

The Asia-Pacific Rebalance: U.S. - China Military-to-Military Confidence-Building Measures

by

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Abstract

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China has cautioned that the military components of the United States rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region complicates the region's security environment and believes U.S. actions are aimed directly at constraining China, ultimately harming its strategic interests. This paper examines the roots of this distrust and why U.S.-China military-to-military confidence building measures will be insufficient to overcome this distrust to improve the relationship between two militaries. Military-to-military relationship building efforts should instead focus more on developing crisis management and escalation control measures.

The Asia-Pacific Rebalance: U.S. - China Military-to-Military Confidence-Building Measures

The Obama administration November 2011 announcement of the strategic “rebalance to Asia,” marking the change in U.S. global priorities following the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, provides a useful case study to critically analyze how prominent hegemony-based international relations theories explain China’s distrust of U.S. intentions. Though the regional reaction has been positive and supportive, China has reacted with concern over U.S. regional intentions despite intense U.S. efforts to paint the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific in a positive light. China believes that the U.S. military force posture and presence changes, reinforced by regional bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts with U.S. allies and partners, are aimed directly at constraining China, complicate the region’s security environment, and ultimately harm its strategic interests. This underlying distrust of U.S. intentions reflects in the long term distrust between the U.S. and Chinese militaries, undermining the improvement of U.S.-China military-to-military ties so important to the success of the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy and associated goals to expand cooperation with China in areas of common interest, while reducing the risk of a crisis resulting from a military accident or miscalculation that could destabilize the broader bilateral relationship. This distrust also effectively thwarts any U.S.-China military-to-military confidence building measures to improve the relationship between the two militaries. Given the level of U.S.-China distrust and a relationship that has historically been competitive, with points of friction, and at times contentious, military-to-military relationship building efforts should focus more on developing crisis management and escalation control measures, not confidence-building measures.

U.S. New Strategy Focused on Asia-Pacific Region, Not on China

In the November 2011 *Foreign Policy* article by then-Secretary of State Clinton, she emphasized the importance of the Asia-Pacific region to U.S. economic and strategic interests, as part of U.S. global efforts to “secure and sustain America’s global leadership,” as the main rationale behind the rebalance.¹ In a March 2013 speech to the Asia Society in New York, then-National Security Advisor Donilon further clarified the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific strategy in the wake of the completion of China’s leadership transition and at the beginning of President Obama’s second term. He repeated the same rationale laid out by then-Secretary Clinton in 2011, with special emphasis that the rebalance “does not mean containing China or seeking to dictate terms to Asia.” He went on, explaining the five pillars of the U.S. strategy, of which the third pillar is building a stable, productive, and constructive relationship with China (the others are strengthening alliances, deepening partnerships with emerging powers, empowering regional institutions, and helping to build a regional economic architecture that can sustain shared prosperity).²

In seeming acknowledgment of frequent Chinese media and government concerns that the rebalance would heighten regional tensions and of the suspicion in many Chinese eyes that the U.S. rebalance is aimed at China, Mr. Donilon up front acknowledged that the U.S.-China bilateral relationship “has and will continue to have elements of both cooperation and competition.” But he also quickly rejected the notion that the rising power, China, is destined to repeat the historical dilemma of coming into conflict with the established power, the United States. He concluded that improving the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship, the critical deficient component of the current bilateral relationship, is central to addressing the insecurity and competition between the

United States and China and will ultimately lead to practical cooperation on areas of common interest.³

U.S. officials reinforced this White House message with repeated explanations of the U.S. rebalance strategy to their Chinese counterparts, emphasizing the important role that China plays in addressing the multiple shared interests and concerns in the region. Additionally, officials always highlighted the mutual desire for a productive and stable military-to-military relationship, despite the troubled and episodic history and the multiple pointed issues that still remain in the relationship. The April 2013 China visit of the U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey, is a good example. Taking advantage of the bully pulpit during the news conference at the conclusion of his half day meeting with his Chinese military counterpart, General Dempsey's first major theme summarized the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific as not one of deploying a large troop presence, but one of "more interest, more engagement, and more quality in equipment and capability" for the purpose of the United States remaining a stabilizing force in the region. The other major theme he emphasized was the importance of "building a better, deeper, and more enduring relationship" at the senior-leader level, to supplement ongoing tactical level military-to-military contact.⁴

