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CHINA: MILITARY DIPLOMACY TODAY

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Summary. The article examines military diplomacy and its role in China's present-day military policy in the context of wide-scale security measures serving to create a favorable international environment for implementing the country's national development strategy.

Keywords: Military diplomacy, strategic consultations, joint military exercises, cooperation within the SCO framework, antiterrorist exercises.

During the years of reform and openness to the rest of the world, military diplomacy holds an important place in China's military policy that is a part of the broad range of security measures serving to create conditions favoring implementation of the national development strategy.

Along with the globalization of security problems, military diplomacy is, in a large measure, basically related to the country's cultural heritage, in particular, to the ideas of Sun Zi, a military theorist of ancient China. In his famous treatise, *The Art of War* (512 B.C.), which still has a degree of relevance in our days as well, Sun Zi ponders how the enemy can be defeated by intellect, rather than by physical force alone. In his view, military strategy consists largely in combining knowledge and physical resources to attain a goal set. Moreover, knowledge and intellect as invisible resources are frequently more important than physical (visible) resources. Sun Zi regarded war as a complex multi-dimensional event in which both warring sides employ all measures available to them, including politics, diplomacy, science, culture, and much else.

Sun Zi's views are recognizable in the "comprehensive national power" conception adopted by China's leadership in the 1980s. According to this conception, the power of a country and its influence on international processes in our days are measured not so much in terms of its military potential as by the extent of its economic, scientific, and technological development, and also by its balanced foreign policy. "Ultimately,"

said Qian Qichen, China's Deputy Foreign Minister in the late 1980s, at the international conference on the relationship between disarmament and development, "maintaining national independence and the country's security depends on economic development, national power, and active involvement in the campaign to uphold regional and international peace, but in no way does it depend on a simple buildup of arms."¹

Today, these ideas have been developed in official documents adopted by China's State Council on national defense issues. China's National Defense White Paper 2006 says that China's military policy includes, in addition to modernization of the country's Armed Forces, expansion of military contacts with other countries on the basis of the five principle of peaceful coexistence,* and also development of military cooperation that does not result in an alliance or confrontation and is not directed against any third countries. China is actively involved in international cooperation in security maintenance; supports the mechanisms of consultations on strategic issues with world powers and its neighbors; participates in joint bilateral and multilateral military exercises; and contributes to the establishment of collective security mechanisms and confidence-building measures in military affairs. China's Armed Forces take part in UN peacekeeping operations and cooperate with other countries in fighting terrorism.²

Military diplomacy in modern China is an element of global policy and, in U.S. analysts' view, is regarded in Beijing as strategic activity.³ It is actively pursued today and becomes a key element of real state policy.

An important role is played in military diplomacy by strategic consultations involving leaders of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on security issues with major world powers, in particular, Russia, India, and the U.S., and also by strategic dialogue with other countries, such as the United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, and South Africa, that, in China's view, have a significant part in maintaining international security.

The late 20th and early 21st centuries registered conclusion of several key security agreements between China and Russia that are molded into a unique system of confidence-building measures. Specifically, these measures include mutual obligations to refrain from first use of nuclear weapons and targeting nuclear missiles at the other party, and to prevent dangerous military activities, in accordance with the military transparency principle within a borderline zone 200 kilometers wide. The 1996 Five-Party Agreement between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China on confidence-building measures near national borders and the 1997 Agreement between the same parties on mutual Armed Forces reductions close to national borders are unprecedented. The first Agreement requires the signatories "... to refrain from using force or the threat of force against one another, renounce seeking unilateral military superiority, and avoid using the forces stationed near the border as a component of the Armed Forces as a whole for attacking another party." The other agreement sets maximum manpower strength and quantity of weapons and combat hardware by each party within a borderline zone 100 kilometers wide.⁴

The Treaty of Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation signed in Moscow on July 16, 2001, between Russia and China was a major step in strengthening confidence-building measures, including those in the military field, in relations between the two countries. Russia and China reaffirmed their previous obligations in this Treaty to refrain from first use of nuclear weapons against each other or aiming nuclear missiles at targets in each other's territory (Article 2), and to undertake confidence-building

measures in the military field and reduce their respective armed forces near their common border on the basis of existing Agreements (Article 7). In the context of opposition to international terrorism, much significance is attached to Article 8 of the Treaty that requires each of the parties to ban creation and operation on their territories of organizations and groups encroaching upon the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of the other party.

