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PLA Calls US Military Exercises in South China Sea “Inappropriate”

Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Gen. Chen Bingde said at a press briefing after holding a meeting with visiting Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Mike Mullen that it is “inappropriate” for the United States to hold military drills in the South China Sea, as China and several countries have recently become embroiled in disputes over the region.¹ “China’s position on the South China Sea is consistent and clear,” Chen said, adding that China continues to believe that disputes over the region should be solved through negotiations. Expressing concern, Chen said, although the United States has stated on many occasions that it has no intention of interfering in the disputes, it has continued to hold military drills in the region “time and again”. Chen was speaking with reference to the 11-day joint naval exercises between the United States and the Philippines navies near the South China Sea held during 28 June and 08 July 2011. Chen also stated that continued U.S. surveillance in the seas of the Chinese coastline does not help the situation, but instead “creates obstacles for Sino-U.S. military cooperation”. The United States and Vietnam were scheduled to hold another joint naval drill in the region from 15 to 21 July 2011. The statement of the Chinese General highlights the difficult issues that continue to dog ties between Beijing and Washington despite efforts to smooth relations after serious strains last year.

China, South Korea Hold Defence Dialogue

South Korea and China held their first Strategic and Defence dialogue on 27 July 2011 at Seoul. This Vice Ministerial-level dialogue was conducted between South Korea’s Vice Defence Minister Lee Yong-gul, who is a civilian, and Gen. Ma Xiaotian, China’s Deputy Chief of General Staff. Discussions were held over a range of security issues. Consequent to the July 2011 meeting of the two defence ministers in Beijing, the two countries agreed to open a bilateral mechanism to strengthen strategic defence cooperation and increase trust and understanding, and to step up cooperation in peacekeeping, disaster relief, humanitarian aid and anti-piracy operations, particularly in the Gulf of Aden and the waters around Somalia. The two sides also pledged to oppose any action that might jeopardize peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula.² This may prove to be an important upgrade in the China-South Korea relations in security provided both sides are capable of actually preventing any escalation in the Korean Peninsula, reinstate trust and ultimately usher in durable peace. Conduct of the dialogue by Ma Xiaotian, a serving general, also highlights the say that the PLA has in China on the Korean Peninsula.

Senior Military Officer from Bangladesh Visits China

Lt Gen Abdul Wadud, the Principal Staff Officer of the Armed Forces Division of the Bangladesh

1. PLA Daily (Online), 12 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/12/content_4464469.htm.

2. <http://en.rian.ru/world/20110716/165231350.html>

Prime Minister's Office was on an official visit to China recently.³ During his visit, he met Gen. Ma Xiaotian, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army in Beijing on July 19, 2011. Recalling the friendly relations between both countries, Gen. Ma said that he appreciated Bangladesh's stand on issues related to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. He also said that the Chinese were willing to make joint efforts with Bangladesh to develop a closer comprehensive cooperative partnership and reiterated willingness to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in various fields with the Bangladesh military. Wadud in turn, stated that Bangladesh too attached importance to developing friendly cooperative relations with the Chinese military and appreciated Chinese help in modernizing Bangladesh military. Incidentally, Gen. Ma Xiaotian also met Lt. Gen. Waheed Arshad, Chief of General Staff of the Pakistan Army the same day. Both these meetings also come close after the important visit of Maj. Gen. Gurmeet Singh of the Rashtriya Rifles of India during 19-24 June 2011 which marked the resumption of India-China military exchanges after a hiatus of one year. Further, the stated keenness of Bangladesh to accept Chinese help for military modernization and China's willingness to do the same is also noteworthy.

China and Belarus conduct Joint Airborne Drill

Chinese and Belarusian airborne troops concluded their first joint training drills held over 10 days in early July 2011 in Belarus. The 83-strong Chinese

special task force, which is roughly the size of a company, participated in this exercise based on executing counter terrorism drills. The Chinese Defence Ministry sources claimed, besides being the first joint drills between Chinese and Belorussian armed forces, it was also the first overseas drill for Chinese paratroopers. In the first phase, an obstacle course, hand-to-hand combat, parachuting, combat firing and anti-terrorism tactics were practiced. In the second phase, encirclement and elimination of "terrorists" by combining parachuting and tactical air landing operations were rehearsed.⁴ Of all the foreign countries with whom China conducts joint military drills, counter terrorism is a recurrent subject. The participation of the military in such drills also reveals the importance and course of action that the Chinese are taking to combat the menace of terrorism.

Chinese and Kazakh Border Forces Carry Out Joint Exercise

In mid-July 2011, the border defence personnel of China and Kazakhstan completed a two-day joint patrol and friendly exchange activity. Since 2003, the frontier defence authority of Tacheng, northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and that of Kazakhstan have engaged in "Shoulder-to-Shoulder" joint border control actions, and have explored and summarized dozens of action modes including joint walk along the border, joint patrol and joint search.⁵ China has been sensitive to the presence of radical Muslim elements near its borders. Xinjiang is also long home to an extremist secessionist movement with

3. PLA Daily (Online), 20 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/20/content_4551812.htm.

4. PLA Daily (Online), 20 July 11, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/20/content_4543679.htm.

5. PLA Daily (Online), 19 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/19/content_4539372.htm.

strong religious and cultural leanings. These drills reflect a manifestation of the Chinese concern on illegal movement of elements related to such secessionist activities.

