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China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia

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Abstract: *Consonant with global trends, China's defense diplomacy has broadened in the pursuit of new foreign policy and security goals. While realpolitik still informs China's military relations with Southeast Asian countries, Beijing has also utilized defense diplomacy to build cooperative relations, underscore its "peaceful development" thesis, increase transparency, and assuage regional anxieties concerning its rising power. Over the past decade, China has stepped up arms sales to the region, military exchanges and naval ship visits, initiated annual defense and security dialogues, and combined training and exercises. However, China's defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia still faces barriers, including tensions generated by sovereignty disputes in the South China Sea, the poor reputation of Chinese weapon systems, and second-order impacts on Southeast Asian countries' existing defense relationships.*

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Relations between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the countries of Southeast Asia have undergone a remarkable transformation since the end of the Cold War. During the span of two decades, China has become one of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) largest and most dynamic trade partners and a key player in ASEAN-led multilateral forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Plus Three, and the East Asia Summit. However, although economic and political ties have strengthened considerably, defense and security cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries has developed at a much slower pace. This is unsurprising. A prerequisite for close military ties is high levels of trust, and the ASEAN states have yet to achieve that with each other, let alone with the PRC. Moreover, although the ASEAN states have, on balance, greatly benefited from China's phenomenal economic growth, the country's growing military power has aroused concern across the region. Emblematic of these concerns is China's increasingly assertive behavior in the South China Sea. To varying degrees, Southeast Asian states have hedged against a rising China – engaging the PRC politically and economically but supporting and facilitating a strong US military presence to balance China. Practical impediments have also slowed the development of Sino–Southeast Asian military ties, including the absence of framework agreements, language barriers, and the lack of interoperability.

Despite these problems, since the early 2000s, military interaction between China and the countries of Southeast Asia has deepened. This is due in part to a set of agreements between the PRC and each of the 10 ASEAN members in 1999–2000, which were designed to expand and deepen bilateral relations. In addition, China has been

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more proactive in its defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia for five main reasons. First, increased defense and security dialogue with individual ASEAN states provides the PRC with opportunities to promote its "peaceful development" thesis and explain its foreign and defense policies to foreign audiences. Second, dialogue also helps China better understand the interests and concerns of neighboring countries. Third, combined training and exercise helps build trust between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its Southeast Asian counterparts, and exposes the Chinese military to foreign doctrines, tactics, and equipment. Fourth, arms sales to the region generate revenue, but more importantly, they have enabled the PRC to expand its influence in several Southeast Asian countries, particularly Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand. Fifth, military assistance can be utilized to offset or undermine extant security relationships between ASEAN members and other external powers.

This article explores the development of China's defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on the period from 2000 to 2010. It begins by looking at global trends in defense diplomacy, followed by an assessment of how China's military cooperation with foreign countries has evolved during the past six decades. The article then goes on to examine in detail the various aspects of China's defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia, including the establishment of annual defense and security consultations, educational exchanges, arms sales, combined exercises, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations, and naval diplomacy.

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Defense Diplomacy in the Post–Cold War Era

Since the end of the Cold War, the concept and practice of defense diplomacy have evolved in response to changing national priorities and the challenges posed by a more uncertain, interdependent, and complex security environment. During the era of superpower rivalry, defense diplomacy – then more commonly referred to as military assistance or defense cooperation – was used by competing countries to pursue geostrategic goals, including strengthening the military capabilities of friends and allies against common enemies – both internal and external – and to sustain spheres of influence.[1] In short, during the Cold War, the purpose of defense diplomacy was to establish or expand influence in foreign countries and check the influence of adversaries.

Undoubtedly, realpolitik considerations continue to inform the defense diplomacy activities of governments and their armed forces around the world. The pursuit of political, economic, and military influence remains a key goal of defense diplomacy. Indeed, contemporary defense diplomacy includes many of the same kinds of activities undertaken during the Cold War. These include the posting of defense attachés overseas, the regular exchange of civilian and uniformed delegations, naval ship and military aircraft visits, combined training and exercises,[2] educational programs for foreign military officers, capacity-building support and arms sales, and bilateral or multilateral defense cooperation agreements and treaties. For the United States – the world's strongest military power – its definition of defense diplomacy (which it prefers to call "security cooperation") still emphasizes the country's national interests and strategic priorities. According to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the aim of security cooperation is to: "Build relationships that promote specified U.S. interests; Build allied

and friendly nation capabilities for self-defense and coalition operations; Provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access."[3]

In general, however, governments around the world have broadened the scope of defense diplomacy to include wider foreign-policy and security goals such as preserving peace and stability, promoting common security, and addressing transnational threats. Cottey and Forster have defined this "new" defense diplomacy as "the peacetime cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defense ministries) as a tool of foreign and security policy,"[4] while Anton Du Pressis has described modern defense diplomacy as "the use of armed forces in operations other than war, building on their trained experience and discipline to achieve national and foreign objectives abroad."[5] Nicholas Floyd concisely defines defense diplomacy as a "foreign policy force multiplier."[6]

Security analysts have identified five new areas of defense diplomacy: first, to strengthen cooperation with former enemies and engage potential adversaries to dispel mistrust, improve communication, and promote mutual understanding. The central aim is to prevent interstate conflicts. In other words, this aspect of defense diplomacy is a form of preventive diplomacy. NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program is the exemplar of the former. Introduced in 1994, PfP seeks to strengthen security relations with "Euro Atlantic" countries (predominantly former members of the Warsaw Pact, including Russia), in some cases with a view to eventual membership of NATO.[7] A good example of the latter is the development, albeit slowly, of Sino–US military-to-military relations since the early 1990s designed to build confidence and cooperation between their respective armed forces.

Second, as has been most clearly articulated by Britain's Ministry of Defence (MoD), defense diplomacy is used to advance security-sector reform in foreign militaries, especially the development of democratically accountable armed forces and respect for human rights. This serves the wider goal of fostering liberal democracy and good governance.[8]

Third, defense diplomacy has been employed to counter the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), especially post–September 11, 2001. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States has spearheaded a number of counter-WMD initiatives such as the Container Security Initiative and the more controversial Proliferation Security Initiative. In addition to nonproliferation, Britain's MoD also includes arms control measures as part of its defense diplomacy.[9]

The fourth new area of defense diplomacy is preparing for, and undertaking, HADR operations. HADR has become an increasingly important area of defense diplomacy, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, which is prone to natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and flooding. The multinational HADR operations launched in the wake of the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami in December 2004 and the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011 underscore the crucial role of military forces in responding to natural disasters.

The fifth new area of defense diplomacy is peacekeeping and developing the peacekeeping capabilities of foreign militaries so they can contribute to UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs), the number of which has increased considerably since the end of the Cold War.