In 2008, the border between Russia and China was finally adjusted in legal terms. After Russia and China signed a series of documents, in particular, the Agreement on the Eastern Section of the Border in 1991, the Agreement on the Western Section of the Border in 1994, the Supplementary Agreement on the Eastern Section of the Border in 2004, and the Supplementary Protocol Describing the Run of the Eastern Section of the Russian-Chinese Border in 2008, the full length of the international border between the two countries is set out in contractual documents. The last Agreement signed in 2004 and the Protocol attached to it draw up the borderline in the area of Bolshoy Island in the upper reaches of the Argun River in Chita Region and Tarabarov and Bolshoy Ussuriysky Islands at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers near Khabarovsk.⁵

Although differences exist in China's relations with India over disputed territories of a total area of 130,000 square kilometers in the region of Ladakh (State of Jammu and Kashmir) and along what is known as the McMahon Line in India's northeastern State of Arunachal Pradesh, a trend has set toward development of strategic partnership relations that are based on the 1988 Declaration on the Principles of Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation between China and India, the 1993 Agreement on the Maintenance of the Peace and Order along the Line of Control on the India-China Border, and the 1996 Agreement on Confidence-Building Measures in the Military Field along the Actual Control Line in Borderline Areas of India and China. Under the last-named agreement, the parties undertook to respect the actual control line in the borderline zone between China and India until the border issue is ultimately solved; to refrain from crossing the line they actually control; reduce or limit gradually the group of land forces, border troops, and paramilitary units in accordance with figures agreed on by the parties; refrain from conducting military exercises in contrast to the other party in areas adjoining the actual control line; prevent dangerous military activities; restrict the scale of military exercises and give notice of military exercises conducted on a specified scale in areas near the actual control line; avoid incidents involving intrusion of military aircraft; and reinforce communication and cooperation between the parties' military personnel and units stationed in areas adjoining the actual control line.

In the years that soon followed, the two countries' relations took a turn for the worse after Beijing's strongly negative reaction to India's withdrawal from the nuclear weapons non-proliferation agreements. Early in the 21st century, the parties resumed cooperation in their efforts to find a peaceful solution to their territorial problems under the new Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Solution of the China-India Border Issue signed in 2005 and the Joint Survey by China and India of the Outlook for the 21st Century in 2008.⁶ In the last few years, relations of strategic partnership between the two countries have gathered momentum. They have signed a series of new agreements on cooperation, including cooperation in the military field, such as conducting a series of joint antiterrorist exercises and naval exercises to practice actions to make sea lanes secure.

In their 2008 Joint Survey of the Outlook for the 21st Century, the parties undertook to "... consistently contribute to confidence-building measures by maintaining steady contacts in defense" and declared their firm adherence to "... the policy of solving sensitive differences, including the border issue, between China and India by peaceful negotiations simultaneously with moves to prevent these differences from affecting rapid development of bilateral relations between them."

In recent years, China has made attempts to resume its military ties with the U.S. that were suspended after NATO's missile strikes at China's embassy building in Belgrade in 1999 and an incident involving collision of an American reconnaissance aircraft with a Chinese fighter plane over the South China Sea in April 2001.

In September 2001, a Chinese and an American delegations met on the Guam Island within the framework of the two countries' Agreement on Consultations on Naval Matters. It was a step toward resumption of military links between the two countries. A year later, in September 2002, an Agreement on Resumption of Exchanges between China and the U.S. in the Military Field was registered among the results of the Summit.

When the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, visited China in October 2005, the two parties staked out their positions on key international and regional problems. They also gave a high assessment of the cooperation between the U.S. and China in the fight against terrorism and their efforts to keep the Korean Peninsula free from nuclear weapons. The Americans, however, voiced concern over China's military spending that the U.S. thought was more significant than the official figures released by the Chinese leaders, and emphasized the need for more openness over the issue because, they said, Beijing's "secretiveness" "aroused universal suspicion." They also expressed apprehensions about China's program to develop its missiles that could reach the U.S. Speaking at China's Academy of Military Sciences, the American Secretary of Defense called on Beijing to provide more explicit explanations of the purposes for which it developed its strategic weapons.