Chinese Anti-Piracy Escort Mission in Indian Ocean

As per the statistics available, as of 15 July 2011, the 8th Chinese naval escort taskforce had escorted 471 Chinese and foreign ships in the Indian Ocean. On the whole, the Chinese naval escort taskforces have escorted more than 4,000 Chinese and foreign merchant ships so far. ⁶

China to Further Modernise Police, Military to Combat Terrorism

Senior Chinese leader Zhou Yongkang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, recently urged for stronger efforts to train more high-quality special police forces and facilitate the building of a modernized armed force. He also underscored the importance of strengthening China's anti-terrorism capability.⁷ Zhou is currently ranked ninth in the Chinese leadership hierarchy. Having served as the Minister for Public Security from 2002 to 2007 Zhou Yongkang is an influential decision maker in China on security matters.

Chinese Civilian Airline Company takes part in Military Transport Drill

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) carried out a force projection drill in Harbin, capital city of Heilongjiang Province in North-east China on July 16, 2011. In this exercise the 13th Military Transport Contingent of China Southern Airlines Co. Ltd. was ordered to dispatch an A320 passenger aircraft with a light armed combat troop unit and a field medical detachment on board to an unknown destination in an emergency situation in actual combat conditions. The drill, codenamed "Tengfei 2011" was organized by the PLA Shenyang Military Area Command (MAC).⁸ Shenyang MAC is responsible for the entire area Northeast of Beijing which is adjacent to the Korean Peninsula. Such rehearsals are held to validate various contingencies in transportation of quick reaction teams. Noteworthy is the fact how China is aiming to achieve civil-military synergy by outsourcing non-essential and specialized military operations to a civilian airline entity like the China Southern Airline which has set up contingents for the purpose.

Airborne Troop Exercise for Radioactive Environment

The PLA Army Aviation Force carried out new weapons and ammunition combat power

6. PLA Daily (Online), 19 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/19/content_4538482.htm.

7. PLA Daily (Online), 15 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/15/content_4487795.htm.

8. PLA Daily (Online), 22 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/22/content_4578003.htm.

generation drill on 10 July 2011. As per the details made available to the media, during this drill the armed helicopters first launched chaff bombs from the sky at a low altitude below 100 meters, and then fired multiple rocket shells and laser-guided missiles successively in the state of level flight on targets on sea surface. Sun Delong, Deputy Director of the Army Aviation Department of the PLA General Staff Headquarters, informed that through this drill, the army aviation troops tested operational manoeuvres such as tactical strikes by four helicopters in quick turns and launching of new-type laser-guided missiles by two helicopters with “ground irradiation”. According to him, this drill has improved the maximum operational effectiveness of the helicopters.⁹ Irradiation is the process by which an object is exposed to radiation. Normally ionizing radiation which is ubiquitous in the environment, also comes from radioactive materials, X-ray tubes, and particle accelerators. This exercise probably demonstrated manoeuvres in a radioactive environment against targets off the China’s coast.

Chinese Navy Carry Out Communication Drill with Drone

The South China Sea Fleet of the PLA Navy (PLAN) has carried out the first remote communication support drill with a PLAN drone sometime in the month of July 2011.¹⁰ The use of drone in the drill confirms the fact that China is

making sizeable investments in developing UAVs and drones.

Chinese Rapid Deployment Military Drill

On 16 July 2011, a G224 high-speed train was engaged in a military drill wherein nearly 1,000 officers and men (about a battalion strength) were transported by high-speed railway for the first time. The drill covered 1,308 km and was carried out in two batches under the supervision of the Military Representative Office of Railway and Waterway stationed in Jinan in east China. The media has noted that the successful transportation of troops by the Beijing-Shanghai high-speed railway marks a new improvement of the rapid mobility capability of the PLA.¹¹ Such drills are held to validate mobilization timings and capabilities of long distance transportation of troops by the Chinese military regularly.

Chinese Develop Secure Military Information System

The network optical fibre one-way transmission equipment developed by a technology group of a unit under the Xinjiang Military Area Command (MAC) of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) passed the appraisal of the Information Security Appraisal and Certification Centre of the PLA Xinjiang MAC early this year. This equipment

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9. PLA Daily (Online), 18 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/18/content_4524864.htm.
 10. PLA Daily (Online), 11 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/11/content_4463350.htm.
 11. PLA Daily (Online), 19 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/19/content_4538481.htm.

has been distributed and used in many PLA units. The media reports that with the help of this equipment, two computers connected to different networks can secure transmission of vast amount of data by an optical fibre in real time without using mobile storage devices such as U disk and compact disk. It is also claimed that the system can physically insulate and block all possibilities of a hacking intrusion or attack, thereby avoiding the risk of a possible information leakage or damage.¹²

PLA Holds Seminar on Strengthening Information Warfare Capabilities

On 8 July 2011, the National Defence University (NDU) of the PLA held a seminar on “accelerating the transformation of the combat power generation

mode” of the PLA. Leaders and experts from various combat units, military academies, leading organs of the Party Central Military Commission (CMC) and the PLA General Headquarters/ Departments participated in this seminar. More than 600 papers were presented which covered the rules, methods, approaches and evaluation indicators of combat power generation. It also covered specific contents, key issues and effective countermeasures of accelerating the transformation of the combat power generation under information warfare conditions.¹³ The Chinese military has been undergoing an RMA in terms of information warfare and computerisation which is integral to their “Three Phased Strategy” of mechanization and computerisation which they plan to complete by 2050.

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12. PLA Daily (Online), 21 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/21/content_4563993.htm.
 13. PLA Daily (Online), 11 July 2011, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2011-07/11/content_4463348.htm.

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