state who wishes to rise (which is all of them), it must have a positive relationship with the system and its dominant powers. China’s rise is an example of this. Before rapprochement with the U.S. in 1972, China’s growth was limited by its isolation from, and opposition to, the U.S.-led system. After repairing relations with the U.S. and the subsequent economic reforms initiated by China in 1979, China was able to alter its relationship with the system from negative to positive. Economic, political, cultural, and military relationships develop as a consequence of state interaction, particularly major powers who must cooperate on some level to be able to derive mutual benefit from the system. It is precisely this process of interaction which Gilpin was referring to when he argued that the longer states interact, the more likely it is that they can maintain positive relations.<sup>205</sup> It is this process of interaction which Mearsheimer minimizes or dismisses altogether. And it is precisely this process of interaction which informs threat perception.

States with a history of cooperation are less likely to view each other with hostile intent than those for whom cooperation has been more difficult. For example, the United States and the United Kingdom share a different relationship than the U.S. does with Russia, though both dyads have a history of cooperation. The U.S. and the U.K. have a long history of positive cooperation across a full spectrum of areas (political, cultural, economic, military). U.S.-Russian relations, conversely, are more firmly based on mutual self-interest (nuclear proliferation, for example). PTT and realism in general have paid

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<sup>204</sup> Randall L. Schweller & Xiaoyu Pu. “After Unipolarity: China’s Vision of International Order an Era of U.S. Decline,” *International Security* 36:1 (Summer 2011), 68.

<sup>205</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 40 & 42.

insufficient attention to the role of threat perception, despite its central role to peaceful or violent outcomes. That is to say, realism has failed to adequately conceptualize threat perception on a theoretical level or incorporate such considerations into existing theoretical arguments.

### Threat Perception

Threat perception is rooted in theoretical concepts of how states respond to uncertainty. Debates on the issue find their foundation in the offensive/defensive realist divide, and variations thereof (e.g., neorealist, neoclassical). As noted above, offensive realists like Mearsheimer see threat perception as being determined solely by material capabilities. States who have a capacity to alter the status quo/challenge the dominant power are treated accordingly. Gilpin and Organski & Kugler, conversely, can be thought of as defensive realists, believing that it is possible for states to rise, and even surpass the dominant state, without necessarily triggering a security dilemma. The ability of the U.S. to surpass the U.K. peacefully is the most often cited example of this.<sup>206</sup> Similarly, increases in military capabilities by the U.K., Japan, or even India, are not perceived as threatening (at least to the same degree) as increases made by China, Iran, or North Korea. The reason for this variance in threat perception is found in the strategic relationship these states share. The U.S. and U.K. have a positive strategic relationship, with a high-degree of strategic trust that informs mutual threat perceptions. Increases in military capabilities by the U.K. are not seen as threatening by the U.S. (and vice versa) because (contrary to Mearsheimer) each has a high degree of certainty of the strategic intentions of the other. While certainly informed by shared culture and history, the strategic trust enjoyed by the U.S. and the U.K. is also based on mutual transparency and on-going reassurance programs designed to reinforce cooperative intentions. All major powers have strategic relationships. What accounts for differences in threat perception is

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<sup>206</sup> See for example: Charles A. Kupchan, *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Barry Buzan & Michael Cox, "China and the U.S.: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'?" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 6 (2013): 109 – 132.

the level of strategic trust within that relationship. Existing theories of threat, like PTT, acknowledge this either implicitly or explicitly.

Identifying threats is central to the U.S.-China debate and many realist theories more generally. It is what makes China's defense spending cause for concern while India's goes relatively un-noticed. Steven Lobell, writing from a neoclassical realist perspective, suggests that "Great powers face threats that originate from shifts either in the international system or in the internal domestic arena, while regional powers can face an addition threat from threats in the subsystem."<sup>207</sup> The boundaries separating these different threat sources are "blurred and interrelated."<sup>208</sup> Lobell notes that "Whether a foreign state is viewed as threatening is in part a function of which component of its power is rising. Specific components might include shifts in territory, population, industry, land-based military, or naval and air power."<sup>209</sup> States respond according to whichever components are deemed threatening to their specific strategic interests. That is, not all relative gains are equally threatening and therefore provoke different responses. The nature of these gains in turn determines whether, and how, a state balances against these perceived threats. It is the shifts "in components of the rising or threatening state's power, rather than shifts in its aggregate power alone," which are important.<sup>210</sup>

Lobell's theory is more nuanced and detailed than this brief analysis allows, however he still fails to adequately explain why shifts in the capabilities of some states are perceived as a threat, while others are not. Without wanting to belabor the point, India's parallel rise has not been met with the same sense of threat that China's has. A state need not be the most powerful to be the most threatening, as Walt has argued.<sup>211</sup> And, according to Lobell's framework for assessing threats, threats are perceived based on the possible challenges to the strategic interests of other states derived from relative gains in certain materially-based components. It would follow that though India is not as economically powerful as China, it would still be perceived as a possible strategic threat

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<sup>207</sup> Steven E. Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model," in *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, Steven Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 46.

<sup>208</sup> Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy," 46.

<sup>209</sup> Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy," 55.

<sup>210</sup> Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy," 73.

<sup>211</sup> Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3 – 43.

by other states in the region. This is not to suggest that other states are overlooking India's gains and dismissing it entirely. However, China's rise is consistently cited as being particularly worrying for states in the region, with many increasing their military budgets in response to China's rise. India's military budget, by contrast, is the third largest in the region, behind only China and Japan.<sup>212</sup> By 2045, it is projected to be the world's third largest defense spender, following the U.S. and China.<sup>213</sup>

India is not a formal U.S. ally, and so the region's passive response to its growth cannot be explained by it being under America's security umbrella in the same way that Japan's might. Granted, China is the more powerful state, is closer geographically to the majority of states in the Asia-Pacific region, has territorial disputes with more states in the region, and has a different historical experience with its neighbors. However, this is power and threat in context. Lobell argues that a state is perceived as threatening partially as a function of changes in certain components; by that metric, India *should* be perceived as more of a threat than it has been. This is particularly true if Mearsheimer is right and the pervasive uncertainty of an anarchic world forces states to "gain power at the expense of present and potential future rivals."<sup>214</sup>

Walt suggests that "Intentions, not power, are crucial."<sup>215</sup> His 'balance of threat' theory "predicts that states will balance against threats; threat, in turn, is driven by a combination of three key variables: aggregate power, geography, and perceptions of intent."<sup>216</sup> Strategic trust can enhance realist arguments by placing shifts in material capabilities in the context of strategic perceptions. Brooks and Wohlforth note that "As Walt applies the theory to the United States, changes in just one independent variable, perceptions of intentions, have major consequences for the recent behavior of great powers."<sup>217</sup> That is, despite being the most powerful actor, other great powers have not attempted to balance against the United States because it is not perceived as a threat.

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<sup>212</sup> Sam Perlo-Freeman & Carina Solmirano, *Trends in world military expenditure, 2013*, SIPRI (April 2014).

<sup>213</sup> United Kingdom, *Strategic Trends Programme: Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2045*, Fifth Ed., Ministry of Defence, (August 2014), 94.

<sup>214</sup> Lobell, "Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy," 47.

<sup>215</sup> Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," 13.

<sup>216</sup> Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 61.

<sup>217</sup> Brooks & Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance*, 61.

Whether states are perceived as threats, in the way Lobell describes, is dependent upon the presence, and degree, of strategic trust. When strategic trust exists, thereby pacifying perceptions of intent, the influence of aggregate power and geography are similarly muted. Strategic trust does not guarantee states will be friends, allies, or even partners, however it can prevent misperceptions and escalations, both particularly relevant during power transitions.

Walt, for example, says as much when he ascribes ‘perceived intentions’ as being central to the level of threat.<sup>218</sup> Lobell similarly argues that threat perception is partially based on which component of power a gain is made by another state, without acknowledging that it also depends on the nature of the relationship between those states. Relative gains do matter, however as Mastanduno and others have demonstrated, the response to such gains are not as clear-cut as offensive realists would suggest.<sup>219</sup> Edelstein says, “the causal mechanisms posited by offensive realists are incorrect while a critical dimension of the logic of defensive realism – that is, how states respond to uncertainty about intentions – is underdeveloped.”<sup>220</sup> It is the latter point this project seeks to redress.

### Uncertainty in IR

A useful point of departure for clarifying differences between offensive and defensive realism and how they deal with the problem of uncertainty is in the causal weight assigned to *probable* and *possible* outcomes.<sup>221</sup> Offensive realists essentially argue that “uncertainty is complete and invariant, as well as a determinative constraint on state behavior.”<sup>222</sup> Offensive realists are “conditioned to remain fearful and maximize their relative power whenever possible.”<sup>223</sup> The mere possibility that another state may

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<sup>218</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>219</sup> Michael Mastanduno, “Do Relative Gains Matter? America’s Response to Japanese Industrial Policy,” *International Security* 16:1 (Summer 1991), 73 – 113.

<sup>220</sup> David M. Edelstein, “Managing Uncertainty: Beliefs About Intentions and the Rise of Great Powers,” *Security Studies* 12:1 (Autumn 2002), 2.

<sup>221</sup> See for example, Edelstein, “Managing Uncertainty”; Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*; Stephen G. Brooks, “Dueling Realisms,” *International Organization* 51:3 (Summer 1997), 445 – 477; William C. Wohlforth, “Gilpinian Realism and International Relations,” *International Relations* 24:4 (2011), 499 – 511.

<sup>222</sup> Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma,” 151.

<sup>223</sup> Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma,” 151.

‘turn’ and threaten your survival compels you to focus on worst-case scenarios and rely on “purely competitive strategies...based solely on assessments of relative capabilities.”<sup>224</sup> “States can never be certain about the intentions of other states,” Mearsheimer writes, “because intentions are inside the heads of leaders and thus virtually impossible to see and difficult to measure.”<sup>225</sup> This is what is known as ‘The Other Minds’ problem.<sup>226</sup> The primary fault with the offensive realist approach is that it treats ‘The Other Minds’ problem, and the general problem of uncertainty, as insurmountable obstacles.

Anarchy is itself a conflict generating feature of the international system. The pervasive uncertainty that states face in an anarchic system compels them to expand or otherwise strengthen themselves (or weaken others) in order to ensure their long-term survival. “Uncertainty is immutable and a central cause of conflict.”<sup>227</sup> Trust and reassurance are inconsequential considerations for offensive realists because “the level of trust is never enough to affect behavior.”<sup>228</sup> In terms of probable v. possible, offensive realists are focused on the *possible* – so long as a state *can* possibly threaten the security/survival of others (by virtue of their material capabilities), other states must operate on the assumption that they *will*. It is only by maximizing power and seizing offensive opportunities (where possible) that a state can guarantee its survival. The most powerful states survive and only the *most* powerful state can be comfortable in its ability to guarantee that survival. Hence, great powers all seek to become the regional hegemon (and, if possible, the global hegemon). In offensive realism, states seek power.

Defensive realism, conversely, is more aptly characterized by the assumption that states react to *probable* threats. States can signal peaceful intentions and react to their own assessments of others’ intentions.<sup>229</sup> Taliaffero identifies two central assumptions of defensive realism: the security dilemma is an intractable feature of anarchy; and structural modifiers influence the severity of the security dilemma in particular regions or

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<sup>224</sup> Edelstein, “Managing Uncertainty,” 1.

<sup>225</sup> Mearsheimer, “Can China Rise Peacefully?”

<sup>226</sup> Ken Booth & Nicholas J. Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” in *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Paul D. Williams, ed., (New York: Routledge, 2008), 134 – 136.

<sup>227</sup> Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma,” 155.

<sup>228</sup> Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 14.

<sup>229</sup> Andrew H. Kydd, “Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other,” *Security Studies* 7:1 (Autumn 1997), 114 – 54.

between particular states.<sup>230</sup> Modifiers include technology, geography, and international economic pressures.<sup>231</sup> Ultimately, states are able to mitigate the consequences, and seriousness, of the ever-present security dilemma. “The intensity of the security dilemma also depends on states’ beliefs about one another’s motives and goals.”<sup>232</sup> By pursuing defensive weapons and a defensive posture, states can increase their own security without undermining the security of others in part by making conquest/war more costly. Defensive realists also believe that it is possible for states to communicate intentions and help reduce uncertainty to manageable levels.<sup>233</sup> “States strive to maximize relative security, not relative power.”<sup>234</sup> In defensive realism, states seek security.

Offensive realists would treat any rising power as threatening by virtue of its material capabilities and relative power vis-à-vis the dominant power. The security dilemma is intense and unavoidable because no amount of reassuring or other attempts to build trust will be enough to mitigate the security competition between competing great powers/hegemony. Defensive realists, conversely, believe the security dilemma is contextual and that technology, geography, and other ‘structural modifiers’ can play a role in communicating ‘threat’ between states. Both offensive and defensive realists assume that uncertainty and anarchy are driving forces behind state behavior. Defensive realists believe uncertainty can be managed and cooperation is possible; offensive realists do not.

Given their close relationship, it is surprising that despite the attention paid to uncertainty and cooperation, trust has been so roundly ignored by IR theorists. Probability assessments, as argued above, are central to the concept of strategic trust and, as just demonstrated, to defensive realist theories. Yet defensive realists do not speak of strategic trust. There is increasingly a belief that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a “new age of uncertainty,” brought about by rapid changes in technology and the onset of transnational

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<sup>230</sup> Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security* 25: 3 (Winter 2000/01), 128 – 161.

<sup>231</sup> Brooks, “Dueling Realisms.”; Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma.”

<sup>232</sup> Charles Glaser, “Will China’s Rise Lead to War? Why Realism Does Not Mean Pessimism,” *Foreign Affairs* 90:2 (2011), 82.

<sup>233</sup> Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy.”; Montgomery, “Breaking Out of the Security Dilemma.”; Kydd, “Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing.”

<sup>234</sup> Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy,” 159.

threats like climate change, terrorism, and pandemics, among other things.<sup>235</sup>

Understanding the role strategic trust plays in shaping perceptions of threat, and in turn overcoming the uncertainty inherent in an anarchic system, is increasingly important for understanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century international relations. This is particularly true in light of the fact that the century will be defined by the ability of the U.S. and China to peacefully manage their competitive relationship.

Strategic trust builds on mutual strategic interests, such as maintaining peace and stability, promoting economic growth, combating terrorism, or responding to global climate change. The presence of this trust – this way of interacting and thinking about a relationship between states – plays an important role in determining which power transitions are cause for alarm and which are benign. When states are able to enhance communication and transparency about strategic intentions, thereby reducing the likelihood of misinterpretation and misperception, strategic trust can be built to a point where routine practices such as military modernization are less likely to cause trepidation in other states. Though structural incentives and the material balance of power complicates the ability of states to develop and maintain durable strategic trust – especially if the states in question do not have a shared history or common culture to draw on, like the U.S. and China – it is far from impossible.

It is important to emphasize that strategic trust does not negate the primacy of material and structural influences on state behavior. Rather, it is a filter through which political leaders and policymakers assess those factors. As Jeffrey Taliaferro notes, “material power drives states’ foreign policies through the medium of leaders’ calculations and perceptions.”<sup>236</sup> The presence of strategic trust can be the difference between interpreting a state’s rise as an opportunity or a liability. This is what Booth and Wheeler refer to as “mitigator logic,” where systemically generated security competition can be “ameliorated or dampened down for a time, but never eliminated.”<sup>237</sup> Strategic trust does not mean states stop paying attention to the distribution of power, or can ignore the uncertainties inherent in an anarchic system. Rather, it dampens the fear uncertainty causes by altering threat perceptions (discussed in more detail below). Power transition

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<sup>235</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 268.

<sup>236</sup> Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy,” 131.

<sup>237</sup> Booth & Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” 139.



theorists implicitly acknowledge this point by leaving the door open to peaceful transitions through processes like systemic accommodation. By extension, they acknowledge that material gains, and the systemic shifts they engender, are not causal; it is a *necessary but not sufficient* variable to explain conflict as an outcome.<sup>238</sup> What is lacking, however, is any specificity for when, or how, systemic accommodation can be achieved. This important distinction is often overlooked, or outright dismissed, by many engaged in the China debate who draw conclusions about state behavior by focusing solely on capabilities, like Mearsheimer.<sup>239</sup>

Arguments like Mearsheimer's ignore the fact that states do not rise in a vacuum; the process is interactive. These types of arguments (based solely on capability) are rooted in what Booth and Nicholas label "fatalist logic," with adherents convinced that the persistent anarchy which characterizes the international system will always push states towards unavoidable wars<sup>240</sup>— what Mearsheimer calls 'the tragedy of great power politics'. If this is indeed the case, then there is "little point in considering policy options at all."<sup>241</sup> Relationships exist between both the U.S. and China, and each state and the international system - relationships which bear directly on their behavior and their cost/benefit calculations. An exchange between Peter Gries and Thomas Christensen draws this out. Gries notes,

that just as personal identities and intentions evolve through interpersonal relations, national identities and goals emerge through international encounters. The search for Chinese intentions, however, usually treats China in isolation from the international context. Metaphorically putting China "on the couch," safely debating from afar whether China is strong or weak, benign or malign, dangerously dismisses the role that other nations play in shaping Chinese behavior...Chinese intentions...evolve in dynamic relationship with American actions.<sup>242</sup>

Similarly, Christensen writes that "The danger is not [...] weapons in isolation, however, but [...] weapons combined with [...] strategic perceptions in Beijing."<sup>243</sup> Gries

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<sup>238</sup> Organski & Kugler. *The War Ledger*.; Levy, "Power Transition Theory & the Rise of China," 11 – 33.

<sup>239</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm"; Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* (April 2006), 160 – 162.

<sup>240</sup> Booth & Wheeler, "Uncertainty," 139.

<sup>241</sup> Steinberg & O'Hanlon, *Strategic Reassurance and Resolve*, 3.

<sup>242</sup> Peter Hays Gries & Thomas Christensen, "Correspondence: Power and Resolve in U.S. China Policy," *International Security* 26:2 (Fall 2001), 157.

<sup>243</sup> Gries & Christensen, "Correspondence," 161.

and Christensen approach the China debate from different theoretical perspectives, however both acknowledge the role of intention and interaction in determining outcome. Strategic trust is at the very core of strategic perception – if there is trust, hostile perceptions are far less likely to dominate the relationship. Peaceful, though still competitive, relationships between states can certainly devolve, and shifts in material capabilities can be the catalyst for such change.<sup>244</sup> However, as Gilpin has argued, “the passage of time makes peaceful coexistence among major competitors easier,” with states learning from long-term interaction, leading to the creation and evolution of governing rules “that facilitate control and management of competition.”<sup>245</sup> This is crux of the issue in U.S.-China strategic relations. Power transitions create unique security dilemmas with powerful structural dynamics which make confrontations where interests converge inevitable; Confrontation, however, does not necessitate war.

A detailed account of how interaction affects perceptions of intent during power transitions is lacking. To correct this, we need to examine the processes through which states seek to cultivate, enhance, and maintain strategic trust. By doing so, we are better able to understand the conditions under which strategic trust works to mitigate security concerns and improve relations, or, conversely, why it does not. Military-to-military relations are central to the trust building process and are a key aspect of bilateral relations between the U.S. and China, broadly cited by policymakers and statesmen. Military-to-military relations serve as a confidence-building measure (CBM) through which states can reduce uncertainty and increase the strategic trust required for stable relations.<sup>246</sup>

In sum, it has been proven that material factors alone are a necessary, but insufficient variable for determining the inevitability of violent power transitions. Central to the determination of violent outcomes are theoretical concepts related to uncertainty and threat perception. Though realist theorists neglect to acknowledge it, these concepts

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<sup>244</sup> For example, see Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), especially Chapter 2, “Amity and Enmity Among Nations,” 25 – 35.

<sup>245</sup> Gilpin, *War & Change in World Politics*, 40 & 42.

<sup>246</sup> For example, see: Shiping Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Graham Allison, “Keeping China and the United States Together,” in Rosecrance and Guoling, eds., *Power and Restraint: A Shared Vision for the U.S.-China Relationship* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), xi – xvi; Chen Zhiya, “Shaping China-U.S. Military Relations,” in Richard Rosecrance & Gu Guoling, eds., *Power and Restraint* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 45 – 60; Ashton B. Carter, “Comments on Chen Zhiya’s “Shaping China-U.S. Military Relations,” in Rosecrance & Guoling, eds., *Power and Restraint* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 61 – 66.

are inherently bound to the concept of trust. As demonstrated above, trust is, by nature, relational, based on risk assessments and probability judgments, and subjectively determined by the contingent and structural circumstances of the relationship. By incorporating the concept of strategic trust, realists are better able to explain how states overcome uncertainty and mitigate the perception of threat in an anarchic world.

Rather than rely on signaling to demonstrate security seeking intentions,<sup>247</sup> strategic trust brings *relations* back to IR. Rather than treating states as isolated units who must rely on interpreting the intentions of others like a game of high stakes charades, it recognizes the reality that great and major powers have continuous strategic relationships with one another which they use to continuously gather information and assess the risks of further cooperation. The best way to determine whether a weapons system is offensive or defensive in nature is not to look at the capability or design of the system (though that is certainly important) but to understand the state employing the system and, in turn, placing it in the context of the overall strategic relationship. This is why the United States fears North Korean or Iranian nuclear weapons but not those of France or the U.K. There is no strategic trust between the U.S. and North Korea or Iran, meaning intentions are divined through capability. In the context of making probability and risk assessments, the lack of information derived from a strategic relationship leads the U.S. to err on the side of caution and pursue a course of action more akin to Mearsheimer's conception of state behavior under conditions of pervasive uncertainty. The relationship with China is at a critical juncture, where incentives for cooperation exist on economic and political levels, but the uncertainty surrounding its military intentions are still unclear. The strategic trust generated through military-to-military relations is central to reducing that uncertainty and facilitating a peaceful accommodation.

With the concept of strategic trust now firmly established, it is possible to turn to a mechanism through which it is produced and maintained: military-to-military relations. Closely examining the mechanism not only provides an understanding of how strategic trust is generated, it also places it in a context in which it is possible to view its effects.

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<sup>247</sup> See: Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing"; Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30:2 (January 1978), 167 – 214; Charles Glaser, "Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help," *International Security* 19:3 (Winter 1994/1995), 50 – 90.

The following chapters bear this out, providing an in-depth analysis of U.S.-China military relations, placing it in the context of strategic trust, and demonstrating how doing so provides a more accurate assessment of the relationship – and in turn, the prospects for a peaceful rise. Before proceeding, however, it is first necessary to analyze the concept of confidence-building, which provides the necessary context for understanding mil-mil relations.

## CHAPTER 3: CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

### Introduction

U.S. spymaster William Colby once said to Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, “The more we know about each other the safer we all are.”<sup>248</sup> Colby’s statement highlights the “uncertainty” problem central to international relations (IR). The challenge for great powers is knowing enough about each other to alleviate the impulse towards hedging and other security dilemma tendencies that undermine, rather than reinforce, systemic stability and individual state security. In an anarchic system, uncertainty can never be fully eliminated. It can, however, be ameliorated to a sufficient degree so as to provide a measure of stability, even between rival states. During the Cold War, the uncertainty problem came to the fore during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Both the United States and the Soviet Union realized how devastating a lack of basic information and communication exchange could be during a crisis between two nuclear armed states involved in a protracted strategic rivalry.

In response to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. and Soviet Union created a variety of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), designed to provide information, communication channels, and some ‘rules of the road’ to reduce misperception, miscalculation, and avoid unintended escalation during inevitable crises. CBMs, sometimes also referred to as Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBMs),<sup>249</sup> are formal (that is, intentional and overt) efforts between two or more states to reduce tensions and reverse, or at least retard, security dilemma dynamics in the relationship. Said another way, CBMs “are pragmatic steps toward ideal objectives.”<sup>250</sup> In this respect,

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<sup>248</sup> Randall B. Woods, *Shadow Warrior: William Egan Colby & the CIA* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 365.

<sup>249</sup> CSBMs have various definitions. For example, Ralph A. Cossa describes CSBMs as “encompassing or embracing the spirit and intent of proposals calling for trust, confidence-building measures, mutual assurance (or reassurance) measures, community-building measures, and other related confidence-building concepts.” For the purposes of this analysis, I will refer only to CBMs as an all-encompassing term. [Ralph A. Cossa, “Asia-Pacific Confidence-Building Measures,” in *Global Confidence Building: New Tools for Troubled Regions*, Michael Krepon, Michael Newbill, Khurshid Khoja, Jenny S. Drezin, editors, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 27.

<sup>250</sup> Michael Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” in *Global Confidence Building: New Tools for Troubled Regions*, 12.

CBMs are an expression of what Booth and Wheeler refer to as “security dilemma sensibility.”<sup>251</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework to contextualize military-to-military relations as a broad type of confidence building measure. This is a necessary step to provide understanding of the limitations and expectations of military-to-military relations, and CBMs more generally. While Chapter 8 discusses issues with the literature on U.S.-China military-to-military relations in more depth, many analysts critique the mil-mil relationship against an unfair (and often unspecified) metric for success. The root of this issue is a failure to analyze the military relationship in its appropriate context, namely as a CBM and not a panacea for the strategic competition between the two countries.

After an overview of CBMs, I apply the concept directly to the U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russia military relationship to establish its relevance to contemporary U.S.-China military relations and serve as a point of reference for subsequent analysis. In the process, I analyze CBMs as both a theoretical concept and practical process, relating it to international relations theories regarding the security dilemma and uncertainty. This is important, as the CBM literature is often devoid of application to IR concepts, or theory more generally. As one observer remarked, “Almost no work has been carried out to develop a theory of successful CBMs.”<sup>252</sup> The primary purpose of this dissertation is not to develop a generalizable theory of successful CBMs. However, by providing an in-depth, theoretically informed analysis of U.S.-China military relations, it contributes to the wider effort of theorizing CBMs.

### *Confidence-Building Measures*

The term ‘confidence building measure’ first emerged during arms control

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<sup>251</sup> A security dilemma sensibility is defined as “an actor’s intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular, it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behaviour, including, crucially, the role that one’s own actions may play in provoking that fear.” Ken Booth & Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 7.

<sup>252</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” xv-xvi.

negotiations in the 1970s between the U.S. and Soviet Union.<sup>253</sup> Indeed, CBMs are acknowledged to have played “an essential role in improving East-West relations during the Cold War.”<sup>254</sup> The most “comprehensive”<sup>255</sup> and “fully developed model for CBMs”<sup>256</sup> is the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which is credited for greatly reducing tensions in Europe. The Helsinki Act “solidified the status quo in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and engendered military-to-military cooperation between the East and the West.”<sup>257</sup> CBMs have outlived their Cold War origins and “are emerging as an essential means of preventing accidental wars and unintended escalation in strife-ridden regions.”<sup>258</sup> It could even be argued that pursuing confidence building measures as a means of reducing and limiting conflict has become a ‘norm’ in international relations. For example, after the U.S. and Soviet Union signed the *Incidents at Sea Agreement* (INCSEA), numerous other countries followed suit; a similar pattern occurred following the signing of the *Dangerous Military Activities Agreement* (DMAA).<sup>259</sup> Both INCSEA and the DMAA are explored in detail below.

The actual definition, or conception, of CBMs is not quite contested, but it is certainly fluid, with each author employing the term slightly differently than the last. Ultimately, CBMs are deliberate efforts by two or more states to improve information sharing and communication as a means of reducing the strategic tension inherent to an anarchic system, specifically the security/military dimension of the uncertainty problem. While the majority of authors writing about CBMs do so from such a perspective, others employ a much broader concept. For example, one analyst writes, “CBMs can be military

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<sup>253</sup> Justin Jones, “Background paper: A naval perspective of maritime confidence building measures,” in *Maritime Confidence Building Measures in the South China Sea Conference*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), Special Report (September 2013), 22; David Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building: Paradigms, Precedents, and Prospects,” Naval War College: China Maritime Studies Institute, No. 6 (2010), 10.

<sup>254</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 1.

<sup>255</sup> Joseph L. Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, Air Command & Staff College, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base (April 2009), 8.

<sup>256</sup> Xia Liping, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Towards CBMs,” in *Chinese Perspectives on Confidence-building Measures*, Michael Krepon, ed. The Henry L. Stimson Center, Report 23 (May 1997), 16.

<sup>257</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 8.

<sup>258</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Towards CBMs,” 16.

<sup>259</sup> For example, INCSEA agreements have been signed between the USSR/Russia and the UK, Germany, France, Norway, Spain, Turkey, the Netherlands, Canada, Portugal, and Greece. DMA agreements exist between Russia and Canada, Greece, and the Czech Republic.

measures or broader initiatives encompassing almost anything that builds confidence and promotes dialogue between countries. They include formal and informal measures, whether unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral, which contribute to a reduction in misperceptions and uncertainty.”<sup>260</sup> A definition this broad is effectively meaningless. Focusing on the defense/security aspects of a relationship was the original intent behind CBMs and differentiates the concept from regular statecraft and diplomacy. More importantly, it highlights the fundamental issue, in terms of both policy and theory: uncertainty and the negative consequences it engenders.

### *CBMs & Uncertainty*

As Brian Rathbun notes, “The force of uncertainty is central to every major research tradition in the study of international relations.”<sup>261</sup> An important distinction between the three mainstream ‘schools’ of IR theory (realism, liberalism, constructivism) are beliefs regarding the effects uncertainty has on state behavior, and the ability of states to overcome the insecurities uncertainty creates. Uncertainty, in this context, is derived from the concept of anarchy. Anarchy, a systemic condition wherein there is no authority above the state that can be appealed to for safety, arbitration, etc., leaves states uncertain about the intentions of others who may wish to do them harm. Realists generally assume this condition prompts states to seek security through the accumulation of hard power, often referred to as ‘self-help’ behavior. Cooperation is more difficult in this worldview, as states must always worry about defection and harm caused by others. Liberals, conversely, assume that the uncertainty about future intentions and self-help behavior can be mitigated through international institutions, making cooperation easier to achieve. Constructivists, like Alexander Wendt, take a more agnostic view of anarchy and uncertainty, believing that the systemic condition of anarchy does not necessarily explain self-help behavior. Instead, these competitive practices are the result of intersubjectively

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<sup>260</sup> Sam Bateman, “Background paper: Maritime confidence building measures – an overview,” in *Maritime Confidence Building Measures in the South China Sea Conference* (2013), 7.

<sup>261</sup> Brian C. Rathbun, “Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51:3 (Sept. 2007), 533.



interpreted interactions that create negative patterns of behavior which are hard to break.<sup>262</sup>

This is of course a superficial overview of theoretical views on uncertainty and anarchy, but the fundamental point is that uncertainty about the intentions of others, whether implicitly or explicitly, lies at the center of many IR theories.<sup>263</sup> It is what Booth and Wheeler refer to as an “unresolvable uncertainty,” where states can never be “certain about the current and future motives and intentions of those able to harm them in a military sense.”<sup>264</sup> It was precisely this type of uncertainty which caused the insecurity between the Soviet Union and the United States, and which CBMs were developed to address. While uncertainty is an unresolvable component of international relations, its negative consequences *can* be mitigated to controllable levels.

In the context of the Cold War, the goal was to reduce the strategic uncertainty, whereas with U.S.-China relations, the goal is to prevent the escalation of strategic uncertainty to Cold War levels (or beyond). There is, of course, no standard for a ‘normal’ amount of strategic uncertainty that can be generalized to all states – perceptions of threat and intent are bound to particular relationships. What I mean is simply a reduction in strategic uncertainty to the point where information regarding capabilities matches information regarding intent, and intent is understood by both parties to be (relatively) benign. This does not erase suspicion, nor does it mean a complete ‘stand down’ of military forces to an entirely relaxed force posture. Essentially, a reduction in strategic uncertainty means an increase in confidence regarding one states understanding of another’s intentions. In the context of a power transition, such as that between the U.S. and China, or a bipolar strategic rivalry (i.e., the Cold War), the threshold for the amount of confidence required to reduce uncertainty in a meaningful way is higher. CBMs are a process through which that confidence is generated and maintained.

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<sup>262</sup> Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46:2 (Spring 1992), 391 – 425.

<sup>263</sup> Rathbun (2007) argues that the concept of uncertainty is actually defined differently by these various approaches, leading to differences in behavioral outcome, or the importance the concept has to the theoretical approach.

<sup>264</sup> Ken Booth & Nicholas J. Wheeler, “Uncertainty,” in *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Paul D. Williams, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 134.

## CBMs: Types & Purposes

To generate that necessary confidence, states can employ a variety of CBMs. James Macintosh, a Canadian analyst who spent the majority of his career researching and writing about CBMs, has identified three principal CBM types:<sup>265</sup>

### **Type A: Information, Interaction, and Communication CBMs:**

1. Information Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the provision (exchange) of information about military forces, facilities, structures, and activities.)
2. Experience Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the opportunity to interact with officials or experts in other countries).
3. Communication Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the creation and/or use of shared communication).
4. Notification Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the advance notification of specified military activities).

### **Type B: Verification and Observation Facilitation CBMs:**

1. Observation-of-Movement Conduct Measures (measures encouraging or requiring the opportunity to observe specified military activities).
2. General Observation Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the opportunity to engage in non-focused “looks” at relatively small and generally-specified sections of territory within which activities of interest and concern may be occurring or may have occurred.)
3. Inspection Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the opportunity to inspect constrained or limited military forces, facilities, structures, and activities).
4. Monitoring Measures (measures requiring or encouraging the opportunity to monitor constrained or limited military forces, facilities, structures, and activities, principally through the use of monitoring devices).
5. Facilitation of Verification Measures (measures requiring or encouraging participants to facilitate and not interfere with agreed verification efforts).

### **Type C: Constraint CBMs:**

1. Activity Constraint Measures (measures requiring or encouraging participants to avoid or limit provocative military activities).
2. Deployment Constraint Measures (measures requiring or encouraging participants to avoid or limit the provocative stationing or positioning of forces).
3. Technology Constraint Measures (measures requiring or encouraging participants to avoid or limit the development and/or deployment of specified military technologies, including systems and subsystems, believed by

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<sup>265</sup> Others have employed a tripartite categorization for CBMs which resembles Macintosh’s, however Macintosh’s, in conjunction with the UNODA typology that was inspired by it, forms the most analytically sound and comprehensive version. For example, John Borawski used a three-part categorization comprised of information exchange, observation/inspection, and operational constraints, which mirror Macintosh’s but lack the specificity and flexibility to be of as much value. For example, see John Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” Chapter 1 in *Avoiding War in the Nuclear Age: Confidence-Building Measures for Crisis Stability*, John Borawski, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press), 1986. Pp. 9 – 39.

participating states to have a destabilizing character or impact).<sup>266</sup>

Some analysts have modified this typology, adding ‘transparency’ as a unique type,<sup>267</sup> while others have categorized CBMs into ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ types.<sup>268</sup>

Transparency is not required as a specific category because it forms the basis for the three types identified by Macintosh. Direct and indirect, meanwhile, are too broad to be of much use when discussing CBMs on the whole, though can be useful when discussing the application of CBMs in a specific strategic domain, such as maritime or air. I will generally be adhering to Macintosh’s typology, both because it is the most comprehensive and because it has already formed the basis for a great deal of CBM analysis.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, while I acknowledge that “success in negotiating CBMs in the military sphere will depend on multiple initiatives in the political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian realms,” the specific focus of this dissertation is on the military dimensions of CBMs.<sup>270</sup>

Military-to-military relations, sometimes also referred to as defense or military diplomacy, encompass all three of Macintosh’s CBM types. While military-to-military relations often only refer to interactions between uniformed members of the military, I use a broader version of the term to include interactions between civilian components of the defense establishment, for example employees of the Office of the Secretary of

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<sup>266</sup> James Macintosh, *Confidence Building in the Arms Control Process: A Transformation View*, Arms Control & Disarmament Studies No. 2, Department of Foreign Affairs & International Trade, Canada (October 1996), 53-54.

<sup>267</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 9.

<sup>268</sup> Jones, “Background paper,” 26. Direct CBMs include channels of communication (hotlines), standards for communication, declarations, non-binding codes, formal agreements, and operational-level dialogue. Indirect CBMs include goodwill visits, bilateral dialogues, combined exercises, operational cooperation, education exchanges, Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues. More specifically, direct CBMs are those “more immediately related to contested zones, contentious issues and threatening capabilities,” and indirect CBMs are “forms of engagement and cooperation that are geographically remote from or in other ways only indirectly related to the main issues, zones or capabilities of contention and concern.”

<sup>269</sup> The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) has a “Repository of military confidence-building measures,” which is comprised of five categories, each with their own subcategories. The five categories are: 1. Communication and Coordination Measures; 2. Observation and Verification Measures; 3. Cooperation and Integration Measures; 4. Military Constraint Measures; and 5. Training and Education Measures. These categories, and their respective subcategories, while technically more specific than Macintosh’s, are capable of fitting within Macintosh’s three categories. UNODA categories 1, 3 and 5 are Type A; category 2 is Type B; and category 4 is Type C. There is some overlap within subcategories, for example within Category 1, the UNODA includes ‘troop movement, exercises, and weapons management,’ which includes elements of both Types A and C.

<sup>270</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 12.

Defense at the Department of Defense. In military jargon, I consider interactions at, and designed to address, the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Specific activities include base visits, educational exchanges, senior-level dialogues, behavioral agreements (frequently Memorandum's of Understanding providing protocols for communication or action during planned, or unplanned, encounters), port visits, communication mechanisms (e.g., hotlines), and joint exercises. A comprehensive breakdown and analysis of U.S.-China military relations applied to Macintosh's typology is provided in Chapter 7.

Regardless of the type of CBM employed, the purpose is the same. Where there is uncertainty regarding the intentions of another state beyond an acceptable level, states are inclined to react by ensuring they have the offensive and/or defensive capability to respond to a potential threat. It is important to remember that *certainty* can never be achieved in the context of international relations, just as it cannot be achieved for individuals in the course of their daily lives. What is required is enough confidence in the trust one state has towards another with respect to its near and long-term intentions. CBMs “function to assist the calculability and predictability of a country's conduct, so that states will have certain expectations regarding the behavior of other states.”<sup>271</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter 2, calculability and predictability are the foundations of confidence, which in sufficient amount builds into trust. By utilizing CBMs, states are also able to reduce the misperceptions and miscalculations that can lead to unintended conflict, or the escalation of the inevitable crises that will occur when the militaries of two or more states are interacting in close proximity on a regular basis.<sup>272</sup> Indeed, as one observer wrote, “Reducing misperception is a *core function* of state-to-state confidence building.”<sup>273</sup> However, it is important to be clear about what CBMs can and cannot achieve.

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<sup>271</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People's Republic of China*, 7.

<sup>272</sup> Jones, “Background paper,” 23.

<sup>273</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 19. Italics added for emphasis.

CBMs have been described as “practical efforts to remove the causes of misunderstanding.”<sup>274</sup> The escalation of a protracted rivalry, or an on-going crisis might be the result of misunderstanding, but the roots of these issues can be crystal clear. The primary source of the strategic rivalry between the Soviet Union and United States was not a question of misunderstanding, but rather opposing ideological and economic visions for the world order. Similarly, the United States and China are acutely aware of the historical record of rising powers peacefully reaching parity, or surpassing, the existing dominant power. In both the U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-China examples, the force driving the strategic uncertainty (and thus generating the competition or rivalry) is systemic. This is where many analyses on CBMs fall short. Just as systemic theorists (primarily realists) often ignore or minimize CBMs as a means of escaping or reducing the potency of strategic competitions, so too have theorists of CBMs ignored or underemphasized systemic factors.

This is most often due to differences of opinion regarding what is causally important in international relations. For realists, because structure drives behavior the locking of horns between major powers like the U.S. and Soviet Union, or U.S. and China, is inevitable (though the consequences of that inevitability are contested within realism). Conversely, those most attracted to the concept of CBMs are often believers in the importance of individuals, images/perceptions, and other intersubjective dimensions of relations. For example, Johan Jorgen Holst offers a well-known definition of CBMs as “arrangements designed to enhance such assurance of mind and belief in the trustworthiness of states and the facts they create.”<sup>275</sup> It is tempting to generalize and describe those most often writing about CBMs as constructivists, however because so much of this literature is completely disconnected from IR theory, the label does not fit.

I agree that structure is the driving force of international relations – for example, if China were not America’s most likely peer competitor, the risks of war between the two would be trivial; possible but not probable. That said, while structure creates the context of major power relations, it does not determine the outcome. CBMs are a

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<sup>274</sup> Jones, “Background paper,” 23.

<sup>275</sup> Quoted in Dong Wang & Xin Jiang, *Session III: Confidence Building Measures: European Experiences and Asian-Pacific Practices*, 4<sup>th</sup> Berlin Conference on Asian Security (BCAS), German Institute for International and Security Affairs (October 2009), 2.

practical tool states use to acknowledge the very real, and very pragmatic, reasons for being suspicious of one another, and implement the means to avoid a negative outcome. According to an official United Nations (UN) report, the goal of CBMs is to, “contribute to, reduce or, in some instances, even eliminate the causes for mistrust, fear, tensions and hostilities, all of which are significant factors in the continuation of the international arms build-up in various regions and, ultimately, also on a world-wide scale. A second goal is to reinforce confidence where it already exists.”<sup>276</sup>

Because of structural dynamics, the idea of ‘eliminating’ the causes of insecurity is misplaced. However, in a situation in which two or more states are ‘security-seekers’ and not predatory, CBMs provide the mechanisms required to “increase mutual confidence in the benign intentions of a *potential adversary*.”<sup>277</sup> Accomplishing this feat “‘involves the communication of credible evidence of the absence of feared threats’, the purpose of which is to lessen the ‘incentives for [violent] competition which derive from uncertainty and possible misunderstanding’.”<sup>278</sup> The communication of credible evidence represents the two central dynamics of CBMs: process and outcome. The outcome, in this instance, are the agreements that come out of the negotiation process, though outcome can also be taken to mean the reduction of tension and the avoidance of war. While the outcome is of great importance, the key value of CBMs is the *process*.<sup>279</sup>

The process is important because it is through the process that states communicate their interests and their sincerity in avoiding conflict with the other state(s). Said another way, it is through the process that states effectively communicate to others that they are security-seeking, rather than predatory, states. To bear this out, it is helpful to look at the component pieces of the CBM process: transparency, reciprocity, confidence, and trust. By understanding how the process relates to these areas, and in turn in alleviating some of the insecurity and uncertainty in contentious relationships, we are able to get a

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<sup>276</sup> United Nations, *Comprehensive Study on Confidence-Building Measures*, Department of Political & Security Council Affairs, Centre for Disarmament, Report of the Secretary General (New York: United Nations, 1982), 6.

<sup>277</sup> Bakhtiyar Tuzmukhamedov, “‘Sailor-Made’ Confidence-Building Measures,” in *Maritime Security: The Building of Confidence*, Jozef Goldblat, ed., United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), (New York: United Nations, 1992), 69. Original emphasis.

<sup>278</sup> Abbot Brayton, “Confidence-Building Measures in European Security,” *The World Today* 36:10 (October 1, 1980), 382.

<sup>279</sup> Macintosh, *Confidence Building in the Arms Control Process* (1996); Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 12.

comprehensive understanding of what CBMs are supposed to do, which then allows us to properly assess the success of CBM initiatives in the context of a particular relationship.

### Transparency

Transparency, like trust, is a word often used but rarely defined. There is no universally accepted definition or criteria about what being ‘sufficiently’ transparent entails. Complicating matters, governments often fail to provide a clear metric because the opacity provides cover to continually press other states to be more transparent. This cuts to the inherent paradox of the transparency problem: transparency is information, and in cases like the U.S.-China relationship where the cause of the insecurity is structural, one state can never have enough information about the other. A state’s desire for information will always exceed its availability. That is because even with an abundance of information, in an anarchic world one can never be sure of the intentions of another with 100% confidence. That degree of certainty simply does not exist. Which begs the question: What is the nature of the transparency and how much is enough to assuage the fears other states have? For example, “Without such transparency,” one recent article argues, “the United States and China’s neighbors are reduced to gauging Beijing’s intentions from its capabilities – a problematic proxy.”<sup>280</sup> While relying on capabilities without the context of intentions is indeed problematic, the lack of specificity applied to transparency is even more so. Without a clear definition or qualifying metric, ‘sufficient’ transparency becomes something of a Rorschach test, varying in meaning according to perception.

The problem, however, is that while a standard definition is possible, a qualifying metric is more elusive. That is because transparency, in this instance, is occurring within the context of a specific relationship. In international relations, that context is often (though not exclusively) determined by the structural dynamic of the relationship. For example, in the case of U.S.-Soviet or U.S.-China relations, the amount of transparency required to dampen suspicions is higher than that required in a less consequential bilateral relationship. Furthermore, the metric for assessing the degree of transparency will be

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<sup>280</sup> Elizabeth C. Economy & Adam Segal, “The G-2 Mirage: Why the United States and China Are Not Ready to Upgrade Ties,” *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 3 (May/June 2009), 18.

harder to satisfy, because the demands being placed on a state to be more transparent will often exceed its willingness. In the eyes of the state revealing information, it will be sufficient; in the eyes of the receiving state, it will not be enough. As one interview subject told me, transparency is a loaded term with a moral component.<sup>281</sup> Third party definitions or sources, such as the United Nations, are often viewed as substandard to the needs of the state. For example, the UN conducts an annual report on military expenditures, where states report their military spending in the hopes that “Such transparency may increase confidence within regions and beyond.”<sup>282</sup> While China submits to this report, discrepancies exist regarding the accuracy, or comprehensiveness, of the numbers reported. It has long been a criticism of the Chinese government that it under-reports its military spending. And while the UN report operates according to a specific guideline, other international databases, such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), use another.

So what, exactly, *is* transparency? The standard dictionary definition refers to “being easy to perceive or detect.” Oriana Mastro describes it as “the degree to which information about potential adversaries’ actions, preferences, capabilities, and intentions is easily accessible and available.”<sup>283</sup> In international relations, this comprises two central elements: capability transparency and intent transparency.<sup>284</sup> Capability transparency is far easier to achieve because it is readily quantifiable and, importantly, verifiable. *State X* releases an official document that notes it has *A* amount of ships, *B* amount of planes, and *C* amount of missiles. Because these are physical assets, their numbers are more easily verified through satellites, monitoring defense industrial information, inspections/visits, and other intelligence gathering sources. In international relations, capability transparency is less of an issue. States accept a degree of opacity to protect systems and technology in the development stages, or sensitive capabilities that they do not want to reveal to protect a particular advantage. And so technical specifics about what particular systems are capable of doing are closely held secrets. But as far as raw numbers of how

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<sup>281</sup> Interview with former U.S. government senior analyst, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>282</sup> United Nations Report on Military Expenditures, online.

<sup>283</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, “Why China Does (and Should) Shun Military Transparency,” ISA conference paper (2014), 4.

<sup>284</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers: The Logic Behind China’s Low Military Transparency,” *Asian Security* 12:2 (June 2016), 64.



many hard power assets a state possesses (e.g., missiles, tanks, planes, ships), there is a fairly high degree of transparency. And through intelligence analysis, there is a general understanding of the capabilities of different systems, if even only in the broadest terms. What is particularly difficult, and of direct relevance to CBMs, and military-to-military relations more specifically, is ‘intent transparency’.

If we use the standard definition of transparency provided above, it is fairly obvious why intent transparency is more problematic: it is never easy to perceive or detect the intentions of another state. More importantly, because of the anarchic system, states are never able to take the official pronouncements of other states at face value. States assess the intentions of others through a variety of means, which together comprise a three-part analysis: statements, capabilities, and action.

Official documents and reports, such as defense ‘white papers’ or, in the case of the U.S., annual reports to Congress, are one method, which in conjunction with official statements from senior officials, help others determine what a state’s official policy perspective is. This is true both of specific issues and regions, but also with regards to how the government views the international system and the threats and challenges facing both the state and the wider international community. These perspectives are reinforced through diplomatic discussions between states, at multiple levels of contact.

The second analytical component relates to capabilities. What does a state have the material capability to do? Are the capabilities in possession, or known to be in development, commensurate with a government’s stated policy objectives and worldview? While not an exact science given the multiple uses of modern military systems and technologies, this aspect of the analysis refers to the offense/defense dynamic referred to by IR theorists like Robert Jervis, Charles Glaser, and John Mearsheimer.<sup>285</sup> The general thrust of the argument is that pursuing defensive capabilities is less threatening to other states, in turn allowing a state to increase its security without simultaneously undermining the security of others, which is what traditionally results in a

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<sup>285</sup> For example, see: Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics* 30:2 (Jan. 1978), 167 – 214; Charles L. Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics* 50:1 (Oct. 1997), 171 – 201; Charles L. Glaser & Chaim Kaufmann, “What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure it?” *International Security* 22:4 (Spring 1998), 44 – 82; John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001); Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics,” *Security Studies* 4:4 (Summer 1995), 660 – 691; Stephen Van Evera, “Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War,” *International Security* 22:4 (Spring 1998), 5 - 43.

security dilemma. There is disagreement with this argument in part because, as Mearsheimer says, “it is very difficult to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons,” with the distinction often depending on which side of the weapon you find yourself.<sup>286</sup> In practice, capabilities are of central importance but are assessed in conjunction with the first and third parts of the analysis: statements and action.<sup>287</sup>

The third and final analytical component of intention is action. What a state actually *does* is far more important than what it says. In this respect, Mearsheimer is correct when he says, “talk is cheap.”<sup>288</sup> If a state’s actions are not in line with its stated policies, it creates uncertainty among other states. This relates to the relationship between predictability and confidence, described in Chapter 2. When there is continuity between a state’s official policies and its actions, it is more likely to be perceived by others as predictable, which in turn gives them confidence. In sufficient amounts, confidence becomes trust. In short, positive predictability makes states less threatening.

There is, of course, negative predictability, in which other states develop a confidence in a particular state’s tendencies towards negative action, which would increase the perception of threat. This is a possible negative repercussion of transparency: A state may get a clearer picture of another state’s capabilities, or intentions, and become more concerned.<sup>289</sup> It should also be noted that if an increase in the amount of information received from another state increases or reinforces suspicion, it can create negative trust. If trust is an expression of confidence and certainty, having negative trust can still help stabilize a relationship because it still addresses uncertainty. A high degree of uncertainty creates instability because of the increased risk of misperception and miscommunication, leading to inadvertent conflict. Being more confident in your assessment of another state’s intentions enables you to apply more appropriate policies to manage the problem. While this is a possible outcome, when weighing the pros/cons of

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<sup>286</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19:3 (Winter 1994/95), 23.

<sup>287</sup> For more on this, see: Matthew Evangelista. “The “Soviet Threat”: Intentions, Capabilities, and Context,” *Diplomatic History* 22:3 (Summer 1998). Pp. 439 – 449.

<sup>288</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The Gathering Storm: China’s Challenge to US Power in Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3 (2010), 383.

<sup>289</sup> Macintosh, *Confidence Building in the Arms Control Process*, 3; William W. Newmann, “Some Limits on Co-operation and Transparency: Operational Security and the Use of Force,” Chapter 16 in *The Limited Partnership: Building a Russian-U.S. Security Community*, James E. Goodby and Benoit Morel, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 289 – 305;

being transparent it is clear it is worth the risk; The chances are far greater that the uncertainty created by being *less* transparent will lead to a negative outcome.

While this three-part assessment of intent is simple and logical enough, in practice the final judgment is subjective. For example, two interview subjects, both highly experienced and who serve(d) at senior levels within the U.S. defense establishment, characterized the balance between these three components differently. One said, “Capability and action *suggests* intent,” whereas the other said, “Capabilities plus intent *equals* action.”<sup>290</sup> The difference is more than semantic and directly relates to how intent is deduced, and the emphasis it is given. In the first instance, how a state behaves is provisionally related to its actual intent; uncertainty remains. In the second instance, a state’s actions are taken as being directly representative of its intent; there is no uncertainty. Whether one subscribes to the first iteration or the second bears directly on how one perceives threat.

If a state’s actions are taken as being representative of its intent, and conclusions are then drawn, it could easily lead to unnecessarily negative policy implications. States behave in particular ways for a variety of reasons. Indeed, it is the discrepancy between action and intent that lies at the heart of the security dilemma: one state takes what it believes to be a defensive action, while another state(s) perceives that action as offensive/threatening, unnecessarily exacerbating uncertainty and insecurity in the relationship. It is precisely because of this disconnect that CBMs are both necessary and effective: they provide the information required to place the three-part analysis in a more appropriate (though still imperfect) context. As former U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice said, “greater military engagement and transparency can help us manage the realities of mistrust and competition.”<sup>291</sup> Joseph Nye echoed this sentiment during his interview, telling me that direct contact, particularly over a prolonged period of time, gives better judgment of potentials, providing context for understanding the deployment of a particular weapons system or the use of particular rhetoric.<sup>292</sup> Enhanced transparency

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<sup>290</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.; Interview with senior U.S. official, March 12, 2017, via Skype phone call. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>291</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 63.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Joseph S. Nye, March 24, 2017, Baltimore, Maryland.

in and of itself is not enough to transform an antagonistic relationship, but it is a necessary component.<sup>293</sup>

Statements, capabilities, and actions are simply three sources of information. And information is really what transparency, in the context of IR, is about. Does a state offer a comprehensive amount of information on its intentions, capabilities, and worldview to enable other states to assess whether or not that information is consistent with its actions? If the actions are seen to be contradictory, can they be adequately explained? Are there attempts to conceal, obfuscate, or otherwise deceive other states? As mentioned above, no state is perfect. There will always be contradictions between statements and actions because of a change in circumstances, just as there will always be a degree of intentional deception. Transparency is about abiding by certain norms, such as releasing information on a regular basis (e.g. annual reports), and communicating to other states in good faith by providing enough information to make it possible to draw conclusions that instill confidence instead of fear. This is, of course, entirely subjective and therefore unavoidably unsatisfactory. While it is difficult to pin down an objective, universally applicable and satisfactory definition and metric of sufficiency, it is possible to focus instead on related elements which help states, and analysts, make conclusions about the degree of transparency in a relationship. The most important of these is reciprocity.

### Reciprocity

Reciprocity and transparency are closely linked. Though discussed in detail in Chapter 6, reciprocity and transparency are at the heart of U.S.-China military relations, with U.S. observers and practitioners often criticizing China for being too lax on both. While transparency in and of itself provides states with useful information to help assess intentions, it is not enough. That is because transparency on its own lacks substantive context. In order to get the most out of transparency, it must exist in the context of a dynamic relationship. When it comes to security/defense, it is the military-to-military relationship that counts, and reciprocity is the tie that binds.

Reciprocity is commonly defined as “the practice of exchanging things with others for mutual benefit, especially privileges granted by one country or organization to

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<sup>293</sup> Macintosh, *Confidence Building in the Arms Control Process*, 3.

another.” In the context of defense relations and transparency, it is responding to access to information in kind. For example, base visits are a common form of defense diplomacy, where one state invites representatives from another to visit a military installation. The visiting state could be briefed on logistics, capabilities, training, standard operating procedures, see troop demonstrations (live fire exercises, for example) – a range of activities meant to familiarize and ‘demystify’. The extent of what would be included in a visit would depend on the quality of the relationship between the states. For example, reciprocal visits between NATO allies would be quantitatively and qualitatively different from visits between the U.S. and China. Differences could include the particular installation, the extent of details provided during the briefing, or the extent of how much of a facility is viewed. Regardless of the details, the fundamental purpose remains the same: to demonstrate openness and security-seeking behavior. Predatory states, for example, are far less likely to be as revealing, for fear of losing the strategic advantage that opacity can provide.<sup>294</sup> In this regard, transparency and reciprocity should be considered a type of signaling (though how ‘costly’ will vary on the circumstance).

When one state extends an offer to open another channel to communicate transparency, which is then received positively but not reciprocated, it undermines the confidence building process. The state making the offer will begin to fear being taken advantage of and will be less likely to make similar overtures to the receiving state in the future. It exacerbates uncertainty and can create escalation spirals which become hard to break or reverse.<sup>295</sup> Reciprocity needn’t be equal, but it should be balanced. That is, not every invitation, gesture, or disclosure must be returned in kind, but there should be an attempt to reciprocate transparency whenever possible. Doing so reinforces confidence and predictability, which in turn stabilize relationships and, by extension, the international system. The particulars of the balance will be dependent upon the relationship and the systemic context in which it is embedded. In the U.S.-China relationship, the systemic context is one marked by a power transition, where even if

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<sup>294</sup> There is, of course, the possibility of deception. This issue is addressed in Chapter 4, in the context of U.S.-Soviet military-to-military relations.

<sup>295</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976/2017); Lyle J. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

China does not overtake the United States in absolute terms (a ‘true’ power transition), it is rapidly approaching peer competitor status, which can be just as destabilizing.<sup>296</sup>

The systemic context is of critical importance. For instance, weaker states have an incentive to be *less* transparent than stronger states. This is because their comparative advantage is considerably less, so protecting what capabilities they have are more important. And this is not necessarily in an antagonistic way. For example, the U.S. is far more transparent about its special operations capabilities, including the size of its forces, than Canada. That is because the size of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) is larger than Canada’s entire regular force military.<sup>297</sup> As noted above, certain capabilities or other elements of national defense are routinely concealed to maintain their integrity. Canada, by virtue of its smaller size, cannot be as transparent as the United States in absolute terms (i.e., it cannot disclose similar types of information, or in similar relative quantities). But it can still reciprocate transparency by providing information about the size of its military, budget, weapons platforms (e.g., planes, tanks), and other general information. It is when major powers are less transparent that opacity becomes problematic. For example, China’s opacity regarding even the most basic of information, such as its defense budget, the planned size of its rapidly expanding navy, or the location and composition of regular units – information made readily available by other major powers (and smaller states) – exacerbates fears of a revisionist China that seeks to dominate the region, if not the world.

What makes China a unique case is not that it is an outlier with respect to transparency in and of itself, but rather the structural context in which China finds itself. As a rising power, and the second most powerful state in the international system, China and the United States operate according to a separate systemic logic. The logic at play

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<sup>296</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “Posing Problems without Catching Up: China’s Rise and Challenges for U.S. Security Policy,” *International Security* 25:4 (Spring 2001), 5 – 40.

<sup>297</sup> SOCOM is numbered at approximately 70,000, while the Canadian regular force (full-time military) is numbered at 68,000. The point about being less transparent is made plainly on a Canadian Forces Joint-Task Force 2 website, writing, “Some countries that appear to have provided more open access to their Special Operations Forces units also have larger militaries, and are able to showcase people and equipment without compromising their most sensitive capabilities. For example, there are more than 52,000 people in the U.S. Special Operations Command, while there are about 67,000 effective strength members in the CAF Regular Force.” United States Special Operations Command *2017 Fact Book*, 12; Canadian Forces official website: <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about/faq.page#q12> (accessed October 1, 2017); Canadian Forces Joint-Task Force 2 official website: <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/operations-special-forces/jtf2-faqs.page> (accessed October 1, 2017).

during a power transition is different than that affecting other states, because the consequences are more severe – both for the U.S. and China and the international system itself. This is important because China’s transparency is measured against that of other states. While it is certainly fair to hold China to that ‘standard’ and acknowledge that being more transparent would, theoretically, lessen the perceptions of threat surrounding its rise, it would be more appropriate to measure China’s transparency against that of other rising states, or states in a similar structural context, such as the Soviet Union. This is done later in the chapter. What is of immediate importance is the role reciprocity plays in dampening perceptions of threat and boosting confidence in interstate relationships and the role CBMs play in facilitating transparency.

Reciprocity ensures the mutual flow of information, allowing states to adjust their risk assessments of cooperating with other states. The more reciprocity and the more transparency in a relationship, the more stable it is. This is a characteristic difference between allies, partners, competitors, and adversaries. The amount of transparency and reciprocity amongst allies will be the highest. A prime example of this is the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance between Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. The amount of reciprocal transparency between partners (those who cooperate extensively and are politically aligned, but not bound by an official treaty) would also be high. Reciprocal transparency can even be fairly high between competitors and adversaries, depending on the particular circumstance. For example, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the level of reciprocal transparency between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, though it fluctuated, was relatively high, especially considering the circumstances. And that is because the governments of both states recognized the inherent value of transparency as a means of reducing the risk of miscommunication and miscalculation. Even in relationships better described by enmity than amity, reciprocal transparency facilitates confidence and, to some degree, trust.

### Confidence & Trust

Confidence and trust are discussed together because, as demonstrated in Chapter 2 they are inextricably linked. Trust is the representation of an accumulation of confidence which reflects predictability. There are different levels of trust which reflect different amounts of confidence. For example, a low level of trust indicates a lower degree of confidence in the predictability of another state's behavior with respect to a particular issue. To say you have trust in a partner is to say you have confidence in an expected outcome. Many interview subjects preferred to use the term 'confidence' rather than trust. One former senior U.S. defense official told me that any confidence you have in international relations will be a "hedged confidence."<sup>298</sup> The distinction reflects the degree of certainty. "I think they will,' not 'I'm sure they will,'" he told me. When asked about the distinction between trust and confidence, many interview subjects described trust similarly, in terms of certainty, and therefore believed trust is rather rare and often only extends to immediate family.

As discussed in Chapter 2, this effectively comes down to preconceived notions of trust, with the particular conception of trust interpreted by most interview subjects being misplaced. Where certainty exists, trust is not required. Trust is contingent and contextual. One is unlikely to cooperate or partner with another state if there is a low level of confidence that an agreement will be kept (for example), unless the stakes of defection are low. In situations where the consequences of defection or cheating are low, or the issue is of little consequence, states may enter into agreements or other transactions because the positives outweigh the potential negatives. Accordingly, in these instances we can speak in terms of confidence. However, CBMs between major powers, though they may have low defection consequences, are never related to issues of little consequence. For example, entering into an agreement to establish a 'hotline' between governments may have little consequence if one of the state's fails to use it as agreed, as far as a state's immediate safety or security are concerned. However, the consequences to the overall relationship, and the exacerbation of uncertainty, suspicion, and negative threat perception, are high stakes, because the consequences of conflict, even if through misperception or miscommunication, are severe. Any defection in such a tense

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<sup>298</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.



relationship is symbolic, and “The importance of symbolic gestures in confidence building cannot be underestimated.”<sup>299</sup>

How much confidence is required to approximate a particular level of trust is entirely subjective and contextual. As unsatisfactory as this is from a methodological and scientific perspective, it is unavoidable. Confidence and trust are deeply rooted in perception, and perceptions are subject to constant revision based on the accumulation and assessment of information. Accordingly, how much confidence and trust are needed between *State X* and *State Y* will be different from that between *State X* and *State Z*. This is particularly true when the structural context of the relationship is considered. The benchmark for ‘sufficient confidence’ between the United States and China is high because the two are currently in a structural context of transition: China is an ascendant power drawing closer to parity with the system’s dominant power, the United States. That means that in addition to the ideological and cultural obstacles at play in the relationship (to name only two), there are structural dynamics which are difficult to overcome. Moreover, the amount and quality of confidence required to overcome those structural dynamics will be interpreted differently by different policymakers and leaders. While leaders of a state are likely to interpret the same material structures differently (e.g., President George W. Bush would see the world differently than President Obama), the institutional inertia and long-term trend-lines of the international system remain relatively static. China, for example, is a potential threat to the United States, but one that is fairly long-term, rather than an immediate threat. Accordingly, because change in the international system is, to a large extent, a more drawn out process, perceptions tend to remain constant.

The institutions of government responsible for forming policies based on assessments of other states also have a tendency to internalize these assessments, making institutional shifts in perception more difficult to achieve. Nicholas Wheeler has discussed the important role state leaders play in helping to break these molds, but even he acknowledges the difficulty they can have in changing the views of supporting institutions within the state.<sup>300</sup> This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the institutions

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<sup>299</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 13.

<sup>300</sup> See Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

of government responsible for security/defense tend to be more conservative as a matter of principle: their function is to be more suspicious and prone to worst-case thinking than others because that is what keeps states in an anarchic world safe. And for those with suspicious minds, trust is hard to develop and easy to break. The result of these contributing factors is that while a particular leader may want to approach an issue a particular way, or to prioritize one issue over another, the issues themselves do not change. This consistency over time is actually a good thing for CBMs and the attempts to build trust in structurally difficult relationships because it adds a measure of stability and a frame of reference for policymakers to work against.

In interstate relationships where structure plays a dominant role in shaping mutual security perceptions, CBMs are unlikely to have a deeply transformative effect. The United States and China, by virtue of their positions are the two most powerful states in the international system, are going to be strategic competitors. It is an unavoidable situation that does not imply violent conflict or even another Cold War situation. It is simply a recognition that two states with global interests and the power to pursue those interests are bound to clash where opposing interests intersect. And it is these points of intersection where the potential for conflict emerges. Because of the anarchic structure of the system, and the persistent uncertainty it creates, there will be recurring points of contention in the relationship. While that fundamental dynamic of the relationship cannot be changed, the prospects for peacefully resolving these inevitable clashes can be. States can improve, or decrease, their capacity to avoid and resolve conflicts of interest.<sup>301</sup> And this is where CBMs come into play: by improving the quality and quantity of confidence in the relationship through a routine (predictable) transfer of information (transparency and reciprocity), states can dampen the negative effects of their structural context and develop strategic trust. As noted in Chapter 2, cooperation = predictability = confidence = strategic trust.

The more channels of communication and information exchange available (transparency), and the greater the quality of exchange (reciprocity), the more confidence states are able to build. This is not to minimize the difficulty of developing confidence –

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<sup>301</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People's Republic of China*, 9.

it is a slow process, often subject to setbacks, and easy to undermine. But it is possible. And more importantly, even modest changes can have noticeably positive effects. As one observer notes, the process “begins by identifying shared interests and developing an ethos of cooperation over time.”<sup>302</sup> An ‘ethos of cooperation’ is essentially a pattern of reciprocation. So long as both states are truly committed to avoiding military confrontation, initiating the process requires only a modest amount of political capital because, as Michael Krepon points out, “No matter how serious outstanding grievances are, prudent national leaders will wish to avoid inadvertent escalation or accidental war.”<sup>303</sup> As the pattern of reciprocity develops, and confidence builds in the mutual perception of each state as a security seeker – or at least as a reliable actor – the states’ shared interests and/or security concerns also develop.<sup>304</sup> The more successful the CBM initiative is, the more costly its failure becomes. This effectively leads to a “cooperation spiral,” where confidence and trust are built incrementally,<sup>305</sup> normalizing the relationship to the fullest extent possible under existing structural conditions.

Confidence relates to the risk assessment states routinely conduct regarding the threat perception and cooperative potential of other states, and for which they require a continuous flow of information. By providing a mutually negotiated channel for the transmission of additional information, CBMs allow states to learn more about, and assess the reliability of, a state they are suspicious of. And that is the basic function of CBMs, to “reduce secrecy and increase trust.”<sup>306</sup> At the same time, CBMs provide something of a trip-wire, as “Any major deviation from agreed parameters of confidence-building measures would then give a strong indication of dubious intent.”<sup>307</sup> It is that ‘trip-wire’ effect that enables confidence to accrue over time, allowing states to build on

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<sup>302</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 12.

<sup>303</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 4.

<sup>304</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 9.

<sup>305</sup> Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 12.

<sup>306</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 8.

<sup>307</sup> United Nations, *Comprehensive Study on Confidence-Building Measures*, 7; “When agreed guidelines are not observed, a greater alert status would be warranted,” Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 6.

modest CBMs, like the establishment of a hotline, to more comprehensive measures, such as those which constrain action.<sup>308</sup>

Importantly, in order to initiate the CBM process in the first place, each state must have a basic degree of confidence in the other. That is, there must be some evidence that the other state is a security-seeking state and has an interest in improving the relationship to avoid, or at least minimize, the prospect of armed conflict. As one analyst put it, “trust decides whether CBMs will be adopted and practiced.”<sup>309</sup> While it is possible for a state to use the pretense of a CBM negotiation to confirm a suspicion if the other state refuses, the initiating state must still be willing to follow through in the event the receiving state accepts. For a state to initiate the CBM process under false pretenses (e.g., to confirm a suspicion), and then withdraw prematurely would send the same signal of dubious intent that they would, presumably, be hoping to avoid. It would have the opposite effect of communicating security-seeking intentions. This is compounded by the fact that in contentious relationships defined by high amounts of tension and uncertainty, particularly regarding intentions, states will already be sensitive to attempts to deceive. “In the rational actor and realist world we live in, distrust becomes the default response to proposals for CBMs.”<sup>310</sup> It is because of this ‘default response’ and related skepticism that many theorists and practitioners dismiss the value of CBMs.

### *CBMs: Limitations & Potentials*

Given the primacy of structure in governing the relations between states, it is not surprising that CBMs are viewed as something of a novelty by more realist-inclined theorists and practitioners. Of the 53 interview subjects asked, 20 expressed skepticism to the idea of military-to-military relations having any substantive impact on international relations generally, and U.S.-China relations specifically. What is interesting, however, is the breakdown of those views. Those with a military background were generally (though not exclusively) more positive about the effect mil-mil relations could have on the U.S.-

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<sup>308</sup> Tuzmukhamedov, ““Sailor-Made,” Confidence Building Measures,” 70.

<sup>309</sup> Kwa Chong Guan, “Conference paper: Trust and maritime confidence building measures,” in *Maritime Confidence Building Measures in the South China Sea Conference*, ASPI Special Report (September 2013), 29.

<sup>310</sup> Kwa, “Conference paper: Trust and maritime confidence building measures,” 29.

China relationship. Academics, conversely, tended to be more skeptical.<sup>311</sup> Of course, those who are, or were, directly involved in mil-mil relations or similar CBM programs, are likely to view them as being more important and/or effective. There was a sober awareness of the limitations of these mechanisms, but as one former military officer told me, “would so many people, over such a period of time, have been doing this with so many different countries – to include China – if there was no intrinsic value?”<sup>312</sup>

Conversely, academics like John Mearsheimer and Robert Ross expressed considerable skepticism or cynicism about the value or importance of these types of relations. While acknowledging the ability to establish certain codes of conduct or limiting uncertainty to a degree, these were secondary issues when compared to the larger structural forces that compel states to behave in particular ways. Said another way, CBMs or military-to-military relations had no substantial impact on the greater strategic relationship. This is a common argument found throughout both the CBM and the wider academic literature (for example, arguments against the causal importance of international institutions). Many of these criticisms, however, are against arguments proponents of CBMs never make. Accordingly, it is important to be clear about CBMs can and cannot do.

It is a common refrain amongst critics of CBMs and military-to-military relations that such programs “do little if anything to help address the dynamics of national strategic relationships, and we should not imagine otherwise.”<sup>313</sup> A similar argument, and one I heard echoed in multiple interviews, is that “History tells us that when a real crisis strikes, goodwill between services is soon forgotten.”<sup>314</sup> The first criticism is entirely misplaced, while the second is only partially correct.

With respect to the claim that CBMs and mil-mil have no direct impact on the larger strategic relationships in which they are embedded, critics are overlooking the value of the process and fixating on the outcome. During the Cold War, the structural context of the relationship between the Soviet Union and United States did not change

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<sup>311</sup> Deliberate efforts were made to speak with a range of academics, practitioners, and analysts from a variety of backgrounds and viewpoints. Ultimately, however, the range of views was limited by the number of people who responded to my interview requests.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with former military officer, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>313</sup> Hugh White, “Grand expectations, little promise,” in *Defense Diplomacy: Is the game worth the candle?* Brendan Taylor et al., The Centre of Gravity Series, Australian National University (November 2014), 11.

<sup>314</sup> White, “Grand expectations, little promise,” 11.

until the Berlin Wall started to crumble. However, the stability of the relationship was far more durable in the late 1980s than it was in the 1950s. That is due in part to the development over thirty-plus years of communication, verification, and restraint measures (to broadly use Macintosh's three types). While these did not prevent the U.S. and Soviet Union from looking at each other as strategic competitors, they did enable them to regard the other as cautious, stable, rational, and fundamentally security-seeking.<sup>315</sup> CBMs dampened the uncertainty in the relationship by facilitating transparency and reciprocity, in turn allowing each state to develop confidence in the other as reliable; if an agreement were to be proposed, for example, the other state could be fairly confident that it would be adhered to. And, to the extent that each side was confident in its understanding of the other's intentions, motivations/interests, capabilities, and rationality, there was certainly a degree of strategic trust in the relationship.

The presence of strategic trust does not mean the United States would 'trust' the Soviet Union in the same way it would an ally like the United Kingdom or Canada. Trust is contingent and contextual. Within the parameters of the bipolar strategic competition that defined the Cold War, the U.S. and Soviet Union had strategic trust. To reinforce this trust, each state also relied on an extensive military deterrent: second strike nuclear capability. In this respect, it could be said that the entire U.S.-Soviet relationship could be defined by the popular maxim 'trust, but verify'. Contrary to those like John Mearsheimer, who interpreted President Reagan's use of this phrase as meaning "you can't trust,"<sup>316</sup> verification not only does not undermine trust or suggest it is not present, but it can reinforce it. Indeed, as noted above, Macintosh's second CBM type is 'Verification and Observation Facilitation'. Recognizing the structural context of international relations, in which uncertainty is ever-present and suspicion, particularly among great powers, is a default reaction, verification serves as a mutual means of confidence building. It allows nervous states to ensure they are not being taken advantage of and that their partner is reliable. This provides information, which in turn helps form threat perceptions. "The idea is to promote or strengthen confidence, when it is non-

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<sup>315</sup> For more on the perception of Cold War security-seeking status, see: Matthew Evangelista. "The 'Soviet Threat': Intentions, Capabilities, and Context," *Diplomatic History* 22:3 (Summer 1998). Pp. 439 – 449.

<sup>316</sup> Interview with John Mearsheimer, March 23, 2017, Baltimore, Maryland.

existent or virtually non-existent. Consequently, verification becomes an integral part of confidence-building measures, until confidence becomes trust.”<sup>317</sup> For example, when negotiating the DMAA, the U.S. negotiating team “stressed that automatic suspicions were inappropriate in today’s atmosphere of constant visits by on-site inspectors policing arms reduction agreements.”<sup>318</sup> Verification can undermine trust if it one-sided, where one state insists on being able to verify adherence to an agreement (such as with on-site inspectors) while failing to reciprocate. As noted above, reciprocation is fundamental to the confidence building process. Verification encourages reciprocity.<sup>319</sup> In that regard, “Verification is more of a political requirement than a technical one. What is to be verified and the levels of confidence that are demanded depend on how we assess the intentions of the adversary.”<sup>320</sup> That said, in situations where a state is looking to convince others that it has changed course, such as by abandoning chemical or nuclear weapons development, one-sided verification can reinforce confidence so long as it is not conducted in a humiliating or unnecessarily invasive way.

CBMs are not a panacea for structurally rooted tensions in international relations. This bears directly on the second criticism, that the goodwill developed between services in the course of military-to-military relations and related CBMs is quickly forgotten in times of serious crisis or confrontation. CBMs and mil-mil are not intended to over-ride systemic, material realities, nor are they intended to function in wartime. Importantly, CBMs are “not value neutral; they will always be shaped by the motivation of national leaders over preferred end states.”<sup>321</sup> Recognizing that the mutual pursuit of self-interest will continue, CBMs are “intended to prevent situations which may lead to escalation towards war.”<sup>322</sup> With that goal in mind, CBMs function *within* the structural context of the relationship and bring a measure of control and stability by reducing uncertainty and

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<sup>317</sup> Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, “Are Confidence-Building Measures Verifiable?” Chapter 10 in *Maritime Security: The Building of Confidence*, Jozef Goldblat, editor, UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), (New York: United Nations, 1992), 143.

<sup>318</sup> R. Jeffrey Smith, “New U.S.-Soviet Accord Entails Philosophical Shift; Contrary to Training, Limited Incursion Into Other’s Territory Must Be Viewed as Benign,” *The Washington Post*, June 8, 1989 (Final Edition), First Section; A8.

<sup>319</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 11.

<sup>320</sup> Richard J. Barnet, “Why Trust the Soviets?” *World Policy Journal* 1:3 (Spring 1984), 476.

<sup>321</sup> Krepon, “Conflict, Avoidance, Confidence Building, and Peacemaking,” 6.

<sup>322</sup> Coutau-Bégarie, “Are Confidence-Building Measures Verifiable?” 147.

providing mutual reassurance of security-seeking intentions. It does not *eliminate* the uncertainty, suspicion, or risk, it simply reduces them to levels which reduce the likelihood of miscommunication, misperception, and inadvertent war. As one observer noted, “Military diplomacy is proving to be an extremely useful means of pursuing national interests short of conflict.”<sup>323</sup> Provided CBMs and military diplomacy are continually nurtured and developed, they can reinforce mutual confidence in long-term strategic intentions, further dampening the uncertainty and, if the political will is present, paving the way for the evolution to mutual trust.

If a state decides to pursue its interests through use of force, no CBM, institution, or other mechanism can stop it. State militaries are institutions designed to protect the state and its interests, and the decision to go to war is a political one. It should be no surprise that professional militaries, if ordered to attack or defend the state against one with whom it had previously enjoyed productive and cordial professional relationships with through military-to-military programs or other CBMs, would do so. That is not the same as saying the goodwill is forgotten; It is simply secondary. The criticism that CBMs and mil-mil do not prevent militaries from fighting one another is, therefore, partially correct: these programs do not function during wartime. However, it is during a serious crisis that CBMs are most important.

CBMs and mil-mil relations provide the channels of communication and the facilitation of relationship building amongst both military and civilian leadership to peacefully resolve crises.<sup>324</sup> It is not unheard of for states to initiate a crisis on purpose, to push an advantage or seek concessions from another state. It is a risky type of signaling, but one that remains a mainstay in the statecraft toolbox all the same. CBMs help provide a measure of escalation control and crisis management because the initiating state would have confidence in its ability to quickly and effectively communicate its intentions to the other state and avoid misperception.<sup>325</sup> That is not to say initiating a crisis would not have

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<sup>323</sup> Peter Leahy, “Military diplomacy,” in *Defence Diplomacy: Is the game worth the candle?* Brendan Taylor, John Blaxland, Hugh White, Nick Bisley, Peter Leahy, See Seng Tan, The Centre of Gravity Series, Australian National University (November 2014), 15.

<sup>324</sup> Cathleen S. Fisher, “The Preconditions of Confidence Building: Lessons from the European Experience,” Chapter 18 in *Global Confidence Building: New Tools for Troubled Regions*, Michael Krepon, Michael Newbill, Khurshid Khoja, Jenny S. Drezin, eds., (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 294 – 95; White, “Grand expectations, little promise,” 11.

<sup>325</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 2.



negative repercussions on the relationship, or even avoid some form of retaliation. It is simply a recognition that “During periods of tension, such channels can play a useful function in preventing inadvertent escalation.”<sup>326</sup>

It fundamentally comes down to a very basic point: in the context of a protracted strategic rivalry, it is far less likely that states will find themselves in an inadvertent conflict caused by misperception or miscommunication when multiple well-developed channels of communication are in place. These lines of communication allow the reciprocal exchange of information needed to ensure each state understands the intentions of the other to the fullest extent possible. Criticisms that CBMs and military-to-military relations do not alter the fundamental strategic context, or do not work once conflict erupts, are moot points. CBMs are not intended to alter the fundamental context, which is structural, but rather provide mechanisms to help make that reality safer. Nor are CBMs and mil-mil relations intended to function during war, but rather ensure war does not happen – or at the least, if it does, it is deliberate.

The purpose of this section was to unpack CBMs as a concept, relate it to IR theory, and explain the underlying logic. To further demonstrate the utility of CBMs as an effective tool for managing protracted strategic rivalries, it is useful to examine the U.S.-Soviet relationship in more detail. Not only will this allow me to apply the concepts described above, but it further establishes the relevancy of taking U.S.-China military-to-military relations more seriously, in both theory and practice.

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<sup>326</sup> Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), Memorandum No. 25, “Maritime CBMs, Trust and Managing Incidents at Sea,” June 2014.

## CHAPTER 4: CBMS & THE COLD WAR

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the utility of CBMs and mil-mil relations in a practical setting that mostly closely resembles the U.S.-China dynamic. To that end, I provide an in-depth analysis of U.S.-Soviet, and later U.S.-Russian mil-mil relations. This is useful for several reasons. First, the U.S. policy approach to military relations with China is modeled directly on its Cold War experiences with the Soviet Union. Second, given their common Marxist-Leninist political and bureaucratic foundations, there are numerous similarities between the Soviet Union and the modern People's Republic of China (P.R.C.). Drawing this out early will help provide context for later analysis. Lastly, given the structural similarities, the Cold War provides temporal context for gauging progress in U.S.-China military relations. That is, taking a closer look at how CBMs and mil-mil relations with the Soviet Union and Russia developed, and over what period of time, provides a frame of reference for assessing an appropriate pace of development in the U.S.-China case.

### *A Closer Look at the Cold War*

When the world's two superpowers nearly came to blows over the placement of ballistic missiles in Turkey and Cuba over thirteen days in October 1962, policymakers in both countries quickly realized the dangers of a lack of information and communication with the other. Though the underlying issues driving the Cold War could not be solved, by improving communication and information flows the competition between the United States and Soviet Union could be more easily controlled. Neither state *wanted* war with the other, though each was determined to defend its interests through the threat of armed conflict. In this respect, the United States and Soviet Union were both security-seeking states.<sup>327</sup> This is not to suggest that either the United States or the Soviet Union would not expand territorially at the expense of the other (and through proxy wars throughout the

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<sup>327</sup> Barnett, "Why Trust the Soviets?" 468; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25:3 (Winter 2000/01), 128-161; Andrew Kydd, "Sheep in Sheep's Clothing: Why Security Seekers Do Not Fight Each Other," *Security Studies* 7:1 (Autumn 1997), 114-54; Shiping Tang, *A Theory of Security Strategy for Our Time: Defensive Realism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).

Cold War, they did), but that the motivation of both states was security rather than conquest.<sup>328</sup> That the great efforts each state took to reduce tension in the bilateral relationship and ensure escalation were tightly controlled, rather than accidental, bears this out, as does the peaceful conclusion to the Cold War.<sup>329</sup>

And so, in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. and Soviet Union began negotiating a series of confidence-building measures meant to manage their strategic rivalry.<sup>330</sup> At the height of the crisis, delayed communications between the President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev impeded negotiations.<sup>331</sup> To avoid a similar outcome in any future crisis, the two sides created a ‘hotline’, known as the Direct Communications Link (DCL), between U.S. and Soviet leaders. The United States initially proposed the hotline in December 1963, however the Soviet Union did not agree to consider the proposal until the spring. Following a brief series of negotiations in May of that year, the Soviet Union and United States signed *The Memorandum of Understanding between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link*. The DCL became active on August 30, 1963, less than a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>332</sup> As Barry Blechman notes, “An official listing of the instances in which the great powers have made use of the Hotline has never been released to the public,” however it was apparently used during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and the

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<sup>328</sup> This is, of course, highly debatable. The Soviet Union wanted to spread Communism and the United States sought to spread democracy, however the motivation behind that ideological push was security; The Soviet Union would be safer in a Communist world and the United States would be safer in a democratic one. This is especially true given the dominant position either state would hold as the standard bearer of each ideology.

<sup>329</sup> Some theories, such as offensive realism, would have predicted that the Soviet Union may have sought to forestall its decline by initiating a war with the United States before it was too weak to do so. Or, conversely, that the United States would seek to push its advantage more forcefully as the Soviet Union collapsed.

<sup>330</sup> Though the DCL was the first established communication program at a senior level, the U.S. and Soviet Union had set up official communication protocols to help avoid accidental escalation in Germany. The Huebner-Malinin agreement of April 1947, which both sides honored, established Military Liaison Missions (MLM) in East and West Germany, facilitating dialogues between the two sides until reunification in 1990.

<sup>331</sup> Sally K. Horn. “The Hotline,” Chapter 2 in *Avoiding War in the Nuclear Age: Confidence-Building Measures for Crisis Stability*, John Borawski, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 44. See also: Ester Simon & Agnes Simon, “The Soviet use of the Moscow-Washington Hotline in the Six-Day War,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 15; 3 (2017), 284 – 305.

<sup>332</sup> Horn, “The Hotline,” 44.

1980 Polish Crisis, to use but three examples.<sup>333</sup> “Its use has been hinted at, less reliably, on other occasions as well.”<sup>334</sup> The DCL has been continuously updated throughout the years with the latest in communication technology and remains in use today.<sup>335</sup> The DCL formed the springboard upon which many other CBMs were launched, to varying degrees of success, throughout the Cold War.

While the strategic arms treaties (those relating to nuclear weapons) are the most well-known CBMs of the Cold War,<sup>336</sup> the majority of CBMs between the United States and Soviet Union, and later Russia, were far more routine. An illustration of these CBMs are provided in Table 1 and Table 2. Using the CBM typology provided above, the U.S. and Soviet Union had a total of 10 formal CBMs, which collectively comprised a total of: 25 *Type A* provisions, 9 *Type B* provisions, and 11 *Type C* provisions. With the Russian Federation, there were an additional 4 formal CBMs, comprising: 19 *Type A* provisions, 16 *Type B* provisions, and 3 *Type C* provisions.<sup>337</sup> These numbers do not reflect the additional mil-mil activities between the two, to include port visits, senior-level visits and dialogues, educational exchanges, base visits, and all the other interactions that comprise a military-to-military relationship.<sup>338</sup> It also does not include CBMs specifically geared towards nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons.

These numbers provide several insights. First, verification and observation provisions did not play as central a role in U.S.-Soviet CBMs as it did in U.S.-Russia CBMs. Instead, the emphasis was on information, interaction and communication (*Type*

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<sup>333</sup> Barry M. Blechman, “Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War,” in *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons*, Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 471. See also: Simon & Simon, “The Soviet use of the Moscow-Washington Hotline in the Six-Day War,” (2017).

<sup>334</sup> Blechman, “Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War,” 471. Other sources suggest the Hotline was used during the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the 1979 Russian invasion of Afghanistan, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, as well as during the 1991 Gulf War and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. For example, see the National Communications System, *40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Brochure* (U.S. Government, 2003).

<sup>335</sup> For example, the DCL was updated to include satellite links in 1978, new teleprinter equipment in 1980, facsimile equipment in 1985, and secure e-mail in 2007.

<sup>336</sup> For example, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks/Treaty, known as SALT I and SALT II, were highly publicized events, attended by the leadership of both the Soviet Union and the United States. The treaty placed limits on the development and deployment of offensive and defense strategic systems, designed to bring some control and stability to the escalating arms race.

