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14. ABSTRACT Tensions between the United States and the Peoples Republic of China continue to rise. U.S. and PRC militaries both operate in the Asia-Pacific region. The INDO-PACOM Commander must expand military relations with the PRC in order to prevent unintended crises from occurring. Military-to-military relations are not appeasement on behalf of the United States. The U.S. benefits more from military ties than the PRC as this paper will demonstrate. Expanding military-to-military relations will reduce the risk of unintended conflicts or accidents between the U.S. and PRC, will build operational trust and cooperation between the Chinese and American militaries and will promote stability in the Asia-Pacific region.					
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**INTERNATIONAL JIU JITSU: EXPANDING MILITARY RELATIONS WITH THE
PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA**



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A CRISIS WAITING TO HAPPEN

Tensions continue to grow between the United States and the People's Republic of China. Distrust between the two states has increased due to PRC aggression in the South China Sea and United States military sales to Taiwan.¹ Military drills and exercises conducted by both states in the South China Sea exacerbate these tensions. Military ties between the two nations are frequently cut when the broader political relationship sours.² Two militaries operating in close proximity with one another against the backdrop of these tensions is a recipe for disaster and a crisis waiting to happen. Similar to the sports of wrestling or Jiu Jitsu – keeping your opponent close and eliminating space between your opponent can be an advantage. Rather than cut off ties with the PRC, the U.S. should increase them. The INDO-PACOM Commander *must* expand military-to-military exercises with the PRC in order to advance national interests in the region. Expanding military-to-military relations will reduce the risk of unintended conflicts or accidents, build operational trust and cooperation between the Chinese and American militaries and will further promote stability in the region.

LIMITATIONS

Before addressing benefits, the limitations and the counterarguments for military-to-military ties must be addressed. Many American policy, military and national security analysts argue that military-to-military engagements between the PRC and the United States military are a futile waste of resources and time.³ According to former Director of Intelligence at U.S. Pacific Fleet Captain Fanell (Ret), military engagements will not likely change PRC behavior in

¹ Author's assessment based on discussion in NWC JMO course.

² Paul Haenle. "Why the U.S. and Chinese Militaries Aren't Talking Much Anymore." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 11, 2021. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/11/why-u.s.-and-chinese-militaries-aren-t-talking-much-anymore-pub-85123>.

³ James Fenell. "Nobody Asked Me, But. . . - Stop "Engagement at all Costs"." Proceedings, September, 2016. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2016/september/nobody-asked-me-stop-engagement-all-costs>.

the South China Sea or curb aggression and excessive territorial claims.⁴ Past military engagements between the two nations also highlight bad faith on behalf of the Chinese. China's decision to use a spy ship to monitor a 2014 Rim of the Pacific exercise (RIMPAC), despite the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN) invitation and participation in the same seems to only reinforce that perspective.⁵

In 2018, the United States disinvited the PRC from participating in future RIMPACs. The United States 2019's NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) specified that "unless it halts all land reclamation, removes weapons installations in the South China Sea, and demonstrates a consistent four-year track record of taking actions toward stabilizing the region"⁶ the PRC will not be allowed back in RIMPAC. Other experts may argue that reaching out to the PRC to expand military ties constitutes a form of appeasement.⁷ The truth is that the U.S. can still choose to take a hardline stance with the PRC *and* have military ties. This paper does not assert that the expansion of military ties will curb Chinese aggression or behavior contrary to the rules based international order. This paper *argues* that small advances in military ties will further U.S. national interests in the region and lead to a better future state for the United States and its strategic competition with the PRC. The saying "keep your enemies closer" aptly applies in the region.

REDUCING UNINTENDED CONFLICT AND ACCIDENTS

First, the U.S. must know how to interact with the PRC in order to reduce the possibility of unintended conflict or accidents. This is the first pillar of military ties that the INDO-PACOM

⁴ Fenell, "Nobody Asked Me, But. . . - Stop "Engagement at all Costs".

⁵ Andrew Erickson, "U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations." *Asia Policy*, No. 3 (JULY 2019), 123-144. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26773958>.

⁶ Erickson, "U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations," 128.