The visit of the U.S. Secretary of Defense to the Main Headquarters of the Strategic Nuclear Forces, one of China's top-secret institutions, was a sign of warming in Chinese-American relations.⁷ At the end of the negotiations, the parties reached agreement on the need to strengthen mutual trust and invigorate exchanges in the military field. In particular, they resolved to promote links between military higher education institutions and encourage an exchange of visits by warships.⁸ On the basis of these arrangements, Chairman of the PRC Hu Jintao and U.S. President George W. Bush meeting in April 2006 agreed to develop military contacts and cooperation. The two leaders spoke about progress, even if moderate, in greater trust and understanding on issues such as China's development option, modernization of its Armed Forces, transparency in information exchange, the Taiwan problem, the U.S. attempts to reshape the world strategically, and so on.⁹

In 2007 and 2008, military links between the two countries continued to expand rapidly. Apart from exchanges between the defense departments, contacts were maintained between Chinese military leaders from the Armed Forces Center and the country's Defense Ministry and representatives of the U.S. Pacific Command. During the visit of Admiral Timothy Keating, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, to China in January 2008, the Americans could see favorable opportunities for development of military ties between China and the U.S. In particular, they proposed more extensive

contacts between young and middle-aged servicemen and closer contacts between the two countries' navies, among others. These proposals were received with approval by the Chinese.¹⁰ Development of normal relations in this field is obstructed, however, by frictions between the two countries over the Taiwan problem. China keeps accusing the U.S. of violating the two parties' Joint Communiqué of August 17, 1982, under which the U.S. pledged to discontinue the sale of weapons to Taiwan and to break military ties with it.

In October 2008, Beijing broke off the talks on defense matters with Washington after the Bush administration had announced the sale of a large shipment of weapons to Taiwan at a cost of over \$6 billion.¹¹ From that time on, Chinese warships ventured dangerously close to American warships in neutral waters off China's coast several times. On several occasions, China refused entry into the Hong Kong harbor to U.S. warships, including two that were in need of refueling during a storm. Agreement to resume military ties between the two countries was only reached in April 2009 when Chairman of the PRC Hu Jintao had his first face-to-face meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama during the G-20 Summit in London.¹² In November 2009, the parties confirmed at the two countries' Summit in Beijing their intention to take decisive steps contributing to the development of bilateral military ties. They said so much in their Joint Declaration.¹³

China's military diplomacy at the regional level seeks to develop its relations with cross-border and neighboring countries in an effort to achieve security in the Asia-Pacific Region (APR) and in Central Asia and to prevent frictions and tensions with some of them degenerating into armed conflicts on China's borders. Over the last decade, China has undertaken vigorous efforts to settle border disputes and normalize its relations with neighboring countries. Its efforts have resulted in a significant reduction in the possibility of conflicts between countries.

China gives much importance to its participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) on Security and to cooperation in security in the China-ASEAN and ASEAN + 3 (China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) formats. Its participation produced several initiatives on cooperation in security in nontraditional fields, institutionalization of military cooperation and military exchanges, and interaction in mitigating the consequences of natural disasters.¹⁴ Besides, China's PLA takes part in multilateral security forums held within the APR boundaries, including nongovernmental conferences, in particular, the forum of representatives of the APR countries' defense departments, the forum of representatives of countries in the Western Pacific on military matters, the Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue, and so on.

China is active in multilateral cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) framework. Specifically, a series of joint documents were prepared and signed to lay a political and legal foundation for the Organization's activities. These are the 2007 Treaty on Long-term Good-Neighborly Relations, Friendship, and Cooperation, the Agreement among the Governments of the SCO Member Countries on Cooperation in the Fight against Illegal Trafficking in Weapons, Ammunition, and Explosives, and the Agreement on the Training of Professionals in the Fight against Terrorism, to name only a few.

The early 1990s were marked by normalization of relations between China and Vietnam, its southern neighbor. Withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Cambodia in

1989, and acceptance by Beijing and Hanoi of the UN plan for Cambodian settlement laid the ground for the two countries to begin transition from years of confrontation and enmity to understanding and rapprochement. In 1991, they signed a joint document that said that “a period of alienation has come to an end” and announced full normalization of relations between Vietnam and China. Relations between the two countries are built today on the basis of the 16 “Golden Characters” formulated by Beijing, namely, “Good-neighborliness and friendship, comprehensive cooperation, long-term stability, and orientation toward the future.” Following lengthy and very complicated negotiations, the two countries signed important agreements on the overland border between them and on the delimitation of the Gulf of Tonkin.¹⁵

In 2007, there were visible signs of a gradual pullback from the dead end in military relations between China and Japan. Under the previous Premier, Junichiro Koizumi, in Japan, Beijing lashed harshly at the Japanese leader’s repeated visits to the Yasukuni temple, a revered resting place of all Japanese servicemen killed in wars fought by Japan, including those who were recognized as war criminals by the International Tribunal after World War II. When a new Premier, Shinzo Abe, came to power in Tokyo in September 2006, the Japanese Government took steps to normalize relations with China. The current warming in relations, including military links, between Japan and China came as a result of a significant upturn in trade and economic relations between the two countries in recent years. In this situation, continuing tension in bilateral relations does not serve the interest of either Beijing or Tokyo.¹⁶

In August 2007, China’s Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan arrived in Tokyo on an official visit, the first in ten years, for talks with Masahiko Komura, Head of Japan’s Military Department, and for a tour of units and facilities of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces. The talks resulted in agreements on measures to reduce tensions between the two countries and exchange of visits by warships.