<sup>337</sup> Information was only available for 1992-1994; Less specific information was available for later CBMs, which prevented me from coding them appropriately.

<sup>338</sup> Such detailed information is unavailable.

A) and constraint (*Type C*). This directly challenges the assumption made by Mearsheimer and others that verification is essential to successful CBM agreements, or any pretext of trust. Verification played a more central role in the nuclear weapons reduction treaties, however these agreements only form a segment of the overall CBM program during the Cold War. While nuclear weapons and the oversized arsenals both sides developed were an important factor in the Cold War rivalry, the emphasis on information, interaction, and communication CBMs highlights the far more important factor: structure.

As the two most powerful states in the system, largely in that position as a result of the world's most devastating war (and the toll it took on traditional state powers in Europe), the U.S. and Soviet Union found themselves in a position rife with insecurity and uncertainty. Bipolar systems are less prevalent historically and have tended to be short-lived. While it has been argued that bipolar systems are more stable than multipolar, or even unipolar systems, the fact remains that at the onset of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union found themselves in an unfamiliar systemic position, further complicated by the existence of nuclear weapons.<sup>339</sup> The Cuban Missile Crisis made clear what the potential consequences of that uncertainty could yield.

While the strategic rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was more dangerous because of nuclear weapons, it was not *caused* by them. Large scale reductions in nuclear stockpiles certainly help overall de-escalation, and factor largely into the perception of better relations and the arrest of spiraling security dilemma dynamics, but they are not enough to address the cause of the strategic rivalry itself.<sup>340</sup> And so, while the underlying structural dynamic between the two could not be resolved, a significant amount of the uncertainty it produced could be. To dampen that uncertainty, states must engage in regular, multi-level efforts to exchange information, increase interaction, communicate regularly, and adhere to a meaningful policy of mutual restraint. The prevalence of *Type A* provisions in U.S. – Soviet CBMs proves that.

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<sup>339</sup> For example, see: Kenneth Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus* 93:3 (Summer, 1964), 881 – 909; Karl W. Deutsch & J. David Singer, "Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability," *World Politics* 16:3 (April 1964), 390 – 406; Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (July/August 2002), 20 – 33.

<sup>340</sup> For more on spiraling and the security dilemma, see Jervis, *Perception and Misperception* (1976/2017).

A second insight is that verification and observation, of the overt, invasive variety that comprises *Type B*, is more difficult to implement in a contentious strategic rivalry. This is especially true in a rivalry of structural significance, such as the Cold War or the U.S.-China relationship. Because the consequences of betrayal are so high, the risks associated with being more transparent with respect to giving your rival access to facilities, technologies, or troop-related activities are also high. Perhaps more salient is that they are more overt and thus more politically sensitive. Because *Type A* and *Type C* CBM activities are more routine and conducted directly between bureaucratic arms of the government (including the military), they are easier to keep out of the public eye. Hosting visiting delegations to sensitive sites or to observe large-scale exercises can be more difficult to hide from the media.

It is also important to consider that verification and observation are intrinsic to *Type A* and *Type C* CBMs. A state would immediately be able to tell if the other was not abiding by an agreement. It can be expected that on occasion, a state would deviate from the expected behavior for a variety of reasons. For instance, during encounters at sea, the U.S. and Soviet Union were expected to follow a particular protocol to avoid incidents, as governed by the 1972 *Incidents at Sea Agreement* (INCSEA).<sup>341</sup> There are occasions, however, when either side would intentionally violate the INCSEA agreement as a means of signaling. For example, Russia tends to be more confrontational to U.S. military assets in the Black and Baltic Seas – areas it considers its territorial waters. Despite these periodic violations, INCSEA was one of the most successful bilateral agreements of the Cold War, serving as an example later mimicked by numerous other countries.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> Technically, the full name of the agreement is the *Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas*, but it is popularly/colloquially referred to as the ‘Incidents at Sea Agreement’, or INCSEA.

<sup>342</sup> Stanley B. Weeks, “Measures to Prevent Major Incidents at Sea,” in *Maritime Security: The Building of Confidence*, Jozef Goldblat, ed. UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), (New York: United Nations, 1992), 61.

<b>Table 1: U.S.-Soviet CBMs, 1963 - 1990<sup>343</sup></b>		
<b>Hotline Agreement (1963)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Created direct communications link	Communication	A
<b>Agreement to Reduce Risks of Nuclear War (1971)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Commitment to improving national safeguards against accidental or unauthorized launch	Declaratory	A
Notification of accidental or unauthorized nuclear incident	Notification	A
Prenotification of missile launches beyond national territory	Notification	A
<b>Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA) (1972)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Regulation of dangerous maneuvers	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Restrictions on harassment	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Signaling guidelines	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Prenotification of dangerous activities on the high seas	Notification	A
Consultations between naval attaches	Consultation	A
<b>Helsinki Final Act (1975)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Obligatory prenotification of maneuvers with 25,000+ troops, 21 days in advance	Notification	A
Voluntary prenotification of other military maneuvers	Notification	A
Voluntary invitations to send observers	Access	B
Voluntary prenotification of major military	Notification	A
<b>Stockholm Agreement (1986)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Obligatory prenotification of maneuvers with 13,000+ troops (3,000 amphibious or airborne	Notification	A

<sup>343</sup> Adapted in part from Fisher, "The Preconditions of Confidence Building," 307 – 312.

paratroopers) or 300 battle tanks		
Obligatory information exchange on notifiable military activities	Information Exchange	A
Obligatory invitations to observers for notifiable military activities (17,000+ troops; 5,000 amphibious or airborne paratroopers)	Observation	B
Exchange of annual calendars of military activities	Notification	A
Verification through on-site inspection	Access	B
<b>Agreement to Establish Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers (NRRC) (1987)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
High-speed data links	Communication	A
<b>Agreement on Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities (DMA) (1989)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Regulation of dangerous military activities	Rules-of-Conduct	C
<b>Agreement on Notification of Strategic Exercises (1989)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Guidelines for unintended entry into national territory	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Exchange of information on dangerous activities or incidents	Notification	A
Establishment of Joint Military Commission	Consultation	A
Prenotification of strategic exercises fourteen days through NRRC	Notification	A
Consultations on implementation	Consultation	A
<b>Vienna Agreement (1990)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Annual exchange of information on military forces, major weapon	Information exchange	A



deployments, and military budgets		
Consultation mechanisms on unusual military activities	Consultation	A
Visits to air bases, military contacts	Access	B
Obligatory prenotification of maneuvers with 13,000+ troops (3,000 amphibious or airborne paratroopers) or 300 battle tanks	Notification	A
Obligatory invitations to observers for notifiable military activities (17,000+ troops; 5000 amphibious or airborne paratroopers)	Observation	B
Exchange of annual calendars of military activities	Notification	A
Verification through on-site inspection	Access	B
Creation of communication network	Information Exchange	A
Annual implementation assessment meeting at Conflict Prevention Center	Consultation	A
Constraints on military activities subject to prenotification with 40,000+ troops unless prior notification given	Constraint	C
<b>CFE Treaty (1990)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Annual exchange of information on artillery, main battle tanks, armored personnel carriers, combat aircraft, and combat helicopters	Information exchange	A
Collective ceilings for groups of state parties for Treaty-Limited Equipment (TLE) – battle tanks, artillery pieces, ACVs, combat aircraft, and attach helicopters	Constraint	C
State party ceilings for TLE	Constraint	C
Collective flank limitations for tanks, ACVs, and artillery	Constraint	C
Notification and exchange of information	Notification	A
Limit of 740 armored vehicle launched bridges in active units	Constraint	C
Constraints on equipment for paramilitary formations	Constraint	C

Three phased reduction of equipment and personnel by means of destruction, recategorization or reclassification; subject to on-site inspection	Access	B
Verification and inspection to monitor holdings, reductions, and destruction of equipment designated permanent storage sites for armaments and equipment	Access	B
Designated permanent storage sites for armament and equipment	Access	B
Commitment outside of treaty to limit land-based combat naval aircraft	Declaratory	A
Establishment of a Joint Consultative Group	Consultation	A

**Table 2: U.S.-Russian CBMs, 1992 - 1994**

<b>Open Skies Treaty (1992)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Mandatory overflights	Access	B
No restricted areas except for safety	Access	B
Cameras, infra-red and synthetic aperture radars	Access	B
Data available to all parties	Information exchange	A
<b>Vienna Document (1992)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Typology</i>
Obligatory prenotification of certain military activities involving 9,000 ground troops (3,000 amphibious or airborne paratroopers) or 250 tanks	Information exchange	A
Obligatory invitations to observers for notifiable military activities involving 13,000 ground troops (3,500 amphibious or airborne paratroopers) or 300 tanks	Notification	A
Exchange of annual calendars of military activities	Information exchange	A
Constraints on the number of large and medium sized military exercises	Constraint	C
Verification by multinational inspection teams	Access	B

Evaluation visits for information on military forces and deployment of major weapon and equipment systems	Access	B
Voluntary aerial inspections	Access	B
Annual implementation assessment meeting of conflict prevention center	Consultation	A
Annual exchange of information on military forces, major weapon deployments, and military budgets	Information exchange	A
Consultation mechanism regarding unusual military activities	Consultation	A
Visits to airbases and military contacts; voluntary hosting of visits to dispel concern about military activity; demonstration of new major weapon and equipment systems	Access	B
Establishment of a communication network	Information exchange	A
Area of application: Atlantic to the Urals, plus Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Access	B
<b>CFE (1A) Agreement (1992)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Obligatory prenotification of any permanent increase in personnel strength [brigade/regiment (1,000+), wing/air regiment (500+)] 42 days in advance	Notification	A
Obligatory prenotification of any call up of army reserve personnel (35,000+) 42 days in advance	Notification	A
Declared national ceilings for personnel strength of conventional armed forces	Constraint	C
Exchange of annual calendars for strength of individual units at or above the level of brigade/regiment	Notification	A
Inspections of CFE weapons	Access	B
Obligatory access to information on personnel serving at inspection site	Access	B

Consultative Commission composed of participating states for treaty verification	Consultation	A
<b>Memorandum of Understanding &amp; Cooperation on Defense &amp; Military Relations (1993)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Codified military-to-military contact program; identifies 19 types of contact activities to be pursued, including cultural and athletic exchanges	Information exchange	A
Establish Bilateral Working Group to coordinate proposed activities; determine which activities will be conducted the following year; prescribe program of lower-level unit activities and exercises	Information exchange and consultation	A
Mandated senior-level visits (annual)	Information exchange	A
Stopped targeting strategic nuclear missiles (May 30, 1994)	Constraint	C
<b>Vienna Document (1994)</b>		
<i>Provisions</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Obligatory prenotification of certain military activities involving 9,000 ground troops (3,000 amphibious or airborne paratroopers) or 250 tanks or 500 ACVs or 250 artillery pieces, mortars or MRLs (100mm caliber)	Notification	A
Obligatory invitations to observers for notifiable military activities involving 13,000 ground troops (3,500 amphibious, heliborne or airborne paratroopers) or 300 tanks or 500 ACVs or 250 artillery pieces, mortars or MRLs (100 mm caliber)	Information exchange and notification	A
Exchange of annual calendars of military activities	Information exchange	A
Constraints on the number of large	Constraint	C

and medium sized military exercises		
Verification by multinational inspection teams	Access	B
Evaluation visits for information on military forces and deployment of major weapon and equipment systems	Access	B
Voluntary aerial inspections	Access	B
Annual implementation assessment meeting of conflict prevention center	Consultation	A
Annual exchange of information on military forces, major weapon deployments, and military budgets	Information exchange	A
Consultation mechanisms regarding unusual military activities	Consultation	A
Visits to airbases and expanded military contacts (especially between military units); voluntary hosting of visits to dispel concern about military activity; demonstration of new major weapon and equipment systems	Access	B
Voluntarily conduct joint military training, exercises, seminars, and visits to work on tasks of mutual interest	Access	B
Establishment of a communications group and expanded use of the communications network	Information exchange	A
Area of application: Atlantic to the Urals, plus Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	Access	B

### INCSEA

The 1972 *Incidents at Sea Agreement* (INCSEA) between the U.S. and Soviet Union is an important CBM, both for understanding the role of CBMs in dampening uncertainty during the Cold War, and for putting U.S.-China mil-mil relations and CBMs in context. During the first twenty or so years of the Cold War, U.S.-Soviet naval incidents were few and far between primarily because until the mid-1960s, the Soviet

navy was weak and focused on coastal protection.<sup>344</sup> The few incidents which did occur in the 1940s and 1950s took place in the Baltic Sea and Sea of Japan, areas considered by the Soviet Union to be territorial waters.<sup>345</sup> As the Soviets developed and deployed a blue water navy capable of operating in waters around the world, its navy increasingly bumped up against U.S. naval forces who had operated in the global commons unchallenged since the end of World War II.<sup>346</sup> As it will be shown in Chapter 7, a similar pattern can be seen with incidents at sea between the U.S. and China: they take place close to China's shores in what Beijing considers its territorial waters, and incidents have increased as China's navy has modernized and begun operating further afield.<sup>347</sup>

In the 1960s, maritime incidents between the U.S. and Soviet Union peaked at an average of more than 40 per year.<sup>348</sup> Several of these incidents were particularly high-profile. For example, while operating as part of an anti-submarine task force in the Sea of Japan, the USS *Walker*, a destroyer, collided with a Soviet destroyer on May 10, 1967,

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<sup>344</sup> Weeks, *Maritime Security*, 57.

<sup>345</sup> Weeks, *Maritime Security*. U.S. reconnaissance aircraft were also shot down in these regions during that same time period. In fact, the vast majority of incidents between the U.S. and Soviet Union from 1945 – 1960 involved interactions within the air domain. U.S. intelligence gathering operations frequently involved photographic and electronic-intelligence missions “conducted along the periphery of the Soviet Union, and, for a period of time, within Soviet airspace.” The Korean War also contributed to several aerial incidents. It has been estimated that over 200 U.S. Airmen were lost as a result of these incidents. Mark E. Redden & Phillip C. Saunders. *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions: Cold War Lessons and New Avenues of Approach*, Center for the Study of Chinese Military Affairs, Institute for National Security Studies, China Strategic Perspectives, No. 5, (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, September 2012), 12.

<sup>346</sup> In his authoritative history of INCSEA, David Winkler provides an extensive chronology of incidents at sea involving the Soviet Union from 1945 - 1989. The chronology details a decades-long game of cat-and-mouse between the Soviet and U.S. navies. Most of the incidents detail Soviet acts against U.S. ships or planes. However, this discrepancy can simply be attributed to a lack of information regarding U.S. activities against Soviet assets. Video footage of several of these incidents is available online. For example, a 1988 incident involving the USS *Caron* can be seen at <https://youtu.be/N4jQhnXrWbg>, and another 1988 incident involving the USS *Yorktown* can be seen at <https://youtu.be/SME4w037FgA>. David F. Winkler, *Preventing Incidents at Sea: The History of the INCSEA Concept* (Halifax: Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2008), 221 – 254; See also: Gary Lee. “Soviets Protest Collision of Warships in Black Sea; Moscow Blames Incident on U.S. Vessels.” *The Washington Post*, February 14, 1988 (Final Edition), First Section; A46; Angus Roxburgh. “Russia protests to US after navies collide in the Black Sea,” *The Sunday Times* (London), February 14, 1988, Issue 8530; Philip Taubman. “Soviet Says It Hopes ‘Provocation’ By U.S. at Sea Won’t Hurt Talks,” *The New York Times*, February 14, 1988 (Late City Final Edition), Section 1; Part 1, Page 1, Column 4.

<sup>347</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 1. Redden and Saunders note “tactical parallels” between U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-China interactions.

<sup>348</sup> Zhang Yuan & Hu Dekun. “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building,” *China International Studies*, March/April 2014, 113-124. Stanley Weeks (1992, 57) notes that “In 1965 and 1966, official U.S. papers recorded 24 and 33 significant incidents at sea with the Soviets,” but there is no information provided as to what constitutes a ‘significant’ incident.

and another Soviet ship the next day. It was reported that the Soviet ships were interfering with anti-submarine exercises. The *Walker* incident resulted in two official U.S. diplomatic protests, a statement of concern from President Johnson, as well as a call by then-Minority Leader of the House of Representatives Gerald Ford to authorize the U.S. Navy to fire on “intruding Soviet ships.”<sup>349</sup> This is a good example of how seemingly minor incidents, like two ships ‘shouldering’ or ‘bumping’ one another (a fairly common occurrence during the Cold War), can exacerbate tensions in the overall relationship. Politicians, either feeling pressure from their constituents or looking to capitalize on the incident, ratchet up their antagonistic rhetoric. The idea of ‘backing down’ or ‘looking soft’ in the face of a challenge from America’s strategic rival becomes less tenable politically. This incentivized the senior military staff of both countries, as well as senior policymakers, to find a way to reduce the number of incidents and minimize their impact.

INCSEA is a bilateral agreement that requires the armed forces of the U.S. and Soviet Union operating on and over the high seas to “exercise caution and forethought when in proximity to each other’s armed forces.”<sup>350</sup> To bolster the agreement, both countries made the 1972 *Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea* (COLREGS), “which establishes ‘rules of the road’ for safe navigation,” applicable to their respective naval forces.<sup>351</sup> INCSEA also provided guidance for pilots operating above the high seas, requiring that “aircraft commanders ‘use the greatest caution and prudence’ in approaching the other party’s aircraft and ships, particularly ships engaged in launching or landing aircraft, and prohibits ‘in the interest of mutual safety’ any ‘simulated attacks’ or use of weapons against the other’s ships or aircraft, as well as any ‘aerobatics’ over or in the vicinity of the other’s ships and aircraft.”<sup>352</sup> In short, INCSEA established “mutual expectations and acceptable conduct by their respective armed forces,” including common communication protocols, as well

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<sup>349</sup> Weeks, *Maritime Security*, 57 -58.

<sup>350</sup> Sean Fahey, “Will Russia Dial Back the Incidents at Sea?” *Lawfare* (online), June 30, 2017.

<sup>351</sup> Fahey, “Will Russia Dial Back the Incidents at Sea?”

<sup>352</sup> Fahey, “Will Russia Dial Back the Incidents at Sea?”

as a “mechanism for periodic review by the parties to seek redress, clarification and amendment.”<sup>353</sup>

There are several factors contributing to the increase in frequency of naval incidents in the mid-to-late 1960s. The first is that the young commanding officers of the Soviet navy were relatively inexperienced, “especially in the challenging business of maneuvering ships at close quarters, when momentary misjudgment and the laws of physics can combine to draw moving hulls together very quickly.”<sup>354</sup> This inexperience affected both the judgment of Soviet officers and the technical capabilities of their crews, leading to unwanted accidents and, in some instances, deaths.<sup>355</sup> Indeed, it was the deaths of Soviet sailors that contributed to Moscow’s willingness to finally consider Washington’s requests to hold bilateral meetings on safety at sea, after a Soviet destroyer collided with the British aircraft carrier *Ark Royal* in early November 1970, resulting in several Soviet fatalities.

Moscow’s sudden reversal surprised Washington, who regarded the change with guarded optimism.<sup>356</sup> The U.S. chargé d’affaires in Moscow, Boris Klosson, speculated that the Soviets may have wanted to “send a positive sign involving the military to help offset the negative effect,” of the *Ark Royal* incident, as well as another non-naval incident that had taken place in October.<sup>357</sup> U.S. Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), took Moscow’s offer as a positive change, but remained

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<sup>353</sup> Fahey, “Will Russia Dial Back the Incidents at Sea?”

<sup>354</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 12 – 13; see also Winkler, *Preventing Incidents at Sea* (2008); Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” in *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons*, Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 484.

<sup>355</sup> This inexperience was not limited to naval crews, but pilots as well. A May 1968 incident between the *USS Essex* and a Soviet Tupolev-16 maritime patrol bomber in the North Sea, resulted in the death of the Soviet crew. After making a low pass, the bomber turned to make another pass, accidentally dipping its wing into the water in the process; the U.S. Navy picked up the remains of the aircrew. John H. McNeill, “Military-to-Military Arrangements for the Prevention of U.S.-Russian Conflict,” Chapter 43 in *Readings on International Law from the Naval War College Review, 1978-1994*, International Law Studies, Vol. 68, John Norton Moore & Robert F. Turner, eds. (1995), 575; video footage of the incident is available online at <https://youtu.be/l3bijF2--os>

<sup>356</sup> Winkler, *Preventing Incidents at Sea*, 84; see also Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Avoiding Incidents at Sea,” Chapter 4 in *Avoiding War in the Nuclear Age: Confidence-Building Measures for Crisis Stability*, John Borawski, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 72 – 89; Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “A Quiet Success for Arms Control: Preventing Incidents at Sea,” *International Security* 9:4 (Spring 1985), 154 – 184.

<sup>357</sup> Winkler, *Preventing Incidents at Sea*, 84.



suspicious of the Soviets' true motivations, as he believed "they had a tremendous reputation for perfidy."<sup>358</sup>

The inexperience of Soviet sea and aircrews also mixed dangerously with the modernization of Soviet military capabilities. With blue-water ships and increasingly sophisticated planes, Soviet military forces may have felt a false sense of confidence, both in the technical capabilities of their platforms (and their ability to control them) and of their power as a nation. The combination of bravado and machismo on the one hand, and newly acquired technical capabilities in the form of advanced weapons systems on the other, can lead a pilot to think he can (and should) fly faster, lower, or closer than he can, or a ship captain to think his ship can maneuver in ways it cannot. More importantly, the raw power of these new weapons platforms "increased the potential escalation consequences and may have emboldened the Soviet navy during encounters with the U.S. Navy."<sup>359</sup> A similar mix of technical and personal arrogance has been a contributing factor in U.S.-China military incidents, most notably the 2001 EP-3 incident, explored in detail in Chapter 7.

A second factor contributing to the uptick in U.S.-Soviet incidents at sea was its function as a means of signaling. The Soviet Union's deliberate use of harassment and provocation as a means of signaling was meant to accomplish several goals. First, it was a way of "conveying their resentment" over U.S. naval operations in areas Moscow considered Soviet territorial waters, including the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Sea of Japan.<sup>360</sup> With its new ability to project power further afield, the Soviet Union wanted to assert its presence in the regions where the U.S. had enjoyed unimpeded access to the world's commons in the years immediately following the end of World War II. By asserting itself in what it considered its territorial waters, the Soviet Union was attempting to establish clear boundaries to its sphere of influence, similar to the one it enjoyed on land. Harassment, therefore, was intended to "produce a change in U.S. behavior by raising the costs and risks of these operations."<sup>361</sup> In a more general sense,

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<sup>358</sup> Winkler, *Preventing Incidents at Sea*, 84.

<sup>359</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 13.

<sup>360</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 485.

<sup>361</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 1.

this was part of an overall Soviet effort to challenge U.S. hegemony (particularly naval), and “remind the United States that it was no longer alone as a major naval power.”<sup>362</sup>

Another related goal was status. The Soviet Union wanted the United States to acknowledge and accept the USSR as its peer. By conducting naval operations similar to those conducted by the United States Navy (USN), the Soviet Union was letting the U.S. and the world know it had similar military capabilities and sophistication. If the United States were to recognize Soviet capabilities by reducing its operations in Soviet territorial waters (out of fear or respect), it would help Moscow cement its status as a superpower. To this end, the Soviet Union began conducting surveillance operations off both U.S. coasts and within the North American Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ).<sup>363</sup> Conducting similar operations in a shared operational environment brought the U.S. and Soviet forces into more regular contact, creating the opportunity for more incidents to take place. More to the point, it created more opportunity for the newly equipped (and emboldened) Soviet navy to challenge the USN. As Redden and Saunders argue, “Increased parity in the scope and nature of each side’s intelligence-collection missions and the mutual vulnerability of collection assets produced a common interest in behavioral norms that reduced operational risk while allowing both sides to continue valuable collection activities.”<sup>364</sup>

Similarly, Sean Lynn-Jones has argued that the Soviet Union “may have seen the agreement as a recognition of their status as the equal of the U.S. Navy on the high seas,” with the agreement serving as a “symbolic recognition of parity on the world’s oceans.”<sup>365</sup> It would also contribute to the Soviet navy’s prestige domestically with respect to the citizenry, as well give it a boost in “political influence as a result of its formal relationship with the U.S. Navy.”<sup>366</sup> From a U.S. perspective, Washington was not interested in status recognition, but rather in reducing Soviet harassment of U.S. vessels. “As the location of U.S. allies and naval bases makes it more likely that U.S. warships

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<sup>362</sup> Timothy J. Nagle, “The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement: Minimum Order and Superpower Relations on the World’s Oceans,” *Virginia Journal of International Law* 31:125 (1990), 130.

<sup>363</sup> Zhang & Hu. “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building.”

<sup>364</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 14.

<sup>365</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 494 - 95.

<sup>366</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 15.

will find themselves operating in or near Soviet home waters, the United States may have had a greater interest in restricting dangerous maneuvers.”<sup>367</sup>

There is some disagreement, however, over the rationale for proposing the INCSEA agreement and/or the underlying strategic motivations that led to its acceptance by Moscow. It has been argued that the Soviet Union knew that the U.S. was more likely to propose a technical arrangement, which Moscow could use to its tactical advantage: any proposal would become a U.S. position, “to which Soviet representatives may ‘reluctantly’ agree, regardless of their true evaluation of the proposal, in exchange – formally or tacitly – for an American concession on a Soviet initiative.”<sup>368</sup> By conducting more surveillance operations off the coast of the United States, as well as being more assertive in challenging the U.S. presence in its territorial waters, the Soviet Union created an imperative for the U.S. to act.

That is not to suggest that the goal was to have the United States propose a formal agreement, like INCSEA. Moscow wanted to create the conditions that would lead to a negotiation to have the United States reduce its presence in Soviet waters in exchange for a similar reduction of Soviet operations off the U.S. coast.<sup>369</sup> It was reported in 1972 that 32 out of 79 incidents at sea in the preceding six years were directly related to these surveillance operations. Reinforcing the importance of transparency and its relationship to uncertainty and the exacerbation of tensions, Lynn-Jones notes that “Air surveillance of Soviet warships may be considered vital due the paucity of naval information released by the Soviet Union.”<sup>370</sup> “These incidents alerted the U.S. to the need to rein in Soviet activities through negotiations. As such, it has been argued that the Soviet Union qualified itself for negotiations with the U.S. because its naval surveillance capacity became on a par with that of the U.S.”<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 494 – 95.

<sup>368</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 479.

<sup>369</sup> Beijing has used harassment of U.S. military craft in a similar manner, hoping to convince Washington that the best and only way to ensure there are no future incidents is for the U.S. to cease close-in surveillance off China’s coast. This is covered in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>370</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 486. A similar dynamic is at play regarding U.S. close-in surveillance of the coast of China. The U.S. insists it must maintain those patrols, which China detests, as a response to Beijing’s lack of transparency.

<sup>371</sup> Zhang & Hu. “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building”; Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 1.

This logic is consistent with wider U.S. strategic goals and can still be seen in current U.S. foreign policy. Washington's pursuit of similar agreements with Beijing are predicated on a similar logic: it would afford China a measure of status and recognition while simultaneously reducing the threat to U.S. forces operating in the region. However, more than simply wanting to reduce the risk to U.S. vessels, whether during the Cold War or currently, the U.S. pursues formal agreements because they recognize the validity of U.S. operations in these areas. Beijing's recognition of that fact has played a role in its reticence to enter into formal agreements with the United States, particularly because Washington has yet to offer it the requisite status.

While these are all contributing factors to the question of why the U.S. and Soviet Union would pursue an agreement, they overlook the critical structural component and the fear of accidental escalation. The two countries were compelled to compete with one another; the simple pursuit of national interests ensured there would be friction. With the Soviet Union keen to assert its presence and interests on the high seas, and the United States determined to resist Soviet (and communist) expansion, the increasingly deadly interactions at sea once again raised the possibility of an accidental escalation with possibly cataclysmic consequences. However, the Cuban Missile Crisis made clear to leaders in both countries that the untempered pursuit of national interests in the nuclear age was unsustainable.<sup>372</sup> It was simply too dangerous to leave to chance.<sup>373</sup>

Lynn-Jones disagrees with the extent of danger posed by naval incidents, writing that it is "unlikely" such an incident could "provoke a major conflict leading to a nuclear exchange," between the Cold War rivals.<sup>374</sup> The danger of naval incidents instead lay in their ability to increase tensions and derail negotiations or other diplomatic efforts, with the "cumulative impact of a succession of incidents" undermining the stability of the bilateral relationship even further.<sup>375</sup> In that regard, incidents at sea are more of a distraction than a direct threat. In an interview conducted for this project, John Mearsheimer agreed, telling me that "Incidents at sea just don't matter that much."<sup>376</sup> By

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<sup>372</sup> Blechman, "Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War," 475.

<sup>373</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 13.

<sup>374</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 492.

<sup>375</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 492.

<sup>376</sup> Interview with John Mearsheimer, March 23, 2017, Baltimore, Maryland.

saying “It’s not a major strategic issue,”<sup>377</sup> those like Mearsheimer too easily dismiss, or overlook, both their escalatory potential as well as the symbolic dimensions of incidents and their impact on the overall relationship.<sup>378</sup> Consequently, the value CBMs like INCSEA have in shaping strategic perceptions and altering the tenor of a protracted rivalry is missed, creating theoretical and logical gaps.

More importantly, however, the skepticism of the dangers posed by incidents at sea do not match Soviet and U.S. assessments at the time. There was a large degree of consensus in both Soviet and U.S. analyses that “the risks of inadvertent war have increased with the deterioration of superpower relations.”<sup>379</sup> Igor Andropov, the Soviet CDE<sup>380</sup> delegate, declared in a statement that “Given the swift action and power of contemporary arms, an atmosphere of mutual suspicion is especially dangerous. Even an absurd accident, an error, a technical fault, may have tragic consequences.”<sup>381</sup> It was precisely the fear of escalation, and the mutual inability to control it, that was at the heart of INCSEA and other subsequent U.S.-Soviet CBMs.<sup>382</sup>

While Lynn-Jones may be skeptical of the ability of an incident to escalate to a full-scale nuclear exchange, he understood the value INCSEA had in ameliorating Cold War tensions. “Observance of the agreement makes U.S.-Soviet competition safer,” he wrote, but “it does not alter the basic terms of that competition.”<sup>383</sup> This is only partially true. INCSEA certainly made U.S.-Soviet competition safer, both for the military servicemembers operating at sea and on a strategic level, by reducing the chances of miscalculation or miscommunication and accidental escalation. It is the second point, the alteration of the basic terms of competition, that is at issue.

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<sup>377</sup> Interview with John Mearsheimer, March 23, 2017, Baltimore, Maryland.

<sup>378</sup> Others have argued that it was indeed a mutual recognition of the potential for incidents to escalate to the nuclear level that pushed the Soviet Union and United States to develop “parallel interests...despite the ideological struggle,” and “associated intense military competition.” Accordingly, it became clear to both countries that “Tactical and operational dynamics in the maritime domain could produce rapid escalation that decisionmakers on both sides might not have been able to control.” Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 13.

<sup>379</sup> Bruce Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” Chapter 7 in *Avoiding War in the Nuclear Age: Confidence-Building Measures for Crisis Stability*, John Borawski, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 121. See also Allyn, 126; and Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 127.

<sup>380</sup> The Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, a 1984 conference in Stockholm, Sweden.

<sup>381</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 121.

<sup>382</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 13.

<sup>383</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 500.

INCSEA, like other Cold War CBMs, *did* help alter the basic terms of Cold War competition. And that is because of its role in shaping perceptions. Admiral Zumwalt, the USN CNO, noted INCSEAs impact, saying it “was less significant for what it said, which was little more than a reaffirmation of the Rules of the Road, than for what it represented, which was a desire on the part of the Soviet leadership to normalize maritime behavior.”<sup>384</sup> This is the point that Mearsheimer, and to a lesser extent Lynn-Jones, miss. Just as the assertive behavior of the Soviets was partially symbolic in its purpose, so too was the formalization of Moscow and Washington’s mutual recognition that despite their rivalry, they were both, fundamentally, security-seeking in their intentions. In that regard, INCSEA was meaningful not just because it made at-sea encounters safer, but because it helped shape perceptions at the strategic level. Lynn-Jones acknowledges this, writing that by reducing “the possibility of misinterpretation of potentially dangerous behavior at sea,” INCSEA “increase[ed] U.S. and Soviet confidence in the nonthreatening nature of each other’s naval actions.”<sup>385</sup>

INCSEA also formalized the Soviet Union as a peer competitor of the United States, affording it the status General Secretary Brezhnev “appears to have been anxious to elicit.”<sup>386</sup> Of course, INCSEA was not the only thing giving the USSR its status, or recognition, as a peer competitor of the United States. But by entering into a bilateral agreement, INCSEA told the world that the Soviet navy had arrived, and that it was formidable. Status plays an important role in great power rivalries, particularly during power transitions.<sup>387</sup> Acknowledging the Soviet Union as a peer, and giving it the status it sought, gave the Soviets one less reason to be aggressive during encounters at sea.

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<sup>384</sup> Quoted in Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 501.

<sup>385</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 502.

<sup>386</sup> Blechman, “Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War,” 478; Weeks, *Maritime Security*, 58.

<sup>387</sup> T.V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, & William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014); William C. Wohlforth, “Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War,” *World Politics* 61:1 (January 2009): 28 – 57; Tudor A. Onea, “Between dominance and decline: status anxiety and great power rivalry,” *Review of International Studies* 40 (2014): 125 – 152; Deborah Welch Larson & Alexei Shevchenko, “Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy,” *International Security* 34:4 (Spring 2010): 63 – 95; Thomas J. Volgy & Stacey Mayhall, “Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change,” *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (1995): 67 – 84; Peter Hays Gries, “Social Psychology and the Identity-Conflict Debate: Is a ‘China Threat’ Inevitable?” *European Journal of International Relations* 11:2 (2005): 235 – 265; Benjamin O. Fordham & Victor Asal, “Billiard Balls or Snowflakes? Major Power Prestige and the International Diffusion of Institutions and Practices,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007): 31 – 52.

Indeed, the connection between bilateral agreements like INCSEA and status continues to play a roll in contemporary U.S.-China military relations, with some observers critical of suggestions the U.S. should pursue a similar agreement with China precisely because it would afford Beijing undue status.<sup>388</sup> What is status if not a strategic-level issue? If states are willing to fight for status (sometimes also referred to as ‘honor’), as observers of international relations going back to Thucydides contend,<sup>389</sup> then the expressions of the pursuit of that status short of war – like incidents at sea – must be considered in kind.

This is the danger that incidents at sea pose. They are probes and lower-level attempts to pursue a goal (such as the attainment of status) short of war. To dismiss their importance is to focus on an outcome without considering its cause. By this I simply mean that focusing on a war (the outcome) without considering the smaller, seemingly less important incidents that preceded it, is to fail to see the forest for the trees. INCSEA, like other CBMs, is a response to the recognition by senior policymakers that incidents, however minor, have the potential to escalate beyond control. And that is precisely because these policymakers recognize what those like Mearsheimer do not: incidents between strategic rivals are expressions of larger issues. They can be an expression of status-seeking, of malicious intent, or simply an accident (to name but three possibilities). If the Soviet Union and the United States had only the rare incident at sea, policymakers in both countries may have assessed them to be accidents. When there are repeated incidents, in similar geographic locations or with similar patterns, it is clearly about signaling. The question for policymakers then becomes ‘what is the message?’. INCSEA, like other CBMs, provides additional information and context to help policymakers decipher those signals, so that they may be able to discern status-seeking from malevolent provocation.

As noted above, INCSEA did not prevent the Soviet Union and United States from competing as strategic rivals, nor did it turn foe into friend. But it was never designed to. Recognition that the two countries would “continue their rivalry at sea,” is

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<sup>388</sup> Pete Pedrozo, “The U.S.-China Incidents at Sea Agreement: A Recipe for Disaster,” *Journal of National Security Law & Policy* 6:207 (2012): 207 – 226.

<sup>389</sup> Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, & Paul Huth, “Reputation and Status as Motives for War,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (May 2014): 371 – 393; Albert Wolf, “What Thucydides’s Trap Gets Wrong About the United States and China,” *RealClearDefense* (online) July 26, 2017.

attributed to the agreement's very success.<sup>390</sup> INCSEA did not result in the cessation of incidents at sea between the superpowers, merely a reduction in their frequency and severity.<sup>391</sup> This was also by design. It helped ensure that when incidents occurred, they were safer and less likely to spiral out of control. The 'rules of the road' each country adhered to provided naval operators with a common language, enabling them to better understand the actions of the other. And the annual meeting of senior naval leadership provided a forum, and mechanism, for each country to voice concern, provide clarification, and protest problematic behavior.<sup>392</sup> In short, it reduced tensions. This is true even during periods when the bilateral relationship deteriorated, leading to an uptick in the number of reported incidents.<sup>393</sup> In fact, INCSEA remained in place even when other diplomatic engagements had been cut off. For example, "The 1980 annual review took place in Moscow, despite the suspension of most other U.S.-Soviet contacts in the wake of the invasion of Afghanistan."<sup>394</sup>

This fact is an important counter-argument to claims that the agreement was purely a product of the détente era, and that wider political considerations steered the military-to-military relationship. Détente certainly created the political conditions to make an agreement possible, but the imperative for the agreement pre-exists the start of détente. Lynn-Jones notes, "it is difficult to find specific connections between [INCSEA] negotiations and the political atmosphere."<sup>395</sup> INCSEA was pursued and generally adhered to because of its inherent value, both practical/operational and symbolic. It has been the inability to isolate the military-to-military relationship from the wider bilateral

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<sup>390</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 500; Griffiths, "U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building," 14. See also Winkler, *Preventing Incidents at Sea* (2008) and William J. Lynn. "Existing U.S.-Soviet Confidence-Building Measures," Chapter 3 in *Preventing Nuclear War: A Realistic Approach*, Barry M. Blechman, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1985. Pp. 24 – 51.

<sup>391</sup> As Lynn-Jones notes, "a reduction in the number of incidents still counts as an overall success." Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 499; Nagle, "The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement," 130.

<sup>392</sup> Lynn-Jones notes that "The agreement itself operates on the implicit assumption that some possible violations will occur and provides a set of procedures for their communication and resolution." Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 500.

<sup>393</sup> Stanley Weeks notes that the number of incidents remained fairly low throughout the Détente era (1972-1977), increased to a peak in the late 1970s as the Cold War intensified again until 1985, after which they began to drop after 1986 as Gorbachev came to power and the Cold War drew to a close (Weeks, *Maritime Security*, 62); Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 498.

<sup>394</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 498.

<sup>395</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 496.



relationship that has hindered efforts to build similarly stable agreements between the U.S. and China.

By clarifying intentions and influencing mutual perceptions, INCSEA made a significant contribution to the stabilization of the strategic rivalry between the U.S. and Soviet Union. The signing of the Incidents At Sea Agreement on May 25, 1972, during the Moscow Summit Meeting, “represented the first important military agreement between the two superpowers since World War II.”<sup>396</sup> The U.S. negotiating team was the “highest-ranking U.S. military delegation to visit the Soviet Union since 1945,” while the Soviet delegation “consisted of even higher-ranking officials.”<sup>397</sup> The signing of this agreement, much like the incidents that spurred its creation, was no small thing. It was important for practical purposes (making routine operational interactions safer) as well as symbolic ones (reaffirming security-seeking intentions and a desire to make the rivalry as stable, and safe, as possible). As one observer put it, it transformed the relationship at sea from “confrontation to comanagement.”<sup>398</sup>

This is, fundamentally, the most important value of INCSEA and why it is held up as a model CBM: The agreement provided a foundation upon which new CBMs could be built, further stabilizing the bilateral relationship. INCSEA “proved to be the first of a network of interlocking bilateral accords that have led to the establishment of a new operational environment for the two armed forces.”<sup>399</sup> As Cold War tensions waned from 1986 on, “Soviet and American military leaders began to exchange visits outside the structure of IncSea [sic] reviews. Besides opening ports to ship visits, the military leaders informally discussed ways to reduce potentially dangerous activities.”<sup>400</sup> It is a testament to the importance and quality of INCSEA that it has outlasted the conflict it was designed to help manage. The remainder of this chapter looks at the U.S.-Russian military relationship in the years after the Cold War.

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<sup>396</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 488.

<sup>397</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 487.

<sup>398</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 14.

<sup>399</sup> John H. McNeill. “Military-to-Military Arrangements for the Prevention of U.S.-Russian Conflict,” Chapter 43 in *Readings on International Law from the Naval War College Review, 1978-1994*, International Law Studies, Vol. 68, John Norton Moore & Robert F. Turner, eds. (1995), 577.

<sup>400</sup> McNeill, “Military-to-Military Arrangements for the Prevention of U.S.-Russian Conflict,” 577.

## **U.S.-Soviet/Russia Military Relations: 1985 – Present**

When Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985, the tenor of the Cold War changed. Gorbachev's desire to implement policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (openness and restructuring) led to the strategic reorientation of the Soviet Union and a reduction of tension with the United States. By 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War ended. One dimension of the bilateral relationship that not only continued but expanded as the Soviet Union transitioned into the Russian Federation was the mil-mil relationship. This section focuses on the bilateral military relationship during the final years of the Soviet Union, specifically the signing of the 1989 *Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement* (DMAA), through to contemporary military-to-military relations between the United States and Russia. Available information becomes increasingly scarce as the years go on, and academic research on the subject is practically non-existent. Accordingly, there are considerable limitations to the depth and specificity of the analysis from the early 2000s to Present.

### *The DMA Agreement*

As noted in the previous section, INCSEA provided Soviet and American policymakers with a foundation upon which they were able to pursue other CBMs that persisted into the post-Cold War era. The most significant of these is the 1989 *Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement* (DMAA). Analyzing the DMAA more closely is important not just to bolster my argument regarding the utility and efficacy of mil-mil relations as a CBM used to generate and maintain strategic trust, but because it provides insight into the rationale of U.S.-Soviet/Russian mil-mil engagement and what each hoped to achieve.

During discussions to increase U.S.-Soviet mil-mil contacts in 1987, U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Admiral William Crowe, Jr., proposed the establishment of a high-level forum similar to INCSEA which would meet regularly and discuss ways of avoiding dangerous military confrontations over land and territorial waters. On July 11, 1988, Admiral Crowe and the Soviet Chief of General Staff, Sergey Akhromeyev, issued a joint statement in Washington, D.C., announcing their intent to

“pursue policies and actions which would assist the armed forces of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in avoiding engagement in dangerous military activity in the vicinity of each other, and in immediately terminating such activity, should it arise.”<sup>401</sup> They also announced the establishment of a joint military-to-military working group to explore the issue in greater detail and make recommendations about which activities should be included in such an agreement. The joint military group met six times between October 1988 and May 1989, with the final agreement being signed in Moscow on June 12, 1989 and entering into force on January 1, 1990.<sup>402</sup> Admiral Crowe’s trip to Moscow marked the first time a CJCS had visited the Soviet Union.<sup>403</sup> More importantly, the negotiations themselves marked the “first direct Soviet – American military-to-military consideration of such matters at the supreme level of command since the end of World War II.”<sup>404</sup>

The initial meeting between Crowe and Akhromeyev was particularly important, as before it took place there “was virtually no military dialogue between the two sides.”<sup>405</sup> A series of events in the late 1970s and early 1980s, beginning with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, had severely curtailed official communication between Moscow and Washington. Indeed, “there was a time during the early 1980s when the *only* official communication between the Soviet Union and the United States outside of normal diplomatic channels was the yearly meeting of naval officers as part of the Incidents at Sea agreement and the ongoing communications through the military liaison missions in

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<sup>401</sup> Union of Soviet Socialist Republics -United States: Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities, *International Legal Materials* 28:4 (July 1989), 877.

<sup>402</sup> The agreement was signed by Admiral Crowe and General Mikhail A. Moiseyev, chief of the Soviet General Staff.

<sup>403</sup> Kurt M. Campbell, “The Soldier’s Summit,” *Foreign Policy* 75 (Summer, 1989), 76. The first U.S. military “figure of prominence and senior rank” to visit the Soviet Union was Air Force chief of staff General Nathan Twining, who “visited the Soviet Union in 1956 at the invitation of Premier Nikita Khrushchev to view recent Russian developments in aviation.” The trip included a visit to the first Soviet atomic reactor, a military aviation assembly plant, and an airshow. Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 113.

<sup>404</sup> Kurt M. Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” *Security Studies* 1:1 (1991), 109.

<sup>405</sup> This is a reference to sustained, regular talks, rather than the annual INCSEA review meetings. Kurt M. Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations” in *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management*, Alexander L. George, ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 522; Campbell notes that “U.S. military representatives had only infrequent contact with their Soviet counterparts between 1945 and 1987, and the meetings and discussions that did occur have been virtually overlooked by historians and strategists.” Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 111-12; see also p. 110.

East and West Germany.”<sup>406</sup> Their meeting not only resulted in the signing of the DMAA and the deepening of mil-mil ties between the Soviet Union and United States, but it helped spur a pattern of reciprocal high-level visits, which are essential to the process of building confidence.<sup>407</sup>

The DMAA established a number of “unprecedented presumptions and procedures,”<sup>408</sup> designed to “prevent the unintentional or miscalculated use of force in peacetime,” as well as reduce the “incidence of harassing military activity by one side against the other.”<sup>409</sup> More specifically, it is intended to “resolve expeditiously and peacefully, any incident between U.S. and Russian forces arising as a result of DMAs,” and “promote safety of operations where U.S. and Russian armed forces operate in proximity to each other during peacetime.”<sup>410</sup> It is focused on four specific dangerous military activities: the accidental or distress (force majeure) entry into the national territory of the other party; the use of lasers in a manner hazardous to the other party; hampering operations in a manner hazardous to the other party in a “Special Caution Area;” and interference with command and control networks in a manner hazardous to the other party.<sup>411</sup>

The ‘force majeure’ provision, interestingly, became particularly contentious during negotiations, as it “extends for the first time the Western legal principle of ‘innocent until proven guilty’ to potentially provocative trespass by U.S. and Soviet forces.”<sup>412</sup> A 1989 *Washington Post* article reported that the “U.S. provision was the most difficult for the Soviets to accept of all the agreement’s provisions.”<sup>413</sup> However, the Soviet destruction of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 in September 1983, which resulted from the

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<sup>406</sup> Italics added for emphasis. Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 117. It should be noted, however, that despite this low-point in the relationship, and general cessation of regular military contacts, the Soviet Union and United States signed an agreement in July 1984 to upgrade the DCL (Hotline). See also: Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 117.

<sup>407</sup> Akhromeyev had visited the United States in July 1988, where he engaged in many discussions with Admiral Crowe and been given tours of an aircraft carrier and various military installations and interacted with American servicemembers from across the branches of the armed forces. Kurt M. Campbell, “The Soldier’s Summit,” *Foreign Policy* 75 (Summer, 1989), 76.

<sup>408</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 109.

<sup>409</sup> Kimberly Marten Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” *PONARS Policy Memo* 7, October 1997, 2.

<sup>410</sup> Chief of Naval Operations, *OPNAV Instruction 5711.96C*, United States Department of Defense, November 10, 2008, 4.

<sup>411</sup> Chief of Naval Operations, *OPNAV Instruction 5711.96C*, 6.

<sup>412</sup> Smith, “New U.S.-Soviet Accord Entails Philosophical Shift.”

<sup>413</sup> Smith, “New U.S.-Soviet Accord Entails Philosophical Shift.”

“dangerous and provocative Soviet policy of regarding any intruding aircraft as hostile,”<sup>414</sup> and the negative attention it put on Moscow, likely played a role in convincing the Soviets to acquiesce. It was also a pre-condition to improving military relations set by Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci during a March 1988 meeting with Minister of Defense Dimitri Yazov in Berne, Switzerland.<sup>415</sup> Kurt Campbell has described the DMAA as the “first comprehensive mechanism aimed at defusing potential military clashes.”<sup>416</sup>

The foundation INCSEA provided was not just figurative but literal, serving as the reference point for designing the DMAA and determining its content.<sup>417</sup> For example, while INCSEA is limited to encounters at sea, the DMAA is designed to address possible confrontations over land and territorial waters. The expansion of the geographical scope of the CBMs governing military encounters ensured the DMAA’s code of conduct governed the “activities of all armed forces, not just [...] Navies or Air Forces.”<sup>418</sup> Sections of the DMAA also augment communication procedures initially introduced in INCSEA, for example by assigning radio frequencies for communications at three operational levels: between Task Force commanders; between ship/aircraft/vehicle commanders of both countries; and between aircraft commanders and air traffic control or monitoring of the other state.<sup>419</sup>

The DMAA, similar to INCSEA, established regular annual and semi-annual meetings between U.S. and Russian senior officers and defense officials, “giving each side the opportunity to raise key concerns with the other, as well as the chance to measure attitude changes against an established baseline of interaction.”<sup>420</sup> While Kimberly

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<sup>414</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 115.

<sup>415</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 119. U.S. insistence on this point was later reiterated by Major General George Lee Butler, appointed by Admiral Crowe to lead the negotiations for the U.S., to Marshal Akhromeyev during a delegation visit to Moscow.

<sup>416</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 110.

<sup>417</sup> Vincent Bela Feher, “International Agreements – *Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities*, June 12, 1989, United States – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 31: 1 (Winter 1990), 333; Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 112, 123; Nagle, “The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement,” 133.

<sup>418</sup> Lukasz Kulesa, Thomas Frear, & Denitsa Raynova, “Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area: A New Plan of Action,” Policy Brief, November 2016 (European Leadership Network), 14.

<sup>419</sup> Kulesa, Frear, & Raynova, “Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area,” 15.

<sup>420</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 2; Kimberly Marten Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” *Armed Forces & Society* 25: 4 (Summer 1999), 582.

Marten Zisk describes these regular meetings as a “lasting success,”<sup>421</sup> a recent report suggests that “according to available information the consultation/review commission of the U.S.-Russia DMA has met only twice since the agreement was concluded.”<sup>422</sup> The European Leadership Network (ELN) report suggests that while the agreement “remains relatively underused, [...] the established behavior regimes and the code of conduct remain in effect.”<sup>423</sup> It is unclear why there is such a discrepancy between Zisk and the ELN report, however it might be attributed to the lack of information available to researchers.<sup>424</sup>

Similar to INCSEA, the DMAA was designed with the recognition of sustained strategic rivalry at its core. An internal White House document detailing the on-going DMAA negotiations and U.S. goals notes the promise the Agreement holds to “contribute to a more stable relationship between our two countries,” but quickly cautions the need to be “prudent about the serious and continuing threat that the Soviet Union represents to us and our Allies.”<sup>425</sup> Accordingly, Timothy Nagle wrote that the “DMAA can best be described as a vehicle for making *inevitable* military competition between the United States and the Soviet Union safer.”<sup>426</sup> Another observer characterized the DMAA as “an important precedent for future naval arms control.”<sup>427</sup> Campbell also notes that the DMAA is “unique in that it advances priorities and procedures for timely communications between military commanders at the scene of an incident.”<sup>428</sup> While INCSEA “essentially left crisis communications to the naval attachés in either capital,” the DMAA “allows local commanders to take steps on the scene to avoid further escalation or misunderstanding.”<sup>429</sup>

The DMAA was novel and unprecedented both in terms of what it hoped to achieve, how it was negotiated, and how it was implemented. It was the first set of

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<sup>421</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 2.

<sup>422</sup> Kulesa, Frear, & Raynova, “Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area,” 23.

<sup>423</sup> Kulesa, Frear, & Raynova, “Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area,” 23.

<sup>424</sup> It is precisely this reason that I was unable to independently verify both claims. Furthermore, it is unclear whether or not the DMAA-established Joint Military Commission is still in existence, however available information, to the extent it exists, suggests it is not.

<sup>425</sup> The White House, *National Security Decision Directive Number 311: US-Soviet Defense and Military Relations*, July 28, 1988.

<sup>426</sup> Italics added for emphasis. Nagle, “The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement,” 141.

<sup>427</sup> Quoted in Nagle, “The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement,” 143.

<sup>428</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 126.

<sup>429</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 126 – 27.

negotiations in the history of U.S.-Soviet relations “to be primarily headed, designed, and signed by military officers on both sides.”<sup>430</sup> The negotiating and signing of the Agreement by uniformed military, as opposed to civilians, was an important first, and set “a precedent and a professional benchmark for the future involvement of military officers in the military affairs of state.”<sup>431</sup> Taking that sentiment one step further, Timothy Nagle has suggested that “The direct discussions between military leaders which has provided so much fertile ground for mutual understanding and predictability would probably be impossible in a more political or diplomatic arena.”<sup>432</sup> As noted above, the 1987 meeting between Admiral Crowe and Marshal Akhromeyev in Crowe’s Pentagon office marked the “first ever private meeting between the highest-ranking military commanders of the United States and the Soviet Union.”<sup>433</sup> It was a meeting that was itself only made possible as a result of two well-received summits between President Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev, in Geneva and Iceland, which helped reduce some of the tension that had built up during the early 1980s and “produced greater optimism about what was possible in the improving relationship between the two sides.”<sup>434</sup> The March 1988 meeting between Defense Secretary Carlucci and Minister of Defense Yazov was the “first ever summit of the two civilian heads of the superpower military establishments.”<sup>435</sup>

Though it is somewhat surprising that it took nearly the duration of the Cold War for such senior officials to meet, perhaps the most important ‘first’ (at least from a U.S. standpoint) was who signed the Agreement itself. A Joint Chiefs of Staff had never before negotiated an executive agreement, and required a “Circular 175 Authority” from the State Department, “the agency usually responsible for negotiating agreements with foreign governments.”<sup>436</sup> Both the State Department and the National Security Council signed off and granting Circular 175 Authority to the CJCS, granting Admiral Crowe the

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<sup>430</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 581.

<sup>431</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 127.

<sup>432</sup> Nagle, “The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement,” 143.

<sup>433</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 118.

<sup>434</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 117. This further supports Wheeler’s (2018) central argument regarding the importance of face-to-face interaction between leaders as a means of altering threat perceptions.

<sup>435</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 118.

<sup>436</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 122.

authority to sign the Agreement. This followed the 1986 *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act*, which “gave the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs unparalleled influence for a military official in Washington.”<sup>437</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that it was Admiral Crowe’s belief in the need for better “uniformed communications” with the Soviet military, and his “strong support for a comprehensive review of dangerous military activities,” involving the two countries that made the DMAA possible.<sup>438</sup> This marks an important shift in U.S. civil-military relations and military diplomacy.

Campbell considers one of the Agreement’s most important legacies as being that “hundreds of thousands of ground troops, pilots, and other military personnel will be trained in ways to avoid potentially dangerous acts.”<sup>439</sup> This enables both an institutional and a cultural shift to take place within the military establishments of both countries, helping improve perceptions. That is not to say each side would not remain suspicious of the other, however there is something to be said about changing the perception from ‘hostile’ to ‘potentially dangerous’. Zisk notes that the DMAA, and the negotiations that lead to its creation, “fundamentally set the stage for the institutionalization of U.S.-Russian military-to-military contacts that followed.”<sup>440</sup> As it will become clear further below, the legacy of the DMAA is felt throughout the existing U.S.-Russian military relationship.

Regardless of whether or not the DMAA was fully implemented, its creation and durability throughout the years is an achievement in itself. The Soviet Union has historically been averse to military-to-military relationships, particularly with western countries.<sup>441</sup> There are several reasons for this, the most important of which are historical and bureaucratic. Historically, there had long been speculation that information obtained through clandestine military ties with Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s were used by the German supreme command in their planning of Operation Barbarossa, the 1941

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<sup>437</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 116.

<sup>438</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 116.

<sup>439</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 127.

<sup>440</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 581.

<sup>441</sup> Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, Adelphi Paper 365, The International Institute for Strategic Studies, (London: Routledge, 2004), 21.



invasion of the Soviet Union.<sup>442</sup> This speculation is rooted in the second prominent reason for Soviet reluctance: bureaucratic culture and suspicion.

Joseph Stalin's paranoia, and the many purges of Soviet officials and citizens that came as a result, are well known. This paranoia was not limited to Stalin, however. Paranoia and a culture of suspicion are byproducts of a closed, authoritarian governmental structure. It was persistent throughout the U.S.S.R. and can be seen in contemporary China. The most relevant manifestation of that paranoia, in both the Soviet and Chinese contexts, can be found in the relationship between the civilian government and the military. The Chinese context is explored in more detail in Chapter 6. In the Soviet Union, however, there was a "special problem concerning political control of the armed forces."<sup>443</sup> For example, according to Barry Blechman, "The U.S. proposal to establish a direct communications link between the two defense ministries appears to have been dismissed out of hand for this reason."<sup>444</sup>

It is perhaps unsurprising that governments who assumed power through revolutionary violence come to fear the instruments of that violence. However, as Campbell notes, "Any expansion in the scope of direct military contacts will inevitably raise sensitivities about the proper role of the military in making national policy and its impact on civil-military relations."<sup>445</sup> And so it should. But the Soviet reticence to give the military a longer leash is of a different nature than the debate that occurs within a democratic society regarding the proper role of the military in foreign policy and diplomacy. Campbell highlights two dominant views regarding the civil-military balance in the United States as being comprised of a "dominant civilian view" and an "enlightened military view." The dominant civilian view holds while the military should take precautions to avoid a military clash, it "should not be involved directly in crisis

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<sup>442</sup> Campbell, "The Future of "Military Diplomacy," in U.S.-Soviet Relations," 523 – 24.

<sup>443</sup> Blechman, "Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War," 480.

<sup>444</sup> Blechman, "Efforts to Reduce the Risk of Accidental or Inadvertent War," 480. The United States initially proposed a direct communication link between the Pentagon and the Soviet Defense Ministry in 1983. For more on the proposed direct military link, see Dale M. Landi, Bruno W. Augenstein, Cullen M. Crain, William R. Harris, & Brian M. Jenkins, *Improving the Means for Intergovernmental Communications in Crisis*, RAND Corporation, June 1984.

<sup>445</sup> Campbell, "The Future of "Military Diplomacy," in U.S.-Soviet Relations," 520.

control after the outbreak of initial hostilities.”<sup>446</sup> Rather, “state-to-state communication in a crisis should be conducted and coordinated centrally by civilian leaders.”<sup>447</sup>

The enlightened military view, on the other hand, holds that “many inadvertent or small skirmishes could be well contained at an early stage through prompt and timely communications, first between local commanders on the scene and then up the chain of command if necessary.”<sup>448</sup> The rationale behind this view is that it is a much more efficient and timely process, whereas “in the time it takes to assemble and brief a national security team in Washington, a minor misunderstanding that could be cleared up on the scene may escalate.”<sup>449</sup> In the United States, to a large extent, it seems as though the enlightened military view has won: U.S. commanders are trusted with far more autonomy and authority to engage in direct diplomacy than many of their foreign counterparts, though they remain firmly subordinate to civilian authority.<sup>450</sup> The debate in authoritarian countries, however, is much different.

Civilian leaders in the Soviet Union, like China, represent the supreme authority of the state in a much more literal sense than in a democratic state. The balance that authoritarian leaders must strike with the military is in ensuring it is powerful enough to maintain domestic stability and protect the state from foreign aggression, but not powerful enough to threaten the state (i.e., the civilian leadership) itself. It is therefore not uncommon to see military commanders summarily dismissed from their positions (or in some cases, killed) if the central leadership fears they are becoming too powerful.<sup>451</sup> This is as true of the Soviet Union as it is contemporary China or North Korea.<sup>452</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 531.

<sup>447</sup> Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 531.

<sup>448</sup> Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 531.

<sup>449</sup> Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 531.

<sup>450</sup> Derek S. Reveron, ed., *America’s Viceroy: The Military and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Derek S. Reveron, *Exporting Security: International Engagement, Security Cooperation, and the Changing Face of the U.S. Military* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

<sup>451</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 115.

<sup>452</sup> Hyonhee Shin & Josh Smith, “Once inside Kim Jong Un’s inner circle, top aide’s star fades,” *Reuters* (online) November 21, 2017; John Power, “Another Purge in North Korea?” *The Diplomat* (online), February 12, 2016.; Joshua Berlinger & Taehoon Lee, “North Korea punishes top military leaders, South Korea says,” *CNN* (online), November 22, 2017; Adam Ni, “The Death of Zhang Yang and China’s Military Purge,” *The Diplomat* (online), December 2, 2017; “Charting China’s ‘great purge’ under Xi,” *BBC* (online), October 23, 2017; Chris Buckley & Steven Lee Myers, “Xi Jinping Presses Military Overhaul, and Two Generals Disappear,” *The New York Times* (online), October 11, 2017.

The idea of having senior military commanders speaking directly with those of the United States, who the Soviet (and Chinese) government already suspect of attempting to undermine its authority, creates an understandable discomfort. However, this desire, or need, to maintain control over all aspects of decision-making creates inefficiencies which can needlessly exacerbate tensions in the event of a crisis. Lending credence to the enlightened military view, for example, China's insistence on centralized decision-making severely complicated the 2001 EP-3 incident. Given these deeply embedded suspicions, the deepening of the mil-mil relationship between the U.S. and Soviet Union then raises important questions about the mutual rationale behind the military engagement program and what each hoped to achieve.

### *The Rationale for U.S.-Soviet/Russian Military-to-Military Relations*

This section explores the rationale behind the DMAA and U.S.-Soviet/Russian military-to-military relations more generally. I then focus on the Soviet rationale and then the American rationale in more detail. In so doing, the relationship between military-to-military relations, and CBMs more generally, the presence of strategic trust in the bilateral relationship will become clear. Following this analysis on rationale, a more in-depth exploration of the role of trust in the relationship is offered, after which I provide an overview of contemporary U.S.-Russian mil-mil relations.

The primary rationale motivating military contacts between the U.S. and Soviet Union/Russia is that these interactions “provide each side with a unique lens for viewing the other side’s intentions and capabilities, and being seen in return, ensuring each side’s security at a time of international uncertainty.”<sup>453</sup> “Each side wants the other to see it as being defensively oriented, so that an unnecessary and potentially dangerous spiral of conflict and arms racing can be avoided.”<sup>454</sup> Military-to-military relations between strategic rivals such as the U.S. and Soviet Union thus have both reassurance and deterrence motivations. By displaying military capabilities to the other state, you are demonstrating transparency on the one hand, while reinforcing on the other that

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<sup>453</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 602.

<sup>454</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 592.

“defensive intentions are not the same thing as weakness.”<sup>455</sup> This further supports the starting assumption that both the Soviet Union and United States were, fundamentally, security-seeking states.

Transparency by way of the exchange of information (which is fundamentally what CBMs are all about), can also serve an important intelligence collection purpose,<sup>456</sup> providing analysts with a deeper understanding of doctrinal thinking, operating procedures, and other vital information needed to ensure operators and senior policymakers can better predict, and determine, benign from malign acts. For example, the DMAA’s central purpose was to “provide rules and predictability for the game.”<sup>457</sup> This predictability primarily comes from the mutual exchange of information. A vital component of that exchange of information comes from the scheduled, and routine, interactions between military commanders from both sides. These meetings, “especially private meetings between top military commanders,” provide “a forum for participants to raise security concerns with each other that might otherwise go unheeded.”<sup>458</sup> The value of this aspect of U.S.-Soviet/Russian CBMs cannot be overstated.

As Deborah Welch Larson wrote, “Failure to empathize with the other state’s perspective and to understand its security needs can lead to increased hostility and mistrust.”<sup>459</sup> This echoes Booth and Wheeler’s ‘security dilemma sensibility’ concept.<sup>460</sup> Regular meetings provide the opportunity to allow that empathy to develop, as well as be expressed. It is not for nothing that the preamble of the DMAA lists the improvement of relations and deepening of understanding as one of its goals.<sup>461</sup> This does not need to connote any naïveté or idealism regarding the extent to which these meetings can have an impact on the overall strategic rivalry which led to their creation. Indeed, the purpose and value of doing so are perfectly in keeping with realist worldviews and expectations. For example, in March 1983, Senator Carl Levin (D-Michigan) and Senator Sam Nunn (D-

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<sup>455</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 594.

<sup>456</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 595.

<sup>457</sup> Nagle, “The Dangerous Military Activities Agreement,” 143 – 44.

<sup>458</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 590.

<sup>459</sup> Deborah Welch Larson, “Words and Deeds: The Role of Declarations in US-Soviet Relations,” in *Declaratory Diplomacy: Rhetorical Initiatives and Confidence Building*, Michael Krepon, Jenny S. Drezin, & Michael Newbill, eds. The Henry L. Stimson Center, Report No. 27 (April 1999), 51.

<sup>460</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 7.

<sup>461</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 125.

Georgia) proposed that U.S. and Soviet military leaders exchange visits. In their explanation for the proposal, they wrote

We must establish better communications between our respective military leaders to improve mutual understanding of the strategic objectives, forces, warning systems, command and control networks, decisionmaking processes, and the identities and personalities of the actual decision makers themselves.

This is something that must be achieved regardless of Soviet aggressive behavior and, indeed, it is probably more important than ever because of such behavior. While the tensions and hostilities which result from such behavior cannot be avoided, the risk of miscalculation can be. It is just plain common sense to “*know thine enemy*” and make sure *thine enemy knows you*.<sup>462</sup>

Following the Levin-Nunn proposal, fifty-six senators (including Levin and Nunn) sent President Reagan a letter in which they proposed “the establishment of a program of regular exchange visits between high-level U.S. and Soviet military personnel. It was noted in their letter that discussions should be broad in scope, as substantive as possible, and carried out by the military leaders themselves.”<sup>463</sup> To ‘know thine enemy’ and develop understanding and empathy for their concerns is not the same as agreeing with them. It is precisely the obviousness of the common sense that Levin and Nunn make clear that makes it all the more surprising that it took until the last decade of the Cold War for these talks to be established, if even simply for their intelligence-gathering value.

It is also interesting to note that oftentimes these forums are presented in purely practical and technical terms, often by the militaries themselves. For example during the DMAA negotiations, both Crowe and Akhromeyev were “sensitive to potential criticism that the military was becoming involved in political discussions.”<sup>464</sup> To deflect this criticism and enable the negotiations to move forward, “Both men underscored that the intent of the working group was simply to improve the professional relationship so that members of the military forces of the United States and the Soviet Union would be less at

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<sup>462</sup> Quoted in Wade J. Williams, “Expanding the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Military Dialogue,” Chapter 9 in *Preventing Nuclear War: A Realistic Approach*, Barry M. Blechman, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 156. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>463</sup> Williams, “Expanding the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Military Dialogue,” 156.

<sup>464</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 120.

risk when operating in the vicinity of one another in peacetime.”<sup>465</sup> And indeed, that was certainly the central focus of the negotiations and the desired outcome.

However, describing the negotiations, and the outcome (the DMAA) in that way, it detracts from the important role military relations play in the shaping the overall relationship. Marshal Akhromeyev, for instance, stressed his belief that the lack of interaction between U.S. and Soviet senior military officials proved to be a “serious deficiency in the improving relationship between the two superpowers.”<sup>466</sup> The military relationship similarly lags behind the political and economic aspects of the contemporary U.S.-China relationship. Because the military serves as the ever-watchful guarantor of a state’s security, the relationship developed between militaries serves as an important reflection of the political relationship. If there are poor, or non-existent, military ties between strategic rivals, the smiles and glad-handing of politicians’ rings hollow.

Fundamentally, however, the improvement of military relations serves to help both sides “avoid accidental or inadvertent clashes, improve mutual military confidence and to remove dangerous misperceptions.”<sup>467</sup> Once tensions began to subside and the Cold War eventually ended, the goals of the mil-mil relationship expanded to include “building active trust among participants and encouraging common norms of military professionalism.”<sup>468</sup> The realization of these goals, however, remain inhibited by structural issues. For example, while both the United States and Russia have common interests “managing European security and countering terrorism and proliferation,” to say nothing of Russia’s need for “Western trade and development,” there remains a significant degree of suspicion regarding what is perceived as “Western encroachment in their traditional sphere of influence,” leading Moscow to pursue “countervailing alliances against the West, especially the U.S.”<sup>469</sup> It is the perception of Western encroachment,

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<sup>465</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 120.

<sup>466</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 118.

<sup>467</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 114; See also Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 588.

<sup>468</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 583.

<sup>469</sup> Cottey & Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy*, 24. See also Richard Weitz, “Revitalizing U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation: Practical Measures,” *The Adelphi Papers* 45:377 (2005), 78.

particularly in the form of NATO-expansion, that some have argued is the rationale behind recent Russian aggression in Ukraine and Crimea.<sup>470</sup>

However, as Levin and Nunn argued, it is precisely when the relationship has soured that military-to-military contacts and their related CBMs are most valuable. Bruce Allyn echoes the sentiment, writing that “the *worse* the U.S.-Soviet political relationship, the *more* essential it is that mechanisms are at hand for bilateral communications and the like regarding military activities and incidents involving the risk of war.”<sup>471</sup> Military diplomacy thus serves an important purpose during both positive and negative periods in a bilateral relationship. When things are going well, mil-mil relations can help by “removing unhelpful stereotypes, exploring potentially destabilizing doctrinal practices, and building stronger domestic institutions.”<sup>472</sup> When the relationship has soured, mil-mil relations serve the purely practical purposes outlined above: ensuring lines of communication stay open to avoid miscommunication and misperceptions that may lead to inadvertent conflict, and/or to reduce tensions in the event of an incident/crisis. Mil-mil relations therefore serve as an indispensable tool of statecraft, particularly for states engaged in protracted strategic rivalries. It is for that reason that Campbell has described “the establishment and evolution of a superpower military regime based on strictly reciprocal meetings, contacts, and negotiations,” as “one of the most unheralded yet potentially important factors in the future of U.S.-Soviet relations.”<sup>473</sup>

Despite the strong rationale for military-to-military engagement, there are, and were, numerous detractors on both sides. As Zisk notes, “some officials of both the Pentagon and the Russian General Staff viewed these programs as a waste of time, diverting their organizations from their primary missions of preparation for potential future warfare.”<sup>474</sup> Former Chief of the Russian General Staff Viktor Samsonov reportedly referred to mil-mil programs with the U.S. as a “means for undermining the

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<sup>470</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs* 93:5 (September/October 2014), 1 – 12; Mearsheimer, “Don’t Arm Ukraine,” *The New York Times* (online), February 8, 2015; Ankit Panda, “Russia in Crimea: When States Act Out of Insecurity,” *The Diplomat* (online), March 15, 2014.

<sup>471</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 117. Original emphasis.

<sup>472</sup> Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 521.

<sup>473</sup> Campbell, “The Future of “Military Diplomacy,” in U.S.-Soviet Relations,” 519.

<sup>474</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 580.

character and resolve of the Russian officer corps.”<sup>475</sup> As it will be shown below, Samsonov may not have been entirely wrong. There are also practical reasons why pursuing deeper military relations may not be in a state’s interests. One of the primary barriers to early efforts to develop CBMs during the Cold War was the Soviet belief that the United States was primarily interested in espionage.<sup>476</sup>

In an anarchic and uncertain world, there must always be a healthy dose of skepticism regarding the value of an agreement and the motives of the other state(s), particularly in the context of a strategic rivalry. As John Borawski notes, “thresholds will always exist for what sovereign states will prove willing to undertake for the sake of confidence-building in an uncertain world.”<sup>477</sup> Borawski highlights notification measures as being “particularly prone to dissimulation, such as by announcing as routine maneuvers or troop rotations that are in reality preparations for aggression,” citing the 1939 German invasion of Poland and the 1968 Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia as two examples.<sup>478</sup> “Advance notification of “maneuvers,”” he writes, “could amount to a clandestine declaration of war.”<sup>479</sup> These fears continue to cast a shadow on U.S.-Russian relations.<sup>480</sup>

Similar concerns were voiced shortly after the signing of the DMAA. Vincent Feher, writing in the *Harvard International Law Journal*, wrote that the Agreement’s “procedures could be exploited to facilitate intelligence gathering activities, with the parties taking advantage of the assumption that close military encounters were unintentional.”<sup>481</sup> “[T]he Agreement could furnish opportunities for either party to test the other’s military capabilities. A Soviet aircraft, for example, could test the reaction time of an American destroyer secure in the knowledge that the Agreement would constrain its captain to assume that the Soviet aircraft was not hostile.”<sup>482</sup> The Agreement’s central premise that each side is to assume the other is “innocent until

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<sup>475</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 596.

<sup>476</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 118.

<sup>477</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 33 – 34.

<sup>478</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 34.

<sup>479</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 34.

<sup>480</sup> Michael R. Gordon & Eric Schmitt, “Russia’s Military Drills Near NATO Border Raise Fears of Aggression,” *The New York Times* (online), July 31, 2017; David Reid, “Massive Russian military exercise heightens fear of troop build-up on western border,” *CNBC* (online), September 13, 2017.

<sup>481</sup> Feher, “International Agreements,” 337.

<sup>482</sup> Feher, “International Agreements,” 337.



proven guilty thus may prompt more aggressive intelligence gathering.”<sup>483</sup> Interestingly, Feher’s observation mirrors a historically prevalent Soviet attitude towards CBMs, wherein they stress the “negative aspect of the paradox of crisis control, i.e., the fact that every safety measure reducing the risk of a catastrophic accident can be seen as a license to engage in reckless behavior.”<sup>484</sup>

Both Feher and Borawski are quite right – “the risk cannot be erased that CBMs will be deliberately misused for purposes of deception,”<sup>485</sup> or other malign intent. However, the early years of the Cold War demonstrated the risks associated with the alternative: intelligence gathering and acts of deception without communication or agreements in place, resulting in a great many deaths and the ratcheting up of tensions during an already tense period of history. The risk cannot be erased, which is precisely why CBMs are of value – they can *reduce* the overall risk to states by enhancing transparency, predictability, and in turn, confidence. In short, they develop requisite amounts of strategic trust necessary to allow the political dimensions of the relationship to be improved, or at the least, maintained. If there were no risk, trust would not need to be part of the equation. At any rate, “significant individuals on both sides decided that the benefits of military-to-military cooperation outweighed the risks.”<sup>486</sup> In order to better understand why each side reached that conclusion, it is important to examine their respective goals in undertaking closer military-to-military relations.

### *Soviet/Russian Approaches & Objectives*

The Soviet approach is heavily influenced by its Marxist-Leninist ideological roots. To that end, in the Soviet view “The approach to defining CBMs should not be narrowly technical, but widely political.”<sup>487</sup> The way this approach manifested itself was in the pursuit of “declaratory” measures. Borawski characterizes these statements as “measures that amount to little more than pledges of benign intent – ‘instant’ CBMS, as it were.”<sup>488</sup> This dismissiveness reflects the historical American, and indeed Western,

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<sup>483</sup> Feher, ““International Agreements,” 337.

<sup>484</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 122.

<sup>485</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 34.

<sup>486</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 583.

<sup>487</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 118.

<sup>488</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 31.

attitude towards such statements. While the impact of declaratory statements should not be overstated, they are worthy of consideration, if for no other reason than to better understand the U.S.-Soviet CBM dynamic.

The Soviets viewed the “mutual adoption of declaratory principles” as a “primary path to reestablish an overall framework for U.S.-Soviet relations.”<sup>489</sup> As demonstrated in Chapter 6, a similar attitude is readily apparent in China’s approach to CBMs, reinforcing the importance of their Marxist-Leninist ideological foundation. Allyn goes on to explain that “Soviet Marxism, as an ideology of social transformation, contains “magical” elements, i.e., elements that treat a desired condition as if it were already an accomplished fact.”<sup>490</sup> These declarations are not meant to accurately describe the present, “but rather change the factual into the desirable (which in Marxist ideology happily coincides with the historically inevitable).”<sup>491</sup> Allyn notes that while the degree of earnestness with which these declarations were received within the Soviet Union leaned more towards the cynical, “they do significantly reflect the ways Soviets approach problem-solving and social-international change.”<sup>492</sup> Declarations provide “an ethical framework intended to serve as a standard to evaluate proper behavior,” which can “at times, assist in creating an atmosphere conducive to concrete problem-solving.”<sup>493</sup>

An example of this can be seen in the Soviet proposal at the CDE in 1984, where the “centerpiece” was “a treaty on the non-use of force and on the no-first-use of nuclear weapons.”<sup>494</sup> The NATO and neutral and nonaligned countries at the conference did not recognize the Soviet pledges as CBMs because they were “not militarily significant or verifiable,” however then-Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko said that “adoption of either pledge would constitute ‘the greatest accomplishment’ of the Stockholm conference.”<sup>495</sup>

There is more than one way to consider the Soviets preferred use of declaratory statements. The first is to consider it through an ideological lens. This approach certainly makes sense, given the wider historical and cultural context in which it is embedded. The

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<sup>489</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 122 - 23.

<sup>490</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 123.

<sup>491</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 123.

<sup>492</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 123.

<sup>493</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 123.

<sup>494</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 31.

<sup>495</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 31.

Soviet CDE delegate, Igor Andropov, similarly said that to agree on concrete (that is technical) CBMs “outside the framework of a broader political approach would be “to erect a roof when the house still has no foundation on which to build.””<sup>496</sup> From the Soviet perspective, it did not make sense to propose concrete, technical CBMs if you could not even agree to a fundamental characterization of the relationship, even if that characterization is aspirational. As Allyn put it, “the Soviet position is that Western CBM proposals are like efforts to provide answers without addressing a fundamental prior problem.”<sup>497</sup>

In that regard, there is a considerable Soviet attachment to the symbolic value of public declarations. In the ‘magical’ sense, while something may not be true today (like mutual trust between the two superpowers), saying it out loud and repeatedly can help make it true tomorrow. And so, while saying you would not use nuclear weapons first is, of course, not enforceable in a practical sense, it is still a statement of intent that connotes goodwill. It is curious that in the world of politics, where so much is said and so little meant, that there would be resistance to making promises that everyone understands are more style than substance. Regardless, the general Western response to these Soviet declarations was to dismiss them as “pretentious and hypocritical,” and of little practical use.<sup>498</sup>

Another way to consider the Soviet use of declarations is to consider them more practically. Deborah Welch Larson has done just that, demonstrating that declarations serve practical purposes, particularly when domestic politics are considered. To start, declarations do not require the approval or ratification of a legislature,<sup>499</sup> allowing leaders to use their position as a ‘bully pulpit’. This can help “gain public adherence to a policy,” as “undermine opponents of cooperation within a state, making it easier for a leader to continue down the path of conciliation.”<sup>500</sup> Larson notes that the value of a declaration during the Cold War varied greatly. For example, “Some symbolic declarations were inherently credible, and changed adversarial relations by improving the political climate,” to which she cites “statements recognizing the other as a legitimate partner, admitting

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<sup>496</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 120.

<sup>497</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 120.

<sup>498</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 123.

<sup>499</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 1.

<sup>500</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 1, 49.

fault, of identifying shared interests in avoiding war,” as examples that had a “positive impact, without need for further implementation.”<sup>501</sup> Barnet similarly noted a “key to moderating the images of hostility on both sides,” was for “the United States to make it unmistakably clear that the Soviet Union is and will be treated as a legitimate superpower with rights and responsibilities commensurate with those of the United States.”<sup>502</sup> These can be considered primarily status and empathy-related declarations.

Conversely, Larson notes that “Declarations in which the superpowers promised to observe certain general ethics or norms often made relations worse.”<sup>503</sup> “Each state interpreted the language to its own advantage,” Larson writes, “leading to mutual recriminations and blame when neither lived up to the other’s expectations.”<sup>504</sup> In some respects, this reinforces the appropriateness of dismissing overtures such as the Soviets CDE proposal. Larson cites preeminent Soviet expert George F. Kennan, who said that “in dealing with the Soviets it was better ‘to stick to strictly specific agreements which left aside all question of motive and purported only to specify what each of us would do, when we would it, and under what conditions it would be done.’”<sup>505</sup> Accordingly, “Declarations in which a leader proclaimed his government’s desire for peace and cooperation had little impact on the other side, which asked for ‘deeds, not words.’”<sup>506</sup> In this context, ‘deeds, not words’ is simply another way of saying ‘trust, but verify’. This point was not lost on the Soviets.

In addition to favoring declarations, the Soviet approach to CBMs emphasized disarmament and operational constraints.<sup>507</sup> Borawski notes that on some occasions, “the Soviets have proposed CBMs of a much more ambitious scope than the U.S. and NATO measures,” which “tend not to disfavor their authors (to wit, aircraft carrier restraints),” but are “at least conceptually [...] of greater military significance than information exchange and observation/inspection CBMs because they actually do something about potentially threatening activities in an operational sense.”<sup>508</sup> This echoes Soviet foreign

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<sup>501</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 1.

<sup>502</sup> Richard J. Barnet, “Why Trust the Soviets?” *World Policy Journal* 1:3 (Spring 1984), 474.

<sup>503</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 2.

<sup>504</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 2.

<sup>505</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 2.

<sup>506</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 2.

<sup>507</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 118; Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 30.

<sup>508</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 31.

minister Andrei Gromyko, who said, “the Soviet Union favors the prevention of dangers and crisis situations, while the U.S., for its part, proposes merely exchanging information about them.”<sup>509</sup> This is, of course, an exaggeration, as the history of INCSEA and the DMAA make clear. What is important, however, is that despite the U.S. being the actor who often initiated CBM negotiations, the Soviet Union embraced the concept and advanced important proposals of its own. This reinforces the normative aspect of CBMs.

The Soviet approach to CBMs, therefore, was ideological on the one hand, and practical on the other. The Soviets preferred to establish a symbolic foundation for the relationship, even if it was more aspirational than descriptive, which the technical details would then be meant to support. In some respects, this reinforces the position of the Soviet Union as a security-seeking state. It at least wanted to make pretensions towards addressing the fundamental cause of the Cold War, even if was at times less willing to accept concrete measures to address its side-effects. One observer summarized the Soviet approach by saying, “the Soviets will engage in crisis control and prevention, not just passively but actively, when it serves their interest to do so.”<sup>510</sup> This, of course, is saying nothing at all, as it describes the behavior of every great power, including the United States. To better understand the Soviet/Russian approach, it is useful to analyze its goals in more detail.

It is difficult to precisely identify and define Soviet/Russian goals for pursuing closer military relations with the United States because of the lack of official documents released by the government.<sup>511</sup> It is also important to note that while many things changed when the Soviet Union became the Russian Federation, the underlying strategic rationale motivating military-to-military relations has remained fairly constant. There are several reasons for this. The first is that, as noted above, the military-to-military relationship itself did not really take shape in a comprehensive way until the twilight of the Cold War. And so as the Russian Federation took shape, many of the same people occupied senior positions and maintained similar views regarding the benefits of closer military relations with the U.S.

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<sup>509</sup> Quoted in Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 118 – 19.

<sup>510</sup> William Ury quoted in Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 33.

<sup>511</sup> Michael J. McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms: Russian-American Military-to-Military Contacts Since 1992,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9:4 (December 1996), 765.

Another reason is that while the extent of the empire had changed, Soviet/Russian ambitions, and its sense of self in the global context, had not. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow lost its ideological imperative. However, from a structural perspective, its motivation remained. That is, Russia still felt itself to be a great power and wanted to be seen as such. That it was no longer the flag-bearer for international communism was not important. The motivation for status, and the perception that military relations with the United States could help provide it, remained central in Moscow's rationale for maintaining and deepening mil-mil ties with the U.S.

Michael McCarthy, one of the few academics to research and publish about U.S.-Russia military relations, identified three primary objectives for Russia's military engagement with the U.S.: learn through shared experiences and cooperative training; develop a cooperative relationship and promote understanding; and maintain Russia's position as a great power.<sup>512</sup> It is the last objective which best demonstrates the continuity between the Soviet and Russian eras, though with some subtle differences. Moscow's pursuit of status through mil-mil relations had both domestic and international components.

As previously mentioned, "Soviet leaders saw the contact program as a method of proclaiming their power and importance in the world."<sup>513</sup> By having a unique relationship with the world's dominant power, the United States, a measure of status and political influence was conferred on the Soviet Union. There was also an important domestic bureaucratic aspect to the quest for status. When Gorbachev came to power, he sought to implement a range of domestic reforms, commonly referred to as perestroika. In order to execute that vision, Soviet leadership "sought to create a more peaceful diplomatic environment conducive to internal reform."<sup>514</sup> Doing so would "free up economic resources from the military, and bring in additional Western aid and investment."<sup>515</sup> This had two separate but mutually beneficial consequences. The first is that Soviet military leaders reacted to the relative decline of their bureaucratic clout "by seeking to become more active in U.S.-Soviet diplomacy," from which they might regain some influence in

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<sup>512</sup> McCarthy, "Comrades in Arms," 765. McCarthy identified these goals by relying on articles or speeches from senior political and military leaders in Russia.

<sup>513</sup> McCarthy, "Comrades in Arms," 751.

<sup>514</sup> Campbell, "The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities," 115.

<sup>515</sup> McCarthy, "Comrades in Arms," 750.

the Kremlin as a result of their “high-profile dealings with Western interlocutors.”<sup>516</sup> The second is that the political leadership in Moscow similarly saw military-to-military contacts, “specifically in the form of visits by senior military leaders,” as an important element in its efforts to “produce a relatively benign international environment.”<sup>517</sup> This represents the domestic component of the status-rationale.

Whereas during the Cold War, the Soviet Union saw agreements like INCSEA as a means of *affirming* its great power status and equal standing with the United States,<sup>518</sup> the post-Cold War rationale for mil-mil engagement was more about *maintaining* that status. When the Soviet Union collapsed, its international prestige and superpower status collapsed with it – or at the least, came into question. As McCarthy put it, “An empire which had been created through 600 years of conquest and annexation had been reduced almost overnight to a rump state.”<sup>519</sup> “In the international arena,” he writes, “Russia appeared to many to be a defeated power.”<sup>520</sup> This was particularly true of its military, which saw its budget slashed and ships and other hardware literally rust away.

To counter the perception that Russia was no longer a great power, senior policymakers used military-to-military relations as a vehicle for ensuring Moscow still had a seat at the table in international affairs. “Both military and civilian leaders in Russia have explicitly stated that obtaining “voice,” [...] is in fact one of the primary aims of their involvement in military-to-military programs.”<sup>521</sup> Beyond this, however, the military saw active engagement with the U.S. military as an important means of demonstrating its power and status *as* a military. “Joint cooperative exercises and reciprocating unit exchanges create an impression of two equals working together.”<sup>522</sup> The Chinese PLA (People’s Liberation Army) have pursued mil-mil relations with the United States for similar reasons. This represents the international component of the status-rationale.

Similar to the Soviet approach to CBMs, Russian mil-mil objectives are a mix of the practical and the symbolic. And similar to the Soviet approach, the practical

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<sup>516</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 116.