⁷ Fenell, "Nobody Asked Me, But. . . - Stop "Engagement at all Costs".

Commander should consider in order to further U.S. interests in the region. The United States Navy will continue to encounter the PLAN throughout the Pacific. The U.S. must know how to interact safely with PRC maritime units when they do meet. The last decade saw an uptick in escalatory interactions which illustrates just how important it is to know how to work with the PRC to reduce escalation. PLAN officer Admiral Wu Shengli “threatened in October 2015 that U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea could prove to be ‘a minor incident that sparks war.’ This threat was later repeated by Vice Admiral Sun Jianguo in July 2016 when he warned that ‘military freedom of navigation...[could] play out in a disastrous way.’”⁸ These remarks by PLAN officers show just how close the two navies can actually get to kinetic escalation.

Also in 2016, a U.S. drone in international waters was confiscated by the PRC, though it was eventually returned to U.S. custody.⁹ In 2018, a Chinese Luyang class destroyer conducted aggressive and dangerous maneuvers near the USS Decatur during a freedom of navigation operation. The Chinese warship drove within forty-five yards of the American ship, verbally warned her and continued to act in an escalatory and hazardously aggressive manner.¹⁰ Generally, naval combatants do not get within 1,000 yards of one another (unless in an international strait or some other planned event).¹¹ Forty-five yards is practically “scraping paint” by maritime standards. These examples demonstrate how dangerous interactions can be

⁸ Scott, Harold. “Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship.” *Asia Policy*, JULY 2019, Vol. 14, No. 3 (JULY 2019), 145-168.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26773959>.

⁹ Harold, “Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship.”

¹⁰ Martinez, Luis. “Chinese warship came within 45 yards of USS Decatur in South China Sea: US.” *ABC News*, October 1, 2018.

<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/chinese-warship-45-yards-uss-decatur-south-china/story?id=58210760>

¹¹ The author’s assessment as a qualified Surface Warfare Officer.

between the two navies. INDO-PACOM must expand military ties in order to reduce this kind of escalation.

The best way to work with the PRC military in order to reduce the risk of miscalculation, and to deconflict forces in close proximity is through communication mechanisms designed to avert a crisis. Examples of these mechanisms include warships communicating via the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), and senior U.S. military leaders reaching out to their counterparts via Defense Telephone Link (DTL).¹² CUES is a document that contains a common “playbook” of signals, communications directions and safety measures that are used to communicate to naval ships and aircraft when meeting each other unplanned. CUES is intended to reduce uncertainty and unintended mistakes when operating in close proximity. It was signed by the U.S. and the PRC in 2014 at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium.¹³ The PRC does not always follow CUES even though it was signed.¹⁴ This reinforces the notion that the broader political relationship between the U.S. and China impacts military communications between the two militaries. Nonetheless, the INDO-PACOM Commander must develop more opportunities to practice communicating with the PRC. Should a conflict at sea ensue between the two navies, communicating via CUES may be the best way to deescalate the situation. Ships should include CUES proficiency at all levels of surface force training and the 7th Fleet Commander should arrange with the respective PLAN counterpart to arrange for planned CUES practice between the two navies as often as feasible.

¹² Kine, Phelim. “Spiral into Crisis: The U.S.-China Hotline is Dangerously Broken.” Politico, September 1, 2021. <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/01/us-china-military-hotline-508140>.

¹³ Kotani, Tetsuo. “Positive Signs for Crisis Management in the East China Sea,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, February 4, 2015.

<https://amti.csis.org/positive-signs-for-crisis-management-in-the-east-china-sea/>

¹⁴ Harold, “Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship” 153.