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K. A. Muthanna neatly sums up these "new" areas of defense diplomacy as the creation of "sustainable cooperative relationships, thereby building trust and facilitating conflict prevention; introducing transparency into defence relations; building and reinforcing perceptions of common interests; changing the mind-set of partners; and introducing cooperation in other areas."[10]

China's Evolving Defense Diplomacy

China has considerably stepped up its defense diplomacy during the past decade, especially with Asian neighbors, in particular in South Asia including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. The PLA's interaction with the armed forces of other countries is detailed in China's biennial defense white papers, which have been issued by the Information Office of the State Council since 1998. Defense diplomacy activities are described under the heading of "International Security Cooperation." China's defense white papers refer to defense diplomacy as "military diplomacy." For example, the 2000 white paper states, "Military diplomacy should serve the state's diplomacy and the modernization of national defense and the armed forces," while the 2004 white paper notes, "The PLA conducts active military exchanges and cooperation with militaries of other countries and has created a military diplomacy that is all-directional, multi-tiered and wide-ranging."[11] For the sake of consistency, however, the term defense diplomacy will be used throughout this article.

Has China's defense diplomacy followed a similar progression to that of other major military powers since the end of the Cold War? In some respects, it has, though there are significant differences between China's defense diplomacy and that practiced by Western liberal democracies.

During the Cold War, China's defense diplomacy was governed by ideological and geostrategic imperatives. Much of the country's defense diplomacy activities took place in Southeast Asia where it took the form of military assistance to Communist nonstate actors and friendly governments with mutual threat perceptions. From its foundation in 1949 until the late 1970s, the PRC provided money, training, and equipment to Communist movements in Indochina, Burma, and Thailand. The largest recipient of Chinese military assistance was the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (or North Vietnam). During the First and Second Indochina Wars (1949–54 and 1964–75, respectively), Beijing transferred massive amounts of military aid to the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), assistance that was critical to Hanoi's military successes against French and US forces. Beijing provided military support to Hanoi from 1949 until 1975 because of their shared Communist ideology but also because China had a geostrategic interest in keeping potentially hostile powers out of Indochina so as to protect its vulnerable southern flank. For this reason, China also provided military assistance to Communist parties in Laos and Cambodia, which were victorious in 1975.[12]

When the Second Indochina War ended in 1975, Beijing terminated all military assistance to Hanoi. As Sino–Vietnamese relations deteriorated, and Vietnam moved closer to China's enemy, the Soviet Union, Beijing stepped up military support for Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia) during 1975–78 in an attempt to forestall Soviet-backed Vietnamese expansionism in Indochina.[13] Following Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, China provided military assistance to anti–Vietnamese

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Khmer Rouge guerrilla forces in the Northwest of the country. China also forged a de facto military alliance with Thailand, a country that felt threatened by Vietnam. During the 1980s, China furnished the Royal Thai Army (RTA) with tanks, armored personnel carriers (APCs), and antiaircraft guns at no cost or at heavily discounted "friendship prices." These assets were deployed along the Thai–Cambodian border to counter the PAVN. In return, the Thai military facilitated the delivery of Chinese arms to the Khmer Rouge.[14] China's military assistance to both the Khmer Rouge and the RTA ended when Vietnam withdrew its forces from Cambodia in 1989. In that same year, however, Thailand ordered six frigates from China.[15]

In the first decade of the post–Cold War era, China's defense diplomacy was mainly conducted bilaterally but also took on a multilateral dimension. The most significant development in this respect was China's participation in the ARF, the multilateral security forum established in 1994. China was initially skeptical of the ARF but gradually became more comfortable with the multilateral process, especially in the second half of the 1990s when it recognized that such forums provided useful platforms to promote the country's foreign and defense policies.

China's participation in the ARF became more proactive after 2000. In 2000, China hosted the Fourth ARF Meeting of Heads of Defense Colleges and also began contributing to the ARF's Annual Security Outlook.[16] In 2003, China proposed the establishment of a Security Policy Conference (SPC) to promote dialogue among senior military personnel from ARF countries, and a year later, it hosted its first meeting. The SPC may have been proposed by China as a rival to the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD), the annual meeting of Asia-Pacific defense ministers sponsored by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies and held in Singapore every year since 2002. China's participation in the SLD was unenthusiastic in the forum's initial stages, but since the mid-2000s, it has adopted a more positive attitude. It was not until 2011, however, that a Chinese defense minister attended the SLD. In the second half of the decade, China hosted ARF seminars on a range of issues including nontraditional security issues, preventing the proliferation of WMDs, and counterterrorism. China's participation in the ARF has been very encouraging, but 18 years into the process, the forum has yet to tackle any of the region's "hard" security issues such as territorial disputes. Instead, increasingly, the focus seems to be on transnational threats and HADR cooperation.

Outside of the ARF framework, China and ASEAN have inked several agreements to improve security cooperation. In 2002, the two sides issued a Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Field of Nontraditional Security Issues, and in 2004, this was followed by a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to operationalize it.[17] The 2003 Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity touched on security issues by reiterating the importance of the "concept of enhancing mutual trust through dialogue, resolving disputes peacefully through negotiations and realizing regional security through cooperation."[18] Specifically, the declaration called for ASEAN and China to implement the 2002 nontraditional security issues declaration and for an "ASEAN–China security related dialogue." A follow-up plan of action in 2004 was more detailed and proposed dialogues, consultations, and seminars on security and defense issues, military personnel training, observance of each other's

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exercises, and the "possibility of conducting bilateral or multilateral joint military exercises."[19] Most of the initiatives suggested in the plan of action have been implemented at either the multilateral or bilateral level. For instance, a four-day meeting of senior defense officials from China and the ASEAN countries took place in Beijing in July 2006 and covered issues such as maritime security, counterterrorism, HADR, and peacekeeping.[20] In 2008, the China–ASEAN Dialogue between senior defense scholars was hosted by China, with a second meeting in 2009.[21] These dialogues have presented Chinese officials with further opportunities to explain the country's defense modernization plans.

Another dimension to ASEAN–China defense diplomacy was added in 2010 with the establishment of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). The ADMM-Plus brings together defense ministers from the 10 ASEAN countries and their counterparts from eight dialogue partners, namely the United States, Japan, China, India, Russia, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.[22] At the inaugural meeting, it was decided to establish working groups in five priority areas: maritime security, counterterrorism, HADR, military medicine, and peacekeeping.[23] The ADMM-Plus will meet every three years, with the next meeting scheduled for Brunei in 2013.

As with the other major powers, however, China's post–Cold War defense diplomacy has focused on bilateral cooperation. In the 1990s especially, China's defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia continued to emphasize military assistance to friendly governments. Myanmar and Cambodia were the principal recipients. However, unlike the Cold War era, China's primary motivation was to gain political and economic influence in those countries rather than to counter mutually perceived enemies.