<sup>517</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 750.

<sup>518</sup> As noted elsewhere, “Soviet leaders saw the contact program as a method of proclaiming their power and importance in the world.” McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 751.

<sup>519</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 765.

<sup>520</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 765.

<sup>521</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 590.

<sup>522</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 766.

dimensions are meant to serve the symbolic ones. For example, Russia has used its military relationship with the United States to learn how to prepare a defense budget,<sup>523</sup> and develop its training and use of noncommissioned officers (NCOs),<sup>524</sup> a perennial weakness of the Russian military.<sup>525</sup> Improving its military serves to reinforce Russia's pursuit of status, in terms of recognition from both the United States and the world (particularly those in Russia's immediate periphery). Military-to-military relations serve that end. However, it is also clear that it serves the more foundational purpose of maintaining stability and reducing the risks associated with strategic competition. While Russia is no longer the superpower it once was, it is still one of the United States' primary strategic rivals.<sup>526</sup> Accordingly, it is important to understand the U.S. goals for pursuing military-to-military relations with Russia.

### *The United States: Approaches & Objectives*

The U.S. approach to CBMs and military relations with the Soviet Union, and the objectives it sought, are far easier to identify on account of the U.S. government's transparency (i.e., speeches, official publications, memoirs).<sup>527</sup> The approach itself, as alluded to above, is primarily technical in nature. That is, the U.S. was interested in specifics. As George Kennan said, "specify what each of us would do, when we would it, and under what conditions it would be done." This reflects bureaucratic and cultural differences between the U.S. and Soviet Union. Motivated by their Marxist-Leninist ideological roots, the Soviets preferred declaratory measures as a starting point, and stressed disarmament and an end to 'provocative' actions, such as U.S. surveillance missions in its territorial waters. The United States, conversely, is foundationally a nation built around the rule of law. Laws specify the circumstances and acceptability of

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<sup>523</sup> McCarthy, "Comrades in Arms," 764.

<sup>524</sup> Zisk, "Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties," 590.

<sup>525</sup> Roger McDermott, "Russian Military Plans New NCO Training Center," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6:163 (The Jamestown Foundation: September 8, 2009).

<sup>526</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017*; Department of Defense, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," 2018.

<sup>527</sup> Interesting to note, however, is that far more has been published on U.S. objectives than approaches, whereas the opposite was true of the Soviet Union. This is, perhaps due to the fact that the U.S. approach is taken for granted by U.S. observers, and so the 'important' dimension is the objectives. More critical analyses of the U.S. approach would go a long way to improving our understanding of whether or not mil-mil relations are 'working', particularly in the context of the U.S.-China relationship.



behavior. The approach to CBMs with the Soviets was reflective of this approach for two primary reasons. The first is that it would hold both countries to a similar standard and make clear what was to be done and when, improving predictability and reducing the chances of miscommunication or misunderstanding. And second, as a nation of laws, it is much easier to sign-off on a specific ‘legal’ document than it is a broad declaratory measure. This is especially true if Congress is involved. What is far more interesting with the United States are the objectives.

While improving the overall relationship between Washington and Moscow was of interest, the primary aim was more practical: to ensure the ongoing strategic rivalry did not inadvertently escalate to a nuclear exchange. This approach is reflected in both INCSEA and the DMAA, as well as the numerous arms limitation treaties signed between the two countries throughout the Cold War. That said, it is clear that policymakers in Washington saw military-to-military relations as a means of accomplishing far more. An internal White House memo circulated during the DMAA negotiations lists the following goals for the U.S.-Soviet mil-mil contact program:

- \*To gain greater access to and understanding of the Soviet defense establishment at all levels – policies, doctrines, programs, budgets and capabilities, as well as the outlook, abilities, and relationships of key personalities;
- \*To influence the Soviets to subject their military policy, programs, budget and activity to more openness and honest debate;
- \*To influence Soviet behavior toward our security objectives, both by demonstrating the capability of our forces, and by increasing Soviet understanding of our defense policies, doctrines, programs, and budgets (taking appropriate security precautions);
- \*To reduce the possibility of incidents of dangerous military activity where our forces are operating in close proximity to each other in peacetime; and
- \*To lend support, by means other than negotiations, to U.S. and Allied positions advanced elsewhere in formal negotiations on such issues as arms control, human rights, regional issues, and other topics on our agenda with the Soviet Union.<sup>528</sup>

McCarthy identified similar goals:

- \*To encourage the Soviet Union to develop defensive doctrines, strategies, and operational planning;
- \*To urge the Soviet defense establishment to take steps towards ‘military *glasnost*’ – openness in defense budgets, planning, strategy, and operations;

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<sup>528</sup> The White House, *National Security Decision Directive Number 311*.

- \*To impress upon the Soviets that U.S. security objectives – the protection of the U.S. and its allies, and advancing freedom and democracy – are benign;
- \*To impress upon the Soviets the openness of U.S. defense planning, including the public disclosure of the defense budget and the open congressional review which follows;
- \*To make known to the Soviets the limited role of the military in a free, democratic society; and
- \*To promote better understanding through human contacts between military officials of the two countries at all levels.<sup>529</sup>

These goals carry-over into the post-Cold War mil-mil engagement strategy with Russia, wherein the U.S. seeks to use military contacts “to help secure democratic principles in the Russian government, society, and military,” as well as to “develop a relationship which could be beneficial during actual joint operations against a common adversary,” and “foster understanding between the two military forces to diminish the history of antagonism and preclude potential misunderstandings during crisis situations.”<sup>530</sup>

Within these objectives, we can identify three themes: intelligence collection, deterrence, and diplomacy. Especially with the Soviet Union, the United States was looking to fill information gaps about the Soviet bureaucratic structure and policy process (including its budget), as well as improve its understanding of the people guiding those structures/processes. This highlights two things: the severity of just how ‘closed’ Soviet society was, where even basic information about the military was a closely guarded state secret, and the importance of the exchange of information to confidence. The more information the U.S. had, the more confident it could be about its assessment of Soviet behavior and intentions. As noted above, there is never quite enough information to satisfy the demand, however an accumulation can be accrued which allows for a measured reduction in uncertainty. The less uncertainty, the more predictability and confidence there will be, and therefore the more strategic trust developed in the relationship. Gromyko’s comment that “the Soviet Union favors the prevention of dangers and crisis situations, while the U.S., for its part, proposes merely exchanging information about them,” was not all hyperbole – the U.S. did, and does, place a premium

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<sup>529</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 751 – 52.

<sup>530</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 761. Cottey & Forster (2004, 19-20) note a similar purpose, writing that the “implicit aim of Western defence diplomacy has been to help prevent conflict with Russia and make the country a long-term partner of the West.”

on the exchange of information. After the Cold War, U.S. leaders “have consciously shared previously classified information with Russia through military-to-military institutions in order to demonstrate that U.S. intentions are only defensive.”<sup>531</sup> That is to say, the U.S. sought to “eliminate threat perceptions”<sup>532</sup> through the exchange of information.

The United States also clearly sought to use military-to-military engagement as a tool of deterrence. This is what “influencing Soviet behavior [...] by demonstrating the capability of our forces,” really means. The U.S. sought to impress the Soviets with its highly advanced military capabilities so as to make Moscow think twice about the prospect of conflict. Military-to-military engagement provides a variety of platforms for delivering that not-so-subtle message. However, ‘influence’ is also a primary function of diplomacy, the third theme of the U.S. mil-mil objectives.

Diplomacy is about the art of influence and getting others to accept your goals as their own. However, influence, as Robert Ross told me, is sometimes simply another word for ‘manipulate’, which has a far more malevolent implication. “That’s what diplomacy is for, to manipulate the other side’s view of your intentions.”<sup>533</sup> In the context of military-to-military relations, particularly between the U.S. and Soviet Union/Russia, that means convincing the other that your intentions are as benign as you perceive them to be. Influence in statecraft generally takes the form of either stick or carrot. Deterrence serves the former while diplomacy serves the latter. In military-to-military relations the line can become blurred: a carrot delivered by the stick.<sup>534</sup> The U.S. uses military-to-military relations as a means of conveying its intentions (security objectives), if not to persuade another state to accept them as their own, but to at least rob those other states of their fear of worst intentions. This was certainly the most likely goal of using mil-mil as a means of diplomacy with the Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent Russia. At the least, diplomatic goals also serve as the conduit for managing moments when that fear takes over, such as during an incident or crisis. However, these three themes together represent a greater ambition – and one which critics decry as being too far reaching – to influence

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<sup>531</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 593.

<sup>532</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 593.

<sup>533</sup> Interview with Robert S. Ross, March 16, 2017 via Skype.

<sup>534</sup> Of course, the threat of military force has always been implicit in diplomacy, but using an institution designed to impose/resist violence as the vehicle for diplomacy can make that threat slightly more explicit.

not just the Soviet/Russian military as an institution, but the overall Soviet/Russian government.

As noted above, the notion that military-to-military relations, or even CBMs more generally, can have an impact when it comes to the fundamental political differences between great powers has been met with a large degree of skepticism. As Borowski put it, CBMs, “cannot sweep away deep-rooted suspicions between states of different social systems and perceived ambitions.”<sup>535</sup> This is true to the extent that implementing and abiding by CBMs alone cannot have such a transformative effect; there must be a political desire to improve relations, rather than simply control their negative consequences. In this regard, the Soviet approach towards CBMs was the right one, to the extent of its recognition of the need to address the ‘causes’ of the rivalry rather than just its symptoms.

However, Borowski’s view overlooks the relationship between perception and policy. If the United States could positively influence the Soviet/Russian military to see U.S. strategic aims differently, or to embrace more ‘democratic’ values (i.e., openness, human rights), it could have an impact on the overall relationship. Simply by virtue of reducing the degree of suspicion and uncertainty in a strategic rivalry, the character of the rivalry has changed. Again, to be clear, it does not necessitate the cessation of the rivalry, which is structurally rooted. However, reducing uncertainty and increasing confidence creates the space required for new political solutions to emerge. CBMs and military-to-military relations facilitate the change in perception required to alter the overall relationship. To bear this out, it is worth exploring the role of trust and confidence in U.S.-Soviet/Russian mil-mil relations.

### *Trust & U.S.-Soviet/Russian Mil-Mil Relations*

According to Borowski, “CBMs have little direct bearing on what is ultimately the political question of building ‘trust’ among nations.”<sup>536</sup> “CBMs are not, in other words, a *deus ex machina* whose implementation would automatically allow the West to

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<sup>535</sup> Borowski, “The World of CBMs,” 9.

<sup>536</sup> Borowski, “The World of CBMs,” 9.

‘trust the Russians’ and vice versa.”<sup>537</sup> Jim Hinds similarly remarked that the “issue involved in negotiating CBMs is not trust; we do not trust each other.”<sup>538</sup> This is true to the extent that CBMs are not a panacea that spur ‘automatic’ results. However, Borawski misses the obvious: that CBMs are the means of addressing the political question of building trust. The decision to pursue, negotiate, and abide by a CBM is a political one. And similar to Mearsheimer’s use of the term ‘trust’, Borawski and Hinds seem to imply that trust is synonymous with certainty, or at the least, positive feelings. The fact is that CBMs not only bear directly on the question of trust building, it was an implicit goal of Cold War CBM efforts.<sup>539</sup> More to the point, the issue of trust and trustworthiness lay at the heart of the debate over Cold War CBM efforts. Both skeptics and proponents of mil-mil CBMs are, implicitly or explicitly, discussing trust. This was expressed in a variety of ways, primarily through issues surrounding transparency, confidence, and uncertainty.

As noted above, transparency figures prominently into questions of trust in international relations. The U.S. and the Soviet Union approached the question of transparency differently. Borawski characterizes the Soviets as having “an enduring distaste for ‘transparency,’” noting they preferred “the more ambiguous and subjective term ‘openness.’”<sup>540</sup> As Allyn points out, “Given the openness of Western political systems, the Soviets have less to gain in information exchange than Western states.”<sup>541</sup> This remains true in U.S.-Russian mil-mil relations. For example, The Pentagon does not worry about Russian intelligence gathering during military-to-military activities because, “the exercises conducted are small-scale, because satellite photography and other signals intelligence have already revealed to the Russian side a great deal about U.S. battle tactics, and because access to sensitive areas of military facilities used in exercises can be tightly controlled.”<sup>542</sup> This bears directly on the concept of trust and the bureaucratic/societal contexts in which it must be built.

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<sup>537</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 9.

<sup>538</sup> Jim E. Hinds, “The Limits of Confidence,” Chapter 12 in *Avoiding War in the Nuclear Age: Confidence-Building Measures for Crisis Stability*, John Borawski, ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), 197.

<sup>539</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 588; Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 2; McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 763.

<sup>540</sup> Borawski, “The World of CBMs,” 30.

<sup>541</sup> Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 120.

<sup>542</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 595.

From a U.S. perspective, the Soviet Union was a “‘closed society,’ whose decision-making process is entirely concealed.”<sup>543</sup> American diplomat and once-Ambassador to the Soviet Union Averill Harriman noted, “You cannot be friendly with the communists the way you can with the British or other Westerners. Their basic loyalties and conceptions are completely different.”<sup>544</sup> From a Soviet perspective, conversely, the U.S. was “seen as a politically unstable partner to implement agreements with the Soviet Union either because the Congress refuses to ratify them or because the political winds shift and the administration changes policy.”<sup>545</sup> This perception of the U.S. carries over into contemporary U.S.-China relations.<sup>546</sup> Accordingly, as Barnett notes, the “very nature of the two political systems feeds distrust.”<sup>547</sup> In order to counteract that fact, mechanisms must be put in place to facilitate the exchange of information on common terms, with common understandings. This is the function and purpose of transparency.

The fundamental problem when discussing transparency – and it is a problem that persists – is that, similar to trust, it is a term used without specificity as to its meaning. To say the Soviets prefer ‘openness’ to transparency suggests a specific understanding of what transparency entails. However, the details of that understanding remain unknown. Transparency, in the context of CBMs and military-to-military relations, is primarily about the exchange of information that allows each side to improve confidence and reduce uncertainty. In its most basic sense, transparency is about providing both sides with the “ability to display their capabilities and intentions while monitoring the capabilities and intentions of the other side.”<sup>548</sup> By extension, it is about the perception of intention and providing each side with enough information to base that perception on facts rather than suspicions or assumptions. For example, the DMAA created “transparency about the immediate intentions of the military forces of the two sides during their daily tasks.”<sup>549</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Barnett, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 469.

<sup>544</sup> Quoted in Williams, “Expanding the U.S.-U.S.S.R. Military Dialogue,” 158.

<sup>545</sup> Barnett, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 469 – 70.

<sup>546</sup> Several of my interview subjects echoed similar perspectives on the U.S. when describing the Chinese view of the United States and mil-mil CBMs.

<sup>547</sup> Barnett, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 470.

<sup>548</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 580.

<sup>549</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 582.

Akhromeyev considered mil-mil relations “a means of reassurance,” writing that “I decided to set forth the military-technical side of our doctrine and to clarify it in the hopes of reducing the anxiety of the American military leaders.”<sup>550</sup> General Butler saw mil-mil relations, and the DMAA in particular, similarly, saying, “we really were dealing with something here that was extremely serious: . . . deeply rooted suspicions about intentions.”<sup>551</sup> The ‘innocent until proven guilty’ provision of the DMAA, for example, was put in place to enable both sides to “avoid the perception of hostile intent.”<sup>552</sup> The avoidance of that perception is only possible with the exchange of information and the familiarity that regular contact breeds, creating context for those interpreting the actions.<sup>553</sup> And so “Whether the end result is reassurance about each side’s defensive intentions or warning about their disappearance,” military-to-military relations serve practical goals.<sup>554</sup> This is particularly true when the relationship is strained, as it helps avert a worst-case outcome. It is precisely this understanding – the reassurance, the attempt to clarify intentions through the mutual exchange of information and familiarity through regular contact – that translates into trust, when appropriately understood.

Richard Barnet remarked that “The United States has concluded more than 100 treaties with the Soviet Union. In general, the record of Soviet performance has raised no doubts about Soviet trustworthiness.”<sup>555</sup> By ‘trustworthiness’, Barnet is referring to the confidence the U.S. could have that the Soviet Union would do what it had agreed to do. Its deeds matched its words. “[T]rust already is and will remain a crucial aspect of U.S.-Soviet relations,” wrote Barnet.<sup>556</sup> But that does not suggest that the United States ‘trusted’ the Soviet Union in any absolute sense. The trust is contingent and contextual. It is *strategic* trust – an expression of contingent confidence. That each state is pursuing its self-interest is fine. What is required is sufficient information to feel confident that you know what the other state’s interest *is*, and that there is a pattern of behavior that

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<sup>550</sup> Quoted in Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 593.

<sup>551</sup> Quoted in Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 592.

<sup>552</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 126.

<sup>553</sup> McCarthy writes that the success of mil-mil in an operation sense “hinges on mutual trust, effective communications and interoperability, and doctrinal familiarity, precisely the results we seek from ongoing military-to-military contacts.” McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 763.

<sup>554</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 602.

<sup>555</sup> Barnet, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 480.

<sup>556</sup> Barnet, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 466.

conforms to that assessment. Accordingly, as Barnet writes, “The question that political leaders, scholars, and the public should be asking [...] is not ‘Can we trust the Russians?’ – for clearly we already do and must – but ‘In what way is it prudent for us to trust them, for what, and how far?’”<sup>557</sup>

In other words, Barnet is referring to the contingent and contextual application of trust. Why pursue agreements with operational restrictions and the exchange of information, with an ultimate goal of altering negative perceptions, if you did not ‘trust’ the other state? To say the U.S. and Soviet Union were only ‘trusting’ the self-interest of the other does not diminish the concept in any way. If anything, it reinforces the central argument that each was fundamentally a security-seeking state and that the extent of mutual negative perception owed more to structural pressure and a lack of information and understanding about the other. For the United States to consider that the Soviet Union viewed the relationship similarly, and that both sought to pursue its self-interest without causing a war in the process.

The pattern of interaction that leads to the creation and maintenance of strategic trust outlined in Chapter 2 – cooperation creates predictability, predictability creates confidence, confidence creates trust – is clearly visible throughout both U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian military-to-military relations, including the CBMs which govern them. It is not for nothing that the “Russian language equivalent for CBMs can be inversely translated into English as ‘trust-strengthening measures.’”<sup>558</sup> In order to assess the success of these efforts, a brief account of contemporary U.S.-Russia military-to-military relations is appropriate.

### *U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Relations: 1992 – Present*

In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, there was a degree of mutual hope in the possibility that the Russian Federation might become “another strategic partner of the United States.”<sup>559</sup> On the back of that optimism, U.S.-Russian military relations were able

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<sup>557</sup> Barnet, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 466.

<sup>558</sup> Tuzmukhamedov, ““Sailor-Made,” Confidence Building Measures,” 69; See also Allyn, “Soviet Views of CBMs,” 117.

<sup>559</sup> Weitz, “Revitalizing U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation,” 78. See also: Steven E. Miller. “Russian-U.S. Security Co-operation on the High Seas,” Chapter 14 in *The Limited Partnership: Building a Russian-U.S.*



to expand in both scope and depth. Visits by senior military leaders, port calls, and unit exchanges all increased throughout 1992 and 1993, however, “without structure, the contacts would remain on the level of ‘military tourism’, and the opportunities offered by the contacts would be lost.”<sup>560</sup> To rectify this problem, Russian President Boris Yeltsin and U.S. President William Clinton agreed to “broaden the interactions between their two countries, specifically in the areas of defense and security,” during an April 1993 meeting in Vancouver, Canada.<sup>561</sup> The relationship between the U.S. and Russia was no longer one of strategic rivalry, but instead one described by Yeltsin and Clinton as a “strategic partnership.” Following a series of negotiations between the Russian Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), the two countries signed the *Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation on Defense and Military Relations* on September 8, 1993.<sup>562</sup> The Memorandum is credited with codifying, or “institutionalizing” the military-to-military program.<sup>563</sup>

The Memorandum mandated a series of senior-level visits, including

- \*Russian Minister of Defense and U.S. Secretary of Defense (annually);
- \*Senior officials of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Office of the Secretary of Defense;
- \*Chief of the GRU (Russian military intelligence) and the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency;
- \*Chief of the General Staff and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff;
- \*Staff officers of the General Staff and Joint Staff, and Service staffs (annually);
- \*Counterpart Commanders-in-Chief (CINC) and Service Chiefs.<sup>564</sup>

Similar to INCSEA and the DMAA, the Memorandum established a Bilateral Working Group to “coordinate the proposed activities, and [...] determine each year which activities would be conducted during the following calendar year.”<sup>565</sup> It is unclear whether these meetings happened, or continue to happen, as mandated. However, McCarthy notes that “both parties believe these visits are very beneficial, even if they do

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*Security Community*, James E. Goodby and Benoit Morel, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 249 – 271.

<sup>560</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 753.

<sup>561</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 753.

<sup>562</sup> The Memorandum was signed by Russian Minister of Defense General Pavel Sergevich and U.S. Secretary of Defense Les Aspin.

<sup>563</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 754; U.S. Department of State, “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Russian Economic Relations/Military Issues,” June 7, 1995.

<sup>564</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 754 – 55.

<sup>565</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 754.

not result in specific agreements,” suggesting that these meetings occurred with some regularity for at least a few years.<sup>566</sup> The uncertainty surrounding the follow-through of the Memorandum speaks to a larger issue mentioned above: the availability of information.

When it comes to assessing the growth or success of the U.S.-Russia mil-mil engagement program, there is sparse information available, with most of what is available consisting of what has been planned, rather than what has actually been carried out. For example, consider the information in Table 3, which lists projected engagement activities to the extent I was able to get information. Readily available information confirming that the projected activities took place is unavailable; of the seven entries in Table 3, the only one that can be confirmed was 2012. The issue of access to information is made further apparent below, when discussing more recent bilateral military-to-military agreements.

The U.S.-Russia military engagement program consists of a variety of activities, at least on paper. As noted above, there are port calls, senior-level visits, educational exchanges, and a degree of unit exchanges, joint exercises, and joint operations. For example, the U.S. Army participated in a joint exercise, codenamed Peacekeeper-94, in Totskoye, Russia in 1994, which was held again in Kansas the following year (Peacekeeper-95). It is worth noting that the official joint mission statement for Peacekeeper-95 cited as its first major goal, “to develop a relationship based on mutual trust and better understanding of each other,” and “enhance military cooperation and trust between the United States and the Russian Federation, with long-term implications for world peace and stability.”<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 755.

<sup>567</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 594.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Projected # of Activities</b>
1988 - 1990	2 – 3 per year <sup>568</sup>
1995	34 activities <sup>569</sup>
1996	40 – 50 per year <sup>570</sup>
1997	“over 100 scheduled.” <sup>571</sup>
1998	“in the dozens.” <sup>572</sup>
2009	“nearly 20 exchanges and operational events” <sup>573</sup>
2012	“more than 70 exercises and operations” <sup>574</sup>

To some degree, the Peacekeeper exercises foreshadowed the joint peacekeeping operations in Bosnia, wherein Russia participated alongside U.S. forces “in the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilization Force (SFOR) [...] under United Nations auspices, which continued even after NATO air strikes in Kosovo began.”<sup>575</sup> While that was certainly a positive development in the bilateral relationship, Russia’s involvement in peacekeeping operations did not come without a measure of drama. For example, in 1999, there was a showdown between British forces, operating under the auspices of NATO, and Russian forces over control of Pristina airport.<sup>576</sup> The Russians had arrived first, though the airport had been earmarked by NATO for its central headquarters in Kosovo. Though the incident was eventually resolved through high-level discussions, it nearly resulted in an armed confrontation between U.S.-led NATO forces and Russia.<sup>577</sup>

<sup>568</sup> Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 126.

<sup>569</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 754.

<sup>570</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 767.

<sup>571</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 2.

<sup>572</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 583.

<sup>573</sup> John J. Kruzal, “U.S., Russia Resume Military Relations,” *American Forces Press Service*, July 6, 2009.

<sup>574</sup> Jim Garamone, “Security Relies on Partnerships, Cooperation, Official Says,” *American Forces Press Service*, November 15, 2013.

<sup>575</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 581.

<sup>576</sup> It should be noted that Operation Joint Endeavor, the peacekeeping operation which saw Russia and the U.S. operate side-by-side, had officially ended in December 1996; afterwards, Russia continued to operate as part of K-FOR, the NATO led mission, however only while in sectors under NATO control; they were not directly under NATO command, and operated independent peacekeeping operations elsewhere in the country.

<sup>577</sup> *BBC News* (online), “Confrontation over Pristina airport,” March 9, 2000; Patrick Wintour & Ian Traynor, “Russian and British troops in tense Pristina stand-off,” *The Guardian* (online) June 13, 1999.

The educational exchange component serves as a useful example for demonstrating the limitations of the post-Cold War military engagement program. Though it exists on paper, it has never really been used as intended. For instance, there is an agreement in place to facilitate exchanges between the Russian General Staff Academy and the U.S. National Defense University, however the exchanges have been mostly one sided. While Russian military officers and civilians have trained in U.S. military schools, “the Russian side has been slow to open its military schools to Americans.”<sup>578</sup> One of the major obstacles to the education program is Russian suspicion and attitudes. For example, Zisk notes that Russian nationalists within Moscow’s “state security apparatus” and government, “believe that the U.S. is trying to undermine Russian autonomy and to influence Russian domestic politics, and they see military-to-military education programs as evidence of this attempt.”<sup>579</sup> Similar beliefs held by Russian nationalists nearly derailed the Peacekeeper-94 exercises, which was delayed for several months “under pressure from nationalists who feared American intentions.”<sup>580</sup>

As noted above, the belief that the United States sees military engagement as a means of influencing the Russian military establishment, and by extension Russian government and society more generally, is not misplaced. Indeed, the International Military Education and Training (IMET) Program, the U.S. program which oversees educational exchanges, notes the direct correlation it sees between English language training and democratization. English language training “increases rapport between students and their U.S. counterparts, promoting important relationships which provide for U.S. access and influence in a sector of society which often plays a critical role in the transition to democracy.”<sup>581</sup> However, the result this belief has is that participating in these exchanges is often a quick path to career suicide for Russian officers.<sup>582</sup> The consequence is that “those officers who will likely have the most impact on Russian civil-military relations in the future are mid-level personnel with great potential for

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<sup>578</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” 586; See also McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 757. The current status of the exchange program is unclear.

<sup>579</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 1.

<sup>580</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 2.

<sup>581</sup> Quoted in McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 758.

<sup>582</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 758.

advancement who are the least likely to volunteer to attend such programs.”<sup>583</sup> A similar issue exists in contemporary U.S.-China military relations.

Despite a somewhat checkered pattern of success, the legacy of these early efforts continues to be seen in more recent years. On May 24, 2002, the U.S. and Russia signed *The Joint Declaration*, declaring that the relationship “should be based on friendship, cooperation, common values, trust, openness, and predictability, so that they may respond to new challenges and threats and thus contribute to creating a peaceful, prosperous, and free world and to strengthening strategic security.”<sup>584</sup> It would seem that a decade or so after the Cold War, Washington lost its aversion to declaratory statements that are more optimistic than realistic. Similarly symbolic, 2003 marked “the first time U.S. military aircraft were on public display in Russia,” when the U.S. sent a handful of aircraft to participate in the Moscow International Air show.<sup>585</sup> After landing their B-52 bomber, Russian air force Colonel Magomed Tolboev told the visiting U.S. aircrew that, “Everyone in the world was afraid of the B-52. It was a symbol of the Cold War. Now that it’s here on Russian ground on such a beautiful, sunny day, it’s a great symbol of our friendship.”<sup>586</sup> Though participating in an airshow has no operational value, it speaks to the more general value that increased interaction has on altering perceptions. “It enhances the military-to-military relationships between our two countries,” said U.S. European Command’s Robert Moore during a 2005 Moscow air show visit, “and it supports U.S. security cooperation policies with Russia.”<sup>587</sup>

In 2007, Russia sent two Tu-95 bombers to the Pacific for the first time since the end of the Cold War to shadow a large U.S. military exercise off the coast of Guam. Russian Major-General Pavel Androsov said that after U.S. jets were scrambled in response, the Russian and American pilots “exchanged smiles.”<sup>588</sup> Similar to the rationale that precipitated so many of the naval incidents preceding the signing of INCSEA,

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<sup>583</sup> Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Transparency and U.S.-Russian Military Ties,” 1.

<sup>584</sup> Oleksandr Gladkyy, “American Foreign Policy and U.S. Relations with Russia and China after 11 September,” *World Affairs* 166:1 (Summer 2003), 5.

<sup>585</sup> *American Forces Press Service*, “U.S. Military Set to Take Part in Moscow Air Show,” August 12, 2005. The DoD first participated in the airshow with a technology booth in 2001.

<sup>586</sup> Quoted in *American Forces Press Service*, “U.S. Military Set to Take Part in Moscow Air Show.”

<sup>587</sup> Quoted in Mona Ferrell, “U.S., Russia Strengthening Ties Through Moscow Air Show,” *American Forces Press Service*, August 17, 2005.

<sup>588</sup> Quoted in Anne Penketh, “Russia shows its muscle; Strategic bombers sent to shadow US military exercise,” *Canberra Times*, August 11, 2007.

Russia's air force chief of staff Lt.-General Igor Khvorov "said the West would have to come to terms with Russia asserting its geopolitical presence."<sup>589</sup> The 2007 incident is particularly noteworthy, as it marks the first time Russian bombers 'buzzed' a U.S. military base since the end of the Cold War.<sup>590</sup> Androsoff referred to the mission itself as the revival of a tradition of flying far afield to meet U.S. aircraft carriers and greet pilots visually.<sup>591</sup>

The structural incentive for Russia to act remains as prevalent today as it was during the Cold War. Just as the Soviet Union used naval harassment as a means of demonstrating the 'arrival' of its newly modernized and capable navy, the resurgence of Russian 'aggression' around this time can be interpreted as a "desire to show that its armed forces have recovered from the decline in the penurious 1990s, when planes were frequently grounded because the air force could not pay its fuel bills."<sup>592</sup> Said another way, Russia was once again looking to assert its military presence as a means of obtaining, or maintaining, status. Accordingly, the potential for incidents and inadvertent crises remains, underscoring the importance of developing and maintaining CBMs to govern behavior and interactions between the U.S. and Russia.

Russia's return to Cold War-era military 'traditions' in 2007 was quickly followed by a low-altitude pass over the USS *Nimitz* carrier battle group by another Tu-95 bomber in February 2008.<sup>593</sup> At the time, the *Nimitz* carrier group was participating in a training exercise in international waters several hundred miles south of Tokyo. Similar to the Guam fly-by, the 2008 incident marked the "first time that such a low pass has taken place since the Cold War ended."<sup>594</sup> Shortly after, the U.S. suspended military cooperation with Russia in response to the Russian-Georgian war that occurred over the course of five days in August 2008. They would not resume until July 6, 2009, after the signing of a "strategic framework agreement."<sup>595</sup> The U.S. CJCS, Admiral Mike Mullen,

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<sup>589</sup> Penketh, "Russia shows its muscle."

<sup>590</sup> Adrian Blomfield, "Russian planes buzz U.S. base in Cold War throwback; American jets intercepted bombers," *The Calgary Herald*, August 10, 2007. The bombers buzzed the U.S. military base on Guam.

<sup>591</sup> Blomfield, "Russian planes buzz U.S. base in Cold War throwback."

<sup>592</sup> Blomfield, "Russian planes buzz U.S. base in Cold War throwback."

<sup>593</sup> Kevin G. Hall, "Russian jet flew low over Nimitz task force, U.S. confirms," *Knight Ridder Washington Bureau*, February 12, 2008. The bomber flew below 3000 feet.

<sup>594</sup> Hall, "Russian jet flew low over Nimitz task force, U.S. confirms."

<sup>595</sup> John J. Kruzal, "U.S., Russia Resume Military Relations," *American Forces Press Service*, July 6, 2009.

and General Nikolai Makarov, chief of the General Staff, signed the agreement which saw the restoration of a joint commission on prisoners of war and servicemembers missing in action, as well as a fairly comprehensive military engagement program. The agreement called for “nearly 20 exchanges and operational events before the end of 2009, including a strategic discussion between the U.S. Joint Staff and the Russian General Staff,” as well as a joint naval war game, several educational exchanges (both Russian visits to U.S. institutions), and a planned joint exercise to respond to a hijacked aircraft.<sup>596</sup> The official White House statement noted the “special responsibility” the U.S. and Russia share for ensuring global peace and stability. “Re-establishing our military-to-military bonds will enhance transparency, establish clear paths of communication, and focus our collective efforts on today’s global strategic challenges.”<sup>597</sup> For example, the U.S. and Russia cooperated on anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia. The White House statement also characterized the framework agreement as one that would “raise military cooperation to a new level and deepen mutual understanding between our respective armed forces.”

Building on this momentum, in September 2010, the U.S. and Russia signed another Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) meant to replace the “outdated” 1993 MOU highlighted above.<sup>598</sup> Signed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, the MOU also created a defense relations working group which would meet annually “to resolve issues in armed forces reform and transformation, defense policy priorities and national security, transparency and confidence-building, and regional and global security.”<sup>599</sup> Shortly after, however, two “submarine hunter” Ilyushin-38 jets from Russia’s Pacific Fleet interfered in a U.S.-Japan joint military exercise, circling “the biggest ever joint U.S.-Japanese military exercise for several hours.”<sup>600</sup> Japan called it “an unprecedented show of force,”<sup>601</sup> though it seems given the presence of only two jets that the characterization is rather overstated.

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<sup>596</sup> Kruznel, “U.S., Russia Resume Military Relations.”

<sup>597</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “United States-Russia Military to Military Relations,” July 6, 2009.

<sup>598</sup> Brahmand.com, “Russia, US ink MoU to boost military cooperation,” September 16, 2010.

<sup>599</sup> Brahmand.com, “Russia, US ink MoU to boost military cooperation.”

<sup>600</sup> Andrew Osborn, “Russian jets spy on Japan-US war games,” *The Daily Telegraph* (London), December 9, 2010.

<sup>601</sup> Osborn, “Russian jets spy on Japan-US war games.”

In March 2011, Secretary Gates addressed mid-level naval officers from the Kuznetsov Naval Academy at the State Russian Naval Museum, where he cited common security challenges, a “deepening military-to-military relationship,” and the will to expand cooperation as drawing the U.S. and Russia closer together to face “emerging issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>602</sup> In addition to cooperation on distribution networks into Afghanistan, Gates said, “the militaries exchange best practices and strategies for training, educating and caring for troops; defense technologies such as ways to counter homemade bombs; logistics, such as efforts along the northern distribution network [in Afghanistan]; and maritime cooperation, including counterpiracy efforts.”<sup>603</sup> “The two militaries always have learned from each other,” said Gates, “even in less cooperative times.”<sup>604</sup>

In May 2016, the U.S. and Russian militaries participated in military exercises in Colorado, involving special operations forces from both states and with a focus on counterterrorist scenarios. It was reported as the “first joint U.S.-Russian military exercises on American territory,” though given the Peacekeeper-95 exercise, it is unclear why it was characterized that way.<sup>605</sup> Just a few months later, a Russian Akula-class nuclear attack submarine sailed undetected in the Gulf of Mexico for weeks, only being discovered after it had already left.<sup>606</sup> It was reportedly the second time since 2009 that a Russian submarine sailed close to the U.S., and came at the same time that Russian bombers flew within restricted U.S. airspace.<sup>607</sup>

Continuing the pattern of progress and incidents, in 2013 the U.S. and Russia established CBMs “intended to promote transparency and enhance strategic stability by reducing tensions caused by threats to and in the use of ICTs [Information and

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<sup>602</sup> Cheryl Pellerin, “Gates: Common Challenges Deepen U.S.-Russian Ties,” *American Forces Press Service*, March 21, 2011.

<sup>603</sup> Pellerin, “Gates: Common Challenges Deepen U.S.-Russian Ties.”

<sup>604</sup> Pellerin, “Gates: Common Challenges Deepen U.S.-Russian Ties.”

<sup>605</sup> *RadioFreeEurope*, “First Ever Joint Russian-U.S. Military Training on American Territory,” May 16, 2012.

<sup>606</sup> *Progressive Media – Company News*, “Russian nuclear submarine visits Gulf of Mexico undetected,” August 14, 2012.

<sup>607</sup> *Progressive Media – Company News*, “Russian nuclear submarine visits Gulf of Mexico undetected.”



Communication Technologies].”<sup>608</sup> This demonstrates that though the relationship is subject to the ebbs and flows of a continuing strategic rivalry (even if one considerably less pronounced than the Cold War), the political leadership in Moscow and Washington recognize the need to develop CBMs to address potentially disruptive technologies and continue to build on the foundation lay during the Cold War. The ICT CBM involved the creation of a new working group dedicated to assessing emerging ICT threats and proposing “concrete joint measures to address them,” as well as the sharing of threat indicators between the U.S. Computer Emergency Readiness Team, located in the Department of Homeland Security, and its Russian counterparts.<sup>609</sup> The CBM also included the authorization to establish a direct “secure voice communications line between the U.S. Cybersecurity Coordinator and the Russian Deputy Secretary of the Security Council.”<sup>610</sup>

The U.S. and Russia also engage in multilateral military exercises, such as *Vigilant Eagle*, with Canada, which started in 2008, or *Northern Eagle*, with Norway, which began in 2004 as a bilateral exercise with the U.S. and Russia but expanded to include Norway in 2008. *Northern Eagle*, a biannual exercise, was cancelled in 2014 in response to Russia’s military operations in Ukraine. The exercise has not yet resumed. *Vigilant Eagle* was similarly suspended in 2014. As a direct response to Russian military operations in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, as well as tensions surrounding mutual military engagement in both Syria and Libya, U.S.-Russia relations have fallen back into a familiar pattern of tension and mutual suspicion.

Russia has increased its long-range patrols near North American borders, from the Arctic Ocean to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, though U.S. officials have sought to play down their importance. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said, “In the current situation we have to maintain military presence in the western Atlantic and eastern Pacific, as well as the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico,” as well as to conduct “reconnaissance missions to monitor foreign powers’ military activities and maritime

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<sup>608</sup> The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Joint Statement on the Inaugural Meeting of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission Working Group on Threats to and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Context of International Security,” November 22, 2013.

<sup>609</sup> The White House, “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Russian Cooperation on Information and Communications Technology Security,” June 17, 2013.

<sup>610</sup> The White House, “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Russian Cooperation on Information and Communications Technology Security.”

communications.”<sup>611</sup> Pentagon spokesman Colonel Steve Warren, conversely, said Russia has a right to fly in international airspace, so long as it conducts “their operations safely and in accordance with international standards.”<sup>612</sup> However, the Pentagon’s measured response likely has more to do with wanting to stifle Russia’s attempts at signaling. General Philip Breedlove, then-NATO’s supreme allied commander in Europe, said that he believed Russia is “messaging us that they are a great power.”<sup>613</sup> Other analysts have come to similar conclusions, believing that the increase in Russian operations is meant to “prove to Western powers that Russia remains a global power, is not in retreat, and cannot be pushed around.”<sup>614</sup> Once again, Russia is using provocation as a means of asserting status. The important takeaway is that during their encounters, both Russian and U.S. pilots are “acting responsibly” and adhering to agreed upon rules of communication and interaction.<sup>615</sup>

2014 marks an important turning point in contemporary U.S.-Russia military relations. In response to Russian military operations in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, a provision in the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) strictly limited the Pentagon’s ability to work with Russia. This has “severely limited” talks between the two countries, however an emergency communications line was established in October 2015 “to ensure that the two nations’ pilots do not mistakenly run into – or fire on – each other in their bombing runs over Syria.”<sup>616</sup> The communication line connects a Russian-speaking U.S. Colonel based in Qatar with their Russian equivalent in Syria; there are three scheduled calls per week, though in practice the two speak daily, “often multiple times.”<sup>617</sup> The *Syria Deconfliction Agreement (SDA)*<sup>618</sup> is the most modern and obvious version of a Cold War-style CBM between the two countries, in that

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<sup>611</sup> *Guelphmercury.com*, “Russia’s bombers to conduct regular patrols, ranging from the Arctic to the Gulf of Mexico,” November 13, 2014.

<sup>612</sup> Howard LaFranchi, “What is Vladimir Putin up to sending Russian bombers close to the US?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 13, 2014.

<sup>613</sup> LaFranchi, “What is Vladimir Putin up to sending Russian bombers close to the US?”

<sup>614</sup> LaFranchi, “What is Vladimir Putin up to sending Russian bombers close to the US?”

<sup>615</sup> LaFranchi, “What is Vladimir Putin up to sending Russian bombers close to the US?”

<sup>616</sup> W.J. Hennigan, “White House opens door to military cooperation with Moscow, but it would be illegal,” *LA Times* (online), January 23, 2017.

<sup>617</sup> Thomas Fear, “Regional Imperative: Why we need the Syria Deconfliction Agreement,” *European Leadership Network*, April 12, 2017.

<sup>618</sup> The official name of the Agreement is the Memorandum of Understanding on Prevention of Flight Safety Incidents in the course of operations in the Syrian Arab Republic.

its primary purpose is to avoid inadvertent conflict or escalation. In addition to technical specifications governing distances between aircraft operating over Syria, the SDA also includes a video conference between senior Pentagon officials and their Russian counterparts held every six to eight weeks. Russia temporarily suspended the SDA in response to U.S. strikes against the Syrian government on April 7, 2017, however the agreement was back in effect by early May 2017.

In addition to the tensions over Syrian airspace, recent years have also seen an increase in the number of incidents at sea. On April 12, 2016, a Russian jet is reported to have flown only 50 feet from the wing tip of a U.S. aircraft, and a day earlier, two Russian Su-24 jets flew close to the USS *Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea. Video of the *Donald Cook* incident was posted to YouTube,<sup>619</sup> and pictures were released to news outlets (see Figure 3). While Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said the Russian pilots wanted to take a look at the USN destroyer “from a safe distance,” it was reported that the jets flew approximately 100 feet vertically and 30 feet laterally from the deck of the ship;<sup>620</sup> the photographic and video evidence confirms those reports. Another report described the behavior of the Russian jets as “simulated attack passes,” and “one of the most aggressive interactions in recent memory.”<sup>621</sup> Admiral Mark Ferguson, commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe, said “We had radio calls in both English and Russian and the aircraft didn’t respond and proceeded on a course directly at the ship.”<sup>622</sup> “While we had seen these interactions before,” he continued, “this one was different because of the proximity to the ship, and the altitude and the flight path that it took.”<sup>623</sup> Importantly, the Russian jet did not turn on its radar and was not armed, which “may have contributed to the decision by the *Donald Cook*’s commander not to respond.”<sup>624</sup> Once again, it was behavior not seen since the Cold War. U.S. Admiral John Richardson said “I don’t think

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<sup>619</sup> For example, see: [youtu.be/e-pLgvJULOM](https://youtu.be/e-pLgvJULOM); [youtu.be/5deRj1umjM0](https://youtu.be/5deRj1umjM0), [youtu.be/y8D48itR2cg](https://youtu.be/y8D48itR2cg), [youtu.be/vkkCZwiENh8](https://youtu.be/vkkCZwiENh8).

<sup>620</sup> Deb Riechmann, “Navy Boss: Russian Jets Should Stop Buzzing US Planes, Ship,” *Associated Press*, May 2, 2016; Jim Sciutto, “Top Navy official: Russian sub activity expands to Cold War level,” *CNN* (online), April 19, 2016.

<sup>621</sup> Phil Stewart, “Russia jets make ‘simulated attack’ passes near U.S. destroyer, U.S.,” *Reuters*, April 13, 2016.

<sup>622</sup> Quoted in Sciutto, “Top Navy official: Russian sub activity expands to Cold War level.”

<sup>623</sup> Quoted in Sciutto, “Top Navy official: Russian sub activity expands to Cold War level.”

<sup>624</sup> Helene Cooper, “Close Encounters With Jets Show Russia’s Anger at NATO Buildup, U.S. Says,” *The New York Times* (online), May 8, 2016.

the Russians are trying to provoke an incident. I think they're trying to send a signal.”<sup>625</sup> The signal is that “they see that we are there in the Baltic,”<sup>626</sup> historically claimed by Moscow as territorial waters. Echoing Gerald Ford’s response to similar Soviet naval harassment, Secretary of State John Kerry said the *Donald Cook* could have opened fire.<sup>627</sup>

**Figure 3: USS *Donald Cook* Incident, April 2017<sup>628</sup>**



On April 29, 2016, shortly after the *Donald Cook* incident, a Russian Su-27 jet “conducted a barrel roll,” over a U.S. RC-135, a slow-moving surveillance plane, as it flew a reconnaissance mission over the Baltic Sea.<sup>629</sup> The Su-27 reportedly got within fifty feet of the RC-135. The aerial maneuver was described by U.S. officials as “unsafe

<sup>625</sup> Quoted in Riechmann, “Navy Boss: Russian Jets Should Stop Buzzing US Planes, Ship.”

<sup>626</sup> Riechmann, “Navy Boss: Russian Jets Should Stop Buzzing US Planes, Ship.”

<sup>627</sup> Though importantly, Ford had said the USN *should* have opened fire. Riechmann, “Navy Boss: Russian Jets Should Stop Buzzing US Planes, Ship.”

<sup>628</sup> Phil Stewart, “Russia jets make ‘simulated attack’ passes near U.S. destroyer, U.S.,” *Reuters*, April 13, 2016.

<sup>629</sup> Riechmann, “Navy Boss: Russian Jets Should Stop Buzzing US Planes, Ship.”

and unprofessional,”<sup>630</sup> which usually indicates a violation of agreed upon behavior. The Russian Defense Ministry responded by saying, “The U.S. Air Force has two solutions. Either not to fly near our borders or to turn the transponder on for identification.”<sup>631</sup> U.S. officials said the transponder had been on.<sup>632</sup> Obama administration officials “said they interpreted Russia’s statement as a demand that the United States stay out of the Baltics,” a which would not be accepted by the U.S.<sup>633</sup> This was simply the most recent in a series of encounters between Russian jets and U.S. RC-135 aircraft, with previous incidents reported in April 2015 and August 2014.<sup>634</sup>

In June 2016, the USS *Gravelly*, escorting an aircraft carrier in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, came within close proximity of the *Yaroslav Mudry*, a Russian frigate that had been shadowing the carrier group. A few days later, the *Mudry* came within 150 yards of U.S. aircraft carrier the USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* while it was conducting flight operations, a particularly dangerous time to interfere.<sup>635</sup> A year later, on June 20, 2017, a Russian Su-27 is said to have flown within five feet of the wingtip of a U.S. RC-135, once again over the Baltic Sea.<sup>636</sup> While U.S. officials deemed the Russian pilots actions “unsafe” due to the “high rate of closure speed and poor control of the aircraft,” Russia responded by saying the U.S. plane had made a “provocative” move.<sup>637</sup> It also reported that a NATO F-16 jet flew close to a plane carrying the Russian defense minister before being “chased away” by a Russian Su-27.<sup>638</sup> In a repeat of the RC-135 incident, on January 29, 2018, a Russian Su-27 intercepted a U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane over the Black Sea at a distance of five feet,<sup>639</sup> video footage of which was released by the U.S.

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<sup>630</sup> David Axe, “Look Out, America: A Russian Su-27 Barrel-Rolled Over a U.S. Aircraft,” *The National Interest* (online), April 17, 2016.

<sup>631</sup> Cooper, “Close Encounters With Jets Show Russia’s Anger at NATO Buildup, U.S. Says.”

<sup>632</sup> Cooper, “Close Encounters With Jets Show Russia’s Anger at NATO Buildup, U.S. Says.”

<sup>633</sup> Cooper, “Close Encounters With Jets Show Russia’s Anger at NATO Buildup, U.S. Says.”

<sup>634</sup> In April 2015, a Su-27 nearly collided with an RC-135 near Kaliningrad; in August 2014, Russian jets “acted so aggressively around one RC-135 that the American crew actually fled,” accidentally crossing into Swedish airspace in the process. Axe, “Look Out, America.”

<sup>635</sup> Kulesa, Frear, & Raynova, “Managing Hazardous Incidents in the Euro-Atlantic Area,” 9.

<sup>636</sup> Zachary Cohen & Ryan Browne, “Russian fighter jet flies five feet from US spy plane,” *CNN* (online) June 20, 2017.

<sup>637</sup> *BBC* (online), “Russian jet ‘flies 5ft from US spy plane’ over Baltic Sea,” June 21, 2017.

<sup>638</sup> *BBC*, “Russian jet ‘flies 5ft from US spy plane’ over Baltic Sea.”

<sup>639</sup> Ryan Browne & Zachary Cohen, “Russian jet flies within 5 feet of US Navy plane, Pentagon says,” *CNN* (online), January 29, 2018.

government.<sup>640</sup> More than 30 interactions between U.S. and Russian planes and ships were reported in the Baltic Sea during the month of June, 2017.<sup>641</sup>

The U.S. has also reported that Russia is deploying its ballistic missile and attack submarines “in numbers, range and aggression not seen in two decades,”<sup>642</sup> as well as an increase in Russian aerial patrols off the U.S. West Coast.<sup>643</sup> As one observer remarked, “These incidents have increased only as political relations between the United States and Russia become more strained.”<sup>644</sup> This serves as an important reminder of the limitations of CBMs and military-to-military relations more broadly. While they *can* serve to help alter perceptions and impact the wider political relationship, they are fundamentally about security management. That is, creating a sufficient amount of strategic trust to help avoid miscalculation and misperception, and respond to crises should they arise. This was the stated rationale behind a February 2017 meeting in Azerbaijan between current CJCS General Joe Dunford and Russian General Valery Gerasimov, where the two leaders agreed to “enhance communications on such stabilizing measures,” to improve the operational safety of military activities “in order to decrease the prospects for crisis and avoid the risk of unintended incidents.”<sup>645</sup> Military-to-military contacts between Russia and the U.S. are vital to “establish and reinforce procedures for us to talk in case we have an incident where we need to exchange information rapidly.” More importantly, however, the familiarity born out of regular interaction helps ensure that the information being exchanged is placed in an appropriate context. That context is a representation of strategic trust, even amongst rivals. The meeting was the first at that level since January 2014, revealing the breakdown in routine face-to-face meetings between senior military officials.

Despite the ups and downs in the relationship, “The military-to-military contact program has become a hallmark of current Russian-American relations, and it is seen by

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<sup>640</sup> 2018 EP-3 Black Sea Incident video footage: <https://youtu.be/DI7Qh9Ph1DA>; [https://youtu.be/uC\\_joSQzYcs](https://youtu.be/uC_joSQzYcs)

<sup>641</sup> *BBC*, “Russian jet ‘flies 5ft from US spy plane’ over Baltic Sea.”

<sup>642</sup> Sciutto, “Top Navy official: Russian sub activity expands to Cold War level.”

<sup>643</sup> Tom Vanden Brook, “Threat from Russian and Chinese warplanes mounts,” *USAToday* (online), May 22, 2016.

<sup>644</sup> Fahey, “Will Russia Dial Back the Incidents at Sea?”

<sup>645</sup> Jim Garamone, “Dunford Meets Russian Counterpart to Strengthen Mil-to-Mil Contacts,” *DoD News*, February 16, 2017.

both governments as one of the most positive developments in their post-Cold War relationship.”<sup>646</sup> On a more operational level, “strong relationships have developed between subordinate commands in each military,” such as between the U.S. Pacific Command and Russia’s Pacific Fleet.<sup>647</sup> It is not surprising that naval commands would be the service branch most likely to develop such relationships, given their operational nature. Navies are far more likely to interact on a regular basis than armies, for example. Perhaps more importantly, “most naval exercises are out of public view and therefore less subject to scrutiny.”<sup>648</sup> However, McCarthy points out that “Even when in public view, naval military-to-military contacts, such as port calls, are seen in a relatively benign manner.”<sup>649</sup> “Port calls have historically been a diplomatic method of improving relations between nations – until the era of modern communications, naval officers served as *de facto* representatives of their nations.”<sup>650</sup> All the same, the first port call by Soviet and American ships did not occur until 1975, when two Soviet ships visited Boston and then two U.S. ships ported in Leningrad.<sup>651</sup>

If Russia (and China) choose to use aggressive interceptions and other behavior generally characterized as ‘harassment’ as a vehicle for sending signals to the U.S. (i.e., assertion of presence and sovereignty, and/or status), no amount of mil-mil activity or CBMs can stop them. Similarly, mil-mil relations can improve familiarity and ease tensions, but they cannot override structural and material realities, or the imprint those realities leave on the institutions tasked with ensuring a state’s safety. For instance, Cottey and Forster note that the Russian Ministry of Defence “remains an essentially military institution, with at best limited civilian control of policy, and the senior Russian military remains one of the more conservative, anti-Western forces within the Russian policy-making elite.”<sup>652</sup> Accordingly, “A decade of Western military outreach has not yet persuaded many Russian decision-makers, especially in the military, that the U.S. and

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<sup>646</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 743.

<sup>647</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 754.

<sup>648</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 767.

<sup>649</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 767.

<sup>650</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 756.

<sup>651</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 756; Campbell, “The U.S.-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities,” 113.

<sup>652</sup> Cottey & Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy*, 23.

NATO are not a threat.”<sup>653</sup> On a wider scale, “it is impossible to judge whether the military-to-military contact program is having any effect on the acceptance of democratic principles within the Russian society or the Russian military,”<sup>654</sup> though all evidence would suggest any impact has been minimal.

There was a similar skepticism from U.S. military officials interviewed for this dissertation with respect to China, with one official telling me he was skeptical of the idea that mil-mil relations would in any way change China’s view of the U.S.<sup>655</sup> To a certain extent, the same is true in reverse. That is because CBMs and mil-mil relations more generally are only part of the equation when a state is determining threat. Particularly, they addresses the important issue of intent. However, the other side of the coin is capability, which for defense planners has pride of place. When the U.S. was working on improving military relations with the Soviet Union, for instance, military leaders were, “eager to expand the program, but were suspicious of Soviet intentions and the future of the Soviet military,” because they could not be sure of the intentions of future Soviet leadership.<sup>656</sup> And so, “capabilities counted more than intentions.”<sup>657</sup>

Given the persistent uncertainty in the international system, a concern for capability is only prudent. While Russia, or China, and the U.S. may improve military-to-military relations and enter into formal CBMs to reduce that uncertainty and place capabilities into an appropriate context, if either state is seen developing capabilities that U.S. officials interpret as being designed to counter its own capabilities, suspicion will remain. Of course, the same is true in reverse, and also applies to actions deemed detrimental or challenging to the existing world order. For example, China’s land reclamation project in the South China Sea, or Russia’s alleged support for the Taliban in Afghanistan.<sup>658</sup> This is the unavoidable security dilemma, or as Booth and Wheeler more aptly describe it, a “security paradox.”<sup>659</sup> As Barnett put it, “the security of the United

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<sup>653</sup> Cottey & Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy*, 22.

<sup>654</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 764.

<sup>655</sup> Interview March 6, 2017, Alexandria, Virginia.

<sup>656</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 751.

<sup>657</sup> McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” 751.

<sup>658</sup> *Reuters*, “China’s land reclamation in South China Sea grows: Pentagon report,” August 21, 2015; Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “Russia is sending weapons to Taliban, top U.S. general confirms,” *The Washington Post* (online), April 24, 2017; Sune Engel Rasmussen, “Russia accused of supplying Taliban as power shifts create strange bedfellows,” *The Guardian* (online), October 22, 2017.

<sup>659</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 9.



States cannot be improved by inducing greater insecurity in the Soviet Union, and vice versa,”<sup>660</sup> and yet each unilateral effort to improve one’s own security invariably had that exact effect. The same dynamic is at play with in both U.S.-Russia and U.S.-China relations, though the uncertainty is far more pervasive with the latter dyad due to China’s rapid rise in the political, economic, and military spheres. While Russia remains a strategic rival of the United States, only China has the potential to become a peer competitor of the United States, making the U.S.-China strategic rivalry a structurally different challenge. That said, the preceding analysis on U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian military-to-military relations makes clear that though they differ in important ways from the U.S.-China relationship, there are many important similarities.<sup>661</sup>

### *History Doesn’t Repeat Itself, But It Does Rhyme...*

While parallels between the two are often drawn, authors, policymakers, and politicians alike are quick to point out that the United States and China are not in a Cold War.<sup>662</sup> And this is certainly true. The Soviet Union and the United States were engaged in an overt, hostile relationship. Lines were drawn, alliances and pacts were formed, and the risk of full-scale violence erupting between the two sides was ever-present. The United States and China, conversely, are strategic competitors – perhaps even rivals – but the relationship is defined neither by amity nor enmity.<sup>663</sup> Rather, the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and China is a mix of cooperation and competition; the balance between the two is subject to debate, as is the tenor of the competition. This is precisely what is at stake when debating China’s rise and the future of U.S.-China relations. If the two sides cannot successfully manage the competitive aspects of their relationship, a slide towards enmity is the likely outcome, and with it the increased chance of great power war – or at the least, another Cold War.

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<sup>660</sup> Barnett, “Why Trust the Soviets?” 473.

<sup>661</sup> Others have made similar comparisons, for example Redden & Saunders, “Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions.”

<sup>662</sup> For example, during a 2012 address to cadets at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Hillary Clinton said, “Today’s China is not the Soviet Union. We are not on the brink of a new Cold War in Asia.”

<sup>663</sup> A strategic rivalry would be one defined by more hostile competition and zero-sum outcomes, whereas strategic competition is the inescapable *modus operandi* of great power relations, with careful attention paid to ensuring ‘wins’ don’t come at great expense to others. During the Clinton presidency, China was referred to as a ‘strategic partner,’ however once George W. Bush took office, this was changed to ‘strategic competitor’. This shift reflects the growth of China’s power during that period of time and the impact that growth had on the tenor and context of the bilateral relationship.

Where the prospects for war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. was discussed in terms of *probability*, similar prospects between the U.S. and China are more often described in terms of *possibility*. That is to say, during the Cold War, the possibility of war was so great that it was simply a question of probability, whereas the probability of war between the U.S. and China is so low that it is a question of possibility. While a seemingly semantic distinction, the difference is important for both practical and theoretical reasons. Conversely, as the two largest economies, the U.S. and China are closely interdependent through bilateral trade and other economic connectivity. By extension, they are interconnected through the independent, but overlapping, relationships each has with other powerful economic and military powers (i.e., the European Union, Japan, Russia). This creates constraints by increasing the costs of going to war, not only to themselves but to other influential actors upon whose cooperation they would rely to win.

More fundamentally, however, the U.S. and China have a fairly robust set of common interests, the most important of which is global stability. China requires a stable regional and global environment to continue its economic growth, which in turn finances its extensive military modernization program. Moreover, the Chinese government prizes domestic stability, which is also predicated on economic growth. The United States seeks to maintain systemic stability for economic reasons, but also because if the international system is stable, so is its position as the dominant power. This common interest in maintaining international stability manifests in different areas, including climate change, humanitarian assistance, global health/pandemic response, counter-terrorism, and to some extent nuclear proliferation. And while China remains a communist country (in name, anyways), the ideational competition is not a factor in U.S.-China relations as far as the strategic dynamic is concerned.<sup>664</sup> Add to this an acute awareness on both sides of the devastation that would follow a conventional or nuclear war between the two, and the rationale for going to war diminishes – namely, there would be little to gain and lots to

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<sup>664</sup> That said, the tension that exists between America's desire to spread democracy (including to China), and the Chinese Communist Party's desire to retain control over Chinese society *does* negatively impact bilateral relations and mutual perceptions. Marxist thought also continues to play an important role in shaping China's military doctrine and foreign policy. Some observers, including several of the people I interviewed for this project, feel too little attention is played to the ideological dynamic of China's foreign policy interests and motivations.

lose. In that regard, the Cold War, as it existed, is truly over, calling into question the utility of drawing comparisons between U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-China relations.

Theoretically, the difference between the *possibility* and the *probability* of war between the U.S. and China is even more significant. When it comes to analyzing the military/security dimensions of the relationship, the theoretical lens most often applied is realism. However, the conclusions drawn from that theoretical analysis differs substantively depending on which version of realism is applied. For offensive realists like John Mearsheimer, the mere possibility of defection or hostile action by another compels states to pursue security-seeking behavior; this is the only way to ensure survival in an anarchic system. Accordingly, Mearsheimer predicts war between the U.S. and China is an inevitability.<sup>665</sup> For defensive realists, conversely, predictions of state behavior are driven by the *probability* of an action. For example, while it is possible the United Kingdom could use its nuclear arsenal against the United States, it is not probable, and so U.S. policy towards the U.K. does not reflect the potential of that threat. This probable/possible distinction then becomes important when drawing comparisons between historical examples because it directly relates to expectations of state behavior.

While the U.S. and China share considerable mutual interests, there is also a high-degree of competition, particularly in the military sphere. China is undergoing an extensive military modernization process. The technologies and capabilities it is pursuing, mixed with the opacity of the Chinese government with respect to its overall strategic ambitions, drives the insecurity that creates the potential for a negative outcome, such as a new Cold War. These distinctions are explored in more detail in Chapter 6, however what is of immediate relevance is the logic of drawing comparisons between U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-China relations despite these substantial practical and theoretical differences. Even though the bilateral dynamic and the threshold for war between the U.S. and China differs substantively from that between the U.S. and Soviet Union (hostile v. competitive, possible v. probable), there are important similarities that make U.S.-Soviet military relations the most appropriate reference for understanding U.S.-China military relations and the applicability of CBMs, the most important being a

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<sup>665</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*; Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm."

structurally driven, protracted strategic competition between the world's two most powerful (and nuclear capable) states.

There are also similarities with respect to patterns of interaction and the motivation behind them. As noted above, similar to the initial onslaught of naval incidents during the Cold War, incidents between the U.S. and China have increased as China has modernized and developed its naval capabilities, operating further afield and thereby interacting more often with the USN. Similar to the Cold War, the vast majority, if not all, of U.S.-China incidents occur in (or above) waters that Beijing consider to be its historical territory. China is also a nascent superpower and is eager to be recognized as such, particularly by the U.S. Accordingly, the motivation for status is present in U.S.-China relations.<sup>666</sup>

There is also a structural similarity, at least rhetorically, which is often overlooked. As Larson notes, within Marxist-Leninist ideology, there is a “thesis on the inevitability of conflict between capitalist and socialist worlds.”<sup>667</sup> In this regard, the concept of an inevitable conflict framing the overall strategic rivalry is similar to the popular ‘Thucydides Trap’ narrative that seems to dominate the U.S.-China literature. Furthermore, there is an important lesson to be drawn from the temporal aspect of the U.S.-Soviet experience. Though the Cold War began in the late 1940s, the U.S. and Soviet Union did not establish an official line of communication until 1963. They would not sign a CBM agreement until almost a decade later. And they would not engage in high-level military diplomacy until the final decade of the Cold War. The takeaway for those assessing contemporary U.S.-China military relations is that overcoming the systemic and cultural (and ideological) barriers to improved relations takes time, and progress must be measured in an appropriate context. As it will be made clear in the following chapters, those analyzing mil-mil relations between the U.S. and China often expect those relations to have had a perceptible and transformative impact on China's behavior. The U.S.-Soviet/Russian examples provide an important historical example against which progress with China might be appropriately measured. Lastly, and most importantly, contemporary U.S.-China military relations are based directly on the U.S.

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<sup>666</sup> For example, see: Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (1<sup>st</sup> edition), (Cambridge: Cambridge UP), 2008.

<sup>667</sup> Larson, “Words and Deeds,” 6.

experience with the Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent, Russia. With a foundation for comparison now firmly established, it is possible to analyze U.S.-China military relations in an appropriate context.

## CHAPTER 5: U.S.-CHINA MILITARY RELATIONS

### Introduction

In 2015, prominent think tank analyst P. W. Singer and former *Wall Street Journal* defense industry reporter August Cole published their novel *Ghost Fleet*. Blending real world technologies and geopolitical trends with fiction, *Ghost Fleet* describes a not-too-distant future where the U.S. and China go to war. The book was widely praised by academics and practitioners for its realistic imagining of the conflict, with retired U.S. Navy Admiral James Stavridis calling it “A startling blueprint for the wars of the future.”<sup>668</sup> It even made its way onto the ‘recommended reading lists’ of every branch of the U.S. military.<sup>669</sup> Early in the book, a character named Vice Admiral Wang Xiaolian returns to the Yulin Naval Base on Hainan Island, the real-life home to many of China’s nuclear submarines, after a trip to the United States. Speaking to one of his aides about his uninspiring trip, Admiral Wang says, “All the American admirals want is yet another ‘strategic dialogue,’ which betrays their inability to decide what they really want as a nation, and of us.”<sup>670</sup> It is a particularly insightful, albeit pithy, characterization of a U.S.-China military-to-military relationship riddled with ambiguity and varying degrees of uncertainty. In that respect, the U.S.-China mil-mil relationship serves as a microcosm of the wider bilateral relationship, defined by both cooperation and competition and a sensitivity to the structural context in which it exists.

To demonstrate just how apt the *Ghost Fleet* reference is, this chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship, from 1979 – 2016. The history details the broad contours of the relationship and its rhythms throughout the years of the mil-mil relationship, providing the necessary context for the subsequent analysis.<sup>671</sup> I break the history down into four distinct eras, characterizing

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<sup>668</sup> ‘Reviews,’ *Ghost Fleet* official website; See also: Eric Michael Murphy, “Reading ‘Ghost Fleet’ is a Mistake,” [www.realcleardefense.com](http://www.realcleardefense.com), July 30, 2015.

<sup>669</sup> Dan De Luce, “A Novel About War With China Strikes a Chord at the Pentagon,” *Foreign Policy* (online), May 15, 2016.

<sup>670</sup> P.W. Singer & August Cole, *Ghost Fleet: A Novel of the Next World War* (Boston: First Mariner Books, 2016), 24.

<sup>671</sup> The historical overview is, unavoidably, U.S.-centric. Available resources on this subject are rather sparse, and from a Chinese perspective (especially in English), practically non-existent. To help provide balance, the following section focuses explicitly on China’s perspective on mil-mil relations.

each with respect to the evolution of the relationship during that time. In the process, I establish that more progress has been accomplished than is commonly perceived. More importantly, it reinforces the importance of temporal context when evaluating progress in later chapters.

### *A (Brief) History of U.S.-China Military Relations from 1979 - 2016*

Richard Nixon famously reestablished contact with China in 1972, however it was not until 1979 that relations between the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC) was officially normalized. Since 1979 and the normalization of relations, the military-to-military relationship, and the rationale behind it – on both the parts of China and the United States – has shifted. The ebbs and flows of the relationship can be thought of as four distinct eras. The first era, 1980 – 1989, is considered the halcyon period in U.S.-China military relations<sup>672</sup> – a highpoint that has not, and arguably cannot, be repeated because the structural conditions that motivated it (the Cold War) have changed. The second era, 1993 – 2001, was a ‘feeling out’ period characterized by numerous stops and starts as the two states wrestled with their own strategic future and each other's. It was a period of time that held the most promise for creating a firm foundation for future military (and bilateral) relations but was marred by a series of incidents and missteps that deepened mutual suspicions. The third period, 2002 – 2011, marked a noticeable maturation in the relationship mostly driven by China's rapid economic, political, and military growth and America's search for stability and cooperation as it waged two wars and managed a global economic crisis. The fourth and final period, 2012 – 2016, is far more intentional and purposeful than previous years, owed in large part to Chinese President Xi Jinping's determination to commit to the stability and improvement of the military-to-military relationship, and the Obama administration's ‘renewed’ interest in engaging with China and the Asia-Pacific more broadly. In all four periods, the relationship's development was circumscribed by structural conditions.

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<sup>672</sup> David M. Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation: Retrospective and Future Prospects*. (Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), September 2010), 8.

*The Wonder Years: 1980 – 1989*

Much like the Nixon administration's decision to pursue rapprochement in the early 1970s, the decision to pursue a defense relationship with China was "clearly influenced by balance-of-power theory."<sup>673</sup> Following normalization, President Carter issued *Presidential Review Memorandum 24*, which concluded that U.S. arms sales to China would worsen U.S. relations with Moscow and would therefore require further review.<sup>674</sup> Shortly after, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski went to Beijing and said the U.S. would be willing to share intelligence and would not object to third-party arms sales, "such as those being contemplated by Great Britain and France."<sup>675</sup> During a visit by Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping in early 1979, the two sides discussed USN port visits to China, as well as plans for a joint monitoring facility in western China to monitor Soviet compliance with arms control agreements and the possibility of U.S. arms sales to China.<sup>676</sup> In January 1979, the U.S. opened a Defense Attaché Office at the new embassy in Beijing.<sup>677</sup> However, before the defense relationship could develop any momentum, the U.S. Congress passed the *Taiwan Relations Act* (TRA), which required the United States to provide Taiwan with arms to bolster its defense against mainland China. In protest, Beijing effectively froze further development on the military-to-military relationship.<sup>678</sup> The nascent Sino-American military-to-military relationship was off to an inauspicious start.

In December 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, reinvigorating debate within the U.S. defense establishment about closer ties with China to counter Soviet aggression.<sup>679</sup> James Blaker, who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Policy from 1983 – 1986, told me there was also a considerable amount of

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<sup>673</sup> Monte R. Bullard, "The US-China Defense Relationship," *Parameters* 13:1 (March 1983), 43.

<sup>674</sup> Christopher D. Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," in *Conflict and Cooperation in Sino-US Relations: Change and Continuity, Causes and Cures*, Jean-Marc F. Blanchard & Simon Shen, eds. (London: Routledge, 2015), 205.

<sup>675</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 205.

<sup>676</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 205.

<sup>677</sup> Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, RL32496, (June 19, 2012), 13.

<sup>678</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 206.

<sup>679</sup> Mark Kjorness, *U.S.-China Military Relations: Unstable, But Not Impossible*. USAWC Strategy Research Project, (US Army War College, March 2011), 3.



concern regarding China's relationship and borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan.<sup>680</sup>

The decision to pursue closer security and defense ties with China has been contentious from the start. In October 1981, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Congressional Research Service convened a workshop on "The Implications of U.S.-China Military Cooperation." While the 12 workshop attendees came to a consensus regarding the value of limited arms sales to China, such as antitank missiles, they also agreed that Washington should be "extremely wary in developing extensive military ties with China."<sup>681</sup> Reasons for the apprehension varied, but were generally centered around the inability of policymakers to predict future Chinese or Soviet behavior – in short, the U.S. could not trust China to be a reliable long-term partner. There was also concern that close military ties would prompt a strong response from Moscow, as well as alienate other Asian countries vital to American interests.<sup>682</sup>

Ultimately, the Carter administration agreed to "establish a ground station in China for the purposes of receiving data from Landsat satellites<sup>683</sup> and to sell transport aircraft, military helicopters, and communications equipment, while the Chinese agreed in principle to sell arms to the anti-Soviet mujahideen in Afghanistan."<sup>684</sup> In January 1980, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown went to Beijing to "publicly begin the security dialogue,"<sup>685</sup> during which he first proposed military-to-military cooperation between the U.S. and China.<sup>686</sup> Brown's visit was reciprocated later that year by Chinese Defense Minister Geng Biao.<sup>687</sup> (Among Geng's entourage was a young Xi Jinping, acting as

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<sup>680</sup> Interview with James Blaker, March 21, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>681</sup> U.S. Government, *The Implications of U.S.-China Military Cooperation*. A Workshop Sponsored by the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, and the Congressional Research Service, (Library of Congress, January 1982), iv.

<sup>682</sup> U.S. Government, *The Implications of U.S.-China Military Cooperation*, vi.

<sup>683</sup> The \$11 million sale of the ground-tracking station "provided the components of a permanently orbiting communications satellite that enhances the PRC's tracking and nuclear target-acquisition capabilities." A. James Gregor. *Arming the Dragon: U.S. Security Ties with the People's Republic of China*. (Washington, D.C., Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987), 107.

<sup>684</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 206.

<sup>685</sup> Bullard, "The US-China Defense Relationship," 43.

<sup>686</sup> Carlyle A. Thayer, "Enhancing Transparency? U.S.-China Military-to-Military Contacts and Strategic Dialogues," 6<sup>th</sup> Berlin Conference on Asian Security, conference paper, June 2012, 4.

<sup>687</sup> Jingdong Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled: Sino-US Military Exchanges, 2001 – 2016*, (Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), January 2017), 21.

Geng's staff secretary.)<sup>688</sup> Defense attaché offices were also established at the Chinese embassy in Washington.<sup>689</sup>

During these early years, “genuinely warm friendships developed between the representatives of both sides, and much of the doubt and misunderstanding fostered by 30 years of isolation was reduced.”<sup>690</sup> Perhaps sensing U.S. uncertainty about deepening the military-to-military relationship, particularly as it concerned arms sales and technology transfers, Chinese interlocutors frequently brought up the role China played in maintaining a balance of power against the Soviet Union, “as if to rationalize for the Americans why the United States should support China.”<sup>691</sup> To drive the point home, the Chinese “stressed that they were tying down 50 Soviet divisions along the Sino-Soviet border, divisions that might otherwise be deployed opposite NATO forces.”<sup>692</sup> It seemed to have the desired effect. In April 1980, China was “removed from the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) category as a Warsaw Pact country and given its own category,” which allowed for the case-by-case sale of certain (largely nonlethal) equipment to China.<sup>693</sup> The Department of Defense and Department of Commerce issued export licenses for numerous dual-use items and military equipment to China, including C-130 transport planes, Chinook helicopters, and “high-speed computers for geophysical analysis and mapping.”<sup>694</sup> By 1981, the ban on arms sales to China was completely lifted.<sup>695</sup>

The Reagan administration, however, was skeptical of the value of military-to-military relations with China, and under the direction of Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, the Department of Defense “immediately vetoed sales involving technology transfers.”<sup>696</sup> Shortly after taking office, the Reagan administration also announced its intention to sell “military spare parts and equipment,” to Taiwan, causing the mil-mil

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<sup>688</sup> Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 21.

<sup>689</sup> Kenneth W. Allen & Eric A. McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, Report 32, (The Henry L. Stimson Center, October 1999), 71.

<sup>690</sup> Bullard, “The US-China Defense Relationship,” 43.

<sup>691</sup> Bullard, “The US-China Defense Relationship,” 43.

<sup>692</sup> Bullard, “The US-China Defense Relationship,” 43-44.

<sup>693</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 206.

<sup>694</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 206.

<sup>695</sup> Thayer, “Enhancing Transparency?” 4.

<sup>696</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 206.

relationship to stall.<sup>697</sup> By summer 1982, the Reagan administration's policy softened when the two countries signed the third U.S.-PRC joint communiqué, "in which the administration promised to gradually reduce arms sales to Taiwan and work toward a thorough settlement of the arms sale issue."<sup>698</sup> In 1983, Weinberger visited China, during which the United States agreed "for the first time to sell military equipment and (defense) weapons and technologies," to China.<sup>699</sup> This visit "signaled the rise of military interaction to a new level," based on three pillars Weinberger announced during his visit: high-level visits, working-level exchanges, and military-technology cooperation.<sup>700</sup> These pillars would serve as the foundation for U.S.-China defense relations throughout the 1980s, during which there were "numerous high-level visits, functional exchanges, technology exchanges, and arms sales, averaging about two to three U.S. military trips to China per month."<sup>701</sup>

The mil-mil relationship began to pick up momentum, with USN ships making port visits to Qingdao and the U.S. Air Force aerial demonstration team, the Thunderbirds, visiting Beijing. The DoD also provided the PLA "with copies of different regulations, documents and manuals, covering everything from training to personnel management to guiding documents for certification of aircraft parts manufacturing."<sup>702</sup> The value of this exchange was more than symbolic. For example, the U.S. military provided the PLA with copies of "Field Manual 100-5, *Air-Land Battle*," which the PLA then used "in their own experimentation with combined arms operations."<sup>703</sup> In 1984, China became eligible for Foreign Military Sales status, though the Reagan administration "limited the weapons systems it made available to the PLA to four categories that were considered to meet the 'defensive' criterion: artillery and

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<sup>697</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 206.

<sup>698</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 206.

<sup>699</sup> David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 331.

<sup>700</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, 72; Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 13. 'Working-level exchanges' are also sometimes referred to as 'functional exchanges' and include things like logistics, maintenance, military medicine, training, doctrinal theory, military education, and professional management. The purpose of these exchanges was to 'enhance the PLA's institutional capacities' (Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 6, 8).

<sup>701</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, 72.

<sup>702</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, 72.

<sup>703</sup> Kevin Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2004), 44.

ammunition; antitank missiles; air defense; and antisubmarine warfare.”<sup>704</sup> However, as the PLA sought a wider range of equipment and technology, and U.S. defense contractors lobbied the White House and Pentagon to relax the restrictions, the Reagan administration expanded the criteria.<sup>705</sup>

Between 1985 and 1987, “the U.S. agreed to four government-to-government weapon sales under the Foreign Military Sales program.”<sup>706</sup> These sales included a

\$505 million “Peace Pearl” project, undertaken by the Grumman Corporation to upgrade the avionics in the PLAAF [People’s Liberation Army Air Force] J-8 fighter, a \$22 million program undertaken by Hamilton/Bulova to upgrade the PLA’s artillery shells and large-caliber ammunition, a \$62 million project undertaken by the Hughes Corporation to build four counter-battery radars and train PLA personnel to use them,<sup>707</sup> an \$8 million sale of Honeywell [Mk 46] antisubmarine torpedoes, and a \$140 million agreement for Sikorsky Corporation (United Technologies) to sell China twenty-four UH-60A Blackhawk helicopters.<sup>708</sup>

However, as David Finkelstein notes, “the actual sales and transfers were probably insignificant in terms of enhancing the actual operational capabilities of the PLA.”<sup>709</sup> Instead, Finkelstein argues, the sales were symbolically important, serving as a “statement of common strategic cause,” between the U.S. and China against “Soviet predations.”<sup>710</sup> Similarly, in a 1994 report, Thomas Wilborn remarked that “There probably cannot be a successful program of security cooperation with China unless the PLA is allowed to purchase armaments and military equipment from U.S. weapons producers.”<sup>711</sup> “Beijing would view denial as an affront,” he continued, “tantamount to naming China an outlaw state.”<sup>712</sup> Be that as it may, Wilborn notes, “In terms of volume of items or costs, arms sales to China never reached the level of a major military sales program.”<sup>713</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 331.

<sup>705</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 331.

<sup>706</sup> Thayer, “Enhancing Transparency?” 4.

<sup>707</sup> Training of PLA personnel was conducted at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Thomas L. Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China: Analysis and a Proposal*, (US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, November 25, 1994), 5.

<sup>708</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 331.

<sup>709</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 7.

<sup>710</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 7.

<sup>711</sup> Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*, 16.

<sup>712</sup> Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*, 16.

<sup>713</sup> Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*, 5.

Even if the sales and transfers did not make a material difference, the important takeaway is not just the symbolism, but their functional intent: they were meant to address weaknesses in China's capabilities and to aid the PLA's modernization. In light of the bilateral relationship's current dynamics, defined by a fear of inevitable conflict, the idea of the United States helping to make the PLA a more capable and effective military seems almost impossible. Indeed, the U.S. Congress passed a law, the National Defense Authorization Act (2000), which expressly forbids DoD from engaging in any mil-mil activities that might improve PLA warfighting capabilities. The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is discussed in more detail further below.

The enthusiasm for the military-to-military relationship, which was tepid at best under the Reagan administration, began to die down by the late 1980s.<sup>714</sup> A confluence of events saw the military relationship completely deteriorate by the end of the decade. In 1987, China sold Silkworm anti-ship cruise missiles to Iran, which created concern in both Congress and DoD and prompted a "re-evaluation" of the mil-mil relationship.<sup>715</sup> In 1988, China sold CSS-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles to Saudi Arabia, which had the potential to destabilize a region still reeling from the long and violent Iran-Iraq War. Beijing felt that complaints about its "relatively modest arms sales program," from the world's second largest "weapons merchant" were "inappropriate."<sup>716</sup>

Around the same time, the Soviet threat had begun to diminish and U.S.-Soviet relations (particularly military-to-military) had begun to improve. Similarly, Sino-Soviet ties had begun to improve as well. This reinforces the important role structure plays in determining the context and limitations of interstate relationships. Indeed, the structural shift led both Beijing and Washington to reassess the foundational logic behind their initial cooperative efforts. As Finkelstein put it, "Without the Soviet threat, the Chinese rationale for security cooperation with the U.S. began to evaporate."<sup>717</sup> In the words of another observer, the end of the Cold War "had put the two countries into a situation of

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<sup>714</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, 72.

<sup>715</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 206; Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 9.

<sup>716</sup> Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*, 8.

<sup>717</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 9.

strategic suspicion.”<sup>718</sup> Where structure had previously compelled ‘friendship’, it now precluded it.

The Bush administration had hoped to deepen relations with Beijing, believing China to have “continuing strategic value in its own right,” while also believing the U.S. could “exert positive influence on China’s future development.”<sup>719</sup> Beijing, meanwhile, was suspicious of U.S. intentions and feared “efforts to Westernize” and split up China, though it understood the economic value a relationship with Washington had for its economic development,<sup>720</sup> the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) primary goal. With the strategic justification for military relations between the U.S. and China already in doubt, two additional events brought the relationship to an abrupt halt. The first was the “tentative emergence of democracy” in Taiwan in the late 1980s, which “provided a new and compellingly positive prism through which some U.S. observers began to see the island, previously ruled by a semi-authoritarian regime with a poor human rights record.”<sup>721</sup>

The second and more consequential event was the June 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, in which the PLA brutally repressed student pro-democracy protests. In February 1990, President Bush suspended all high-level exchanges with China, including visits by defense officials and attaché contacts.<sup>722</sup> In December 1992, President Bush took it one step further, cancelling the “full range of defense technology cooperation, including all FMS programs,”<sup>723</sup> and “sen[ding] equipment and personnel back to China.”<sup>724</sup> The U.S. and the European Union (EU) embargoed the transfer of military

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<sup>718</sup> Yang Jiemian, “Avoiding Crisis Between the Two Great Powers,” Chapter 10 in *Power & Restraint: A Shared Vision for the U.S.-China Relationship*, Richard Rosecrance and Gu Guoling, eds., (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 140.

<sup>719</sup> Phillip C. Saunders & Julia G. Bowie, “US-China military relations: competition and cooperation,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 39: 5-6 (2016), 664. This echoes a similar sentiment relayed to me by a former Senior DoD official, who said the U.S. goal at the time (mid-1980s-early 1990s) was to stop treating China like a card to be played against the Russians, and instead engage them as a country worth having developed relations with in its own right. Interview with former Senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>720</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 664.

<sup>721</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 9.

<sup>722</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 207; Thayer, “Enhancing Transparency?” 4.

<sup>723</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China’s Foreign Military Relations*, 72.

<sup>724</sup> Roy D. Kamphausen & Jessica Drun, *Sino-U.S. Military-to-Military Relations*. NBR Special Report 57, (The National Bureau of Asian Research, April 2016), 106.

equipment and technology to China.<sup>725</sup> The restrictions are still in place, much to the chagrin of the PRC,<sup>726</sup> though in recent years the EU has flirted with ending its embargo.<sup>727</sup> The Blackhawk helicopters had already been delivered, and the ammunition project was close to completion, “but only two of the four Hughes radars and none of the Honeywell torpedoes had been delivered.”<sup>728</sup> The “Peace Pearl” program had not yet begun production, due in large part to cost overruns<sup>729</sup> and tensions between Beijing and the Grumman Corporation; China terminated the project in 1990 after receiving only two of its J-8 aircraft.<sup>730</sup> The U.S. returned outstanding funds for the cancelled programs, however the embargo meant China was unable to secure spare parts for the Blackhawks, rendering them effectively useless. The military-to-military relationship would not resume until 1993.

### *Growing Pains: 1993 – 2001*

There had been “virtually no formal contact” between the U.S. and China on military issues until the U.S. National Defense University (NDU) resumed its annual fieldtrip to China in 1991.<sup>731</sup> There were also informal contacts between DoD and the Ministry of Defense during Operation Desert Storm, “including the PRC Defense Attaché visiting the Pentagon and receiving briefings on U.S. operations in the Gulf.”<sup>732</sup> But there were no high-level or functional exchanges, port visits, or “‘operator’ level exchanges” during the Bush administration.<sup>733</sup> With the Cold War over, the U.S. embraced the new ‘unipolar moment’.<sup>734</sup> As defense planners and policymakers in Washington reoriented

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<sup>725</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 331.

<sup>726</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China’s Foreign Military Relations*, 72.

<sup>727</sup> David Shambaugh, “Don’t lift the arms embargo on China,” The Brookings Institution (online), February 23, 2005.

<sup>728</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 331 – 32.

<sup>729</sup> Thomas Wilborn notes that the cost overruns were due in large part to the Grumman Corps., “urgency to obtain the contract,” and the PLA’s “obsession with secrecy,” which prevented the Grumman Corp., from realizing that the cockpit of each J-8 was unique, “requiring individual adjustments.” Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*, 5.

<sup>730</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 332.

<sup>731</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 13. David Shambaugh notes that ‘Capstone delegations’ from the U.S. NDU were never formally suspended. David Shambaugh, *Enhancing Sino-American Military Relations*. Sigur Center for Asian Studies, George Washington University, (July 1998), 1.

<sup>732</sup> Jing-dong Yuan, “Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen: Restoration, Progress, and Pitfalls,” *Parameters* 33 (Spring 2003), 52.

<sup>733</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 207.

<sup>734</sup> Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70: 1 (January 1990), 23 – 33.

themselves to the post-Cold War world and a new administration, questions about how China fit into the ‘new world order’<sup>735</sup> began anew. The U.S. wanted to seize on the momentum of its Cold War victory and bring as many states formerly under the Soviet umbrella into the democratic fold, bolstering the Western Liberal world order and, by extension, U.S. primacy. To that end, the Clinton administration came in with a general foreign policy strategy oriented towards “engagement and enlargement.”<sup>736</sup>

With respect to China, the Clinton administration’s policy of engagement was built around the idea that comprehensively engaging the PRC would provide “a window for China to observe international practices that would then encourage it to conform to international standards.”<sup>737</sup> The engagement policy was motivated in large part by “China’s return to rapid economic growth,” which “convinced American elites, including U.S. businesses and senior Clinton administration policymakers, that China was an important ‘emerging market’ and would be an important player in a globalizing world economy.”<sup>738</sup> This belief manifested itself in different ways, including the decision to “delink China’s Most Favored Nation status from its record on human rights.”<sup>739</sup>

While China’s economic potential was a clear motivation for closer engagement, security concerns remained central to Clinton’s engagement strategy for a variety of reasons. First, just as the Soviet threat had disappeared for the U.S., so too had it disappeared for China. As Beijing and Moscow mended fences, the PLA was increasingly able to acquire Russian weapons and technology.<sup>740</sup> During this time, the PLA was also acquiring weapons and technology from Israel, putative friend to the United States.<sup>741</sup> China’s ability to acquire fairly modern technology meant the Pentagon had to keep a closer eye on a country that many within Washington had come to believe “had limited strategic importance.”<sup>742</sup> Not only does this represent a departure from the Bush administration’s belief in China’s inherent strategic potential, it also highlights how

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<sup>735</sup> George H. W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union*, January 29, 1991.