Furthermore, CUES must be expanded to include all of the PRCs naval forces like China's coast guard and maritime militia. Current agreed upon commitments between the U.S. and PRC do not include these arms of the PRCs maritime force.¹⁵ The INDO-PACOM Commander must work with the PLAN to codify commitments to safe practices at sea with these maritime entities. Professor Erickson of the United States Naval War College noted that should a crisis on the Korean peninsula erupt, U.S. and PRC forces would inevitably come into close contact with each other, particularly the PRCs maritime militia.¹⁶ U.S. forces will need to know how to communicate with these units, even if just to stay out of each other's way. The PRC have different rules of engagement, different ways of deploying troops and stationing ships. The worst time to be discovering these intricacies is during a crisis.¹⁷

One of the principal objections to military-to-military engagements with the PRC is over the perception that the PRC gains more from the engagements than the United States. Crisis communication systems like CUES and DTL however, shape PRC behavior far more than vice versa. According to Dr. Scott Harold (political scientist and Associate Director of the RAND Center for Asia Pacific Policy), risk reduction and crisis communications mechanisms "tend to be modeled on preexisting international norms that accord with U.S. interests and values. China is thus forced to adjust its own operational practices to match these norms rather than requiring the United States to change its patterns of behavior."¹⁸ Dr. Harold furthermore brings this idea together in several tables he created that highlight what both the U.S. and PRC obtain from interactions with each other (tables 1 and 2 below).

¹⁵ Erickson, "U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations," 139.

¹⁶ Erickson, "U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations," 140.

¹⁷ Erickson, "U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations," 140.

¹⁸ Harold, "Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship" 163.

The United States' Value from Other Engagement Modalities

Engagement Modality	U.S. goals				
	Shape Chinese policy	Promote cooperation	Reduce risks	Signal	Understand the PLA
Risk reduction and crisis communication mechanisms	Yes	Limited	Yes	No	Yes
Ship visits	Limited	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes
Professional military education exchanges	Limited	Limited	No	Yes	Yes
Defense Telephone Link/Video teleconferences	No	Limited	Yes	Yes	No
Tactical-level bilateral exercises	Limited	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes
Trilateral exercises (e.g., Operation Kowari)	Limited	Limited	Limited	Yes	Yes
Multilateral exercises (Cobra Gold, RIMPAC)	Limited	Yes	Limited	Yes	Yes
Song and dance troupe exchanges	No	Limited	No	Yes	Yes
Other shared interest cooperation dialogues	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

¹⁹ Tables are direct quotes from Dr. Harold's article

¹⁹ Harold, "Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship" 164.

China's Value from Other Engagement Modalities

Engagement Modality	Chinese goals			
	Shape U.S. policy	Learn from the United States	Signal to other countries	Signal to domestic audiences
Risk reduction and crisis communication mechanisms	No	No	No	Yes
Ship visits	No	Some	Yes	Yes
Professional military education exchanges	No	Some	No	Yes
Defense Telephone Link/Video teleconferences	No	No	No	Yes
Tactical-level bilateral exercises	Limited	Some	Yes	Yes
Trilateral exercises (e.g., Operation Kowari)	Limited	Some	Yes	Yes
Multilateral exercises (Cobra Gold, RIMPAC)	Limited	Some	Yes	Yes
Song and dance troupe exchanges	No	No	No	Yes
Other shared interest cooperation dialogues	Limited	Some	Yes	Yes

²⁰ Tables are direct quotes from Dr. Harold's article.

²⁰ Harold, "Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship" 165.

Dr. Harold's tables show that crisis communication mechanisms shape PRC policy, promote some cooperation, reduce risk and help the U.S. understand the PRC. The Chinese on the other hand do not shape U.S. policy, learn from the United States, or signal a pro-PRC narrative to other nations. Communicating via DTL yields similar results. The PRC does gain domestic prestige from the exchanges, but little else.²¹

Additionally, with fewer and fewer communications between the two militaries, the risks of an incident rise. Annual military-to-military exchanges between the PRC and U.S. decreased from over 40 a year to less than 20 between 2014 and 2021.²² "One Chinese scholar suggested that the confidence-building measures that exist today between China and the United States are rudimentary compared to those between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War."²³ Paul Haenle of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace wrote anecdotally: "When I was serving on the National Security Council in 2009, the USNS Impeccable was harassed by Chinese fishing vessels, and direct dialogue with the Chinese military helped resolve the incident".²⁴ The INDO-PACOM Commander must increase the amount of crisis communications with the PRC which will decrease the risk of unintended military conflict and gain the PRC very little in return.