In 1988–89, Myanmar's military government turned to China for financial and diplomatic support in the face of international criticism and sanctions following the crackdown on antigovernment protesters in 1988. Sensing a golden opportunity to improve relations with its strategically located and resource-rich southern neighbor, Beijing responded positively. An immediate priority for the junta was military hardware to maintain internal security and deter foreign intervention.[24] In 1989, China agreed to provide Myanmar's armed forces (the *Tatmadaw*), with an extensive range of military equipment. During the 1990s, China transferred to Myanmar 200 tanks, 100 artillery pieces, 300 APCs, hundreds of transport vehicles, tens of thousands of rifles, small arms and ammunition, 56 F-7 fighter-bombers, 50 close air support and ground-attack aircraft, dozens of helicopters, and 30 naval vessels.[25] The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates the total value of Chinese defense equipment delivered to Myanmar between 1989 and 2008 at $1.757 billion.[26] According to Andrew Selth, the equipment and training provided by China during this period transformed the *Tatmadaw* from a "small, weak counter-insurgency force" into a "powerful defense force capable of major conventional operations."[27]

China also used military assistance to help Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen consolidate power after 1997. In July 1997, Hun Sen, who held the position of second prime minister, ousted First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranaridh in a violent coup. The country's largest donors, including Australia, Japan, the United States, and European countries, suspended all aid. The PRC, however, immediately recognized the results

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of the coup and extended a $10 million soft loan to Cambodia, $2.8 million of which was used to purchase military vehicles and small arms from the PRC. The hardware was used to equip units of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) loyal to Hun Sen.[28] Subsequently, China provided financial support to the RCAF for demobilization, construction materials for military barracks, schools, and hospitals, and the refurbishment of the Khmer Rouge era Kampong Chhnang airfield.[29] The provision of military aid enabled the PRC to expand its influence in Cambodia. Since the 1997 coup, Sino–Cambodia political and economic ties with the PRC have strengthened, and Phnom Penh has supported Beijing on a number of domestic and international issues.

Realpolitik considerations aside, China's defense diplomacy broadened in the 2000s commensurate with new foreign-policy and security goals. At the turn of the new century, China sought to burnish its image and assuage regional anxieties engendered by its rising political, economic, and military power. A diplomatic "charm offensive" was launched in Southeast Asia in the early 2000s, which was designed to send two messages: first, that China's economic growth was the rising tide that lifted all boats and therefore contributed to regional peace and prosperity; and second, that China was a benign power that did not pose a strategic threat to its neighbors even as its military capabilities grew stronger. Chinese leaders promulgated the "peaceful rise/development" thesis: that China would continue to rely on the forces of globalization to achieve economic development goals, eschewing territorial expansion or hegemony.[30] Later, peaceful rise/development was replaced with "harmonious development." It included familiar themes in Chinese foreign policy such as the importance of multilateralism to realize common security and upholding mutually beneficial cooperation to achieve prosperity, but it also signaled that China was ready to pursue a more proactive and assertive role in international affairs.[31]

Defense diplomacy was harnessed to promote China's "peaceful/harmonious development" paradigm and charm offensive. Military exchanges, defense and security dialogues, and combined exercises with the armed forces of foreign countries were initiated or stepped up. Increased interaction with foreign civilian and military officials provided Chinese security practitioners with regular opportunities to communicate the country's foreign and defense policies. Such exchanges also help mitigate criticism that the modernization of China's armed forces lacks transparency. Since 2003, for instance, foreign military observers have been invited to attend PLA exercises. As the 2008 defense white paper states, 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."[32] In reality, of course, China's defense diplomacy serves a dual purpose: Although Beijing is keen to reassure neighboring countries, it is also eager to showcase its growing military capabilities. A strong military underscores China's great-power status and is also an exercise in deterrence.

In keeping with its Western counterparts, China's defense diplomacy has been widened to include noncombat missions such as peacekeeping and HADR. These became part of the PLA's "new historic missions" in 2004.[33] Even before 2004, however, China had become an active participant in UNPKOs.[34] China's contribution

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to peacekeeping missions serves a number of purposes: It demonstrates the PRC's commitment to its international responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council; it helps promote the image of a peaceful China; and it contributes to the professionalization of its military and police forces in terms of training and field experience.[35] Similarly, China's participation in HADR operations enhances its credentials as a benign and responsible rising power, while also providing its security forces with valuable field experience.

While China's defense diplomacy, like that of many Western countries, has evolved to take on new missions in the post–Cold War era, the overlap is not perfect. As noted earlier, security sector reform, and the development of democratically accountable armed forces in particular, has become an important element of Western defense diplomacy. And post–September 11, 2001, so have counter-WMD proliferation efforts. But for China, neither of these areas is accorded the same priority. China's longstanding position is that it does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. As an authoritarian state, China is not in a position to advise on civil–military relations in a democratic state. Indeed, China has come under criticism for providing military assistance to regimes with poor human rights records, such as Myanmar, Zimbabwe, and the Sudan. And although the PRC has voiced support for nonproliferation, it is not part of its defense diplomacy activities due to sovereignty concerns.

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China's Bilateral Defense Diplomacy in Southeast Asia, 2000–10

Prior to 2000, China's military cooperation with Southeast Asia was limited to a handful of countries. Since then, however, China's defense diplomacy has been extended to all 10 ASEAN members and prospective member Timor-Leste. It has also been broadened beyond arms sales/transfers to include a range of cooperative activities including annual defense consultations, educational and think-tank exchanges, combined exercises, and discussions on defense industry collaboration. The foundation of this new defense diplomacy was laid through a series of joint statements signed by China and each of the ASEAN countries in 1999–2000, the purpose of which was to strengthen bilateral cooperation across a broad spectrum of activities. The language employed and the range of activities proposed differ, however, for each ASEAN member, reflecting in part the closeness of relations. It should be noted that political interaction and especially economic interaction were given a much higher priority than defense cooperation in these joint statements.

Thailand, China's closest partner in mainland Southeast Asia, was the first country to issue a joint statement on enhanced cooperation with the PRC in February 1999. In terms of defense diplomacy, the two sides agreed to strengthen "cooperation between their strategic and security research institutes, [and] strengthen consultations between their military personnel and diplomatic officials on security issues, exchange between the two militaries of each other's experience in humanitarian rescue assistance and disaster reduction, and exchanges of military science and technology as well as information of all kinds."[36] Malaysia and China issued a similar joint statement in May 1999, which called on the two countries to promote defense cooperation through visits, exchange of information/intelligence, and the "possibility of identifying joint or co-production projects in defense industry."[37] The third joint statement, between Myanmar and

China, did not address defense cooperation directly, presumably because cooperation in that area had already been covered in a series of agreements signed during the 1990s. The China–Brunei joint statement of August 1999 merely expressed an interest in bilateral defense cooperation.[38] The Sino–Indonesian joint communiqué of August 1999 included an aspiration to strengthen cooperation in "military circles" without providing any details.[39] The May 2000 Sino–Singapore joint statement called for high-level visits, dialogue between defense institutions, and "exchanges between professional groups of their armed forces."[40] A month later, the joint statement of China and the Philippines promised "exchanges between their military establishments on matters relating to humanitarian rescue and assistance, disaster relief and mitigation."[41] China's efforts to promote bilateral relations in Southeast Asia were capped in late 2000 with joint statements with Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The text of the Sino–Lao statement called for the strengthening of "friendly interaction" between their respective armed forces while the Sino–Cambodia text contained a similar clause.[42] The Vietnam–China statement made no mention of military cooperation, a reflection of continued sensitivities over disputed territories and maritime boundary claims in the South China Sea.