<sup>736</sup> William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, July 1994.

<sup>737</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 44.

<sup>738</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 665.

<sup>739</sup> Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, 24.

<sup>740</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 13-14.

<sup>741</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, “US-China Military Relations Not a One-Way Street,” *The Henry L. Stimson Centre News Advisory*, December 8, 1999.

<sup>742</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 665.



relatively weak China and the PLA were at this time. The need to monitor China's military modernization was particularly important, as Taiwan's nascent democratic reform brought with it renewed calls for independence from within the country.<sup>743</sup>

Concerns about China's suspected weapons sales and horizontal proliferation of technology, particularly to states like Iran, persisted. Though it had yet to view China as a strategic threat, Washington certainly considered it something of a 'rogue' state that flouted international norms and laws. In July 1993, in what would be the first modern incident between the U.S. and China, the Clinton administration ordered the interception a PRC cargo ship, the *Yinhe*, which it suspected of transporting chemicals that could be used for chemical weapons to Iran. After a bit of a showdown, which included China's protestation of U.S. "harassment," on August 9, Beijing finally allowed "U.S. participation in a Saudi inspection of the ship's cargo on August 26, 1993."<sup>744</sup> The U.S. State Department reported the suspected chemicals were not found, and China responded by filing a grievance against the U.S. and questioning the credibility of its intelligence.<sup>745</sup> Beijing's support was seen as "instrumental" to the success of U.S. nonproliferation efforts.<sup>746</sup> Military-to-military relations were seen as a means of obtaining a better understanding of the decision making behind China's arms exports, "a process in which the military's role was clearly growing."<sup>747</sup>

Lastly, the emergence of North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons program in 1993-1994 required China's cooperation in finding a diplomatic resolution.<sup>748</sup> China's role in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis "indicated that China and the United States shared some important common interests and heightened hope of expanding

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<sup>743</sup> Kjørness, *U.S.-China Military Relations*, 5; Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 10.

<sup>744</sup> Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service, RL32496, (January 5, 2015), 52.

<sup>745</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52; For more on the *Yinhe* incident, see Kai He, *China's Crisis Behavior: Political Survival and Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2016), 48 – 55.

<sup>746</sup> Yuan, "Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen," 53.

<sup>747</sup> Yuan, "Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen," 53.

<sup>748</sup> Yuan, "Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen," 52; Walter Neal Anderson, *Overcoming Uncertainty: U.S.-China Strategic Relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. INSS Occasional Paper 29: Regional Security Series, USAF Institute for National Security Studies, (USAF Academy, Colorado, October 1999), 50.

cooperation.”<sup>749</sup> This combination of concern and potential motivated the Clinton administration to seek closer military-to-military relations. Echoing its belief in the promise of diplomatic and economic engagement, the Clinton administration believed that “through enhanced interactions, the Chinese military was more likely to be open, transparent, and communicative, thereby aiding the two countries in understanding each other’s intentions.”<sup>750</sup> It sought to “articulate the goal of building a constructive strategic partnership with China.”<sup>751</sup> However, the push for closer military relations was helped in large part by Deputy Secretary of Defense William Perry<sup>752</sup> and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Chas Freeman.<sup>753</sup>

Perry, in particular, played a vital role.<sup>754</sup> As David Shambaugh observed, “While in office and subsequently, Perry himself displayed unusual commitment to the U.S.-China military relationship – although Perry’s friendliness toward the PLA drew the attention of conservative critics in the United States.”<sup>755</sup> The central role played by these senior officials underscores the connection between interpersonal relationships and trust-building highlighted by Wheeler, even though Wheeler focuses primarily on the initial interactions between heads of state. In April 1994, Perry wrote a memo explaining the rationale behind renewed military-to-military relations with China, wherein he said, “Our security posture dramatically improves if China cooperates with us. In order to gain that cooperation, we must rebuild mutual trust and understanding with the PLA, and this could only happen through high level dialogue and working level contacts.”<sup>756</sup> He noted further that “arms sales are not contemplated at this time.”<sup>757</sup>

Whether there had ever been ‘mutual trust and understanding’ with the PLA in the first place is debatable, but the rationale for re-engaging China militarily was clear. It was important to try and work with China and develop some common understanding to try

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<sup>749</sup> Yuan, “Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen,” 53.

<sup>750</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 207.

<sup>751</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 665.

<sup>752</sup> Perry was Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1993-94.

<sup>753</sup> Yuan, “Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen,” 52.

<sup>754</sup> Charles W. Hooper, *Going Nowhere Slowly: U.S.-China Military Relations 1994 – 2001*. Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University (July 2006), 7.

<sup>755</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 332.

<sup>756</sup> William J. Perry, “U.S.-China Military Relationship,” Memorandum for Secretaries of the Military Departments, Washington, D.C., April 1994.

<sup>757</sup> Perry, “U.S.-China Military Relationship.”

and solicit its support of U.S. interests. While China was still economically, politically, and militarily weak in the early 1990s, the writing was already on the wall for those paying attention. In 1994, Denny Roy concluded that “current developments foretell an economically gigantic China with a historic fear of foreigners, a distaste for cooperation, and an interest in developing a blue-water navy and long-range air combat capabilities.”<sup>758</sup> Ominously, if not prophetically, Roy continues by saying “These may be the first signs of what will develop into the greatest threat to the region’s stability since the Pacific War.”<sup>759</sup> Perry was equally prescient, writing in his 1994 memo that “The military relationship with China could pay significant dividends for DOD.”<sup>760</sup> Recognizing the reality that the PRC could not be blindly trusted, he suggested the U.S. “proceed in a forward-looking, although measured, manner.”<sup>761</sup>

Heeding that advice, in November 1993, Freeman traveled to China to re-establish military relations where he met with numerous high-ranking PLA officials.<sup>762</sup> An August 1994 visit by Deputy Chief of General Staff, General Xu Huizi, who met with Perry and CJCS General John Shalikashvili in Washington, D.C., and Pacific Command (PACOM) Commander, Admiral Richard Macke, in Hawaii, set the stage for a visit to China by Secretary Perry. During his October visit to China, the U.S. and PRC established a U.S.-China Joint Defense Conversion Commission, meant to “better enable Chinese military plants to produce civilian products,”<sup>763</sup> however the defense conversion component “did not receive Congressional support and was quickly dropped from the agenda, albeit with considerable Chinese consternation.”<sup>764</sup> The U.S. and China also agreed to a range of projects “involving the modernization of China’s air traffic control system.”<sup>765</sup> Secretary Perry and General Chi Haotian, the Minister of Defense, also came to an agreement to begin a transparency initiative, which saw Assistant Secretary of

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<sup>758</sup> Denny Roy, “Hegemon on the Horizon?: China’s Threat to East Asian Security,” *International Security* 19:1 (Summer 1994), 168.

<sup>759</sup> Roy, “Hegemon on the Horizon?,” 168.

<sup>760</sup> Perry, “U.S.-China Military Relationship.”

<sup>761</sup> Perry, “U.S.-China Military Relationship.”

<sup>762</sup> Freeman met with General Liu Huaqing (Central Military Commission Vice Chairman), General Chi Haotian (Defense Minister), Lt. General Xu Huizi (Deputy Chief of General Staff), and Lt. General Huai Guomo of the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52.

<sup>763</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 207.

<sup>764</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China’s Foreign Military Relations*, 73.

<sup>765</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 207.

Defense for Strategy and Requirements Ted Warner visit China in December to provide a brief on the U.S. defense strategy and budget.

Secretary Perry's visit "restored the defense relationship to its healthiest level since 1989."<sup>766</sup> The visit reinvigorated the mil-mil relationship and was followed by numerous exchanges.<sup>767</sup> In March 1995, the USS *Bunker Hill*, a Ticonderoga-class cruiser, made the first port visit to China since 1989. In all respects, the military-to-military relationship had normalized, though under different structural conditions and with a new set of guiding principles. In October 1995, Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye testified before Congress, during which he identified "revised 'pillars' of the relationship," which included, "high-level visits, functional exchanges (working level professional exchanges), routine military activities and confidence-building measures (ship visits and defense transparency talks), and participation in multinational security fora."<sup>768</sup>

A 2002 USCC report notes that between 1993 and 1995, the following mil-mil measures were established, or re-established:

- Restoration of high-level military exchanges, such as visits to China by Defense Secretary William Perry and two former commanders-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Command;
- Enhanced military transparency, including consultations and briefings regarding defense budgets and military strategies;
- Restoration of exchanges of military academic units, such as visits between the American National Defense University (NDU) with the Chinese NDU;
- Establishing joint agreements on preventing nuclear proliferation and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;
- Cooperation on defense conversion;
- Reciprocal visits of naval warships.<sup>769</sup>

However, once again, the relationship's momentum was stalled by a series of incidents. In response to a decision by the Clinton administration to grant a visa to Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui to make a private visit to give a speech at his alma matter Cornell University on June 9, 1995, the PLA launched M-9 short-range ballistic missiles toward

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<sup>766</sup> Allen & McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, 73.

<sup>767</sup> These exchanges are documented extensively in Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52 – 53.

<sup>768</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 14.

<sup>769</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2002 Report to Congress* (July 2002), 30.

targets in the East China Sea under the guise of “test-firings” between July 21-28. Beijing also cancelled a planned visit to Washington by Minister of Defense Chi and held other military exercises directed against Taiwan until November, marking the start of what is now referred to as the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis.<sup>770</sup> The PRC also suspended military exchanges with the U.S.<sup>771</sup> On August 3, 1995, China expelled two U.S. Air Force (USAF) attaches stationed in Hong Kong after accusing them of “collecting military intelligence in restricted military areas along the southeastern coast” of China, where they had been travelling.<sup>772</sup> By the end of the summer, however, “tempers cooled,” and exchanges between the two had resumed.<sup>773</sup> In August, Lt. General Li Xilin, the PLA Commander of the Guangzhou Military Region, visited Hawaii to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of victory in the Pacific in World War II, during which time he met with Secretary of Defense Perry, CJCS Shalikashvili, and PACOM Commander Macke. General Li’s visit helped demonstrate that the relationship had frayed but not broken.

In mid-November 1995, Assistant Secretary of Defense Nye visited Beijing, where he met with General Chi. At some point during that visit, Nye said that “‘nobody knows’ what the United States would do if the PLA attacked Taiwan.”<sup>774</sup> Perhaps seeking to clarify the U.S. position on the matter, during a March 7, 1996, dinner meeting hosted by Secretary of State Anthony Lake, Secretary of Defense Perry told PRC Foreign Affairs Office Director Liu Huaqiu that there would be “grave consequences” if China attacked Taiwan.<sup>775</sup> Between March 8 - 25, as Taiwan neared its first democratic elections on March 23, the PLA launched four M-9 short-range ballistic missiles “into waters close to the two ports of Keelung and Kaohsiung in Taiwan,” and conducted live fire exercises in the Taiwan Strait.<sup>776</sup> The Clinton administration responded by

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<sup>770</sup> For more on the Taiwan Strait Crisis, see He, *China’s Crisis Behavior*, 55 – 65; Robert L. Suettinger, “U.S. “Management” of Three Taiwan Strait “Crises,”” in Swaine, Zhang, & Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 251 – 292 ; Niu Jun, “Chinese Decision Making in Three Military Actions Across the Taiwan Strait,” in Swaine, Zhang, & Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 293 – 326; Robert S. Ross, *Chinese Security Policy: Structure, Power and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2009), 133 – 178.

<sup>771</sup> Shambaugh, *Enhancing Sino-American Military Relations*, 2.

<sup>772</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 54. Similarly, on January 19, 1996, the PRC expelled the U.S. Assistant Air Force Attaché, along with the Japanese Air Force Attaché, after detaining them while travelling in southern China.

<sup>773</sup> Shambaugh, *Enhancing Sino-American Military Relations*, 2.

<sup>774</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 55.

<sup>775</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 55.

<sup>776</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 55.

dispatching two aircraft carriers, the USS *Independence* and USS *Nimitz*, to waters near Taiwan's east coast, and the USS *Bunker Hill*, an Aegis-equipped cruiser, to track the missiles. The U.S. cancelled the since re-scheduled Chi visit and "Military ties were cut off and went into a semi-deep freeze."<sup>777</sup> High-level visits all but stopped, with the exception of a June 1996 visit to China by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Walter Slocombe. "Both sides did not want to completely cease or suspend exchanges, but both decided to reduce their quantity and quality to express displeasure."<sup>778</sup>

By Fall 1996, the relationship began to pick up momentum again, though the incident had left a lasting impact on both states. In March 1997, the first PLAN port visit to the continental United States took place (in San Diego; the PLAN had previously made a port call in Hawaii).<sup>779</sup> On May 14, 1997, CJCS Shalikashvili gave a noteworthy speech at the PLA's NDU, during which he called for "mil-to-mil contacts that are deeper, more frequent, more balanced, and more developed, in order to decrease suspicion, advance cooperation, and prevent miscalculations in a crisis."<sup>780</sup> He also advocated for "a more equal exchange of information, confidence building measures, military academic and functional exchanges, the PLA's participation in multinational activities, and a regular dialogue between senior military leaders."<sup>781</sup>

Several senior U.S. defense officials visited China, and in December 1996, the long-postponed visit to the U.S. by Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian took place. Chi met with out-going Secretary of Defense Perry, during which time the DoD presented a draft proposal for a bilateral military maritime cooperative agreement. This would lead to the signing of the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA) by Secretary of Defense William Cohen in China in January 1998.<sup>782</sup> The MMCA, discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, "intended to set up a framework for dialogue on how to minimize the chances of miscalculation and accidents between U.S. and PLA forces operating at sea or

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<sup>777</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 208.

<sup>778</sup> Shambaugh, *Enhancing Sino-American Military Relations*, 3.

<sup>779</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 57.

<sup>780</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 57.

<sup>781</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 57.

<sup>782</sup> Officially, the Agreement is called the "Agreement Between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China on Establishing a Consultation Mechanism to Strengthen Military Maritime Safety."

in the air.”<sup>783</sup> The Chi visit also resulted in the institutionalization of the Defense Consultative Talks (DCT), the first of which took place in December 1997. In October 1997, PRC President Jiang Zemin and President Clinton held a summit meeting in Washington, during which they “agreed to strengthen mil-to-mil contacts to minimize miscalculations, advance transparency, and strengthen communication.”<sup>784</sup>

The late 1990s marks something of a paradox in U.S.-China mil-mil relations. It was both ‘the best of times’ and the ‘worst of times’. Christopher Yung notes that “By 1999 the military-to-military relationship was at its most robust since the 1980s.”<sup>785</sup> Similarly, Roy Kamphausen and Jessica Drun remark that “By the time President Bill Clinton conducted his historically long nine-day visit to China in June 1998, the mil-mil dimension had developed to the point that it was seen as one of the leading elements of the overall bilateral relationship.”<sup>786</sup> Things were looking good, particularly given the recent turbulence caused by the Taiwan Strait Crisis. However, things were heating up in the United States.<sup>787</sup>

In April 1998, the Justice Department opened a criminal investigation into the possible violation of export control laws by U.S. satellite manufacturers Loral Space and Communications Ltd., and Hughes Electronics Corporation. They allegedly “provided expertise that China could use to improve its ballistic missiles,” after they shared technical information with China on the “cause of its rocket’s explosion while launching a U.S.-origin satellite in February 1996.”<sup>788</sup> In response to these allegations, Congress passed legislation to control satellite exports to China and the House established the ‘Cox Committee’<sup>789</sup> to investigate “allegations of corporate misconduct and policy mistakes.”<sup>790</sup> In late 1998 – early 1999, the Cox Committee began looking into a “Clinton administration investigation that began in 1995 into whether China obtained secret U.S.

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<sup>783</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 58.

<sup>784</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 57.

<sup>785</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 209.

<sup>786</sup> Kamphausen & Drun, *Sino-U.S. Military-to-Military Relations*, 107.

<sup>787</sup> Saunders & Bowie (2016, 665) write that “domestic politics intruded on the US side,” while Finkelstein (2010, 13) said the mil-mil relationship “became embroiled in U.S. domestic politics.”

<sup>788</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 59.

<sup>789</sup> Formally called the House Select Committee on U.S. National Security and Military/Commercial Concerns with the People’s Republic of China. It was chaired by Republican Representative Christopher Cox.

<sup>790</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 59.

nuclear weapons data, in addition to missile technology associated with satellite launches.”<sup>791</sup> During hearings, “witnesses accused the Chinese of exploiting their contacts with American military personnel and civilian experts to acquire U.S. nuclear and other defense secrets.”<sup>792</sup> In April 1999, the Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet confirmed that “China obtained by espionage classified U.S. nuclear weapons information that probably accelerated its program to develop future nuclear weapons.”<sup>793</sup>

The Cox Report, released in May 1999, coupled with a Republican-led Congress generally critical, or at the least skeptical, of the Clinton administration’s engagement policy with China, brought the mil-mil relationship under increasing scrutiny. In October 1999, Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (2000), which placed restrictions on mil-mil contact with the PRC. The NDAA “prohibits the Secretary of Defense from authorizing any mil-to-mil contact with the PLA if that contact would ‘create a national security risk due to inappropriate exposure’ of the PLA” to any of 12 defined operational areas.<sup>794</sup> The NDAA prohibitions are listed in full in Table 4. A USCC backgrounder report released in 2011 notes that,

One of the cited justifications for the legislation included an alleged incident during a U.S.-China mil-to-mil exchange in the late 1990s, when a visiting Chinese military officer learned about a key vulnerability of U.S. aircraft carriers in a conversation with U.S. Navy personnel, and the PLA subsequently acquired weapons targeted against the vulnerability.<sup>795</sup>

Whether or not that incident actually happened is not immediately clear. That a PLA officer could learn of such an important vulnerability during a conversation, and that the PLA could so easily acquire the means to directly respond to it, seems suspect. In short, however, the DoD was not to engage in any activities that could improve the PLA’s warfighting capabilities. The legislation continues to be a major point of contention for the PLA, who routinely object to its existence and consider it an “obstacle”

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<sup>791</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 61.

<sup>792</sup> Richard Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21, No. 4, (December 2009), 389.

<sup>793</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 61.

<sup>794</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 13.

<sup>795</sup> Amy Chang, *The Chinese People’s Liberation Army Delegation Visit to the United States, May 2011: A Summary of Key Actors and Issues*. U.S.-China Economic Security Review Commission Staff Research Backgrounder (June 30, 2011), 2-3.



to the mil-mil relationship.<sup>796</sup> The NDAA also required the submission of an annual report outlining the Secretary’s “assessment of the state of mil-to-mil exchanges and contacts with the PLA, including past contacts, planned contacts, the benefits that the PLA expects to gain, the benefits that DoD expects to gain, and the role of such contacts for the larger security relationship with the PRC.”<sup>797</sup> While it was originally conceived as an oversight tool for Congress to ensure DoD did not violate the NDAA, it has also forced DoD to pay more attention to the mil-mil relationship as part of the process of preparing the annual report.

<b>Table 4: National Defense Authorization Act (2000) Prohibitions<sup>798</sup></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Force projection operations;</li> <li>• Nuclear operations;</li> <li>• Advanced combined-arms and joint combat operations;</li> <li>• Advanced logistical operations;</li> <li>• Chemical and biological defense and other capabilities related to weapons of mass destruction;</li> <li>• Surveillance and reconnaissance operations;</li> <li>• Joint warfighting experiments and other activities related to transformations in warfare;</li> <li>• Military space operations;</li> <li>• Other advanced capabilities of the Armed Forces;</li> <li>• Arms sales or military-related technology transfers;</li> <li>• Release of classified or restricted information;</li> <li>• Access to a DoD laboratory</li> </ul>

The release of the Cox Report (and its accusations of Chinese espionage),<sup>799</sup> as well as the passing of the NDAA may have been irritants to the relationship, but on their own were not enough to cause major damage. However, they came immediately after (or in the case of the Cox Report, concurrently) with one of the most serious incidents between the U.S. and China since normalization. On May 7, 1999, the United States bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, during NATO operations against Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, whose Serbian forces attacked Kosovo and had been committing mass atrocities against civilians.<sup>800</sup> The bombing killed three Chinese

<sup>796</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 13.

<sup>797</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 15.

<sup>798</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 13.

<sup>799</sup> An independent CIA damage assessment allegedly expressed considerable uncertainty about the extent of Chinese espionage and its potential damage. Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 389.

<sup>800</sup> According to an interview with a former DoD official, a Chinese Senior General (four star) was in a meeting with the U.S. Secretary of Defense when the U.S. started bombing Belgrade, but had left before

journalists, wounded twenty seven other Chinese citizens, and destroyed “much of the facility’s south side, including the office of the military attaché.”<sup>801</sup> The official version has it that the U.S. had been targeting the Serbian Federal Directorate for Supply and Procurement (FDSP).<sup>802</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had concluded that the FDSP was selling “advanced military technologies (such as ballistic missile parts) to rogue states like Libya and Iraq and using the proceeds to finance the Serbian armed forces.”<sup>803</sup> What the CIA had allegedly not realized was that the PRC had moved into the building in 1997. The accidental bombing “led to street demonstrations and violence against U.S. interests in Beijing and elsewhere in China on a scale unseen since the Cultural Revolution of the late 1960s.”<sup>804</sup> In July, as tensions subsided somewhat, and after five rounds of negotiations, the U.S. agreed to compensate the Chinese government \$28 million, as well as an additional \$4.5 million to the people injured in the bombing and the families of the three who had been killed.<sup>805</sup>

Despite these reparations, including formal apologies from President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeline Albright, China “angrily suspended mil-to-mil contacts,” and denied port access in Hong Kong to USN ships until September 1999.<sup>806</sup> Mil-mil exchanges would remain suspended<sup>807</sup> until DASD for Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt

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the accidental bombing occurred. Interview with former DoD official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call. For more on the Embassy bombing, see He, *China’s Crisis Behavior*, 66 – 75.

<sup>801</sup> Kurt M. Campbell & Richard Weitz, “The Chinese Embassy Bombing: Evidence of Crisis Management?” in *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis*, Michael D. Swaine, Zhang Tuosheng & Danielle F. S. Cohen, eds. (Washington, D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 327.

<sup>802</sup> It has been reported that the bombing was, indeed, intentional, meant to stop broadcasts allegedly being relayed on behalf of Zeljko Raznatovic (also known as Arkan), an indicted war criminal, to his Serbian death squads. A U.S. Colonel is quoted as saying ““That was great targeting ... we put two JDAMs down into the attaché’s office and took out the exact room we wanted ... they (the Chinese) won’t be using that place for rebro (re-broadcasting radio transmissions) any more, and it will have given that bastard Arkan a headache.”” It has been noted that the munitions used in the bombing - so called ‘smart bombs’ due to their precise targeting capability – hit the exact location of the building that housed the Defense Attaché’s office, where the broadcasts were said to originate. The Observer, “Truth behind America’s raid on Belgrade,” *The Guardian* (online), November 28, 1999.

<sup>803</sup> Campbell & Weitz, “The Chinese Embassy Bombing,” 327.

<sup>804</sup> Campbell & Weitz, “The Chinese Embassy Bombing,” 327.

<sup>805</sup> Campbell & Weitz, “The Chinese Embassy Bombing,” 342. For more on this incident, see also: Wu Baiyi. “Chinese Crisis Management During the 1999 Embassy Bombing Incident,” in *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis*, Michael D. Swaine, Zhang Tuosheng & Danielle F. S. Cohen, eds. (Washington, D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006). Pp. 351 – 376.

<sup>806</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 61.

<sup>807</sup> Some interaction continued. For example, in May, a USN working group visited Qingdao to discuss international standards of communication at sea as part of the MMCA.

Campbell traveled to Beijing in late November to discuss their resumption. Military-to-military contacts formally resumed in late January 2000 with the visit of Deputy Chief of General Staff, Lt. General Xiong Guangkai, to participate in the third DCT with Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Slocombe.<sup>808</sup> The mil-mil relationship would continue throughout 2000 at a fairly healthy level, with only two major irritants: the cancellation of an Israeli weapons sale to the PRC as a result of criticism and pressure from both the Clinton administration and Congress, and the defection of Senior Colonel Xu Junping, who closely handled U.S.-PRC military relations.<sup>809</sup> Mirroring the trend of being seemingly incapable of getting any lasting traction in the relationship, 2001 would prove itself to be a most fateful year.

In early 2001, USN and PLAN ships and planes began coming into increasingly close contact with one another. On March 24, a PLAN frigate passed “as close as 100 yards” to the USNS *Bowditch*, an unarmed surveillance ship, while a PLA reconnaissance plane shadowed it; this “harassment” continued for months.<sup>810</sup> This was the continuation of a trend of more aggressive interceptions of U.S. forces operating near China that began in December 2000.<sup>811</sup> While the sort of harassment aimed at the *Bowditch* was unsafe and troubling, it paled in comparison to what was happening in the skies. PLAN fighter jets had been undertaking increasingly aggressive and dangerous interceptions of U.S. reconnaissance flights, particularly those operating within China’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).<sup>812</sup> In December 2000, Washington raised the issue of unprofessional and interceptions and the risks they incurred in a demarche to Beijing; “The PRC government did not respond.”<sup>813</sup>

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<sup>808</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 62.

<sup>809</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 63.

<sup>810</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 64.

<sup>811</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 64.

<sup>812</sup> The U.S. and China disagree over whether foreign ships require Beijing’s permission to operate in China’s EEZ. Beijing believes they do, and has domestic legislation to that affect. The U.S. believes they are effectively international waters and does not require prior notification to operate in that region. “Most legal experts believe the U.S. is on firmer legal footing and a majority of the world’s capitals agree with the U.S. position, but China is not alone: 26 other countries insist on “home state consent” for foreign military activities in their EEZ. However, China is the only state that has “operationally challenged” U.S. warships on multiple occasions.” Jeff M. Smith. “China comes around?” PacNet, No. 41, Pacific Forum CSIS, June 11, 2013. See also: Tran Truong Thuy & Le Thuy Trang, *Power, Law, and Maritime Order in the South China Sea* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>813</sup> Hooper, *Going Nowhere Slowly*, 19 – 20.

Things came to a head on April 1, when a PLAN F-8 fighter collided with a USN EP-3 reconnaissance plane over the South China Sea. The PLAN pilot was killed and the EP-3 crew was forced to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island. The crew of 24 was held for 11 days, while the plane itself was not released to the U.S. until July 3. This incident is covered in more detail in Chapter 7. In response to the incident, the Bush administration, which was already skeptical of the value of engaging China,<sup>814</sup> suspended military contacts. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld then considered mil-mil contacts on a case-by-case basis, pending the conclusion of a review of the relationship he had begun before the EP-3 incident occurred.<sup>815</sup> PLA defense attachés were not even allowed into the Pentagon.<sup>816</sup> The relationship would remain tense until the terrorist attacks on September 11 distracted the U.S. and provided China with an opportunity to offer its support to the new U.S.-led ‘war on terror’.

### Step-by-Step: 2002 – 2011

The George W. Bush administration had a decidedly different approach to foreign policy than its predecessor, particularly as it concerned China. Where the Clinton administration had referred to the PRC as a “strategic partner,”<sup>817</sup> the Bush administration branded it a “strategic competitor.”<sup>818</sup> Noting the shift, Shambaugh wrote, “common Chinese-American interests are too meagre, and their differences too deep, to sustain any kind of ‘strategic partnership’.”<sup>819</sup> Instead, “China and America are strategic competitors (albeit of vastly unequal power) locked in an ambiguous relationship with elements of conflict, coexistence and cooperation.”<sup>820</sup> This was the framework that had been in place when both the EP-3 incident and 9/11 attacks took place. By September 2001, only ‘essential’ contacts, such as those regarding the MMCA, had taken place. It was not until

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<sup>814</sup> Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, 335.

<sup>815</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 2; Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 21. The Bush administration had wanted to stop everything to re-evaluate existing policy. The decision to slow down the relationship pending review was not revealed until the EP-3 crisis. Interview with former DoD official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>816</sup> Interview with Mike McDevitt, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>817</sup> William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (White House, 1998), 43.

<sup>818</sup> Thomas W. Lippman, “Bush Makes Clinton’s China Policy an Issue,” *The Washington Post* Friday, August 20, 1999, P. A9.

<sup>819</sup> David Shambaugh, “Sino-American Strategic Relations: From Partners To Competitors,” *Survival* 42: 1 (Spring 2000), 97.

<sup>820</sup> Shambaugh, “Sino-American Strategic Relations,” 97.

April 2002, when Chinese Vice President Hu Jintao visited the U.S., that the two countries agreed to discuss the resumption of regular military contacts.<sup>821</sup> In December 2002, the Defense Consultative Talks resumed after a two year hiatus.<sup>822</sup> In 2003, Rumsfeld hosted his counterpart, General Cao Gangchuan, “the first PLA minister of national defense to visit the Pentagon in seven years.”<sup>823</sup> Rumsfeld would reciprocate with a visit to China in 2005, the first Secretary of Defense to do so since William Cohen in 2000. Slowly, but surely, the relationship improved.

One factor in the relationship’s improvement was undoubtedly Washington’s shift to combating global terrorism, principally in Afghanistan. The U.S. required China’s help, which had the effect of “refocus[ing] its attention to better handling its China policy.”<sup>824</sup> The U.S. and China shared intelligence and cooperated on efforts to help pilots that may require emergency landings in China, while China sealed its border with Afghanistan.<sup>825</sup> The imperative to cooperative was aided by the outbreak of the second North Korean crisis in 2002.<sup>826</sup> The net effect was that it “produced a gradual exploration of areas of potential cooperation,” including mil-mil relations.<sup>827</sup> This led to a change from emphasizing China as a ‘strategic competitor’ to encouraging it to be a ‘responsible stakeholder’.<sup>828</sup> Saunders and Bowie note that the “‘responsible stakeholder’ concept served as a basis for discussing increased bilateral cooperation and provided a framework for new high-level dialogue mechanisms, including the Senior Dialogue initiated in 2005 and the Strategic Economic Dialogue that began in 2006.”<sup>829</sup> While this shift was an

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<sup>821</sup> Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 21; According to Kan (2015, 65), the PRC media had reported that Rumsfeld and Hu had reached a consensus to resume talks, but the Pentagon issued a statement saying they had only agreed to have their representatives “talk about how to proceed on mil-to-mil contacts, which were still approved on a case-by-case basis.”

<sup>822</sup> Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 22.

<sup>823</sup> Kamphausen & Drun, *Sino-U.S. Military-to-Military Relations*, 108.

<sup>824</sup> Yuan, “Sino-US Military Relations Since Tiananmen,” 55.

<sup>825</sup> Zhan Maohai, “Principles of Military-to-Military Relations,” in *Proceedings of the 1<sup>st</sup> IDA-CIISS Workshop: Military-to-Military Relations and Defense Personnel Costs*, Stephen J. Balut, Dennis C. Blair, Lei Yuanshen, Zhan Moahai, David Finkelstein, John Hanley, and Stanley A. Horowitz. (Institute for Defense Analyses, August 2006), 10.

<sup>826</sup> Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 22.

<sup>827</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 666.

<sup>828</sup> In 2005, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick gave the keynote address to the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations, wherein he called for China to be a “responsible stakeholder.” The speech stirred a great deal of debate, which continues to this day. See Zoellick’s complete comments: [https://www.ncusr.org/sites/default/files/migration/Zoellick\\_remarks\\_notes06\\_winter\\_spring.pdf](https://www.ncusr.org/sites/default/files/migration/Zoellick_remarks_notes06_winter_spring.pdf) [accessed March 22, 2018].

<sup>829</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 666.

important recognition of China's growth and maturation over the preceding decade, and its "strategic importance," the relationship continued in a fairly reserved manner.<sup>830</sup>

During the 6<sup>th</sup> DCT, held in February 2004, DoD proposed a defense telephone link (DTL) – a "hotline"- with the PLA. It would continue to be discussed throughout 2005 and 2006 before Defense Minister Cao finally agreed to the U.S. proposal in November 2007. PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating used the DTL "in its first operational use" in May 2008, calling PLA Deputy Chief of General Staff Ma Xiaotian "about the U.S. Air Force's use of two C-17 transports to deliver earthquake relief supplies to Sichuan."<sup>831</sup> The DTL and other U.S.-PRC 'hotlines' are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. On September 6, 2005, PACOM Commander Admiral William Fallon traveled to China where he "sought to deepen the 'exceedingly limited interaction'" between the two states.<sup>832</sup> While the Clinton administration saw value in engaging with the PLA, "the G.W. Bush administration insisted on reciprocity and taking the adversarial nature of the relationship into account."<sup>833</sup> This kept the relationship from developing too quickly. However, the cautious approach the Bush administration took allowed the relationship to emphasize consistency while slowly expanding the quantity and scope of mil-mil activities.

Meanwhile, routine frictions continued to hamper the already modest mil-mil relationship. U.S. assets operating in international waters continued to be harassed by PLA forces. In September 2002, the USNS *Bowditch* was once again harassed by PLA patrol aircraft in the Yellow Sea. The PLA claimed the *Bowditch* had violated China's EEZ; both countries exchanged diplomatic protests.<sup>834</sup> "Over the ensuing three years the *Bowditch* was harassed at least a half-dozen times in China's EEZ, including being rammed by Chinese fishing ships."<sup>835</sup>

In 2006, a PLAN Song-class diesel electric submarine "approached undetected" within five miles of the USS *Kitty Hawk* carrier group operating near Okinawa.<sup>836</sup> While not 'harassment', it was nonetheless a provocative act. It also echoed an incident in

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<sup>830</sup> Saunders & Bowie, "US-China military relations," 666.

<sup>831</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>832</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 68.

<sup>833</sup> Yung, "Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations," 210.

<sup>834</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 65.

<sup>835</sup> Jeff M. Smith. "China comes around?" PacNet, No. 41, Pacific Forum CSIS, June 11, 2013.

<sup>836</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 70.

October 1994, when aircraft from the *Kitty Hawk* “came close to a confrontation with Chinese air force planes while tracking a Chinese submarine.”<sup>837</sup> During later conversations, PLA officials told their U.S. counterparts “that the incident happened entirely by chance, and that the submarine had only surfaced to avoid a potential misunderstanding with *Kitty Hawk*.”<sup>838</sup> Such claims were met with considerable skepticism in Washington.<sup>839</sup> PACOM Commander Fallon would later use the *Kitty Hawk* incident as a rationale for continued mil-mil relations, claiming that “it illustrates the primary reason why we are trying to push, to have better military-to-military relationships.”<sup>840</sup>

On January 11, 2007, the PLA “conducted its first successful direct-ascent anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons test,” launching a missile “with a kinetic kill vehicle” to destroy a PRC weather satellite in low earth orbit.<sup>841</sup> The test both alarmed and angered Washington (in part because the test created a considerable amount of debris, creating a hazard), which was only exacerbated by the fact that it took Beijing twelve days to issue

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<sup>837</sup> Matsuda Yasuhiro, “An Essay on China’s Military Diplomacy: Examination of Intentions in Foreign Strategy,” *NIDS Security Reports*, No. 7 (December 2006), 36. In the aftermath of that incident, “PRC representatives reportedly told a U.S. military attaché in Beijing that Chinese forces would “shoot to kill,” should a similar confrontation occur.” Campbell & Weitz, “The Limits of U.S.-China Military Cooperation,” 172.

<sup>838</sup> Simon Shen & Ryan Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter: The evolution of Sino-US crisis management communication mechanisms,” in *Conflict and Cooperation in Sino-US Relations: Change and Continuity, Causes and Cures*, Jean-Marc F. Blanchard & Simon Shen, eds. (London: Routledge, 2015), 233.

<sup>839</sup> For example, during a 2007 hearing before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Republican Congressman and leader of the China Caucus, J. Randy Forbes (Virginia) referred to PLA submarine’s actions as “stalking” (3). Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Asian & Pacific Security Affairs, Richard Lawless, referred to the incident as evidence of China’s “increasingly assertive posture,” (38). United States – China Economic and Security Review Commission, *The U.S.-China Relationship: Economic and Security in Perspective*, Hearing Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 110<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, February 1 – 2, 2007. Washington, D.C., March 2007.

<sup>840</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 235.

<sup>841</sup> The satellite was destroyed at approximately 530 miles above earth. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 70; Shirley Kan, *China’s Anti-Satellite Weapon Test*, Congressional Research Service, RS22652, (April 23, 2007), 1. For more on the ASAT test, and the U.S. response, see: Phillip C. Saunders & Charles D. Lutes, “China’s ASAT Test: Motivations and Implications,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 46: 3 (2007). 39 – 45; Anthony J. Mastalir, *The U.S. Reponse to China’s ASAT Test: An International Security Space Alliance for the Future*, Drew Paper No. 8, Air Force Research Institute, Air University, (Air University Press, Maxwell Airforce Base, Alabama, August 2009); Frederick W. Mahler, “China’s Anti-Satellite Test: A Precursor to Challenge U.S. Freedom to Maneuver in Space?,” Master of Military Art & Science Thesis, U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2008; Bates Gill & Martin Kleiber, “China’s Space Odyssey: What the Antisatellite Test Reveals about Decision-Making in Beijing,” *Foreign Affairs* 86: 3 (May/June 2007), 2 – 6; Gregory Kulacki & Jeffrey G. Lewis, “Understanding China’s Antisatellite Test,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 15:2 (July 2008), 335 – 347.

a statement on the test.<sup>842</sup> On January 15, U.S. Ambassador to China Clark Randt delivered a demarche to Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister He Yefei, while in Washington, D.C., Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Robert Joseph delivered one to the Chinese Ambassador. In Ambassador Randt's demarche, it was noted that ASAT test resulted in over 2,500 pieces of orbital debris "directly attributable" to the test, and that 45 percent of "all identified satellite (spacecraft and rocket bodies) breakup debris now in low Earth orbit," has been generated by China, who is "now responsible for more breakup debris in low earth orbit than any other state."<sup>843</sup> It further noted that Beijing's "inadequate" response and its "unwillingness to provide a full explanation for its actions call[s] into question China's intentions in space and undermines trust."<sup>844</sup> The U.S. also sought the help of its allies in "demarching China."<sup>845</sup>

The U.S. privately continued to press China for a more thorough explanation for over a year, with little success. It was noted in a diplomatic cable sent in January 2008 that China was "slightly more forthcoming" on the subject during mil-mil exchanges with the PLA, during which it termed the test a "scientific experiment" and "dismissed as overblown concerns about the leftover debris field."<sup>846</sup> However, the same cable notes that "Senior Chinese officials have continued to decline to provide any meaningful response to expressed U.S. concerns about the ASAT during recent security dialogues with Secretary of Defense Gates and other senior DoD officials."<sup>847</sup> Commenting on the ASAT test, CJCS Pete Pace said, "It wasn't clear what their intent (with the test) was. When the intent isn't clear, and when there are surprises and you confuse people, you

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<sup>842</sup> Kan, *China's Anti-Satellite Weapon Test*, 4.

<sup>843</sup> U.S. Diplomatic Cable 08STATE1264\_a, "Second Demarche for China Regarding China's January 2007 Anti-Satellite Test," retrieved via Wikileaks.

<sup>844</sup> U.S. Diplomatic Cable 08STATE1264\_a, "Second Demarche for China Regarding China's January 2007 Anti-Satellite Test," retrieved via Wikileaks.

<sup>845</sup> U.S. Diplomatic Cable 08STATE1265\_a, "Request to Allies for New Demarche to China Regarding China's January 2007 Anti-Satellite Test," retrieved via Wikileaks. The Cable notes that the U.S. requested that the U.K., Canada, Australia, Japan, and South Korea demarche China, and that France and Germany did so on their own initiative. It reported that the French and German "Chiefs of Mission in Beijing" received "no sensible answer" from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>846</sup> U.S. Diplomatic Cable 08STATE1264\_a, "Second Demarche for China Regarding China's January 2007 Anti-Satellite Test," retrieved via Wikileaks.

<sup>847</sup> U.S. Diplomatic Cable 08STATE1264\_a, "Second Demarche for China Regarding China's January 2007 Anti-Satellite Test," retrieved via Wikileaks.



raise suspicions.”<sup>848</sup> PACOM Commander Admiral Timothy Keating made a similar point during a May 11, 2007 meeting with Central Military Commission Vice Chairman General Guo Boxiong, telling General Guo that the test sent a ““confusing” signal, inconsistent with China’s stated interest in the peaceful use of outer space.”<sup>849</sup> Pace went on to add that, “one area where we can work harder between the two militaries to make sure...we tell each other what we’re doing, why we’re doing it, how we’re doing it (and what our intentions are, so that it is clear.”<sup>850</sup> In addition to these ‘irritations’ in the relationship, the issue of Taiwan played a prominent role in bilateral military relations during both terms of the Bush administration.

In the wake of the EP-3 incident, the Bush administration approved the largest arms sale to Taiwan since 1982, “which included such weapons systems as diesel-electric submarines, P-3 antisubmarine aircraft and Kidd-class destroyers.”<sup>851</sup> This, in addition to the election of Chen Shui-bian, of the more pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, as President of Taiwan in 2000, made Beijing increasingly concerned about Taiwan, and its possible movement towards claiming independence.<sup>852</sup> This strained relations between the U.S. and China, who looked to Washington to help “keep this problem in its box.”<sup>853</sup>

When Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Taiwan in November 2007, he assured Beijing that the U.S. supported stability in cross-strait relations.<sup>854</sup> However, shortly after Gates left, the U.S. announced it would sell Taiwan “12 surplus Orion P3-C maritime patrol aircraft and SM-2 Block 3A Standard anti-aircraft missiles.”<sup>855</sup> This reportedly sent “shock waves” through the PLA and “entire Chinese system,” leading the PLA to believe that “the U.S. did not care about stability in cross-strait relations,” and

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<sup>848</sup> Quoted in James Mulvenon, “Make Talk Not War: Strategic U.S.-China Military-to-Military Exchanges in the First Half of 2007,” *China Leadership Monitor* 21 (2007), 5.

<sup>849</sup> U.S. Diplomatic Cable 08STATE1264\_a, “Second Demarche for China Regarding China’s January 2007 Anti-Satellite Test,” retrieved via Wikileaks.

<sup>850</sup> Mulvenon, ““Make Talk Not War,” 5.

<sup>851</sup> Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 21.

<sup>852</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 210; Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 666.

<sup>853</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 210; Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 666.

<sup>854</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 210.

<sup>855</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 210.

suspend mil-mil ties.<sup>856</sup> This included cancelling a scheduled visit by the USS *Kitty Hawk* to Hong Kong for Thanksgiving, as well as a denial of “emergency docking rights” to the USS *Patriot* and USS *Guardian*, two minesweepers seeking shelter and refueling prior to an impending storm.<sup>857</sup> When the *Kitty Hawk* left Hong Kong after being denied port access, it sailed through the Taiwan Strait, “raising PRC objections.”<sup>858</sup> Mil-mil exchanges resumed in January 2008. On March 22, 2008, “in a sign of U.S. anxiety about PRC threats to peace and stability,” ahead of Taiwan’s presidential election (which included a contentious referendum on Taiwan’s involvement with the UN), DoD dispatched two aircraft carriers east of Taiwan “to respond to any PLA provocation or crisis.”<sup>859</sup>

All-told, the Bush administration conducted six arms sales to Taiwan between 2001 – 2008.<sup>860</sup> The issue boiled over again in October 2008, when the PLA suspended military exchanges in response to the Bush administration’s announcement of an arms sale to Taiwan. DASD David Sedney went to Beijing in late-December to try and resume military contacts, to no avail. They would remain suspended for the duration of the Bush administration.

DASD Sedney returned to Beijing once again in late February 2009 to get the mil-mil relationship back on track. After meeting with Deputy Chief of General Staff Ma Xiaotian for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Defense Policy Coordination Talks (first held in December 2006), Sedney described the meetings as “‘the best set of talks’ he has experienced.”<sup>861</sup> The results, however, were “limited.”<sup>862</sup> The PLA protested three “obstacles” to improving the mil-mil relationship: arms sales to Taiwan, legal restrictions on military contacts (NDAA 2000), and the annual reports to Congress on PRC military power conducted by

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<sup>856</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 210.

<sup>857</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 72; Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 211.

<sup>858</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 72.

<sup>859</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 72.

<sup>860</sup> This is a broad number; each announced sale package had smaller individual sales, timed throughout the year. For example, the 2002 arms sale was comprised of 7 individual sale items which took place between June and November. For more see, Shirley Kan, *Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990*, Congressional Research Service, RL30957 (June 13, 2014).

<sup>861</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 73.

<sup>862</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 73.

the Pentagon.<sup>863</sup> Another recurring “obstacle” are surveillance and intelligence-gathering activities conducted close to China’s coastline, “especially in areas close to PLA Navy bases and facilities.”<sup>864</sup>

The Obama administration approached the mil-mil relationship in a way that incorporated the Clinton administration’s optimistic outlook on engagement with the Bush administration’s recognition that China was a rapidly rising power and an increasingly assertive potential rival.<sup>865</sup> In November 2009, President Obama traveled to Beijing, where he lay the groundwork to improve bilateral military relations. Specifically, the administration sought to “increase cooperation between the two militaries in such areas as peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief [HA/DR], and counter-piracy; to institutionalize the military-to-military relationship; and to increase mutual understanding in an increasingly complex security environment.”<sup>866</sup> Key to this plan, particularly the ‘institutionalization’ of mil-mil ties, was avoiding the stop/start pattern that plagued the relationship.<sup>867</sup> However, once again repeating the historical cycle, progress would be hampered by a series of events and issues.

In 2010, the Dalai Lama visited the White House, drawing Beijing’s ire.<sup>868</sup> Around the same time, the U.S. was becoming increasingly vocal in its complaints of China’s currency policy, and had also declared freedom of navigation in the South China Sea (which China claims nearly the entirety of as its territory) a “national interest.”<sup>869</sup> When in January 2010, the Obama administration announced it would move ahead with the \$6.4 billion arms sale deal with Taiwan that the Bush administration had arranged in 2008, it led to the “most serious disruption of U.S.-China military relations since the EP-3 incident.”<sup>870</sup> The day after the White House announced the arms sale, China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs suspended mil-mil relations,<sup>871</sup> though “higher-level defense policy

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<sup>863</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 73.

<sup>864</sup> Yuan, *Dragon & Eagle Entangled*, 17; Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 75.

<sup>865</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 667.

<sup>866</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 211.

<sup>867</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 667.

<sup>868</sup> Matt Spetalnick, “Obama meets Dalai Lama, angering China,” *Reuters* (online), February 18, 2010.

<sup>869</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 211.

<sup>870</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 211.

<sup>871</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2010 Report to Congress* (November 2010), 155.

talks continued during this time frame.”<sup>872</sup> Mil-mil ties would not return to normal until DASD Michael Schiffer traveled to Beijing in September 2010, during which he sought to stabilize the relationship by advancing a series of principles “which the two militaries should abide by in interacting with one another.”<sup>873</sup> These included, “mutual respect; mutual trust; reciprocity; mutual interest; continuous dialog; and mutual risk reduction.”<sup>874</sup>

Efforts to mend the military relationship and insulate it from the occasional tensions that arose in the wider bilateral relationship were taking place at a time when the U.S. and most of the global economy were recovering from a serious financial crisis. This had two correlated results. The first is that the PRC “misinterpreted Obama administration efforts to increase cooperation as a sign of U.S. weakness and an opportunity to press Washington for concessions.”<sup>875</sup> The economic downturn had simply reinforced a pre-existing belief on the part of many senior PRC policymakers that the United States was a declining power. As a result of this belief, beginning around 2009, China became more assertive “on a wide range of bilateral, regional, and global issues,” including on maritime and sovereignty claims in the South and East China Seas and in PLA interactions with U.S. military ships and aircraft conducting lawful routine operations within China’s EEZ.<sup>876</sup>

Between March 4 and 8, 2009, numerous PLAN vessels and aircraft, in coordination with civilian trawlers, undertook an increasingly “aggressive and dangerous” harassment campaign against two unarmed U.S. “ocean surveillance ships,” the USNS *Victorious* and the USNS *Impeccable*, while operating in the Yellow Sea and South China Sea. This became known as the *Impeccable* incident (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7) and was referred to by the Director of National Intelligence (and former PACOM Commander) Dennis Blair as the most serious crisis since the EP-3 incident in 2001.<sup>877</sup> In March, PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with President

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<sup>872</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 212.

<sup>873</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 212.

<sup>874</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-US military-to-military relations,” 212.

<sup>875</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 668.

<sup>876</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 668.

<sup>877</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 73.

Obama, who stressed military dialogue as a means of avoiding future incidents.<sup>878</sup> However, in May the USNS *Victorious* was involved in another incident involving PRC fishing vessels,<sup>879</sup> and in June, the USS *John McCain*'s towed sonar array collided with a PLA submarine off the coast of the Philippines.<sup>880</sup>

China's more assertive foreign policy during this time alarmed many of its neighbors, who looked to the United States to "demonstrate its commitment to the region."<sup>881</sup> On November 17, 2011, President Obama addressed the Australian Parliament in Canberra, where he outlined a "shift" in U.S. foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>882</sup> Obama said the U.S. had made a "deliberate and strategic decision," that "as a Pacific nation, the United States will play a larger and long-term role in shaping this region and its future."<sup>883</sup> Obama's announcement followed a similar speech delivered a week earlier by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The "21<sup>st</sup> century will be America's Pacific century," she said, characterized by "a period of unprecedented outreach and partnership in this dynamic, complex, and consequential region."<sup>884</sup> Clinton also wrote an article for *Foreign Policy* magazine entitled "America's Pacific Century," where she laid out the country's vision for the future. At the heart of America's 'Pacific pivot' (later rebranded as a 'rebalancing' due to the 'pivot's' perceived negative connotations)<sup>885</sup> is the goal of ensuring "continued American leadership well into this century."<sup>886</sup>

Immediately prior to the announcement of the 'Pacific pivot', the Obama administration announced a \$5.8 billion arms sale to Taiwan. Surprisingly, Beijing had a fairly muted response to both the arms sale and the pivot. Rather than suspend military-to-military ties, as it had in the past, the PRC instead expressed concern and skepticism regarding Washington's stated rationale for the 'rebalance' to the Asia-Pacific, and

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<sup>878</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 73.

<sup>879</sup> The PRC often uses fishing vessels to harass ships in its 'territorial' waters, creating a level of deniability for the government. It also increasingly uses its Maritime Militia, as well as its law enforcement branches (such as the Coast Guard), to confront foreign vessels. For more on this, see: Andrew S. Erickson & Conor M. Kennedy, "China's Maritime Militia: What It Is and How to Deal With It," *Foreign Affairs* (online), June 23, 2016.

<sup>880</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 73.

<sup>881</sup> Saunders & Bowie, "US-China military relations," 668.

<sup>882</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament," November 17, 2011.

<sup>883</sup> Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament."

<sup>884</sup> Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," Remarks at the East-West Center, November 10, 2011.

<sup>885</sup> For more on this, see Campbell, *The Pivot* (2016).

<sup>886</sup> Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Affairs* (online), November 2011.

“lament[ed] the ‘lack of strategic trust’” between the two states.<sup>887</sup> It further urged Washington to show “greater respect for Chinese ‘core interests,’”<sup>888</sup> which is often a euphemism for Beijing’s territorial claims and Taiwan. Indeed, as Saunders and Bowie note, “the most prominent element of China’s response was increased efforts to build a stable relationship with Washington.”<sup>889</sup> Though the mil-mil relationship had not altered in a particularly dramatic way (for example, with respect to the types of engagements), from 2001 – 2011, it had definitely matured.

### Quantum Leap: 2012 - 2016

In February 2012, PRC Vice President Xi Jinping visited the United States, where he was greeted at the Pentagon by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and a full honors ceremony.<sup>890</sup> While there, Xi also met with CJCS General Martin Dempsey. During the visit, Xi “noted that military contacts are important for the U.S.-PRC cooperative partnership.”<sup>891</sup> Xi’s visit to the Pentagon left a lasting impression.<sup>892</sup> Saunders and Bowie note that he “appears to have been personally concerned about the risks of military accidents and dissatisfied with the policy options the PLA produced for U.S.-China military relations.”<sup>893</sup> He commissioned two academic studies on U.S.-China mil-mil relations “to generate independent assessments of the pros and cons of expanding military ties,” with the U.S., and “ordered the PLA to increase its military interactions with U.S. military counterparts.”<sup>894</sup> In 2013, Xi would succeed Hu Jintao as President, allowing him to reshape the mil-mil relationship as he saw fit. The 2012 – 2016 period would see the realization of the Obama administration’s goal of ‘institutionalizing’ the mil-mil relationship, at least to some degree. First, in 2012, China proposed the establishment of a “new type of great power relations” (NTGPR), comprised of three elements: “no conflict

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<sup>887</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 668.

<sup>888</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 668.

<sup>889</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 668.

<sup>890</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 77.

<sup>891</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 77.

<sup>892</sup> This meeting, and the impact it had on Xi’s embracing of the importance of mil-mil relations, was cited by several interview subjects, including Bonnie Glaser (February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.).

<sup>893</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 677.

<sup>894</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 677-78.

or confrontation, mutual respect [for core interests], and win-win cooperation.”<sup>895</sup> It was, in effect, an attempt by China to get the United States to recognize it as a peer and accept Beijing’s “core interests of sovereignty and territorial integrity,” principally Taiwan and its claims in the South and East China Seas.<sup>896</sup>

The Obama administration accepted aspects of the concept, though avoided any mention of accepting respect for China’s core interests as an element of the bilateral relationship.<sup>897</sup> U.S. allies and partners in the region became “alarmed” that it was “accepting a Chinese conceptualization of the relationship,” leading officials to drop “the [NTGPR] term from U.S. characterizations” of the relationship.<sup>898</sup> Reflecting the importance Xi placed on mil-mil relations, NTGPR would be followed shortly after with calls for ‘a new type of military-to-military relations,’ which Xi brought up with President Obama during a 2013 summit in Sunnylands, California. The 2013 USCC *Report to Congress* notes that “From 2012 to 2013, the number of U.S.-China military-to-military contacts – including high-level visits, recurrent exchanges, academic exchanges, functional exchanges, and joint exercises – more than doubled from approximately 20 to 40.”<sup>899</sup>

The 2012 – 2016 period would see a series of notable firsts in the mil-mil relationship. On September 17, 2012, the USN and PLAN held their first bilateral counter-piracy exercise in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>900</sup> In July 2013, as part of the Strategic Security Dialogue (SSD),<sup>901</sup> U.S. and PRC officials held the first meeting of the Cyber Working Group,<sup>902</sup> reflecting Beijing’s willingness to engage in a dialogue on a previously taboo subject – though China would suspend the group in May 2014 after the

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<sup>895</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 669.

<sup>896</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 669.

<sup>897</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 669.

<sup>898</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 669.

<sup>899</sup> USCC, *2013 Report to Congress*, 230.

<sup>900</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 78.

<sup>901</sup> The SSD is itself an offshoot of the Security & Economic Dialogue (S&ED), started by Hu Jintao and Barack Obama in April 2009. The S&ED is a combination of the W. Bush-era Strategic Economic Dialogue (chaired by Secretary of the Treasury) and the Senior Dialogue (Chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State). The S&ED replaced ‘senior’ with the PRC’s preferred ‘strategic,’ and elevated the Secretary of State to a co-chair. The first S&ED took place in Washington in July 2009. According to the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), the S&ED is used “to address a broader range of issues, and improve communication between our militaries in order to reduce mistrust.” Barack H. Obama. *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. White House, (May 27, 2010), 43.

<sup>902</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 79.

U.S. Department of Justice indicted five PLA personnel for cyber espionage.<sup>903</sup> In early April, 2014, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel received a two-hour tour of the PLAN's sole aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, referred to in U.S. media as "an unprecedented opening by Beijing to a potent symbol of its military power."<sup>904</sup> That same month, the PLAN hosted the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS)<sup>905</sup> for the first time. During the two-day event in Qingdao, WPNS members unanimously approved the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), a voluntary and legally non-binding agreement which, "If observed consistently," could "significantly reduce the risk of miscommunication, miscalculation, and accidents at sea."<sup>906</sup> China had opposed the adaptation of CUES at previous WPNS meetings, making its acceptance and adaptation particularly noteworthy.<sup>907</sup>

In June 2014, the PLAN participated for the first time in the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) military exercises, the largest multilateral naval exercise in the world (though it had previously attended as an observer). China "contributed the second-largest contingent to the exercise (behind the United States)."<sup>908</sup> However, the PLAN's participation in RIMPAC would be tarnished after it was found to have simultaneously deployed an "uninvited intelligence collection ship to monitor and gather information on the exercise."<sup>909</sup> PACOM Commander Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III referred to China's decision to deploy the spy ship as "a little odd," while the USCC 2014 *Report to Congress* said it was "inappropriate and undermined the spirit of cooperation and transparency that RIMPAC seeks to cultivate."<sup>910</sup> China's behavior was compared to

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<sup>903</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2014 Report to Congress* (November 2014), 263.

<sup>904</sup> Phil Stewart, "U.S. defense chief, in first, visits China's aircraft carrier," *Reuters* (online), April 5, 2014.

<sup>905</sup> Established in 1988, the WPNS aims to "increase cooperation and the ability to operate together, as well as to build trust and confidence between Navies by providing a framework to enable the discussion of maritime issues of mutual interest, the exchange of information, the practice and demonstration of capabilities, and the exchange of personnel" (USCC 2014, 261). It has 21 members and 3 observers.

<sup>906</sup> CUES is an agreement "upon which the participating nations have a standardized protocol of safety procedures, basic communications and basic maneuvering instructions to follow for naval ships and aircraft during unplanned encounters at sea." USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 261.

<sup>907</sup> The 2015 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* cites China's hosting of the WPNS as having played a role in "increased cooperative transparency, improved transparency, and reinforced international norms." United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* 2015, (April 7, 2015), 64.

<sup>908</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 257.

<sup>909</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 258.

<sup>910</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 258.



“inviting a friend over for dinner and then having their buddy break in your back door to rob you.”<sup>911</sup>

The most important ‘firsts’ to come out of this period, and which best represent the ‘institutionalization’ of the mil-mil relationship, was the November 2014 signing of two MOUs during an Obama-Xi summit in Beijing. Xi had first proposed the MOUs on notifications of major military activities and rules of behavior for air and naval activities during the 2013 Sunnylands summit. It required “more than 10 rounds of discussions,” before the MOUs were signed.<sup>912</sup> The first MOU, “Notification of Major Military Activities,” “has a modular design that can incorporate new notification mechanisms via annexes,”<sup>913</sup> and “aims to increase transparency between the two militaries by providing best practices for regularly sharing information about security-related policy developments in each country and by establishing a mechanism to encourage the two militaries to invite each other to observe unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral exercises.”<sup>914</sup>

The initial agreement “included two annexes: one covering strategy and policy announcements and one on the observation of military exercises.”<sup>915</sup> The second MOU, “Rules of Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters,”<sup>916</sup> is similar to CUES and “seeks to avoid miscalculation and misunderstandings in encounters between U.S. and Chinese surface ships by establishing best practices for unplanned encounters.”<sup>917</sup> During Xi’s September 2015 visit to Washington, an annex governing “air-to-air encounters” was added to the ‘Rules’ MOU,<sup>918</sup> while another “providing rules for an emergency military hotline,” was added to the ‘Notifications’ MOU.<sup>919</sup> With these annexes in place, “future discussions about operational safety will take place as part of the existing” MMCA

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<sup>911</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 258 fn.

<sup>912</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2015), 64.

<sup>913</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 676.

<sup>914</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2015 Report to Congress* (November 2015), 257.

<sup>915</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 676.

<sup>916</sup> Also sometimes referred to as the Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters.

<sup>917</sup> USCC, *2015 Report to Congress*, 257.

<sup>918</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “US-China military relations,” 676. The 2016 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* notes that “The new air-to-air annex draws upon international norms and provides DoD and PLA the framework for a comprehensive regime that will increase operational safety and reduce risk,” (97).

<sup>919</sup> USCC, *2015 Report to Congress*, 257.

talks.<sup>920</sup> The 2016 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* notes that “The completion of the two annexes reflects a shared objective of the two militaries to improve relations, manage risk, and expand cooperation in areas of mutual interest while managing differences.”<sup>921</sup> In so doing, it reinforces that both states are attempting to signal their security-seeking preferences (and/or intentions), as well the utility of CBMs and mil-mil to reduce tensions and uncertainty between competing great powers.<sup>922</sup>

While these were positive developments in the relationship, particularly the Chinese-initiated MOUs, they coincided with an overall increase in tensions. On November 23, 2013, the PRC “suddenly announced” an East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), which “asserted coverage of the airspace over the Senkaku Islands,” which are officially owned by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan.<sup>923</sup> The ADIZ also overlaps with existing ADIZ’s of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The United States responded to China’s announcement by flying two B-52 bombers through the ADIZ, while Secretary of Defense Hagel referred to the implementation of the ADIZ as a destabilizing attempt to alter the status quo.<sup>924</sup> Traveling in Tokyo when the announcement had been made, Vice President Joe Biden echoed Hagel’s comment, referring to the ADIZ as an effort to “unilaterally change the status quo in the East China Sea,” that “raised the risk of accidents and miscalculation.”<sup>925</sup>

Less than a month later, on December 5, 2013, the USS *Cowpens* was harassed by PLAN ships as it shadowed the *Liaoning* in international waters in the South China Sea. The PRC had declared “a forty-five-kilometer “safety zone” around the *Liaoning* while

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<sup>920</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* 2016, (April 26, 2016), 97.

<sup>921</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 97.

<sup>922</sup> “The confidence-building mechanisms manage risk and improve reciprocal transparency, while invigorating existing multilateral and bilateral engagement mechanisms, such as the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement and the Defense Policy Coordination Talks.” DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 97.

<sup>923</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 80. China refers to them as the Diaoyu Islands, while Taiwan refers to them as the Diaoyutai Islands. They are located just north of Taiwan. “Japan resumed control of the uninhabited islands in 1972 when the United States, which administered them after World War II, returned them to Japan, along with other islands adjacent to Okinawa.” Kenneth W. Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” in *Investigating Confidence-Building Measures in the Asia Pacific*, Ranjeet K. Singh, ed., The Henry L. Stimson Center, Report 28 (May 1999), 18.

<sup>924</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 80.

<sup>925</sup> Mark Lander, “China pushes back on air defence as Biden seeks to cool tensions,” *The Globe and Mail* (online), December 4, 2013.

it's at sea,"<sup>926</sup> While it is normal for carrier groups (U.S. or other) to establish a safety zone around its ships, the size of the PRC's claimed zone at this time "violates every principle of international maritime law and the freedom of the seas."<sup>927</sup> Insisting on its lawful operation in international waters, the *Cowpens* refused PLAN demands that it change course.<sup>928</sup> A PLAN ship cut in front of the bow of the *Cowpens* "as close as 46 yards," nearly causing a collision.<sup>929</sup> Ship-to-ship communication between the *Cowpens* and the *Liaoning* "defused the tension," however Secretary Hagel referred to the incident as "very incendiary" and "irresponsible."<sup>930</sup> He further warned that such behavior "could be a trigger or a spark that could set off some eventual miscalculation."<sup>931</sup> PACOM Commander Locklear would later attribute the near-collision to a "lack of experience" on the part of the PLAN ship that maneuvered so closely to the *Cowpens*.<sup>932</sup>

From at least 2009 onwards,<sup>933</sup> there has been an uptick in the number of unsafe interceptions and naval harassment by the PLA, which roughly corresponds to when the PRC's land reclamation efforts in the South China Sea increased.<sup>934</sup> The implementation of the MOUs in 2014 has helped curtail the number and intensity of these incidents,<sup>935</sup> however "the extent to which the Chinese and U.S. militaries have followed the MOU guidance in their interactions is unclear."<sup>936</sup> The USCC has remarked that "President Xi's government appears willing to cause a much higher level of tension in the bilateral relationship than past administrations have," which "may be a consequence of China's growing confidence in its economic and military power."<sup>937</sup> Many observers also believe

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<sup>926</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 17.

<sup>927</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 17.

<sup>928</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 80.

<sup>929</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 80.

<sup>930</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 80.

<sup>931</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 263.

<sup>932</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 80. For more on the *Cowpens* incident, see Fabey, *Crashback*, 139 – 163.

<sup>933</sup> The 2014 USCC *Report* notes that "China has pursued a more assertive approach to its longstanding territorial disputes in the South and East China Sea since 2009." USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 262.

<sup>934</sup> These incidents are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>935</sup> "According to September 2015 testimony to Congress by Admiral Harris [PACOM Commander], U.S. Pacific Command has "seen very few dangerous activities by the Chinese" since August 2014. Days later, U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice also asserted that "[w]e've seen a marked improvement in operational safety since we signed [the MOUs]." USCC, *2015 Report to Congress*, 257 fn. That said in 2015 and 2016, numerous unsafe encounters between PLA and U.S. aircraft were reported, discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

<sup>936</sup> USCC, *2015 Report to Congress*, 257.

<sup>937</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 265.

the deliberate ratcheting of tensions is to “determine if and how the United States will ‘push back,’” and “test the United States’ commitment to its treaty allies and the region.”<sup>938</sup> In effect, China is becoming more assertive in pursuing its interests because it can. The parallels to the U.S.-Soviet experience, at least with respect to the maritime domain, are clear. Just as the Soviet navy used assertive and aggressive posturing to assert its presence and status, the PLAN is announcing to the world ‘we have arrived’. During a 2007 USCC hearing, Thomas Ehrhard said, “I think the message they’re sending [...] is that they can challenge these global commons.”<sup>939</sup> “The U.S. thinks they dominate these global commons,” he continued, “but they do not.”<sup>940</sup> The USCC believes “China’s pursuit of a more confrontational relationship with the United States likely will persist.”<sup>941</sup>

What is important to note is that despite the fact that the context in which the mil-mil relationship was taking place had worsened, the durability of the relationship itself had improved. For example, the 2014 USCC *Report to Congress* notes that “With a few exceptions, the U.S.-China security relationship deteriorated in 2014,”<sup>942</sup> and yet “more high-level U.S.-China military-to-military exchanges happened in 2014 than in each of the previous three years.”<sup>943</sup> (Interestingly, the 2015 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* notes that in 2014, the mil-mil relationship “sustained positive momentum,”<sup>944</sup> which only reinforces the inherent difficulty of assessing the progress, or even value, of the mil-mil relationship, which remains deeply contested.) In April 2015, the USN and PLAN even conducted joint drills in “uncontested waters of the South China Sea,” focusing on “improving communication at sea,” and “search and rescue.”<sup>945</sup> The Obama administration’s efforts to ‘institutionalize’ the relationship has more or less been effective,<sup>946</sup> and represent a ‘quantum leap’ from previous periods. A considerable

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<sup>938</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 265.

<sup>939</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship* (2007), 161. At the time, Ehrhard was a Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategy and Budgetary Assessments, a Washington, D.C., think tank.

<sup>940</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship* (2007), 161.

<sup>941</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 10.

<sup>942</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 261.

<sup>943</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 265.

<sup>944</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* 2016, (April 26, 2016), 64.

<sup>945</sup> USCC, *2015 Report to Congress*, 259.

<sup>946</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 263-64.

amount of this success is owed to President Xi and his belief in the importance of stable mil-mil relations.<sup>947</sup> However, the 2014 USCC report cautions that “Thus far, however, stronger military-to-military ties have done little to reduce distrust and tension in the broader relationship.”<sup>948</sup> As the following sections will demonstrate, this is not necessarily true. Part of the problem with such characterizations is that they are made in the absence of context. The USCC report, for instance, provides no clarity regarding its conception of trust or how it is being measured.

This chapter has provided an overview of the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship. It has highlighted the various issues which continue to hamper progress – primarily Taiwan, U.S. surveillance operations within China’s EEZ, the 2000 NDAA restrictions and related Congressional reports. It has also demonstrated the fragility of the relationship, which has been suspended by the U.S. or China in the wake of incidents or to signal displeasure with a policy or action. It has also shown that despite the recurrence of incidents and other roadblocks, the relationship has managed to improve, becoming more stable and durable. This chapter has also highlighted many of the similarities the U.S.-China case share with the U.S.-Soviet experience, including a hesitancy to embrace CBMs and mil-mil relations, a general distrust of U.S. intentions, and a trend between China’s growth in power, its desire for status, and the frequency of incidents. The following chapters delve deeper into these issues, including China’s perspectives and approaches to CBMs and military diplomacy and a closer look at the various military exchanges and activities that comprise the relationship. With a general overview of the history of U.S.-China military relations now established, it is possible to examine the relationship in more detail.

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<sup>947</sup> Interview with Senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>948</sup> USCC, *2014 Report to Congress*, 264.

## CHAPTER 6: THE VIEW FROM BEIJING

This section provides an overview and analysis of China's view of CBMs and defense diplomacy, and the role of the PLA, including its strategic culture and views on transparency and trust in the context of military affairs. The purpose is not to be comprehensive so much as it is to provide sufficient context for subsequent analysis. Many of the issues introduced in this section, such the role of the PLA's structure or views on transparency, are not placed into the wider context of the U.S.-PRC mil-mil relationship until Chapter 7, which analyses the mil-mil relationship in practice. It should be noted that information on the PLA, and on the CCP's foreign policy and decision-making more generally, "remains elusive."<sup>949</sup> More importantly, as Michael Swaine points out, "it is extremely difficult to verify what little information is available."<sup>950</sup> Even in the published works of renowned experts, there are lots of qualifying words like 'likely' and 'probably'. The problem is rooted in the CCP's opaque governance and the PLA's "obsession" with secrecy and transparency, which is addressed in detail further below.<sup>951</sup> Attempts to rectify these issues by reaching out directly to PLA Defense Attachés in Washington, D.C., and Ottawa (including through intermediaries), were unsuccessful. Accordingly, the information in this section is sourced from both interviews and secondary resources.

The section is structured as follows: first, a brief overview of the PRC/PLA's worldview provides the context necessary to understand its approach to CBMs and issues of defense diplomacy. Next, I analyze the structure of the PLA and PRC foreign policy decision-making as it relates to mil-mil relations. I then examine the PLA's strategic thinking, including its views on transparency and trust. Finally, I look at China's approach to CBMs before exploring recent trends in PLA defense diplomacy. This is followed by a closer look at the U.S. perspective and approach to the mil-mil relationship with China, before finally providing an overview of the competing approaches the U.S. and China take to CBMs and building trust. Together, these sections provide the

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<sup>949</sup> Michael D. Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, Andrew Scobell & Phillip Saunders, eds., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 141.

<sup>950</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 142.

<sup>951</sup> Wilborn, *Security Cooperation with China*, 5.

foundation for a closer, more detailed empirical analysis of the mil-mil relationship in practice.

### *The Chinese Dream*

In a November 29, 2012 speech, Xi Jinping spoke about achieving the ‘Chinese Dream’ – the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.<sup>952</sup> “Reviewing the past,” he said, “all Party members must bear in mind that backwardness left us vulnerable to attack, whereas only development makes us strong.”<sup>953</sup> Xi was referring to the ‘Century of Humiliation’, a period of time that roughly began with the Opium War against the British in 1839, and ended after the CCP’s victory over the Kuomintang in the Chinese Civil War and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. The Century of Humiliation left an indelible mark on the minds of both the CCP and the Chinese people, a reminder of how weakness (economic, political, and militarily) leaves you vulnerable to the whims of the powerful. Similar to Thucydides’ ‘Melian Dialogue’ and its central lesson that the strong do what they will while the weak suffer as they must, the CCP understand it is better to be the strong than the weak. Xi even provides a timeline for the realization of this Dream.

I firmly believe that the goal of bringing about a moderately prosperous society in all respects can be achieved by 2021, when the CPC [Communist Party of China] celebrates its centenary; the goal of building China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious can be achieved by 2049, when the People’s Republic of China marks its centenary; and the dream of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will then be realized.<sup>954</sup>

Beijing “sees modernizing China’s economy and improving living standards as crucial to

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<sup>952</sup> Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press Co., 2014), 37-39. It should be noted that while Xi applied the label ‘Chinese Dream,’ its content is derived from previously articulated CCP goals. For example, former President Jiang Zemin spoke of China being a “prosperous, strong, democratic and culturally advanced socialist country” by the time the PRC celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. David M. Finkelstein & John Unangst, *Engaging DoD: Chinese Perspectives on Military Relations with the United States*, (CNA: October 1999), 5.

<sup>953</sup> Xi, *The Governance of China*, 37.

<sup>954</sup> Xi, *The Governance of China*, 38. It is believed by many analysts that the realization of Xi’s dream means the reunification of Taiwan with Mainland China (partially evidenced by the inclusion of ‘harmonious’, though also based on numerous other official speeches by Xi and other senior officials). A notable example of this view can be seen in prominent Washington, D.C., think tank, *Project 2049*. Dedicated to Taiwanese independence (and democracy), it was founded in 2008 by Randall Schriver, a critic of U.S.-China mil-mil relations and the current Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian & Pacific Security Affairs.

maintaining domestic stability and ensuring regime survival,” with a secondary goal being to “establish China as a leading power in Asia, making it capable of influencing the policies of other countries in the region.”<sup>955</sup>

The PLA is central to the realization of Xi’s Dream and the ultimate guarantor that China will never again find itself ‘suffering what it must’.<sup>956</sup> *China’s Military Strategy*, a PRC White Paper released in May 2015, notes that the PLA is essential to “provide a strong guarantee for achieving the national strategic goal of the ‘two centenaries’ and for realizing the Chinese Dream of achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>957</sup> It is not coincidental that 2049 is also the timeline set by the PLA for “attaining its modernization objectives.”<sup>958</sup> However, long before Xi articulated China’s ambitions in 2012, the PRC had been sensitive to its relative strength vis-à-vis those most likely (and/or able) to cause it harm. The Century of Humiliation resulted in a profound feeling of insecurity and a “sense of wounded pride” amongst members of both the PLA and the Chinese citizenry.<sup>959</sup> Moreover, the PLA “views itself as the ‘torch bearer’ for remembering” the Century of Humiliation and uses it as a justification for China’s defense modernization.<sup>960</sup>

The lessons borne out of that history are foundational to the PLA, instilled in its personnel “through a selective retelling of modern Chinese history.”<sup>961</sup> As a consequence of both the history and how it is taught to subsequent generations, “Chinese resistance to foreign interference is very strong.”<sup>962</sup> Indeed, the “CCP actively encourages the PLA to distrust foreign intentions.”<sup>963</sup> For example, in a 2004 speech, President Hu Jintao

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<sup>955</sup> Heidi Holz & Kenneth Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics: The People’s Liberation Army Experience with Military Relations,” in *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China’s Military*, Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds. (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, June 2010), 430.

<sup>956</sup> Xi, *The Governance of China*, 242; “China views modernization of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as essential to achieving great power status and what Chinese President Xi Jinping calls the “China Dream” of national rejuvenation.” DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2015), i.

<sup>957</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Military Strategy*, (Beijing, May 2015).

<sup>958</sup> Michael D. Swaine, *America’s Challenge: Engaging a Rising China in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 159.

<sup>959</sup> Alison A. Kaufman & Peter W. Mackenzie, *Field Guide: The Culture of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, (CNA, February 2009), 16.

<sup>960</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 15.

<sup>961</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 16.

<sup>962</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 16.

<sup>963</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 16.



“warned that ‘Western hostile forces have not given up the wild ambition of trying to subjugate us, intensifying the political strategy of westernizing and dividing up China.’”<sup>964</sup> This concern continues to permeate Beijing’s approach to U.S.-China relations. It is also the lens through which U.S. operations in the Pacific, particularly those within China’s EEZ, are viewed.<sup>965</sup>

Beyond its historical memory, the PRC has maintained a clear view its security environment and the threats therein. This is partially motivated by its geographic position, where it shares a 22,000 km border with fourteen other states (the most in the world, tied only with Russia) and has a 14,500 km coastline. However, China’s primary external concern is the great powers capable of interfering with its domestic stability or global interests. For example, “In the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union deployed over one million mechanized troops along the China-USSR border to prepare for a swift and deep invasion of China. In addition, both the United States and the Soviet Union plotted to attack China with nuclear weapons.”<sup>966</sup> In light of its history, both recent and distant, it is understandable why Beijing may feel insecure.

To address this insecurity, the PRC and PLA have essentially embraced a “24-character strategy”<sup>967</sup> introduced by Deng Xiaoping: “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; *hide our capacities and bide our time*; be good at maintaining a low profile; never claim leadership.”<sup>968</sup> As a DoD report put it, “China seeks to ensure basic stability along its periphery and avoid direct confrontation with the United States in order to focus on domestic development and smooth China’s rise.”<sup>969</sup> Currently, China is experiencing what it refers to as a “period of strategic opportunity in

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<sup>964</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 16.

<sup>965</sup> James P. Nolan, “Why Can’t We Be Friends? Assessing the Operational Value of Engaging PLA Leadership,” *Asia Policy* 20 (July 2015), 65.

<sup>966</sup> Da-peng Qi, “The PLA’s Role in China’s Regional Security Strategy,” in *Living with China: Regional States and China through Crises and Turning Points*, Shiping Tang, Mingjiang Li, & Amitav Acharya, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 37.

<sup>967</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2003), 12. It is subsequently referred to as a ‘12 character guiding principle’ in the DoD *Annual Report* (2005), 7 (fn).

<sup>968</sup> Italics added for emphasis. The translation differs based on source, but the essence remains. United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2005), 7.

<sup>969</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2015), i.

which the United States is not completely dedicated to stifling China's rise."<sup>970</sup> In theoretical terms, China is pursuing a strategy of internal balancing.<sup>971</sup> The challenge is modernizing the PLA and pursuing/defending China's interests without triggering a response from the U.S. As Brooks and Wohlforth note, "No country, or group of countries, wants to maneuver itself into a situation in which it will have to contend with the focused enmity of the United States."<sup>972</sup> However, change has not come easily for the PLA, who perhaps because of its embellished view of its history and military prowess,<sup>973</sup> has been reticent to acknowledge weakness.

The first realization for the need to modernize its military forces came after China's relatively brief, but violent, war with neighboring Vietnam in 1979. The PLA was "Shocked into change," by the "stiff resistance" it encountered during the nearly month-long campaign and began its "first major reforms" in the mid-1980s.<sup>974</sup> Coupled with the ever-present Soviet threat, the recognition of its relative weakness factored heavily into Beijing's pursuit of U.S. weapons and technology throughout the 1980s. The late 1980s and early 1990s brought with it changes to both China's internal and external security environments. The 1989 Tiananmen incident "threatened domestic stability and regime legitimacy," the CCP's primary domestic concerns.<sup>975</sup> Shortly after, the Soviet Union dissolved and the Cold War ended, leaving the United States as the world's "lonely superpower."<sup>976</sup> However, as dramatic a shift as the end of the Cold War was for

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<sup>970</sup> Mastro, "The Vulnerability of Rising Powers," 70; The PLA's modernization is seen as essential to "preserving and sustaining" this "period of strategic opportunity" to "advance China's national development during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. China's leaders see this period as providing an opportunity to focus on fostering a stable external environment to provide the PRC the strategic space to prioritize economic growth and development and to achieve "national rejuvenation" by 2049." DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2014), i.

<sup>971</sup> Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth, *World Out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2008), 7; Yuan-kang Wang, "China's Response to the Unipolar World: The Strategic Logic of Peaceful Development," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 45:3 (2010): 554 – 567.

<sup>972</sup> Stephen G. Brooks & William C. Wohlforth, "American Primacy in Perspective," *Foreign Affairs* 81:4 (July/August 2002), 27.

<sup>973</sup> For example, in its 'selective retelling' of its history, "The PLA emphasizes that it has always defeated larger, more-advanced adversaries due to the brilliance of China's traditional strategic principles and the superior human qualities of PLA personnel." Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 17.

<sup>974</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 8.

<sup>975</sup> Eric Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, Andrew Scobell & Phillip Saunders, eds., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 219.

<sup>976</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "The Lonely Superpower," *Foreign Affairs* 78:2 (March 1999), 35 – 49.

China, and the international system more generally, it was another brief war that would once again shock the PLA.

Though it lasted just over a month,<sup>977</sup> it is hard to underemphasize how important the 1991 Gulf War was to PLA strategists. *Operation Desert Storm* was the first war of the unipolar era and showcased the world's most advanced military against a country that was primarily equipped with Chinese and Russian weaponry. Indeed, in addition to not vetoing the UN Security Council resolution that authorized the use of force to liberate Kuwait, the PRC offered the United States technical details on Chinese weapons systems used by Iraq.<sup>978</sup> Even still, the PLA had expected the Iraqi military to put up more of a fight.<sup>979</sup> Instead, it watched as U.S. and coalition forces decimated Saddam's forces. The Iraqi air defense system, which "was at least as sophisticated as the systems China was capable of employing," proved itself largely ineffective against U.S. and coalition aircraft.<sup>980</sup> The Iraqi T-72 tanks, which were "considerably superior" to what the PLA was fielding, "presented no challenge whatsoever to the U.S. Army."<sup>981</sup>

The Gulf War has widely been referred to as a "wake-up call" for the PLA.<sup>982</sup> "The Gulf War was an absolute shock to the system on the Chinese side," a former senior U.S. official told me.<sup>983</sup> "We lost four tanks in the Gulf War. Four. I think we lost one aircraft to enemy fire. This was, sort of, unbelievable. But it happened."<sup>984</sup> The U.S. performance was so impressive that "Chinese military writings refer to the Gulf War as the 'epitome' of modern war."<sup>985</sup> Particularly impressive to the PLA were the U.S.

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<sup>977</sup> The First Gulf War is officially listed as occurring between January 17 – February 28, 1991.

<sup>978</sup> Mark T. Nakagawa, *United States Military-to-Military Contacts with the People's Liberation Army: Can It Further U.S. Policies and Aims in the Asia-Pacific Region?* Thesis. U.S. Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas (2003), 37.

<sup>979</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior military official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>980</sup> Robert Farley, "What Scares China's Military: The 1991 Gulf War," *The National Interest* (online), November 24, 2014.

<sup>981</sup> Farley, "What Scares China's Military."

<sup>982</sup> Hooper, *Going Nowhere Slowly*, 12; Howard & Willner, *China's Rise and the U.S. Army*, 22; Andrew Scobell, David Lai, & Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Lessons from Other People's Wars* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, November 2011), 14.

<sup>983</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>984</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C. Officially, 23 U.S. Abrams Tanks were destroyed or damaged in the Gulf War, though seven were the result of friendly fire and two were "intentionally destroyed to prevent enemy capture after they became disabled." The rest were "damaged by enemy fire, land mines, on-board fires, or to prevent capture after they became disabled." United States General Accounting Office (GAO), *Operation Desert Storm: Early Performance Assessment of Bradley and Abrams*, GAO/NSIAD-92-94 (January 1992), 24.

<sup>985</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 51.

military's logistics capabilities.<sup>986</sup> A former senior U.S. military official told me the PLA were less impressed by America's ability to project power than its ability to sustain operations at a distance. "The logistics of the situation was what really amazed them and demonstrated to the Chinese how very far behind they actually were."<sup>987</sup> The Gulf War would continue to be studied by the PLA for many years and impressed upon the CCP the need to invest more in its military, which had generally taken a backseat to the primary goal of development.<sup>988</sup>

Shortly after the Gulf War was the previously mentioned *Yinhe* incident and then the Taiwan Strait Crisis (TSC). The TSC was another important moment for the PLA. First, and perhaps most importantly, it was a turning point in China's perception of the U.S. and its understanding of the likelihood of going to war against each other.<sup>989</sup> Related to this point, the Crisis contextualized China's weakness. Taiwan is one of China's 'core' interests – something it has publicly stated it is willing to fight to defend. The U.S. show of force in response to the Crisis lay bare the PLA's weakness and inability to actually defend one of the nation's core interests. If Taiwan had decided to declare *du jure* independence in response to China's provocations, there is not much the PLA could have done to respond – it had very limited capabilities, did not train particularly often or particularly hard, and was hampered by a bloated and corrupt bureaucracy.<sup>990</sup> However, "Over the years," the PRC perspective on the TSC has evolved, with some arguing that the PLA's missile launches in 1995 and 1996 "were successful because Washington and Taipei (and Tokyo) were put on notice that Beijing was serious about the Taiwan issue."<sup>991</sup>

China was not just concerned about incidents that directly affected its interests, like the TSC, but by America's willingness to use force, especially unilaterally, around

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<sup>986</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 44 – 45.

<sup>987</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior military official, April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>988</sup> For more on the lasting impression of the Gulf War on the PLA and its modernization, see: Dean Cheng, "Chinese Lessons from the Gulf Wars," in Scobell, Lai, & Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Antiaccess Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (RAND Corp., 2007); Roger Cliff et al., *Shaking the Heavens and Splitting the Earth: Chinese Air Force Employment Concepts in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (RAND Corp., 2011); Harlan W. Jencks, "Chinese Evaluations of "Desert Storm": Implications for PRC Security," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 6:2 (Summer/Fall 1992), 447 – 477.