A year later, China and Japan agreed, within the framework of their joint statement of May 8, 2008, to encourage their military ties and expressed their intention to explore ways of expanding them, including exchanges between military educational and military research institutions.¹⁷ This process was given added momentum in the time ahead. In November 2009, China and Japan reached agreement to conduct joint naval exercises in 2010 to practice rescue operations at sea and to start talks on interaction of the two countries’ Armed Forces in emergencies; cooperation in UN-sponsored peacekeeping operations; and a mechanism for communication between their defense departments to be established.¹⁸

China’s involvement in the international practice of exchanging visits by warships is a form of its military diplomacy that it uses extensively to show the flag of its developing naval forces.

In March 1989, China’s training ship the Zheng He visited the U.S. on the first-ever visit by a Chinese warship to the Western Hemisphere. Exchange of visits has intensified in recent years. In May 2002, a squadron of Chinese warships sailed on a series of successive visits to Singapore, Egypt, Turkey, Ukraine, Greece, Portugal, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru.¹⁹ In July 2007, a detachment of Chinese warships visited St. Petersburg, Russia, Portsmouth, UK, Cadiz, Spain, and Toulon, France.²⁰ In November 2007, the Chinese navy’s missile-carrying destroyer Shenzhen pulled into the Tokyo

seaport on a first friendly visit in post-World War II history. In all, 29 detachments of China's warships visited 34 countries in recent years (2007 inclusive).²¹

Celebrations marking 60 years of China's navy in April 2009 were a significant event. Over 20 warships from 14 countries, including the U.S. destroyer Fitzgerald, took part in the naval parade off Qingdao, Shandong Province, the Northern Fleet's main naval base, at the invitation of the Chinese navy's command.

By far the greatest attention is given to relations with cross-border neighbors, including Japan, Australia, and Southeast Asian countries, as well as Russia, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, India, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. Relations with the first-named countries (Japan, Australia, and Southeast Asia) bear the imprint of unsolved problems of sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea and are maintained in accordance with the 2002 Declaration on the Principles of Activity in the South China Sea. Another group includes countries in West Asia, Africa, and Latin America where China wanted to exercise its influence using long-serving PLA officers as military advisors there in the past. These countries are still important to China today as suppliers of natural resources, fuels in the first place, and also as markets for Chinese manufactures. Countries in a third group are Western Europe, Canada, and the U.S. Western Europe is for China a key center of power in today's multipolar world and a source of modern dual-purpose technologies (suitable for civilian and military applications). The PLA's military ties can reinforce Beijing's diplomatic efforts to establish strong relations with this part of the world that possesses enormous economic and technological resources.

Taiwan is an exception from this area of China's diplomatic efforts because Beijing regards it as an integral part of China's territory.

Apart from creating a favorable military security environment and protecting the country's sovereignty, military diplomacy is expected to contribute to modernization of China's Armed Forces.²² Efforts are focused here on gaining access for high- and middle-level PLA officers to the latest in modern military science, particularly, military doctrine, military art, organization of operational and combat training for staffs and troops, military medicine, and several related areas. Commanding officers of the PLA's combat units of the size of division and brigade, military districts, central control bodies, and the PLA's General Staff are assigned regularly for training in other countries. In 2005 and 2006, over 500 Chinese servicemen in these groups were assigned on training missions to more than 20 countries. Meanwhile, almost 2,000 servicemen from over 140 countries received training at China's military educational establishments.²³ This trend held in 2006 to 2008, when more than 900 students of China's military educational establishments were sent to receive training in over 30 countries, and nearly 4,000 servicemen from more than 130 countries came to China for training. Broad use is made of bilateral ties between Chinese military educational establishments and their foreign counterparts. Such ties are maintained today with 20 countries, including the U.S., Russia, Japan, and Pakistan.²⁴

China is vigorously promoting cooperation with Russia in this area. For example, the Russian and Chinese Defense Ministers meeting in May 2002 revealed, among other things, that 2,000 PLA officers received training in Russia over the previous few years, and another 200 officers continued their studies at Russian military educational establishments.²⁵ In 2006, over 140 Chinese servicemen studied at Russian higher education institutions, including the General Staff Academy. Besides, crews of surface

and subsurface ships, aircraft, air defense systems, and so on receive training regularly at Russian training centers under contracts for delivery of Russian weapons and heavy military equipment to China.²⁶

A steady trend toward expansion and diversification of external military contacts, flexibility, and variety of their forms has been set in the past two decades.