To operationalize the commitments made in these joint statements, subsequent MOUs are required. However, since 1999–2000, only Thailand and Indonesia have concluded such agreements. The May 2007 Joint Action Plan on Thailand–China Strategic Cooperation calls on the two sides to maintain military dialogue and exchange visits, conduct combined military exercises focused on countering nontraditional security threats, and promote further cooperation in the fields of military training, logistics, personnel training, academic exchanges, defense consultation, mutual observance of military exercises, disaster relief and rescue, and the defense industry. Part III is devoted to security cooperation and recommends enhancing cooperation in the following areas of nontraditional security: counterterrorism and antiterrorism; trafficking in illegal narcotics, people, and arms; money laundering, cyber and financial crime; and piracy at sea. To that end, it proposes the regular exchange of officials and experts, capacity building through training and study visits, and the convening of a Thailand–China Joint Working Group on Nontraditional Security Cooperation as a mechanism to exchange views and share information among relevant law enforcement agencies.[43] The Joint Action Plan was followed by combined exercises between the Chinese and Thai armed forces in 2007 and 2008 (which will be discussed more later). No other ASEAN country has yet to sign such a detailed Joint Action Plan with the PRC.

Indonesia and China followed up their 1999 joint statement with a declaration on "Building a Strategic Partnership" in April 2005. Among the 28 key measures identified was a commitment to promote closer military–security ties, specifically developing each other's defense industries, the establishment of a defense consultation mechanism, and the need to boost cooperation between national law enforcement and intelligent agencies in the fight against transnational security threats.[44] In contrast with Sino–Thai military-to-military cooperation, Sino–Indonesian military activities have been slower to develop though, as described in subsequent sections, China has sold limited amounts of defense equipment to Indonesia, some defense industrial cooperation is moving forward, and their armed forces have conducted combined exercises.

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The following sections examine in detail how these bilateral agreements helped broaden the scope of defense cooperation between China and Southeast Asian countries in the following areas: defense attachés, high-level exchanges and annual defense and security consultations; defense education programs; arms sales, grant aid, and defense technology cooperation; combined training and exercises; peacekeeping and HADR; and naval diplomacy.

Defense Attachés, Exchanges, and Annual Security Dialogues

In-country representation is vital to the success of a country's defense diplomacy, and this role is fulfilled by defense attaché offices. Defense attachés are stationed at diplomatic missions and are the primary point of contact with the host nation's armed forces. The role of a defense attaché is to nurture and expand bilateral defense cooperation, articulate the country's defense policy, collect information on political and security affairs, manage security assistance programs, and arrange to escort visiting delegations. According to the US Department of Defense (DoD), in 2010, China had more than 300 defense attaché staff posted abroad, up from 201 in 2002. In the same year, 102 countries had defense attachés in China, up from 79 in 1996.[45] By the early 1990s, China had normalized or established diplomatic relations with the current 10 ASEAN members allowing for the establishment of defense attaché offices in each others' capitals. China and Timor-Leste exchanged defense attachés when the latter gained formal independence in 2002.

China and Southeast Asian countries have exchanged high-level defense delegations, both from their civilian defense department and the various military services, on a regular basis since the end of the Cold War. Delegations have been led by defense ministers, service chiefs, general staff, and the heads of national defense colleges. Although these visits provide important opportunities to discuss regional security issues and future defense cooperation, their ad-hoc nature is no substitute for regular institutionalized meetings. An important development in China–Southeast Asia relations since 2000 has been the establishment of annual defense and security consultations between China and six ASEAN countries. These forums have provided a useful mechanism for both sides to exchange views on regional security issues and advance military cooperation.

The first ASEAN country to hold annual defense and security consultations with China was Thailand.[46] This not only reflected the close and cordial relationship between the two countries, which has existed since the late 1970s, but also that many of China's diplomatic or military bilateral initiatives with Southeast Asian countries are often offered to Thailand first. The talks, inaugurated in 2001, led to a series of combined exercises. Vietnam became the second Southeast Asian country to establish annual defense talks with China in April 2005, followed by the Philippines in May 2005.[47] Significantly, however, annual defense and security talks between China and Vietnam and China and the Philippines have failed to mitigate rising tensions over territorial and maritime boundary claims in the South China Sea since 2007, presumably because the problem has not been dealt with in a substantive manner. Indonesia and China began annual defense consultations in 2006, followed by Singapore and China in 2008.[48] In September 2012, Malaysia and China held their first defense and

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security consultation.[49] To date, China has not established annual defense consultations with Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, or Timor-Leste for reasons that are unclear.

Defense Education

Training courses and educational programs for foreign military officers are an essential component of defense diplomacy. Courses offered cover a range of subjects including language instruction, functional and technical training, and academic programs at staff colleges and defense universities. Foreign military participation is important for two reasons. First, it allows overseas officers to share ideas with their classmates, thus facilitating an exchange of views on regional and international security issues. This helps change mind sets, or at the very least creates a better appreciation of other countries' perspectives, which in turn increases mutual understanding. Second, it creates formal and informal professional networks that can be vital in crisis situations.

China has been providing educational and training opportunities for foreign military personnel since the early 1970s.[50] The PLA also sends officers to overseas educational institutions. Although Beijing has not issued detailed statistics, the 2008 defense white paper states that between 2005 and 2007, China sent more than 900 "military students" overseas, that 20 military educational institutions in China have established exchange programs with their overseas counterparts, and that during an unstated period of time, "some 4,000 military personnel from more than 130 countries have come to China to study at Chinese military educational institutions."[51]

Military officers from Southeast Asian countries attend educational programs in China, and vice versa, though the precise figures are not in the public domain. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Southeast Asian officers who attend courses in China at institutions such as the National Defense University in Beijing have been dissatisfied with the quality of education as instructors seldom deviate from the official line and because PLA and foreign military officers are taught separately.[52] As such, defense courses in Western countries such as the United States, Britain, and Australia are more sought after by senior Southeast Asian military officers.

Arms Sales, Grant Aid, and Defense Technology Cooperation

The PRC is not a major player in the global arms industry, though during the past decade, sales to countries in the developing world have increased. In 2003–06, China made 4 percent of all arms transfers agreements worldwide, amounting to $7.2 billion. In 2007–10, the PRC's share dropped to 3 percent, or $8.1 billion. During the period 2003–10, China was the fifth largest supplier of global arms. However, Chinese arms sales were dwarfed by those of the two largest players, the United States and Russia. In 2007–10, for instance, the United States accounted for 46 percent of global arms transfers ($107.4 billion) and Russia accounted for 16 percent ($38.43 billion).[53] China's main arms exports are tanks and self-propelled guns, artillery, APCs, patrol boats, combat aircraft, and surface-to-air and anti-ship missiles (ASMs). The PRC's main customers are developing countries with limited defense budgets or states under military sanctions by Western countries. China has transferred military equipment

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to developing states at significant discounts or at cost, often using military grant aid. Beijing has also accepted payment through barter trade, though this mode of transaction is becoming increasingly less common.