<sup>989</sup> Interview with U.S. government official, March 12, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>990</sup> Interview with Scott Harold, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>991</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 13.

the world. Throughout the 1990s, “Beijing watched with unease as the United States engaged in military interventions around the world: during the first war with Iraq; in Haiti; in Somalia; and, especially, in the Balkans.”<sup>992</sup> The Clinton-era goal of ‘shaping’ the international system and enticing China to effectively join and support the liberal world order did not have the desired effect. In fact, “it was during this same period, that the PLA strategic thinkers began openly identifying the United States as a ‘hegemon’ and China’s most likely future military threat.”<sup>993</sup> For policymakers in Beijing, “The international reactions to Tiananmen – economic and military sanctions,” as well as the various U.S.-China incidents throughout the 1990s (i.e., *Yinhe*, TSC, 1999 Embassy bombing<sup>994</sup>), “led to a reexamination of China’s security environment, particularly vis-à-vis the United States.”<sup>995</sup>

The result of that reexamination is widespread and on-going. First, the PLA issued a new set of military strategic guidelines, “a significant political-military event within China.”<sup>996</sup> In 1985, the CCP’s Central Military Commission (CMC), “radically revised China’s strategic defense policy,” by directing the PLA to shift its focus from preparing for an “early, major, and nuclear war,” to “local limited wars around China’s borders, including its maritime territories and claims.”<sup>997</sup> The PLA “lessons learned” from the Gulf War “had a profound impact” on the subsequently released military strategic guidelines.<sup>998</sup> The CMC then amended the strategic defense policy to “fight local wars under modern, high technology conditions.”<sup>999</sup> This has since been updated twice, once in 2004 and again in 2015. The first adjustment directed the PLA to prepare for “win local wars under conditions of informatization,” while the second more recent

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<sup>992</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 10.

<sup>993</sup> Hooper, *Going Nowhere Slowly*, 15; “China’s leaders consistently characterize the United States as a “hegemon”, connoting a powerful protagonist and overbearing bully that is China’s major competitor, but they also believe that the United States is a declining power with important military vulnerabilities that can be exploited. China views itself as an emerging power.” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. *2002 Report to Congress*, (July 2002), 15.

<sup>994</sup> Beyond the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy, U.S./NATO actions in Kosovo reinforced the perception that the U.S. was willing to use military force to pursue its interests. Interview with U.S. senior official, March 12, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>995</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 220.

<sup>996</sup> Finkelstein, “China’s National Military Strategy,” 68.

<sup>997</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” 6.

<sup>998</sup> David M. Finkelstein, “China’s National Military Strategy: An Overview of the “Military Strategic Guidelines,” *Asia Policy* 4 (July 2007), 69.

<sup>999</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” 6.

adjustment, revealed in China's 2015 defense white paper, "directs the PLA to 'win informatized local wars' with emphasis on struggle in the maritime domain."<sup>1000</sup>

The PLA's overall doctrine, which has been only slightly modified since first released in 1993, is primarily focused on ensuring "China's developmental interests."<sup>1001</sup> China's "expanding international economic interests" and "growing reliance on imported energy," both central to its developmental interests, further incentivized Beijing to invest in a "more robust national defense capability."<sup>1002</sup> In the words of a Chinese military officer, "The PLA is shifting from its previous near sole focus on defense of Chinese territory to the protection of Chinese interests."<sup>1003</sup> And so the PRC began heavily investing in the PLA's modernization. While China's official defense spending figures are widely contested, it is generally accepted that the PRC defense budget grew by double digit percent increases from approximately 1998 - 2007,<sup>1004</sup> and by at least 8.5 percent per year from 2007 - 2016.<sup>1005</sup> The 2017 DoD *Report to Congress* notes that "Chinese leaders seem committed to increases in defense spending for the foreseeable future, even as China's economic growth slows."<sup>1006</sup>

The PLA's modernization is primarily focused on "developing the capabilities to deter or defeat adversary power projection and counter third-party intervention - including by the United States - during a crisis or conflict."<sup>1007</sup> More specifically, it is aimed at ensuring that the PLA could win a war against Taiwan, a victory which would likely depend on its ability to prevent, or delay, U.S. intervention.<sup>1008</sup> Reunification with

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<sup>1000</sup> Cortez A. Cooper, *PLA Military Modernization: Drivers, Force Restructuring, and Implications*, Testimony presented before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission on February 15, 2018 (RAND Corp., 2018), 4.

<sup>1001</sup> Qi, "The PLA's Role in China's Regional Security Strategy," 39. The policy is officially referred to as the "Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period." Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 16.

<sup>1002</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 220.

<sup>1003</sup> Quoted in Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 29.

<sup>1004</sup> Sheffield, "Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People's Republic of China," 5.

<sup>1005</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017* (May 15, 2017), ii. The 2015 DoD *Annual Report* (i) lists an average increase of 9.5 percent between 2005 and 2014.

<sup>1006</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), ii.

<sup>1007</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), ii.

<sup>1008</sup> "Preparing for potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait remains the focus and primary driver of China's military investment; however, the PRC is increasing its emphasis on preparations for contingencies other than Taiwan, such as contingencies in the East China Sea and South China Sea." DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2015), i.

Taiwan is important to the CCP in order to “satisfy cultural and nationalist sentiment,” as well as to “address perceived political and security interests.”<sup>1009</sup> Beijing fears that an independent Taiwan “could serve as a strategic foothold for the United States,” and conversely believes “securing control over Taiwan would allow China to move its defensive perimeter further seaward.”<sup>1010</sup> More to the point, China views the United States as “the greatest obstacle to achieving” reunification.<sup>1011</sup>

To overcome that obstacle, the PLA is “targeting capabilities with the potential to degrade core U.S. military-technological advantages.”<sup>1012</sup> Built around a strategy commonly referred to as Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), the PLA effectively seeks to use asymmetrical capabilities to defeat the technologically superior U.S. military.<sup>1013</sup> Ultimately, the U.S. government believes that China seeks to become the “preeminent power in Asia,”<sup>1014</sup> displacing “U.S. primacy in East Asia and the Western Pacific” and promoting a “new regional security architecture led by China and in which the United States plays a more limited role.”<sup>1015</sup> In the words of President Xi, it is an “Asia for Asians,” where China resumes its “rightful place” in both the regional and global order.<sup>1016</sup>

As a former U.S. senior military official told me, the mindset of ‘we’re a great power and you’re a little power’ is deeply embedded in China; Beijing does not act the same towards the U.S. or even Russia as it does other countries in the region.<sup>1017</sup> This was made patently obvious during the 2010 annual ASEAN security forum, when China’s Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi stared directly at Singapore’s foreign minister, George Yeo, and said “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and

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<sup>1009</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 15.

<sup>1010</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 15.

<sup>1011</sup> Qi, “The PLA’s Role in China’s Regional Security Strategy,” 46.

<sup>1012</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), ii.

<sup>1013</sup> For more on A2/AD, see: Roger Cliff et al., *Entering the Dragon’s Lair* (2007); Thomas G. Mahnken, “China’s Anti-Access Strategy in Historical and Theoretical Perspective,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34:3 (June 2011), 299 – 323.

<sup>1014</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 14.

<sup>1015</sup> USCC, *2015 Report to Congress*, 262. China seeks to “achieve “parity” in political, economic, and military strength with other great powers,” and to generate enough power “so that no major action will be taken by any other international actor in Asia without first considering Chinese interests.” United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2000).

<sup>1016</sup> Minxin Pei, “Is ‘Asia for Asians’ just a slogan?” *Taipei Times* (online), December 6, 2014.

<sup>1017</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior military official, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call.

that's just a fact.”<sup>1018</sup> During his 2007 testimony to the USCC, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Asian & Pacific Security Richard Lawless said, “We remain concerned with China’s efforts that seek also to limit the United States presence and influence. Efforts to develop exclusionary regional frameworks are contrary to the trend of greater regional cooperation in Asia.”<sup>1019</sup> The United States remains committed to ensuring it, too, maintains its ‘rightful’ place in the region.

While China is not yet the preeminent power in the Asia-Pacific, it is well on its way. The PLA’s modernization, central to the realization of Beijing’s ‘great power’ ambitions, particularly over the last twenty years, has been rather extraordinary. Former U.S. Congressman Randy Forbes (R-Virginia), the founder and chair of the Congressional China Caucus, likened China’s modernization to the shark in the movie *Jaws*. “All of a sudden this huge giant appears on the scene and everybody looks around and says where did it come from and how did it get here.”<sup>1020</sup> Referring to the PLA, Forbes continued, saying, “The only thing that continued to surprise us, that continues to surprise me, is that our government continues to be surprised over and over again by what we find and what we see in the development of China.”<sup>1021</sup> Forbes’s criticism speaks to both the pace of the PLA’s development and the U.S. government’s ability to obtain accurate information about it. At the same USCC hearing where Forbes made his remarks, Richard Lawless noted that the “pace and scope of China’s military transformation has accelerated each year.”<sup>1022</sup> This is a far cry from how the PLA was described not too long before Forbes and Lawless made their observations.

By all accounts, the PLA of the 1980s and 1990s was a paper tiger. Though the world’s largest standing army,<sup>1023</sup> the PLA was “very weak, overmanned, under equipped, under trained,” and generally “not very capable.”<sup>1024</sup> It was poorly financed and technologically stunted.<sup>1025</sup> However, once the CCP began devoting resources towards the PLA’s modernization, it made progress in strides. The PLA’s modernization

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<sup>1018</sup> John Pomfret, “U.S. takes a tougher tone with China,” *Washington Post*, Friday July 30, 2010, A01.

<sup>1019</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 38.

<sup>1020</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 2.

<sup>1021</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 2.

<sup>1022</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 36.

<sup>1023</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 1.

<sup>1024</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior military official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1025</sup> Interview with former U.S. senior military official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.



is partially about evolving from a primarily land-based, stove-piped, regional system into an expeditionary force of increasing capability and lethality, able to project power further from China's shores.<sup>1026</sup> To accomplish this, China has acquired foreign military and dual-use technologies, often through illicit means such as cyber theft, as well as targeted foreign direct investment and "exploitation of the access of private Chinese nationals to such technologies."<sup>1027</sup>

Under President Xi, the PLA has downsized, shrinking the forces by 300,000 troops,<sup>1028</sup> restructuring its command organization, and rooting out corruption, particularly among senior ranks.<sup>1029</sup> As one U.S. senior DoD official tells me, while there are pockets of excellence and technical sophistication, many challenges still remain.<sup>1030</sup> For example, as a conscript army, the PLA is still quite bloated and not as well trained. Perhaps more importantly, it has not had any combat experience since 1979, meaning its systems, personnel, and command structure have not been tested.<sup>1031</sup> As Kaufman and Mackenzie put it, the PLA is "still experiencing the 'growing pains' of its transformation from a peasant army to a modern military."<sup>1032</sup> Still, there is no questioning that the PLA has come a long way from the "short arms and slow legs," characterization of before.<sup>1033</sup>

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<sup>1026</sup> Interview with former U.S. government official, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1027</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017); ii.

<sup>1028</sup> Reducing the size of the PLA to make it more professional and agile, and suited for the types of joint operations required of modern militaries (involving seamless coordination and integration across multiple branches), has been a long-time goal. For example, see Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 31.

<sup>1029</sup> Cooper, *PLA Military Modernization*, 8 – 9.

<sup>1030</sup> Interview with Senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1031</sup> For more on the PLA's modernization, see: Kevin Pollpeter & Kenneth W. Allen, eds., *The PLA as Organization v2.0*. (Vienna, VA: Defense Group, Inc., 2015); James Mulvenon & David Finkelstein, eds., *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2005); Roy Kamphausen & Andrew Scobell, eds., *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2007); Roy Kamphausen & David Lai, eds., *The Chinese People's Liberation Army in 2025* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2015); *Coping with the Dragon: Essays on PLA Transformation and the U.S. Military* (Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., December 2007); Dennis J. Blasko, "PLA Ground Force Modernization Underway in All Military Regions, Preparing for a Variety of Missions," *Asia Policy* 4 (July 2007), 78 – 83; Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress*, (Congressional Research Service, RL33153, May 31, 2016).

<sup>1032</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 1.

<sup>1033</sup> "“Short Arms-Slow Legs” is an idiom first used by a Chinese general to describe the PLA after he had analyzed the Gulf War. It is symbolic of the PLA's present dilemma: they do not have the transportation to get to a fight; and even if they get there, they cannot hit anybody, unless their opponent has even shorter arms and slower legs than the PLA." Russell D. Howard, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army: "Short*

Indeed, as the 2013 USCC *Report to Congress* notes, “PLA modernization is altering the security balance in the Asia-Pacific, challenging decades of U.S. military preeminence in the region.”<sup>1034</sup> Beijing is using its “increasingly modern” military to be more assertive, “particularly in pursuit of its territorial claims in the East and South China seas.”<sup>1035</sup> An early USCC report notes that “China’s leaders seek to deter the United States from effectively intervening in any Chinese use of force against Taiwan, by denying the United States the unfettered freedom under international law to operate in the seas and airspace near China.”<sup>1036</sup> This clarifies the rationale behind the PRC’s land reclamation activities in the South China Sea, and the corresponding challenging of other states’ freedom of navigation near them (particularly the United States). Other aspects of the PLA’s modernization are threaded throughout the rest of this chapter. With some general context established, it is important to take a closer look at the PLA’s structure as it relates to military-to-military relations.

### *Barbarian Handlers*

As noted above, information about the PLA, like the rest of the Chinese government, is limited. For example, while “in recent years” U.S. observers have “gained a much greater understanding of the PLA’s equipment and capabilities,” “knowledge of the *values, beliefs, and essential cultural features* that influence the way PLA members behave, interact, and make decisions is much less widespread.”<sup>1037</sup> Indeed, Michael Swaine notes that “clear and conclusive evidence of the precise role of the military in China’s foreign policy formulation and implementation remains elusive,” and that “very little is known about China’s military-related policy decision-making structure and process in general, both in normal times and especially during political-military crises.”<sup>1038</sup> That said, there is sufficient information available to establish the broad

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*Arms and Slow Legs*, INSS Occasional Paper 28, Regional Security Series, (USAF Institute for National Security Studies, USAF Academy, Colorado, September 1999), 28.

<sup>1034</sup> USCC, *2013 Report to Congress*, 233.

<sup>1035</sup> USCC, *2012 Report to Congress*, 144.

<sup>1036</sup> USCC, *2002 Report to Congress*, 15.

<sup>1037</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 1. Original emphasis.

<sup>1038</sup> Swaine, “The PLA Role in China’s Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior,” 141 – 142; see also June Teufel Dreyer, *China’s Strategic View: The Role of the People’s Liberation Army* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 1996).

contours of the PLA and how it fits into the PRC's foreign policy process with respect to mil-mil relations.

Similar to the military in the United States, the PLA is the “most trusted institution in China.”<sup>1039</sup> “It binds the country together,” said one former senior military official. However, unlike the U.S. military, the PLA is, first and foremost, a “Party-Army,” – “its missions, institutions and practices are all shaped by the fact that its ultimate loyalty is the Chinese Communist Party,” rather than the nation itself.<sup>1040</sup> Domestic stability and the survival of the regime is the primary driver of PLA decision making.<sup>1041</sup> Being a Party-Army gives the PLA a different perspective on how, where, and why to employ military forces or use military force.<sup>1042</sup> This is fundamental to its approach to mil-mil relations and CBMs more generally. As Finkelstein notes, “for the PLA, engaging in the military relationship is as much a political act as it is a professional military endeavor.”<sup>1043</sup> As the military arm of a political party, particularly a communist one, the PLA is ideologically driven and approaches the relationship from an ideological perspective.<sup>1044</sup>

The PRC's Marxist-Leninist-Maoist roots “permeate” the military structure.<sup>1045</sup> For example, “From 1965 – 1988, no PLA personnel wore any ranks.”<sup>1046</sup> They had ranks from 1955 – 1965, based on the Soviet system, however they were abolished at the start of the Cultural Revolution. Ranks were brought back as part of the modernization spurred by the lessons of the PRC's war with Vietnam.<sup>1047</sup> The PLA is regional, where you join a

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<sup>1039</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 13, 2017, via Skype phone call. The U.S. military consistently ranks highest in public opinion polls regarding the public trust in American institutions. See: Daniel W. Drezner, “Is this the tipping point for trust in the U.S. military?” *The Washington Post* (online), October 26, 2017.

<sup>1040</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 1. They further note that the “PLA promotes the view that its greatest strengths are the morale and discipline of its personnel, and that these qualities enable the PLA to compensate for weak material capabilities. However, PLA leaders worry that these “human qualities” are increasingly difficult to maintain in a rapidly changing society.” It is for this, and similar reasons, that the PRC are sensitive to any “cultural pollution” that the country's increasing contact with Western nations may bring. See also: Nolan, “Why Can't We Be Friends?” 66.

<sup>1041</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1042</sup> Interview with former U.S. government official, March 10, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1043</sup> Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 26.

<sup>1044</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. government official, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1045</sup> Interview with former U.S. military official, March 24, 2017, via Skype phone call; also DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 11 – 12.

<sup>1046</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, “Senior U.S. and Chinese Military Visits Since 1979,” (Unpublished report), 19.

<sup>1047</sup> Interview with Kenneth Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

local unit and stay there your whole career, making familiarization with others manageable. However, the 1979 war with Vietnam saw the deployment of some 500,000 troops, leading to a situation where soldiers were mixed and the lack of familiarity created command difficulties; “They didn’t even have name tags.”<sup>1048</sup> Another factor in the reintroduction of a rank system to the PLA came from their increasing relations with foreign militaries beginning around 1980, as the lack of rank created confusion when dealing with foreign militaries who did.<sup>1049</sup> Reforming the regional command structure and ranking system are part of the PLA’s ongoing modernization efforts.<sup>1050</sup>

The ideological component of the PLA is significant and came up in numerous interviews. One prominent think tank analyst mentioned the PLA’s highly nationalistic and communist-oriented nature, characterized by the control and presence of the CCP throughout the organization.<sup>1051</sup> “This creates a basic ideological disposition, where they don’t believe the U.S. has China’s best interests in mind.”<sup>1052</sup> Furthermore, as China becomes more powerful, the PLA believes the U.S. will become more hostile as it seeks to secure its position as the dominant power, leading the PLA to be ‘on guard’ against U.S. aggression or attempts to otherwise subvert the state.<sup>1053</sup> Similarly, one interviewee characterized the PLA as “highly ideologically trained to believe the worst about the West,”<sup>1054</sup> while another said he thinks the U.S. government actually underestimates the role ideology plays the CCP and PLA’s views of the U.S.<sup>1055</sup> From his perspective, the PRC has “ideological hostility” towards the U.S., and PLA forces are “bureaucratically rewarded” for toeing the party line and being distant to the U.S.<sup>1056</sup> Two others noted that under President Xi, the ideological component of both the PLA and the CCP has been reinforced, creating an additional barrier in the bilateral relationship.<sup>1057</sup> This view is supported by Xi’s ability over the past few years to consolidate his position within the

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<sup>1048</sup> Interview with Kenneth Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1049</sup> Interview with Kenneth Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1050</sup> For example, see Kenneth W. Allen, “China Announces Reform of Military Ranks,” *China Brief* 17: 2, February 6, 2017, (Washington, D.C., The Jamestown Foundation), 7 – 13.

<sup>1051</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1052</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1053</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1054</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. government official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1055</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1056</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1057</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. government official, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call; Interview with former senior U.S. government official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

CCP to a historically significant degree. For example, Xi recently succeeded in having term limits removed from the Chinese constitution, paving the way for him to rule indefinitely.<sup>1058</sup> Perhaps more troubling still, another interviewee noted that contemporary China cannot exist without the ideological base, and therefore “the ideological bent can’t be softened.”<sup>1059</sup>

The PLA’s ideological foundation in communism extends to its bureaucratic structure, with “PLA decision-making principles and practices mirror[ing] those of the Chinese Communist Party.”<sup>1060</sup> This means that “leadership is collective and decisions are based on broad agreement,” and that “although certain individuals have a great deal of influence, *no one has the authority to single-handedly make decisions.*”<sup>1061</sup> Instead, “all major decisions in PLA units are made by the unit’s Party committee.”<sup>1062</sup> Political officers are attached to every PLA unit at the company level and above, where they are considered “co-equals” with the military commander and “share joint leadership over the unit. They jointly issue orders, give directions to lower levels, and oversee all of the unit’s daily work.”<sup>1063</sup> Rather than simply ‘ideological minders’, these are professional officers “trained by the PLA to carry out Party tasks.”<sup>1064</sup>

As noted, the precise role the PLA plays in the wider CCP decision-making process is unclear. One former senior U.S. official described them as the “two pillars” of China.<sup>1065</sup> According to Michael Swaine, the PLA has a “highly limited position of power within the elite leadership structure.”<sup>1066</sup> However, in an interview, Oriana Mastro suggested as the PLA becomes more capable and begins operating further afield, it is becoming increasingly important to the foreign policymaking process.<sup>1067</sup> Though both

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<sup>1058</sup> Chris Buckley & Adam Wu, “Ending Term Limits for China’s Xi Is a Big Deal. Here’s Why.” *The New York Times* (online), March 10, 2018.

<sup>1059</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. government official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1060</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 24.

<sup>1061</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 24. Original emphasis.

<sup>1062</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 25.

<sup>1063</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 24.

<sup>1064</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 24.

<sup>1065</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. government official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1066</sup> Swaine, “The PLA Role in China’s Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior,” 142. Swaine further notes, however, that the role the PLA adopts within the CCP’s decision-making is contested. For example, some view it as an interest group that pressures the civilian leadership “to adopt a more assertive stance toward Washington overall, thereby influencing the leadership succession process,” (141), whereas others see it as the primary decision-maker behind Beijing’s increasingly assertive foreign policy actions (141).

<sup>1067</sup> Interview with Oriana Mastro, February 22, 2017, via telephone.

the CCP and PLA say the CCP controls the military, there is a delicate balance between the two over who actually controls China.<sup>1068</sup> That said, the “Ultimate decisionmaking authority regarding fundamental foreign and defense policies resides in the CCP Politburo Standing Committee,” which tellingly “contains no military representative.”<sup>1069</sup> The CCP does its best to ensure that Party loyalty is instilled in the PLA through substantial ideological training. For example, in a 2012 speech, President Xi said,

In our efforts to strengthen our armed forces we must treat theoretical and political education as our first priority, and ensure that our work is always done in accordance with the right political principles. We will educate our officers and soldiers in the theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics and foster their core values as contemporary revolutionary service personnel. We will ensure that they follow the Party’s commands [...] The armed forces must never falter in upholding the Party’s absolute leadership [...].<sup>1070</sup>

A year later, Xi said “It is essential for the military to follow the Party’s commands, which determines the political orientation of military development.”<sup>1071</sup> The tension between these ‘two pillars’ is important, and in many ways resembles the dynamic in the Soviet Union. Just as Stalin feared a military more powerful than the party it served, so does the CCP. For example, President Xi has ousted several high-ranking generals during his on-going ‘anti-corruption’ campaign in a move that was widely seen as removing political opposition and consolidating his control over the military.<sup>1072</sup> As shown further below, the PLA also sees the pursuit of mil-mil relations with the U.S. as a means of bolstering its own status in Beijing.<sup>1073</sup> However, the question of control is perhaps secondary to the issue of communication.

Swaine points out two related issues related to communication between the PLA and the CCP, which are themselves rooted in structural bureaucratic issues (themselves deeply influenced by the PRC’s ideological foundation). First, “no organization within

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<sup>1068</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. government official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1069</sup> Swaine, “The PLA Role in China’s Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior,” 158. In the case of the President, there is overlapping authority. For instance, President Xi is also Chairman of the Central Military Commission. However, there are no PLA members in the Standing Committee.

<sup>1070</sup> Xi, *The Governance of China*, 240 – 241.

<sup>1071</sup> Xi, *The Governance of China*, 242.

<sup>1072</sup> For example, see: USCC, *2012 Report to Congress*, 143 – 144; Tim Daiss, “China Turns Up Heat On Corruptions: ‘No Mercy Against Law Breakers,’” *Forbes* (online), August 28, 2016; *Reuters*, “Chinese army cracks down on housing, cars in anti-graft drive: report,” February 15, 2014.

<sup>1073</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 23; United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2010), 55.

the PLA has the authority and responsibility to routinely demand and receive notice of PLA activities that might impact China's foreign relations."<sup>1074</sup> More to the point, Swaine notes that the PLA's "resistance to sharing information about military capabilities and operations," means that it is "quite possible that little if any regular contact occurs between any parts of the Chinese military and China's foreign affairs system regarding military activities relevant to foreign policy."<sup>1075</sup>

The negative impact this lack of communication (and structural-bureaucratic facilitation) could have on China's foreign relations can be profound. For instance, when Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited China in 2011, the PLA conducted a flight test of its new J-20 stealth fighter just hours before Gates was set to meet with President Hu Jintao. "When Secretary Gates inquired about the test flight, President Hu claimed to be unaware that it had occurred."<sup>1076</sup> This was not just President Hu being coy – he was apparently legitimately surprised to hear of the test flight. Hu's response "raised concerns that the PLA might be acting independently of China's civilian leaders."<sup>1077</sup> Shortly after leaving China, Gates gave a speech in Tokyo where he noted that "[o]ver the last several years we have seen some signs of...a disconnect between the military and the civilian leadership," in China, though he was quick to add that he believed Hu and the CCP "remained fully in control of the military,"<sup>1078</sup> but that "the PLA did not seem to go out of its way to inform regularly the political leadership."<sup>1079</sup> Andrew Scobell later brought attention to the fundamental issue: "civilian control of the military is underinstitutionalized in 21<sup>st</sup> Century China."<sup>1080</sup>

The second related issue Swaine points out is how the lack of communication affects the PRC's decision-making during a crisis. He notes that "Very little detailed,

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<sup>1074</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 148.

<sup>1075</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 148.

<sup>1076</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2011 Report to Congress*, (November 2011), 164.

<sup>1077</sup> USCC, *2011 Report to Congress*, 164.

<sup>1078</sup> USCC, *2011 Report to Congress*, 164.

<sup>1079</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 34.

<sup>1080</sup> Quoted in USCC, *2011 Report to Congress*, 164. Swaine similarly notes that "We know almost nothing about the scope, frequency, and policy impact of personal interactions that might occur between the most senior civilian party and military leaders regarding foreign policy issues... We do not know to what degree the CCP general secretary or other senior civilian party leaders are kept informed of the progress of military programs with significant implications for China's foreign relations." Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 157.

reliable information exists regarding Chinese crisis decision making in general and the military's role in particular, especially concerning the informal and high-level dimensions of the decision making process."<sup>1081</sup> This is compounded by the somewhat decentralized operational structure of the PLA, where "local PLA entities are not necessarily under the close direction of the senior civilian (or perhaps even military) leadership."<sup>1082</sup> This can lead PLA forces to "take actions that run counter to the overall intent and strategy behind PRC foreign policy."<sup>1083</sup> What's more, the PLA's external signaling capacity outside the issue of Taiwan is "underdeveloped," meaning "attempts to convey benign intentions during a crisis may be undermined by actions or misleading messages conveyed by local or even central PLA actors."<sup>1084</sup> The effect this can have on crisis management, particularly with the U.S., is explored in more detail in Chapter 7.<sup>1085</sup>

The structural dislocation between the PLA and CCP affects all levels of Beijing's foreign policy, including mil-mil relations.<sup>1086</sup> As Swaine notes, "At senior levels, the civil-military interactions most relevant to PRC foreign policy occur primarily through the CCP's Central Military Commission (CMC) and several CCP leading small groups associated with foreign policy issues."<sup>1087</sup> By "virtue of their predominant political power in the Chinese party-state system," the CCP's civilian leadership makes the "final decisions on fundamental national security-related policy issues."<sup>1088</sup> It also controls the PLA's budget, deployment of PLA forces in wartime, and "defines China's basic security interests and the PLA's basic defense mission and political line."<sup>1089</sup> It would certainly

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<sup>1081</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 148. See also: Swaine, "Understanding the Historical Record," in Swaine, Zhang, & Cohen, *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 1 – 101.

<sup>1082</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 155.

<sup>1083</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 155.

<sup>1084</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 156. Swaine lists some possible examples of "unplanned or uncoordinated" behavior, including "PLAN submarine incursions into Japanese territorial waters during November 2004; PLAN or PLAN-related "aggressive" ship or aircraft maneuvers in or over contested waters or within the PRC exclusive economic zone at various intervals during the past fifteen years...[and] the surfacing of a PLAN submarine with the defensive perimeter of a U.S. carrier in 2007 [the Kitty Hawk incident]."

<sup>1085</sup> For more on this, see Alison A. Kaufman & Daniel M. Hartnett, *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control* (Alexandria: CNA, February 2016).

<sup>1086</sup> For more on civil-military relations in China, see: Michael Kiselycznyk & Phillip C. Saunders, *Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA's Role in Elite Politics*, China Strategic Perspectives 2 (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, August 2010).

<sup>1087</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 143.

<sup>1088</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 143.

<sup>1089</sup> Swaine, "The PLA Role in China's Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior," 143.



seem as though one pillar has more control than the other. That's not to say the PLA is without influence, however. The one area it consistently seeks to assert itself is defense diplomacy. Here, too, the tension between the PLA and the civilian-led foreign policy bureaucracy (particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)), is readily apparent.

As Finkelstein and Unangst note, "There is no question that the PLA is responsible for the *management* and *execution* of military relations with the U.S."<sup>1090</sup> However, "the PLA 'manages' military relations *on behalf of* the larger Chinese national security and foreign policy establishment."<sup>1091</sup> As China's power continues to grow, so too does the importance of the PLA. As noted above, the PLA is central to both Beijing's foreign and domestic ambitions. As a consequence, the PLA is able to assert itself more than it could in the past. A 2009 Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on U.S.-China military contacts observes that "The PLA is consolidating its influence over the domain of military diplomacy with outcomes that are sometimes incongruent with the objectives of China's foreign affairs system – principally, though not exclusively, the domain of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."<sup>1092</sup>

The territorial dispute between the PLA and the MFA regarding defense diplomacy is long-standing. For example, in 1985, plans for a port visit by a U.S. ship went awry after Beijing insisted on there being no nuclear weapons aboard. The U.S. maintains a long-standing 'no confirm/deny' policy regarding the deployment of nuclear weapons on its ships and after a series of delays, the visit was cancelled. However, an internal Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report suggests a power struggle between the MFA and PLA was really to blame. The report says,

We judge the immediate responsibility for cancelling the ship visit lies with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which believes the developing military relationship is "moving too fast." An ongoing bureaucratic controversy between the MFA and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for control of the military relationship may have been a critical contributing factor. If so, the MFA may have scuttled the visit in order to gain control over the developing military relationship and to slow its pace.<sup>1093</sup>

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<sup>1090</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 49. Original emphasis.

<sup>1091</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 50. Original emphasis.

<sup>1092</sup> Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service, RL32496. (August 6, 2009), 219.

<sup>1093</sup> Defense Intelligence Agency, U.S. Department of Defense, "Defense Estimative Brief: U.S. - China Military Relations: Implications of the Ship Visit Issue," (August 23, 1985), 2.

The back and forth between the MFA and PLA continues to hamper U.S.-China military relations, particularly with respect to the curtailment of ties in response to Taiwan arms sales. According to a 2009 CRS report, “From the PLA perspective, the MFA plays the U.S.-China military-to-military card for reasons not closely linked to military relations and their inherent security concerns.”<sup>1094</sup> This view helps to explain why the MFA is so quick to try and reestablish military ties “to avoid lasting damage” to the relationship once they have been severed.<sup>1095</sup> As mentioned above, the “line between the ‘political’ and the ‘military’” in China is “amorphous and difficult to separate.”<sup>1096</sup> Accordingly, “‘Political diplomacy’ and ‘military diplomacy’ are merely different means to secure the same ends.”<sup>1097</sup> The CRS report continues, saying “The PLA objects to the policy flip-flopping as it sends the wrong signal and makes the PLA look unprofessional.”<sup>1098</sup> The bureaucratic wrangling does not seem as though it will be resolved anytime soon, particularly given how sensitive the issue of civilian control over the PLA is, and it lies at the heart of many of the problems in the U.S.-China military relationship. The PLA, however, is a bureaucracy unto itself, with various internal institutions all playing a role in establishing and overseeing the mil-mil agenda.<sup>1099</sup>

Within the PLA, the General Staff’s Second Department Foreign Affairs Office (GSD-FAO) is “responsible for maintaining an organized, coherent approach” to military relations.<sup>1100</sup> The 2009 CRS report notes that while the GSD-FAO’s role has expanded alongside the overall increase in PLA defense diplomacy, “its small size limits its effectiveness in managing the large volume of exchanges.”<sup>1101</sup> Despite its limitations, the

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<sup>1094</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 235.

<sup>1095</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 235.

<sup>1096</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 26.

<sup>1097</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 26.

<sup>1098</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 235. Kan notes that “The military does not see any reason for reversing policy if the principles have not fundamentally changes (meaning, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan will likely continue).”

<sup>1099</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 223. For example, Kan notes that “A number of PLA institutions have a degree of autonomy in establishing contact with foreigners – so-called windows – including officers in three academic military institutions (National Defense University, the Academy of Military Sciences, and National University of Defense Technology), various associations affiliated with the PLA, and nineteen operational units spread across the various services that have been certified to receive foreigners.”

<sup>1100</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 223.

<sup>1101</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 223.

GSD-FAO is central to the PLA's defense diplomacy program, able to "influence the shape and direction of M2M relations writ large."<sup>1102</sup> Its staff members "write analytic reports offering recommendations for development of M2M relations with specific countries," and the Office plays an "increasing role in military planning and analysis related to China's evolving security environment."<sup>1103</sup> The GSD-FAO sets the "priorities and the tone" of PLA military relations, holding "procedural authority that can have significant impact on how and to what degree policies and initiatives are carried out."<sup>1104</sup> It is an "in some ways isolated" and separate bureaucracy, "specialized and extensively trained in managing relationships with foreign militaries."<sup>1105</sup> Its members are referred to colloquially as "barbarian handlers,"<sup>1106</sup> PLA members whose job it is "to deal with foreigners, not lead troops."<sup>1107</sup> They are, in the words of one former senior DoD official, "policy people who wear uniforms."<sup>1108</sup>

Indeed, many of these PLA handlers are intelligence officers,<sup>1109</sup> "considered politically 'reliable,'" with "significant foreign experience, and speak English well."<sup>1110</sup> Kaufman and Mackenzie note that "The officer with the best English is often the least knowledgeable about PLA operations; his primary role is to act as a liaison with foreigners."<sup>1111</sup> This can create difficulties in practice (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7). For example, because they are specialists in dealing with foreigners rather than operational details, it has been reported that "these officers appear to have little experience in operational units and little knowledge of the PLA outside their own responsibilities."<sup>1112</sup> Furthermore, "they seem most concerned with keeping U.S. and

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<sup>1102</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 224.

<sup>1103</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 224.

<sup>1104</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 224 – 225.

<sup>1105</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 225; Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2009), 223.

<sup>1106</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 225.

<sup>1107</sup> John Pomfret, "In Chinese admiral's outburst, a lingering distrust of U.S.," *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2010, A10.

<sup>1108</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1109</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 28; Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.; Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call; Interview with think tank analyst, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call

<sup>1110</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 28.

<sup>1111</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 31.

<sup>1112</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 28.

Chinese operational personnel at arm's length from one another.”<sup>1113</sup> This echoes the observations of a former senior U.S. military official, who said,

The Chinese officers that I spent most of my time engaging with were in place to foster the relationship between the two nations. They were more political appointees – well trained political appointees who had mastered English and were attempting to shape the relationship, as opposed to operational military commanders, like we were, that were there to foster a trust relationship with our counterparts.<sup>1114</sup>

The GSD-FAO is the “‘first line of defense’ for PLA external affairs,”<sup>1115</sup> but it is not the only one. An influential Center for Naval Analyses (CNA) report written in 1999 focuses instead on the Foreign Affairs Leading Group (FALG), of the Central Committee of the CCP. According to this report, the FALG is where “the most important issues concerning military relations with the U.S. are discussed.”<sup>1116</sup> More generally, FALG is China’s “national-level foreign policy coordination and consultation forum,” which includes PLA representation.<sup>1117</sup> Some of the routine mil-mil interactions with the U.S. that might require FALG review include ship visits, visits of high-level defense officials, and dialogues with broad national security implications.<sup>1118</sup> That said, due to the bureaucratic and procedural opacity within the Chinese system, the overall structure and decision-making process within the CCP and PLA as it relates to mil-mil relations is unclear. For example, a U.S. official is quoted in the CNA report as saying, “I still do not know who the gatekeeper is in the PLA for military relations.”<sup>1119</sup> As the following section will show, Beijing sees opacity as an important strategic advantage. The following section discusses the PLA’s strategic thinking, including its views on transparency and trust, two fundamentally important aspects of CBMs and military-to-military relations.

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<sup>1113</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 28.

<sup>1114</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1115</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 224.

<sup>1116</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 50.

<sup>1117</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 50.

<sup>1118</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 53.

<sup>1119</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 48.

Seeing Red: PLA Strategic Thought

“China,” according to Thomas Christensen, “may well be the high church of realpolitik in the post-Cold War world.”<sup>1120</sup> It is a view shared by noted China specialist Alastair Iain Johnston, who has argued that “China has historically exhibited a relatively consistent hard realpolitik or *parabellum* strategic culture,” which “exhibits a preference for offensive uses of force, mediated by a keen sensitivity to relative capabilities.”<sup>1121</sup> It is a strategic culture where “Hyper-sovereignty values,” are a “central driver” of Beijing’s foreign policy, and where “military force is a potentially useful tool, among others, for the pursuit of traditional power and prestige maximizing national interests in a competitive and relatively dangerous world.”<sup>1122</sup> If China is the high church of realpolitik, the PLA are its priests and secrecy its dogma. The PLA’s secrecy is pervasive, and it recognizes that it is the “least ‘open’ organization in China, both internally and with foreigners.”<sup>1123</sup> Elements of secrecy and deception are deeply entrenched in China’s strategic culture and lie at the center of many of the challenges confronting the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship.

As a consequence of China’s secrecy fetish, it is difficult for outside observers to understand its strategic culture and decision-making in a meaningful way. The DoD’s 2005 *Annual Report to Congress* notes that “Direct insights into China’s national strategies are difficult to acquire,”<sup>1124</sup> and so outside observers “therefore, have few direct insights into central leadership thinking on the use of force.”<sup>1125</sup> During his 2007 USCC testimony, Richard Lawless echoed that view, remarking that the U.S. government “simply do not have enough visibility into why they make the decisions they make,” with ‘they’ meaning the CCP.<sup>1126</sup> The 2007 DoD *Report to Congress* notes that “China’s leaders do not explicitly provide an overarching ‘grand strategy’ that outlines strategic

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<sup>1120</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, “Chinese Realpolitik,” *Foreign Affairs* 75:5, (September/October 1996), 37.

<sup>1121</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, “Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China,” in *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 216.

<sup>1122</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, “China’s Militarized Interstate Dispute Behavior 1949-1992: A First Cut at the Data,” *The China Quarterly* 153 (March 1998), 2.

<sup>1123</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 15.

<sup>1124</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), 9.

<sup>1125</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), 15.

<sup>1126</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 50.

goals and the means to achieve them,”<sup>1127</sup> particularly not in a way that resembles similar U.S. documents, such as the *National Security Strategy* or *National Defense Strategy*. It further questions whether “[s]uch vagueness” reflects a “deliberate effort to conceal strategic planning,” or “uncertainties, disagreements, and debates that China’s leaders themselves have about their own long-term goals and strategies.”<sup>1128</sup> Indeed, as one observer put it, “To conduct accurate research on Chinese policy, strategy, and intentions is perhaps an impossible mission.”<sup>1129</sup>

In 1995, a visiting DoD official attended a dinner, during which he made repeated calls for increased PLA transparency. Afterwards, he presented his host, a senior PLA officer with a gift, who upon seeing the opaque wrapping paper, “smiled and remarked, ‘this is Chinese transparency.’”<sup>1130</sup> The PLA breaks military transparency into two types: transparency of strategic intentions and transparency of operational capabilities.<sup>1131</sup> Strategic intention “refers to a broad description of state principles,” such as China’s stated ‘no first use’ nuclear weapons policy.<sup>1132</sup> Transparency of capabilities “refers to specific knowledge of a military’s organization, personnel, or assets.”<sup>1133</sup> It is the view of the PLA leadership that “if a nation’s strategic intentions are clear and benign, there is no need to worry about its operational capabilities.”<sup>1134</sup> While Chinese leadership believes it has been sufficiently (and increasingly) transparent about its strategic intentions, other states (particularly the United States), disagree. That is because “Chinese behavior is often inconsistent with the objectives officially declared.”<sup>1135</sup> Compounding that inconsistency, the lack of knowledge regarding the PLA and CCP’s decision-making or motivations<sup>1136</sup> means other states cannot reliably place China’s actions in an appropriate

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<sup>1127</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2007), 6.

<sup>1128</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2007), 6.

<sup>1129</sup> Zheng Wang, “Understanding China’s Military Strategy: The Challenge to Researchers,” *Asia Policy* 12 (July 2011), 159.

<sup>1130</sup> Hooper, *Going Nowhere Slowly*, 18.

<sup>1131</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 21.

<sup>1132</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 21.

<sup>1133</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 21.

<sup>1134</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 21.

<sup>1135</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 63.

<sup>1136</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), i.

context. That is to say, they lack strategic trust. This in turn raises the prospect of conflict through misunderstanding or misperception.

It is widely accepted that China “lags far behind other Asia-Pacific countries in accepting military transparency.”<sup>1137</sup> Indeed, as Richard Weitz notes, “Among the world’s major military powers, only the Russian government adheres to such a high level of public secrecy.”<sup>1138</sup> In response to U.S. and other states’ complaints about China’s “perceived lack of transparency,” the CCP began publishing security and defense ‘White Papers’,<sup>1139</sup> releasing its first in 1998.<sup>1140</sup> A few years earlier, in 1995, China began briefing U.S. officials “on its defense budget and military strategy,”<sup>1141</sup> though these briefings rarely provided details that were not already available. Just over a decade later, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) launched an official website in both English and Chinese “to promote a positive image of China’s image to foreign audiences.”<sup>1142</sup> In May 2008, the MND “officially set up an spokesperson system,” known as the Information Office of the Ministry of National Defence of the PRC, which releases “important information through regular or irregular press conferences and written statements.”<sup>1143</sup> The ‘important’ information is what most other countries would consider rather routine disclosures.

Despite these efforts, the response from the U.S. and other foreign governments has been tepid, at best. The DoD *Annual Report to Congress* regularly laments China’s lack of transparency, while still acknowledging incremental improvements. For example, in the 2003 *Report*, it notes that China’s 2002 Defense White Paper (DWP) “continues to reveal little about the quantity or quality of China’s military forces, to include the PLA budget,” despite China’s “official claims that it reflects increased transparency.”<sup>1144</sup> The 2005 *Report* similarly remarks that China’s fourth DWP, released in 2004, reflects a

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<sup>1137</sup> Kenneth W. Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” in *Global Confidence Building: New Tools for Troubled Regions*, Michael Krepon, Michael Newbill, Khurshid Khoja, and Jenny S. Drezin eds. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>1138</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 386.

<sup>1139</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 386.

<sup>1140</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 9.

<sup>1141</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 18.

<sup>1142</sup> The website was launched in August 2009. DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 8.

<sup>1143</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. *China’s National Defense in 2008*. Beijing, China. January 2009.

<sup>1144</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 4.

“modest improvement over previous years,” though still “provides only limited transparency in military affairs.”<sup>1145</sup> Remarking on the 2006 DWP, Richard Lawless said that while “considered by most observers to be an improvement over earlier versions,” which continues a “trend of modest improvements in transparency and in the quality of reporting,” it “continues to lack basic factual details on PLA force composition and defense expenditures.”<sup>1146</sup> Importantly, Lawless adds, “There is little information in the White Paper or other official Chinese pronouncements to explain the motivations behind much of China’s military modernization efforts.”<sup>1147</sup>

The PLA’s modernization and budget are both frequent sticking points for U.S. criticism. The 2005 DoD *Annual Report* notes that “China’s leaders continue to guard closely basic information on the quantity and quality of the Chinese armed forces,” pointing to the lack of information regarding the “full size and composition of Chinese government expenditure on national defense,” as an example.<sup>1148</sup> It is widely accepted that total defense expenditures in China are “two to three times the officially published figures.”<sup>1149</sup> Adam Liff and Andrew Erickson argue that the fixation on “China’s military strategic and budgetary opacity” results in an “over-simplistic narrative about China’s rise and long-term strategic intentions.”<sup>1150</sup> When placed in an appropriate context, they argue, China’s defense spending is far less alarming or out of the ordinary. However, opacity regarding the PLA’s modernization is particularly troubling because it is closely linked with perceptions of intent.

As Zheng Wang observes, “The central question of the recent debate about China is not so much how to measure the country’s strength but how to gauge its strategy – how China chooses to use its power.”<sup>1151</sup> That said, the two are inseparable – in the absence of clarity regarding the intent of how military power may be used, the actual capabilities take precedence. If the CCP is so cagey regarding even the most basic of facts regarding

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<sup>1145</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), 1.

<sup>1146</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 40.

<sup>1147</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 40.

<sup>1148</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), i.

<sup>1149</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), i.

<sup>1150</sup> Adam P. Liff & Andrew S. Erickson, “Demystifying China’s Defence Spending: Less Mysterious in the Aggregate,” *The China Quarterly* 216 (December 2013), 805.

<sup>1151</sup> Zheng, “Understanding China’s Military Strategy,” 158; see also DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2009), i.



its military (such as its size or budget), it exacerbates uncertainty and leads to negative threat perceptions.<sup>1152</sup> Lawless made this point rather clearly, noting that “unless we have a very firm understanding or reasonably firm understanding of intent and the logic behind the intent of actions, then the capabilities lead to a threat.”<sup>1153</sup> The 2010 U.S. *Quadrennial Defense Review* notes that “China has shared only limited information about the pace, scope, and ultimate aims of its military modernization programs, raising a number of legitimate questions regarding its long-term intentions.”<sup>1154</sup> One interview subject suggested that perhaps China has yet to publicly state how big of a navy fleet it plans on building, “because they know they’ll scare the crap out of everybody!”<sup>1155</sup> The result of such opacity is that states will hedge against the “unknown.”<sup>1156</sup>

Curiously, “Beijing often complains that Chinese policies are being misunderstood by the outside world,” without realizing that “the major reason for these misunderstandings is actually its own secretive practices.”<sup>1157</sup> It lacks, in the words of Booth and Wheeler, a “security dilemma sensibility.”<sup>1158</sup> In the view of one prominent think tank analyst I interviewed, “the Chinese are *literally* incapable of putting themselves in the shoes of another country and understanding their worldview.”<sup>1159</sup> More than that, the think tank analyst said, “They’re a very selfish country.”<sup>1160</sup> Echoing a similar view, Bonnie Glaser has referred to China as an “autistic power,” that “just does not seem capable of understanding how its behavior really scares the rest of the region.”<sup>1161</sup> It is a characterization others have made.<sup>1162</sup> China is only concerned with its own versions of sovereignty or nationalism, for example. The attitude is “It’s our time

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<sup>1152</sup> Interview with Think Tank Analyst, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1153</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 47.

<sup>1154</sup> United States Department of Defense, *2010 Quadrennial Defense Review*, (February 2010), 31.

<sup>1155</sup> Interview with Think Tank Analyst, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1156</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2008), i.

<sup>1157</sup> Zheng, “Understanding China’s Military Strategy,” 159.

<sup>1158</sup> Booth & Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 7.

<sup>1159</sup> Interview with Think Tank Analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1160</sup> Interview with Think Tank Analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1161</sup> Quoted in Joshua Philipp, “China May Be on the Path to War, Author-Filmmaker Warns,” *The Epoch Times* (online), January 21, 2016.

<sup>1162</sup> Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Sources of Chinese Conduct, Explaining Beijing’s Assertiveness,” *The Washington Quarterly* 37:4 (Winter 2015), 136 – 138; Edward N. Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. The Logic of Strategy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

now, to hell with the rest of you.”<sup>1163</sup> This lack of empathy finds its roots in China’s strategic culture, which finds Beijing interpreting calls for greater transparency through a realpolitik lens rather than a genuine plea by others to abide by certain standards of transparency, particularly amongst great powers.

China has a “broader definition of ‘state secrets’ than the U.S.”<sup>1164</sup> As noted above, even the most basic information about the PLA such as the location of certain units or its budget – “information that Americans might see as innocuous,” – are considered “state secrets.”<sup>1165</sup> Beijing fears that military transparency will reveal its weaknesses,<sup>1166</sup> and believes the U.S. calls for greater transparency because “it wants to know where China is currently in the process of its rise to determine if its own power is at the point of being challenged.”<sup>1167</sup> Furthermore, it perceives U.S. transparency primarily as an exercise in deterrence; it is a “means of advertising military strength.”<sup>1168</sup> As shown below, that view is not entirely misplaced. Said another way, Beijing perceives transparency as a tool the strong use against the weak.

In November 1997, China’s UN Ambassador Sha Zukang gave a speech where he said that achieving absolute military transparency was not achievable, and instead the demand for transparency should “determined by specific situations.”<sup>1169</sup> Rather than push for an “abstract, universal formulation of measures on military transparency,” that is applied to all countries, the specific political, military, and security environments must be taken into account, as “a similar degree of transparency will bring about different effects in different countries.”<sup>1170</sup> It is a view shared by “most Chinese scholars.”<sup>1171</sup> The U.S. is the world’s only superpower, and therefore can be the most transparent. That is because its strength affords it a higher threshold for transparency (there are fewer risks associated with revealing certain information), as well as reinforces its position as the most powerful

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<sup>1163</sup> Interview with Think Tank Analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1164</sup> Sheffield, “Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China,” 12.

<sup>1165</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 21.

<sup>1166</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 388; Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 48 – 49.

<sup>1167</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 70.

<sup>1168</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 48.

<sup>1169</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 10.

<sup>1170</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 10.

<sup>1171</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 17.

state in the system (again, deterrence for the U.S. has a strong deterrent effect). More than that, it is believed that a state as powerful as the U.S. “should voluntarily improve its own transparency and make large reductions in sea and air forces, and should not try to hinder the peaceful development of civilian science and technology in developing countries.”<sup>1172</sup> This is a reference to bans and limitations on technology transfers from the U.S. to China, particularly those considered ‘dual use’, which have both civilian and military applications.

From the Chinese perspective, conversely, Beijing cannot afford to be nearly as transparent as the U.S. because it is the weaker power. Accordingly, it believes that the uncertainty created by its opacity serves as a strategic advantage against a more powerful rival many within Beijing believe is intent on curtailing its rise.<sup>1173</sup> As Oriana Mastro put it, “providing evidence of the dissipating gap in military power between China and the United States could trigger unwanted U.S. attention and abruptly end the current period of strategic opportunity in which the United States is not completely dedicated to stifling China’s rise.”<sup>1174</sup> Essentially, China wants to ensure the U.S. lacks ‘clarity of danger’<sup>1175</sup> for as long as it can – at least until it “perceives that it is approaching regional power parity with the United States.”<sup>1176</sup>

Similarly, Xia Liping, writing about China’s perspective on transparency, notes that many Chinese analysts believe that “China should have some military transparency in the future.”<sup>1177</sup> This is an important point: structure (that is China’s relative power vis-à-vis the U.S.) not only increases the pressure on Beijing to be more transparent, it incentivizes it as a means of signaling (e.g., deterrence and status).<sup>1178</sup> Liff and Erickson write that “some PLA experts have called for China to decrease suspicion about its defense budget by releasing more information.”<sup>1179</sup> Until approximate parity is reached,

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<sup>1172</sup> Yasuhiro, “An Essay on China’s Military Diplomacy,” 38.

<sup>1173</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 12; Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 65 & 71; Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 388.

<sup>1174</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 70.

<sup>1175</sup> ‘Clarity of danger’ comes from Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co, 1979), 172.

<sup>1176</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 72.

<sup>1177</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 17.

<sup>1178</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 and Chapter 8.

<sup>1179</sup> Liff & Erickson, “Demystifying China’s Defence Spending,” 827.

however, China is “going to maintain a sense of strategic ambiguity in terms of not allowing us to define what their military strengths and weaknesses are.”<sup>1180</sup>

As noted above, China’s approach to transparency is deeply entrenched in its wider strategic culture. More specifically, it is wedded to a “strategic tradition that lauds deception as a means to confuse potential opponents and promote deterrence through uncertainty rather than by robust displays of China’s military capacity.”<sup>1181</sup> The idea is that a potential rival, such as the U.S., would not be able to plan an offensive operation or otherwise take military action against China because it will be too uncertain of its capabilities, complicating prior consideration of the action’s success or possible consequences.<sup>1182</sup> As Kurt Campbell put it, “by this avenue of logic, the less operational intimacy and understanding with PLA forces, the greater the deterrent value.”<sup>1183</sup> It is also an approach reinforced by China’s recent historical experiences. For example, during the Cold War, China “faced the threat of large-scale military invasion by the Soviet Union,” and so had “to try its best to keep its military information secret.”<sup>1184</sup> As noted above, China is determined to never again find itself at the mercy of a stronger power, reinforcing the necessity of secrecy and deception in the minds of its strategic thinkers.<sup>1185</sup>

Deception has proven itself to be a useful strategic approach for China over the years, taking numerous other states by surprise with its actions. For example, China’s intervention in the Korean War “caught the United States by surprise. Similarly, India, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam, as well as many outside observers, did not anticipate Chinese incursions into the territories of those countries.”<sup>1186</sup> The 2005 DoD *Annual Report* also points out that more recently, China has displayed “several new weapons systems whose development was not previously known in the West.”<sup>1187</sup>

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<sup>1180</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 161.

<sup>1181</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 392.

<sup>1182</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 65; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 12.

<sup>1183</sup> Quoted in Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 22.

<sup>1184</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 17.

<sup>1185</sup> For more on this, see: Peter Callamari & Derek Reveron, “China’s Use of Perception Management,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 16:1 (2003), 1 – 15.

<sup>1186</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), 16.

<sup>1187</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2005), 16.

PRC military writings “point to a working definition of strategic deception as “[luring] the other side into developing misperceptions...and [establishing for oneself] a strategically advantageous position by producing various kinds of false phenomena in an organized and planned manner with the smaller cost in manpower and materials.”<sup>1188</sup> It is a strategy that stresses “seizing the initiative in conflicts and keeping the adversary off balance,” by emphasizing “deception at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.”<sup>1189</sup> Strategic deception is taught by “whole departments of military academies” in China, “derived from Chinese experience through the millennia.”<sup>1190</sup> Deception is not just a byproduct of the PRC’s communist, counter-revolutionary roots, but rather embedded within Chinese culture itself, passed through history in the teachings of Chinese military luminaries such as Sun Tzu.<sup>1191</sup>

All that is to say, transparency does not come naturally to the Chinese government. The implications are potentially dangerous, not just for other states, but for the CCP itself. For example, PLA commanders skilled in the art of deception may use these same skills to “cover up or slow transmission of bad news internal to the PLA system, a chronic problem in the PRC.”<sup>1192</sup> The CCP’s “heavy reliance on secrecy” may therefore be a “double-edged sword, confusing China’s leaders as much as China’s adversaries.”<sup>1193</sup> This is particularly relevant in the event of an incident or crisis, as Chapter 7 makes clear. A related implication of the PLA and CCP’s internalization of the ‘virtues’ of secrecy and deception is that it colors their worldview, making them less trusting of other states. As a former U.S. military official told me, “When you are a liar, you are less likely to assume others are telling you the truth.”<sup>1194</sup>

During testimony given before the USCC in 2007, Thomas Ehrhard, then a Senior Fellow at a Washington think tank, said that “China clearly does not want to promote

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<sup>1188</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2011), 25.

<sup>1189</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2007), 14.

<sup>1190</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2006), 14.

<sup>1191</sup> Jon Latimer, *Deception in War: The Art of the Bluff, the Value of Deceit, and the Most Thrilling Episodes of Cunning in Military History, from the Trojan Horse to the Gulf War* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2001), 274 – 276.

<sup>1192</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2007), 14.

<sup>1193</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2007), 14.

<sup>1194</sup> Interview with former senior military officer, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call.

transparency in their modernization program, because they have not yet accepted that transparency benefits them.”<sup>1195</sup> China’s historical and cultural attachment to deception is now working at odds with its modern geostrategic position and ambitions. If China’s wishes to seize its moment of ‘strategic opportunity’ to create an environment conducive to the realization of Xi’s ‘Chinese Dream,’ it will need to reconcile the “inherent tension” in its strategic culture that pits a “deep-seated tendency to conceal military capabilities and force development against a partial acceptance that excessive secrecy inflames regional and global anxiety about China’s rising power.”<sup>1196</sup> Furthermore, to be a great power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means integrating into a global economy “which depends upon transparency and the free flow of information for success.”<sup>1197</sup> Indeed, as Alastair Johnston put it, “The tension today between external economic, institutional, and normative constraints on Chinese behavior on the one hand and *realpolitik* concepts of ‘majorpowerhood’ internalized by China’s leaders on the other has never been more acute in the history of the People’s Republic.”<sup>1198</sup> And Johnston made that observation twenty years ago – the tension today is all the more visible.

PRC officials, it is said, “have yet to ‘view transparency less as a transaction to be negotiated and more as a responsibility that accompanies the accumulation of national power.’”<sup>1199</sup> This transactional approach is not limited to transparency; it is cultural. China was, historically, a tributary state. In contemporary interstate relations, it prefers bilateral negotiations and agreements rather than multilateral ones, in part to ensure China’s interests are well represented, and whenever possible, deferred to.<sup>1200</sup> One former senior U.S. official told me his “Chinese friends are always negotiating, at every juncture, constantly, always.”<sup>1201</sup> Similar behavior can be found in the PLA’s approach to personal relationships cultivated through military diplomacy, discussed in Chapter 7.

During his 2007 testimony to the USCC, U.S. Army Colonel (now Lt. General) Charles Hooper said, “China has always been a nation of walls, walled cities, walled villages, walled houses, and a Great Wall, all hiding and protecting the secrets

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<sup>1195</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 140.

<sup>1196</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 25.

<sup>1197</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 26.

<sup>1198</sup> Johnston, “China’s Militarized Interstate Dispute Behavior 1949 – 1992,” 2.

<sup>1199</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 392 – 393.

<sup>1200</sup> Interview with Kenneth Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1201</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

within.”<sup>1202</sup> Changing a civilization with over 4000 of history does not happen overnight. As Kenneth Allen rightly points out, “the issue of transparency in the U.S.-China military relationship should be viewed as a 25-year perspective, not on a one-year basis.”<sup>1203</sup> When looked at through a long-term, historical lens, China’s moves towards greater transparency over the past twenty years (beginning with the regular publication of DWP’s) have been commendable. Indeed, according to some, the “PRC is far more transparent than we give them credit for.”<sup>1204</sup> More importantly, they reflect China’s rise in power over that same period, reinforcing the important role structure plays in compelling states to adopt certain policies and behaviors. That is, as China has become more powerful, the imperative to develop and maintain strategic trust (of which transparency is an important component) with other powerful states (especially the U.S.), has increased. This is particularly visible in its approach to military-to-military relations and CBMs more generally.

### *Chinese Views on CBMs and Military Diplomacy*

As noted in Chapter 3, the literature on CBMs is somewhat limited. This is even more true of China’s views and approaches to CBMs. Compounding this dearth of resources is a “strong propagandistic coloration,” to official pronouncements on the subject, “that can make it difficult to understand the true intentions behind China’s actual behavior.”<sup>1205</sup> That said, Xia Liping suggests that with the exception of the issue of transparency, “There is little doubt among Chinese scholars on the significance of CBMs.”<sup>1206</sup> This was not always the case. For the decade that followed the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, “China did not embrace the concept of CBMs.”<sup>1207</sup> In fact, it thought of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe as being reflective of a policy of appeasement by Western states “toward the hegemony of the Soviet Union.”<sup>1208</sup> Kenneth Allen notes that it was not until China began opening itself economically to the

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<sup>1202</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 144.

<sup>1203</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 147.

<sup>1204</sup> Interview with former U.S. government official, March 24, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1205</sup> Matsuda, “An Essay on China’s Military Diplomacy,” 1-2.

<sup>1206</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 17.

<sup>1207</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 45.

<sup>1208</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 45.

West in the early 1980s, and its subsequent strategic defense policy reevaluation in 1985, “that Beijing began to take notice of existing CBM concepts.”<sup>1209</sup>

This reinforces once again the important role that structure plays in incentivizing states to embrace CBMs and develop strategic trust. Once it became in China’s interest to pursue stable relations with the U.S. and other powerful states, the concept became more appealing. Indeed, China’s “primary reason” for “employing CBMs is to satisfy its foreign policy objectives of ‘safeguarding China’s security and regional peace in order to enhance economic growth.’”<sup>1210</sup> In order to maintain its period of ‘strategic opportunity’ and ensure the regional stability required to internally balance against the U.S., China has recognized the value of CBMs.<sup>1211</sup> When it was still a weak and isolated country, the value of involving itself with CBMs, particularly with more powerful states (of which China is deeply suspicious), was not clear to PRC policymakers. Relatedly, another reason for China’s apathy towards CBMs in the late 1970s – early 1980s was that the European experience with CBMs was not “easily or directly transferable to China due to cultural and historical differences.”<sup>1212</sup>

Xia characterizes China’s approach to CBMs as being comprised of two unique phases. In the first phase, “China did not attach much importance to CBMs.”<sup>1213</sup> In the second, “China has pursued CBMs in order to eliminate or reduce military confrontation and to prevent unwanted armed conflicts.”<sup>1214</sup> During the second phase, “CBMs are gradually becoming an important means by which China is seeking to maintain a peaceful international environment that will be beneficial to the economic development of China and to a long-term peaceful security environment.”<sup>1215</sup>

China formally embraced the concept and value of CBMs in its first DWP, released in 1998. The 1998 DWP stated that “China places great stress on and actively promotes cooperation in CBMs, including regional security dialogue and cooperation at different levels, through various channels, and in different forms.”<sup>1216</sup> The same DWP

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<sup>1209</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 45.

<sup>1210</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 43.

<sup>1211</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 46.

<sup>1212</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 45.

<sup>1213</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 19.

<sup>1214</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 18 - 19.

<sup>1215</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 19.

<sup>1216</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 43.



also featured the first mention of “military diplomacy” by name.<sup>1217</sup> Interestingly, Kenneth Allen points out that “Chinese writings and high-level speeches for domestic audiences appear to use the concepts of confidence building but do not use the actual term,” whereas in its DWPs and speeches meant for foreign audiences, they do.<sup>1218</sup>

Reflecting Beijing’s preference for bilateral agreements (outlined above), “China’s clear preference is to employ bilateral CBMs,” though it has begun to adopt and embrace multilateral CBMs as well.<sup>1219</sup> Table 5 details the various types of CBMs China has “employed to achieve foreign policy objectives.”<sup>1220</sup> As it shows, China has primarily pursued *Type A* (information, interaction, and communication) CBMs, with some possible *Type C* (constraint) measures. It is difficult to properly code these CBMs on account of the lack of information. China’s preference for *Type A* CBMs is in keeping with its desire to establish ‘mutual understanding’ before pursuing more specific or binding agreements.<sup>1221</sup> This is similar to the Soviet approach, where there was a preference to address the causes of the insecurity before addressing its symptoms. The lack of *Type B* (verification and observation) CBMs similarly reflects China’s views on transparency.

Beijing also places “great emphasis” on “high-level diplomatic visits around the globe, a robust military exchange program, and the establishment of hotlines, border demarcation negotiations, prior notification and restriction of military maneuvers, and troop movements along borders.”<sup>1222</sup> High-level visits are particularly important, with many breakthroughs in the establishment of CBMs coming as a result of visits by “heads of state or ministers responsible for foreign affairs and defense.”<sup>1223</sup> The evolution of China’s thinking and approach to CBMs is best seen in its embrace of military diplomacy.

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<sup>1217</sup> Cai Penghong, “ASEAN’s Defense Diplomacy and China’s Military Diplomacy,” *Asia Policy* 22 (July 2016), 91.

<sup>1218</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 46.

<sup>1219</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 44.

<sup>1220</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 4.

<sup>1221</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 4.

<sup>1222</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 46.

<sup>1223</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 12.

**Table 5: China’s Approach to CBMs, by Type<sup>1224</sup>**

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description (e.g.)</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Declaratory measures	Nuclear-related statements such as: no first use, nuclear de-targeting, and calls for nuclear free zones	A & C <sup>1225</sup>
Arms Control & Disarmament measures	Agreements to accept on-site inspections;	B
Transparency measures	the publication of DWPs	A
Diplomatic measures	High-level visits	A
Measures to improve mil-mil relations	Military exchanges & conferences	A
Measures to ensure maritime safety	Maritime safety agreements; discussions about joint search & rescue	A & C <sup>1226</sup>
Measures to improve border security & settle territorial disputes	Border demarcation agreements; troop reductions	A & C
Communication measures	Establishing hotlines	A
Peacekeeping measures	Involvement in UN PKO	A

“A myopic focus on erratic U.S.-China military relations,” Eric Hagt argues, “obscures the PLA’s increasingly active military diplomacy around the world.”<sup>1227</sup> This is indeed true, which is why it is important to look at the PLA’s overall military diplomatic activity; it provides necessary context for evaluating its military relations with the U.S. The increase in the PLA’s military diplomacy comes as a result of the strategic recalibration the PRC underwent in the mid-1990s (as outlined above), as well as the overall expansion of China’s involvement in international affairs.<sup>1228</sup> However, beginning in the early 2000s, there has been a noticeable uptick, as Figure 4 demonstrates. After China became the second-largest economy in 2010, “its military diplomacy shifted toward deepening exchanges and elevating mutual trust and cooperation with other countries.”<sup>1229</sup> The trend was amplified after Xi Jinping became China’s president in

<sup>1224</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 4.

<sup>1225</sup> Type C would only be applicable if the specific CBM placed a constraint on an action. De-targeting, for example, could be a Type A CBM.

<sup>1226</sup> Again, Type C would only apply if a maritime safety agreement placed constraints on signatories.

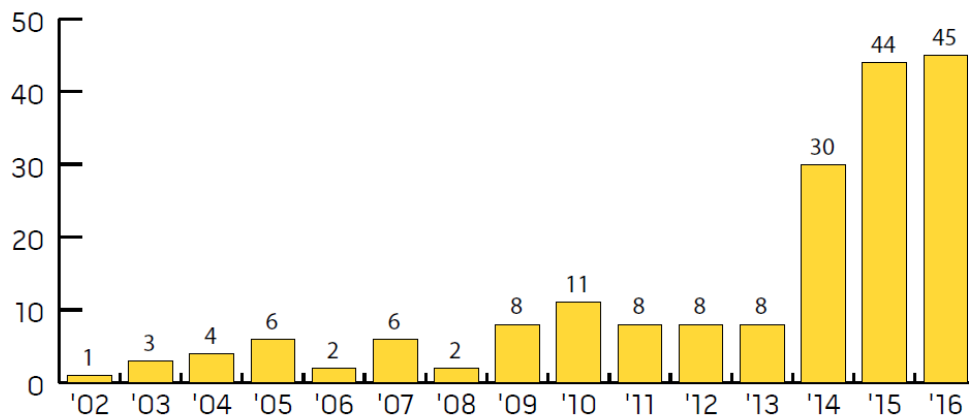
<sup>1227</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 218.

<sup>1228</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 219; Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 461; John S. Van Oudenaren & Benjamin E. Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” *Parameters* 46: 4 (Winter 2016-17), 106.

<sup>1229</sup> Cai, “ASEAN’s Defense Diplomacy and China’s Military Diplomacy,” 91.

2013,<sup>1230</sup> who in January 2015 called for the country to “place a greater emphasis on military diplomacy as part of its overall foreign policy strategy.”<sup>1231</sup> The PLA has been called upon by the leadership in Beijing to “strengthen military-to-military relationships” as part of a wider “diplomatic policy initiative to build strategic partnerships around the world.”<sup>1232</sup>

**Figure 4: Total PLA International Military Exercises, 2002 - 2016<sup>1233</sup>**



As a consequence of the cultural and bureaucratic issues detailed above, the PLA’s task has been easier said than done. Van Oudenaren & Fisher note that an “obstacle for Chinese public diplomacy is overcoming an inward-facing culture and authoritarian, Leninist political system to appeal to a global audience.”<sup>1234</sup> While China’s increasingly international interests have compelled Beijing to push for important changes, the PLA has at times been a reluctant partner. That said, as a consequence of the CCP’s increased emphasis on military diplomacy, the PLA has seemingly embraced the importance of public diplomacy and “seeks to promote a positive image of Chinese military power as a force for stability that contributes to international security.”<sup>1235</sup> Reflecting these changes

<sup>1230</sup> Xi had been elected to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party and Chairman of the CMC in November 2012, effectively making him the leader of the country, however he was not elected President until March 2013.

<sup>1231</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 107.

<sup>1232</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 220.

<sup>1233</sup> Graph image taken from Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, & John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003 – 2016: Trends and Implications* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, July 2017), 29.

<sup>1234</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 109.

<sup>1235</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 109; see also Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 429 – 30.

(however incremental or resisted they have been), Beijing “increasingly recognizes that robust military-to-military relationships rest on more than transactional considerations.”<sup>1236</sup> The PLA now works to “develop relationships with foreign military forces based on “personal and institutional affiliations,”<sup>1237</sup> to varying degrees of success. Figure 5 details the PLA’s most frequent military diplomatic partners. It becomes readily apparent that the PLA has targeting political and strategically important states. Russia, for example, is an increasingly important training partner and source of advanced weapons technology.<sup>1238</sup> Other states, like Pakistan, provide China with strategic access, such as Beijing’s investment in Pakistan’s Gwadar port which gives it access to the Arabian Sea. Figure 6 in turn details the primary locations of PLA visits abroad. The U.S. and Russia remain in the top two, however more states beyond the Asia-Pacific region are featured, highlighting Beijing’s increasingly global interests. The frequency of visits to states like Egypt and Cuba are primarily motivated by China’s arms exports.

**Figure 5: The PLA’s Top 10 Most Frequent Military Diplomatic Partners, 2003 - 2016**<sup>1239</sup>

Overall Rank	Countries	Geographic Region	Military Exercises	Naval Port Calls	Senior-Level Meetings	Grand Total
1	United States	North America	25	9	101	135
2	Russia	Russia	38	4	81	123
3	Pakistan	Asia	29	12	67	108
4	Thailand	Asia	21	9	54	84
5	Australia	Asia	16	8	59	83
6	Vietnam	Asia	2	4	54	60
7	New Zealand	Asia	6	7	43	56
8	Singapore	Asia	10	9	37	56
9	Indonesia	Asia	16	6	33	55
10	India	Asia	18	6	30	54

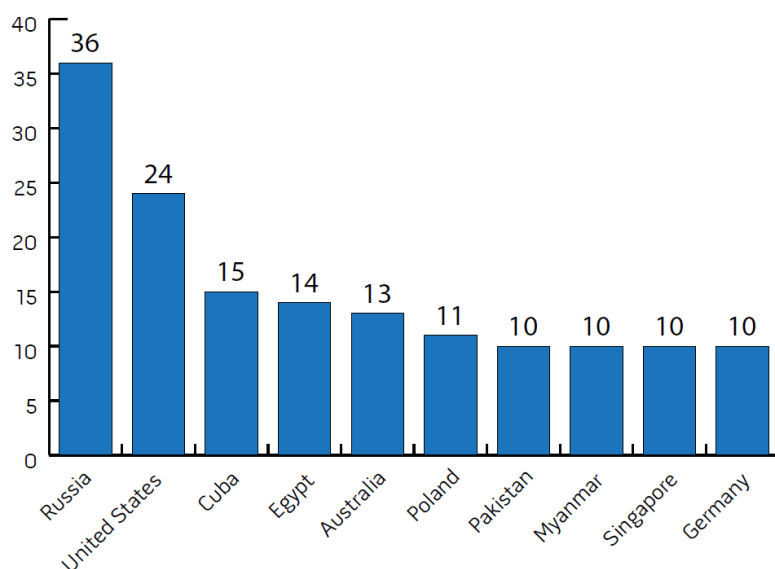
<sup>1236</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 109.

<sup>1237</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 109.

<sup>1238</sup> Richard Weitz, *Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, 2015); Peter Ferdinand, “Sunrise, Sunset: China and Russia Construct a New Relationship,” *International Affairs* 83:4 (September 2007), 841 – 867; Ethan Meick, “China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving Toward a Higher Level of Cooperation,” *USCC Staff Research Report*, March 20, 2017.

<sup>1239</sup> Graph taken from Allen, Saunders, & Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy*, 45.

**Figure 6: Number of PLA Visits Abroad, 2003 - 2016<sup>1240</sup>**



One of the principal means of developing those relationships is through senior/high-level visits and exchanges. These activities provide international exposure for officers in a notably insular organization, allowing them to better understand alternative world views<sup>1241</sup> which, in theory, should help the PLA develop the ‘security dilemma sensibility’ required to ensure regional stability. Senior level visits and exchanges also allow those officers to “communicate China’s positions to foreign audiences,” and “advance foreign relations through interpersonal contacts and military assistance programs.”<sup>1242</sup> Moreover, as Hagt notes, “the networks formed between officers of the PLA and foreign militaries have implications for PLA interests abroad.”<sup>1243</sup> While they can serve Beijing’s interests, its persistent paranoia surrounding a wayward military can place counterproductive limitations on the PLA’s interpersonal relationships. This is particularly (if not exclusively) true of interactions with Western militaries, as Beijing remains suspicious of exposing the PLA, and Chinese society more generally, to “pervasive and subversive” Western influences.<sup>1244</sup> For example, PLA officers “that have not received formal political education (commanders below brigade level) are generally

<sup>1240</sup> Graph taken from Allen, Saunders, & Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy*, 50.

<sup>1241</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1242</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1243</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 223.

<sup>1244</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 115.

off limits to foreigners.”<sup>1245</sup> As it will be shown in Chapter 7, these restrictions have hampered the development of U.S.-China military relations. Beyond senior/high-level visits and exchanges, the PLA has also increasingly been involved in a range of mil-mil activities, including “joint exercises, extensive training programs, and security dialogues with numerous countries,”<sup>1246</sup> as well as “military technology assistance, [...] naval ship visits, and personnel training and exchanges.”<sup>1247</sup> The PLA’s activities are explored in more detail further below.

As noted above, for the PLA, military diplomacy is a “strategic political activity,” conducted to further Beijing’s national objectives.<sup>1248</sup> It is fundamentally a “vehicle to pursue strategic political ends,” rather than a “freestanding set of military initiatives conducted by military professionals for explicitly military reasons.”<sup>1249</sup> The *PLA Encyclopedia*, the official Chinese military encyclopedia, defines military diplomacy as “diplomatic activities that represent the military interests of the nation.”<sup>1250</sup> According to a supplemental to the same encyclopedia, PLA military diplomacy has at least nine goals, detailed in Table 6. When it comes to military-to-military relations with the U.S. in particular, the DoD’s 2010 *Annual Report to Congress* lists five primary benefits China expects to gain, detailed in Table 7. The goals/benefits are primarily strategic in nature and mostly related to the PLA’s modernization and, ultimately, the realization of the ‘Chinese Dream’. The nine goals listed in Table 6 are far more sanitized, as might be expected from an official PRC source, and the CCP’s communist roots are evident throughout (such as its desire to strengthen ties with developing states or the opposition of imperialism and colonialism). That said, the goals/benefits sought by China through its military diplomacy are not particularly different from those sought by the U.S. (detailed in Chapter 4 and further below), or the Soviet Union (detailed in Chapter 4).

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<sup>1245</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 224.

<sup>1246</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 218.

<sup>1247</sup> Qi, “The PLA’s Role in China’s Regional Security Strategy,” 41.

<sup>1248</sup> Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 431.

<sup>1249</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 24.

<sup>1250</sup> Quoted in Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 431.

**Table 6: Purposes of PLA Military Diplomacy**<sup>1251</sup>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To uphold national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, and security;</li><li>2. To conduct military diplomatic activities that counter Taiwan independence, promote unification, and uphold the one-China principle;</li><li>3. To oppose imperialism, colonialism, hegemonism, aggression, and expansion and to uphold world peace;</li><li>4. To strengthen unity and cooperation with the militaries of developing countries;</li><li>5. To pursue an independent and peaceful foreign policy and to oppose military interventionism, gunboat policies, and Cold War policies;</li><li>6. To independently develop military relations based on the five principles of coexistence with all countries;</li><li>7. To send military experts and military diplomats to participate in bilateral and multilateral discussions related to the definition of national boundaries;</li><li>8. To participate in multilevel, multichannel regional bilateral and multilateral security dialogue and cooperation, and to actively participate in international arms control; and,</li><li>9. To use various foreign policy channels to increase exchanges with the defense ministries, armed forces, military academies, scientific research establishments, and defense industries of countries around the world.</li></ol>
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**Table 7: PRC Benefits Sought from U.S Military Relations**<sup>1252</sup>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Perception Management:</b> China’s civilian and military leaders use defense contacts with the [U.S.] and other countries as avenues to communicate political messages and shape perceptions of China among foreign leaders.</li><li>• <b>Insights on the U.S.:</b> The PLA seeks to use contact with the [U.S.] to gain a better understanding of [its] leadership, policies, capabilities, and intent, and to gain insights into potential U.S. vulnerabilities.</li><li>• <b>Enhancement of Military Capabilities:</b> The PLA seeks to benefit from functional and professional exchanges with the [U.S.] in areas such as doctrine development, force structure, personnel management, professional military education, training, technology, and technical information that would support PLA defense modernization.</li><li>• <b>International Prestige:</b> Senior political leaders in Beijing also pursue contacts with the Department of Defense to elevate China’s status as a regional and world power. [...] China’s leaders seek to use “normal” defense relations with the [U.S.] to enhance China’s international status and to drive a wedge between the [U.S.], its allies, and its partners, including Taiwan.</li><li>• <b>Domestic Politics:</b> Defense relations with the [U.S.] may provide the PLA with leverage in internal political debates regarding overall Chinese policies toward the United States and other regional actors.</li></ul>
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Officially, “the PLA develops cooperative military relations with other countries that are non-aligned, non-confrontational and not directed against any third party, and engages in various forms of military exchanges and cooperation in an effort to create a military security environment featuring mutual trust and mutual benefit.”<sup>1253</sup> Unofficially, the PLA engages in military diplomacy for a variety of reasons. One of the primary reasons is that the PLA has not conducted any major combat operations since its border

<sup>1251</sup> Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 432 - 433.

<sup>1252</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 55.

<sup>1253</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s National Defense in 2008*, 49.

war with Vietnam in 1979. As detailed above, much has changed, both with respect to the PLA itself and the nature of modern warfare. “[B]ilateral and multilateral exercises help compensate for a lack of experience,” and contribute to the PLA’s operational preparedness.<sup>1254</sup> The PLA sees such exercises as “key to narrowing the gap between training and real world experience,” and uses them to “enhance warfighting competencies, test and evaluate tactics, develop and refine integrated joint operations command structures and concepts, and evaluate service proficiencies.”<sup>1255</sup>

At the operational level, military engagement provides the PLA with opportunities to “share doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures with other militaries, both modern and developing.”<sup>1256</sup> At the strategic level, it “allows Beijing to demonstrate its capabilities and emerging role in the international system.”<sup>1257</sup> Through such engagement, China “seeks to improve its international standing and enhance its presence abroad while easing foreign anxieties about the PLA’s growing capabilities and expanding missions.”<sup>1258</sup> There is a strong connection to status at the strategic level. As one U.S. government official told me, when China is engaging in mil-mil with others, it is often for validation and to demonstrate that they can (and should) be treated as an equal – or if engaged with a smaller power, as more than an equal.<sup>1259</sup>

Beyond that, Beijing also uses military diplomacy to “secure access to the foreign military technology and expertise necessary to continue rapid military modernization.”<sup>1260</sup> This is something the U.S. is well aware of (as reflected in the 2000 NDAA restrictions), however as a result of its prolific foreign weapons sales, is difficult to prevent. The U.S. Defense Secretary reported to Congress in May 2013 that “PLA observer status in military training exercises of nations in possession of U.S. military equipment, systems, and weapons could have unintended consequences that result in the

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<sup>1254</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 107.

<sup>1255</sup> U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2016 Report to Congress* (November 2016), 216.

<sup>1256</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1257</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1258</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2016), 221; see also Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 429 – 430 & 459 – 460.

<sup>1259</sup> Interview with U.S. government official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1260</sup> Holz & Allen, “Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics,” 459 - 460.



unauthorizes disclosure of defense articles, technical data, or defense services to China.”<sup>1261</sup>

While Hagt argues that the “PLA has long accepted the basic premise that it stands to gain more than lose from foreign contact,”<sup>1262</sup> it is becoming increasingly clear that its approach to military diplomacy has mirrored its modernization efforts. The 2014 USCC *Report to Congress* notes that “As the PLA modernizes and becomes more capable and confident, it likely will increase its engagement with foreign militaries.”<sup>1263</sup> I asked many interviewees questions based around this idea – that the PLA’s modernization would make it more capable, and more confident, in engaging in mil-mil activities. I also asked if they thought the increase in the PLA’s overall mil-mil engagements would have any positive spill-over effect for the U.S-China mil-mil relationship. The answers were varied. For example, several said that while it is possible that as PLA capabilities improve it will become more transparent or more willing to engage in mil-mil (with the U.S. or others), there is not yet any evidence to suggest it has.<sup>1264</sup> Most, however, were adamant that the PLA’s modernization has “absolutely had an impact” on its ability and interest in participating in mil-mil activities, or even its overall transparency.<sup>1265</sup> Others qualified their answers, saying that the PLA’s modernization has increased its willingness and capacity to engage in mil-mil, “just not with us.”<sup>1266</sup>

Most interestingly, however, were several responses that focused on the wider benefits of the PLA’s increased military diplomacy. A former senior U.S. official pointed to how the PLA’s engagement in mil-mil activities with states around the world help reinforce international norms and rules (and China’s adherence to them), particularly as it is able to see (operationally and theoretically) how other major powers behave in different regions.<sup>1267</sup> Accordingly, it can positively influence or shape China’s policies,

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<sup>1261</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 11.

<sup>1262</sup> Hagt, “The Rise of PLA Diplomacy,” 226.

<sup>1263</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2014), 256 – 257.

<sup>1264</sup> Interview with former U.S. government official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.; Interview with former U.S. government official, March 24, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1265</sup> Interview with Scott Harold, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call; Interview with former U.S. military official, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call; Interview with former U.S. military official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1266</sup> Interview with Peter Dutton, March 30, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1267</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

posture, and behavior, “especially as China looks to be acknowledged and accepted as a world leader.”<sup>1268</sup> Similarly, a former military official focused on the relationship between increased mil-mil and China’s pursuit of status, saying, “the more they feel like they’re a great power, and don’t feel like they have to flex their muscle to show it, that seems to have been beneficial. And it does improve the professionalism of their navy.”<sup>1269</sup> Lastly, two other interviewees considered the impact the exposure to increased mil-mil has on the confidence of the individual PLA officers and soldiers taking part in their familiarity/ability to engage with foreigners.<sup>1270</sup> The respondents differed on the impact this would have, with one suggesting the results would be only minimal while the other was decidedly more optimistic.

The variance in these responses is to be expected, of course, however it speaks to the difficulty of objectively identifying and/or characterizing trends in military-to-military relations. The 2011 DoD *Report to Congress* reflects some of these views, suggesting that the PLA’s modernization has facilitated cooperation in two key ways. First, it has “removed capability-based constraints, allowing the PLA to operate with more advanced forces and at greater distances from the PRC mainland.”<sup>1271</sup> Second, because its “increasingly modern array of platforms, both imported and indigenously designed,” Beijing “takes pride in ‘showing the flag,’”<sup>1272</sup> which reinforces the relationship between the PLA’s military diplomacy and status. The PLA Navy (PLAN) is particularly useful in this regard, as Figure 7 demonstrates. Navies are well suited to ‘show the flag’, in the context of both regular and military diplomacy. The PLAN has also been the recipient of a great deal of the PLA’s overall modernization effort, as many of Beijing’s interests are maritime in nature, such as ensuring the maintenance of sea lanes vital for the import of energy resources or the export of Chinese goods.

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<sup>1268</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

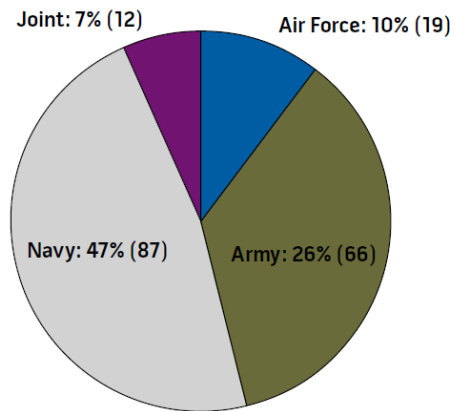
<sup>1269</sup> Interview with former U.S. military official, March 1, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1270</sup> Interview with former U.S. military official, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA; Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1271</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1272</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

**Figure 7: Total PLA International Military Exercises by Service, 2002 - 2016<sup>1273</sup>**



One area where the PLA’s modernization, and pride in ‘showing the flag’, is evident is in its involvement in UN peacekeeping operations (PKO). Prior to 2002, Beijing “generally avoided” participating in UN PKOs “due to lingering skepticism of the international system and a long-stated policy of ‘non-interference’ in other countries’ internal affairs.”<sup>1274</sup> In 2004, China had 359 peacekeepers deployed to eight UN missions, “with no single contingent containing more than 70 troops.”<sup>1275</sup> Just six years later, that number had increased to 2,131 non-combat peacekeepers, supporting 10 UN missions, “with five separate contingents containing more than 200 troops.”<sup>1276</sup> In fact, of all of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC), China is the leading contributor of peacekeepers.<sup>1277</sup> China opened an MND Peacekeeping Center in July 2009, becoming the PLA’s first peacekeeping facility “dedicated to professional training and international exchange.”<sup>1278</sup>

China has also demonstrated a willingness to deploy PLA personnel on increasingly dangerous missions. For example, after a PLA peacekeeper was killed in Lebanon in 2006, Beijing increased its troop contributions to the mission (UN Interim Force in Lebanon).<sup>1279</sup> As Van Oudenaren and Fisher note, the PLA’s major UN peacekeeping contributions are “[u]nsurprisingly” in places where China “has significant

<sup>1273</sup> Allen, Saunders, & Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy*, 32.

<sup>1274</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 66.

<sup>1275</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 66.

<sup>1276</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 66.

<sup>1277</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 66.

<sup>1278</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 66.

