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CHINA'S GROWING INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE MANAGEMENT

Although China is routinely criticised for its rapidly increasing defence budget and lack of transparency as to its intentions, much less attention is paid to the positive role China is playing internationally through contributions to peacekeeping, counter-piracy operations and through active participation in multilateral defence forums.

Of the United Nations Security Council's Permanent Five, China is by far the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations. Overall, it is the 13th largest contributor. By contrast, France is 26th, the United Kingdom 45th with the United States at 63rd and Russia 68th. (New Zealand by the way has slumped to 92nd – not a good look as we press our case for a seat on the Security Council.) Until recently, China's contributors took the form of engineer, medical and logistic personnel, capabilities often in short supply in such missions, but earlier this year China also dispatched combat troops in support of the UN mission in strife-torn Mali. In October 2013, China hosted the 6th ASEAN Regional Forum Peacekeeping Experts Meeting. China has also recently hosted a UN military observers course providing training to officers from 15 countries.

China has contributed ships to the counter-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, which is mandated by the UN Security Council, since December 2008. China's Navy has cooperated with naval ships of more than twenty countries in this mission and has provided protection to several thousand merchant ships – both Chinese and foreign. China has taken part in a voluntary mechanism called Shared Awareness and De-Confliction, which aims to coordinate and de-conflict counter-piracy activities in order to maximise the benefits of the mission without sacrificing national identity. China's role in defending the global system against trans-national criminal enterprises of this sort is in the interests of all countries who rely on freedom of navigation in the maritime commons.

China is also supporting the international mission charged with the removal of Syria's chemical weapons arsenal by providing a guided missile frigate to escort ships carrying those weapons away from Syria. Like the Gulf of Aden mission, this operation will see the Chinese Navy working with the United States Navy.

China is an active participant in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus Forum (ADMM+). The Forum, which was established in 2010, is an 18-strong grouping designed to give emphasis to regional defence capacity-building through more regular engagement including in training and joint exercises. For the past three years, China and Vietnam co-chaired the ADMM+ Expert Working Group on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, one of the five expert groups established by the Forum. China has also contributed to the work of the other four working groups including the Peacekeeping Operations Group co-chaired by New Zealand and the Philippines.

In April China will for the first time host the next meeting of the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS) which was established in 1987 to promote cooperation between member countries, (New Zealand is a longstanding member), strengthen mutual understanding and trust and jointly safeguard maritime security. China has taken an active part in the development of WPNS technical document documents and systems. The April meeting is expected to take a major step forward in the work of the WPNS by formally adopting the Code for Unalerted Encounters at Sea, the aim of which is to promote safety measures and facilitate communication when naval and public ships, submarines or aircraft make contact.

China will also be taking an active part for the first time in the major United States-hosted RIMPAC exercise which takes place later this year in waters off Hawaii. RIMPAC is the world's largest maritime warfare exercise and seeks to enhance interoperability between Pacific Rim armed forces as a means of promoting regional stability.

In carrying out these roles China is familiarising itself with international norms of military behaviour and is engaging in the kinds of peace support operations welcomed by the international community. Any significant shift in regional and global power balances will inevitably raise concerns from those who prefer the comfort of the *status quo ante*. But when addressing the possible issues arising from China's rapidly growing military capabilities,

it is important to acknowledge that China's military can and does play an increasingly important role in support of the global order.

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