

# THE GREAT RED FLEET

*China's Port Call Diplomacy: Battlegoons as Bandwagons*

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by

Damien John Robinson

Mater of Arts, U.S. Naval War College, 2011  
Bachelor of Arts, Connecticut College, 1997

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## ABSTRACT

What does Beijing hope to achieve through port call diplomacy? And, more importantly, is it succeeding? I argue that PLAN port visits support tangible Chinese policy goals in the host country and ultimately encourage economic and political alignment with Beijing. There are certainly overlapping motivations behind these visits, but the essential aim is to induce accommodation for Beijing's policy preferences by revising upward a foreign leader's perception of Chinese power and status, as well as the potential benefits that may accrue from closer ties with Beijing.

Leaders are central to this theory. National-level policymakers care about naval visits and the signals they convey. This is true for the leaders in Beijing who deploy and carefully choreograph their ship's visits, as well as the foreign hosts who must factor the ship's implications into their strategic cost-benefit analysis. A naval vessel is a potent, multidimensional symbol of economic and military power with the potential to convince foreign leaders of China's elevated status and likely success. In keeping with Jervis, a ship's persuasive power is due in part to the idiosyncratic nature of human decision-making and the specific cognitive limitations of the leaders involved.

China's increased economic and military power—made highly visible by the sharp increase in PLAN ship visits after 2008—might be expected to produce a balancing response from host states. Or, some might predict that port calls would be more prevalent during times of increased tension or crises, as a way to intimidate the host country into compliance with Chinese demands. However, I find that Beijing is attempting to manage the unpredictability of leader perception through inducements rather than overt coercion. By properly sequencing ship visits with leadership engagements—and the potential economic incentives that they bring—Beijing has shrewdly revealed its growing military capability. And by doing so, it has received the tangible benefits that come from demonstrations of military power, while managing and mitigating the potential costs.

To evaluate port call diplomacy's success, I provide a series of case studies to determine whether port calls helped achieve positive outcomes for Beijing or elicited a negative reaction. The cases are grouped by the essential Chinese Communist Party goal that they support—economic expansion, sovereignty issues, and national unification. In addition to the diplomatic activity surrounding each port visit, I pay close attention to three markers of positive alignment with Beijing: (1) military-to-military cooperation in the form of multilateral and bilateral exercises; (2) Chinese port deals now under the Belt and Road Initiative; (3) and bilateral partnership agreements. I find there is indeed a positive association between calls, military exercises, port deals, and partnership agreements. To generalize these findings, I provide statistical analysis of port calls and my three measures of alignment with Beijing.

While Beijing enjoyed a positive response early on, PLAN port call diplomacy is an iterative game. Beijing has managed to thread a strategic needle in the time period covered; however, this does not mean that continued success is assured. Linkages between port visits and larger externalities cut both ways. If economic incentives do not materialize or mature as expected, foreign leaders may perceive China in a less optimistic light. Finally, PLAN port visits have already attracted the attention of other great powers. As distinctively visible status signals, they are a proxy for the contentious, multi-dimensional competition that is playing out between China and the United States globally. Rather than achieving victory without fighting for Beijing, port call diplomacy will likely fuel increased naval competition in the Indo-Pacific region.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *Introduction*

In late November 2009, the Chinese destroyer *Shijiazhuang* and replenishment ship *Hongzhu* began a diplomatic tour of South America with stops in Chile, Peru, and Ecuador.<sup>1</sup> At the time, the *Shijiazhuang* was the newest destroyer in China's fleet. The last People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) presence in South America had been in 2002 when the destroyer *Guangzhou* made a round-the-world voyage, which also included stops in Peru and Ecuador. In both the 2002 and 2009 visits, the host countries were among China's largest trade partners and recipients of Chinese investment in South America, particularly raw material suppliers. Beyond trade, the PLAN port visits indicate Beijing's diplomatic priorities and broader interest in the region. Beijing's high-level political engagement with South America began in 2004 with President Hu Jintao's trip to Santiago, Chile, to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC). President Hu returned to South America in 2008 when the APEC summit was again hosted in South America, this time in Lima, Peru. Since leadership time and attention is perhaps the greatest indicator of strategic interest, Hu Jintao's presence was consequential, and Peru emerged as a willing participant in Chinese economic expansion in South America.<sup>2</sup>