China today has established and maintains military relations with more than 150 countries. Military attaché offices have been staffed and are operational at 109 Chinese embassies, and 98 countries have set up their military attaché offices in Beijing. In 2007 and 2008, high-level PLA military delegations went to over 40 countries, while, in its turn, China received more than 60 military delegations led by defense ministers and chiefs of general staffs. Hotlines have been put into operation between the China's military department and its counterparts in Russia and the U.S. Progress has been made in promoting military ties between China and Japan.²⁷

Beginning in 2002, the PLA is becoming an increasingly more active participant in military exercises conducted jointly with armies of other countries, and exchange of observers at military exercises is developing into a more widespread practice. Between 2002 and 2009, the PLA took part in 17 joint exercises and four joint training games with the Armed Forces of neighboring countries,²⁸ and China's military observers were assigned to attend military exercises in Turkey, Thailand, Pakistan, India, the U.S., and Australia. In turn, military experts and observers from 24 countries were present, at the PLA invitation, at the exercises code-named the Northern Sword 2005 of the Beijing Military District's Forces in September 2005.²⁹

In May 2007, the Chinese Navy participated in multinational naval exercises conducted in the southern area of the South China Sea to practice joint actions by different countries' navies to fight pirates and repel terrorist attacks, and also to mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. Apart from China's naval forces, warships from the U.S., India, France, Japan, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea were involved in the exercises.³⁰ China shows interest in these exercises because measures to enforce security of navigation in the Singapore and Malacca straits that it uses to import up to 80% of its oil needs are critical to the country's economy. This area is currently under control of the coastal guard forces of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore with support from the U.S. Navy.³¹

In March 2009, China participated in the multinational antiterrorist exercises staged by naval forces from the U.S., France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Japan. The exercises were initiated by Pakistan to practice cooperation in operations to maintain security of sea shipping, including the fight against pirates, and spread over a large area including the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, and the Malacca Strait.³²

Between 2005 and 2009, bilateral antiterrorist Russian-Chinese military exercises were successfully conducted by Russia and China under the code names Peace Mission 2005 and Peace Mission 2009, with multilateral military exercises, Peace Mission 2007, held in between within the SCO framework to demonstrate the potential of the SCO member countries' Armed Forces to face up to the threats and challenges of the 21st century, above all terrorism, separatism, and extremism. According to assessments from the Russian side, the joint practical operations of the Russian and Chinese armed forces are gaining in efficiency from exercises to exercises.³³

The Agreement signed in June 2007 between the SCO member countries on joint exercises created a legal framework for preparing and conducting them on a regular basis in the future. Agreement has been reached to hold the next joint military exercises in 2010.³⁴

It may be assumed that the efforts of military diplomacy as a component of China's foreign policy will be focused on maintaining military security in the world and region, contributing to modernization of the defense potential, and involvement in the fight against international terrorism and piracy. Special attention will be given to opposition to the joint U.S.-Japanese project to deploy a theater missile defense system, with Taiwan joining in. This project would tilt the balance of forces in the Asia-Pacific Region and put up obstacles to the solution of China's strategic task – settling the Taiwan problem.

The world financial crisis has not had an appreciable effect on the growth of China's defense budget, which is still a priority and grows at rates above those registered by the economy: official defense spending (military budget appropriations) for 2009 rose to \$70 billion from \$61 billion in 2008 (an increase of 14.8%), while China's GDP is expected to register growth of about 9%. This prioritization has helped maintain favorable conditions for advancement of military diplomacy that remained very active in 2009, with the scale and number of visits larger than they were in previous years – a good foundation to maintain and expand China's existing military ties with other countries in 2010.³⁵

On another assumption, China's program for expanding military contacts in the near future will grow in terms of numbers and geographic spread. Along with measures to create favorable external conditions to promote security and contribute to modernization of the country's military potential, military diplomacy will be used to develop and strengthen China's relations with countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America as a way to solve its most pressing problem – meeting the needs of China's growing economy for natural resources and fuels and in markets for Chinese goods in the face of the world financial crisis.

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