OPERATIONAL TRUST: USSR AND PRC PARALLELS

Second, the INDO-PACOM Commander must expand military to military relations with the PRC in order to promote cooperation and operational trust. Captain Rielage (a former Director for Intelligence and Information Operations for U.S. Pacific Fleet) describes the

²¹ Harold, "Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship" 164.

²² Paul Haenle. "Why the U.S. and Chinese Militaries Aren't Talking Much Anymore." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 11, 2021.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/08/11/why-u.s.-and-chinese-militaries-aren-t-talking-much-anymore-pub-85123>.

²³ Haenle, "Why the U.S. and Chinese Militaries Aren't Talking Much Anymore."

²⁴ Haenle, "Why the U.S. and Chinese Militaries Aren't Talking Much Anymore."

differences between political trust and operational trust. Political trust is trusting another nation to be a good partner. This kind of trust can be destroyed quickly depending on who is in charge of a country politically. Operational trust occurs between militaries where each expects that the other is safe, reliable and professional.²⁵ Captain Rielage describes examples of operational trust in series of example questions: “*given a station, can you keep it? Will you? Can you put fuel in my helicopter without killing my crew? Will you keep a stand-off from hazardous operations if I signal you? Is your boarding ladder safe for my sailors to climb?*”²⁶ This kind of trust is built over time with the ultimate objective of being able to work in close proximity to one another or even together on mutually beneficial exercises.

An example of this type of trust already exists in recent history. This is the operational trust between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union. While being *political* adversaries, both nations managed to have enough operational trust to minimize incidents at sea even while operating in close proximity to one another.²⁷ In 1972 the *Agreement Between the Government of The United States of America and the Government of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas* was signed by the two nations.²⁸ Some specific highlights of the treaty include collision avoidance guidance, international signals to be used when the respective navies were operating in close proximity, direction on how to operate near naval formations, and even guidance on informing each other when operating in

²⁵ Rielage, Dale. “An Imperative to Engage.” Proceedings, April 2015.
<https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2015/april/imperative-engage>

²⁶ Rielage, “An Imperative to Engage.”

²⁷ Marolda, Edward. “Conflict and Cooperation: The U.S. and Soviet Navies in the Cold War,” Colloquium on Contemporary History No.10, June 12, 1996.
<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/c/conflict-coop-us-soviet-navies-cold-war.html>.

²⁸ U.S. Department of State Website. “Agreement Between the Government of The United States of America and the Government of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas.” <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/4791.htm>.

close proximity to submarines.²⁹ In 1985 Secretary of the Navy John Lehman commented on Soviet and American incidents after this agreement when he “observed that the frequency of incidents [between the USSR and U.S] was ‘way down from what it was in the 1960s and early 1970s.’”³⁰ This is an example of what could lay ahead between the U.S. and PRC if operational trust is built.

One particular way of creating operational trust between the U.S and PRC is through joint counterpiracy operations. The U.S. and PRC have had success working together doing counterpiracy in the past. In 2008, while piracy near Somalia was common, the PLAN and U.S. Navy worked together. Cindy Cheng (a senior analyst at the Carter Center) wrote in the Carter Center’s *Africa-U.S.-China Trilateral Cooperation Research Series* “while this cooperation was mostly limited to mutually reinforcing actions, there was coordination between U.S. and Chinese naval forces on an ad hoc basis.”³¹ The PRC first sent a fleet to the Gulf of Aden in 2008. Since 2010, the PRC has responded to a greater number of distress calls from non – Chinese ships.³² Cindy Cheng describes how the USS Winston S. Churchill conducted anti-piracy drills with the PLAN frigate Yi Yang in 2012. Both navies expressed that the exercise was beneficial in learning how each other operates.³³ The INDO-PACOM Commander should arrange for joint counterpiracy in the Pacific using what occurred in the Gulf of Aden as a blueprint.

Another reason that the INDO-PACOM Commander should advocate for counterpiracy in the Pacific – particularly in the South China Sea is that the more the two navies cooperate the

²⁹ U.S. Department of State Website. “Agreement Between the Government of The United States of America and the Government of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas.” <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/4791.htm>.