<sup>1279</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 66.

economic interests.”<sup>1280</sup> In 2012, the PLA deployed combat troops in a peacekeeping capacity for the first time to South Sudan, “where the state-run China National Petroleum Corporation operates extensive energy projects.”<sup>1281</sup> As of 2016, more than one thousand PLA peacekeepers were operating in the country. 2016 also marks the establishment of China’s first overseas military facility. Located in Djibouti, the facility is meant to “facilitate logistical support for peacekeeping missions in Africa and antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden,”<sup>1282</sup> where China has maintained a naval task force since January 2009.<sup>1283</sup>

The fact that China’s peacekeeping contributions are greater in regions where it has more interests should not be considered a negative. If anything, it serves to reinforce international norms and institutions, and of military diplomacy as a means of positively contributing to international security. Similarly, “driven by a desire to be perceived as a responsible global power,” the PLA has also become more active in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) missions.<sup>1284</sup> As the PLA’s HA/DR capabilities improve (something it has worked with the U.S. to accomplish), “China almost certainly will seek to play a more prominent role in responding to humanitarian crises and disasters in the region.”<sup>1285</sup> This desire is undoubtedly motivated by the international shaming China received in the wake of its paltry response to a devastating typhoon in the Philippines in 2013, where it provided only \$100,000 in cash and “humanitarian emergency relief assistance.”<sup>1286</sup>

The PLA has also increasingly embraced military educational exchanges. Its university-level international military education programs are modeled on the U.S. National Defense University International Fellows Program, “after several high-level PLA officers visited the U.S. National Defense University during the early 1980s.”<sup>1287</sup> Of the nearly 70 military academies the PLA operates in China, approximately half are open

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<sup>1280</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 108.

<sup>1281</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 108.

<sup>1282</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 108.

<sup>1283</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2014), 260.

<sup>1284</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2008), 56.

<sup>1285</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2014), 258.

<sup>1286</sup> Daniel Baltrusaitis, “China’s Revealing Typhoon Haiyan Response,” *The Diplomat* (online), November 14, 2013.

<sup>1287</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 109 - 110.

to foreign military personnel.<sup>1288</sup> The PLA's first mixed training class, with both Chinese and foreign officers, took place at the Air Force Command College, where "56 officers from the air forces of 29 foreign countries and 12 officers from the PLA Air Force," graduated in June 2009.<sup>1289</sup> The pace with which the PLA's educational exchanges has increased is rather stunning. Between 2003 and 2008, the number of foreign military personnel studying in PLA colleges and universities increased from 1,245 from 91 countries (2003-2004) to approximately 4,000 from more than 30 countries (2007-2008).<sup>1290</sup> In 2005 and 2006, more than 500 PLA personnel studied abroad in over 20 countries.<sup>1291</sup> Van Oudenaren and Fisher note that the PLA's military education program is "likely most effective" as a tool of diplomacy when conducted with countries outside of East Asia, "particularly with authoritarian states in the developing world, who share China's suspicion of what are often perceived as Western-imposed values, such as human rights and democratization, that infringe on national sovereignty."<sup>1292</sup> In this regard, the expansion of China's military education program should be perceived as being detrimental to international security and the reinforcement of international norms.

Overall, the pace and scope of China's military diplomacy, particularly since 2000, has been staggering. From 1985 – 2008, "a total of 31 PLAN task forces conducted 77 port calls abroad."<sup>1293</sup> Of those 31 task forces, 21 were dispatched "during the 2000s," however Holz and Allen note that "there is no discernable pattern for the number of visits per year, which ranged from none in 2004 to five in 2007."<sup>1294</sup> In 2002, it conducted its first cruise around the world, visiting 10 countries along the way.<sup>1295</sup> In 2003, Beijing had established military relations with more than 140 countries, "more than at any other time in its history."<sup>1296</sup> The number of military attaché offices posted in Beijing increased from

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<sup>1288</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, "Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power," 109.

<sup>1289</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1290</sup> Holz & Allen, "Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics," 443.

<sup>1291</sup> Qi, "The PLA's Rose in China's Regional Security Strategy," 42.

<sup>1292</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, "Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power," 110.

<sup>1293</sup> Holz & Allen, "Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics," 446.

<sup>1294</sup> Holz & Allen, "Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics," 446.

<sup>1295</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (2004), x; Holz & Allen, "Military Exchanges with Chinese Characteristics," 446.

<sup>1296</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2004), x.

40 in 1987 to 63 in 1998,<sup>1297</sup> and 102 by 2010.<sup>1298</sup> The MND, which assumes responsibility for China's military attachés,<sup>1299</sup> has over 300 attachés posted abroad in over 100 countries, up from 201 in 2002.<sup>1300</sup> In 2005, China hosted over 90 high-ranking visits,<sup>1301</sup> while the PLA sent 100 delegations abroad.<sup>1302</sup> By 2011, those numbers had increased, with China receiving over 200 military delegations and sending over 170 overseas.<sup>1303</sup> For some context on how that compares to previous eras, between 1979 and 1987, the PLA “hosted 500 military delegations and sent thousands of military officials abroad for visits, study, and lectures.”<sup>1304</sup> The PLA “participated in more exercises and drills with foreign militaries in 2014 than in any previous year since 2005.”<sup>1305</sup> It is truly a dizzying pace. With the Chinese context firmly established, it is possible to briefly examine the U.S. view of engaging China in military diplomacy.

## **The View from Washington**

Because aspects of the U.S. approach to CBMs and military-to-military relations have been covered in other chapters, the purpose of this section is to highlight U.S. views of military relations with China. First, I outline the various official objectives ascribed to the military engagement program. I then consider some of these objectives in more detail, beginning with the effort to ‘shape’ or influence China, the importance of avoiding misperception and miscommunication, and lastly, transparency. I rely primarily on official U.S. reports, with supplementary insights from interviews.

### *U.S. Military Engagement Policy Objectives*

The policy division of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSDP) oversees all U.S. defense contacts with the PLA “to ensure that exchanges and interactions with PRC

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<sup>1297</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 49.

<sup>1298</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1299</sup> Yasuhiro, “An Essay on China’s Military Diplomacy,” 7.

<sup>1300</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 65.

<sup>1301</sup> Qi, “The PLA’s Role in China’s Regional Security Strategy,” 42.

<sup>1302</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2009), 54.

<sup>1303</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 7.

<sup>1304</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Krepon et al.), 49.

<sup>1305</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2014), 266.

entities comply with legislative requirements, provide clear benefit to the United States, encourage transparency, consider political and military sensitivities in the region, and mitigate security risks.”<sup>1306</sup> That said, many others (such as regional commands like PACOM) are involved in formulating the annual agenda for activities with China, including high-level visits, exercises, and port visits. As one retired PACOM commander told me, “anyone who thinks they have an oar to put in the water, does,” from the President on down.<sup>1307</sup> Issues related to the creation and implementation of U.S. mil-mil policy is explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

U.S.-China military relations are part of a comprehensive engagement strategy with the PRC,<sup>1308</sup> which is itself part of a “broader” U.S. strategy for the Asia-Pacific region. That broader strategy is “focused on building a stable and diversified security order, an open and transparent economic order, and a liberal political order.”<sup>1309</sup> To support that strategy, the DoD “seeks to build a military-to-military relationship with China that is healthy, stable, reliable, and continuous,”<sup>1310</sup> under the premise that it is in both countries’ interests to “expand practical cooperation in areas where both countries’ interests overlap, and to constructively manage differences.”<sup>1311</sup> The 2013 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* characterizes the U.S. approach to “contacts and exchanges with China’s military” as being based on “the principles of mutual respect, mutual trust, reciprocity, mutual interest, continuous dialogue, and mutual risk reduction.”<sup>1312</sup>

Official information regarding the specific policy objectives for mil-mil relations with China is difficult to find prior to the late 1990s. The history outline in Chapter 5 helps to explain why. Prior to the resumption of military relations in 1993, the focus of the relationship was countering the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the primary goal of military-to-military relations was to “encourage a common approach to mutual security

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<sup>1306</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2009), 54.

<sup>1307</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1308</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2013), 61; Kan. *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 14.

<sup>1309</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2015), ii.

<sup>1310</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (2012), iv; Kan. *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 25.

<sup>1311</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2015), ii.

<sup>1312</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2013), 61.

matters and contribute to deterrence of Soviet military expansionism in Asia, with minimum negative impact on other Asian nations.”<sup>1313</sup> The period between 1993 and 1997, when the first articulation of the objectives of mil-mil relations with China was made, corresponds with the general uncertainty surrounding both U.S.-China relations (particularly in light of the TSC), and U.S. foreign policy more broadly. However, in a briefing to Congress in 1997, DoD provided eight objectives for the mil-mil relationship; other statements have been made in the years since, all of which are detailed in Table 8.

<b>Table 8: U.S. Mil-Mil Policy Objectives</b>	
<b>Year</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
1997	Increase PLA transparency; Demonstrate U.S. military capabilities; Advance U.S.-PRC security dialogue through discussions with PLA leadership; Develop confidence building measures designed to reduce chances of miscalculations and accidents between operational forces; Pursue bilateral functional exchanges that are beneficial to DoD and the U.S. military (e.g. military medicine) and/or that provide operational insights on the PLA; Routinize senior-level defense dialogue to ensure open communications during tensions; Monitor the PLA’s influence in PRC internal politics and foreign policy decision-making; Expand PLA participation in appropriate multinational and multilateral military activities. <sup>1314</sup>
2000	Foster an environment conducive to frank, open discussion; complement the broader effort to engage the PRC; reduce the likelihood of miscalculations regarding cross-strait issues. <sup>1315</sup>
2008	Support the President’s overall policy objectives regarding China; prevent conflict by clearly communicating U.S. resolve to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region; lower the risk of miscalculation between the two militaries; increase U.S. understanding of China’s military capabilities and intentions; encourage China to adopt greater openness and transparency in its military capabilities and intentions; promote stable U.S.-China relations; increase mutual understanding between U.S. and PLA officers; encourage China to play a constructive and peaceful role in the Asia-Pacific region; to act as a partner in addressing common security challenges; and to emerge as a responsible stakeholder in the world. <sup>1316</sup>
2012	Improving cooperative capacity in areas of mutual interest, such as peacekeeping, HA/DR missions, and counter-piracy operations; Fostering greater institutional understanding through contacts between armed forces, including military academic institutions and mid-and-junior-grade officers; and Building common assessments of the regional security environment and related security challenges. <sup>1317</sup>
2016	Building sustained and substantive dialogue through policy dialogues and senior leader engagements; building concrete, practical cooperation in areas of mutual interest; and enhancing risk management efforts that diminish the potential for misunderstanding or miscalculation. <sup>1318</sup>

<sup>1313</sup> United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Report by the J-5 to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on United States – China Relationship*, (April 17, 1981), 3.

<sup>1314</sup> DoD, Report to Congress (2005), 11.

<sup>1315</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 17.

<sup>1316</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 17-18.

<sup>1317</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2012), 13.

<sup>1318</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 85.



Though the language has changed, the fundamental goals for pursuing mil-mil relations with China have remained relatively unchanged since the late 1990s: deterrence, information, influence (China's behavior and policies), and stability (i.e., the reduction of misperception/miscommunication). In practice, the first three effectively serve the fourth. In the colorful words of a former senior government official, the U.S. approach to deterrence relies heavily on transparency and showing its military capabilities to other states to "show how good they are, as if to say 'don't fuck with us.'"<sup>1319</sup> Mil-mil relations also serve as an important avenue for overt intelligence gathering, allowing U.S. officials and military operators to learn and observe through first-hand encounters, as well as communicate U.S. policies and perspectives. That is to say, it is an important source of both collecting and disseminating information. The influence imperative is discussed in more detail below, but is essentially about using mil-mil relations as a means of shaping China's behavior and worldview. Stability, similarly discussed in more detail below, is not necessarily about removing or overcoming the foundational causes of bilateral tension (such as China's rising power), but rather to reduce risks associated with the uncertainty such tension engenders. All four of these fundamental goals apply at both the strategic and the operational levels.

The question 'What is the purpose of engaging China militarily?' was asked of nearly all interview subjects. While answers were expectedly varied, they all related to the four primary objectives outlined above, though the emphasis was different. One former senior official said the purpose was the "bring the PLA out of its shell," and "broaden their horizons and understanding of the West," and U.S.<sup>1320</sup> Another official, who had previously been directly involved in formulating and overseeing U.S.-China mil-mil policy, said, "If one is of the perspective that trying to avoid the Thucydides Trap is a good thing, then mil-mil fits into the context of how to manage and seek to navigate a relationship between a rising and a status quo power who operate large, complex, sophisticated militaries in close proximity to one another."<sup>1321</sup> "It's about trying to build predictability and a common set of expectations," by creating a safe operating

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<sup>1319</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1320</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1321</sup> Interview with senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

environment.<sup>1322</sup> Similarly, another former official who worked in a related capacity, noted that there are different levels for the purpose of mil-mil engagements with China, said it is about trying to get a “clear understanding of what each side does and how they conceive of what they do and think of the process and outputs of what they’re doing.”<sup>1323</sup> Further consideration of the practical implications of the U.S. approach to the purpose and framing of military relations with China is explored in more detail in Chapter 8.

When considering both the officially stated objectives and those articulated by interviewees, it is clear that the overarching goal is strategic trust, even if some interview subjects were skeptical those goals can ever be reached. Similarly, though many would not agree with the use of the term (or any related to trust), the central aspects of the rationales provide are reflected in the concept of strategic trust. It is about developing a relationship with a potential rival to be able to obtain and exchange information, and place that information in context, to ensure that policies aimed at each other are based on accurate assessments of threat and intention. It is about developing confidence in your understanding of the other and of their understanding of you. In 2002, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith echoed this sentiment, saying,

If these military-to-military exchanges actually lead to our gaining insights into Chinese thinking and policies and capabilities and the like, and they can gain insights into ours, then it doesn’t mean we’ll necessarily agree on everything, but it at least means that as we’re making our policies, we’re making them on the basis of accurate information.<sup>1324</sup>

To be clear, Feith is not a proponent of the concept of strategic trust and did not make that statement with strategic trust in mind. During our interview, it was said that the goal of mil-mil relations is not trust, but accuracy. However, when you consider the four components of U.S. mil-mil policy objectives (deterrence, information, influence, and stability), it is clear that at least two of those (information and stability) are found directly within the conceptual structure of strategic trust, as described in Chapter 2. Foundational to both are confidence. The influence imperative is a peripheral component, in that a

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<sup>1322</sup> Interview with senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1323</sup> Interview with former U.S. official, March 10, 2017, Washington, D.C. Another interviewee said something similar, that the purpose is to get an accurate understanding of/info on the other. Interview with former senior U.S. official, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1324</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 17.

desired byproduct of engaging in CBMs and military diplomacy is that the strategic trust they create have the desired effect of curbing provocative policies. However, it is not required for strategic trust to be present, or for CBMs and military diplomacy to be effective. Deterrence, lastly, is an unavoidable component of military diplomacy between great power rivals, as the pervasive structural uncertainty compels states to maintain a hedge in the event of betrayal. Furthermore, military diplomacy is one component of a comprehensive policy effort, as is deterrence. They are (or can be) complimentary. It is also important to remember that the currency of hard power (that is, the threat of force) is the backbone of all great power diplomacy. It is unspoken, but recognized, that implicit in any U.S. imposition or diplomatic request of another state is the recognition that defying that request carries penalties, as great powers (particularly those with positions of primacy within the system like the U.S.) have the capability both to reward and punish.

'Shaping the Enemy'<sup>1325</sup>

The objective of shaping China's behavior is an important part of the story of U.S.-China military relations for two reasons. First, it is a central policy objective for U.S. defence engagement with the PRC, built around two focal points: influencing China, or the PLA, directly, and influencing the strategic environment in which China makes its decisions. We can think of these as direct or indirect shaping, respectively. The second reason it is important is because it is an element of the engagement strategy that has, arguably, shown the least amount of progress, making it a focal point of criticism. This section focuses on the first reason, particularly direct shaping, while the second (criticism) is explored in Chapter 8.

As Table 8 demonstrates, direct shaping has been a component of U.S. military engagement policy with China since at least the late 1990s. This is itself an extension of Clinton administration's broader policy of engagement and enlargement. The basic premise is that by engaging China (politically, militarily, economically, and diplomatically), it will integrate itself deeper into the existing global order, and by

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<sup>1325</sup> 'Shaping the Enemy' is a reference both to Sun Tzu's fifth principle of war and the U.S. military strategy of shaping. For more on the Sun Tzu reference, see: Mark McNeilly, *Sun Tzu and the Art of Business: Six Strategic Principles for Managers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For more on the U.S. strategy, see Derek S. Reveron, Ed., *Shaping the Security Environment* (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2006).

extension, support U.S. foreign policy goals. Numerous official reports and speeches mention the U.S.'s willingness to accept a strong and capable China so long as it is a productive member of the international community. The 2006 *National Security Strategy* details a strategy that “seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities.”<sup>1326</sup>

This objective is also reflected in U.S. military engagement policy. For example, the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review* describes the policy as being meant to “shape China’s choices in ways that foster constructive cooperation in addressing common security challenges.”<sup>1327</sup> The 2011 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* states that the mil-mil relationship with China is a “critical part of the Administration’s strategy to shape China’s rise in a way that maximizes cooperation and mitigates risk.”<sup>1328</sup> The 2014 *Report* similarly states that military engagement with China “supports U.S. objectives of promoting China’s development that would be consistent with international rules and norms, and that would serve as a source of security and shared prosperity in Asia.”<sup>1329</sup> Direct shaping also factors into U.S. policy objectives for military educational exchanges and interactions with junior officers, with the belief that such activities might “foster pro-U.S. leanings and understanding, particularly among younger officers who might lead in the future.”<sup>1330</sup> Beijing’s paranoia regarding the ‘subversive’ influences of Western engagement are not entirely unfounded. The shaping strategy is also readily apparent in Washington’s primary concern for the relationship: miscalculation and misunderstanding (or misperception).<sup>1331</sup>

### *Miscalculation & Misperception*

Reducing the chances for miscalculation and misperception are the primary driver of U.S. policy objectives in mil-mil engagements with China.<sup>1332</sup> In 1997, the DoD’s

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<sup>1326</sup> George W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. The White House, (March 16, 2006), 42.

<sup>1327</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 36.

<sup>1328</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 20.

<sup>1329</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 20; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 85.

<sup>1330</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 22.

<sup>1331</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 3.

<sup>1332</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 3, 5, 25; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2013), 62; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 53.

Office of Net Assessment released a study in which it identified five “dangerous misperceptions” China may succumb to which could “pose dangers to U.S. security interests.”<sup>1333</sup> These are:

1. Over-estimating U.S. hostility;
2. Over-estimating U.S. weakness;
3. Over-estimating U.S. decline;
4. Under-estimating costs of war; and
5. Under-estimating fears of neighbors to China’s rising military power.<sup>1334</sup>

When these misperceptions are placed within the context of China’s strategic culture, it becomes clear how the first three components of U.S. engagement policy (deterrence, information, influence) serve to address Washington’s concerns about the fourth (stability). Engagement “fosters understanding of each others’ military institutions in ways that dispel misconceptions and encourage common ground for dialogue,” and “allows senior leaders to address the global security environment and relevant challenges.”<sup>1335</sup>

Avoiding, or reducing, the chances of miscommunication and misperception is the goal of military engagements at both the strategic and operational levels. By developing familiarity at the operational level, the U.S. and China are able to reduce “the risk of conflict through accidents and miscalculations,” while lines of communication developed through regular interactions at the strategic level (via senior level visits and dialogues) can help defuse a crisis.<sup>1336</sup> It is because of these driving policy objectives that the U.S. has objected so strongly to Beijing’s habit of cutting off mil-mil relations in response to incidents or U.S. policies that upset it. The goal for the U.S. is to achieve a durable, sustained relationship that can withstand the ebbs and flows of a relationship that is guaranteed to contain many. Ensuring that stability has been a ‘talking point’ for senior U.S. officials during dialogues and visits throughout the course of the relationship.<sup>1337</sup>

With the U.S. emphasis on reducing the chances of miscommunication and misperception, it is clear that the ultimate aim of military engagement with China is not

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<sup>1333</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 24.

<sup>1334</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 24.

<sup>1335</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2013), 62.

<sup>1336</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2013), 230.

<sup>1337</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2012), 17.

to transform the relationship (though direct and indirect shaping is present), but rather to mitigate the effect of its negative consequences, namely uncertainty. But again, it is not just ‘uncertainty’ that the U.S. seeks to minimize, but the particularly acute uncertainty felt by great powers engaged in a potential strategic rivalry, such as between the U.S. and Soviet Union during the Cold War. In the case of the U.S. and China, the uncertainty is further exacerbated by the structural context of a power transition. While the U.S. and China are not yet at ‘Cold War’ levels of antagonism or enmity, the power transition dynamic adds another layer of persistent uncertainty that both countries must work to overcome if they wish to avoid the historical Thucydides Trap. At the center of U.S. efforts to avoid the unintended triggering of conflict with China is its pursuit of transparency.

### Transparency

If U.S. military engagement policy with China had two thematic pillars, they would be transparency and reciprocity.<sup>1338</sup> This section deals only with the former, while the latter is discussed in Chapter 7. Major DoD reports “warn China year after year about the potential repercussions of secrecy, to include increased suspicion about Chinese intentions and the possibility of inadvertent conflict due to miscalculation and misunderstanding.”<sup>1339</sup> Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Lawless stated the issue clearly during testimony given before the House Armed Services Committee in 2007, saying that “in the absence of adequate explanation for capabilities which are growing dynamically, both in terms of pace and scope, we are put in the position of having to assume the most dangerous intent a capabilities offers.”<sup>1340</sup> While the PLA’s modernization is the most frequent target of U.S. efforts for greater transparency, it is not the only one. For example, the 2003 DoD *Annual Report to Congress* identifies “three gaps in U.S. knowledge about Chinese military power.”<sup>1341</sup>

1. China’s military power compared to Taiwan’s;

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<sup>1338</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 55.

<sup>1339</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 63.

<sup>1340</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 3.

<sup>1341</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 4.

2. “Intangible Chinese capabilities” such as logistics, doctrine, and command and control;
3. U.S. confidence in determining how “Beijing’s greater interest in coercion and pre-emption strategies and identified emerging methods of warfare,” particularly “missiles and information warfare,” will affect the “overall military balance.”<sup>1342</sup>

Table 9 further details different areas the U.S. has sought transparency.

<b>Table 9: Areas of Transparency Sought by U.S.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defense expenditure, strategies, plans, and intentions.<sup>1343</sup></li> <li>• Strategic intentions;</li> <li>• calculus of deterrence in the context of its strategic forces modernization;</li> <li>• priorities in the military research, development and acquisition process;</li> <li>• plans and intentions in military space and counterspace;</li> <li>• investment strategies in military and dual-use science and technology;</li> <li>• emerging views on the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and Iran;</li> </ul> <p>the impact of China’s growing dependence on foreign sources of energy and strategic minerals on defence and force planning.<sup>1344</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLA leadership intent;</li> <li>• Leadership decision making process;</li> <li>• Relationship between civil and military leadership;</li> <li>• Notification of/purpose for testing new/advanced systems;</li> <li>• Notification/purpose of large scale exercises;</li> <li>• Intended applications of new and emerging technologies;</li> <li>• How areas of modernization emphasis fit/support national aspirations.<sup>1345</sup></li> </ul>

This is where the ‘shaping’ component comes into play. Despite U.S. pleas that transparency helps reduce the chances of inadvertent conflict (misperception and miscalculation), Beijing is reticent to comply both because it is suspicious of ulterior motives (namely the containment of China) and because deception and secrecy are culturally embedded. Military-to-military relations are the primary mechanism through which the U.S. is able to both communicate the imperative of transparency and institutionalize it, for example by codifying agreements to be transparent about certain

<sup>1342</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 4.

<sup>1343</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 56.

<sup>1344</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 43. (From ‘Strategic intentions’ to ‘emerging views on security’.)

<sup>1345</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 140 – 141. (From ‘PLA leadership intent’ to ‘How areas of modernization’.)

things as MOUs. The DMAA with the Soviet Union/Russia is another example of this. The shaping strategy is predicated on the hope that overtime, China will begin to accept the mutual benefits of greater transparency and displace some of the internalized attachment to secrecy and deception. Said another way, the U.S. strategy is intended to socialize China into accepting Western standards of transparency. However, as noted above, because so much of the U.S. desire for transparency is motivated by the PLA's modernization,<sup>1346</sup> China is unlikely to comply until it feels it has reached parity (or close to it) with the U.S. militarily. Even at the PLA's current rate of progress, it is not expected to reach that goal within the next ten to fifteen years, though its regional advantages are accelerating rapidly,<sup>1347</sup> sometimes to the surprise of U.S. analysts.<sup>1348</sup>

This does not bode well for the progress of achieving greater transparency in the relationship. However, as with the PLA's general attitudes towards military diplomacy, it is possible that as China's power increases and its position within the global hierarchy solidifies, structural pressures will compel it towards being more transparent. Beijing might accept that greater transparency is in its self-interest, particularly if its continued ascension prompts a greater balancing effort from the U.S. and/or other regional powers. However, given the deep roots secrecy has within China's strategic culture, believing Beijing will be compelled to change to a sufficient degree to alleviate the tension in the bilateral relationship with the U.S. may simply be wishful thinking. Moreover, it is possible that domestic pressures, particularly declining economic growth and rising social unrest, may compel the CCP to "compensate" by "encouraging and relying on popular nationalism."<sup>1349</sup> This is a real possibility, as "the gradual discrediting of socialist ideology in Chinese society and increased domestic exposure to Western influences," has already led the CCP to step up its "external propaganda efforts to forge and promote a

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<sup>1346</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (2014), ii; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 85; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 55; USCC, *Report to Congress* (2012), 141.

<sup>1347</sup> Eric Heginbotham et al., *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996 – 2017* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2015), 31. See also DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2008), 22.

<sup>1348</sup> United States Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (2006), i.

<sup>1349</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 329.



new Chinese ideology at home and abroad.”<sup>1350</sup> It is combining these efforts with modern technology to frightening effect.<sup>1351</sup>

Transparency not only links shaping with the reduction of miscalculation and misperception, it is the glue that binds all four military engagement components together. Being transparent about U.S. military capabilities is at the heart of its deterrence strategy. It also facilitates the mutual exchange of information required for successful policy creation and implementation. Transparency, as shown above, is also central to both the influence and stability components. It is also central to the difficulties U.S.-China military relations have experienced in practice.

### *Competing Approaches to CBMs*

The U.S. and China approach CBMs differently. While China prefers a ‘top down’ approach, the U.S. prefers a ‘bottom up’.<sup>1352</sup> These are explained in detail in the following paragraphs. This is a result of both culture and bureaucratic structure and their differing approaches to building trust. Indeed, Finkelstein and Unangst suggest the approach both states take to military relations and CBMs is “diametrically opposed.”<sup>1353</sup> The U.S., for example, is a legalistic country. China, conversely, “has never really been a culturally legalistic culture. They don’t have much real experience with international law.”<sup>1354</sup> In the U.S. view, trust is the result of cooperation. “Trust must be earned.”<sup>1355</sup> Accordingly, it favors specific, binding CBMs which, if adhered to, build confidence and trust. This is seen in the inescapable tautology that confidence-building measures are measures to build confidence. China, conversely, considers cooperation to be “symbolic

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<sup>1350</sup> Van Oudenaren & Fisher, “Foreign Military Education as PLA Soft Power,” 115.

<sup>1351</sup> Josh Chin, “Chinese Police Add Facial-Recognition Glasses to Surveillance Arsenal,” *The Wall Street Journal* (online), February 7, 2018; Liza Lin & Josh Chin, “China’s Tech Giants Have a Second Job: Helping Beijing Spy on Its People,” *The Wall Street Journal* (online), November 30, 2017.

<sup>1352</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 44; Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-U.S. military-to-military relations,” 214; Scott W. Harold, “Stabilizing Military-to-Military Ties Between the United States and China,” in *China, Inside & Out: A Collection of Essays on Foreign & Domestic Policy in the Xi Jinping Era*, RAND Corporation (Santa Monica, 2015), 8.

<sup>1353</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 44.

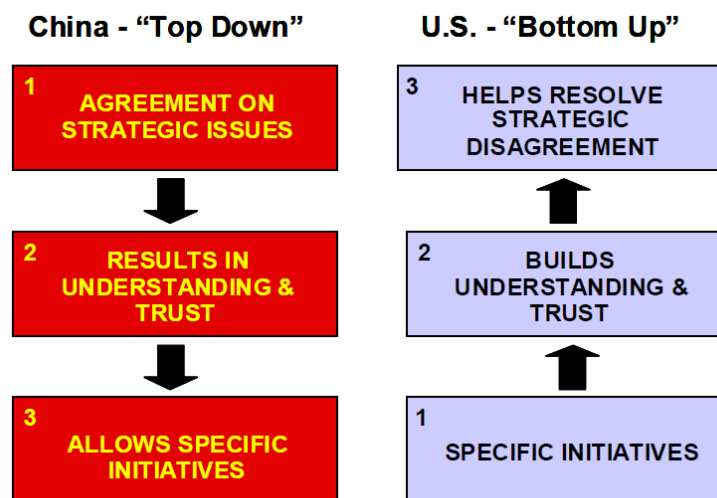
<sup>1354</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1355</sup> Yung, “Continuity and change in Sino-U.S. military-to-military relations,” 214.

of levels of trust that already exist.”<sup>1356</sup> As Jones notes, “In the Western ideal, this is a paradox.”<sup>1357</sup> Figure 8 illustrates these competing approaches.

China prefers to focus on coming to agreement on strategic principles, from which specific initiatives can be developed.<sup>1358</sup> A somewhat similar approach was evident with the Soviets and their preference for declaratory principles. This is reflected in the emphasis China places on dialogue, particularly at high-levels. In China, dialogue is itself a confidence building measure.<sup>1359</sup> It is through dialogue that two parties can reach mutual understanding and resolve strategic differences, which fosters trust and allows for meaningful cooperation.<sup>1360</sup> Figure 9 illustrates this approach. It is reminiscent of the ‘policy by consensus’ approach found elsewhere in the PRC’s bureaucracy. Though the U.S. and China may be striving towards the same goal, their different approaches have at times caused tensions in the relationship.<sup>1361</sup>

**Figure 8: Competing Approaches to CBMs<sup>1362</sup>**



<sup>1356</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 4. This important point is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, which considers various approaches to measuring progress and outcomes in mil-mil relations.

<sup>1357</sup> Jones, “Background paper,” 23.

<sup>1358</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 45.

<sup>1359</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 93.

<sup>1360</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 4.

<sup>1361</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 24.

<sup>1362</sup> Image taken from Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of U.S.-China Security Cooperation*, 25.

**Figure 9: China’s Approach to Trust, Confidence, & Cooperation<sup>1363</sup>**



The implications of these different approaches are far reaching. For example, it impacts perceptions of, and approaches to, transparency. Where the U.S. would regard a display of transparency as a means of building trust (along the lines of ‘trust, but verify’), China regards displays of transparency the *result* of trust. The differing approaches also have an important impact on the pace of progress in the relationship, and the expectations that come with it. From the Chinese perspective, “The U.S. is not patient. The U.S. wants to see results too quickly. Americans want to move too fast in the military relationship.”<sup>1364</sup> Evidence of this can be seen in the MFA’s desire to slow the rate of progress of military relations in the 1980s, as described above. There is also an impact on which types of engagements are pursued, as the U.S. favors functional exchanges, which includes interactions for mid-level officers and operational cooperation, such as with HA/DR or counter-piracy. China, as noted, prefers high-level dialogues.

It is unlikely that either the U.S. or the PRC will alter their approach to trust or CBMs anytime soon. Instead, both sides must work towards finding traction somewhere in the middle. For the U.S., this means paying more attention to senior level-dialogues, especially the importance of language. For example, one analyst noted that Chinese officials are “dead-set on the rhetoric. It’s very important for Chinese officials to hear senior U.S. officials use their phrasing.”<sup>1365</sup> Xi’s ‘new type of great power relations’, for example, was an effort by Beijing to get Washington to come to a mutual understanding at the strategic level, one which respects China’s ‘core interests’. Washington’s temporary embrace of the term surely gave those in Beijing the impression that progress towards the resolution of strategic differences was being made. In short, the U.S. must increase its ‘security dilemma sensibility’ by viewing the relationship through the lens of what is important to leaders in China. That is not to suggest that it should subvert its

<sup>1363</sup> Recreated from Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 4.

<sup>1364</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 45.

<sup>1365</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

interests to those of China, only that it must recognize that declaratory principles and dialogues at senior levels are as important to the process as tangential outcomes in the form of CBMs (e.g., MOUs, hotlines).

China, conversely, is increasingly recognizing the value of the U.S. approach. As its power grows, senior policymakers in Beijing are increasingly recognizing the value of having specified rules and protocols governing interactions between militaries.<sup>1366</sup> As one observer notes, “By embracing or resisting CBMs in the future, Beijing can help alleviate or affirm lingering suspicions of its future course in the region.”<sup>1367</sup> However, its approach suggests there is still much work to be done getting China to embrace the ‘spirit’ of CBMs. For example, a principle of Beijing’s policy regarding CBMs is to “establish CBMs according to both the reality of diversification in the Asia-Pacific region and the new features of the international situation, and not to blindly imitate the models of other regions and those of the past.”<sup>1368</sup> That is, other states should recognize China’s power and place in the region, both current and historical, and defer to its preferences. While such an instrumental approach does not preclude CBMs from being successfully implemented, it is not particularly endearing, limiting the positive impacts they might have in truly transforming perceptions in adversarial relationships.

This chapter has detailed China’s approach to military diplomacy and CBMs, including its strategic culture and its mil-mil policy-making process. By detailing China’s historical perspective and strategic culture, it is possible to consider the evolution of U.S.-China mil-mil relations (including China’s perceived reluctance to embrace them) in an appropriate context. The purpose was not to excuse China’s lack of transparency or unwillingness to participate in mil-mil exchanges with as much enthusiasm as some U.S. observers would like. Rather, the intent was to provide a Chinese perspective, which is often underemphasized (or simply not included) in U.S. analyses of the mil-mil relationship. This chapter also served to clarify U.S. policy objectives. In so doing, it becomes evident just how much the Soviet experience has influenced the U.S. approach. As the next chapters demonstrate, while the Soviet experience helped frame the U.S.

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<sup>1366</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 16.

<sup>1367</sup> Allen, “China’s Approach to Confidence-Building Measures,” (Singh), 5.

<sup>1368</sup> Xia, “The Evolution of Chinese Views Toward CBMs,” 18.

approach to mil-mil relations with China, Washington has yet to really internalize any of the lessons learned during the Cold War. With the appropriate context for both U.S. and Chinese perspectives on the military-to-military relationship now firmly established, it is possible to look at how the relationship has functioned in practice.

## CHAPTER 7: U.S.-CHINA MIL-MIL IN PRACTICE

Previous chapters have established the thinking behind engaging in military relations and the respective objectives China and the U.S. seek in doing so, as well as the broad contours of the relationship over time. The purpose of this chapter is to take a closer look at how the relationship has functioned in practice. First, it considers the various CBMs that exist between the U.S. and China (MOUs and hotlines). It then analyses the various mil-mil activities, following the official U.S. categorization, which are high-level visits and exchanges, recurrent exchanges, functional exchanges, academic exchanges, and ship visits and exercises. These are explained in more detail further below. I then take a closer look at incidents at sea between the U.S. and China, especially the 2001 EP-3 and 2009 *Impeccable* incidents. Analyzing how the mil-mil relationship, including any existing CBMs, have functioned during incidents and crises clearly demonstrates the potential and limitations of mil-mil engagement. In addition, many of the issues raised in the preceding chapters are brought to the fore during such incidents. Lastly, I examine mil-mil activities over time to re-frame how the success of the relationship is measured and to identify issues with the practice of mil-mil that have been ignored or underemphasized.

### U.S.-China CBMs

This section considers the various CBMs that the U.S. and China have established, including MOUs, and hotlines, and categorizes them based on Macintosh's typology. Most of the history and context of these CBMs has been covered in Chapter 5, and so the focus here is on providing some more detail where appropriate and on placing them into the wider context of CBMs established in Chapter 3. The most substantial CBMs between the U.S. and China are the MOUs, and their supplemental annexes, first signed by Presidents Obama and Xi in 2014. These are the Notification of Major Military Activities MOU and the Rules of Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters MOU.<sup>1369</sup> Each of these MOUs has three annexes.

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<sup>1369</sup> These are officially known as the Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of American Department of Defense and the People's Republic of China Ministry of National Defense on

The first, the ‘Notification’ MOU (NMOU), is meant to form the “basis from which both sides exchange notifications of military activities and strengthen confidence and mutual trust through reciprocal notifications and information sharing,” with the aim to “reduce misunderstanding, prevent miscalculation, and manage risk and crisis effectively.”<sup>1370</sup> Section III of the NMOU stipulates the meeting of an annual “assessment working group” to be held as part of the Defense Policy Coordination Talks (DPCT), where senior officials will “review the prior year’s progress and consult on improvements for future implementation of the mechanism.”<sup>1371</sup> Section IV stipulates that “neither side should disclose to third parties the content of notifications received under this mechanism without the written approval of the other side.”<sup>1372</sup> Given the PRC’s penchant for secrecy and a desire to keep negative aspects of the relationship out of the media as much as possible, this stipulation has effectively prevented the public disclosure of substantive issues discussed at these annual meetings.

Annex I of the NMOU, titled “Notification of Major Security Policy and Strategy Developments,” is effectively designed to provide a mechanism through which each side can notify the other of “their respective country’s security policy, strategy, and legal information, including the adjustment of respective national defense policies and strategies, by providing briefings and information about speeches, major government publications such as White Papers, strategy publications, and other official announcements related to policy and strategy.”<sup>1373</sup> Section II further stipulates that either state may request meetings with “subject matter experts and principal authors of publications.”<sup>1374</sup>

Annex II, “Observation of Military Exercises and Activities,” aims to “foster mutual trust and transparency in military affairs,” through the observation of military exercises and activities.<sup>1375</sup> The intent is having military observers at exercises increases

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Notification of Major Military Activities Confidence-Building Measures Mechanism, and the Memorandum of Understanding Between the Department of Defense of the United States of America and the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China Regarding the Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters.

<sup>1370</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 134.

<sup>1371</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 135.

<sup>1372</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 136.

<sup>1373</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 138.

<sup>1374</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 138.

<sup>1375</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 140.

“mutual understanding of the intent, organization, and implementation,” with the goal being to “reduce the potential for misunderstanding or miscalculation.”<sup>1376</sup> This includes unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral exercises or activities “in which the side extending the invitation is either the host or co-host.”<sup>1377</sup> Though it was not executed under the NMOU, China’s initial participation in RIMPAC as an observer is an example of this.

Section III specifies four specific goals:

1. Gradually expand and increase over time the quality and quantity of reciprocal observation of military exercises;
2. Deepen mutual understanding and increase comprehension of each side’s intent;
3. Demonstrate in a concrete and measurable manner, steadily increasing openness, mutual trust, and reciprocal confidence;
4. Build greater understanding and mutual respect between observers and hosts.<sup>1378</sup>

Annex III, “Military Crisis Notification Mechanism for Use of the Defense Telephone Link,” is “intended to improve and normalize mutual notification of military crisis information,” through the Defense Telephone Link (DTL), including “audio and visual modes, in order to reduce risk, foster mutual trust, and increase openness.”<sup>1379</sup> It is built upon the 2008 Defense Telephone Link Agreement, and is designed to establish norms, encourage effective use of risk-reduction measures, and support the effectiveness of the DTL “in times of actual crisis.”<sup>1380</sup> As Section III notes, this means ensuring calls are made at the appropriate level, “within the mutually determined time frame, particularly at a time of crisis.”<sup>1381</sup> Section III further identifies five specific goals for the Annex:

1. Improve the ability to communicate clearly the nature of the military crisis in a smooth and timely fashion;

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<sup>1376</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 140.

<sup>1377</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 140.

<sup>1378</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 140 – 141.

<sup>1379</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 142.

<sup>1380</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 142.

<sup>1381</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 142.



2. Ensure Communications at the appropriate leadership level are sufficient and effective;
3. Deepen mutual understanding and increase comprehension of each side's intent;
4. Prevent destabilizing escalation in times of crisis or tension; and
5. Demonstrate, in a concrete and measurable manner, steadily increasing openness and mutual trust.<sup>1382</sup>

Of course, what those measurements might look like, or even what is meant by 'mutual trust', is not included in the Annex. Section IV stipulates that consistent with the 2008 Agreement, non-crisis calls should come with 48-hour advance notice, and the receiving state should provide a response within 24-hours. The DTL and other U.S.-China hotlines, are discussed in more detail further below.

The 'Rules' MOU (RMOU), is an "effort to strengthen adherence to existing international law and norms, to improve operational safety at sea and in the air, to enhance mutual trust, and to develop a new model of military-to-military relations between the two sides."<sup>1383</sup> Similar to the NMOU, Section IV of the RMOU stipulates an annual meeting where senior officials can review the previous year's events and adherence, however, the RMOU annual meeting takes place as part of the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA). Section V importantly notes that the RMOU is "not intended to be binding under international law," though also notes it is "made without prejudice to either Side's policy perspective on military activities in the Exclusive Economic Zone."<sup>1384</sup> The difference in approach to such activities is noted in Chapter 5 (footnote 812), as well as further below. Again, similar with the NMOU, there is a provision preventing the disclosure of "the content of assessments conducted under this Memorandum," without the written consent of both parties. This makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to accurately assess the RMOU's effectiveness in curtailing 'unsafe' or 'unprofessional' behavior during encounters, an issue explored in more detail further below.

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<sup>1382</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 143.

<sup>1383</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 112.

<sup>1384</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 113.

Annex I, “Terms of Reference of the Rules of Behavior for Safety of Air and Maritime Encounters,” simply provides clarity on definitions of common terms, such as ‘military vessel’, and reaffirms that wherever applicable, definitions are those found in UNCLOS, COLREGs and CUES. Section II of the Annex reaffirms the sovereignty of military vessels and aircraft (including auxiliary vessels owned or operated by the State), the rights and responsibilities of pilots and commanding officers to act in self-defense if warranted, and to avoid accidents and unsafe practices.

Annex II, “Rules of Behavior for Safety of Surface-to-Surface Encounters,” stipulates that military vessels should “ensure navigation safety through active communications and coordinated actions,” as stipulated by CUES and related international maritime agreements.<sup>1385</sup> Section III reaffirms the importance of communication and of responding in a timely manner, while also refraining from “using uncivil language or unfriendly physical gestures,”<sup>1386</sup> – a challenge for sailors the world over, no doubt. Many of the Sections stipulate the technical details of marine navigation and interaction that need not be explained here. Section IV, however, is interestingly titled “Rules for Establishing Mutual Trust at Sea.” While it does not provide any details regarding what ‘mutual trust’ means, or how to recognize when it exists, its content in many ways reflects the rules found in the U.S.-Soviet INCSEA and DMA Agreement, including avoiding simulated attacks, the use of lasers, and the illumination of navigation bridges or aircraft cockpits. Remaining Sections further detail communication rules (for instance, all voice communication should be conducted in English).

Lastly is Annex III, “Rules for Behavior for Safety of Air-to-Air Encounters.” In many ways, it mirrors Annex II, but in the context of aerial encounters. It even includes a provision (Section III, iii) that states “Military aircrew should refrain from the use of uncivil language or unfriendly physical gestures,”<sup>1387</sup> which brings to mind a famous scene from the 1986 film, *Top Gun*, wherein U.S. pilots ‘flip the bird’ to their adversary during a routine intercept (see Figure 10). While the reference is likely coincidental, *Top Gun* is very well known to both the U.S. and the PRC, whose China Central Television (the predominant state broadcaster) has attempted to pass off scenes from the film as

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<sup>1385</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 117.

<sup>1386</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 118.

<sup>1387</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 127.

official PLAAF footage on more than one occasion.<sup>1388</sup> Section III further notes that while the Annex is designed to “encourage communications,” military aircraft are not obligated to do so.<sup>1389</sup> Similar to Annex II, Section VI of Annex III is titled “Rules for Establishing Trust in the Air.” While similarly vague on the meaning of trust or how it is identified, Section VI, ii, stipulates that pilots should avoid aerobatics and simulated attacks in the vicinity of vessels encountered. The use of aerobatics is particularly relevant, as the subsection on incidents at sea further below details. The remainder of the Annex provides technical details for communication and interaction.

**Figure 10: *Top Gun*’s Unfriendly Gesture<sup>1390</sup>**



The MOUs seem to have had an effect. While they have not prevented incidents at sea or in the air (as detailed below), the MOUs have provided a measure of stability and predictability to U.S.- PLA encounters. For example, in 2015, PACOM Commander, Admiral Harry Harris, told Congress that PACOM had “seen very few dangerous activities by the Chinese” since August 2014.<sup>1391</sup> The Admiral’s testimony was reinforced just days later when National Security Advisor Susan Rice said the U.S. had “seen a marked improvement in operational safety since we signed [the MOUs].”<sup>1392</sup> Interview subjects knowledgeable about trends in the frequency and tenor of these encounters were unable to provide any details, though given the requirements regarding third party disclosure noted above, this is not surprising. However, one senior official told me that

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<sup>1388</sup> Michael Bristow, “China TV ‘substitutes Top Gun for air force footage,” *BBC News* (online), January 31, 2011.

<sup>1389</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2016), 127.

<sup>1390</sup> *Top Gun* (Paramount Pictures, 1986).

<sup>1391</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 257.

<sup>1392</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 257.

China has made a “good attempt” to reduce the instances where an individual pilot or naval commander responds to their frustration of a U.S. policy, such as a U.S. plane operating off the coast, by acting aggressively or unsafely.<sup>1393</sup> He also told me that in response to U.S. Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea, the PLA has behaved professionally and followed all appropriate measures as dictated by the MOUs.<sup>1394</sup> Similarly, a prominent think tank analyst told me,

It has given us a real degree of predictability, that when we’re sailing out in the South China sea, or we are flying, and we contact the other side because we see a ship or an aircraft, or identify it on radar, and the Chinese respond, they communicate – they didn’t always do this in the past! So they’ll say where they’re going, what their heading is, so the chance of collision certainly exists, but I think it’s far lower than it used to be.<sup>1395</sup>

In addition to the MOUs, there are several hotlines connecting various levels of the U.S. and PRC governments. As noted in Chapter 5, a Direct Communications Link (DCL) was established between presidents in May 1998. After many years of prodding, Beijing finally allowed a DTL to be established between the Chinese MND and the U.S. DoD. Richard Weitz notes that China’s eventual acceptance of the U.S. proposal started in late 2006, after the USS *Kitty Hawk* incident (when a PLA sub surfaced within striking range of the aircraft carrier during exercises off the coast of Japan), and the U.S. response to China’s 2007 ASAT test.<sup>1396</sup> The first use of the DTL took place on April 10, 2008, when Defense Secretary Robert Gates called General Liang Guanglie, China’s new Minister of Defense. According to Weitz, “Liang berated Gates for selling arms to Taiwan and for maintaining ties with the Taiwanese defense community.”<sup>1397</sup> Gates responded by warning “Liang that Washington would resist attempts by either Beijing or Taipei to change the status quo across the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>1398</sup> The first operational use of the DTL occurred just a month later, when PACOM Commander, Admiral Timothy

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<sup>1393</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1394</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1395</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1396</sup> Richard Weitz, “A military hotline would mean little’ U.S. China strains,” *The International Herald, Opinion*, P.9 (April 9, 2007).

<sup>1397</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387.

<sup>1398</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387.

Keating, called PLA Deputy Chief of General Staff Ma Xiaotian “about the U.S. Air Force’s use of two C-17 transports to deliver earthquake relief supplies to Sichuan.”<sup>1399</sup>

The U.S. has subsequently tried establishing a hotline between the PACOM commander and his/her Chinese counterpart, however, China has yet to respond to the request; PACOM’s hotline currently connects with PRC officials in Beijing.<sup>1400</sup> In addition to the DTL, U.S. and PLA officials have begun using video teleconference technology more frequently. For example, in April 2015, U.S. CNO, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, began quarterly video conference calls with Commander of the PLAN, General Wu Shengli, “to discuss a range of issues in the military-to-military relationship.”<sup>1401</sup> Admiral Greenert’s replacement, Admiral John Richardson, continued the quarterly calls with General Wu. After a January 2016 teleconference, Richardson said “face-to-face interaction and frank exchanges help build a personal connection that benefits both our navies now and into the future,” while a USN press release “noted that such conversations serve to establish a dialogue that reduces the risk of miscalculation between U.S and Chinese naval forces.”<sup>1402</sup> In May 2016, CJCS, General Joe Dunford, used teleconference technology to discuss “areas of cooperation in the bilateral relationship, stability on the Korean Peninsula, and risk reduction mechanisms in the military-to-military relationship,” with Chief of the Joint Staff Department, General Fang Fenghui.<sup>1403</sup>

While the establishment of the DTL and increasing use of video teleconference technology are positive trends as far as having formal channels of communication, China’s acceptance and use of such links has been inconsistent at best. For example, the PLA would not agree to actually *use* the DTL until May 2011.<sup>1404</sup> There are several reasons to explain this reticence. First, owing to the CCP’s fear of a wayward military, civilian officials want to keep the PLA tightly controlled and supervise all mil-mil contacts between the U.S. and China.<sup>1405</sup> This has manifested itself in bizarre ways. For example, Admiral Keating reportedly once asked a senior Chinese general in Beijing for his phone

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<sup>1399</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>1400</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387.

<sup>1401</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 260.

<sup>1402</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2016), 233.

<sup>1403</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 86.

<sup>1404</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>1405</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387 – 388.

number “so that they could speak directly,” to which the general responded by saying that “he did not yet have a phone number, despite the multiple receivers on his desk.”<sup>1406</sup> As Weitz notes, “Many Chinese military officers, such as Keating’s interlocutor, might fear that appearing to develop close relations with their American counterparts could prove harmful to their careers.”<sup>1407</sup> This fear is discussed in more detail below.

There is also a cultural element in play, which is closely bound to the bureaucratic structure of the PRC. As a senior DoD official told me,

China will tell us that the communication measures are good but don’t work in a crisis because that’s not how Chinese culture works. They’re reluctant to use a hotline in a crisis because there’s no one person in the Chinese system who’s empowered to use the phone. They’re managed via committees, so a single person using the phone is potentially destructive. They are very upfront about it. They will even say it’s partially in their nature to stop communicating during a crisis.<sup>1408</sup>

The tendency to let the phone ring was experienced firsthand by President George H. W. Bush, who despite his extensive dealings with the CCP as “head of the U.S. Liaison Office in China from 1974 – 75, as well as his later stints as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and Vice President,” found his calls unanswered during the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown.<sup>1409</sup> President Clinton found a similar response after the 1999 Belgrade Embassy bombing.<sup>1410</sup> China’s use of hotlines during incidents is discussed in more detail below, however, its recent history does not instill confidence in the mechanism. As Weitz put it, “A direct phone connection between two parties only works when the other side is willing to listen.”<sup>1411</sup> The signing of the MOUs, and their subsequent annexes, gives hope that Beijing has come to accept the benefits of stable communications, particularly in times of crisis.

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<sup>1406</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 392.

<sup>1407</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 392.

<sup>1408</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1409</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387.

<sup>1410</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387.

<sup>1411</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 387.

U.S.-China CBMs in Perspective

As this section has shown, CBMs between the U.S. and China are both fairly recent and few. On the one hand, this can be interpreted as a positive, in that it reflects the lack of a need for them. This would be a naïve view. On the other, it can be seen as an inadequate situation with potentially deadly consequences. It is useful to consider these CBMs in terms of their typology, to be able to identify specific areas of weakness. Table 10 details the existing U.S.-China CBMs according to Macintosh’s typology.

<b>Table 10: U.S.-China CBMs</b>		
<b>NMOU (including annexes)</b>		
<i>Provision</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Annual assessment meeting	Consultation	A
Voluntary exchange of information regarding security policy, strategy, and legal information	Information Exchange/Notification	A
Voluntary invitation to observe military activities or exercises	Access	B
Voluntary use of DTL for military crisis notification	Notification	A
<b>RMOU (including annexes)</b>		
<i>Provision</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Annual assessment meeting	Consultation	A
Guidelines for common language/definitions	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Guidelines for surface-to-surface encounters	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Communication protocols (sea)	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Maritime Navigation Warning Area Protocols	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Rules for Establishing Mutual Trust at Sea	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Rules for Emergency On-Scene Coordination	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Guidelines for air-to-air encounters	Rules-of-Conduct	C
General Flight Rules	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Rules for Establishing Mutual Trust in the Air	Rules-of-Conduct	C
Communication Protocols (air)	Rules-of-Conduct	C
<b>Presidential DCL (1998)</b>		
<i>Provision</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Created direct communications link	Communication	A

<b>DoD – MND DCT (2008)</b>		
<i>Provision</i>	<i>CBM Type</i>	<i>Macintosh Type</i>
Created direct communications link	Communication	A

As Table 10 shows, U.S.-China CBMs are, indeed, underdeveloped. Most noticeably, existing CBMs are voluntary, rather than legally binding. This significantly weakens the value of the CBMs by limiting the implications of their use, for example by avoiding any actual constraints on behavior.<sup>1412</sup> Indeed, some observers have argued that the lack of legally binding MOUs actually “weaken” international law by creating certain ‘outs’ in cases where the MOUs may overlap with pre-existing international laws.<sup>1413</sup> That they are also confidential is also problematic.

There is also a noticeable lack of verification and observation facilitation CBMs (*Type B*), which given the ongoing issues surrounding reciprocal transparency, is unsurprising. From a Chinese perspective, “The primary problem is that the U.S. side does not believe what we say. This is an issue of trust – the United States simply doesn’t trust the PRC’s/PLA’s words.”<sup>1414</sup> This is an area the U.S. and China should pursue, as CBMs of the ‘trust, but verify’ variety can make a serious impact in improving transparency and strategic trust. Verification measures, particularly if they are reciprocal, can help break suspicions and reinforce perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness.

However, it is important to keep the U.S.-China MOUs in context, rather than simply compare them to the U.S.-Soviet CBMs, which many are quick to do. As noted in Chapter 4, it took decades before the U.S. and Soviet Union signed any MOUs. Moreover, the power disparity between the Soviet Union and United States was not as profound as it is - at least for the time being - in the U.S.-China relationship. As will be demonstrated further below, the trend line shows that as China has become more powerful, and more confident, it has increasingly embraced and supported CBM efforts.

<sup>1412</sup> Steven Stashwick, “New U.S.-China Military Agreement Won’t Be Defusing Any Crises,” *China US Focus* (online), September 11, 2017; Bonnie Glaser, “A Step Forward in U.S.-China Military Ties: Two CBM Agreements,” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, November 11, 2014; Mira Rapp-Hooper, “What’s in a Confidence Building Measure?” *Lawfare* (online), February 8, 2015; Mira Rapp-Hooper & Bonnie Glaser, “In Confidence: Will We Know if U.S.-China CBMs Are Working?” *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, (CSIS)*, February 4, 2015.

<sup>1413</sup> James Kraska & Raul “Pete” Pedrozo, “The U.S.-China Arrangement for Air-to-Air Encounters Weakens International Law,” *Lawfare* (online), March 9, 2016.

<sup>1414</sup> Zhan, “Principles of Military-to-Military Relations,” 12.



Progress has been slow, and Beijing’s commitment to these agreements remains uncertain, but there is clear progression both in terms of tangible outcomes (i.e., the MOU annexes) and in China’s perception of their utility. In the future, as the situation warrants (which is largely predicated on the PRCs capability to reciprocate certain actions), it will not be surprising to see a U.S.-China Open Skies Treaty or DMAA, as existed with the Soviets (and now with Russia). As others have argued, the U.S. should continue to push for more comprehensive and legally binding CBMs.<sup>1415</sup>

The following sections provide a more detailed analysis of the various mil-mil activities, as categorized by the U.S. military. They are described as follows:

- Recurrent exchanges: these are the institutionalized dialogues such as the Security & Economic Dialogue, Defense Consultative Talks, Defense Policy Coordination Talks, and the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement.
- High-level visits and exchanges: typically involves interaction between top civilian officials, such as the Secretary of Defense, as well as senior military officials such as the CJCS, heads of military services, and regional commanders with responsibilities for Asia (PACOM, Pacific Fleet Commanders).<sup>1416</sup>
- Functional and Academic exchanges: Interactions between operational and mid-level officers, including academic exchanges. “These exchanges include activities in areas ranging from military medicine to peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations.”<sup>1417</sup>
- Ship visits and exercises: ship visits and exercises promote trust between the two sides and build joint capacity to provide international public goods like including search and rescue, disaster relief, and counter-piracy.

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<sup>1415</sup> McVadon, “The Reckless and the Resolute,” 10 – 12.

<sup>1416</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “U.S.-China military relations,” 671.

<sup>1417</sup> Saunders & Bowie, “U.S.-China military relations,” 672.

### Recurrent Exchanges

According to the DoD, these “recurring institutionalized events form the backbone of U.S.-China defense discussions each year,” and “serve as a regularized mechanism for dialogue at the strategic and policy levels.”<sup>1418</sup> Recurrent exchanges are, effectively, dialogues. The general history of U.S.-China dialogues was covered in Chapter 5. That said, as with many other aspects of the relationship covered in this dissertation, detailed information is scant. More often than not, the only information released by the U.S. government is a joint statement issued as a press release that simply acknowledges a meeting took place and describes its content in a superficial way. Occasionally there are newspaper articles. Interview subjects were not any more forthcoming. This leaves large gaps in our ability to understand and analyze these talks in a particularly meaningful way. Indeed, one analyst described the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA), as “opaque.”<sup>1419</sup> There are four primary recurrent exchanges between the U.S. and China: the DPCT, the Defense Consultative Talks (DCT), MMCA, and the Strategic and Economic Dialogue (S&ED). While they are unique dialogues, occurring at various levels of seniority within both governments, they do occasionally overlap. For example, an agreement to establish MOUs under the MMCA were reached at an S&ED meeting.<sup>1420</sup> Because of its complexity, the MMCA is discussed in a separate section.

The DPCT, first held in December 2006,<sup>1421</sup> is an annual talk that often takes place between the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for East Asia in the U.S. and a similarly ranked representative from China (usually a deputy chief of the general staff responsible for foreign affairs, or the director of MNDs Foreign Affairs Office), focused on “improving understanding between American and Chinese military officials.”<sup>1422</sup> According to the 2010 DoD *Annual Report*, the DPCT also provide “delegations an opportunity to further build and deepen bilateral strategic trust, exchange views on a number of regional and global issues, and seek ways to cooperate on areas of

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<sup>1418</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 87.

<sup>1419</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1420</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2016), 230 – 231.

<sup>1421</sup> The DPCT is the result of a Special Policy Dialogue between U.S. military and PLA officials held in early 2005 “to discuss policy disputes and end an impasse in talks over safety and operational concerns under the MMCA,” Allen, Unpublished Report, 5.

<sup>1422</sup> Michael Wines, “U.S. and China Revive Military Talks,” *The New York Times* (online), February 28, 2009.

mutual interest.”<sup>1423</sup> In 2015, for example, the DPCT took place between DASD David Helvey, accompanied by representatives from the Joint Staff, PACOM, the State Department, and the National Security Council, and Rear Admiral Li Ji, deputy director of Foreign Affairs Office of China’s MND.<sup>1424</sup> Proposed annual exchange schedules are often agreed to during these meetings. For example, during the 12<sup>th</sup> DPCT, held in January 2017, the U.S. and China agreed to “over 50 exchange items.”<sup>1425</sup>

However, it is the Defense Consultative Talks (DCT), the “highest level bilateral dialogue between the U.S. and PRC defense establishments,” which provides mil-mil relations with an overarching framework.<sup>1426</sup> The DCT is chaired by the U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and the PLA’s Deputy Chief of General Staff, and was first held in 1997 in Washington, D.C.<sup>1427</sup> It has taken place on a near-annual basis, though has occasionally been postponed during periods when overall mil-mil relations were suspended.<sup>1428</sup> Indeed, the issue of the relationship’s ‘on-again-off-again’ cycle has been a topic of discussion at several DCTs.<sup>1429</sup> While it is impossible to say these talks have led to the stabilization of the relationship, it is noteworthy that the 12<sup>th</sup> DCT took place just three months after the U.S. announcement of an arms sale to Taiwan, the frequent cause of the relationship’s suspension.<sup>1430</sup> Table 11 shows the full list of recurrent exchanges. In a reminder of the occasional opacity of even U.S. sources, it is not clear if DCTs took place in 2015 or 2016. While the annual DoD reports list them as being scheduled, subsequent reports do not confirm them as having taken place. Attempts to independently verify have, at the time of writing, been unsuccessful. It is also unclear

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<sup>1423</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 58.

<sup>1424</sup> The State Council, The People’s Republic of China, “China, US to hold defense policy talks,” January 30, 2015. Li is actually Deputy Director of the MND’s Office for International Military Cooperation. DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 87.

<sup>1425</sup> Zhao Weibin, “A Review of China-U.S. Military Relations in 2017,” ChinaUSFocus.com, December 22, 2017.

<sup>1426</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 57.

<sup>1427</sup> Thayer, “Enhancing Transparency?,” 5.

<sup>1428</sup> Interestingly, however, the absence in 2003 does not correspond to a particular incident or period of suspension. It is unclear why a DCT did not take place at this time. For example, Thayer (2012, p.6) notes that “At the request of the U.S., General Xiong Guangkai brought a proposal for military exchanges in 2003. After the meeting Under Secretary Rodman told the press he could not claim progress in gaining greater reciprocity and transparency in military-to-military exchanges from China.” This suggests that the U.S. decided against a formal DCT that year on account of China’s proposal, though, again, this is not entirely clear.

<sup>1429</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 54.

<sup>1430</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2012), 139.

exactly why DPCTs would take place when overall relations were suspended, such as 2008, though the fact that they take place at a lower level and are focused more on scheduling and other ‘mundane’ technicalities rather than strategic level talks would make sense.

**Table 11: Major Recurrent Exchanges, 1997 - 2016**

Year	DCT <sup>1431</sup>	DPCT	SED/S&ED	MMCA <sup>1432</sup>
1997	1st DCT	-	-	-
1998	2nd DCT	-	-	1st plenary meeting
1999	-	-	-	2nd plenary meeting
2000	3rd DCT; 4th DCT	-	-	-
2001	-	-	-	-
2002	5th DCT	-	-	3rd plenary meeting
2003	-	-	-	4th plenary meeting
2004	6th DCT	-	-	-
2005	7th DCT	-	-	5th plenary meeting
2006	8th DCT	1st DPCT	1st SED	6th plenary meeting
2007	9th DCT	-	2nd SED; 3rd SED	-
2008	-	2nd DPCT	4th SED; 5th SED	7th plenary meeting
2009	10th DCT	4th DPCT	1st S&ED	-
2010	11th DCT	5th DPCT	2nd S&ED	8th plenary meeting
2011	12th DCT	6th DPCT	3rd S&ED	-
2012	13th DCT	7th DPCT	4th S&ED	9th plenary meeting
2013	14th DCT	8th DPCT	5th S&ED	10th plenary meeting
2014	15th DCT	9th DPCT	6th S&ED	-
2015	?	10th DPCT	7th S&ED	11th plenary meeting
2016	?	11th DPCT	8th S&ED	12th plenary

Another primary dialogue is the Security & Economic Dialogue (S&ED). Indeed, it is the “highest-level and highest-profile regularly scheduled” bilateral dialogue.<sup>1433</sup> The S&ED actually began as the ‘U.S.-China Strategic Economic Dialogue’ (SED) in 2006,

<sup>1431</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 8. Information from 2015 – 2017 comes from *DoD Annual Reports to Congress*.

<sup>1432</sup> This table only notes plenary meetings; working group meetings regularly take place in years plenary meetings are not held.

<sup>1433</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” in *Tangled Titans: The United States and China*, David Shambaugh, ed., (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 158.

as a means of addressing “the wide array of often contentious economic issues between the two countries.”<sup>1434</sup> It was specifically meant to address “long-term strategic challenges,” rather than “immediate solutions to the issues of the day.”<sup>1435</sup> Congressional complaints about China’s “inaction on trade and currency matters,” created “pressure” to have the SED address “immediate progress on issues” as well as long-term strategic issues.<sup>1436</sup> This was expanded into the S&ED in 2009 after a meeting between President’s Obama and Hu at the G-20 summit in London, with the first S&ED meeting being held in late July 2009. It combined the Strategic Economic Dialogue with the Senior Dialogue, chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State, and “elevated the Secretary of State to a co-chair.”<sup>1437</sup> Substantively, the S&ED added a ‘strategic’ track to the already established economic one, allowing the Dialogue to cover a “range of global, regional, and bilateral political and security issues.”<sup>1438</sup> It has been the venue for many attempts to push the mil-mil relationship forward, as well as to highlight its importance in the overall bilateral relationship. At the first S&ED, for example, President Obama “stressed military contacts to diminish disputes with China.”<sup>1439</sup>

The S&ED also contains several ‘sub-dialogues’, including the Strategic Studies Dialogue (SSD), which began in May 2011.<sup>1440</sup> The SSD is the “first high-level joint civilian-military mechanism,” whose origins lie in the “slow progress in bilateral military-to-military relations and growing American concerns about the lack of effective coordination between civilian and military actors in the Chinese system.”<sup>1441</sup> The U.S. aim in the SSD is to “build more understanding” on issues that have “the potential for miscalculation and accident,” with priority issues including “nuclear strategy and doctrine, missile defense, outer space, and cyber security.”<sup>1442</sup> The PRC, conversely,

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<sup>1434</sup> Robert G. Sutter, “Dialogues and Their Implications in Sino-American Relations,” *Issues & Studies* 49:3 (September 2013), 11.

<sup>1435</sup> Claire Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED: Time to Tinker, Not to Toss,” *Freeman Report* 18 (August 2016), 1.

<sup>1436</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 1.

<sup>1437</sup> Allen, Unpublished Report, 5.

<sup>1438</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 1.

<sup>1439</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 4.

<sup>1440</sup> Other sub-dialogues include the U.S.-China International Security and Non-Proliferation Dialogue, the U.S.-China Policy Planning Dialogue, and the U.S.-China Counterterrorism Security Consultation. Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 161.

<sup>1441</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 161.

<sup>1442</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 161.

“hopes to use the SSD to advance bilateral mutual strategic trust,” with a focus on its concerns regarding U.S. surveillance activities within its EEZ and arms sales to Taiwan.<sup>1443</sup> The SSD is chaired by senior defense and civilian officials from both countries, including “representatives from the military, diplomatic, and intelligence communities.”<sup>1444</sup>

The S&ED, as the most high-profile regularly occurring dialogue, also attracts the most attention – and criticism. Thomas Christensen, a political scientist who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia from 2006 – 2008, wrote about the earlier period of the talks, prior to the establishment of the S&ED. Speaking specifically of the strategic track of the Senior Dialogue, Christensen said, “Ten years earlier, people in these positions in the two countries likely would not have known each others’ names, let alone been involved in extensive discussions about how best to foster stability and growth in various parts of the world.”<sup>1445</sup> The positive impact of these interactions on the bilateral relationship for Christensen were abundant. “At a minimum, the two sides made their concerns and strategies toward various problems more clear. Personal relations among officials were built and sometimes called upon in tense times.”<sup>1446</sup> Indeed, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Shear cited a similar benefit after the first S&ED in 2009.<sup>1447</sup> However, the true measure of success for Christensen was in the alteration of policies. While China “remained far from achieving the aspirational status of responsible stakeholder imagined in Zoellick’s 2005 speech,” Christensen writes, “its policies underwent significant and constructive changes on certain international security and humanitarian issues that would be hard to explain in the absence of the dialogues.”<sup>1448</sup>

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<sup>1443</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 161.

<sup>1444</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 161.

<sup>1445</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, *The China Challenge: Shaping the Choices of a Rising Power* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2015), 218.

<sup>1446</sup> Christensen, *The China Challenge*, 218.

<sup>1447</sup> In testimony given shortly after the Dialogue took place, Shear said the meeting “served as a prime opportunity for our senior officials to get to know their Chinese counterparts,” and that “Having our Chinese counterparts understand the administration’s positions and priorities was one of the most valuable results of the Dialogue.” David B. Shear, “U.S.-China Relations: Maximizing the Effectiveness of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue,” Testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, September 10, 2009, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1448</sup> Christensen, *The China Challenge*, 218.

Perhaps as a consequence of that perceived success, the S&ED continued to expand under the Obama administration. Some observers feel doing so has caused the Dialogue to lose its efficacy. One former senior U.S. official told me he felt the S&ED strategic dialogues “have become too big, too watered down.”<sup>1449</sup> Indeed, the S&ED now involves “Between 15 and 30 agency heads and cabinet-level officials and a total of more than 150 officials from each country.”<sup>1450</sup> Where they used to provide a forum for several senior officials from both sides to discuss important issues, the expansion of agendas (and participants) has left less time for meaningful conversation. “That is a way to build strategic trust. You need to take the time.”<sup>1451</sup> There is certainly something to this criticism. For example, an advantage of the SSD is the “relatively small number of officials” involved, allowing “discussions to very quickly move away from talking points to ‘revealing discussions about intentions and mistrust.’”<sup>1452</sup> While the S&ED may have lost some of its utility as it has become bloated, it remains a productive and useful process “that serves U.S. interests,”<sup>1453</sup> for several reasons.

First, just as Christensen observed with the earlier SED, the S&ED’s “most significant achievement” has been creating the opportunity for relationships to develop between senior-level officials “that have enabled these individuals to more effectively address problems in the bilateral relationship when they arise.”<sup>1454</sup> A former Obama administration official is quoted as saying, “These relationships would not have been as intense if they had not been anointed as key counterparts. This is not trivial.”<sup>1455</sup> A secondary benefit of these interactions is that officials who would normally only deal with a narrow set of issues is exposed to the wider strategic relationship in a more direct way, facilitating not only bilateral interactions, but intra-governmental ones as well. Glaser notes that “Chinese officials acknowledge that S&ED has improved coordination among agencies in China and between the central government and provinces on specific issues.”<sup>1456</sup> Jean Garrison has noted a similarly positive effect in the U.S., in that the

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<sup>1449</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1450</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 158.

<sup>1451</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1452</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 161.

<sup>1453</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 1.

<sup>1454</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 158.

<sup>1455</sup> Quoted in Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 158 - 159.

<sup>1456</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 159.

various senior-level dialogues “had the added benefit of forcing the sometimes divided U.S. government bureaucracies to deal with China in a more uniform and coherent manner.”<sup>1457</sup>

Another, somewhat related, benefit of the S&ED is that it “operates with the direct imprimatur and supervision of both countries’ presidents.”<sup>1458</sup> This ensures not only that the leadership of both countries are well briefed on the issues and discussions covered during the Dialogue, but also that decisions rendered as a consequence are communicated and accepted by their respective bureaucracies. That said, the issue is more important in the Chinese context. For example, the structure of the Dialogue helps ensure the President of China receives both good and bad news, a not-so-insignificant benefit in the context of a culture where “not wanting to tell one’s leader bad news can limit communication regarding problems.”<sup>1459</sup> Similarly, it also “neutralizes” a tendency of some Chinese officials fearing the potentially dangerous consequences of compromising on a policy change or finding a solution to a U.S. “grievance.”<sup>1460</sup> “Instead,” Claire Reade notes, the presidential connection and the “prestigious, public nature of the event, makes it important for the meeting to be a success.”<sup>1461</sup>

While this is certainly a benefit, it also comes with a potential downside, as the high-profile nature of the Dialogue places a premium on the ‘public image’ dynamic. For example, Glaser notes that for China, “large banquets and cultural displays are necessary to demonstrate to the domestic audience that the highly important Sino-U.S. relationship is cooperative, and is being well managed by Beijing.”<sup>1462</sup> That is to say, it places a premium on the symbolic components of the annual meeting. The United States, conversely, is more concerned with “deliverables,” which serve as evidence that the time and cost devoted to the Dialogue are worthwhile investments.<sup>1463</sup> Cultural differences and their impact on the mutual approaches to dialogues and mil-mil relations more generally is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

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<sup>1457</sup> Sutter, “Dialogues and Their Implications in Sino-American Relations,” 12 - 13.

<sup>1458</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 1.

<sup>1459</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 1.

<sup>1460</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 1 - 2.

<sup>1461</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 2.

<sup>1462</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 159.

<sup>1463</sup> Glaser, “The Diplomatic Relationship,” 159.



Another consequence of its high-profile nature is that both countries have committed to participating in it, helping to create “certainty that the United States and China will engage in serious bilateral economic and strategic dialogue on a regular basis, enhancing the stability of the relationship.”<sup>1464</sup> That said, meeting and speaking does not guarantee a positive outcome. While some “outcome statements” show signs of progress, such as China agreeing “for the first time not to intervene in exchange markets except under very limited conditions,”<sup>1465</sup> others are simply reaffirmations of a commitment to work on the relationship and strive towards cooperation and mutual prosperity.

China’s commitment to dialogues on the whole, whether bilateral or multilateral, has at times been questioned.<sup>1466</sup> For example, since 2002, the International Institute for Strategic Studies hosts the annual ‘Shangri-La Dialogue’ of defense ministers in Singapore. Though well attended by regional ministers, including the United States, China was absent from the dialogue until 2007, and refused to send its defense minister until 2011, raising “questions about China’s willingness to engage with others on military matters at an appropriately senior level.”<sup>1467</sup> The fact that the PLA did not send the Defense Minister in 2012, 2013, or 2014 surely did not help. The PLA’s reticence to participate in mil-mil is noted elsewhere throughout this dissertation, however when the first S&ED took place in 2009, the PLA “reluctantly” sent Rear Admiral Guan Youfei, the Deputy Director of the FAO in charge of mil-mil relations with the U.S., and did so only after being “pressed” by the U.S.<sup>1468</sup> Indeed, as Weitz put it, “Members of China’s uniformed military elite have always appeared uncomfortable about engaging in a deep defense dialogue with their American counterparts.”<sup>1469</sup>

On the whole, however, dialogues like the MMCA, S&ED, DCT, and DPCT, provide an important means of communication and confidence building between the two states. As Christensen has noted based on his direct experiences, dialogues have been a “major part” of Washington’s “strategy to elicit cooperation from China.”<sup>1470</sup>

Importantly, dialogues are also often pointed to as being a source of “trust building

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<sup>1464</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 2.

<sup>1465</sup> Reade, “The U.S.-China S&ED,” 3.

<sup>1466</sup> Cossa, “Asia-Pacific Confidence-Building Measures for Regional Security,” 21.

<sup>1467</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 5.

<sup>1468</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 74.

<sup>1469</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 392.

<sup>1470</sup> Sutter, “Dialogues and Their Implications in Sino-American Relations,” 12.

between the two powers,”<sup>1471</sup> though as noted in Chapter 2, the exact meaning of ‘trust’ or even the evidence of its being built is often to the imagination of the reader. The fact these dialogues are recurrent is especially important. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates noted in 2007, “it is important to enter into a longer-term dialogue of confidence building measures because they create an ongoing process rather than a one-time coordinated event.”<sup>1472</sup> Interactions between institutions provide officials with a better sense of the other – how it operates, what their concerns are, etc. As a former official said, “What are their real priorities? What are the issues they keep coming back to? What are the political things they have to say, or institutional things they have to say, versus the personal views? With enough interactions, you start being able to piece it all together. And that’s part of trust.”<sup>1473</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the *process* – the regular dialogues and interactions – are fundamental to the outcome. As one former DoD official told me,

I would say these mechanisms are really important. Because they solidify, they create venues, they create means of interaction. So along with those come with meetings that are put on the calendar. It allows them different places to have disagreements aired, rather than a phone call.<sup>1474</sup>

The S&ED, for example, has been the venue for notable efforts by China to embrace the spirit of confidence-building. It was at the S&ED that the two states pledged to work towards the “development of a new model of U.S.-China military-to-military relations,” even though it “has never been clear what China exactly wants out of the new military-to-military model.”<sup>1475</sup> In statements by senior PRC officials, it was said that the ‘new type’ of mil-mil relations should be characterized by “equality, reciprocity, and win-win cooperation,”<sup>1476</sup> though what that meant substantively, in terms of policy, was never expanded on in any detail and the tagline was ultimately abandoned in subsequent

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<sup>1471</sup> Sutter, “Dialogues and Their Implications in Sino-American Relations,” 25.

<sup>1472</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 9.

<sup>1473</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 10, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1474</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1475</sup> Bonnie S. Glaser & Jake A. Douglas, “Another Sign that U.S.-China Relations are Souring,” *The National Interest* (online), July 7, 2015.

<sup>1476</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2012), 143.

S&ED statements.<sup>1477</sup> The willingness of the U.S. to accept and adopt the language of a ‘new type’ or ‘model’ of mil-mil relations was itself characterized by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel as “reaching out to China,”<sup>1478</sup> making its abandonment by Washington all the more telling.

### The MMCA

The MMCA is quite different from the other recurrent exchanges in that it is more of a framework for recurring dialogues than it is a single dialogue itself, like the DCT or DPCT. Initialed at the first DCT in December 1997 and signed by Defense Secretary William Cohen in January 1998, the MMCA “only arranged meetings to discuss maritime and air safety (i.e., to talk about talking). There was no agreement on communication during crises or rules of engagement.”<sup>1479</sup> That is, it was established to “foster a process for dialogue.”<sup>1480</sup> It consists of two primary articles.<sup>1481</sup> Article I states that both parties “shall encourage and facilitate, as appropriate, consultations [...] for the purpose of promoting common understandings regarding activities undertaken by their respective maritime and air forces when operating in accordance with international law.”<sup>1482</sup> Article II details the three mechanisms for consultation. First, annual meetings, “normally scheduled for two to three days, and consisting of briefings and discussion on agenda items to be agreed upon by consensus between the Parties,” including “such measures to promote safe maritime practices and establish mutual trust.”<sup>1483</sup> Second, the establishment of working groups, “consisting of subject matter experts, to study and discuss agenda items agreed by consensus between the delegations at the annual meetings.”<sup>1484</sup> Third, “Special meetings,” can be convened through mutual agreement, “for the purpose of consulting on specific matters of concern relating to the activities at

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<sup>1477</sup> Glaser & Douglas, “Another Sign that U.S.-China Relations are Souring.”

<sup>1478</sup> Quoted in Glaser & Douglas, “Another Sign that U.S.-China Relations are Souring.”

<sup>1479</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 27.

<sup>1480</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 30.

<sup>1481</sup> There are 9 Articles in total, however Articles 3 – 9 primarily deal with less substantive issues like the release of reports, the ability of both parties to amend the Agreement, and other functional issues.

<sup>1482</sup> *Agreement Between the Department of Defense of the United States of American and the Ministry of National Defense of the People’s Republic of China on Establishing a Consultations Mechanism to Strengthen Military Maritime Safety* (MMCA), 1.

<sup>1483</sup> MMCA, 2.

<sup>1484</sup> MMCA, 2.

sea of their respective maritime and air forces.”<sup>1485</sup> The MMCA “represented the first confidence-building measure between the U.S. and Chinese militaries (and the first official agreement between the two countries since 1990.”<sup>1486</sup>

The MMCA has undoubtedly accomplished a lot as far as improving the military-to-military relationship. Officials from both governments “repeatedly state that they find these talks useful.”<sup>1487</sup> “In addition to confirming the similar international practices,” one USN officer wrote, “our officers gained a broader understanding of issues from the Chinese perspective.”<sup>1488</sup> Through the 12 plenary meetings and more than 15 working group and special meetings which have occurred under the MMCA umbrella, the MMCA has “enhanced mutual understanding and trust, promoted Sino-U.S. military maritime safety, and deepened results-oriented exchanges and cooperation” between the PLAN and USN.<sup>1489</sup> Indeed, the Agreement has been praised by the PLA “not for its discussion of technical maritime issues but ‘because it brings U.S. and PLA military officers at the O-5 to O-7 levels where strategic issues can be discussed and ‘mutual understanding’ pursued.”<sup>1490</sup> The MMCA has also provided the framework for the various MOUs and other CBMs that have been implemented over the years (discussed in more detail further below). That said, the MMCA has also been routinely criticized.

To be sure, all aspects of the U.S.-China military relationship are heavily criticized, for reasons explained in detail in Chapter 8. However, even by official reports, the MMCA has not matched expectations. Indeed, a 2002 USCC report describes it as a “hollow shell.”<sup>1491</sup> However, according to an interview with a prominent think tank analyst, that was by design. According to this analyst, Kurt Campbell (who was DASD for Asia & the Pacific at the time), referred to the MMCA as an “empty vessel and we’re gonna put things in it.”<sup>1492</sup> One of the principal criticisms levied at the MMCA is that it “appears vague and lacking in the detailed ‘rules of the road’ provisions” found in other

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<sup>1485</sup> MMCA, 2.

<sup>1486</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 383.

<sup>1487</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 384.

<sup>1488</sup> George S. Capen, “The military maritime consultative agreement,” *Proceedings* 125:8 (August 1999), 62.

<sup>1489</sup> Zhang & Hu, “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building.”

<sup>1490</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 93.

<sup>1491</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 30.

<sup>1492</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

agreements, such as INCSEA, upon which the MMCA was designed.<sup>1493</sup> (The relationship between the MMCA and INCSEA is discussed in more detail below.) As Weitz notes, “There were no restrictions placed either on military practices or on agreed procedures for how to interact if problems arose.”<sup>1494</sup> It is a lapse that has only recently been corrected, with the introduction of the two MOUs signed in 2014 and the subsequent annexes added a year later. The glacial pace of such progress is a related criticism. For example, the “first combined exercise held under the MMCA,” a search and rescue exercise in 2006, took eight years of talks to make happen.<sup>1495</sup> It is not exactly a timeline that inspires confidence.

Even the notion that the MMCA has promoted trust-building is contested. In 2009, the PLA proposed a change to the MMCA charter, “to shift attention away from operational safety to planning for naval exercises and other navy-to-navy contact.”<sup>1496</sup> These proposed changes were firmly opposed by the U.S., but raised doubts about Beijing’s commitment to CBMs. As a result of China’s seemingly lukewarm acceptance of the MMCA, some observers have said “it plays a limited role in enhancing military mutual trust,”<sup>1497</sup> though unsurprisingly, no details are provided as to what that actually means. Related to the question of Beijing’s commitment to the process, it is often noted that rather than use the MMCA as a mechanism for discussing and resolving operational issues, China often uses it as a platform for airing its opposition to the “four major obstacles” it sees as holding back both military and overall bilateral relations. These are: arms sales and general military support to Taiwan; U.S. military surveillance operations within China’s EEZ; the 2000 NDAA (and its legislatively mandated annual reports to Congress from DoD and the USCC); and, lastly, “the United States lacking strategic trust in China.”<sup>1498</sup>

Another common criticism of the MMCA (and of mil-mil relations more generally), is that it is prone to “political interference.”<sup>1499</sup> Whereas the U.S. and Soviet Union maintained their annual INCSEA meetings despite tensions or other disruptions,

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<sup>1493</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 383.

<sup>1494</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 383.

<sup>1495</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 31.

<sup>1496</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 75.

<sup>1497</sup> Zhang & Hu, “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building.”

<sup>1498</sup> Thayer, “Enhancing Transparency?,” 13.

<sup>1499</sup> Zhang & Hu, “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building.”

the MMCA has been disrupted numerous times.<sup>1500</sup> As Table 11 details, there have been numerous years where supposedly annual plenary meetings did not take place, often as a result of China's response to an announced arms sale to Taiwan. As Zhang and Hu note, "should a crisis occur, the trust generated during these meetings could help dispel suspicions that might have otherwise arisen and helped defuse the situation."<sup>1501</sup> Given Washington's concern with reducing misperception and miscommunication with the aim of avoiding accidental crises, the frequent disruptions are particularly problematic. The invocation of INCSEA is common in criticisms of the MMCA. On the one hand, it speaks to the success of the U.S.-Soviet INCSEA and reaffirms its place as the model of a successful great power CBM. On the other, it exposes important differences between the Cold War and contemporary U.S.-China relations.

The origins of the MMCA can be found in the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis, after which the U.S. "began a discussion with the Chinese about creating a crisis-management mechanism similar to" the U.S.-Soviet/Russian INCSEA.<sup>1502</sup> Interestingly, the MMCA "would have been called an INCSEA (but the United States wanted to avoid 'Cold War' connotations."<sup>1503</sup> China has also displayed a sensitivity towards Cold War-references to its relationship with the U.S.<sup>1504</sup> Nevertheless, the question of whether the U.S. should pursue an INCSEA with China continues to be asked.<sup>1505</sup> For example, during his March 2007 nomination hearing to be PACOM Commander, Admiral Timothy Keating proposed negotiating an INCSEA with the PLA.<sup>1506</sup> Julian Schofield has argued

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<sup>1500</sup> Zhang & Hu, "Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building."

<sup>1501</sup> Zhang & Hu, "Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building."

<sup>1502</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 30.

<sup>1503</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>1504</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.; Eric A. McVadon, "The Reckless and the Resolute: Confrontation in the South China Sea," *China Security* 5:2 (Spring 2009), 8.

<sup>1505</sup> Redden & Saunders, "Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions,"; David F. Winkler, "Breaking News: Incidents at Sea Did Not End with the Cold War!" *Canadian Naval Review* 9:4 (2014), 15 – 21; Ronald O'Rourke, "Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Disputes Involving China: Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service R42784 (December 2014), 71 – 74; Stacey A. Pedrozo, "China's Active Defense Strategy and Its Regional Impact," Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission, U.S. House of Representatives, First Session, 112<sup>th</sup> Congress (January 27, 2010), 8; Pete Pedrozo, "The U.S.-China Incidents at Sea Agreement: A Recipe for Disaster," *Journal of National Security Law & Policy* 6: 207 (2012), 207 – 226; Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32; McVadon, "The Reckless and the Resolute," 8 – 9; David N. Griffiths, "Challenges in the Development of Military-to-Military Relationships," in *China, the United States, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership*, Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle J. Goldstein, & Nan Li, eds. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2010), 48 - 52.

<sup>1506</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 31.

that an INCSEA with China is “the next logical step”<sup>1507</sup> and would serve as a restraint in the event of a crisis.<sup>1508</sup> Richard Weitz cautiously suggests rewriting the MMCA into an INCSEA might have some positive effect.<sup>1509</sup> However, the idea has far more critics than proponents. Furthermore, there seems to be a fairly clear consensus among the critics as to why an INCSEA with China is a bad idea.