China's Distrust of U.S. Intent

Despite the White House messaging on the rebalance, reinforced by U.S. officials to their Chinese counterparts, the general Chinese reaction has been concern over the increased regional tensions caused by an increased U.S. presence and suspicions over U.S. intentions.⁵ The Chinese fear of a U.S. "containment" strategy is grounded in the belief that the U.S. seeks to constrain China's rise through U.S. force posture expansion, increased security ties with allies and partners, and the increased

role of regional, multilateral institutions, which ultimately would constrain China's freedom of action and harm its strategic environment.⁶

So despite the U.S. intent to reassure the region with its increased presence and posture, China seems to feel more threatened and less reassured. Given this new U.S. strategic adjustment, adding to an already long history of U.S. distrust of the Chinese military demonstrated by punitive or precautionary actions (arms sales sanctions on China in response to the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, U.S. laws that restrict U.S. military contacts with the Chinese military and government, U.S. military airborne and maritime surveillance operations near the Chinese coastline), the Chinese military has very little incentive to improve the relationship between the two militaries.

The U.S. Army War College (USAWC) often highlights two international relations theories when describing the challenge of China's rise, which help explain the roots of the Chinese suspicion. The first theory, Gilpin's Theory of Hegemonic War, from the neorealist school of thought, uses the example of the Peloponnesian War (a major USAWC historical teaching example) between the rising power, Athens, and the established power, Sparta, to explain how a dissatisfied rising great power causes instability in the current international system by threatening the vital interests of the dominant, hegemonic established power. The established power feels compelled to start a preemptive war while it is still stronger.⁷ It is this "Thucydides Trap" where history predicts that China will come into conflict with the United States, that former Secretary of State Clinton and current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Dempsey, have warned that both sides need to avoid and that military-to-military engagement is a critical component of the bilateral relationship.

It appears that Chinese scholars fall into two groups. The first group questions the U.S. long-term capacity to sustain the rebalance in light of its much publicized budget problems and political inability to internally come to a consensus to solve it. The second group focuses on the military components of the rebalance as proof that the U.S. is intentionally targeting China with this strategy. They cite the increased force posture and military capabilities along with expanded security cooperation with allies and partners.⁸ Regardless of the Chinese views (United States cannot sustain, United States is targeting China), proponents of the Theory of Hegemonic War (“Thucydides Trap”) would argue that China, the rising power, should fear U.S. inclinations to start a preemptive war while it is stronger. If a preemptive war seems too extreme, then perhaps China would fear that U.S. inclinations to take actions in the security realm that would ultimately constrain China’s freedom of action to challenge the existing global order and harm its strategic environment. From this perspective, one can argue that China’s views of the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific are rooted in a distrust that the U.S. cannot help but to view the Chinese as strategic opponents, which ultimately shapes the real intent of the U.S. strategy—the U.S. intent to constrain China.

The second theory is the other hegemonic theory, Organski’s Power Transition Theory, that Dr. Lavid Lai of the USAWC Strategic Studies Institute cites to warn that China’s rise as the dissatisfied challenger to the United States dominant power will increase the probability of conflict, with the probability peaking near the point of power transition between them. In other words, when the two states have reached rough parity of power, the rising power, China (which is also dissatisfied with the international world order established by the dominant power, the United States), has the most incentive to

forcefully challenge its major opponent.⁹ It is this common belief, that the rising China is a threat to Taiwan, the region, and ultimately the United States, that fuels a lot of the traditional “China threat” characterization of China, painting the United States and China as potential opponents in a future conflict.

Proponents of the Power Transition Theory (where the United States sees a “China Threat”) would argue that China, the rising power, should be wary of a United States that sees China as a threat and expects China to seek conflict in the region and against U.S. interests. And therefore China would expect the United States to seek a strategy that constrains China to delay that power transition as long as possible and ultimately to prepare for the eventual conflict that the United States would believe (according to the theory) that China will seek to start. So from this perspective, once again one can argue that China’s views of the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific are rooted in a distrust that the U.S. cannot help but to view the Chinese as strategic opponents, which ultimately shapes the real intent of the U.S. strategy—the U.S. intent to constrain China.¹⁰