According to SIPRI, between 2000 and 2010, China's main overseas markets for arms sales were South Asia (principally Pakistan; $7.3 billion), North Africa and the Middle East ($1.5 billion), and sub-Saharan Africa ($732 million).[54] Arms transfers to Southeast Asia amounted to a mere $394 million, nearly half of which went to Myanmar. SIPRI records Chinese arms sales to seven Southeast Asian countries: Cambodia ($64 million), Indonesia ($30 million), Laos ($7 million), Malaysia ($5 million), Myanmar ($183 million), Thailand ($85 million), and Timor-Leste ($20 million). Sales to Southeast Asia represented approximately 6 percent of China's total global sales.[55]

PRC arms transfers to Southeast Asia are motivated in part, of course, by commercial considerations. However, the primary reason is to gain or increase influence in the recipient country. Mention has already been made of PRC support for the governments of Myanmar and Cambodia in the 1990s. In the 2000s, deliveries of Chinese-manufactured equipment to Myanmar continued, albeit on a reduced scale. As noted above, SIPRI estimates Chinese defense sales to Myanmar in 2000–10 to be $183 million, compared with $1.594 billion in 1989–99.[56] This reflects the Myanmar government's desire to reduce dependence on the PRC by diversifying the sources of its defense acquisitions to include countries such as Russia and North Korea, but it is also due to a reduction in purchases of foreign arms as a whole. Chinese arms sales to the Hun Sen government also continued into the 2000s. In particular, the PRC helped the Royal Cambodian Navy (RCN) to significantly improve its capabilities. In 2005, the PRC provided soft loans for the acquisition of 15 patrol boats for the RCN; the 9 patrol boats delivered in 2007 were reportedly valued at $60 million.[57] The vessels will be used to protect Cambodia's maritime resources, including off-shore energy fields in the Gulf of Thailand, to which Chinese state-owned energy companies are interested in gaining exclusive rights.[58]

Beijing has also used defense diplomacy to gain influence in Timor-Leste. Since the country broke away from Indonesia in 1999 and gained formal independence in 2002, the PRC has set its sights on becoming Dili's long-term Asian partner, principally because it wants access to the country's rich natural resources, especially crude oil and natural gas. Defense diplomacy has played an important role in China's overtures toward Timor-Leste. In 2002–04, Beijing donated approximately $1 million worth of nonlethal military equipment to the country's fledgling armed forces, the Falintil-Forcas Defesa Timor Leste (F-FDTL), including tents, uniforms, and transport vehicles, and financed accommodation for senior officers to the tune of $6 million.[59] China's capacity-building support for the F-FDTL was small-scale in comparison with countries such as Australia and Portugal, but since 2007, the PRC has become a major player in Timor-Leste's defense sector. In 2008, Beijing agreed to finance construction of office complexes for the Ministry of Defense and Security and the headquarters of the F-FDTL, estimated to cost $10 million.[60] The complex was officially inaugurated in April 2012.[61] A year earlier, Dili had signed its first major contract with a PRC defense vendor for the supply of eight lightly armed jeeps. This was followed in April 2008 by

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the government's largest defense acquisition to date: a $25 million contract with Poly Technologies, a Chinese company with close links to the PLA, to buy two modified 175-meter *Shanghai*-class patrol boats.[62] Included in the contract was the provision to train 30 to 40 F-FDTL personnel in China and construction of a small landing dock on the country's south coast. The agreement provoked criticism in Timor-Leste because of the lack of transparency surrounding the deal: No open tender process was conducted and the government refused to release details of the agreement. The suitability of the vessels was also called into question due to Timor-Leste's rough seas and tropical conditions, for which neither of the boats were designed. Corruption may have played a part in the deal. Nevertheless, the contract significantly raised China's defense profile in Timor-Leste. The patrol boats were delivered on May 20, 2010, the country's independence day. Dili has not followed up with further naval orders from China, however. In 2011, South Korea donated three patrol boats to the F-FDTL.[63]

Since 2000, the PRC has used military aid, including arms sales, to exploit differences between Southeast Asian countries and the United States. In reaction to China's rising power, virtually all ASEAN countries have adopted a dual policy toward the PRC that engages the country through political dialogue, economic interaction, and security cooperation, while simultaneously hedging against a more assertive China by maintaining close defense links with the United States and other external powers. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, led to a strengthening of security ties between Washington and the majority of ASEAN members, but especially Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines. China viewed these developments with concern and adopted counterhedging strategies aimed at driving a wedge between ASEAN countries and the United States. Two such opportunities presented themselves in 2004 and 2006 with the Philippines and Thailand.

In mid-2004, the government of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, a staunch supporter of the Bush administration's "War on Terror," upset Washington by withdrawing the small Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) contingent from Iraq early after militants kidnapped a Filipino truck driver and threatened to execute him unless Manila ended its support for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Arroyo's decision to withdraw AFP personnel from Iraq resulted in a sharp, but temporary, downturn in US–Philippine relations, including the suspension of certain kinds of military aid. Beijing moved to exploit the downturn in US–Philippine relations, and a flurry of high-level visits between Philippine and Chinese officials ensued, including a trip to Beijing by President Arroyo in September 2004 during which the two sides agreed to establish annual defense talks. At the inaugural talks in 2005, the PRC offered to donate $1.2 million in heavy engineering equipment to the AFP. The equipment, consisting of six bulldozers and six road graders, was delivered in January 2006.[64] Admittedly, the size of China's military aid to the Philippines was very small, but it represented an important step after more than a decade of strained relations over conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea. In 2007, China reportedly made a follow-up offer of $6.6 million in grant aid for the purchase of more heavy engineering equipment, but the Philippines does not seem to have accepted the offer.[65] Sino–Philippine defense ties have been abeyance since the uptick in bilateral tensions in South China beginning in 2007, while US–Philippine defense ties have strengthened considerably.

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Two years later, China employed a similar counterhedging strategy with Thailand. Following the ouster of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra on September 19, 2006, the Bush administration was obliged to suspend $24 million in military aid to Thailand because a democratically elected government had been replaced by nondemocratic means.[66] During a visit to Beijing by coup leader General Sonthi Boonyarataglin a few months later, the Chinese government extended $49 million in military credits to Thailand, double the amount suspended by Washington.[67] The grant aid was later used to purchase Chinese-made C-802 ASMs worth $48 million as part of a program to phase out C-801 ASMs used on the Chinese-built frigates Thailand had ordered in 1989.[68] China's military aid to Thailand did not, however, have a significant impact on the US–Thai alliance, and US military aid was restored following elections in December 2007.

With the exception of Myanmar, China has not been a key supplier of major conventional weapon systems to Southeast Asia. This is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future. Several reasons account for this. One major factor that has limited PRC arms sales in the region is the low quality of equipment. For hardware such as military vehicles, artillery and small arms, Chinese-manufactured equipment is perfectly adequate, especially for the least developed countries of Southeast Asia such as Myanmar and Cambodia. For more advanced, high-technology weapons, however, China's defense companies are unable to compete with their counterparts from the United States, Europe, and Russia. The latter in particular has established itself as a major supplier of armaments to developing countries in Asia. Two of Russia's biggest customers in Asia are India and China, and Moscow has also signed major arms transfer agreements with Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Many Chinese-manufactured weapons systems are based on Soviet-era designs and therefore are not cutting-edge. Moreover, military equipment manufactured in the PRC has a poor reputation for quality, durability, and after sales service such as the provision of spare parts, ordinance and upgrades.