³⁰ U.S. Department of State Website.

³¹ Cindy Cheng. “China and U.S. Anti-piracy Engagement in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean Region.” *Africa-U.S.-China Trilateral Cooperation Research Series*, no. 5 (2017).

https://www.cartercenter.org/news/publications/peace/china_publications/china_trilateral_cooperation.html.

³² Cheng, “China and U.S. Anti-piracy Engagement in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean Region.”

³³ Cheng, “China and U.S. Anti-piracy Engagement in the Gulf of Aden and Western Indian Ocean Region.”

more it *legitimizes* the U.S. presence in that region in the eyes of the PRC. U.S. strategic objectives favor a rules-based international order and to keep the PRC a status quo power. Working with the PRC military (even with small, tactical engagements) brings the PRC into that order. Engagements like joint counterpiracy also improve U.S. understanding of the Chinese military's command and control, their doctrine and organization.

The INDO-PACOM Commander can also create operational trust between the U.S. and PRC through joint Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HADR) and At-Sea Search and Rescue (SAR) exercises and operations. There has already been success in the past. In 2012 for example, search and rescue bilateral exercises took place between the American Coast Guard and the Chinese Maritime Safety Administration near Hawaii.³⁴ According to Dr. Harold, Chinese analysts believe that HADR and SAR exercises are valuable to the PRC because they can learn from American expertise and enhance their image internationally.³⁵ Opponents of military ties might argue that this is precisely why the U.S. *should not* do these exercises. The benefits largely outweigh the costs however. One very tangible benefit is that by doing joint military exercises that the PRC values – the *less willing* they will be to cut ties in the first place.

The PRC has a tendency to cut military ties with the U.S. as a sort of “punishment” for what the PRC deems as adversarial behavior. In August of 2022, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi made a much-publicized visit to Taiwan. After the visit, China's Foreign Ministry issued a statement cancelling talks between U.S. and PRC regional military commanders and discussions on military maritime safety. The ministry continued in its statement

³⁴ Scott Harold. “Expanding Contacts to Enhance Durability: A Strategy for Improving U.S.-China Military- to-Military Relations.” *Asia Policy*, No. 16 (JULY 2013), 103-138.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/24905233>.

³⁵ Harold, “Expanding Contacts to Enhance Durability: A Strategy for Improving U.S.-China Military- to-Military Relations.”

that “cooperation on returning illegal immigrants, criminal investigations, transnational crime, illegal drugs and climate change will be suspended.”³⁶ The INDO-PACOM Commander must commit to joint ventures such as HADR and SAR which are valuable to the Chinese in order to *raise the cost* of severing military ties.

INCREASING STABILITY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

Lastly, the INDO-PACOM Commander must expand military ties with the PRC in order to promote stability in the region. According to the senior adviser and Henry A. Kissinger Chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Dr. Michael J. Green: “there is one perspective on Chinese naval modernization that may be common across Asia: all of the powers seek a *stable* U.S.–China relationship.”³⁷ During the infamous “EP-3 Incident” (sometimes known as the “Hainan Island Incident”), an American EP-3 signals intelligence platform and a PRC fighter aircraft collided and the EP-3 was forced to land in Hainan Island.³⁸ The crew was detained for 11 days.³⁹ Dr. Green argues that the incident not only caused consternation for the U.S. but also for many other powers in the Pacific to include Japan, Australia, Thailand and Singapore. These nations were especially concerned that the situation might not be resolved peacefully during the brief moment in time where it seemed like the U.S. and PRC could not actually come to a resolution.⁴⁰ The region does not want a conflict to take place between the U.S. and PRC and the INDO-PACOM Commander must expand military ties in order to assure allies and partners.

³⁶ Knickmeyer, Ellen, Miller, Zeke, Rising, David. “China cuts off vital US contacts over Pelosi Taiwan.” AP News, August 5, 2022.

<https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-china-asia-beijing- b252479810add6a225fa1e4a6d441983>.

³⁷ Michael Greene. “U.S.–China Maritime Cooperation Regional Implications and Prospects,” *China, the United States, and 21st-Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership*, (2015), 355-364.