The common thread between these two hegemony theories describing U.S.-China regional security dynamics is the strategic distrust between the two countries, especially for China in its distrust of U.S. strategic intentions. Viewing U.S. strategic messaging and military and diplomatic activities through this lens, it is easy to see how China can interpret U.S. strategic intentions and associated activities as part of a hostile strategy aimed at constraining China and ultimately harming its strategic interests. The U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific will continue to unfold in the years ahead with planned force posture changes, increasing security ties with allies and partners, and

increasing focus on regional and multilateral institutions to manage security interests. These security related activities, along with the expected increased diplomatic and military engagement with Asia, will likely increase China's distrust of U.S. efforts in the Asia-Pacific and increase its sense of insecurity.¹¹

The traditional reasons for the historically troubled U.S.-China military-to-military relationship, that U.S. China analysts have historically cited, also have roots in distrust. The Chinese concerns focus on fears of revealing the operational and doctrinal weaknesses of the Chinese military and fears of allowing operational air and maritime safety discussions that could ultimately lead to legitimizing U.S. military airborne and maritime surveillance operations near the Chinese coastline.¹² Because of China's distrust of U.S. strategic intentions and subsequent distrust of a robust military-to-military relationship, China has been long been willing to threaten suspension of the military-to-military relationship, and has done so several times, during downturns in the bilateral relationship (e.g. in reaction to U.S. Taiwan arms sales decisions).

Consequently, China has historically linked improvements to the U.S. China military-to-military relationship to U.S. changes in national security policies that impinge on China's national interests. These include arms sales to Taiwan, long standing arms sales sanctions on China in response to the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, U.S. laws that restrict U.S. military contacts with the Chinese military and government, and U.S. military airborne and maritime surveillance operations near the Chinese coastline.¹³ These are the cornerstones of U.S. national security policy and strategy towards China and are unlikely to change anytime soon. One can trace the roots of this bilateral policy dynamic ultimately to China's distrust of both U.S. strategic intentions and U.S.-China

military-to-military relations. The Chinese military therefore has very little incentive to improve the bilateral military-to-military relationship with the U.S. military.

U.S. Strategic Messaging and Activities Reinforce China's Distrust

As for U.S. strategic perspectives and strategic intentions, proponents of the Theory of Hegemonic War ("Thucydides Trap") would argue that the United States, as the dominant, hegemonic power, would see China as the dissatisfied rising power causing instability in the current international system and threatening U.S. vital interests, and would thus develop a strategy that would constrain China's rise in a manner where it ultimately does not challenge the existing global order. Those proponents would also argue that the United States needs to prepare for conflict if that strategy fails (the preemptive war component of this theory). Those proponents would point to U.S. Government official strategy documents published since the start of the Obama administration to show that the U.S. leadership shares these same viewpoints. One can see in these documents the U.S. wariness of China's rise, concern over China's challenge to the current global order, and direct intent to make preparations to mitigate against China's activities juxtaposed against the almost divergent desire to seek a deeper relationship with China.

The May 2010 National Security Strategy's third China paragraph sentence, after opening by discussing building a relationship with China, up front states that the United States will "monitor China's military modernization program and prepare accordingly to ensure that U.S. interests and allies, regionally and globally, are not negatively affected."¹⁴ The following year, the 2011 National Military Strategy spends the second half of its six sentence long China paragraph repeating the same warnings and discussing U.S. preparations to mitigate against these security threats, but with more

specificity towards China's undesirable activities ("concerned about the extent and strategic intent of China's military modernization" and "assertiveness in space, cyberspace, etc.") and assertiveness describing U.S. preparations ("prepared to demonstrate the will and commit the resources needed to oppose").¹⁵

Proponents of the Power Transition Theory (where the United States sees a "China Threat") would argue that the United States would see China, the rising power on a path to transition power with the United States, as a threat and expect China to seek conflict in the region and against U.S. interests. Subsequently, the United States would seek a strategy that constrains China to delay that power transition as long as possible and ultimately to prepare for the eventual conflict that the United States would believe (according to the theory) that China will seek to start. Those proponents would point to the strategic documents published after the November 2011 announcement of the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific as well as the subsequent U.S. strategic messaging and military and diplomatic activities to show that the senior leadership of the United States shares these same viewpoints. They would reference these words and actions as specific examples of U.S. leadership wariness of China's rise, concern over China's challenge to the current global order, and direct intent to make preparations to mitigate against China's activities that betray true U.S. intentions even as the United States expresses its desire to seek a deeper relationship with China.