These shortcomings have limited Chinese arms sales in Southeast Asia, especially among the more developed members of ASEAN. In 2005, Indonesia purchased C-802 ASMs for $11 million, and in 2006, ordered 130 portable surface-to-air missiles.[69] Indonesia has also purchased C-705 ASMs to arm its domestically produced guided missile ship.[70] In 2008, Indonesia placed an order with China for 18 Giant Bow twin 23-mm air defense systems.[71] Thailand bought rocket-propelled grenade launchers from China in 2001, and in 2002, placed a $98 million order for 2 Thai-designed offshore patrol vessels (OPVs), which were delivered three years later.[72] Bangkok has not, however, taken up subsequent offers from China to supply defense equipment, including 2 further OPVs (instead it is building British-designed vessels) and an unspecified number of tanks. A barter trade agreement whereby Thailand would have swapped dried fruit for Chinese APCs also fell through. Thailand subsequently purchased 96 APCs from the Ukraine.[73] In February 2010, it was reported that China had offered to supply the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) with two secondhand *Song*-class submarines, possibly for free.[74] Initially, Bangkok rejected Beijing's offer in favor of buying 6 secondhand submarines from Germany, but when this deal was cancelled, the issue of Chinese submarine transfers to Thailand resurfaced.[75] However, according to one Western defense

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attaché, the Thai Navy is reluctant to accept *Song*-class submarines because of their age and unreliability.[76] China has offered to sell Malaysia a range of weapons systems, including naval ships, but has failed to make major inroads due to quality issues.[77] Malaysia continues to rely on defense vendors in the United States, Britain, Russia, and France, with which it has had longstanding relations. PRC arms sales have been limited to 18 FN-6 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles ordered in 2004 and delivered five years later.[78] Singapore, which has the largest defense budget and most modern armed forces in Southeast Asia, purchases its foreign weapons systems almost exclusively from Western countries and also has a capable domestic arms industry. As such, there is little prospect of the city-state turning to China for military equipment. The Philippines, which has struggled to implement a defense modernization program since the mid-1990s due to budgetary problems, relies heavily on its ally the United States for excess defense articles such as patrol boats, helicopters, and military vehicles.

In addition to quality issues, political sensitivities have also limited Chinese arms transfers to Southeast Asian countries, especially the ASEAN members that have overlapping sovereignty claims with the PRC in the South China Sea: Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. None of these four countries have strong defense relationships with the PRC, and in virtually all cases, their defense acquisitions programs have been partly driven by the territorial dispute. So long as the dispute remains unresolved, major Chinese weapons sales to these four countries remains highly unlikely.

Defense technology cooperation between China and countries in Southeast Asia has been quite limited despite various agreements and discussions.

The 2007 Sino–Thai Joint Action Plan called for defense industry cooperation, and later in the year, Thai Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont discussed the possibility of joint weapons production with visiting Chinese Defense Minister General Cao Gangchuan.[79] Details were not forthcoming at the time, though there was some speculation that future defense industry cooperation might center on missile production. In 2012, it was reported that Thailand and China had agreed to jointly develop the DTI-1G multiple rocket launcher in a three-year project costing $4.7 million.[80]

Indonesia and China have discussed defense industry collaboration extensively though with little follow through. Indonesia's motivation has been to harness Chinese technology to assist in the development of an advanced domestic arms industry. The Indonesian Defense Forces' (TNI's) inventory is dated, and by its own admission, 70 percent of equipment needs to be replaced.[81] Acquiring arms from abroad is an expensive undertaking and Indonesia is understandably keen to produce its own equipment at less cost, and with an eye to future exports. Moreover, a more capable domestic arms industry would help immunize the country from international sanctions such as those applied by the United States and other countries from 1991 until 2005, which severely degraded the TNI's operational capabilities.

The 2005 Sino–Indonesian Strategic Partnership declaration called on both countries to "promote the development of national defense industries in each other's country."[82] A few months later, during President Yudhoyono's visit to China, an MOU was reached on research and development in defense technology cooperation between China's Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense and

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Indonesia's Office of the State Minister for Research and Technology.[83] At the time, Minister of Defense Juwono Sudarsono said the agreement would allow Indonesia to develop propulsion and guidance systems for short- and medium-range missiles.[84] At the Second Indonesia–China Defense Security Consultation Talks in April 2007, a draft agreement on defense technology cooperation was signed and then formalized at a meeting of the two defense ministers in November.[85] In January 2008, China and Indonesia reached agreement for their state-owned defense industries to produce military transport vehicles and aircraft, with funding to be agreed upon at a later date.[86] In 2008, China and Indonesia reportedly signed a deal to jointly produce rocket launchers.[87] In early 2012, it was reported that Indonesia and China were in negotiations to coproduce the C-705 ASM.[88] According to former Indonesian Defense Minister Juwono, defense industry collaboration between the two countries has been slow to develop due to reluctance on China's part to transfer technology.[89]

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Combined Training and Exercises

Chinese participation in combined training and exercises is a new and very significant development in the country's defense diplomacy. Prior to 2002, the PLA had never participated in a combined exercise, partly because of operational weaknesses but also because China seems to have thought this would send negative signals to the outside world. By the early 2000s, however, China had changed positions for the following reasons. First, combined exercises would contribute to building trust between the PLA and foreign militaries. Second, it would alleviate criticism concerning the lack of transparency in its defense modernization program. Third, as noted by DoD, by conducting combined exercises, the PLA "gains operational insight by observing tactics, command decision-making and equipment used by more advanced militaries."[90] China's 2010 defense white paper acknowledges all three benefits with the statement that combined exercises are "conducive to promoting mutual trust and cooperation, drawing useful lessons, and accelerating the PLA's modernization."[91]

China's first combined exercise was with the Kyrgyz military in 2002. By 2010, the PLA had participated in 44 combined exercises with more than a dozen countries.[92] Many of these exercises, including multilateral maneuvers in 2003, were between the PLA and its counterparts from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In accordance with its desire to project a benign image, China has presented the exercises as not directed at third parties but at addressing transnational security threats, particularly terrorism. However, although some PLA-participated combined exercises have included elements of counterterrorism training, many have not. More importantly, according to some observers, the exercises have been quite superficial: heavily scripted, short in duration, and conducted during daylight hours – in short, unrealistic combat scenarios.[93] Indeed, as Wilson Chun Hei Chau has argued: "It is questionable whether these exercises offer any improvement to the participating militaries' warfighting capabilities."[94]

Compared with the SCO and South Asian countries, combined training and exercises involving the PLA and military forces from Southeast Asia have been relatively infrequent and modest in scope for a number of reasons: first, the absence of framework

agreements and joint planning mechanisms; second, problems of interoperability and language barriers; third, political sensitivities, including second-order effects on existing foreign military relationships.