³⁸ Hainan Island Incident Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hainan_Island_incident.

³⁹ Hainan Island Incident Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hainan_Island_incident.

⁴⁰ Greene, “U.S.–China Maritime Cooperation Regional Implications and Prospects,” 361.

A question that the U.S. must continue to ask itself is: could the two nations negotiate a peaceful solution to another EP-3 incident in the present day? Admiral Prueher, the former U.S. Ambassador to China during the EP-3 collision was unable to get through to the Chinese Foreign Ministry in the immediate aftermath of the collision. It took over 12 hours before the Chinese Foreign Ministry would begin to talk.⁴¹ When asked to assess the current state of military-to-military relations in 2021 (twenty years after the incident) he replied that he was concerned that “U.S. and Chinese military forces in the Pacific could ‘run amok’ because of what he describes as ‘non-existent’ bilateral military communications channels.”⁴² Another incident could push U.S. allies and partners further away from U.S. influence because rather than choose between the two powers they may prefer to stand alone.

The INDO-PACOM Commander should consider that many countries in the region do not want to have to choose between the “two giants.” Conducting military-to-military engagements with the PRC gives the U.S. more clout in the region when the rest of the world sees the U.S. trying to build a relationship with the PRC. At the 32nd ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Summit, the “Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that a mounting trade spat between the United States and China was one of the most pressing worries for Southeast Asian nations as their leaders echoed the concern over rising protectionism.”⁴³ Prime Minister Loong may have been highlighting an economic issue between the two nations, however it is not difficult to imagine how Singapore and other ASEAN members would be similarly concerned over a military incident between the U.S. and PRC. The INDO-PACOM

⁴¹ Kine, “Spiral into Crisis: The U.S.-China Hotline is Dangerously Broken.”

⁴² Kine, “Spiral into Crisis: The U.S.-China Hotline is Dangerously Broken.”

⁴³ Jack Kim. “U.S., China trade tensions a pressing concern for ASEAN: Singapore PM.” Reuters, April 27, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asean-summit/u-s-china-trade-tensions-a-pressing-concern-for-asean-singapore-pm-idUSKBN1HZ03A>.

Commander must continue to reach out to the PRC to conduct engagements, even if they are denied by the PRC. This will continue to demonstrate to ASEAN that U.S. interests in the region are peaceful.

Another way in which pursuing military relations with the PRC can promote stability in the region is that it can galvanize the international community towards resisting PRC aggression if the U.S. is rebuked by the PRC. Travis Sharp (a non-resident fellow at the Modern War Institute at West Point) advocates for keeping the PRC in RIMPAC specifically for this reason. Sharp highlights the following example from history: “Prior to World War I, Winston Churchill pursued naval arms control talks with Germany hoping that, if they languished, skeptical British liberals would realize that Germany was hostile and agree to fund his shipbuilding program. Engaging a rival laid the groundwork for more effective confrontation later.”⁴⁴ Engaging the Chinese in good faith with military relations portrays the U.S. in the best light possible. If the PRC chooses to escalate interactions with the United States, the INDO-PACOM Commander can rightly point out to the domestic and international community that the U.S. tried to establish peaceful relations with the PRC. This will make it much easier to gain public support against PRC escalation and adventurism in the Asia-Pacific region.

CONCLUSION

As described throughout this paper - expanding military ties with the PRC is not a panacea meant to solve China’s excessive claims and aggressive behavior in the South China Sea. The United States and the former Soviet Union were political adversaries and military ties between those two states did not change that reality. Yet, the operational trust built between the

⁴⁴ Sharp, Travis. “The Pragmatist’s Case for Keeping China in RIMPAC.” War on the Rocks, June 1, 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/the-pragmatists-case-for-keeping-china-in-rimpac/>.

two militaries did at least lead to *less* incidents between the two great powers.⁴⁵ Expanding military ties between the PRC and the U.S. is what the INDO-PACOM Commander must do in order to further national interests in the region. Expanding military-to-military relations will reduce unintended conflict and accidents, build operational trust between the two militaries and ultimately can promote stability in the region.

⁴⁵ U.S. Department of State Website.

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