The January 2012 Department of Defense Strategic Guidance places the discussion of China's growing military power in the same second Asia rebalance paragraph immediately before and after discussions of peace and stability maintenance through U.S. influence and U.S. investments to maintain regional access, implying

linkage. Furthermore, China is also discussed, along with Iran, in the paragraph that discusses U.S. power projecting challenges posed by anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) potential adversaries, once again implying linkage (or even directly implying that China is a potential adversary).¹⁶

The A2/AD discussion repeats official U.S. statements over the previous year in a parallel discussion on the development of the U.S. Air-Sea Battle operational concept to project power in increasingly threatening A2/AD environments. Despite U.S. official statements to the contrary, the public discussion of the Air-Sea Battle concept often conflated this effort as a possible strategy against China, probably due to early think tank publications identifying China as the main reason to develop such a concept.¹⁷ Even in spite of the very public discussion of the fiscal challenges the U.S. faces, the March 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review outlines the same regional concerns posed by China along with the same U.S. responses, despite this period of fiscal austerity.¹⁸

From the perspective of the Obama administration U.S. Government official strategy documents and viewed through the two hegemonic theories (Hegemonic War and Power Transition), the common thread describing U.S.-China regional security dynamics is the strategic distrust (China would say “distrust”, the United States would say “concern”) that the United States may have for China (either stated or implied). When official White House statements describe the U.S.-China relationship with a cooperation and competition dynamic, to include in the military-to-military realm, that makes it more challenging to refute that U.S. strategy does not have an element of distrust of China. And from China’s perspective, proponents of both theories would

argue that China would interpret these strategy documents as the United States not trusting China.

To add to the strategic messaging of the U.S. Government official strategy documents, U.S. diplomatic and military efforts directly related to the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific or indirectly related by coincidence would also have a strategic messaging impact on China. From 2010, the year prior to the official announcement of the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, to 2012, the year after the announcement, one can view the U.S. activity as a change in priority from engaging China's offshore states to engaging mainland states on the Chinese periphery—Vietnam, Cambodia, and Burma to the south, and South Korea on the north. The increased level of diplomatic and military engagements with these countries, either by design or by coincidence (such as response to North Korea aggression, unrelated directly to China, and U.S. firm support for treaty allies Japan and Philippines in seeming response to their territorial disputes with China in the East China Sea and South China Sea), nevertheless sends a strategic message to China.

Proponents of the balance of power theory would characterize these moves as counterproductive, with the risk that these actions would raise Chinese suspicion of U.S. intentions. Regardless of the effectiveness of the ultimate strategy behind these moves, viewed through the lens of the two hegemonic theories (Hegemonic War and Power Transition), one consequence would be increased Chinese suspicion and distrust of U.S. intentions, fueling already growing Chinese distrust of U.S. strategic intentions.¹⁹ This once again demonstrates that the Chinese military does not trust the U.S. military and therefore has very little incentive to improve the bilateral military-to-military

relationship with the U.S. military. Confidence building measures would do little to reduce the level of strategic distrust and military tensions between the U.S. and China and so should not receive priority military-to-military relationship development efforts. The years of U.S.-China military-to-military relations has shown little evidence that confidence building measures, strategic dialogues, and risk reduction forums have reduced strategic mistrust.²⁰ Given this security relationship dilemma, this leads to the discussion of what else then is strategically important to focus military-to-military relationship development efforts.

Escalation Control and Crisis Management

Risk of Crisis and Escalation

Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, leading American and Chinese specialists of their respective countries, in their influential 2012 monograph on U.S.-China strategic distrust (Brookings Institute and Peking University's Institute for International and Strategic Studies), also came to the same assessment that both countries are fundamentally distrustful of each other's strategic intentions and are more inclined towards a competitive, adversarial relationship than a cooperative relationship between major powers. These conclusions resulted from their reviews of U.S. and Chinese government leadership officials and closely parallel that of the above international relations theories.²¹ Given the level of U.S.-China distrust described by both this respected study and the above international relations theories assessment, it seems apparent that the risk of an unintended crisis that escalates would be high.