The first reason echoes the original U.S. reticence to use the INCSEA label – its Cold War connotations. During our interview, former PACOM Commander, Admiral William Fallon, told me he was “not a fan” of the idea of having an INCSEA with China. “It’s a Cold War construct.”<sup>1510</sup> The relationship with the Soviets was “clearly based on an adversarial relationship.”<sup>1511</sup> Despite their burgeoning rivalry, the U.S. and China have a far more cooperative relationship with many shared interests. A related criticism is that an INCSEA with China would afford it undue status; “unlike the Soviet Navy, the PLA Navy is not a ‘blue water’ navy with global reach and responsibilities. Elevating the PLA Navy to such a stature would not be in the best interests of the United States.”<sup>1512</sup> The extension of this argument is that rather than engage China in a “separate and exclusive agreement,”<sup>1513</sup> the emphasis should be on ensuring that China adheres to existing ‘rules of the road’ already in place. An often unspoken, yet surely present, component of this argument is that because the U.S. still maintains an “absolute advantage at sea,” Washington “does not urgently feel the need to seek an agreement with China that would restrict the freedom of its naval operations.”<sup>1514</sup>

While there is certainly validity to that argument, it too easily dismisses the role of status as a motivator for China’s behavior. By ‘giving’ China the status of a peer, it curtails its need to *assert* that status. It seems to a relatively low-cost means of accommodating China’s rising power, if even only symbolically. After all, INCSEA, like many of the CBMs with China, are essentially just the repackaging of preexisting rules

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<sup>1507</sup> Julian Schofield, “We can’t let this happen again,” *Proceedings* 127:6 (2001), 59.

<sup>1508</sup> Schofield, “We can’t let this happen again,” 61.

<sup>1509</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 395.

<sup>1510</sup> Interview with Admiral William Fallon, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1511</sup> Interview with Admiral William Fallon, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1512</sup> Pedrozo, “The U.S.-China Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 209; see also, Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>1513</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>1514</sup> Zhang & Hu, “Sino-US Maritime Incident Prevent and Military Confidence Building.”

and norms (as the stated purpose of the RMOU makes clear). However, the argument Pedrozo and others are making is that for China to be treated as a peer of the United States, it must act responsibly, which includes adhering to the established ‘rules of the road’. From this comes a third, and much more foundationally important, criticism.

The primary issue when it comes to incidents between U.S. and PLA forces at sea is not a lack of understanding regarding what the ‘rules’ are – though its adherence to COLREGS, UNCLOS, and CUES have been questionable at times,<sup>1515</sup> China understands what its naval forces *should* be doing when operating at sea (at least as far as international law and norms go). Rather, the problem is that “the PLA is not interested in a “rules-based, operator-to-operator approach to safety on the high-seas,”<sup>1516</sup> because it does not want to normalize or legitimize U.S. operations within its EEZ. China’s perspective on foreign military activity within its EEZ has been covered in previous sections and need not be repeated here. What is important, however, is that Beijing’s view that foreign states must request permission to operate within its EEZ has been a central motivator behind the various incidents that have occurred between U.S. and PLA forces in the region (primarily in the South and East China Seas, though occasionally in the Yellow Sea as well). Particularly sensitive are U.S. surveillance operations, many of which take place just beyond China’s territorial water boundary of 12 nautical miles. Indeed, “the U.S. Navy and Air Force have intensified their close-in surveillance activities against China,” which are seen by the PLA as a deliberate provocation.<sup>1517</sup> “No other countries in today’s world, not even Russia, are under such daily American military pressure,” note Lieberthal and Wang.<sup>1518</sup>

The U.S. response to China’s protests are two-fold. First, the U.S. insists that according to international law, its activities are legal and that it is simply affirming its freedom of navigation. Second, Washington connects its need to conduct surveillance operations to China’s secrecy, or to its support (or lack thereof) of U.S. policy efforts in the region. During his interview, Admiral Fallon told me that the biggest issue during his

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<sup>1515</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 30.

<sup>1516</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 32.

<sup>1517</sup> Kenneth Lieberthal & Wang Jisi, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*, John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series 4 (March 2012), 13.

<sup>1518</sup> Lieberthal & Wang, *Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust*, 13.



tenure as commander of PACOM was close-in surveillance.<sup>1519</sup> He would tell the Chinese such activities could stop if they would be more transparent and forthcoming, making such intelligence gathering unnecessary.<sup>1520</sup> “China is suffering the indignity of exercises close to its shores,” Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg said, as a “direct result of China’s support for North Korea and unwillingness to denounce their aggression.”<sup>1521</sup> Washington has also attempted to reinforce its legal position by encouraging China to reciprocate by operating within U.S. EEZs. For example, in 2012, China had begun conducting “naval activities” around Guam and Hawaii, to which PACOM Commander Admiral Samuel Locklear responded by saying, “They are [conducting exercises in our EEZ], and we encourage their ability to do that.”<sup>1522</sup> This is reflective of a ‘shaping’ policy. Similarly, it has been suggested that the U.S. decision to allow China to participate in RIMPAC was motivated by a belief that it might lead to China adopting a reciprocal policy of allowing U.S. vessels to operate in international waters within its EEZ without threat or harassment.<sup>1523</sup> Though as Weitz notes, “attempts to rely on bilateral defense ties to shape the other party’s behavior are unlikely to prove effective.”

China’s attempts to curtail U.S. surveillance activities have not only prompted it to engage in risky behavior (as the discussion on incidents below will attest), it has prevented Beijing from embracing, or at least abiding by, CBMs. However, as the PLA has modernized, and it has become more powerful and begun operating further afield, it has also been more apt to embrace the ‘rules of the road’. For example, one senior U.S. official told me that beginning in 2012, PLAN began using bridge-to-bridge communication during interactions.<sup>1524</sup> Prior to that, the PLA resisted doing so because they saw it as acknowledging the U.S. right to be there. Just as the U.S. sees no immediate incentive to pursue an agreement that may limit its operational flexibility, Beijing, as a rising power, is not keen to lock itself into agreements that may not only limit its operational flexibility but legitimize U.S. presence and operations close to its

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<sup>1519</sup> Interview with Admiral William Fallon, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1520</sup> Interview with Admiral William Fallon, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1521</sup> Smith, “China comes around?”

<sup>1522</sup> Smith, “China comes around?”

<sup>1523</sup> Richard Hunt & Robert Girrier, “RIMPAC Builds Partnerships that Last,” in *The U.S. Naval Institute on Naval Cooperation*, Sam J. Tangredi, editor, (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 2015), 90.

<sup>1524</sup> Interview with senior U.S. defense official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

shores.<sup>1525</sup> Another important consideration is the PLA structure and decision-making process. Within the PLA, and the CCP more generally, there is a “sensitivity” about lower-levels acting independently.<sup>1526</sup> The PLA may not yet have the confidence that lower operational levels will adhere to certain guidelines, and fear the negative repercussions of violating an agreement, or simply the embarrassment of being branded ‘unprofessional’.

The MMCA’s overall efficacy as a CBM remains uncertain. As one former DASD for East Asia told me, both sides have “manipulated” the MMCA in the past, using it for political posturing and signaling rather than as a mechanism to clarify misperceptions, reduce misunderstandings, and improve bilateral operational safety.<sup>1527</sup> Its success depends on the political commitment and mutual desire to operate safely, something which though recent trends suggest is present, may not survive the pressure of the relationship. As noted above, the PLA’s behavior suggests dialogues are having an impact. As one interview subject put it, “They’ve deepened the level of interaction they want to have.”<sup>1528</sup> That said, the causality of the PLA’s evolution is indeterminate. It is likely a combination of material/structural changes, and socialization as a result of increased and more prolonged contact. With the exception of the PRC’s land reclamation projects in the South China Sea, one former senior DoD official said

They are, in fact, starting to operate more like us. Not necessarily because they’re learning from us, and as a function of the mil-mil engagement, but just because as their interests change and evolve and expand, they are beginning to understand and appreciate better the wisdom of why we take certain approaches. And as they gain similar capabilities and pursue similar interests, they are mirroring us. Because that is the logical way in which a great power would operate.<sup>1529</sup>

A 2014 op-ed by longtime DoD ‘China hand’ Leah Bray similarly observes that “as China’s scope of military operations have expanded and the frequency of its military interaction with foreign militaries has increased, the Chinese armed forces have gradually realized that operational safety – and having a common understanding of procedures and

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<sup>1525</sup> Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 393.

<sup>1526</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1527</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. defense official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1528</sup> Interview with former U.S. military official, March 1, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1529</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. defense official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

norms with the international community – is in China’s best interest.”<sup>1530</sup> “They’re beginning to understand better just how hard it is to be a superpower and protect global interests,” a former senior military official told me.<sup>1531</sup> “To be accepted like a great power, you can’t just talk like one. You have to act like one.”<sup>1532</sup>

Accordingly, the MMCA, like the other dialogues, is but one piece of the puzzle. As a former official told me, you cannot separate the different levels of interaction – you need higher-level strategic engagement and dialogue as well as the political commitment to ensure compliance and operational safety.<sup>1533</sup> This is a view echoed by Robert Sutter, who notes that, “Dialogues are instruments of improved relations but they do not compel improvement, which at bottom is decided by policy elites in Beijing and Washington.”<sup>1534</sup> Accordingly, the next subsection looks at senior/high-level visits and exchanges, including those between heads of state.

### High-Level Visits & Engagements

High-level visits and engagements in many ways form the most common type of mil-mil interaction between the U.S. and China. More importantly, they contribute to the perceived success of the military relationship. This subsection provides a general overview of exchanges, including their frequency over the years, and then considers some of the challenges and criticisms associated with them.

As noted in Sutter’s quote above, policy decisions are made by senior officials in Beijing and Washington. For this reason alone, they are an important component of the overall mil-mil relationship. This is true of both uniformed and civilian leadership, including heads of state. The relationships formed between officials can facilitate the advancement of the relationship in important ways, whether by increasing the volume or depth of activities, or by creating conceptual breakthroughs in the way issues are mutually perceived and addressed. In this respect, Wheeler’s recent work in *Trusting*

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<sup>1530</sup> Leah Bray, “It’s Time for Good Behavior; China is beginning to realize that establishing rules of interaction for international military encounters is in its best interest,” *The Wall Street Journal* (online), December 4, 2014.

<sup>1531</sup> Interview with former senior military official, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1532</sup> Interview with former senior military official, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1533</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. defense official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1534</sup> Sutter, “Dialogues and Their Implications in Sino-American Relations,” 6.

*Enemies*, which focuses on the importance of interpersonal relationships in breaking down negative perceptions and increasing trust, is directly on point. Its major fault, if anything, is that it focuses too narrowly on heads of state as being the primary facilitators of meaningful change in contentious international relationships. While the interactions of heads of state are important, particularly in the U.S.-China relationship, they are not enough.

U.S. and Chinese presidents have been responsible for important, and trend-setting changes in the bilateral relationship. Nixon's famed trip to China in 1972 comes to mind. In the specific context of mil-mil relations, the impact positive relations between heads of state is immediately felt. Presidents Barack Obama and Hu Jintao jointly affirmed that a "healthy, stable, and reliable military-to-military relationship is an essential part of [their] shared vision for a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive U.S.-China relationship."<sup>1535</sup> It was a decision the PLA publicly supported,<sup>1536</sup> and was based on a mutual commitment to take "concrete steps to advance sustained and reliable" mil-mil relations.<sup>1537</sup> Similarly, Obama and President Xi were responsible for pushing the mil-mil relationship forward following their July 2013 Sunnylands summit, during which they emphasized the importance of steering the relationship in a new direction to avoid "the historical trap of conflict between a rising power and an established one, preventing the relationship from unnecessarily deteriorating into strategic rivalry."<sup>1538</sup> They both "articulated the desire for a new model of military-to-military relations" as being integral to the maintenance of a "positive, cooperative and comprehensive" bilateral relationship,<sup>1539</sup> as "enhanced and substantive" military dialogue and communication "would foster greater understanding and expand mutual trust."<sup>1540</sup> As noted in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, President Xi's embrace of the importance of mil-mil has been particularly meaningful for the stability and tenor of the mil-mil relationship since 2012, even as he has overseen the implementation of a more aggressive foreign policy.

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<sup>1535</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2013), i.

<sup>1536</sup> Hagt, "The Rise of PLA Diplomacy," 236 – 237.

<sup>1537</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 10.

<sup>1538</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2014), 59.

<sup>1539</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2014), 59.

<sup>1540</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2014), ii.

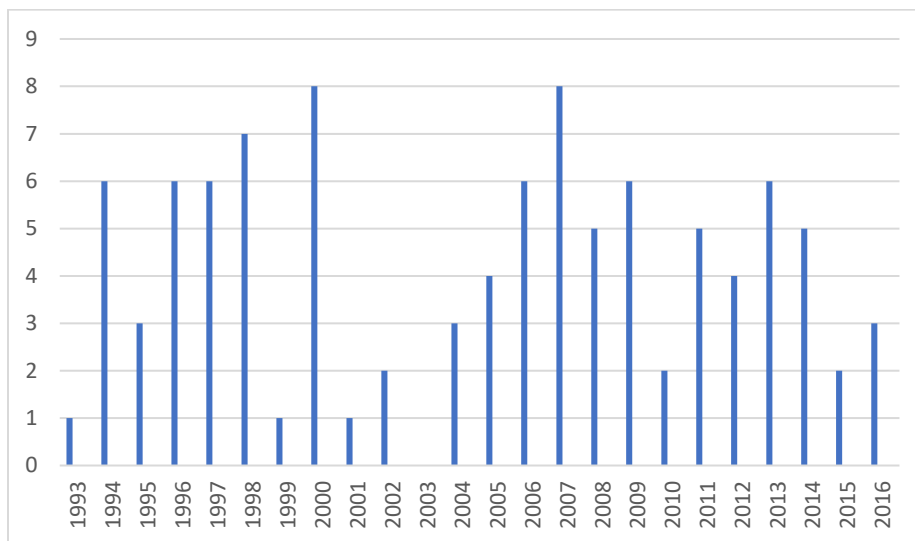
However, as important as interactions between heads of state are, they are the result of meetings and discussions held at lower levels, (which are the result of meetings and discussions at even lower levels). Nixon’s famous trip to meet Mao, for instance, came only as a result of the positive interactions between Nixon’s National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1971. To be sure, Kissinger was acting at the behest of Nixon, but the point is that interactions between senior-level policymakers are far more frequent, and because they are not as high-profile, they are often far more substantive, meaning their impact on the relationship is potentially more consequential. Said another way, heads of state provide the political commitment for action, but the foreign policy and defense bureaucracies are responsible for its substance. Because those lower-level interactions are more frequent, they play a more important role in shaping the perceptions of states and the policies that are implemented as a result. Table 12 lists U.S.-China presidential visits, from 1979 - 2016. By contrast, Figures 11, 12, and 13, chart senior level visits over the same period of time.

<b>Table 12: U.S.-China Presidential Visits 1979 – 2016<sup>1541</sup></b>	
<b>U.S. Presidential Visits to China</b>	
<b>President</b>	<b>Year(s) Visited</b>
Ronald Reagan	1985
George H. W. Bush	1989
William Clinton	1998
George W. Bush	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008
Barack Obama	2009, 2014, 2016
<b>PRC Presidential Visits to United States</b>	
Li Xiannian	1985
Jiang Zemin	1997, 2002
Hu Jintao	2006, 2011
Xi Jinping	2013, 2015

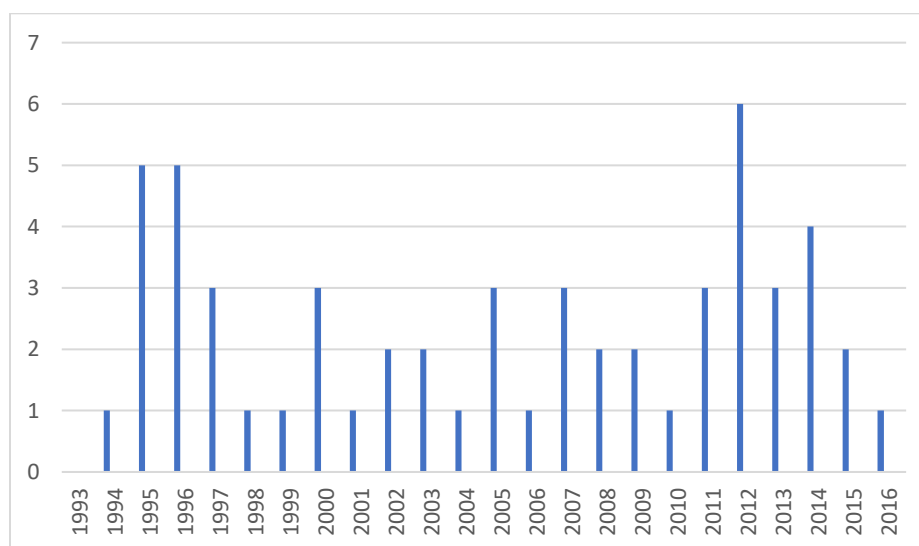
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<sup>1541</sup> This only includes official state visits or working trips (such as the 2013 Sunnylands summit), and not other meetings or trips that took place alongside visits for other purposes, such as attending a UN meeting.

**Figure 11: U.S. High-Level Visits to China, 1993 - 2016<sup>1542</sup>**



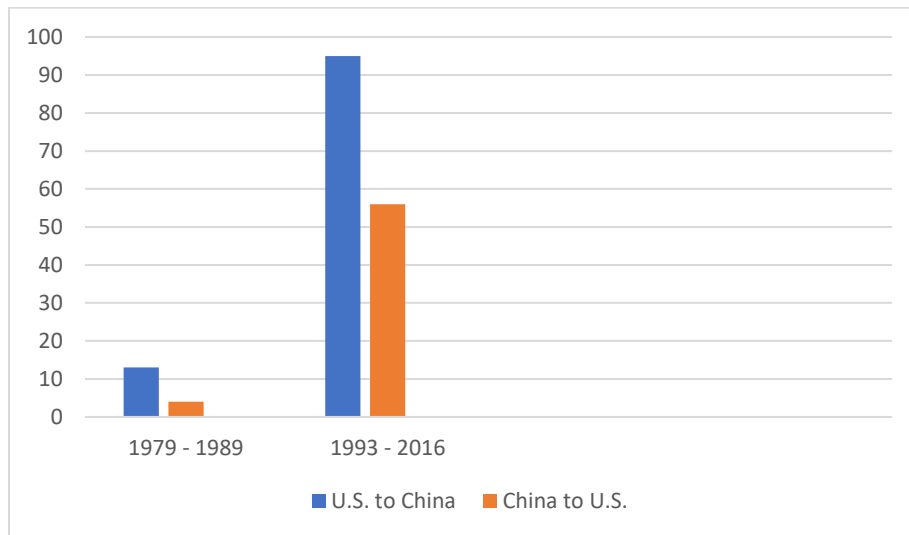
**Figure 12: China High-Level Visits to the U.S., 1993 - 2016<sup>1543</sup>**



<sup>1542</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52 – 82. This Table counts only ‘major’ senior-level visits to China, including Hong Kong, where a specific official was identified. It omits visits conducted by, or for, academic purposes, such as those by the President of the National Defense University (NDU). It also does not include lower-level visits, such as the 2008 visit by a delegation of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO). Lastly, it excludes scientific exchanges, such as those involving the National Imagery and Mapping Agency.

<sup>1543</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52 – 82. As with Table X, only visits with identifiable officials were included and academic and NCO visits were excluded.

**Figure 13: U.S.-China High-Level Visits/Exchanges, 1979 - 2016<sup>1544</sup>**



As with the dialogues detailed above (some of which facilitate these interactions), high-level contacts are valued because they provide an “important means to exchange views on the international security environment, to identify areas of common interest, to manage differences, and to facilitate common approaches to shared challenges.”<sup>1545</sup> They serve as a means, as one DoD official put it, to “convey authoritative messages.”<sup>1546</sup> Numerous interview subjects identified high-level visits as being the most effective engagement activity in the mil-mil relationship. One former U.S. military officer said that it is “so important to have interactions. You need to develop the human element.”<sup>1547</sup> This familiarity is important not just amongst the senior officials who interact, but among the lower level officials who are responsible for coordinating their meetings.

Most interview subjects described their Chinese counterparts as professional and even friendly. As one DoD official told me, there is a high degree of trust and mutual respect on a staff-to-staff level, and much can be done when they are instructed to do so. “It’s not unpleasant; we have a good time together,” he said.<sup>1548</sup> It is, of course, personality dependent. Another former DoD official who was tasked with the routine

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<sup>1544</sup> 1979 – 1989 is derived from information in Allen, *Unpublished Report*, 11 – 26; 1993 – 2016 comes from Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52 – 82, with the same omissions noted above.

<sup>1545</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 86.

<sup>1546</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1547</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1548</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

management of the mil-mil relationship with China told me he encountered some PLA or MND staff who would become combative about everything if there was a wider national or institutional disagreement.<sup>1549</sup> Overall, he said, while the relationship was not as “free-flowing and open” as with other interstate mil-mil relationships, overtime you could get to know a counterpart, have reasonable conversations, and “very often find a fairly easy solution to most problems.”<sup>1550</sup>

Another former DoD official who was involved in the relationship at an earlier time, echoed that characterization. In one example, he told me of the challenges of preparing for the arrival of a PLA delegation, which included negotiating over everything from what kind of transportation would be used, to the types of hotels they would stay in, and all the places they would visit. During these negotiations, they hit an impasse, so he and his counterpart separated from the larger group and spent about twenty minutes talking. “We just acknowledged that we’re both staff officers with constraints and priorities, so let’s just be open and honest about issues – budgetary cycles, restrictions, what have you.”<sup>1551</sup> They were soon able to come to an agreement, and the relationship improved between them over the next two years until his counterpart defected, leaving him to start anew with a Chinese official that was “very suspicious about dealing with me and the U.S.”<sup>1552</sup>

However, despite their importance and appeal, high-level visits are far from perfect. One of the primary obstacles to the success of this type of engagement activity is that visits and dialogues with PLA officials are often highly scripted affairs, with officials sticking to PRC talking points rather than engaging in a free-form conversation.<sup>1553</sup> “Statements made by China while on exchanges normally have specific agendas, and China intentionally manipulates discussions to achieve political objectives.”<sup>1554</sup> Indeed, as one observer notes, “In these exchanges, the terminology is consistent, with the same things said regardless of whom they are meeting, and they use division of roles to convey

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<sup>1549</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 10, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1550</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 10, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1551</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1552</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1553</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 29.

<sup>1554</sup> Matsuda, “An Essay on China’s Military Diplomacy,” 6.



a strong message to visitors.”<sup>1555</sup> As one former senior military official put it, “You read each other talking points, eat dinner, promise to do better in the relationship, go home and nothing changes.”<sup>1556</sup> Substantial dialogue is also limited by the language barrier, with senior officials on both sides often not knowing the language of the other.<sup>1557</sup>

Sometimes, interactions are far less cordial. For example, a former senior government official described an incident where he was attending a briefing by a PLA officer who essentially “barked” his briefing at the U.S. officials, “stuck only to what he was required to say, and didn’t say anything else. He clearly didn’t want to be there or to be discussing the issue and he had no desire to have a true discussion on the strategic side.”<sup>1558</sup> It was, as he described it, “very worrisome.” This was one of the most oft-cited reasons interview subjects diminished the value of these interactions. “You don’t get much more from dialogues than you’d get from public releases,” said one former senior DoD official.<sup>1559</sup> This not only inhibits relationship-building but also candor, which is central to the process of building trust and confidence. “To get real strategic trust, you need candor.”<sup>1560</sup> This is true at all levels of interaction, including those between heads of state.

Because of the highly-scripted nature of the majority of PRC/PLA interactions, particularly at very high levels, participants are often forced to adhere to the false-pleasantries official meetings are known for. “You tell each other things you don’t really believe and paper over differences until it all falls apart,” one former U.S. official said.<sup>1561</sup> This approach can exacerbate negative perceptions. To illustrate his point, the former official said, “George W. Bush would tell the Chinese, ‘I can’t come to China and pretend I don’t care about your human rights record. It’s unsustainable for me domestically, so I won’t do it. It’s better to tell the truth,’” whereas President Obama, in his first visit, “tried very hard to be accommodating, but then returned to the U.S. and sold weapons to Taiwan and met with the Dalai Lama. The lack of candor hurt the trust in the relationship because it made the Chinese feel the U.S. and Obama were being two-

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<sup>1555</sup> Matsuda, “An Essay on China’s Military Diplomacy,” 6.

<sup>1556</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 13, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1557</sup> Interview with former U.S. official, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1558</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1559</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, April 18, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1560</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1561</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

faced.”<sup>1562</sup> Candor, of course, does not guarantee better results. For example, Vice President Dick Cheney once asked China for greater transparency regarding its military spending and modernization, to which a CCP Foreign Ministry spokesperson responded by accusing the U.S. of “acting like a nosy neighbor.”<sup>1563</sup>

At lower levels of interaction, a hindrance can not only be the scripted nature of the meetings, but those conducting them. For example, “the senior officials that China has designated as hosts for U.S. delegations often do not carry the same authority within the respective defense institutions as their U.S. guests,” limiting the efficacy of the discussions.<sup>1564</sup> As noted in Chapter 6, PLA officers assigned to manage the relationship – the so-called ‘barbarian handlers’ – are not necessarily there for the same reasons as their American counterparts. One former senior USN officer told me,

The Chinese officers that I spent most of my time engaging with were in place to foster the relationship between the two nations. They were more political appointees – well trained political appointees who had mastered English and were attempting to shape the relationship, as opposed to operational military commanders, like we were, that were there to foster a trust relationship with our counterparts.<sup>1565</sup>

He continued, saying,

I came away pretty dissatisfied with the progress we were making with the Chinese, mil-to-mil, or in the area of strategic trust. I mean, quite frankly, we weren’t progressing the way I thought the way the two countries had the potential to progress. And I would attribute some of that to the difference in, even the approach, to the military-to-military relationship. Where the Chinese were trying to manage it, as I just described to you, they were treating it as a transaction...on a transactional basis. The United States, I felt, was sincerely trying to both convey to the Chinese what we thought this could achieve in terms of lessening the risk of miscalculation, and growing acquainted and succeeding and engaging over time – I don’t think that was really their objective.<sup>1566</sup>

Another former military officer who made a similar observation, saying, “I’ve met with folks who are operators who really looked down on those guys. So some of those people

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<sup>1562</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1563</sup> Sheffield, *Military-to-Military Confidence Building Measures and Cooperation with the People’s Republic of China*, 5.

<sup>1564</sup> Ian E. Rinehart & David Gitter, *The Chinese Military: Overview and Issues for Congress*. CRS, R44196, (September 18, 2015), 27.

<sup>1565</sup> Interview with former senior USN officer, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1566</sup> Interview with former senior USN officer, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call.

that are pursuing some of the mil-to-mil may not be exactly the people we need to be talking to in terms of building strategic trust.”<sup>1567</sup> A conversation with a prominent think tank analyst helped to draw out why.

You have to keep in mind that 95 percent of the interactions that any American has with PLA are with intelligence officers, or with PLA guys who are analysts who have an intelligence role on the side, that they are academics/analysts who specialize in the United States. It’s not that common to have a no-kidding, direct interaction with a PLA professional who is not responsible for intel or dealing with the United States. Those interactions are rare with the Chinese. I mean, I’ve had them, and when you have those interactions, in many cases it’s a very different kind of thing. Because these guys have very little exposure.<sup>1568</sup>

As the last quote points out, not all interactions are scripted, and opportunities often present themselves for candid conversations between officials, often during social events or quietly off to the side during more formal gatherings.<sup>1569</sup> One report observed that “Many younger officers and officers close to retirement seem to believe they have ‘less to lose’ by speaking more openly in their casual chats with foreigners.”<sup>1570</sup> Interview subjects were nearly uniformly split between those who dismissed the value of dialogues because of their scripted nature and those who had found ample opportunity for meaningful exchanges.

High-level visits are also hampered by bureaucratic differences. In the U.S. military, senior officers are assigned to a post for a relatively short period of time, often just two or three years. Compounding the impact of that cycle, it is not uncommon for senior military officials, such as PACOM Commanders, to retire once their term is up.<sup>1571</sup> In China, conversely, it is far more common for an individual to hold a position for an extended period of time. For example, Admiral Wu Shengli, the Commander of the PLAN, held his position for eleven years. The rotational pace in the U.S. military inhibits the cultivation of long-term relationships, which is one of the reasons the U.S. has pushed

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<sup>1567</sup> Interview with former military officer, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1568</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1569</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 30.

<sup>1570</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 30.

<sup>1571</sup> This is true not just because many officers at that level are close to the age, or years of service, for statutory retirement, or are unable to advance due to the dwindling number of spots that high within the command structure.

China to allow for more junior-level interactions. More than that, the U.S. cycle prevents the same accumulation of institutional knowledge that exists within the PLA.

An interesting, and underexplored, dynamic at play in high-level visits and exchanges is that of ‘military tourism’. “We have a history here of every person who has stars on their shoulders wants to go to China,” one think tank analyst said.<sup>1572</sup> A former USN officer echoed that sentiment, saying “lots of new senior U.S. military officials want to go and get the red carpet treatment.”<sup>1573</sup> A similar pattern can be seen in the PLA, where officers would often use mil-mil visits “to rank themselves. Who got the best visit, the best meetings, the best military tourism.”<sup>1574</sup> However, in the Chinese context, there is a cultural element associated with status, and so often whom a person meets with is more important than the outcome or substance of the meeting.<sup>1575</sup> If the emphasis is on ego-stroking rather than building confidence, it is unsurprising that the outcomes are less effective than expected. However, ego is a powerful motivator, particularly within militaries. As one former senior U.S. official told me,

There *is* no more arrogant group of people than senior military officials. And they *really* believe that, look, ‘what this relationship needs is more communication from *me*. And I need to get in the game and to communicate more with Chinese interlocutors.’ The level of confidence of ‘I can pull this off, I can do it’ is remarkable.<sup>1576</sup>

This confidence is compounded by a general tendency within the U.S. armed forces to assume an air of superiority when dealing with foreign militaries that is rooted in their knowledge, or at least belief, that the U.S. is the best military in the world. The ‘ego factor’ manifests itself in another important way: the illusion of friendship.

One of the primary purposes of high-level visits is so that senior military officials can become acquainted with each other and, ideally, develop friendships that will continue as the officers’ advance in their careers.<sup>1577</sup> The functional benefit of such friendships is that in times of tension or crises, a U.S. officer could pick up the phone and either smooth things over or at least get some clarity on intentions. The question of being

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<sup>1572</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1573</sup> Interview with former military official, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1574</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1575</sup> Kaufman & Mackenzie, *Field Guide*, 32.

<sup>1576</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1577</sup> Nolan, “Why Can’t We Be Friends?” 58.

able to pick up a phone to resolve conflict is explored further below. What is of immediate relevance is the question of the friendship itself. This is particularly important because it relates to trustworthiness. For primarily cultural reasons, those in the U.S. are more open to trusting their counterparts, whereas those in China are much more reserved.<sup>1578</sup> The roots of this difference are found in the transactional approach discussed in Chapter 6.

In China, there is a cultural concept known as *guanxi*, which literally translates to “interpersonal relations.”<sup>1579</sup> Guanxi “is a concept of largely utilitarian self-interest in the forming of professional relationships,” and has been described as involving “the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness.”<sup>1580</sup> James Nolan, an Air Force officer who studied the prospects for interpersonal relationships between senior military officers in the U.S. and China, notes that “While guanxi relationships are neither entirely transactional and self-interested nor lacking in etiquette, ethics, and sentiment, relationships rooted in this principle typically last as long as there is something that each counterpart can do for the other.”<sup>1581</sup> As Kan notes, “the PRC’s cultural approach to relations or friendships treats them as tough business negotiations,”<sup>1582</sup> which is reminiscent of the observation a former senior official made (noted in Chapter 6), that “Chinese friends are always negotiating, at every juncture, constantly, always.”<sup>1583</sup> As a former senior military officer told me, “They [China] want to be able to leverage the relationship to get what they want,” whereas “Americans want to be friends too quickly.”<sup>1584</sup> Another former USN officer explained the contrast in approaches like this:

There is a terrible American predisposition to think because you’ve met someone two or three times, that you’re real buddies. Even if you’ve played golf with them, or gone out in the street and the sidewalk and smoked cigarettes together, whatever it is, that somehow you have a special relationship with them. That’s pure delusional. The Chinese are very professional but they’re looking out for Chinese interests. And if nothing else, for their own career. To be perceived within the Chinese infrastructure of being the best friend of the Pacific

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<sup>1578</sup> Nolan, “Why Can’t We Be Friends?” 60.

<sup>1579</sup> Nolan, “Why Can’t We Be Friends?” 59.

<sup>1580</sup> Nolan, “Why Can’t We Be Friends?” 59.

<sup>1581</sup> Nolan, “Why Can’t We Be Friends?” 59.

<sup>1582</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 24.

<sup>1583</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1584</sup> Interview with former senior military officer, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call.

Commander would probably doom them to a short career. Or a shortened career in your current position.<sup>1585</sup>

The consequences of this illusory friendship can be profound. “The feeling of friendship can be deceiving,” one interview subject said. “If you’re in a crisis situation and you think the person on the other end of the phone is your friend, it might help avoid accidents and misunderstandings, but also makes you vulnerable to deception.”<sup>1586</sup>

Nolan’s research reached a similar conclusion. “If the U.S. were to adopt a misplaced faith in the value of personal relationships with PLA counterparts as a primary means to de-escalate future crises, U.S. policymakers would be placed at a disadvantage for quickly or effectively resolving future crises with China.” In some cases, limited ‘friendships’ have formed, such as between CNO Admiral Jonathan Greenert, or his predecessor Admiral Gary Roughead, and PLAN Commander Wu Shengli, where a degree of rapport and familiarity allowed for fairly regular and candid conversations.<sup>1587</sup> However, the fairly well accepted consensus is that personal relationships between U.S. and PLA senior officers that have operational/practical value is illusory and, due to bureaucratic/institutional and cultural factors, is likely to never achieve the quality or characteristics sought by the U.S. Hooper sums up the view rather nicely, saying,

The myth of the personal relationship, that we could somehow forge personal relationships with senior PLA officers. In some cultures, that’s possible. In Chinese culture, it is not, and 20 years of experience should have shown us that. The Chinese military is process-oriented. For them having a perfunctory and superficial relationship is enough. We are results oriented, and if we achieve the results, current objectives of our military exchanges with China, they lose and we win. Chinese culture, political culture, is zero sum. So our goals are contradictory to their goals.<sup>1588</sup>

Hooper’s characterization was echoed by nearly all the participants interviewed for this project. This demonstrates the limitations of a more aspirational type of trust, like mutual or normative trust. Not only does the structural dynamic of the U.S.-China relationship impeded such trust, but clearly there are cultural and bureaucratic elements in play as well. However, the types of interpersonal relationships aspired to by the U.S.

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<sup>1585</sup> Interview with former senior military officer, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1586</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. defense official, April 11, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1587</sup> Interview with former senior military officer, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1588</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 145.

are not required for strategic trust. They can help, certainly, but they are not required. More to the point, the failure to develop mutual trust does not undermine or erode strategic trust. If anything, it can enhance it by clarifying mutually understood boundaries for the relationship. The U.S. should continue to attempt to develop these interpersonal relationships, though their expectations should be informed by the cultural and bureaucratic realities outlined above.

### *Functional Exchanges, Academic Exchanges, and Ship Visits & Exercises*

Functional exchanges, academic exchanges, and ship visits and exercises are examined collectively for two primary reasons. The first is that many of the opportunities and challenges in these three activity areas are similar to those identified above. The second is purely a matter of practicality: far less information is available about them. Furthermore, elements of these activities have been covered in previous sections. Of the three, functional exchanges are the most consequential with respect to how the overall mil-mil relationship is perceived.

Officially, “Reciprocal exchanges – including those between functional officers, rising leaders, and institutions of professional military education – help to identify and explore new areas of cooperation, discuss differences, and serve to develop a generation of leaders on both sides who are knowledgeable and adept at handling the increasingly complex and vital U.S.-China military-to-military relationship.”<sup>1589</sup> Functional exchanges can, at times, overlap with high-level visits because they often include visits to military facilities, units, or weapon platforms (i.e., ships or planes). The primary issue with these exchanges is reciprocity. While the United States feels that it has been particularly transparent and generous with the PLA, allowing them access to a range of units, facilities, and platforms, it is a common perception that China takes visiting U.S. delegations to the same ‘showcase’ units.<sup>1590</sup> For example, the DoD’s 2003 *Annual Report to Congress* stated that “since the 1980s, U.S. military exchange delegations to China have been shown only ‘showcase’ units, never any advanced units or any

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<sup>1589</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 88.

<sup>1590</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 36; Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 57 – 68.

operational training or realistic exercises.”<sup>1591</sup> Pollpeter’s 2004 RAND study, however, disputes that characterization, detailing the numerous “lesser-equipped” PLA units the U.S. has visited.<sup>1592</sup> The report notes that between 1993 and 1999, U.S. visitors “went to 51 PLA units,” whereas between 1994 and 1999, the PLA visited 71 U.S. units.<sup>1593</sup> Indeed, the U.S. has been the ‘first’ foreign state to visit several sensitive PLA facilities or platforms, including Defense Secretary Hagel’s tour of the *Liaoning* in 2014.<sup>1594</sup> That said, several familiar factors have limited the PRC’s reciprocity in functional exchanges.

First, and most obviously, is the PLA’s historical distrust of foreigners and penchant for extreme secrecy. Indeed, as Pollpeter notes, “the PLA will give approximate numbers of personnel and equipment during briefings rather than the exact numbers typically provided by the U.S. military.” Pollpeter further notes that “PLA officers from the Foreign Affairs Office monitor such briefings, causing PLA briefers to be more restrictive in what they reveal to U.S. participants.”<sup>1595</sup> This can be taken to frustrating extremes. As noted in Chapter 6, the PLA has a habit of obfuscating even the most basic information. “During a PLA delegation visit to the U.S. in 1997, for example, delegation members refused to answer simple questions of unit designation, type of aircraft flown, or even what province they were from.”<sup>1596</sup> “Secrecy,” as has been noted in previous sections, “is difficult to overcome.”<sup>1597</sup> That said, “U.S. participants in contacts with the PLA have reported gaining insights into PLA capabilities and concepts,” demonstrating that even heavily curtailed functional exchanges can bear fruit.<sup>1598</sup>

Relatedly, it is important to remember that until very recently, the PLA was a rather backwards institution and the secrecy, or lack of transparency, was as much about avoiding embarrassment as it was revealing weakness. A former military official and defense attaché in China told me they “rarely went anywhere they couldn’t put in a western kitchen and a western cook who could handle western food and set up housing

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<sup>1591</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2003), 4.

<sup>1592</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 57.

<sup>1593</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 36.

<sup>1594</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 37.

<sup>1595</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 68.

<sup>1596</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 68.

<sup>1597</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 68.

<sup>1598</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 37.



close-by that was appropriate and with Western bathrooms and toilets.”<sup>1599</sup> He also cited the example of access to China’s National Defense University (NDU), which only took place “around 1985, after they had built new facilities with classrooms, dorms, auditoriums, etc., that they were proud of and could accommodate westerners.”<sup>1600</sup>

Lastly, reciprocal visits are unavoidably bound to the issues surrounding mutual approaches to deterrence. The U.S. is more powerful and more confident in its abilities and is eager to demonstrate its martial prowess to other states as a means of instilling fear or subtle intimidation. Accordingly, it would often take visiting PLA delegations to see units, facilities, or equipment that it had not specifically requested. As a former senior officer told me, “The response of the Chinese when the U.S. would ask for reciprocity was ‘you’re showing us stuff we never asked to see. If you want to take us to it, fine, but don’t ask us to do the same to you!’”<sup>1601</sup> Interestingly, the U.S. approach to functional exchanges in some ways mirrors the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, in the sense of ‘manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness,’ by taking PLA delegations to advanced units, facilities, or platforms with the expectation that the PLA will then feel the need to reciprocate. This is what Hooper refers to as “the myth of obligatory reciprocity.”<sup>1602</sup> “Guilt-based decision-making is antithetical to Chinese culture and it will not happen. [...] They feel no obligation to reciprocate.”<sup>1603</sup>

Academic exchanges are seen as a means of exposing junior officers, particularly those expected to rise through the ranks, to the culture (military and other) and thinking of the other state. However, as noted in Chapter 6, up until very recently, PLA military academies were segregated, meaning foreign students attended separate classes and were housed in separate barracks than their PLA counterparts. This limitation, which still exists in some instances, prevents visiting students from getting as much out of the experience as they otherwise would. Still, at least one interview subject identified educational exchanges as being the “most effective form of engagement, particularly if you can get lower ranked officers – captains and majors – involved. It allows friendships

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<sup>1599</sup> Interview with former U.S. military official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1600</sup> Interview with former U.S. military official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1601</sup> Interview with former senior military official, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1602</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 145.

<sup>1603</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 145.

and relationships to form. Learning together allows things to develop and for shared understandings. It's the best method for developing long-term relationships."<sup>1604</sup> Information regarding the frequency of academic exchanges is not readily available, however based on some limited information derived from Kan's CRS report, between 1993 – 2015 at least eight U.S. delegations have gone to China and fourteen from China have visited the U.S.<sup>1605</sup> It is my understanding, however, that U.S. NDU capstone delegations visit China regularly.

Ship visits and exchanges are one of the most frequent, and fruitful, aspects of the mil-mil relationship. Navies have historically had a diplomatic function, and by virtue of the increased U.S. and PLA presence in Asian-Pacific waters, the two navies are in regular contact. As a Russian sailor once said to USN Defense Attaché Commander Bill Hamblet, "It is considered very rude for one country to visit another in an [army] tank, but quite acceptable to visit in a warship."<sup>1606</sup> Officially, "Ship visits and exchanges promote trust between the two sides and built joint capacity to provide international public goods in areas of mutual interest, such as SAR [Search and Rescue], HA/DR, and counter-piracy. Port calls are also used to enhance operational safety and exercise communications and navigations protocols."<sup>1607</sup> Table 13 illustrates the frequency of port calls between 1995 and 2016.

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<sup>1604</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1605</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52 – 82.

<sup>1606</sup> Bill Hamblet, "Fascination & Frustration: An Attaché in Moscow," in *The U.S. Naval Institute on Naval Cooperation*, Sam J. Tangredi, editor, (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 2015), 112.

<sup>1607</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 89.

<b>Year</b>	<b>U.S. to China</b>	<b>China to U.S.</b>
1995	1	-
1996	1	-
1997	1	1
1998	2	-
2000	1	1
2001	1	-
2002	1	-
2003	1	1
2004	2	-
2005	1	-
2006	2	1
2013	1	1
2014	1	-
2015	1	2
2016	2	1
<b>Total:</b>	19	8

As noted elsewhere, the naval component of the relationship is the most important in the bilateral military relationship. Naval encounters and incidents are the most frequent, existing CBMs are primarily maritime in nature, and any military confrontation between the U.S. and China would be fought at sea and in the skies. Accordingly, the naval relationship demonstrates both the possibilities and the limitations of what military relations can achieve.

On the positive side, China’s inclusion in RIMPAC, though contentious, signals the greater integration of the PLAN into the community of modern naval powers, and with it the norms of interaction and operation. It is noteworthy that the PLAN’s inclusion in the massive multilateral exercise was prompted by the PLA itself, who questioned PACOM Commander, Admiral Locklear, about their exclusion during a June 2012 visit.<sup>1609</sup> During RIMPAC 2016, the PLAN participated in a variety of drills, including HA/DR, submarine rescue, maritime blockage, and antipiracy drills, “but was restricted by U.S. law, per the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, from engaging in combat drills related to surface warfare, air and missile defense, and amphibious operations.”<sup>1610</sup> According to the “Chinese contingent’s drill director,” the PLAN had three goals for the exercises: “to advance U.S.-China ‘new-type’ military

<sup>1608</sup> 1995 – 2014 sourced from Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 52 – 82; 2015 – 2016 sourced from DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 91 – 92.

<sup>1609</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 14.

<sup>1610</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2016), 225.

relations, to deepen cooperation and communication with participating navies, and to demonstrate the PLA's intent to protect and promote regional and global peace, security, and stability."<sup>1611</sup> Though its involvement was overshadowed by the deployment of an intelligence ship (as described in Chapter 5), China's participation should be regarded as a positive step. Its engagements during RIMPAC have even been looked at as a lens through which to decide whether or not to relax certain NDAA restrictions.<sup>1612</sup>

The PLAN's inclusion in such multilateral exercises are particularly important given that in many respects, it is in its formative years as a service. Including it can help shape its understanding and internalization of 'best practices' that can increase operational safety during encounters at sea. Moreover, it may "lessen the adversarial perception the Chinese have of the U.S. military."<sup>1613</sup> As a former naval officer put it, it also "acknowledges their status and the reality of the situation – that they're the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest navy. It gives them face. Unless the U.S. is prepared to label them an enemy, it's hard not to include them."<sup>1614</sup> The status RIMPAC participation affords China is an important motivator for Beijing, a point not lost on U.S. observers. China's ongoing participation in RIMPAC is contentious, with some observers (including members of Congress) considering it a 'reward' of China's 'bad behavior', particularly in the South China Sea.<sup>1615</sup> Including China gives "unwarranted status to the PLA."<sup>1616</sup> This has prompted calls to 'disinvite' the PLA from the exercise,<sup>1617</sup> with one observer even going as far calling China's participation in RIMPAC "appeasement."<sup>1618</sup> Others have questioned China's motives for wanting to participate. For example, a senior DoD official suggested that the PLA seems more interested with image than credibility; "they want the photo ops during RIMPAC rather than the actual engagement."<sup>1619</sup> Similarly, they are preoccupied with being perceived as a competent and formidable naval force. "They want

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<sup>1611</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2014), 257.

<sup>1612</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 13 – 14.

<sup>1613</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 140.

<sup>1614</sup> Interview with former military officer, March 2, 2017, Alexandria, VA.

<sup>1615</sup> Wyatt Olson, "Despite recent tension with U.S. in Pacific, China invited to 2018 RIMPAC," *Stars and Stripes* (online), May 30, 2017.

<sup>1616</sup> Rinehart & Gitter, *The Chinese Military*, 28.

<sup>1617</sup> Grant Newsham, "Why America Should Disinvite China to RIMPAC 2018," *The National Interest* (online), December 7, 2017.

<sup>1618</sup> Jim Fanell, "Inviting China to RIMPAC Is Appeasement," *Proceedings* 143:7 (July 2017), 1, 373.

<sup>1619</sup> Interview with DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

to make sure they're not embarrassed or shown up by the Japanese," the DoD official remarked.<sup>1620</sup> A think tank analyst similarly said, "When they're at RIMPAC, I can tell you, they're scared shitless that they're gonna make a mistake and they're gonna look bad."<sup>1621</sup> Regardless of the PLAN's true motivations for participating, its doing so serves a functional purpose with the potential for a mutually beneficial outcome.

Naval interaction has also been fairly stable. For example, despite the increase in tensions regarding China's land reclamation projects in 2015, USN and PLAN ships conducted joint drills in "uncontested waters of the South China Sea," focusing on "improving communication at sea," and SAR.<sup>1622</sup> The first joint exercise between the two navies did not take place until 2006.<sup>1623</sup> From a U.S perspective, mutual participation in bilateral and multilateral exercises provides opportunities "to enhance tactical cooperation, communication, and trust."<sup>1624</sup> There have been numerous bilateral and multilateral exercises between the USN and PLAN, often centered around SAR, HA/DR, and counter-piracy. These interactions reinforce the benefits accrued through the implementation and observation of the various MOUs and CBMs established in recent years. That said, and as alluded to above, the PLA's adherence to the 'rules of the road' and CBMs has been inconsistent. This is evident when looking at China's behavior and responses to various incidents. Accordingly, the following section looks at the various incidents that have plagued the maritime relationship, focusing in particular on the 2001 EP-3 incident and the 2009 *Impeccable* incident. These two incidents in particular drive home the limitations that have been identified in earlier sections, including the myth of the personal relationship, the negative repercussions of the PLA's structure, and the cultural dimensions of CBMs between the U.S. and China.

### *Incidents at Sea*

An 'incident at sea' effectively means "an action on the high seas by a ship or plane that endangers, or is alleged to endanger, another vessel or aircraft."<sup>1625</sup> As Lynn-

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<sup>1620</sup> Interview with DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1621</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1622</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 259.

<sup>1623</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2009), 55.

<sup>1624</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2011), 55.

<sup>1625</sup> Lynn-Jones, "The Incidents at Sea Agreement," 486.

Jones notes, the reaction to incidents can create a “vicious circle” of action and reaction, causing incidents to “take on a life of their own and provoke continued reprisals.”<sup>1626</sup> Accordingly, while an “incident itself might not directly escalate to major armed conflict, it could create grounds for political demands or reprisals.”<sup>1627</sup> This leads to what George has referred to as the “policy dilemma” of crisis management.<sup>1628</sup> “Once a crisis is set into motion, each side feels impelled to do what is needed to protect or advance its most important interests; at the same time, however, it recognizes that it must avoid utilizing options and actions for this purpose that could trigger unwanted escalation of the crisis.”<sup>1629</sup> Naval incidents, in particular, “have often increased tensions and provided the catalyst for the outbreak of war.”<sup>1630</sup> It follows from George and Lynn-Jones’s observations that the issue of crisis management is centrally important.

While I acknowledge this to be true, the purpose of this section is not to provide an in-depth analysis of U.S. or Chinese approaches to crisis management, elements of which have been discussed elsewhere in this dissertation. Instead, this section provides details and analysis on U.S.-China incidents at sea, with a particular focus on the 2001 EP-3 and 2009 *Impeccable* incidents. While there have been other notable incidents, such as the 2013 *Cowpens* incident (described in Chapter 5), information regarding the details are not as widely available. The section will begin with the EP-3 incident before turning to the *Impeccable* incident and then a brief examination of other recent incidents and encounters between U.S. and PLA forces. The purpose is to provide context for some of the limitations described in earlier sections, as well as the effectiveness of CBMs on altering behavior or the tenor of naval and aerial encounters.

### *The 2001 EP-3 Incident*

At 7:47pm (GMT) on March 31, 2001, 26-year-old USN pilot, Lt. Shane Osborn, and his crew of 20 men and 3 women climbed aboard their EP-3E signals intelligence

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<sup>1626</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 486.

<sup>1627</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 491.

<sup>1628</sup> Alexander L. George, “A Provisional Theory of Crisis Management,” Chapter 4 in *Avoiding War: Problems of Crisis Management*, Alexander L. George, ed., (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), 23.

<sup>1629</sup> George, “A Provisional Theory of Crisis Management,” 23.

<sup>1630</sup> Lynn-Jones, “The Incidents at Sea Agreement,” 491.

plane at Kadena Air Base, Okinawa, Japan.<sup>1631</sup> (An image of an EP-3 is provided in Figure 14.) It was a routine mission – a “Sensitive Reconnaissance Operation” (SRO) in the South China Sea, where the primary task was to use its high-tech electronics equipment to “monitor the signals environment of the People’s Republic of China, with emphasis on PRC South Sea Fleet tactical communications, radars, and weapons systems.”<sup>1632</sup> It is the sort of mission crews like Osborn’s had conducted at least 200 times before.<sup>1633</sup> EP-3’s are large, slow-moving aircraft, making their presence near foreign airspace fairly easy to detect. Indeed, it is kind of the point. Known as a “diagnostic irritant,” U.S. EP-3 crews (and other similar intelligence collection planes), count on an adversary spotting the plane and then turning on additional radars, air-defense systems (e.g., surface-to-air missiles), and scrambling jets for interception, providing more signals intelligence for the U.S. crews to siphon.<sup>1634</sup> “The intelligence data is then transmitted back to the area or theater intelligence headquarters, giving U.S. commanders a snapshot of the adversary’s capabilities and methods.”<sup>1635</sup>

The plane flew “west between Taiwan and the Philippines before following the coastline of the PRC past Hong Kong toward Hainan Island.” The plane’s flight path is illustrated in Figure 15. The EP-3 flew at 22,500 feet and enjoyed a clear sky with seven-mile visibility.<sup>1636</sup> Shortly after midnight, both the crew and the mission operations center “issued advisories” recognizing that the PLA was aware of their presence and was in the process of dispatching fighter aircraft to intercept them just as the EP-3 was “approaching its turnpoint to return to base.”<sup>1637</sup>

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<sup>1631</sup> Department of the Navy & National Security Agency (DoN & NSA), United States Government, *EP-3E Collision: Cryptologic Damage Assessment and Incident Review: Final Report*, (July 2001), 5.

<sup>1632</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 5.

<sup>1633</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-Song class submarine encounter,” 229.

<sup>1634</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 78.

<sup>1635</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 78.

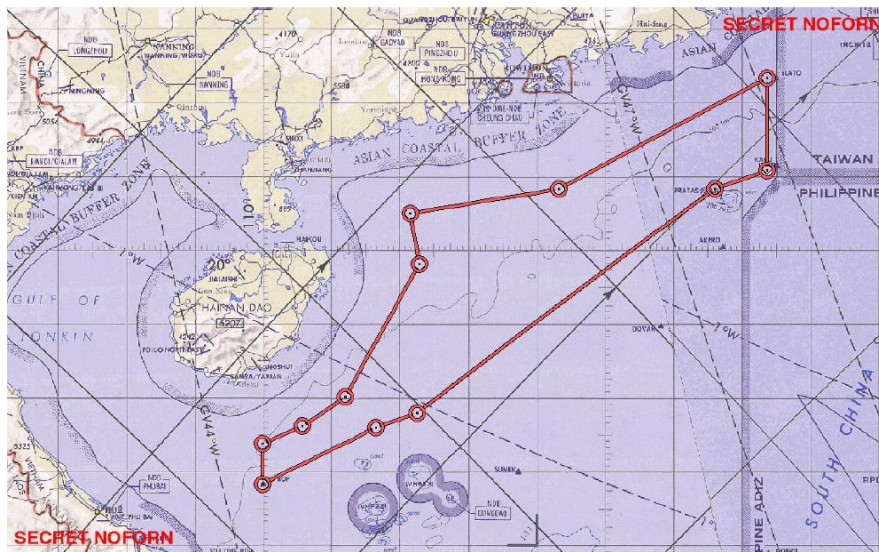
<sup>1636</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 5.

<sup>1637</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

Figure 14: USN EP-3E Aries II Surveillance Aircraft<sup>1638</sup>



Figure 15: EP-3 Flight Path<sup>1639</sup>



Meanwhile, at 8:45 am (local time) on Lingshui air base on Hainan Island, 32-year-old PLA Naval Air Force Wing squadron leader Wang Wei, and his wingman, Zhao Yu, boarded their Shenyang F-8 interceptors (see Figure 16) armed with Israeli Python air-to-air missiles and took off after the EP-3.<sup>1640</sup> Within fifteen minutes, they intercepted

<sup>1638</sup> Wyatt Olson, “Pentagon: Chinese jets flew close to U.S. spy plane,” *Stars and Stripes* (online), May 19, 2016.

<sup>1639</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 5. If you count clockwise from the circle at the top right, the interception/accident happened between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> circles.

<sup>1640</sup> Bill Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” *Air Force Magazine* (July 2001), 51.



the EP-3 some seventy to eighty miles off China’s coast. Wang was, “Even by fighter jock standards,” a “hot dog, a risk-taker, one of those guys who’s constantly pushing the envelope.”<sup>1641</sup> Indeed, he was known to the USN as something of a ‘maverick’. Several months before, Wang had intercepted another EP-3 flight, where he flew within ten feet of the plane and “held up a piece of paper with his email address written on it,” (Figure 17) an incident which was recorded by a member of the U.S. flight crew.<sup>1642</sup>

**Figure 16: PRC Shenyang F-8 ‘Finback’<sup>1643</sup>**



**Figure 17: Wang Wei Email Stunt<sup>1644</sup>**



The normal procedure during aerial interceptions, based on international rules, is for the intercepting planes to “stand off a safe distance, at least five hundred feet or so – close enough for the target plane’s pilot to know that the interceptors are there, that

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<sup>1641</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 84.

<sup>1642</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 84.

<sup>1643</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shenyang\\_J-8](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shenyang_J-8)

<sup>1644</sup> *BBC News* (online), “U.S.-China spy-plane row,” April 29, 2001.

they're standing by in case he tries any funny stuff, but not so close as to interfere with the target aircraft's flight."<sup>1645</sup> Though such interceptions between U.S. and PRC forces were (and are) quite routine, in the months leading up to the April 1 encounter between Osborn and Wang they had taken on a decidedly aggressive tone. For example, "Out of almost fifty intercepts by Chinese fighters off the Chinese coast in the previous four months, on six occasions the Chinese pilots have flown within thirty feet of the U.S. planes, and twice they've come within ten feet."<sup>1646</sup> Just two weeks earlier, Osborne's EP-3 had been intercepted by two F-8s who flew within fifty feet of it.<sup>1647</sup> Both the U.S. and PRC governments logged formal complaints about the deteriorating state of their aerial encounters. As Weitz notes, "immediately before the EP-3 collision, the Chinese delegation to the MMCA complained about what Beijing calculated to be a growing number of provocative U.S. military flights near its airspace."<sup>1648</sup> The American representative allegedly responded by saying that "it is international airspace and we have no intention of modifying what we are doing."<sup>1649</sup> Similarly, at a December 2000 MMCA meeting, the U.S. "filed a complaint regarding the dangerous approaches conducted by Chinese fighters at U.S. aircraft, but no response was ever received from China."<sup>1650</sup> What happened when Wang and Osborn crossed paths that morning is subject to debate.

When they initially made contact, the two F-8s maintained a distance of approximately one mile from the U.S. craft.<sup>1651</sup> Shortly after 9:00 am, Wang made his first of three approaches to the EP-3, coming within ten feet, during which he apparently "rendered a salute" and fell back "to approximately 100 feet off the left wing of the EP-3E."<sup>1652</sup> A minute later, Wang approached again, this time coming within five feet of the EP-3.<sup>1653</sup> When he looked out the cockpit window, Osborn could see Wang had his oxygen mask off and was gesturing towards the EP-3 crew and "mouthing some

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<sup>1645</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 81.

<sup>1646</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 81.

<sup>1647</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 81.

<sup>1648</sup> Weitz, "Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy," 383.

<sup>1649</sup> Weitz, "Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy," 383.

<sup>1650</sup> Casey J. Miller, *The PRC Decision-Making Process*, (Naval Postgraduate School Thesis, March 2002), 46 – 47; John Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, (CNA, January 2002), 2.

<sup>1651</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

<sup>1652</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6; Fabey, *Crashback*, 83.

<sup>1653</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

words.”<sup>1654</sup> Osborn refused to comment on what kind of gestures Wang had been making,<sup>1655</sup> “but the assumption is that it’s not complimentary.”<sup>1656</sup> Wang then backed off again, staying approximately 100 feet behind the EP-3’s left wing.

As Michael Fabey notes, “Standard operating procedure for U.S. aviators during interceptions is to keep the plane flying straight and level, and not respond to any provocation by the jet pilot.”<sup>1657</sup> U.S. aircrews did not always honor these procedures, such as the time during a December 1999 interception of an EP-3 where the crew donned Santa Claus hats and “flipped off the fighter pilot.”<sup>1658</sup> In this instance, however, Osborn followed protocol. There is no radio communication between the planes.<sup>1659</sup> One minute after his last approach, Wang again moved towards the EP-3.

As noted above, EP-3’s are large, slow-moving aircraft. This makes it more difficult for the faster, more agile fighter jets to stay alongside them, as they are not designed to be flown at such low speeds.<sup>1660</sup> Indeed, the F-8s stall speed “is only a little less than the EP-3E’s cruising speed of 200 mph.”<sup>1661</sup> This becomes particularly problematic given the particular techniques some PLA pilots chose to employ during these interceptions. One such technique is known as “thumping,” where the PLA pilot will “fly unseen under the slow-moving American planes and then suddenly swoop up directly in front of them, startling the American pilots and buffeting their planes with jet engine backwash.”<sup>1662</sup>

On his third approach, Wang had been positioning himself to ‘thump’ the U.S. plane,<sup>1663</sup> increasing his angle of attack in an attempt to reduce his closure rate.<sup>1664</sup> While the maneuver had the desired effect, “it placed the fighter directly below, and in very close proximity to, the EP-3E’s left wing.”<sup>1665</sup> Osborne “can see that the Chinese pilot is

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<sup>1654</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 52; DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

<sup>1655</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 52.

<sup>1656</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 83.

<sup>1657</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 83.

<sup>1658</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 83.

<sup>1659</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 83.

<sup>1660</sup> Gerry J. Gilmore, “Chinese Jet Struck Navy EP-3 Aircraft, Rumsfeld Says,” *American Forces Press Service*, April 13, 2001.

<sup>1661</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 82.

<sup>1662</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 82.

<sup>1663</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 53.

<sup>1664</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

<sup>1665</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

having trouble controlling his aircraft.”<sup>1666</sup> At 9:05 am, Wang reports that he is unable to maneuver the plane and is “being sucked in by the EP-3E.”<sup>1667</sup> As the F-8 passes under the EP-3’s left wing, it “suddenly lurches up – and the EP-3E’s thirteen-foot-long far left propeller chews through the fighter [...] cutting the plane in two.”<sup>1668</sup> Wang’s vertical tail was severed and debris from his plane struck the EP-3, destroying its nose cone and causing damage to its propellers and one of its engines.<sup>1669</sup> “The first thing I thought was, ‘This guy just killed us,’” Osborne said at an April 14, 2001 press conference.<sup>1670</sup> The loss of the nosecone depressurized the cabin, while the engine and propeller damage forced the plane to roll left, “banking at 130 degrees – which means it’s almost completely upside down,” and began plunging towards the ocean. It is unclear from both Chinese and U.S. reports whether or not Wang was able to deploy a parachute; his body was never recovered.<sup>1671</sup> China spent ten days searching more than 52,000 square miles of ocean with the help of “110 aircraft, more than 100 warships and at least 1,000 other ships, including salvage vessels, fishing boats, and civilian boats,” and more than 55,000 people.<sup>1672</sup> Chinese media would later report that Wang had been eaten by sharks, however U.S. defense officials said “the death by shark appeared to be part of the propaganda campaign to give Wang a more heroic death so as to further enhance his standing among the Chinese people.”<sup>1673</sup> The CCP undertook a significant propaganda effort to lionize Wang as a hero, declaring him a “revolutionary martyr,” and “Guardian of the Seawaters and Airspace.”<sup>1674</sup>

While Osborn and his co-pilot, Lt. Patrick Honeck, struggled to regain control of the plane, the rest of the crew fought against the forces of gravity, which pinned them to their seats or to the floor,<sup>1675</sup> while strapping on parachutes and beginning the process of destroying the classified information and equipment onboard.<sup>1676</sup> After falling 14,000

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<sup>1666</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 83.

<sup>1667</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

<sup>1668</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 85.

<sup>1669</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6.

<sup>1670</sup> Susan Schindehette et al., “Born To Fly,” *People Weekly* 55:17 (April 30, 2001).

<sup>1671</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 53; Fabey, *Crashback*, 85.

<sup>1672</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 53.

<sup>1673</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 52.

<sup>1674</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 52.

<sup>1675</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 85.

<sup>1676</sup> Schindehette et al., “Born To Fly.”

feet, Osborn and Honeck managed to stabilize the craft and began weighing their options: ditch the plane in the ocean, bail out, or attempt to land.<sup>1677</sup> Given the low chances of surviving the first two options, Osborn elected to try and land the plane.<sup>1678</sup> The closest destination is Lingshui air base on Hainan Island.

It is reported that Osborn attempted to broadcast Mayday and distress signals 25 to 30 times,<sup>1679</sup> trying to reach Lingshui air base over the international emergency frequency to seek permission to make an emergency landing; they received no reply.<sup>1680</sup> The maps onboard the EP-3 did not provide the location of the airfield, forcing the crew to “eyeball it.”<sup>1681</sup> Without a response from the Chinese air base, the EP-3 made a clearing pass over the airfield before conducting a “no-flap landing” at 9:34 am,<sup>1682</sup> ten minutes after Wang’s wingman, Zhao, returned to base. “We’ve landed and we’re okay,” the crew reported to PACOM in its final message<sup>1683</sup> before the plane was surrounded by approximately 20 – 24 PLA soldiers.<sup>1684</sup> While Fabey writes that the soldiers were carrying AK-47s,<sup>1685</sup> (automatic rifles), a classified U.S. report notes that only six to eight of the soldiers were armed, and with “bolt-action weapons.”<sup>1686</sup> The soldiers never pointed their weapons at the U.S. crew.<sup>1687</sup>

After a nearly half-hour standoff between the U.S. crew and the PLA soldiers outside, the 24 EP-3 crewmembers deplaned, where they were “herded onto buses, and taken to a vacant officers’ barracks on the base.”<sup>1688</sup> While undoubtedly a tense moment, it is not as dramatic as some accounts have described. The U.S. crew were offered water and cigarettes and taken to what Osborn described as “their best barracks.”<sup>1689</sup> Despite

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<sup>1677</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 86; Schindehette et al., “Born To Fly.”

<sup>1678</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 6; Fabey, *Crashback*, 87.

<sup>1679</sup> Gilmore, “Chinese Jet Struck Navy EP-3 Aircraft, Rumsfeld Says.”

<sup>1680</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 88.

<sup>1681</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 89.

<sup>1682</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 7.

<sup>1683</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications*, (CRS, RL30946, October 10, 2001), 2.

<sup>1684</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 7.

<sup>1685</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 89.

<sup>1686</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 7.

<sup>1687</sup> DoN & NSA, *EP-3E Collision*, 7.

<sup>1688</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 89.

<sup>1689</sup> Schindehette et al., “Born To Fly.”

being woken at all hours of the night for questioning,<sup>1690</sup> “they treated us fine,” Osborn said, even serving them “such local delicacies as pickled eggs, chicken feet and fish heads.”<sup>1691</sup> The PLA guards eventually brought them cards and English newspapers; “One guard even asked them to teach him the lyrics to the Eagles’ song ‘Hotel California.’”<sup>1692</sup> They are eventually moved to a “government-run hotel in the city of Haikou.”<sup>1693</sup> The detention of the American crew started an eleven-day diplomatic standoff between Beijing and Washington. Table 14 provides an overview of the timeline of the incident.

The mutual response to the crisis has been the focus of numerous studies.<sup>1694</sup> Beijing’s response, in particular, has attracted a great deal of attention, in large part because of what it was thought to reveal about China’s decision-making and crisis control processes.<sup>1695</sup> As Fabey put it, Beijing’s response was “a litany of mock outrage, vicious denunciations, stubborn demands, and outright lies.”<sup>1696</sup> Shortly after the EP-3 landed, the PLA “made an uncoordinated pronouncement of anger about the incident, which later

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<sup>1690</sup> The questioning itself, apparently, including shouting, ranting, and slamming fists against desks while accusing the aircrew of being ‘air pirates’, ‘criminals’, and ‘master spies,’ who will be charged with espionage and the intentional killing of the PLA pilot and never see their families again. However, if they apologized on camera, in the ‘spirit of humanitarianism’, they would be released. Fabey, *Crashback*, 92.

<sup>1691</sup> Schindehette et al., “Born To Fly.”

<sup>1692</sup> Schindehette et al., “Born To Fly.”

<sup>1693</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 91.

<sup>1694</sup> He, “China’s Crisis Behavior,” 76 – 84; Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-Song class submarine encounter,” 229 – 233; Miller, *The PRC Decision-Making Process*; Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*; Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*; Zhang Tuosheng, “The Sino-American Aircraft Collision: Lessons for Crisis Management,” in *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis*, Michael D. Swaine, Zhang Tuosheng & Danielle F. S. Cohen, eds. (Washington, D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 391 – 422; Dennis C. Blair & David V. Bonfili, “The April 2001 EP-3 Incident: The U.S Point of View,” in *Managing Sino-American Crises*, 377 – 390; Edward Slingerland, Eric M. Blanchard & Lyn Boyd-Judson, “Collision with China: Conceptual Metaphor Analysis, Somatic Marking, and the EP-3 Incident,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007), 53 – 77; James Mulvenon, “Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis: A Content Analysis,” *China Leadership Monitor* 1 (January 2002), 1 – 11; Paul H. B. Godwin, “Decisionmaking Under Stress: The Unintentional Bombing of China’s Belgrade Embassy and the EP-3 Collision,” in *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress*, Andrew Scobell & Larry M. Wortzel, eds. (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, September 2005), 161 – 190.

<sup>1695</sup> For example, see: Alison A. Kaufman & Daniel M. Hartnett, *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control* (CNA, February 2016); Wu Xinbo. “Understanding Chinese and U.S. Crisis Behavior,” *The Washington Quarterly* 31: 1 (Winter 2007-08), 61 – 76; Lonnie D. Henley, “War Control: Chinese Concepts of Escalation Management,” in *Shaping China’s Security Environment: The Role of the People’s Liberation Army*, Andrew Scobell & Larry M. Wortzel, eds. (Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle, PA, October 2006), 81 – 103; Andy Gudge, “Chinese Crisis Management,” Conference Brief, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. War College, October 2004).

<sup>1696</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 90.

put the government in a position to defend the PLA’s initial behavior.”<sup>1697</sup> However, given the PRC’s sensitivity to Western encroachment and interference, it was to be expected that Beijing would adopt an indignant tone. And indeed, it did.

As Keefe notes, “Any ship or plane that enters Chinese territorial waters or winds up on Chinese territory without permission, no matter what the circumstances, is likely to be seen as a challenge to Chinese sovereignty and, indirectly, as a challenge to the Communist Party’s legitimacy.”<sup>1698</sup> “Such an ‘invasion,’” Keefe says, “requires an aggressive, often vitriolic response.”<sup>1699</sup> Beijing characterized Wang’s death as part of the CCP and PLA’s heroic, and historical, struggle against “hegemonism,” “Beijing’s word to describe U.S. power and influence in the Pacific.”<sup>1700</sup> Moreover, that Wang perished confronting the “culprit aircraft” of the U.S., which had “illegally violated Chinese airspace,”<sup>1701</sup> was just another “sign of the Chinese military’s determination to protect national security and ‘rejuvenate’ the Chinese nation.”<sup>1702</sup>

<b>Table 14: 2001 EP-3 Incident Timeline<sup>1703</sup></b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Development</b>
April 1	Collision occurs, killing Chinese pilot and forcing U.S. plane to land on Hainan Island without permission. President Bush demands the immediate return of the crew and access to the plane.
April 2	U.S. officials from Embassy in Beijing travel to Hainan to begin negotiations and check on the crew.
April 3	PRC President Jiang demands apology from U.S.; Washington publicly states no apology is forthcoming. U.S. officials in Hainan get access to EP-3 crew.
April 4	Jiang demands an apology; leaves for tour of South America. U.S. Secretary of State Powell expresses regret over the missing PLAN pilot.
April 5	President Bush expresses regret over the incident (especially loss of airplane and pilot) but refuses to apologize.
April 6	U.S. officials meet EP-3 crew for the second time.
April 7	Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen sends a letter to the U.S. State department via the Chinese Ambassador to the U.S., Yang Jiechi, stating the U.S. response to the incident is unacceptable. Again, Beijing demands an apology. Washington restates its refusal to apologize. U.S. officials meet with the EP-3 crew for the third time.
April 8	No developments
April 9	Both sides begin working on a joint statement to end the crisis. Fourth meeting between U.S. officials and the EP-3 crew takes place.
April 10	China restates its demand for a full apology. U.S. officials meet with EP-3 crew.
April 11	Wang is officially declared dead by Beijing. Ambassador Prueher presents a letter saying the

<sup>1697</sup> Miller, *The PRC Decision-Making Process*, 47.

<sup>1698</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 15.

<sup>1699</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 15.

<sup>1700</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 51.

<sup>1701</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 90.

<sup>1702</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 52.

<sup>1703</sup> Adapted from Miller, *The PRC Decision-Making Process*, 43 – 45.

	U.S. was “very sorry” for the loss of Wang and for landing at Lingshui air base without permission. Plans are made for a meeting on April 18 to discuss the return of the EP-3. China announces the U.S. crew can leave.
April 12	The EP-3 depart Hainan Island, where they are flown to Guam and then Hawaii, where they hold a press conference.

When the U.S. protested the accusation that it had illegally violated Chinese airspace (separate from the emergency landing), “China suggested that, even if the EP-3 aircraft was flying over international waters when the accident occurred, the U.S. was violating international norms by monitoring communications within China’s territory.”<sup>1704</sup> This stance is rooted in China’s views on what is legally permissible behavior within an EEZ, though its protestations of U.S. surveillance are undermined by its own surveillance and military activities within the EEZ’s of its neighbors,<sup>1705</sup> including Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

During the first meeting between U.S. Ambassador (and former PACOM commander) Admiral Joseph Prueher and Assistant Foreign Minister Zhou Wenzhong approximately twelve hours after the collision, China presented its version of events. The PRC insisted the EP-3 was at fault, causing the collision after it “intentionally” turned and “rammed” Wang’s F-8.<sup>1706</sup> Three days after the collision, a spokesperson from the Chinese MFA stated that “by veering and ramming the Chinese jet at a wide angle, against flight rules, the U.S. surveillance plane caused the crash of the Chinese jet.”<sup>1707</sup> Admiral Prueher, “Drawing on his experience as a Navy pilot [...] immediately characterized this version of events as ‘physically impossible.’”<sup>1708</sup> As Fabey put it, “Saying a lumbering EP-3E could ‘ram’ a nimble F-8II jet fighter from four hundred yards away is like saying that a school bus could chase down and ram a Ferrari.”<sup>1709</sup> Video<sup>1710</sup> and other documentary evidence from the EP-3,<sup>1711</sup> a lack of similar evidence

<sup>1704</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-Song class submarine encounter,” 229.

<sup>1705</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-Song class submarine encounter,” 229 - 230.

<sup>1706</sup> Gertz, “The Last Flight of Wang Wei,” 53.

<sup>1707</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-Song class submarine encounter,” 229.

<sup>1708</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 5.

<sup>1709</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 91.

<sup>1710</sup> Video footage from the EP-3 is available on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/CUp\\_jX17ZIE](https://youtu.be/CUp_jX17ZIE)

<sup>1711</sup> In 2003, the U.S. government released hundreds of documents related to the EP-3 crisis in response to a Freedom of Information request. While they do not include video or pictures, detailed information



from the PRC, the recent (recorded) history of similar unsafe interceptions by PLA pilots, and the discrepancies in size, speed, and maneuverability of the two planes, casts further doubt on Beijing's version of events.

That said, some of Beijing's allegations are likely true. For example, the Chinese government "insisted that the EP-3E, to shake the intercepting aircraft, slowed down to make it difficult for the jets to fly alongside."<sup>1712</sup> This seems like a perfectly reasonable response by the U.S. pilot, and does not justify Wang's decision to fly so close to the EP-3. If anything, Wang should have recognized the difficulty his plane would have flying at such a low speed and chosen a different method of approach. Regardless, at the meeting between Prueher and Zhou, China formally blamed the U.S. for the collision and "demanded that the U.S. accept full responsibility for the incident."<sup>1713</sup> At approximately the same as the meeting was taking place, the MFA issued a press release outlining the Chinese version of events "and the Chinese view that the U.S. was fully responsible for the incident."<sup>1714</sup> According to John Keefe, who authored one of the most widely cited studies on the EP-3 incident, "These first encounters gave us the sense that this incident had created a problem for the Chinese government and that it was not going to handle the incident well."<sup>1715</sup>

Given what is known of China's decision-making apparatus, and the various cultural dimensions described in Chapter 6, there are questions surrounding the version of events the PLA presented to civilian authorities in Beijing. For example, "It is likely that the highest-ranking officer at Lingshui airfield contacted the General Staff Department directly, who then contacted the CMC staff members, who in turn called senior government officials in Beijing."<sup>1716</sup> All told, the information had to pass through five different departments before reaching the top leadership in Beijing.<sup>1717</sup> It is known that passing along bad news is not a particularly easy thing for PLA officers to do, and some

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regarding recorded exchanges and intelligence collected by the plane (such as the PLA pilots communications) were included.

<sup>1712</sup> Gertz, "The Last Flight of Wang Wei," 53.

<sup>1713</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident*, April 2001, 5.

<sup>1714</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident*, April 2001, 5.

<sup>1715</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident*, April 2001, 5.

<sup>1716</sup> Miller, *The PRC Decision-Making Process*, 47.

<sup>1717</sup> Shen & Kaminski, "From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-*Song* class submarine encounter," 230.

analysts have wondered if the PLA did not flat-out lie to the civilian leadership about what happened.<sup>1718</sup> Such views focus on two particular aspects of China's version of events: the cause of the collision and the circumstances of the EP-3's emergency landing at Lingshui – which Beijing contends was done without asking permission.<sup>1719</sup> The information regarding both issues “could only have come from military sources,”<sup>1720</sup> who likely “massaged” the information.<sup>1721</sup>

In addition to demanding the U.S. accept responsibility, the PRC prevented the detained crew from calling U.S. officials or their families.<sup>1722</sup> U.S. Embassy phone calls to the MFA and MND “went unanswered or unreturned.”<sup>1723</sup> Other than Ambassador Prueher's meeting, which was followed by another meeting 24 hours later, there had been no communication. During a press conference in Beijing on April 2, Ambassador Prueher “characterized this lack of communication as ‘inexplicable.’” However, when considered in the context of what is known about China's bureaucratic structure – where there is no single person empowered to pick up a phone or make decisions and policies are determined by consensus – Beijing's lack of communication is quite explicable. Beyond these ‘structural’ and cultural barriers, another far more practical reason may be to blame. Brigadier General Neal Sealock, the Defense Attaché in Beijing at the time who was responsible for negotiating the release of the crew, told me that,

All of the contacts that I was required to use, by their own rules in terms of military attachés functioning within the country, was through the Ministry of National Defense Foreign Affairs Bureau. Well almost to a person, they were all on a trip with the Deputy Chief of the General Staff to Australia and New Zealand. So almost all the contacts that I had, and all numbers that I had, minus the central number to MND-FAB, were gone. And so I had no one to talk to. And I kept calling virtually every fifteen minutes after I was notified, just trying to, hopefully, mitigate or at least make sure they understood that it was an accident and not an incident that we wanted to escalate, and try to get the word to the right people. And that was just not possible.

So again, being held at arms length by a duty officer that didn't have guidance on where to go or who to notify, apparently, until much later in the day, almost

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<sup>1718</sup> Mulvenon, “Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis,” 2.

<sup>1719</sup> Mulvenon, “Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis,” 2; Fabey, *Crashback*, 90.

<sup>1720</sup> Mulvenon, “Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis,” 2.

<sup>1721</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-*Song* class submarine encounter,” 230.

<sup>1722</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 2.

<sup>1723</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 6.

twelve hours later. So that was part of the challenge – communication. And again, what I call the perfect storm in having most of those folks gone – that I knew and had relationships with, that I may have been able to impact on the situation earlier had they been there. But that’s a speculative position, I suppose.<sup>1724</sup>

The lack of communication felt like “operating in the dark.”<sup>1725</sup>

China’s ‘decision by consensus’ approach also caused them to delay while the government conducted its own investigation<sup>1726</sup> and established an “ad-hoc crisis management apparatus.”<sup>1727</sup> General Sealock noted that throughout the entire affair, his interlocutors were very formal and professional, but everything required a tough negotiation, even just to see the crew.<sup>1728</sup> Indeed, it would not be until April 4, some 62 hours after the collision, before General Sealock and his team were finally granted access to the crew. “Overall,” he said, “it was resolved relatively quickly by Chinese standards, but slow by American ones.”<sup>1729</sup>

The diplomatic impasse continued with a series of statements and letters by senior officials on both sides. President Bush issued several increasingly strongly worded statements over the following days, demanding the release of the U.S. crew and return of the plane.<sup>1730</sup> Chinese President Jiang responded, saying “when one person bumps into another, it’s normal for the person to say, ‘Excuse me.’”<sup>1731</sup> By April 5, however, both states had begun moving in the direction of resolution following a letter sent by Secretary of State Colin Powell to Chinese Vice Premier Qian Qichen, whom Powell had met during Qian’s trip to Washington just a month earlier.<sup>1732</sup> The letter proposed a series of steps for resolving the incident, as well as a statement of regret regarding the presumed loss of Wang; public statements announcing similar regret had also been made the day prior.<sup>1733</sup> Based on the letter, Ambassador Prueher and Assistant Foreign Minister Zhou developed a five-step plan for resolution:

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<sup>1724</sup> Interview with Brigadier General Neal Sealock (U.S. Army, ret.), April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1725</sup> Interview with Brigadier General Neal Sealock (U.S. Army, ret.), April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1726</sup> Interview with Brigadier General Neal Sealock (U.S. Army, ret.), April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1727</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk*-Song class submarine encounter,” 230.

<sup>1728</sup> Interview with Brigadier General Neal Sealock (U.S. Army, ret.), April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1729</sup> Interview with Brigadier General Neal Sealock (U.S. Army, ret.), April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1730</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 6.

<sup>1731</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 6.

<sup>1732</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 7.

<sup>1733</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 7.

1. China requested the OK to publish a paragraph from Powell's letter in which he expressed his regret over the loss of Wang. Powell approved the request almost immediately;
2. An official statement from Ambassador Prueher "expressing sentiment about the loss of life in the collision and regret about entering Chinese airspace,"<sup>1734</sup>
3. The third step addressed the release of the aircrew;
4. The convening of a meeting to discuss preventing future accidents; and
5. The fifth step addressed the return of the aircraft.<sup>1735</sup>

According to Bill Gertz, "China's embassy in Washington had quietly put out word through a sympathetic American academic that if China would be allowed to misinterpret the U.S. statement as a blanket apology for the entire affair, the crew would be released."<sup>1736</sup> Notably, some cultural distinctions were involved here, as in Chinese, the "word for 'apologize' means the apologizer not only expresses regret for what happened but takes full responsibility for it; to apologize for something is a formal and stylized process, a kind of verbal bowing or kowtowing that results in a serious loss of face for the apologizer."<sup>1737</sup> Prueher sent a letter to China's Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxun, expressing his "sincere regret" for the loss of Wang, and that the U.S. was "very sorry" that the EP-3 had "entered Chinese airspace without verbal clearance."<sup>1738</sup> At 6:00 am on April 12, a chartered Continental 737 from Guam landed on Hainan Island, refueled, and took off 90 minutes later with the EP-3 crew onboard. The ultimate resolution to the crisis was bolstered by public comments by President Bush, who "amplified" Powell's statement of regret, saying he regretted not only the loss of the pilot, but of the plane as well.<sup>1739</sup> Some critics referred to the statements from Powell and Bush as a "national humiliation."<sup>1740</sup>

As for the plane itself, despite protestations from PACOM Commander Admiral Dennis Blair that the EP-3 had "sovereign immunity," and the PRC "may not board it or

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<sup>1734</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 7.

<sup>1735</sup> Keefe, *Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001*, 7.

<sup>1736</sup> Gertz, "The Last Flight of Wang Wei," 53.

<sup>1737</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 92.

<sup>1738</sup> Gertz, "The Last Flight of Wang Wei," 53.

<sup>1739</sup> Robert Kagan & William Kristol, "A National Humiliation," *The Weekly Standard*, Editorials, P. 11, April 15, 2001.

<sup>1740</sup> Kagan & Kristol, "A National Humiliation."

keep it,”<sup>1741</sup> China did exactly that. On May 1, China allowed U.S. technicians from the EP-3’s manufacturer Lockheed Martin to assess the damage. However, in a not-so-subtle signal, the U.S. resumed reconnaissance flights off China’s coast on May 7. This is in keeping with U.S. assertions that these operations are protected by international law – a point it reinforced by reminding the PRC that it has its own surveillance plane (the Yun-8) and conducts similar missions, as do at least six other Asian countries.<sup>1742</sup> The U.S. also continued to push back against Beijing’s assertion that it was ‘spying’, saying the EP-3 was flying an overt reconnaissance mission, unarmed, and without fighter escorts.<sup>1743</sup> Nonetheless, at this point it had become a matter of politics and posturing, and China “declared it would not allow the EP-3 to fly home on its own.”<sup>1744</sup>

Eventually, on May 29, the U.S. and China came to an agreement whereby the EP-3 would be disassembled and transported back to the U.S. on a cargo plane. When the U.S. objected, China reminded it that in 1976, a Soviet defector flew his MiG-25 to Japan, where it was promptly dismantled by USAF Foreign Technology Division technicians before finally returning it in packing crates.<sup>1745</sup> The U.S. had 30 days to complete the work – a “fairly tight deadline, given the complexity of the task,” that was made more difficult by the weather; Hainan Island averaged more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit, with humidity above 90 percent.<sup>1746</sup> The recovery team had to build their own living quarters (requiring 14,000 pounds of lumber to be flown to the Island), as well as all the equipment and personal supplies the team would need for the duration.<sup>1747</sup> “Every single item that flew into or out of Hainan had to be logged and approved by Customs authorities.”<sup>1748</sup>

As if that was not enough, Beijing made sure to include one final detail: the cargo plane could not be American. Instead, the U.S. was forced to charter a plane from a Russian company (the only one with a plane large enough for the job), which flew several

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<sup>1741</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 2.

<sup>1742</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 7.

<sup>1743</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 7.

<sup>1744</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 7.

<sup>1745</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 17.

<sup>1746</sup> Sandra I. Erwin, “Recovered EP-3 Could Be Rebuilt in Eight Months,” *National Defense* (online), October 2001.

<sup>1747</sup> Erwin, “Recovered EP-3 Could Be Rebuilt in Eight Months.”