China's first combined military exercise with an ASEAN country was with Thailand. In 2005, the PLA provided experts and equipment for a three-month landmine clearance training program for the RTA.[95] The training program included both classroom instruction and assisting the Thai army with mine clearance operations along the Thai–Cambodia border. During the 1990s, China had gained extensive experience in mine clearance along the Sino–Vietnamese border following the normalization of relations between those two countries. In the early 2000s, China dispatched demining experts to several African countries, but the 2005 training program was the first time the PLA had shared its expertise with an Asian country.[96] The demining training program was immediately followed by a combined exercise between the PLA Navy and RTN code-named "China–Thailand Friendship 2005." The exercise involved two PLA-Navy vessels, the guided missile destroyer *Shenzhen* and supply ship *Weishanhu*, and the RTN frigate *Chao Praya*. The exercise – which lasted a mere 3 hours and 20 minutes – simulated Chinese and Thai escorting UN-chartered ships on a humanitarian mission.[97] Similar exercises had been conducted with the Pakistani Navy in October 2003 and the Indian Navy in November 2003, but this was the first naval exercise between the PLA-Navy and a Southeast Asian navy.

The 2007 Sino–Thai Joint Action Plan called on the two sides to conduct combined military exercises designed to counter nontraditional security threats. The first of these exercises took place in July 2007 in Guangzhou, China. The 13-day exercise, code-named "Strike 2007," involved 15 Special Forces from each side – the first exercise between Chinese Special Forces and those from another country – and included marksmanship, hand-to-hand combat techniques, jungle warfare training, and hostage rescue scenarios.[98] A follow-up exercise was held a year later in Chiang Mai, Thailand; "Strike 2008" lasted 20 days and involved 24 Special Forces personnel from each side.[99] In October 2010, China and Thailand conducted a third Special Forces exercise, "Strike-2010" in Guilin, China. The exercise was 15 days long and involved 60 personnel from each side.[100] In all three exercises, the Thai and Chinese military personnel were placed in mixed teams.

Thus far, Sino–Thai military exercises have focused on nontraditional security threats and HADR. So long as this trend continues, Thailand's treaty ally, the United States, is unlikely to raise objections. However, military cooperation in more conventional areas might be more contentious. In 2009, the PRC proposed an amphibious landing exercise with the Thai military and even offered to fund Thai participation when Bangkok demurred over costs.[101] The Thai government eventually agreed in principle to the exercise – though politely declined the offer of financing – but only on the understanding it would involve no more than 50 to 100 Marines from each side. Reflecting the longstanding policy of balancing relations between the United States and China, the chief of the RTN said he hoped Washington would understand that Bangkok "needs to have a drill with other friendly countries as well."[102] The United States is not opposed to Sino–Thai military cooperation per se, but had reservations about this particular exercise because the Thai Marines take their doctrine from their US

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counterpart, thus exposing the PLA to US amphibious landing tactics. This issue underscores how developing defense ties with the PRC cannot be viewed in isolation and that Southeast Asian governments most consider the second-order effects on extant military relationships, particularly with the United States. The Sino–Thai combined Marine exercise eventually took place in October–November 2010 near the Sattahip Naval Base in the Gulf of Thailand. Code-named “Blue Strike-2010” (also reported as “Blue Assault-2010”), the exercise involved more than 100 Marines from each side. However, unlike the much larger annual US–Thai Cobra Gold exercises, which feature large-scale amphibious landings, “Blue Strike-2010” focused on antiterrorism training.[103] In May 2012, Thai and Chinese Marines conducted a second exercise, “Blue Commando-2012,” in Guangdong province. “Blue Commando-2012” was also characterized as an antiterrorism exercise.[104]

Singapore was the second ASEAN country to conduct military exercises with China. In May 2007, warships from China and eight other countries, including Singapore, conducted a combined maritime exercise in waters off Singapore under the framework of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).[105] Following the conclusion of the 2008 Sino–Singapore Agreement on Defense Exchanges and Security Cooperation, military personnel from the PLA and Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) conducted a small counterterrorism exercise in June 2009 in Guilin, China. The nine-day exercise, dubbed “Cooperation 2009,” involved 60 military personnel from each country. The exercise simulated the management of incidents involving radiological, biological, and chemical weapons.[106] A second PLA–SAF counterterrorism exercise, “Cooperation-2010,” took place in Singapore in November 2010.[107] Sixty SAF personnel and 86 PLA personnel participated in the nine-day exercise. In March 2011, the PLA-Navy took part in a WPNS exercise held off Singapore’s coast.[108]

Although Singapore is China’s largest ASEAN trade partner, the city-state’s military relationship with the PRC has been slow to develop for several reasons. After independence in 1965, Singapore conducted an active commercial relationship with China but kept the country at political arm’s length to disabuse suspicious neighbors Indonesia and Malaysia that the city-state was the “Third China” and a possible base for PRC support for regional Communist parties. Lacking the physical space in which to conduct military exercises, Singapore turned to Taiwan, and in 1975, the SAF began training at Taiwanese military facilities under a program known as Operation Starlight.[109] The SAF’s presence on Taiwan was not a major issue when China and Singapore established diplomatic relations in 1990, but as Taiwan pushed the independence envelope from the mid-1990s, Beijing became less tolerant of the arrangement. In 2002, reports suggested that China had offered the SAF access to training facilities on Hainan province in what seemed like an attempt to undermine Operation Starlight.[110] Singapore rejected the offer for reasons that are unclear but may have been connected to lingering sensitivities in Indonesia and Malaysia, and opposition from the United States. Nevertheless, Singapore has progressively reduced its training activities in Taiwan, from 15,000 to 7,000 personnel every year.[111] The reduction may have been in reaction to the Chinese government’s unconcealed anger at then-Prime Minister-designate Lee Hsien Loong’s visit to Taiwan in 2004, which was widely interpreted as a signal that Beijing was no longer willing to accept close Singapore–Taiwan relations in the military sphere.

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The scale of Sino–Singaporean military exercises is likely to remain small-scale and focused on nonsensitive activities such as dealing with transnational threats. China has little to offer in terms of training that Singapore does not already derive through regular exercises with its counterparts from the United States, Australia, and Britain. Moreover, the United States would oppose joint Singapore–China exercises in which the PLA was exposed to high-tech US military equipment operated by the SAF such as F-16 and F-15 fighter jets.