Indeed the history of U.S.-China relations since China's 1970's emergence from isolation and integration into the world community has seen both the highs of increased economic and diplomatic contacts and cooperation on the world stage as well as the

lows resulting from a series of conflicts and crises involving contact between the two military forces in the Asia-Pacific region that would temporarily set back the bilateral relationship. The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait crisis, the 2001 U.S. EP-3 surveillance plane collision near China's southern coast, the 2000's multiple Chinese harassments of U.S. Navy ocean surveillance ships, and 2010's increasingly vocal Chinese complaints against U.S. military activities in China's 200-nautical mile Economic Exclusion Zone along with U.S. military surveillance ships and reconnaissance flights close to the Chinese coast show how assertive military activities by both sides have intentionally and unintentionally resulted in a crisis and escalation, and sometimes damage to the bilateral relationship.²² Add to that the 1999 accidental U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia and the U.S. repeated decisions to sell arms sales to Taiwan that have resulted in temporary suspensions of the bilateral relationship, the relationship has always sat in a tinderbox of distrust and adversarial moves and countermoves, always ready to ignite into a conflict and escalate.

Despite the U.S. intent to reassure the region, the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific will bring into sharper focus for China that the U.S. will increase the types of activities in the region that have historically led to past crises. That can only make Beijing feel that the United States is directly challenging China's strategic interests. Given the past history of how these challenges have turned out, we can reasonably expect an increased risk of an unintended crisis that escalates. Indeed in response to the U.S. diplomatic and military efforts mentioned earlier that are directly related to the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific or indirectly related by coincidence, China appears to have

been pushing back directly or coincidentally against the U.S. strategy, causing increased tensions in the region.

In reaction to the U.S. rebalance moves, China's countermoves have been its increased coercive diplomacy with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to splinter U.S. efforts to unify the ASEAN multilateral response to Chinese assertive territorial dispute behavior, its assertive stance in the continued territorial disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea with U.S. treaty allies in spite of continued U.S. firm support for them, and its South China Sea territorial dispute flare up in 2010 with Vietnam at the same time of U.S. rapprochement with its former war enemy.²³ This continued dynamic of move and countermove will increase the likelihood of U.S. and Chinese military forces coming into closer contact and operating in circumstances of assertive diplomacy mixed in with assertive force presence. The risk of an accident or miscalculation that leads to an unintended crisis that escalates will be higher as this cycle continues.

Even more troubling is that the risk of crisis and escalation resulting from an unintended military confrontation could be higher between the United States and China in current modern times than it was between the United States and the Soviet Union. Washington and Moscow learned lessons from several crises with military escalation risks (Berlin and Cuba) as well as developed risk aversion to confrontations due to the very real risk of annihilation consequences from a nuclear exchange.²⁴ The U.S.-China relationship is much less experienced in crisis avoidance and escalation management. Washington and Beijing also cause problems by maintaining less clarity in bilateral intent than during the Cold War. On one hand, both countries state that the bilateral

relationship is vital with both wanting a cooperative partnership, yet take actions against each other that each side would characterize as adversarial. Complicating that is ambiguity in the respective regional policies. China's regional policy has ambiguity with changing "core interests" statements and expansive regional territorial claims. The United States regional policy has ambiguity with its Taiwan unofficial recognition and security assistance dual policy as well as U.S. neutral position asking for a peaceful resolution of the East and South China Seas territorial disputes, while providing security assurances to treaty allies Japan and Philippines.²⁵

Crisis Management and Escalation Control Measures

Given the expected increase in opportunities where the risk of an unintended crisis and escalation would be high, it seems prudent to prioritize military-to-military relationship development efforts on mechanisms that would allow both sides to more effectively manage future crises and control escalation. This includes communications links and channels to immediately exchange perspectives and discuss intentions, meeting mechanisms to communicate in a more structured manner to develop a negotiated solution, and rules of behavior operational guidelines and communications protocols to ensure safe operations in close proximity. Though focused on managing crises, these bilaterally shared mechanisms can also act as potential mechanisms for future routine military-to-military interactions once both sides mutually see and desire the benefits of routine interaction in a specific area.