<sup>1748</sup> Erwin, “Recovered EP-3 Could Be Rebuilt in Eight Months.”

trips to Kadena Air Force Base in Japan, and finally to Dobbins Air Force Base, Georgia. Each time the Russian AN-124 cargo plane left Hainan, it was loaded with 678,400 pounds of cargo – the maximum weight the runway at Lingshui could support.<sup>1749</sup> In total, the AN-124 transported 162 tons of equipment off the Island.<sup>1750</sup> It took until July 3<sup>rd</sup> for the EP-3 to be completely removed from China, and cost upwards of \$5.8 million – not including what it cost to repair and rebuild the plane.<sup>1751</sup> The PRC also billed the U.S. approximately \$1 million for expenses it accrued during the crisis, including the detention of the U.S. crew, to which the U.S. countered with what it considered to be a “fair figure for services rendered and assistance in taking care of the aircrew and some of the materials and contracts, and whatnot, to remove the EP-3 itself.”<sup>1752</sup> The non-negotiable amount sent to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing: \$34,567. China rejected the offer as “unacceptable.”<sup>1753</sup>

The meeting originally proposed in Prueher and Zhou’s resolution plan took place April 18-19, 2001, though the PRC decided against holding the meeting under the MMCA, having the MFA lead the talks instead.<sup>1754</sup> China’s refusal was due, “in part, to their reluctance to give legitimacy to U.S. activities in the region and also Chinese perceptions of the U.S. as a hegemon with aggressive intent.”<sup>1755</sup> This is cited as evidence of the shortcomings of both the MMCA and CBM efforts between the two states more generally.<sup>1756</sup> “Experience suggests that the current MMCA is inadequate for effective incident management at sea,” wrote one observer (before the creation or implementation of the MOUs).<sup>1757</sup>

Such characterizations are true in the sense that the MMCA was entirely ineffective in preventing or responding to the EP-3 crisis, however it is important to keep things in perspective. The EP-3 incident took place approximately two years after the 1999 Embassy Bombing, which was still fresh in the minds of both the PLA and the

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<sup>1749</sup> Erwin, “Recovered EP-3 Could Be Rebuilt in Eight Months.”

<sup>1750</sup> Erwin, “Recovered EP-3 Could Be Rebuilt in Eight Months.”

<sup>1751</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 7 - 8.

<sup>1752</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 8.

<sup>1753</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 8.

<sup>1754</sup> Kan et al., *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001*, 6.

<sup>1755</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 30 – 31.

<sup>1756</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 30 – 31.

<sup>1757</sup> Griffiths, “U.S.-China Maritime Confidence Building,” 19.

PRC's civilian leadership.<sup>1758</sup> As noted in Chapter 5, it was interpreted by Beijing as a deliberate action. This, coupled with what it perceived as an uptick in the frequency of the close-in surveillance operations close to its borders and a historical sensitivity to Western encroachment, left Beijing with few options.<sup>1759</sup> It is also important to remember that though the MMCA had been in place since 1998, "the two governments had still not developed any additional procedures for better communication in case of future military incidents."<sup>1760</sup>

While it is generally accepted that neither side intentionally meant to cause the collision, it is clear that China's intent with the riskier interceptions was to create an unsafe environment for U.S. military personnel. "The idea is to rattle the Americans, shake them up a little, show them that there's a price to be paid for flying these missions, maybe even deter the Americans from flying them."<sup>1761</sup> This attitude was visible not just in the sky, but in the water as well. It was only days before the EP-3 incident that a PLAN frigate confronted the USNS *Bowditch*, "an unarmed hydrographic survey vessel collecting data in the Yellow Sea."<sup>1762</sup> The point, effectively, is to be able to provoke a response from the U.S. so that China can say the U.S. presence in the area is what is at issue. As Kan notes, "the PLA rejected the possibility of accidents, blaming continued U.S. operations for any risks, so that another collision would be only the United States' fault."<sup>1763</sup> For domestic reasons, the PLA and CCP also wanted to show they were "standing up to the Western power."<sup>1764</sup> The frequent surveillance operations are perceived as an insult and a direct challenge to both China's sovereignty and the CCP's legitimacy.<sup>1765</sup> The MMCA is designed less to address these perceptions than it is to control their consequences. In 2001, it was still very much the 'empty vessel' Campbell described when it was created. Notably, the MMCA was the venue for the resumption of military dialogue between the two states, who met in Guam in September 2001.

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<sup>1758</sup> Blair & Bonfili, "The April 2001 EP-3 Incident," 377.

<sup>1759</sup> For more on Beijing's choices and decision-making process in response to the Incident, see He, *China's Crisis Behavior*, 78 – 84.

<sup>1760</sup> Blair & Bonfili, "The April 2001 EP-3 Incident," 377.

<sup>1761</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 82.

<sup>1762</sup> Smith, "China comes around?"

<sup>1763</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 28.

<sup>1764</sup> Interview with former senior military officer, April 5, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1765</sup> Blair & Bonfili, "The April 2001 EP-3 Incident," 378.

What the EP-3 incident *did* do, however, was expose critical weaknesses with respect to crisis management, both internally and bilaterally. In that sense, it was the closest the U.S. and China have come to having their own ‘Cuban Missile Crisis’, though it did not have as productive of an outcome. “It was obvious that both China and the U.S. lacked rapid and reliable means to communicate accurately and evaluate the impacts on both countries.”<sup>1766</sup> In the U.S., the early decision to allow the DoD to handle the crisis, “which was not predisposed to conduct international negotiations, rather than the State Department,” for the first four days created confusion.<sup>1767</sup> Similarly, the tone and rhetoric of the U.S. response suggests that Washington “did not appear to seriously consider how its response could be interpreted by China’s general public, which tends to be wary of anything resembling foreign bullying, limiting Beijing’s ability to compromise and negotiate.”<sup>1768</sup>

In China, the limitations of its highly centralized and consensus-by-committee approach was made obvious, as the preceding discussion demonstrates. “Overall,” one observer notes, “the EP-3 incident suggests that the civilian leadership in Beijing was dependent on the PLA for intelligence, and that the PLA misled PRC officials regarding who was at fault for the accident.”<sup>1769</sup> This is a dangerous precedent to set in a country where the civilian leadership fears losing control over its military. Importantly, however, Beijing seems have recognized the inefficiencies of its response and implemented changes.<sup>1770</sup> Mulvenon notes that “the CCP has increasingly promoted PLA members with whom they have deep bonds of trust, in the hopes of avoiding a repeat of the internal misinformation that may have affected China’s response following the EP-3 collision.”<sup>1771</sup> It also created an “integrated National Security Council,” modeled after the

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<sup>1766</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 231.

<sup>1767</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 231.

<sup>1768</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 233.

<sup>1769</sup> Miller, *The PRC Decision-Making Process*, 48.

<sup>1770</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 237.

<sup>1771</sup> Mulvenon, “Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis,” 4.



U.S. NSC, to “better coordinate its responses in future crises.”<sup>1772</sup> The government also added “crisis management” lessons at the Central party School of the CCP, “the foremost CCP cadre training institution.”<sup>1773</sup> Lastly, as President Xi continues to strengthen his position of power (such as the aforementioned abolishment of presidential term limits), it is increasingly likely that the ‘consensus-by-committee’ format will be relaxed, making it possible for there to be an individual within the PLA, MND, or MFA, who is empowered to answer the DTL phone when it rings in a time of crisis.

The 2009 *Impeccable* incident, considered to be the most serious since the EP-3 collision, helps draw out just what was learned from the episode and what changes were made to avoid its repetition.

### *The 2009 USNS Impeccable Incident*

While the 2009 *Impeccable* incident is the most widely publicized U.S.-China incident since the 2001 EP-3 collision, it is not nearly as dramatic a tale. There is no loss of life or equipment, no detainees or tense diplomatic *tête-à-tête*’s. Perhaps not coincidentally, far less has been written about the *Impeccable* incident, limiting the depth of the following analysis.

The story begins much in the same way as did the EP-3. On March 8, 2009, the USNS *Impeccable*, an unarmed naval auxiliary ship, was operating in international waters approximately seventy-five miles south of Hainan Island. The *Impeccable* is a “predominantly civilian-manned”<sup>1774</sup> ocean surveillance ship, “which is to say, a spy ship.”<sup>1775</sup> An image of the ship is provided in Figure 18. One of its capabilities is towing a sonar array system “that performs acoustic collection surveillance to help locate and identify submarines.”<sup>1776</sup> Ships like the *Impeccable* not only help locate subs, but develop acoustic signatures for them too,<sup>1777</sup> something that would most certainly be used in

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<sup>1772</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 237.

<sup>1773</sup> Shen & Kaminski, “From the EP-3 incident to the USS *Kitty Hawk-Song* class submarine encounter,” 237.

<sup>1774</sup> McVadon, “The Reckless and the Resolute,” 1.

<sup>1775</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 98.

<sup>1776</sup> McVadon, “The Reckless and the Resolute,” 1.

<sup>1777</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 99.

antisubmarine warfare.<sup>1778</sup> As noted in Chapter 5, Hainan Island is home to the Yulin Naval Base, from which many of the PLAN's nuclear submarines operate. At the time of the incident, the Yulin base was fairly new and had only recently begun hosting the nuclear subs.<sup>1779</sup> This made China particularly sensitive to foreign naval activity in its vicinity. Indeed, one report has suggested that the *Impeccable* was conducting hydrographic surveys related to the Yulin base at the time of the incident.<sup>1780</sup>

**Figure 18: USNS *Impeccable***<sup>1781</sup>



As the *Impeccable* was carrying out its operations, the crew was on the alert. A thousand miles away, another USNS ship, the *Victorious*, had recently found itself on the receiving end of PLA harassment, having its bridge illuminated with a high-intensity light, her bow crossed at close distance at night, and low-altitude passes by PLAN maritime patrol aircraft as it operated in the Yellow Sea.<sup>1782</sup> Figure 19 maps the approximate locations of the *Victorious* and *Impeccable* incidents. Several days earlier, on March 5, a PLAN frigate crossed the *Impeccable*'s bow at a range of 300 feet; two hours later a Y-12 maritime surveillance aircraft conducted 11 low-altitude passes.<sup>1783</sup>

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<sup>1778</sup> McVadon, "The Reckless and the Resolute," 1.

<sup>1779</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas, *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence*, CSIS (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 57.

<sup>1780</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper, John Schaus, and Jake Douglas, "Counter-Coercion Series: Harassment of the USNS *Impeccable*," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, CSIS, May 9, 2017.

<sup>1781</sup> Green et al., "Counter-Coercion Series."

<sup>1782</sup> McVadon, "The Reckless and the Resolute," 1 – 2; Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, 56; Fabey, *Crashback*, 106.

<sup>1783</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, 57.

Two days later, a PLAN auxiliary general intelligence ship challenged the *Impeccable* over the radio: leave the area or be prepared to “suffer the consequences.”<sup>1784</sup> The *Impeccable* was soon to find out it was not an idle threat. On March 8<sup>th</sup>, the ship was surrounded by five PRC vessels – a PLAN intelligence collection ship, two armed patrol vessels from the Chinese Fisheries Law Enforcement Agency and the State Oceanic Administration, and two small privately owned fishing trawlers. The Chinese government frequently uses privately owned trawlers and their crews as “a kind of seaborne military,” who are occasionally called upon to shadow or harass foreign ships in international waters.<sup>1785</sup> This provides a measure of plausible deniability for the PLAN, despite the fact that their control over these ships is well known.<sup>1786</sup>

One of the trawlers closed to within 50 feet of the *Impeccable* while its crewmembers shouted at the U.S. vessel and waved a PRC flag.<sup>1787</sup> The *Impeccable* crew responded by using a firehose to ward off the trawler, soaking its crew. Undeterred, the Chinese crew stripped to their underwear and closed to within twenty-five feet of the *Impeccable*'s stern.<sup>1788</sup> Crew aboard the trawler began attempting to snag the *Impeccable*'s towed sonar array cable with a boat hook – “a foolish attempt, given that the towed array gear weighs thousands of pounds.”<sup>1789</sup> Recognizing the threat to his ship, the captain of the *Impeccable*, Mark Paine, radioed the Chinese ships and requested they “open up an avenue of egress” so that it could leave the area.<sup>1790</sup> Shortly after, the two trawlers moved out in front of the *Impeccable*, dropped large pieces of wood in its path, and then “park[ed] themselves a hundred yards in front of the larger ship.”<sup>1791</sup> The *Impeccable* was forced to make an emergency stop, leaving it “dead in the water, and surrounded by hostile Chinese ships.”<sup>1792</sup> The fishing trawlers repeated the previous

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<sup>1784</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 102; McVadon, “The Reckless and the Resolute,” 2; Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*,” 57.

<sup>1785</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 102.

<sup>1786</sup> For more on this, see: Erickson & Kennedy, “China’s Maritime Militia: What It Is and How to Deal With It,” *Foreign Affairs* (online), June 23, 2016; Conor M. Kennedy & Andrew S. Erickson, “China’s Third Sea Force, The People’s Liberation Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA,” *China Maritime Report 1* (China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College, March 2017).

<sup>1787</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 103.

<sup>1788</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 103; Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*,” 59.

<sup>1789</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 103.

<sup>1790</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 103; Green et al., “Counter-Coercion Series.”

<sup>1791</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 103.

<sup>1792</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 103.

demand that it leave the area, however “It is unclear whether this demand came through bridge-to-bridge radio, over loudspeaker, or directly from Chinese personnel on the deck.”<sup>1793</sup> Another of the Chinese ships moved into blocking position and “inched progressively closer until it was also only a few dozen feet from the *Impeccable*.”<sup>1794</sup> Shortly after, the *Impeccable* was allowed to leave. It returned to the area the following day escorted by the USS *Chung-Hoon*, a guided-missile destroyer. Video footage of the incident is available on *YouTube*,<sup>1795</sup> while Figure 20 provides pictures. Table 15 provides a timeline of the incident.

**Figure 19: *Impeccable* & *Victorious* Incidents**<sup>1796</sup>



<sup>1793</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 59.

<sup>1794</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 59.

<sup>1795</sup> USNS *Impeccable* Incident: <https://youtu.be/hQvQjwAE4w4>

<sup>1796</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, xiv.

Figure 20: USNS *Impeccable* Incident Footage<sup>1797</sup>



<sup>1797</sup> <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-harassment-usns-impeccable/>

**Table 15: 2009 *Impeccable* Incident Timeline<sup>1798</sup>**

	China	United States
<b>Phase I: Harassment leading up to the incident</b>		
Mar 4	FLEC vessel shines spotlight on <i>Victorious</i> , crosses its bow	<i>Victorious</i> conducts undersea reconnaissance in the Yellow Sea
Mar 5	CMS aircraft buzzes <i>Victorious</i>	
	PLA frigate crosses <i>Impeccable</i> 's bow, aircraft conducts low flybys	<i>Impeccable</i> conducts undersea reconnaissance in South China Sea
Mar 7	Challenges <i>Impeccable</i> over radio	
<b>Phase II: Chinese ships surround and harass the <i>Impeccable</i></b>		
Mar 8	5 ships surround <i>Impeccable</i>	
	Fishing trawlers try to cut towed array	<i>Impeccable</i> fires water hose at crew
	Trawlers advance to within 25 feet	Offers to withdraw
	Drops debris in <i>Impeccable</i> 's path	Comes to emergency stop
	CMS approaches, but allows <i>Impeccable</i> to depart	Withdraws from the area
<b>Phase III: U.S. and China dispute proximate vs. ultimate cause</b>		
Mar 9		Publicizes incident and lodges protests
Mar 10	Criticizes U.S. reconnaissance	Links incident to aggressive pattern
Mar 11	Chinese and U.S. officials "agree" to avoid further incidents	
<b>Phase IV: U.S. destroyer escorts the <i>Impeccable</i> back to the area</b>		
Mar 11		Destroyer escorts <i>Impeccable</i> to area
Mar 18		Threatens to send regular armed escorts
<b>Phase V: Chinese state media call an end to the standoff</b>		
Mar 20	State media "call an end" to standoff	

The next day, on March 9, the DoD “publicized China’s ‘aggressive and unprofessional’ behavior and accused Beijing of flouting its obligations under UNCLOS,” while reiterating the *Impeccable* and *Victorious* were operating in international waters.<sup>1799</sup> China responded with its own statement, accusing the U.S. of violating international and domestic Chinese law by “engaging in activities in China’s exclusive economic zone in the South China Sea without China’s permission,” and characterized the *Impeccable*’s harassment as “normal activities of law enforcement.”<sup>1800</sup>

<sup>1798</sup> Graph taken from <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-harassment-usns-impeccable/>

<sup>1799</sup> Green et al., “Counter-Coercion Series.”

<sup>1800</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*,” 60. For more on the legal dimensions of the incident, see: Raul Pedrozo, “Close Encounters at Sea: The USNS *Impeccable* Incident,” *Naval War College Review* 62:3 (Summer 2009), 101 – 111; Jonathan G. Odom, “The True ‘Lies’ of The *Impeccable* Incident: What Really Happened, Who Disregarded International Law, and Why Every Nation (Outside of China) Should be Concerned,” *Michigan State Journal of International Law* 18: 3 (2010), 410 – 452; Jonathan G. Odom, “The ‘Case’ of USNS *Impeccable* versus 5 Chinese Ships: A Close Examination of the

Senior officials, both military and civilian, in both states moved quickly towards resolution. U.S. military officials made a point of contrasting “the incident with the two countries’ anti-piracy cooperation in the Gulf of Aden.”<sup>1801</sup> On March 20, Chinese state media announced that the “Chinese military is ready to call an end to the standoff.”<sup>1802</sup> Nothing had been resolved, but both Beijing and Washington seemed content to put the incident behind them and move forward. A month later, civilian trawlers harassed the *Victorious* as it operated in the Yellow Sea.<sup>1803</sup> The pattern of harassment was similar, as the trawlers closed within thirty yards of the *Victorious* before eventually positioning themselves in front of the ship, forcing it to stop. Once again, the call came for the *Victorious* to leave China’s “sovereign” waters.<sup>1804</sup>

The EP-3 and *Impeccable* incidents are two of the most widely publicized incidents at sea between the U.S. and China, but they are far from the only ones. Indeed, the frequency at which U.S. and PLA forces interact in ‘unsafe’ or ‘unprofessional’ encounters raises serious doubts about the efficacy of the MOUs and other CBMs. A brief overview of just the incidences between 2013 and 2016 draw this out, particularly because this period overlaps with the introduction of the MOUs described above.

The first and arguably most prominent incident since the *Impeccable* was the 2013 USS *Cowpens* incident, described in Chapter 5.<sup>1805</sup> In brief, while operating in international waters in the South China Sea, the *Cowpens* was shouldered by a PLAN Amphibious Dock Ship “that suddenly crossed its bow at a distance of less than 500 meters and stopped in the water,” forcing the *Cowpens* to take evasive action to avoid a collision.<sup>1806</sup> The *Cowpens* had entered a forty-five kilometer “inner defense layer” of the

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Facts, the Evidence, and the Law,” in *Governing Ocean Resources: New Challenges and Emerging Regimes: A Tribute to Judge Choon-Ho Park*, Jon M. Van Dyke, Sherry P. Broder, Seokwoo Lee, & Jin-Hyun Paik, editors, (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2013), 307 – 341.

<sup>1801</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*,” 64.

<sup>1802</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*,” 64.

<sup>1803</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*,” 64.

<sup>1804</sup> Fabey, *Crashback*, 107.

<sup>1805</sup> The incident is described in detail in Fabey, *Crashback*, 139 – 163.

<sup>1806</sup> Carl Thayer, “USS *Cowpens* Incident Reveals Strategic Mistrust Between U.S. and China,” *The Diplomat* (online), December 17, 2013.

PLA's sole aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*. In typical fashion, the U.S. and PRC governments traded barbs over who was at fault.<sup>1807</sup> The trend would continue.

Between March and August 2014, there were at least four instances where PLAAF planes “engaged in dangerous and aggressive maneuvers against U.S. Navy aircraft over international waters in the South China Sea.”<sup>1808</sup> The most dangerous of these occurred in August in what has since been dubbed the ‘Top Gun’ Incident.<sup>1809</sup> During this incident, a PLA J-11B fighter dangerously intercepted a USN P-8 Poseidon patrol aircraft 135-miles east of Hainan Island (see Figure 21). Once again, the Yulin sub base was the assumed target of the P-8’s surveillance flight.<sup>1810</sup> During the interception, the J-11 flew under the P-8 at a range of fifty to one hundred feet, before passing the nose of the plane at a ninety degree angle, “to make a point of showing its weapon load-out” to the U.S. pilots.<sup>1811</sup> It then flew under and alongside the P-8, flying within twenty feet of its wingtips. And then, in a move reminiscent of the scene from *Top Gun* described above, the J-11 conducted a barrel roll less than forty-five feet above the P-8.<sup>1812</sup> U.S. officials called the move “unacceptable,”<sup>1813</sup> “aggressive,” “unprofessional,” and a “deeply concerning provocation.”<sup>1814</sup> Conversely, an MND spokesperson claimed the J-11 had simply made a “regular identification and verification” in a “professional operation” and had “kept the jet...at a safe distance [from] the U.S. aircraft.”<sup>1815</sup> The U.S. accusations were “groundless.”<sup>1816</sup> The U.S. released video and photographs of the incident that suggests otherwise.

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<sup>1807</sup> Zachary Keck, “Cowpens Incident Shows Limits of Mil-to-Mil Ties,” *The Diplomat* (online), December 20, 2013.

<sup>1808</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 256 fn.

<sup>1809</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 224.

<sup>1810</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 228.

<sup>1811</sup> Zachary Keck, “China’s ‘Dangerous Intercept’ of U.S. Spy Plane,” *The Diplomat* (online), August 23, 2014.

<sup>1812</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 224.

<sup>1813</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 229.

<sup>1814</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2014), 263.

<sup>1815</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 230; Keck, “China’s ‘Dangerous Intercept’ of U.S. Spy Plane.”

<sup>1816</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, ” 230.



Figure 21: ‘Top Gun’ Incident<sup>1817</sup>



2015 saw several tense encounters between U.S. and PLA forces. In one instance, a P-8, accompanied by a crew from CNN, flew over and near several of China’s reclaimed land projects in the South China Sea. Over the course of the flight, the PLAN ordered the P-8 to leave the airspace eight times.<sup>1818</sup> “Foreign military aircraft. This is Chinese Navy. You are approaching our military alert zone. Leave immediately.”<sup>1819</sup> The U.S. pilots respond by stating their right to navigate through international airspace.<sup>1820</sup> In May, the same month as the CNN flight, a U.S. defense official said USN surveillance missions near China’s land reclamation projects “occur on an almost-daily basis.”<sup>1821</sup> In September 2015, two Chinese jets flew within 500 feet of a USAF surveillance plane operating eighty miles from China’s coast above the Yellow Sea.<sup>1822</sup> In May 2016, a Chinese J-11 came within fifty feet of a U.S. EP-3 conducting “a routine mission” in international airspace above the South China Sea in an encounter DoD officials referred

<sup>1817</sup> Green et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia*, 229.

<sup>1818</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 255 – 256.

<sup>1819</sup> Ankit Panda, “China Issues 8 Warnings to U.S. Surveillance Plane in South China Sea,” *The Diplomat* (online), May 21, 2015.

<sup>1820</sup> P-8 South China Sea flyover: <https://youtu.be/OaKbZW0pqkM>

<sup>1821</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 256.

<sup>1822</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2015), 257.

to as “unsafe.”<sup>1823</sup> While this recurrent pattern of risky interceptions is disconcerting, PACOM Commander Admiral Harry Harris has suggested that they are typically caused by “poor airmanship, not some signal from Chinese leadership to do something unsafe in the air.”<sup>1824</sup> Lastly, in December 2016, the PLAN seized an underwater drone being operated by the USNS *Bowditch* in international waters some fifty miles northwest of Subic Bay in the Philippines. While the U.S. claims the PLAN ignoring repeated radio calls from the *Bowditch* before snatching the drone from the water, an MFA spokesperson claims the PLAN “discovered” it, “identified and verified it in a responsible and professional manner,” and then removed it “to prevent it from harming navigational and personnel safety of passing ships.”<sup>1825</sup> While it raised tensions between the two states, the drone was quietly returned a week later.

The recurring pattern in these incidents is fairly clear. All take place within China’s EEZ and are a response to U.S. surveillance activities. Figure 22 details the approximate locations of some of the most well-known incidents. In many ways, the pattern is reminiscent of the clashes between the U.S. and Soviet Navy in the mid-to-late 1960s. The Soviet Union was particularly aggressive in asserting its presence in what it considered its ‘territorial’ waters. China’s interpretation of UNCLOS stipulates that while foreign military vessels have the right to pass through China’s EEZ (‘innocent passage’), they do not have the right to conduct military operations. The U.S. insists otherwise, though a constant point of criticism against the U.S. position is that it has yet to actually ratify UNCLOS.

Based on these oppositional interpretations of UNCLOS and what is legally permitted, the U.S. and China approach incidents at sea with different objectives. The U.S. seeks to prevent crisis by reducing the chances of miscommunication and miscalculation. The thinking is that U.S. operations in these areas is not going to cease, and so the emphasis should be on making such encounters safer. China worries this

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<sup>1823</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2016), 231.

<sup>1824</sup> Michael E. O’Hanlon & James Steinberg, *A Glass Half Full? Rebalance, Reassurance, and Resolve in the U.S.-China Strategic Relationship*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2017), 81.

<sup>1825</sup> Steven Jiang & Kevin Bohn, “China returns seized U.S. underwater drone,” *CNN* (online) December 20, 2016.

approach is simply “giving seatbelts to speeders.”<sup>1826</sup> Rather than simply make such encounters safer, Beijing wants to limit U.S. military operations in its periphery.<sup>1827</sup> More than that, “China sees the maritime area as part of its defensive perimeter,” and “will try to stop U.S. military operations that it views as a threat to its national security.”<sup>1828</sup> That both the U.S. and China are partially motivated in their approaches by their respective policies on Taiwan complicates things further.

Some observers have recommended that the U.S. use the close-in surveillance operations as a bargaining chip to extract concessions from China in another area, such as increased transparency or pledges not to use force to reunify Taiwan.<sup>1829</sup> If Washington chooses not to trade a reduction, or cessation, of surveillance operations in China’s EEZ, it may soon lose a valuable bargaining chip. As multiple interview subjects noted, the balance of power is tilting in China’s favor, limiting the U.S. freedom of action in the region.<sup>1830</sup> As one analyst told me, “The U.S. needs to start thinking more long term. It won’t be able to sustain the level of predominance up to the 12 mile limit that its enjoyed for the last 70 years, for the next 30 years.”<sup>1831</sup> Indeed, during recent testimony to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral Philip Davidson said that “China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States.”<sup>1832</sup> This is a stunning admission, and one which challenges traditional characterizations of dominant power responses to efforts by rising powers to alter the status quo.

This is potentially good news. Structural change alters the incentives and perceptions of both rising and dominant powers. For example, as China becomes more powerful, and confident, its views on transparency might shift. As Chas Freeman explained, “Transparency advertises strength, which is why we have liked it and, up to

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<sup>1826</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1827</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 22 & 27.

<sup>1828</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 30.

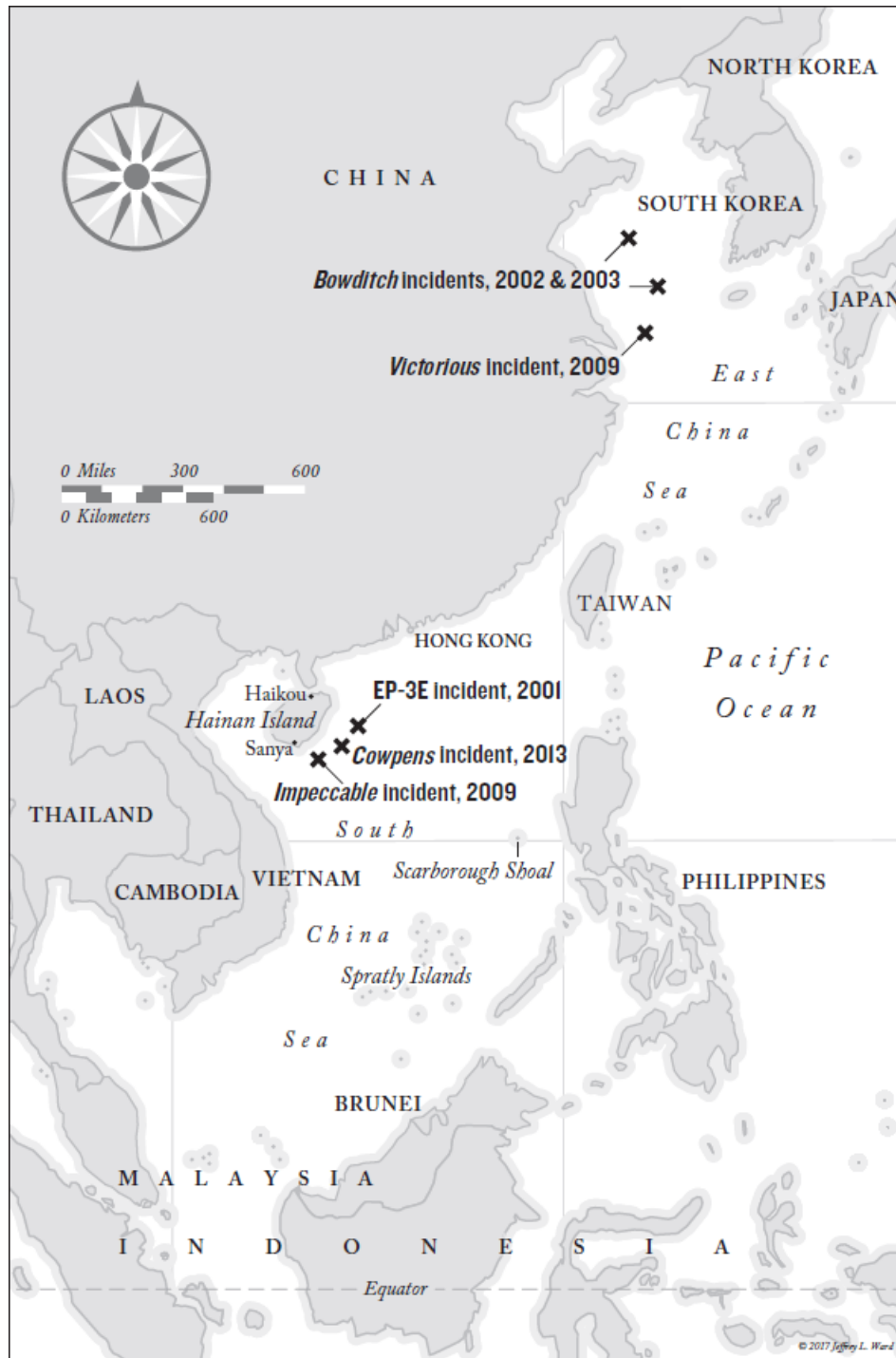
<sup>1829</sup> Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 287 -288; Charles L. Glaser, “A U.S.-China Grand Bargain?: The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation,” *International Security* 39:4 (Spring 2015), 49 – 90.

<sup>1830</sup> Redden & Saunders, *Managing Sino-U.S. Air and Naval Interactions*, 30.

<sup>1831</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 3, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1832</sup> Admiral Philip Davidson, Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Philip Davidson, USN Expected Nominee for Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, (April 17, 2018), 18.

Figure 22: Major U.S.-China Incidents, 2001 - 2013<sup>1833</sup>



now, the Chinese have not. Increasingly, however, they do.”<sup>1834</sup> This is reflected in the slow, albeit noticeable, progress China has made in its military transparency.<sup>1835</sup>

<sup>1833</sup> Image taken from Fabey, *Crashback*, xiv.

<sup>1834</sup> Quoted in Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 352 – 353.

Similarly, as China operates further afield, encounters more foreign vessels (including military), and develops a more global perspective based on the expansion of its interests, it is likely to further embrace CBMs and MOUs that stipulate behavior and provide common protocols of communication. This is evidenced by its acceptance and, for the most part, adherence to the MOUs signed with the U.S. in 2014. Just as INCSEA did not prevent incidents from happening, neither will the MOUs. However, they have had a tempering effect. The 2010 DoD *Annual Report* notes that the U.S. has “not observed a resurgence of the sort of harassment by PRC fishing vessels of U.S. auxiliary ships conducting routine and lawful military operations beyond the PRC’s territorial seas that occurred in spring 2009, but it could become an issue again.”<sup>1836</sup> In short, China has slowly but surely embraced CBMs because it is increasingly in its interest to do so. The unavoidable difficulty of measuring the success of those CBMs is that it is an attempt to prove a negative – the absence of serious crises. However, correlation does not necessarily mean causation, and without detailed knowledge on the decision-making of both states, it is impossible to know.

Conversely, the material shift in power is also likely to have a transformative effect on the U.S. outlook. As noted above, it has all-but-ceded the South China Sea to China by failing to aggressively respond to its land reclamation activities. While the USN and its allies continue to conduct FONOPs in the region and assert their right to operate wherever international law allows, the scales have been tipped in Beijing’s favor. The U.S. must now determine whether the best response is to attempt to reassert its dominance over the region or negotiate some form of accommodation. This would likely mean a reduced U.S. presence in exchange for China’s responsible management of the area (which includes maintaining the freedom of navigation). The U.S. has already begun preparing for such an eventuality by deepening its bilateral relationships with other states in the region (particularly Japan), and aiding in their allies’ efforts to bolster their naval and military forces in response to China’s rise. This has included bolstering relations with India, which the U.S. has encouraged to take a more active role in the Indian and South China Seas, Vietnam, Singapore, Australia, and the Philippines – though since Rodrigo

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<sup>1835</sup> Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 353.

<sup>1836</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 55.

Duterte was elected president in 2016, the relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines has been strained.

The EP-3 and *Impeccable* incidents are useful reminders of the limitations to what mil-mil relations can accomplish. Indeed, Kan notes that the recurrence of incidents like the EP-3 and *Impeccable* increased skepticism in the U.S. of the value of military relations with China.<sup>1837</sup> Though CBMs between the two countries were fairly underdeveloped during both instances, it is clear that regular military contacts cannot overcome the fundamental, structurally rooted causes of tension in the U.S. – China relationship. For example, He notes that the *Impeccable* incident “originated essentially from the strategic anxiety caused by the power reconfiguration between the United States and China.”<sup>1838</sup> Said another way, ‘it was the rise of China and the fear it caused in the United States’. However, it is important to remember that the goal of CBMs is not to make the U.S. and China friends or allies. This is a point lost on some analysts. For example, Weitz writes that “a stronger MMCA, or the advent of additional confidence-building measures or new security dialogues, can only address the symptoms, rather than the underlying causes, of the continuing problems in the bilateral defense diplomacy.”<sup>1839</sup> Others, like James Holmes, have made similar arguments.<sup>1840</sup>

Addressing the symptoms is precisely what CBMs are designed to do. CBMs are meant to facilitate the exchange of information with the purpose of minimizing the ‘anxiety’ in the relationship by creating familiarity as they try to negotiate an accommodation. Indeed, the limitations of the EP-3 and *Impeccable* incidents are not an argument for the inefficacy of CBMs or mil-mil relations, but a reinforcement of why they are needed.<sup>1841</sup> The MMCA was used by both sides to lodge protests about concerns over U.S. surveillance operations in China’s EEZ in the lead-up to the EP-3 crisis, however the underdeveloped Agreement was unable to facilitate a resolution. If the MMCA had the MOUs in place that it currently has, perhaps the EP-3 incident could have been avoided. Similarly, the EP-3 crisis came to an end in large part due to Secretary Powell’s letter to Vice Premier Qian, using their recent meeting as an entry

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<sup>1837</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 8.

<sup>1838</sup> He, *China’s Crisis Behavior*, 87.

<sup>1839</sup> Weitz, ““Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 396.

<sup>1840</sup> James Holmes, “The Limits of Mil-to-Mil Contacts,” *The Diplomat* (online), August 4, 2011.

<sup>1841</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 26.

point to break the standoff. This reinforces the benefits and importance of regularly occurring high-level visits and exchanges.

The U.S. government recognizes the need for better mil-mil and CBMs with China. For example, the 2013 DoD *Annual Report* notes that the “fundamental purpose for two countries to conduct military-to-military relations is to gain a better understanding of how each side thinks about the role and use of military power in achieving political and strategic objectives. It is *precisely during periods of tension when a working relationship is most important.*”<sup>1842</sup> Both incidents could have ended very differently. The inadequacy of durable mil-mil relations and comprehensive CBMs may produce an undesired outcome for both countries should another serious incident occur; this is particularly likely as China becomes more powerful and closes the power gap with the United States. This, too, is something the U.S. government recognizes.<sup>1843</sup>

As one observer noted, “In terms of crisis management, the challenge for the two countries is not *whether* but *how.*”<sup>1844</sup> The existing CBMs and frameworks (such as the MMCA), provide the means for improving and deepening mil-mil relations with China. The pattern of U.S.-China mil-mil contacts shows a cautiously optimistic trend in this direction (Table 16 and Figure 23). These figures show the total number of U.S.-China mil-mil exchanges and contacts from 2000 – 2016. There were 29 mil-mil activities in 2016, including three high-level visits, five functional exchanges, and six recurrent exchanges.<sup>1845</sup> Information before this time is difficult to obtain, as the public record essentially begins with the Congressionally mandated annual reports from DoD and the USCC. A single report from 1986 notes a total of 26 “military and military-related exchanges” in 1985: 13 from the U.S. to China, and 10 from China to the U.S.<sup>1846</sup> A further breakdown notes 6 of the 13 U.S. visits were ‘military visits,’ while the remaining 8 were ‘military-related’; the division is 5 and 5 for Chinese visits to the U.S.<sup>1847</sup>

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<sup>1842</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2013), 61. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>1843</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 53; DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 85.

<sup>1844</sup> Yang Jiemin, “Avoiding Crisis Between the Two Great Powers,” Chapter 10 in *Power & Restraint: A Shared Vision for the U.S.-China Relationship*, Richard Rosecrance and Gu Guoling, eds., (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 149.

<sup>1845</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), 91.

<sup>1846</sup> Department of Defense Intelligence, *United States-China Military Relations, 1979 – 1985: Analysis and Chronology*, (1986), vii.

<sup>1847</sup> Department of Defense Intelligence, *United States-China Military Relations*, vii.

It is important that the U.S. and China institutionalize high-level visits in manner similar to that between the U.S. and Russia with their 1993 *Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation on Defense and Military Relations*. Years will go by between visits by high-level officials. For example, China’s Minister of Defense, General Liang Guanglie, visited the U.S. in 2012, the first such trip by the PLA’s highest-ranking member in nine years.<sup>1848</sup>

**Table 16: Total U.S.-China Mil-Mil Exchanges, 2000 - 2016<sup>1849</sup>**

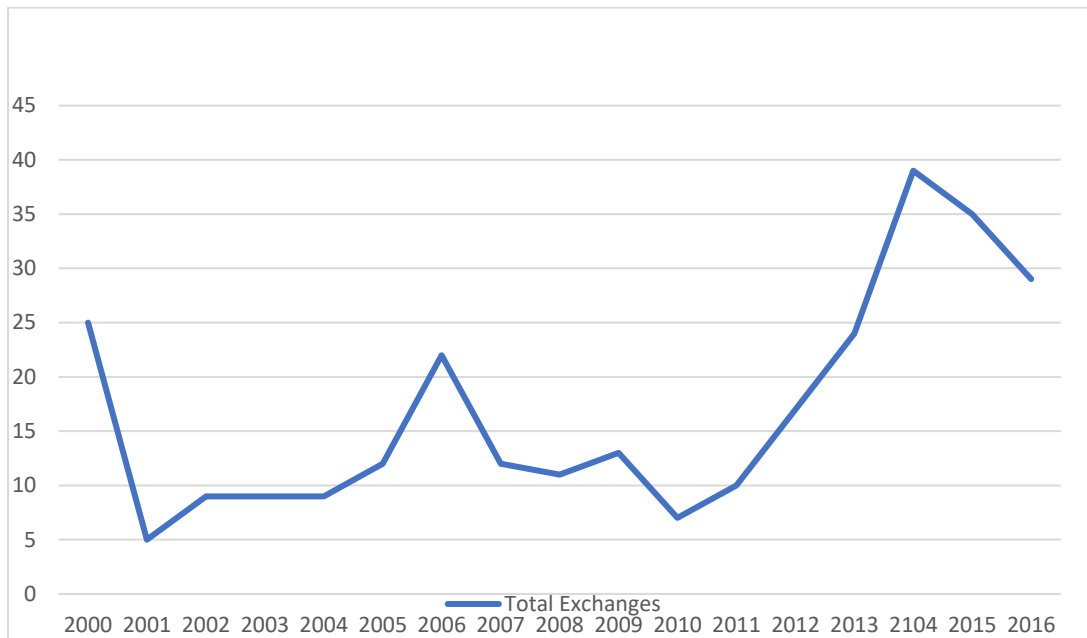
<i>Year</i>	<i>High-Level Visits</i>	<i>Recurrent Exchanges</i>	<i>Functional Exchanges</i>	<i>Academic Exchanges</i>	<i>Ship visits &amp; Exercises</i>	<i>Total</i>
2000	9	6	3	4	3	25
2001	1	2	1	0	1	5
2002	2	3	1	2	1	9
2003	2	2	2	1	2	9
2004	3	3	1	0	2	9
2005	3	5	2	1	1	12
2006	4	5	7	2	4	22
2007	7	1	3	1	0	12
2008	2	4	5	0	0	11
2009	3	5	5	0	0	13
2010	0	4	3	0	0	7
2011	4	4	2	0	0	10
2012	5	5	2	4	1	17
2013	5	6	5	4	4	24
2014	6	7	8	8	8	39
2015	4	6	7	5	9	35
2016	3	6	5	10	3	27

<sup>1848</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2012), 140.

<sup>1849</sup> This chart is adapted from Saunders & Bowie, “U.S.-China military relations,” 674.



**Figure 23: Total U.S.-China Mil-Mil Exchanges, 2000 – 2015<sup>1850</sup>**



Given the cultural and systemic contexts in which the relationship takes place, high-level visits should be prioritized. The top-down nature of the PRC system, and its approach to trust and CBMs makes this unavoidable. Indeed, “The Chinese see dialogue as a confidence building measure and, in fact, have stated in the past that high-level dialogues have been too short and too infrequent.”<sup>1851</sup> While the U.S. should still push for more mid-to-senior level interaction, it needs to be more flexible with how it approaches the relationship. Deferring to China’s preferences in this regard seems like a fairly low-cost means of maximizing the potential for successful mil-mil engagements and the development and implementation of more CBMs.

Recurrent exchanges should be held more consistently (though the DCT and DPCT are fairly stable), and greater effort should be made by senior officials to expand the scope and depth of CMBs like the MMCA. As noted above, Type B CBMs focusing on transparency should be developed, though again, this is likely to be inhibited by China’s material capabilities. Similarly, functional exchanges and ship exercises should be expanded in appropriate areas, such as HA/DR. Operational familiarization in areas of mutual interest ensures the two militaries become accustomed to interacting while

<sup>1850</sup> This graph was inspired by Saunders & Bowie, “U.S.-China military relations,” 674.

<sup>1851</sup> Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, 93.

deepening their understanding of the others operational processes. Indeed, senior officials within the Chinese government frequently “point to military exchanges as critical evidence that China places great importance on the issue of military transparency and devotes itself to promoting mutual trust.”<sup>1852</sup> Academic exchanges can play an important role in supporting that familiarization process.

However, the trendlines, to the extent that they exist, are only part of the equation. As noted above, the relationship has been fairly episodic, subject to stops-and-starts as the overall bilateral relationship develops. It is only recently that there has been enough stability, and progress (e.g., MOUs), that observers tepidly believe the ‘spigot’ approach to the mil-mil relationship may finally be a thing of the past. Accordingly, the quality of mil-mil contacts are just as important as their frequency. It is invariably a subjective judgment. However, far too often, critics of mil-mil relations with China fail to consider the relationship and what it is intended to accomplish in the proper context. Accordingly, it is important to put the military-to-military relationship in perspective.

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<sup>1852</sup> Mastro, “The Vulnerability of Rising Powers,” 72.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

### **U.S.-China Military Relations in Perspective**

This chapter considers how the U.S-China mil-mil relationship and its perceived value and limitations are characterized by both skeptics, often called ‘Dragon Slayers’, and supporters, often called ‘Panda Huggers’. In the process, I reveal the inadequacies of both approaches, which though they capture important elements of the relationship, fail to pay enough attention to the intended outcome: strategic trust. By placing mil-mil relations in the proper context, informed by the previous chapters, it becomes readily apparent that while obstacles remain, the mil-mil relationship has been far more successful than is often perceived. I then identify important contributions this conclusion makes to theories of trust and international relations. Lastly, I highlight avenues of future research.

### *Panda Huggers and Dragon Slayers*

Analyses of U.S.- China relations inevitably invoke the hackneyed imagery of eagles, dragons, tigers, or pandas. While certainly an overused, if not problematic, cliché, two particular animalistic characterizations have become synonymous with diverging views on U.S.-China relations: Panda Huggers and Dragon Slayers.<sup>1853</sup> They are, effectively, stylized versions of the familiar ‘dove and hawk’ trope found throughout international relations literature. Panda Huggers are those who believe in the value of engagement with China, and all that entails: reasonable accommodation when appropriate, cultural and historical sensitivity, the possibility of trust, and, ultimately, the notion that China’s rise does not portend the end of the Liberal world order or even the United States. It is often used as a derogatory label, as it connotes a westerner who supports the Chinese Communist Party or otherwise kowtows to the PRC. Dragon

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<sup>1853</sup> Fabey, *Crashback* (2017); Ben Lowson, “The Four Types of China Engager: Which Are You?,” *The Diplomat* (online), January 28, 2017; Peter Hays Gries, *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Jonathan Czin, “Dragon-slayer or Panda-hugger? Chinese Perspectives on “Responsible Stakeholder” Diplomacy,” *Yale Journal of International Affairs* (Spring/Summer 2007), 100 – 112; Rob Gifford, “Panda-Huggers and Dragon-Slayers: How to View Modern China Today,” *Social Education* 74:1 (January/February 2010), 9 – 11; Jeannie Ivanov, “Panda Huggers and Dragon Slayers,” *Beijingreview.com.com* August 9, 2010.

Slayers, conversely, are those who purport to see the ‘writing on the wall’<sup>1854</sup> and advocate for a more militaristic and assertive response to China’s rise. This subsection considers their views towards mil-mil relations in turn.

In the specific context of military-to-military relations, Panda Huggers are those who believe engaging China with military diplomacy would accomplish one, or several, of the following:

- That it would help professionalize the PLA, which in turn could help make Chinese military aggression less likely, or at the least help ensure interactions were less likely to result in an accident (particularly by “fostering pro-U.S. leanings and understandings” among “younger officers who might lead in the future.”<sup>1855</sup>;
- It would improve mutual understanding, which in turn would (or could) reduce the chances for conflict;
- That mil-mil engagement could shape China’s strategic behavior in ways “that do not threaten” U.S. interests;
- Mil-mil would “forge lines of communication” with PLA leadership that would be useful in time of crisis or confrontation;<sup>1856</sup> and,
- That face-to-face contact at multiple levels over an extended period of time is the most effective way to “ascertain developments in China’s military and defense policies.”<sup>1857</sup>

Much of this has been covered in the previous sections outlining the objectives of the U.S. and China’s mil-mil policies and need not be repeated.

Dragon Slayers, conversely, believe that U.S. mil-mil engagement policies have resulted in “near total failure.”<sup>1858</sup> They argue one or more of the following:

- China has shown limited transparency and/or reciprocity, while being granted access to U.S. units, facilities, and equipment;

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<sup>1854</sup> Will Hutton, *The Writing on the Wall: China and the West in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Abacus, 2007).

<sup>1855</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 22.

<sup>1856</sup> Adapted from USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 143.

<sup>1857</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 23.

<sup>1858</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 29.

- That rather than deterring China, “most PLA officers return home with a renewed resolve that the PLA must increase the resources and dedication necessary to challenge U.S. military superiority.”<sup>1859</sup>;
- Military engagement has had no discernable impact on the resolution of incidents or crises (either at avoiding them or at responding to them once they happen, such as via the DTL);
- Personal interaction is of limited utility given China’s system of government and cultural approach; and
- Military-to-military relations and CBMs do nothing to address the substantive issues plaguing the relationship.

Many of these objections have also been addressed at various points throughout the preceding analysis.

To be clear, Dragon Slayers do not necessarily argue that mil-mil relations with China should be completely stopped. Many simply argue for curtailing the scope of the activities and limiting them solely to things like high-level dialogues or CBMs and cancelling operational and other contacts.<sup>1860</sup> For example, Larry Wortzel, has argued that “Normal trade relations do not mean normal military relations,” and that joint exercises and other functional interactions should stop. Instead, “The Department of Defense should talk only with those leaders in Beijing who will made the decisions governing when China uses force or goes to war,” and keep those discussions focused on “strategic issues,” such as Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, and its territorial ambitions in the South China Sea.<sup>1861</sup> Schriver, similarly, has said the U.S. “failed miserably” in “gaining a window on the PLA’s modernization, gaining neither access as expected nor reciprocity,” nor has it been able to “shape China’s behavior,” or deterred the PLA’s “aggression.”<sup>1862</sup> While acknowledging that dialogue has been uneven but good overall, and that CBMs are a worthwhile pursuit,<sup>1863</sup> he has also argued that mil-mil activities should be limited.<sup>1864</sup>

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<sup>1859</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 144.

<sup>1860</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 21.

<sup>1861</sup> Larry M. Wortzel, “Why Caution Is Needed in Military Contacts with China,” The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder 1340, December 2, 1999.

<sup>1862</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 21.

<sup>1863</sup> Stephen J. Yates, Al Santoli, Randy Schriver, & Larry Wortzel, *The Proper Scope, Purpose, and Utility of U.S. Relations with China’s Military*. Heritage Lectures 689, The Heritage Foundation. (October 10, 2000), 4 – 5; see also p. 6 – 7.

On the issue of transparency in particular, Robert Ross said, “Nothing is transparent that the other side cares about.”<sup>1865</sup> Echoing that view, Hooper has said, “I think we are kind of being fed the illusion of transparency,” but “if we were learning anything of substance, we wouldn’t still be discussing the issue.”<sup>1866</sup> It would seem, however, that Ross and Hooper are ignoring the ‘sufficiency’ problem of transparency discussed in Chapter 3: transparency creates new questions, which creates demand for increased transparency.

### *Rethinking U.S.-China Mil-Mil Relations*

Panda Huggers and Dragon Slayers are both right and wrong. It is clear from the historical record, for example, that China has been less transparent, reciprocal, or consistent in its exchanges with the U.S. Yet those using that as an example for the failure or irrelevance of mil-mil relations with China, such as Schriver or Hooper, fail to consider both China’s progression in these areas over the last ten to fifteen years, as well as China’s historical perspective. Related criticisms suffer from a similar lack of context. For example, it has been said the failure in establishing a stable CBM architecture similar to that which existed between the U.S. and the Soviets is a result of the PLA’s “reluctance to acknowledge any legitimacy to U.S. national security concerns.”<sup>1867</sup> There is truth to this claim, however the same is true in reverse. That is, there is little-to-no regard for how China perceives the U.S. or why. This reflects a lack of ‘security dilemma sensibility’ on the part of the U.S., which has an impact on the way it executes mil-mil relations with China.

As noted above, there is a certain arrogance that senior military (and civilian) officials carry with them as a result of their representing the most powerful state in history. This is an excusable, or at least understandable, quality. However, more often than not it means that these senior officials approach foreign relationship through a U.S. lens. What’s more, other states often approach their interactions with the U.S. through a U.S. lens as well. With China, it is important that U.S. officials look at the mil-mil

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<sup>1864</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 21.

<sup>1865</sup> Interview with Robert S. Ross, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1866</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 144.

<sup>1867</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 29 – 30.

relationship through a Chinese lens.<sup>1868</sup> As Ken Allen told me, “Even minor mistakes like mis-publishing a name sends a signal to the Chinese that you don’t understand them. So why should they tell you anything if you can’t even get basic things right? If you don’t show any effort to understand them?”<sup>1869</sup> This does not excuse China’s reticence to embrace even the most basic norms of transparency (for example), but it does reinforce the need for the U.S. to be considerate of how its own policies, such as persistent close-in surveillance operations, might be interpreted.

Related to this, U.S. officials often tend to overlook the United States’ own less-than-stellar history of being consistently truthful. Several interview subjects made this point. For example, one said, “As a longtime practicing American diplomat, all I can say is I found my government *totally* unreliable if our interests began to diverge from undertakings we had solemnly sworn we would uphold.”<sup>1870</sup> “The idea that the U.S. is the gold standard of trustworthiness and reliability is false,” he said.<sup>1871</sup> “No Native American would believe that for a second.”<sup>1872</sup> David Lampton similarly noted that the U.S. has a “credibility problem” with China, pointing to policies regarding Taiwan as an example.<sup>1873</sup> For example, in 1982, the U.S. and China released their third joint communique, dealing primarily with their respective views on Taiwan. In the seventh point of that communique, it is written that,

the United States government states that it does not seek to carry out a long-term policy of arms sales to Taiwan, that its arms sales to Taiwan will not exceed, either in qualitative or in quantitative terms, the level of those supplied in recent years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and China, and that it intends to reduce gradually its sales of arms to Taiwan, leading over a period of time to a final resolution.<sup>1874</sup>

As the former diplomat said to me, “You can’t expect the behavior of other countries to be better than the standard you set for yourself.”<sup>1875</sup> Based on the interviews conducted for this project, as well the various existing analyses written on U.S.-China mil-mil

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<sup>1868</sup> Interview with Kenneth Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1869</sup> Interview with Kenneth Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1870</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1871</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1872</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1873</sup> Interview with David Lampton, March 1, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1874</sup> Text of U.S. China Communique on Taiwan, *The New York Times* (online), August 18, 1982.

<sup>1875</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 16, 2017, via Skype phone call.

relations, this degree of objective introspection is rather uncommon. More often than not, the opposite is true. For example, a 1997 report prepared for the DoD Office of Net Assessment noted that it was “remarkable how little China’s fundamental perceptions of world politics changed,” in the twenty-five years after the Shanghai Communique (1972).<sup>1876</sup> Given the history of U.S. arms sales to Taiwan since 1982, it is unsurprising that China might question U.S. trustworthiness.<sup>1877</sup>

Indeed, analyses of U.S.-China military-to-military relations tend to emphasize China’s faults. This also came out in numerous interviews, with subjects who would claim that any faults or limitations in the mil-mil relationship rest solely with Beijing. There is certainly some truth to this. The U.S. has been the ‘pursuer’ of closer and more comprehensive military relations from the start, mirroring a similar pattern that was evident with the Soviets during the Cold War. In this regard, its commitment to improving the relationship and developing strategic trust is without doubt. However, the U.S. being an “ardent suitor” is a common criticism.<sup>1878</sup> The argument is that the “value that U.S. officials place on the contacts overly extends leverage to the PLA.”<sup>1879</sup> A former PACOM Commander supported that criticism. “The United States made a *big* deal of military-to-military engagements, as an element of obtaining better engagement and levels of trust between the two countries, maybe to a fault.”<sup>1880</sup> He continued, saying,

We invited it to become a prized element of the relationship, and as a consequence we got into [those] transactional fits and starts. And they thought that they were kind of punishing the U.S. by taking it away. We felt that they were risking the relationship because they weren’t contributing to strategic trust between the two nations, which then establishes increasing levels of risk. I don’t think that was what was on their mind. I think that what was on their mind was the idea that if they took it away and offered it again, in a transactional sense, they could get what they wanted.<sup>1881</sup>

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<sup>1876</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 24.

<sup>1877</sup> Da Wei, “Strategic Reassurance: A Chinese Perspective,” in *The Hu-Obama Summit and U.S.-China Relations: A Collection of Essays Presented by FPRI’s Asia Program*, Jacques DeLisle, ed. (November 2009), 11.

<sup>1878</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 21; Scott W. Harold, “Expanding Contacts to Enhance Durability: A Strategy for Improving U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations,” *Asia Policy* 16 (July 2013), 108.

<sup>1879</sup> Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, RL32496, (October 27, 2014), x.

<sup>1880</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1881</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call; see also, DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2010), 54; Weitz, “Enduring difficulties in China-U.S. defense diplomacy,” 385.



This view mirrors a similar criticism that “While the United States has sought to build confidence in avoiding crises, the PLA has avoided giving confidence.”<sup>1882</sup> “The Chinese pattern has been to absorb as much information as possible and share as little as possible.”<sup>1883</sup> The extended context of that criticism is that China benefits far more than does the United States, which lies at the heart of the Dragon Slayer viewpoint.<sup>1884</sup> Far too often, however, these criticisms are not accompanied by an objective analysis of the U.S. approach to the relationship.

According to the 2017 DoD *Annual Report*, annual U.S. defense contacts and exchanges are “carefully tailored.”<sup>1885</sup> Based on my conversations with numerous current and former DoD and military officials, as well secondary source evidence, this is far from an accurate statement. Though the exact approach varies by administration,<sup>1886</sup> in practice, the process of putting together the annual agenda is a combination of rather arbitrary factors. OSDP provides top down guidance on priority areas, and then each stakeholder (e.g. PACOM) will submit a proposed list of activities, which in turn is adjudicated by OSDP and the Joint Staff.<sup>1887</sup> The process was described to me as,

Sort of like a set of concentric figure eight’s that blend into the middle and then something happens. So there’s the part of the process where folks in the department, largely in OSD but also the Joint Staff, think through ‘what are our objectives for the year and what are we trying to accomplish’. And that kind of happens on one ledger. And then there’s the other ledger of ‘such and such a general’ or ‘such and such an admiral’ or ‘such and such an office’ wants to go to China to do something. And then we start trying to marry these up.<sup>1888</sup>

Once that list was finalized, it would be a matter of talking to Chinese counterparts to determine what could be supported and when. It quickly became clear, however, that

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<sup>1882</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 25.

<sup>1883</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 30.

<sup>1884</sup> For example, see: Harold, “Expanding Contacts to Enhance Durability,”; Roy D. Kamphausen. *Enhancing U.S.-China Military-to-Military Exchanges*. NBR Briefing Series, (September 2015); Kyle Churchman, “Building a New Type of U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship: An Interview with Major General Yao Yunzhu,” The National Bureau of Asian Research, (September 18, 2015).

<sup>1885</sup> DoD, *Annual Report to Congress* (2017), ii.

<sup>1886</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1887</sup> Interview with U.S. official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1888</sup> Interview with former U.S. official, March 10, 2017, Washington, D.C.

‘carefully tailored’ is secondary to practical considerations of what has been proposed and what makes sense on the calendar.

A former PACOM Commander, however, suggested that “It’s not as simply as just making an agenda and sending it off to OSD.”<sup>1889</sup> “It’s highly complex and very political, on both sides.”<sup>1890</sup> The Admiral in question suggested that the extent to which the military-to-military relationship, and agenda, is politicized is not well acknowledged within the U.S. The role of domestic politics, particularly that of Congress, in influencing the mil-mil relationship (aside from the NDAA 2000 and related oversight responsibilities), is under appreciated. Evidence of Congressional involvement can be found in statements made throughout the years by members of Congress. In December 2001, Senator Bob Smith (R – New Hampshire) and Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R – California) wrote to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld expressing their concern over the mil-mil relationship with China, specifically that it failed to reduce tensions, lacked reciprocity, and provided “militarily-useful information” to the PLA.<sup>1891</sup> When Defense Secretary Panetta was late submitting the 2012 *Annual Report to Congress*, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Howard McKeon (R – California), wrote him a letter saying the delay “minimizes the uncertainty and challenges posed by China’s military build-up.”<sup>1892</sup> The extent to which members of Congress involve themselves in the actual annual agenda of mil-mil is uncertain, but they are certainly paying attention and it is undoubtedly part of Washington politics.

Several of the current and former officials I spoke to assured me that annual agendas match stated objectives (as detailed in Chapter 6), with a review process conducted several times throughout the year. However, when asked more pointed questions about which engagement activities are most effective for executing those objectives, no one could provide a clear answer. The inability to point to a metric with which OSDP measures the effectiveness of their mil-mil policy relates to two wider issues. The first is the overall governmental approach to U.S.-China mil-mil policy. The second is the question of how to assess the relationship.

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<sup>1889</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1890</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. military official, February 27, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1891</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 12.

<sup>1892</sup> Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts* (2015), 17.

The issue of how the U.S. approaches the relationship from an institutional and policy standpoint is one I raised with most interview subjects. For the most part, there was a general consensus that the U.S. approaches and manages the relationship as best as can be expected. For example, China has the luxury of being able to focus the brunt of its attention on the United States because it does not have the same complex web of global interests and relationships. The U.S., conversely, must pay attention to a range of issues and states. This is a disadvantage that has not gone unnoticed by senior officials.<sup>1893</sup> However, the problem is more foundational. The U.S. simply has not prioritized the relationship to the same degree that China has.<sup>1894</sup> A USCC report puts it plainly, stating,

The U.S. Government has dedicated insufficient resources to collect, translate, and analyze Chinese writings and statements. Consequently, it has a limited understanding of the perceptions of the United States held by Chinese leaders and the Chinese people. This undermines our government's ability to respond appropriately to the challenges and opportunities of the relationship, as well as to prepare for potential crises.<sup>1895</sup>

In 2007, Congressman Randy Forbes made a similar observation. “[E]xactly what catalyst, what revelation, is going to emerge that will make us as a nation step back and say maybe we need to do something more comprehensive in our planning as it relates to China.”<sup>1896</sup> He continued, saying,

I’ve gone to agency after agency, had briefing after briefing [...] and the first question I always ask them, are you taking to this agency or are you doing this? And without exception, when Congressmen Skelton and I would go, we would always be told, no, we need to, but we’re not. We asked do you have a comprehensive plan? No. Every once in a while we’re told we have one, and maybe there’s one that exists in some closet somewhere that I’ve just never seen, but I’ve never met the person that has seen it. Unless we have that comprehensive plan, I think we’re going to continue to be surprised, and we can’t afford to be surprised.<sup>1897</sup>

Seven years after making that statement, Forbes send a letter to Defense Secretary Hagel, where he wrote of his concern that DoD,

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<sup>1893</sup> For example, see Campbell, *The Pivot* (2017).

<sup>1894</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 15.

<sup>1895</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2002), 15.

<sup>1896</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 2.

<sup>1897</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 6.

currently lacks the thorough guidance and oversight mechanisms necessary to maintain a consistent mil-mil policy that best serves U.S. national security objectives over the ‘long haul’ of the emerging U.S.-China peacetime competition. I am aware of multiple examples where the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint Staff, Service Chiefs, the Pacific Command Commander, or the component commands at PACOM were pursuing multiple, divergent mil-mil engagement objectives.<sup>1898</sup>

It is a persistent problem. U.S. Army Colonel Jer Donald Get raised a similar point in a 1996 report, noting a lack of clear priorities, measurable objectives, or doctrine to guide the relationship.<sup>1899</sup> A former DASD for East Asia told me, the U.S. has not “lashed ends, ways, and means, together effectively in mil-mil with China, in part because different services are pulling in different directions, because leaders are pursuing different agendas, and because of political issues emanating from Washington.”<sup>1900</sup> In 2007, Forbes proposed the creation “of a national strategic interagency staff to harness the collective energy and opportunities of our nation to prepare for the long-term impact of China’s rising power and influence around the world.”<sup>1901</sup> This disconnect between ‘ends, ways, and means’ does not just adversely impact the policy making process, but how U.S. military personnel engage their Chinese counterparts.

There is a fairly well accepted belief that the PLA is far more strategic and purposeful with their mil-mil engagements, and that its officers are well prepared for their interactions with the U.S. Kenneth Allen has disputed this notion, saying, “I’ve talked to PLA folks. And they say that a lot of their delegations that come here are as ill-prepared to discuss things with us as we are ill-prepared to discuss things with them.”<sup>1902</sup> This is, however, a minority view. The counterpoint to the PLA’s preparedness is the under-preparedness of U.S. officials engaged in mil-mil with China. Here we see the confluence of several previously mentioned aspects of the U.S. approach. First, due to their busy schedules, senior military officials are often poorly briefed, both on the mil-mil relationship but also on Chinese customs. Second, delegates are often only given

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<sup>1898</sup> Randy J. Forbes, “Time to Review U.S.-China Mil-to-Mil Objectives, Guidance,” Letter to Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work, December 10, 2014.

<sup>1899</sup> Get, *What’s with the Relationship Between America’s Army and China’s PLA?*

<sup>1900</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, March 17, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1901</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 5.

<sup>1902</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 163.

classified briefings, which then restricts what they are able to say during discussions with their PLA counterparts.<sup>1903</sup> Third, the China-based defense attachés who facilitate the meetings often do not have the opportunity to properly debrief the visiting U.S. officials, leaving their reports incomplete. Relatedly, trip reports are not mandatory and are not always submitted, preventing any knowledge or insights gained during the trip from “getting back into the system. It localizes the information.”<sup>1904</sup> Compounding this is the fact that the senior officials who go on these trips, such as PACOM Commanders, either rotate into different positions or retire following their relatively brief terms. The net impact of all of this is the loss of institutional knowledge. The U.S. tries to address this in part by encouraging China to accept more mid-level officer interactions, however for the numerous reasons already mentioned (e.g., fear of ‘cultural pollution’, top-down system), this is not a particularly productive solution. Lastly, the aforementioned ‘arrogance’ of senior officials often means, “we did not prepare ourselves to learn from them, *from* them, not about them.”<sup>1905</sup>

The second issue, how to assess the relationship, is far more complex. Current and former officials were rather candid about the difficulty in trying. “There isn’t really a metric for success,” one former DoD official said.<sup>1906</sup> Another told me that you can neither quantify nor qualify which activities are more effective.<sup>1907</sup> Similarly, another said “it’s impossible to measure, it’s very fuzzy.”<sup>1908</sup> Several told me success is anecdotal, and based on the subjective interpretations of the people involved.<sup>1909</sup> A former PACOM Commander said the metric for success was not quantified; “We were seeking strategic progress, as evidenced by improving relations on the security side and the attainment, I would argue, [...] which is seeing aspects of strategic trust manifest over time.”<sup>1910</sup>

The lack of an official metric for success raises an important question: how can senior policymakers ‘carefully tailor’ the annual mil-mil engagement agenda with

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<sup>1903</sup> Interview with Ken Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1904</sup> Interview with Ken Allen, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1905</sup> USCC, *The U.S.-China Relationship*, 163.

<sup>1906</sup> Interview with former DoD official, March 24, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1907</sup> Interview with senior DoD official, March 6, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1908</sup> Interview with former senior military official, April 7, 2017, via Skype phone call.

<sup>1909</sup> Interview with former senior DoD official, March 6, 2017, Washington, D.C.;

<sup>1910</sup> Interview with former senior military official, March 31, 2017, via Skype phone call.

activities that best meet U.S. objectives if there is no way of assessing the relationship itself? This is true of government practitioners as well as the think tank analysts and academics who have written about it. As noted in the introductory chapter, existing analyses of the mil-mil relationship are predominantly published by think tanks or policy journals. Accordingly, there is little-to-no theoretical linkage in the analysis. This is most obvious when considering the conclusions these reports draw regarding the efficacy of the relationship over time. Generally, conclusions are predicated on a fairly simple calculation: how stable have contacts been, how many interactions have there been, and how often. That is to say, it tends to be a rather quantitative exercise of the ‘more is better’ variety. Generally speaking, more *is* better. However, neither analysts, academics, or government officials give consideration for how to assess the intended outcome: strategic trust.

Assessing, or measuring, strategic trust is difficult. However, there are plenty of possible metrics that can be pointed to for re-assessing the value and efficacy of mil-mil relations between the U.S. and China. The first and most important thing is to assess strategic trust in the appropriate context. Just like CBMs, it is not a cure-all. The presence of strategic trust does not require the presence of mutual trust. Mutual trust is about sharing another state’s interests and perceptions; strategic trust is about understanding them. Holmes argues that “there’s little reason to assume that closer contact inexorably begets greater trust and confidence between two parties.”<sup>1911</sup> This is true only if we are talking about mutual trust – the type of trust that might exist between allies, such as the U.S. and the U.K., or Canada. Closer contact with another state provides you with the sort of information that you can not acquire through satellites or conventional espionage. It provides you with context and a depth of understanding that allows you place information gathered through those traditional channels in context.

This is the primary metric for gauging the success of mil-mil engagement with China. As one analyst put it, “Have I learned anything new? And what?”<sup>1912</sup> Transparency and reciprocity are good indicators and certainly good policy objectives, but given the structural and cultural context of the mil-mil relationship, such measures are

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<sup>1911</sup> James R. Holmes, “No, Mil-to-Mil Ties Can’t Make the U.S. & China Play Nice,” *The Diplomat* (online), June 7, 2013.

<sup>1912</sup> Interview with think tank analyst, March 7, 2017, Washington, D.C.

“sure to lead to disappointment.”<sup>1913</sup> That is because they obscure the *actual* measure of progress. Despite the recurrent criticisms of China’s resistance to be more transparency or reciprocate on a level the U.S. deems ‘sufficient,’ DoD has undeniably learned a great deal about the CCP and PLA through mil-mil interactions. It has deepened its understanding of the PLA’s decision making process and strategic culture, including how those are influenced by Chinese culture more broadly. It has a better understanding of the PLA’s modernization goals, enabling DoD to place it in context. For example, numerous DoD reports make clear that Taiwan remains the primary focus of the PLA’s modernization efforts, rather than a desire to directly confront the U.S. Overall, mil-mil contacts have better equipped the U.S. to interpret Chinese signals in an appropriate context. More importantly, channels of communication, understanding of signaling, and institutionalized CBMs have all seen considerable, albeit slow, progress. It would be hard to imagine that either country would be better off had those contacts not existed. And as noted above, before it can truly say that China is learning more about the U.S. than vice versa, Washington must take a close look at how it manages its side of the process.

Mil-mil relations, and CBMs more generally, are not about “liking each other, or being nice.”<sup>1914</sup> They are about developing and maintaining strategic trust. As a former senior military officer put it, strategic trust is about a “level of predictability to know what motivates the other, what the mutual interests are, and that you will act on those interests, which is something the other side can predict with some degree of accuracy. My behavior is motivated by factors that you understand.”<sup>1915</sup> Chapters 4 and 7 make this clear. The aim is to reduce the uncertainty – the ‘fear’ – that arises as a consequence of great power rivalry, particularly during a power transition. A lack of consideration for the role of structure further obscures assessments of progress in the mil-mil relationship.

The U.S.-Soviet relationship was characterized by unambiguous rivalry, which perhaps makes it easier to understand why mil-mil relations, and CBMs, were as underdeveloped as they were, and why they took as long to implement as they did. The U.S.-China relationship, conversely, is characterized by ambiguity, with clear evidence of both cooperation and competition. China is neither friend nor foe. Because the U.S.

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<sup>1913</sup> Finkelstein & Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, 61.

<sup>1914</sup> Interview with former military official, March 1, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1915</sup> Interview with former military official, March 1, 2017, Washington, D.C.

began engaging China before it was a powerful country, and because so much of that engagement (particularly after the Cold War) was predicated on the assumption that “engagement with rivals and their inclusion in international institutions and global commerce would turn them into benign actors and trustworthy partners,” – an assumption which, “for the most part [...] turned out to be false,” - perception of its outcome has been skewed.<sup>1916</sup>

The Cold War provides important context for understanding China’s approach to mil-mil relations and CBMs more generally. Understanding these similarities enables us to place the U.S.-China mil-mil relationship in some greater historical context. For example, just as the Soviets challenged the U.S. in an attempt to alter U.S. operations in its ‘territorial’ waters, so too has China. Similarly, there is a clear status imperative at play in both the Soviet and Chinese policies of aggressive, or assertive, actions during encounters with U.S. forces. Just as the Soviets were concerned that CBMs gave ‘a license to engage in reckless behavior,’ China believes them akin to ‘giving seatbelts to speeders’. Both China and the Soviet Union preferred political agreements over technical ones. And both jealously guard(ed) even the most basic information about their militaries, including budgets. In light of these similarities, it comes readily apparent that viewing the U.S.-China military relationship through the lens of a ‘normal’ interstate relationship, as many observers have, is setting the relationship up for failure. For instance, China is not as easily ‘shaped’ as other weaker states the U.S. has engaged.

While the U.S. military engagement strategy for China was modeled after its experiences with the Soviet Union, it has never approached the relationship with the same structural understanding. The Soviet Union was a peer – or close to it. China was (and arguably still is) not. More the point, while there have been numerous serious incidences between the U.S. and China, there has yet to be what one former senior official called a “scare the pants off you” crisis, analogous to the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>1917</sup> “To have a crisis like that, then the strategic imperative of understanding each other becomes clear. We’ve not had that kind of strategic moment with the Chinese.”<sup>1918</sup> This presents

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<sup>1916</sup> Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. White House, (December 18, 2017), 3.

<sup>1917</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.

<sup>1918</sup> Interview with former senior U.S. official, March 9, 2017, Washington, D.C.



something of a paradox. The whole point of pursuing mil-mil and CBMs with China is precisely to avoid such a crisis. And yet, it is clear that there are people in both states who fail to see the value of the pursuit. The ‘early investment’ in mil-mil relations and CBMs will likely pay dividends should that ‘scare the pants off you’ moment come to pass. And that is because of the confidence each side has in their ability to understand and predict the other. This is what strategic trust is about.

China has been slow to embrace mil-mil, and CBMs, but over time it has – and to an increasing degree. Those that have expected ‘more and faster’ lack the very understanding and perspective of China that mil-mil provides. It has not been in China’s interest to pursue or support either CBMs or mil-mil relations with the U.S. because it has been the weaker state, and one with a historically imprinted fear of exploitation and subjugation by more powerful foes. Accordingly, progress must be considered with a degree of patience. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, “this is not an area where you will see dramatic breakthroughs and new headlines, but rather evolutionary growth.”<sup>1919</sup> In the meantime, the question is whether the structural pressure evolves faster than China’s ability to overcome the historical and ideological baggage preventing more durable mil-mil relations, CBMs, and strategic trust.

Introducing the concept of strategic trust not only provides a more nuanced understanding of U.S.-China mil-mil relations, and its associated policy approaches, it also has theoretical implications. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, IR theorists have largely ignored the question of trust. This is particularly true of contemporary analyses of U.S.-China relations. Incorporating the concept of trust into these analyses fills important gaps in the conceptual and analytical approaches brought to bear on the issues surrounding China’s rise. It helps provide a process for explaining the evolution of a relationship from enmity to amity but placing it in the context of the trust continuum. Focusing solely on cooperation, as mainstream theorists have, tells only half the story. Discussing cooperation in the context of trust not only enables a more credible explanation of the evolution of state relationships from strategic trust to mutual trust, it puts cooperative relations in a broader context. Wheeler has offered insight into how interpersonal

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<sup>1919</sup> USCC, *Report to Congress* (2011), 64.

relationships formed between heads of state facilitate this process. Rathbun has provided a theory of the relationship between trust and institutions. This dissertation has provided a first step towards a generalizable theory of strategic trust, and the use of military diplomacy as the mechanism through which states develop and maintain it.

As Chapter 2 has argued, incorporating the theoretical concept of trust is also compatible with the structural imperatives and boundaries set out by realist theories. Core realist texts, like Gilpin's *War & Change in World Politics* or Organski & Kugler's *The War Ledger*, texts which heavily influence many contemporary analyses of U.S.-China relations, incorporate ideas of accommodation, but never explain these ideas with sufficient detail. Concepts of trust, particularly strategic trust, enrich these theoretical approaches. It provides greater insight into how states interpret signals of intent, as Wheeler's recent work has shown. This, in turn, explains the formulation of threat perceptions and how states cope with uncertainty. Within the specific context of power transition theories, for example, incorporating trust bolsters arguments relating to the 'satisfaction' of rising and dominant states. Part of that satisfaction is bound with Gilpin's notions of learning and the ability to "facilitate control and management of competition."<sup>1920</sup> A purely structural reading of Gilpin, or of Organski and Kugler, cannot adequately explain these processes. If we place the U.S. and China relationship as it has been described in this dissertation into the theoretical context that these power transition theorists have offered, it becomes easier to accept their logic because there is a specific mechanism through which that control and management becomes possible. In that regard, it becomes clear that military relations is an overlooked component of interstate relationships, particularly those between strategic rivals. However, without consideration of the outcome (strategic trust), understanding the mechanism alone loses value.

The theory of strategic trust, as I have developed and implemented here, takes structure and anarchy as its starting point and recognizes the limitations and pressures those features of the international system place on the behavior and perceptions of states. It is for that reason that I believe mutual trust is a bridge too far when discussing U.S.-China relations. Similarly, it explains why talking about strategic trust as if it were mutual trust, or normative trust, as has generally been the case, is a sure path to

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<sup>1920</sup> Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 42.

disappointment. That disappointment distorts perceptions of the U.S.-China relationship, leading to overly pessimistic conclusions. Strategic trust helps to explain how, in the midst of that structural pressure and anarchy, and the pervasive uncertainty they generate, security-seeking states manage competition and rivalry. Uncertainty without strategic trust is chaos. Not anarchy, but chaos. Strategic trust does not impute certainty, but confidence in the face of uncertainty. It is what tempers the fear a rising China causes in the U.S. Military-to-military relations are the mechanism through which states gather the information and build the relationships necessary to allow the dampening of that fear and uncertainty to take place.

The preceding chapters have demonstrated this. First, it established the validity of mil-mil relations and the CBM concept before proving their utility in helping to manage the most serious bilateral strategic rivalry of recent history – the Cold War. Then, through a thorough analysis of the U.S.-China military relationship, including historical trends, China’s strategic culture, mutual objectives for the relationship, and issues of implementation, it demonstrated the viability of strategic trust for explaining how China might continue to rise without trigger a war with the United States. It does not attempt to minimize the difficulty and danger of navigating that process of accommodation required of a peaceful power transition. Nor does it offer strategic trust, mil-mil relations, or CBMs as a panacea for what ill the relationship. Success is dependent on both states remaining security-seekers and committing to managing their developing rivalry in mutually beneficial ways.

Future research should be directed at two primary goals. First, build on the theoretical conception of strategic trust and apply it to a wider range of cases and contexts. For example, military-to-military relations is limited by the availability of resources, and so other mechanisms should be explored. While I strongly contend that the U.S.-China relationship is unique on account of its structural dynamics, applying the concept of strategic trust to other dyads, or even larger groupings of states, would be an important test. The U.S.-Russia relationship, for example, remains an ideal source for comparative analysis. Expanding the scope of analysis may also shed more light on the process of moving from strategic to mutual trust. Broadening the application of the concept would also help identify empirical metrics for assessing the presence and

durability of strategic trust. Second, within the context of power transitions and China's rise, the concept should be applied to other strategically important relationships in the region. The China-Taiwan relationship, or China-Japan relationship would both be excellent choices for further research. If it can be established that China has, or is attempting to develop, strategic trust with these countries, it would reinforce arguments supporting China's ability to rise peacefully.

The U.S. and China are not likely to become allies anytime soon. As China continues to rise, it will inevitably raise tensions with the United States and others in the region. It is also inevitable that as U.S. and PLA forces continue to operate in the same environments, accidents will happen, even during intentionally confrontational encounters (such as the EP-3 incident). The structural dynamics of the relationship make this unavoidable. Change disrupts stability and predictability, which in turn generates fear and uncertainty. However, this is an argument *for* mil-mil relations and the pursuit of strategic trust, not against it. In the First Century, B.C., Decimus Laberius said, "Treat your friend as if he will one day be your enemy, and your enemy as if he will one day be your friend." In the 1974 film *The Godfather: Part II*, mob boss Michael Corleone said something similar: "keep your friends close, but your enemies closer." Strategic trust is predicated on similar logic.

## Appendix 1: Interview Subjects

All interviews took place between February 14 – April 20, 2017.\*\*

**Kenneth Allen:** Senior China Analyst, Long Term Strategy Group

**Kristien Bergerson:** Senior Policy Analyst, Security & Foreign Affairs, U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission

**James Blaker:** Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Policy, 1983 – 1986; Senior Advisor to Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1994 – 1996

**Kurt Campbell:** Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian & Pacific Affairs, 2009 – 2013; Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia and the Pacific, 1995 - 2000

**Michael S. Chase:** Senior Political Scientist, RAND Corporation

**Daniel Chiu:** Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, 2012 – 2014

**Bryan Clark:** Special Assistant to Chief of Naval Operations & Director of Commander's Action Group, 2011 – 2013; Senior Fellow, Center for Strategic & Budgetary Assessments (CSBA)

**Capt. Bernard Cole, USN (Ret.):** Professor, National War College

**Cortez Cooper:** former U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer (FAO), China; Senior International Policy Analyst, RAND Corporation

**Col. John Corbett, U.S. Army (Ret.):** Army Attaché, Beijing, 1986 – 1988; Army Attaché, Hong Kong, 1992 – 1998; Senior Country Director for China, Hong Kong, & Taiwan, Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), 1998 – 2001

**Abraham Denmark:** Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, 2015 – 2017; Country Director for China Affairs (OSD), 2007 – 2009

**Peter Dutton:** Director, China Maritime Studies Institute, U.S. Naval War College

**Michael Fabey:** Defense Journalist; Author of *Crashback: The Power Clash Between the U.S. & China in the Pacific* (New York: Scribner, 2017)

**Adm. William Fallon, USN (Ret.):** Commander, PACOM, 2005 - 2007

**Douglas Feith:** Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 2001 - 2005

**Larry Ferguson:** China Analyst, Center for Naval Analyses (CNA)

**Lindsey Ford:** Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2012 – 2015; Director for Political-Security Affairs, Asia Society Policy Institute

**M. Taylor Fravel:** Associate Professor of Political Science, MIT

**Bonnie Glaser:** Senior Advisor for Asia and Director, China Power Project, Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)

**Charles Glaser:** Professor of Political Science & International Affairs, and Director, Institute for Security & Conflict Studies, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University

**Avery Goldstein:** David M. Knott Professor of Global Politics and International Relations, and Director, Center for the Study of Contemporary China, University of Pennsylvania

**Scott Harold:** Associate Director, Center for Asia Pacific Policy, and Political Scientist, RAND Corporation

**Timothy Heath:** Senior China Analyst, China Strategic Focus Group, PACOM, 2009 – 2014; China Navy Analyst, Office of Naval Intelligence, National Maritime Intelligence Center, 2000 – 2004; Senior International Defense Research Analyst, RAND Corporation

**Lonnie Henley:** former U.S. Army FAO, China; Senior Defense Intelligence Analyst for China, Defense Intelligence Agency, 2008 – 2014; Adjunct Professor, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University

**James Holmes:** J.C. Wylie Chair of Maritime Strategy, U.S. Naval War College

**Christopher Johnson:** former Senior China Analyst, Central Intelligence Agency (retired 2012); Senior Adviser and Freeman Chair in China Studies, CSIS

**Andrew Kydd:** Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison

**David Lampton:** Hyman Professor and Director of SAIS-China and China Studies, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University

**Deborah Larson:** Professor of Political Science, UCLA

**Lt. Col. Paul Mancinelli, USAF (Ret.):** Country Director, China Strategy/Policy Advisor, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014 – 2017; China Foreign Area Officer, Regional Affairs Strategist, 2008 – 2017; China Country Director, PACOM, 2011 – 2012; Senior Policy Analyst, China Strategic Focus Group, PACOM, 2012 - 2014

**Oriana Skylar Mastro:** Assistant Professor of Security Studies, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University

**John Mearsheimer:** R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science, University of Chicago

**Rear Adm. Michael McDevitt, USN (Ret.):** Senior Fellow, CNA

**David Mulrone:** Canadian Ambassador to China, 2009 - 2012

**Joseph Nye:** Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, 1994 – 1995; Chair of the National Intelligence Council, 1993 – 1994; Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus, Harvard University

**Cmdr. Jonathan Odom, JAGC, USN:** Military Professor, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies

**Adm. William Owens, USN (Ret.):** Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1994 - 1996

**Robert Ross:** Professor of Political Science, Boston College

**J. Stapleton Roy:** U.S. Ambassador to China, 1991 – 1995

**Eric Sayers:** Special Assistant to the Commander, Commander's Action Group, PACOM, 2016 - 2018; Majority Staff lead for PACOM & Asia-Pacific security policy oversight, U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, 2014 – 2016; Vice President, Beacon Global Strategies LLC

**John Schaus:** Country Director for China, OSD, 2011 – 2012; Fellow, International Security Program, CSIS

**Michael Schiffer:** Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, 2009 - 2012

**Andrew Scobell:** Senior Political Scientist, RAND Corporation

**BGen. Neal Sealock, U.S. Army (Ret.):** U.S. Defense Attaché, Beijing, 2000 – 2002

**David Sedney:** Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, 2007 – 2009; Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy, Beijing, 2004 – 2007; Deputy Director, Office of Chinese & Mongolian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 1999 – 2001

**Andrew Shearer:** former National Security Advisor to Australian Prime Ministers John Howard and Tony Abbott; Senior Advisor on Asia Pacific Security, and Director, Alliances and American Leadership Project, CSIS

**BGen. David Stillwell, USAF (Ret.):** Deputy Director for Politico-Military Affairs, Asia, Joint Staff, 2013 – 2015; Defense Attaché, Beijing, 2011 – 2013

**Mark Stokes:** Country Director for China & Taiwan, OSD, 1997 – 2004; Assistant Air Attaché, Beijing, 1992 – 1995; Executive Director, The Project 2049 Institute

**Robert Sutter:** Professor of Practice of International Affairs, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University

**Michael Swaine:** Senior Fellow, Asia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

**Ashley Tellis:** Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

**Drew Thompson:** Director for China, Taiwan, & Mongolia, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs

**Cynthia Watson:** Professor of National Security Strategy, National War College, National Defense University

**Dennis Wilder:** CIA Deputy Assistant Director for East Asia and the Pacific, 2015 – 2016; NSC Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for East Asian Affairs, 2005 – 2009; Director for China, National Security Council (NSC), 2004 – 2005; Assistant Professor of Practice, Asia Studies Program, and Senior Fellow, Initiative for U.S.-China Dialogue on Global Issues, Georgetown University

**Adm. Robert Willard, USN (Ret.):** Commander, PACOM, 2009 - 2012

**Col. Albert Willner, U.S. Army (Ret.):** former China FAO; U.S. Defense Attaché equivalent to Taiwan, 2005 – 2007; Principal Research Scientist, China Studies Division, CNA

**Jordan Wilson:** Policy Analyst, Security & Foreign Affairs, U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission

**Paul Wolfowitz:** Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2001 – 2005; Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 1989 – 1993

**Col. Larry Wortzel, U.S. Army (Ret.):** Assistant Military Attaché, Beijing, 1988-1990; Army Attaché, Beijing, 1995 – 1997; Commissioner, U.S.-China Economic & Security Review Commission, 2001 - present

**Toshi Yoshihara:** Senior Fellow, CSBA

\*\* Four additional informal conversations took place (1 in Beijing, China in August 2016 with a former senior U.S. official, 3 via e-mail between February and April 2017). Information from these interviews was used as background, however at the request of these individuals, our conversations, and their identities, are not formally acknowledged.



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