In 2011, Indonesia became only the third ASEAN country to conduct a combined exercise with China. The exercise, code-named "Sharp Knife-2011," involved antiterrorism training between Special Forces from the TNI and PLA.[112] A second Sino–Indonesian combined Special Forces exercise was held in Jinan, Shandong province in July 2012.[113]

Peacekeeping and HADR Operations

As noted earlier, since 2004, peacekeeping and HADR operations have become two of the PLA's "new historic missions." Of course, even prior to 2004, the PRC had made important contributions to UNPKOs. But as the International Crisis Group observes, since 2003, there has been a "rapid surge" in China's contributions: In 2007, 1,861 Chinese security personnel were involved in UNPKOs, up from 120 in 2003.[114] As of December 2010, the PLA had 1,955 personnel serving in nine UNPKOs, the largest number from a permanent member of the UN Security Council.[115] China has not, however, contributed combat troops to UNPKOs, preferring instead to send civilian police, military observers, and "force enablers" such as military medical and engineering units.[116]

Since the end of the Cold War, there have been two UNPKOs in Southeast Asia: the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) from 1992 to 1993 and the various missions in East Timor/Timor-Leste since 1999. China has contributed personnel to both missions. Two PLA engineering battalions composed of 400 personnel each participated in UNTAC, China's first-ever military contribution to a UNPKO.[117] In Timor-Leste, China has been active in all three UN missions: the UN Transitional Authority East Timor (UNTAET) (1999–2002); the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (2002–05); and the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (2006 to present). China's main contribution to the missions in Timor-Leste has been civilian police officers, and UNTAET was the first UNPKO involving Chinese law enforcement officers. According to the 2008 defense white paper, between 2000 and 2008, China sent a total of 237 police officers to Timor-Leste.[118]

China established a civilian peacekeeping training center in Langfang, Heibei province in 2000: the China Peacekeeping Civilian-Police Training Center (CPTC) operated by the Ministry of Public Security. A military equivalent, the PLA Peacekeeping Training Center, was set up in Huairou, Beijing in 2009.[119] It does not appear that either of these centers hosts foreign students, though conferences, workshops and tabletop exercises with foreign participants have taken place at CPTC.[120]

As noted in the 2010 defense white paper, the PLA considers it an "obligation to take part in international disaster relief operations organized by the government, and to fulfill international humanitarian obligations."[121] In 2001, the PLA established the

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Chinese International Search and Rescue (CISAR) team made up of military engineers and medical personnel to support HADR missions. CISAR was dispatched overseas twice in 2010, to Haiti and Pakistan. In addition to CISAR, since 2002, the PLA has provided relief supplies to 28 humanitarian aid missions and 22 disaster-affected countries.[122] The PLA-Navy is in the process of acquiring several purpose-built hospital ships. The primary purpose of these vessels is medical relief during combat operations, but during peacetime, they can be used in HADR missions.[123] The PLA has participated in international seminars and workshops on HADR. China and Indonesia drafted the General Guidelines on Disaster Relief Cooperation for the ARF, which were adopted in 2007.[124] To date, the PLA has not participated in any HADR operations in Southeast Asia. However, given the PLA's growing HADR capabilities, this will almost certainly change in the future.

Naval Diplomacy

Port calls by foreign warships are a generally nonsensitive and effective way to build goodwill and showcase a nation's naval capabilities. Although China and Southeast Asian countries have been exchanging ship visits since the early 1990s, the number of port calls increased in frequency during the first decade of the 21st century. The Chinese navy has stepped up the frequency of port calls to Southeast Asia since the early 2000s for two main reasons: First, the modernization of the PLA-Navy has allowed Chinese warships to operate at greater distances from the mainland; and second, Southeast Asian ports provide a convenient stopping-off point for PLA-Navy vessels returning from counterpiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, which China has been participating in since 2008.

In the 2000s, a number of firsts in Sino–Southeast Asian naval diplomacy occurred. In November 2007, for instance, a PLA-Navy vessel visited Ho Chi Minh City, the first visit by a Chinese navy vessel to Vietnam since the early 1970s; the Royal Malaysian Navy made its first port call in China in June 2002; in August 2008, *RSN Steadfast* became the first Singapore navy frigate to visit the PRC; and in August 2010, the PLA-Navy made its first-ever visit to Myanmar when two ships docked near Yangon.[125] Even though the PLA-Navy has increased the frequency of its port calls to Southeast Asia since 2000, it is still a relatively infrequent visitor compared with other foreign navies. In 2010, for example, two PLA-Navy ships visited Singapore compared with 150 ship visits by the US Navy and 30 from the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.[126]

Conclusion

As has been the case with other major military powers during the past 20 years, China's defense diplomacy has moved from a single-minded focus on boosting the defense capabilities of strategic partners to encompass a broader range of peacetime activities. China's military diplomacy now serves a number of specific foreign and defense policy objectives. In Southeast Asia, these include expanding PRC influence across the region while countering the influence of other great powers, especially the United States; communicating China's "peaceful rise" thesis; building trust and enhancing cooperation

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with the armed forces of Southeast Asia; and using experiences learned from regional militaries to assist in the modernization of the PLA.

Southeast Asian countries have broadly welcomed closer interaction between their armed forces and the PLA, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm. While all ASEAN countries regularly exchange high-level defense delegations with China, only six of the organization's members hold defense and security dialogues with the PRC – Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Singapore – and only three of these countries – Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia – have conducted combined exercises with the PLA. These exercises have been limited in scope and duration and appear to be largely symbolic. PRC arms transfers to the region have increased during the past decade, but China is not yet a serious competitor to the United States, Russia, or Western European countries such as France, Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. For China's arms manufacturers, the key markets remain South Asia, North Africa and the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa.

China's defense diplomacy has achieved successes in Southeast Asia but has also faced barriers. Ongoing tensions in the South China Sea over disputed atolls and maritime boundary claims rule out close defense relations with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei. China's annual bilateral defense dialogues with Vietnam and the Philippines have failed to mitigate tensions over the contested Spratly Islands. Southeast Asian countries with strong military ties to the United States, such as Singapore and Thailand, are wary of damaging those ties by pursuing very close relations with the PLA. Until China develops a world-class arms industry, it will struggle to make serious inroads into Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, defense diplomacy is a long-term process, and China will remain committed to the policy so long as its political, economic, and security interests in the region continue to expand. From a realpolitik perspective, China's defense diplomacy in Southeast Asia can only grow in importance during the next decade if, as seems likely, Sino–US competition sharpens.

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NOTES

1. Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defense Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance,* Adelphi Paper No. 365 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2004), pp. 7, 15.
2. A combined exercise is conducted by the armed forces of two or more countries. A joint exercise involves two or more services (i.e., army, navy, or air force).
3. See the Defense Security Cooperation Agency Web site at http://www.dsca.mil/PressReleases/faq.htm
4. Cottey and Forster, *Reshaping Defense Diplomacy,* p. 6.
5. Cited in K. A. Muthanna, "Military Diplomacy," *Journal of Defense Studies* Vol. 5, No. 1 (January 2011), p. 2.
6. Nicholas Floyd, *Dropping the Autopilot: Improving Australia's Defense Diplomacy*, Policy Brief (Sydney: The Lowy Institute for International Policy, November 2010), p. 3.
7. For more details on NATO's PfP Program, see http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50349.htm
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10. Muthanna, "Military Diplomacy," p. 3.
11. *China's Defense in 2000* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, 2000); *China's Defense in 2004* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council, 2004).
12. See Ch. 1, 4, 7, and 8 in Ian Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China: The Search for Security* (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2011).
13. Storey, *Southeast Asia and the Rise of China*, pp. 178–179.
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25. Andrew Selth, *Burma's Armed Forces: Power without Glory* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2002), p. 137.
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