Some of these mechanisms already exist. The oldest and most notable one is the 1998 Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA). Though advertised as the bilateral agreement for a mechanism to resolve tension and prevent crisis by a focus on operational maritime and air safety, this did not prevent continued dangerous air and

sea confrontations between the United States and China. One U.S. official explained that the MMCA had limited usefulness because the Chinese military is not interested in a “rules-based, operator-to-operator approach to safety on the high seas.”²⁶ That comes as no surprise given that the Chinese military does not trust the U.S. military and therefore has very little incentive to improve the bilateral military-to-military relationship with the U.S. military. However, ineffectiveness at reducing strategic mistrust does not mean that the MMCA does not have value. The fact that this is an already bilaterally agreed to mechanism for discussing operational maritime and air safety (though just talking in general, not in specifics useful to operators) provides both countries a valuable starting point subsequent to a crisis, especially when extended meetings need to occur to help manage escalation and eventually resolve the crisis. In spite of criticisms of the historically limited utility of MMCA, this mechanism should remain a priority military-to-military relationship development effort due to its utility as a crisis management and escalation control measure.

To reinforce that operational safety effort in spite of the Chinese military reluctance to discuss rules of behavior operational guidelines and communications protocols, the U.S. military should nevertheless continue to provide U.S. and international standards for rules of behavior operational guidelines and communications protocols in all of its other activities where they come into contact with the Chinese military and they have to use at least some of these guidelines and protocols due to simple necessity. Examples include counter-piracy operations off of the Horn of Africa, U.S. hosted international maritime exercise Rim of the Pacific 2014 that China will participate in for the first time, and future humanitarian assistance and disaster relief

operations. This practical workaround is an important first step to future progress on bilaterally acceptable agreement norms and protocols.

Another mechanism that already exists is the 2008 Defense Telephone Link (DTL). The history of China taking calls from U.S. officials has been problematic in times of crisis due to the nature of the Chinese government. During the 2001 EP-3 crisis, Chinese officials would not take calls until their slow collective central leadership had made a decision. However, just because you cannot guarantee contact with Chinese officials does not mean the DTL does not have value. The fact that this link is already established provides both countries a valuable starting point subsequent to a crisis. Also, the more you use this link, the more routine the interactions become (and ideally the more trust and understanding), and ideally the more likely Chinese officials may use this link in a future crisis.²⁷

Even after the announcement of the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific, the number of times the United States and China have exercised the DTL has increased, matching the increased frequency in use of the Obama Administration in using the national “hotlines” in crisis and in routine use.²⁸ This mechanism should remain a priority military-to-military relationship development effort due to its utility as a crisis management and escalation control measure. This is arguably the most important measure. In the 21st century and the availability of multiple means of communication, it is much less likely that the Chinese government would simply refuse to take a call, even to receive a message. The ability for the Secretary of Defense or for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to quickly and securely communicate their understanding of a crisis and their intent is absolutely critical to manage a crisis and deescalate a situation.

Additionally, the United States should pursue a video teleconference link with China like the one established with Russia. The U.S.-Russia link, first used in December 2013, modernizes and upgrades the decades old U.S.-Russia “hotline” with state of the art technology. Like the Russia call that discussed several issues, including missile defense, Syria, cybersecurity, countering improvised explosive devices, a U.S.-China video telephone link would give the senior defense leaders modern communications means that the U.S. uses for its most critical issues.²⁹ This type of capability would give the U.S. and Chinese leadership a more complex mechanism to better communicate their understanding of a crisis and deescalate. A video teleconference link provides the additional capabilities to show maps, photos, graphics, and video clips significantly increasing the amount and clarity of information exchanged compared to the DTL capability.

Time will tell how accurate this assessment of China’s distrust of U.S. strategic intentions behind the rebalance to the Asia-Pacific will be. The hegemony-based international relations theories that are most prominent inform us that this distrust will undermine the improvement of U.S.-China military-to-military ties. This distrust will prevent military-to-military confidence building measures from achieving significant breakthroughs in the improvement of the relationship. Nevertheless, a destabilization of the broader bilateral relationship resulting from crisis caused by an unintentional military accident or miscalculations harms U.S. strategic interests. Given the expected friction in the relationship, the priority focus for military-to-military relationship building should be on developing crisis management and escalation control measures that prevent an accidental military incident from spiraling out of control and harming the relationship.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (November-December 2011): 56-63.
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