Within this context, it is unsurprising that the *Shijiazhuang* and *Hongzhu* arrived in Callao, Peru, on 5 December 2009. Prior to the ships' arrival, President Hu met with Peruvian president Alan Garcia on 13 November in Singapore. According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President Hu commented that 2008 had been a significant year in China-Peru relations.

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<sup>1</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Navy Fleet Arrives in Ecuador for Goodwill Visit," December 11, 2009, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/6839740.html>. According to Xinhua's reporting on the Ecuador port visit, the ships were headed to French Polynesia; however, there is no other information available about this potential stop.

<sup>2</sup> Jamestown Foundation, "China's Maturing Relationship with Latin America," China Brief Volume: 9 Issue: 6, March 18, 2009, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-maturing-relationship-with-latin-america/>.



Both leaders had made reciprocal visits to the other's country and trade and investment was on the rise. Surprisingly, Hu specifically mentioned the upcoming PLAN visit, concluding that, "the development of the China-Peru strategic partnership has taken a firm step." President Garcia responded, "Peru warmly welcomes the Chinese Navy fleet's visit to Peru and is ready to work with China to advance the bilateral strategic partnership."<sup>3</sup>

True to his word, President Garcia held an elaborate ceremony in Lima's Plaza Mayor on 5 December to welcome the Chinese sailors from the *Shijiazhuang* and *Hongzhu*, led by Rear Admiral Wang Fushan. President Garcia and Vice President Luis Giampietri Rojas also paid a visit to the *Shijiazhuang* in Callao. Garcia expressed his interest in Chinese defense technology and hoped Peru could learn from the visit. But more importantly, he announced that the Peru-China free trade agreement that was signed in April would go into effect the next day.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1.1 – Welcoming Ceremony in Lima, Peru, 5 December 2009 (Xinhua)

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Meets with Peruvian President Garcia," November 13, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3513\\_665118/3515\\_665122/t627714.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3513_665118/3515_665122/t627714.shtml).

<sup>4</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Peruvian President Meets Chinese Navy Senior Officer," SINA English, December 5, 2009, <http://english.sina.com/china/p/2009/1205/290829.html>.

What should be made of this? Some might not consider this activity consequential to international politics, but the fact that President Hu was cognizant of a PLAN destroyer's planned port call, and that President Garcia personally welcomed Admiral Wang and the Chinese ships, demonstrate the significance of this naval behavior and the importance leaders place on it. The intersubjective event clearly meant something to both presidents, but despite hundreds of years of practice, we know very little about the mechanisms and effects of port call diplomacy beyond a relatively small number of cases involving blunt coercion and posturing. This dissertation attempts to fill the void by providing a theory of Chinese port call diplomacy that explains the meaning and also the effect of this naval behavior on Chinese strategic goals.

In a twenty-year period, PLAN port visits rose from just seven individual ship calls in 1998 to a high of 146 in 2017, an increase of over 2000 percent. PLAN port calls, or "friendly visits," are well covered by Chinese media—full of colorful welcoming ceremonies, athletic matches, and smiling hosts with Chinese sailors. These ship visits are a specific phenomenon, a type of naval diplomacy, that has increased dramatically with China's rise. Between 1985 and 1999, PLAN ships made an average of just over three port visits per year. From 2000 to 2008, this average increased to roughly 11 visits; however, in January 2009 PLAN ships joined Combined Task Force 51 (CTF-51) antipiracy patrols off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. Antipiracy patrols, as well as a shift in Chinese strategic thought, led to an intense elevation in PLAN activity worldwide after 2008. Between 2009 and 2018, port visits rose to an average of just over 67 per year. See figure 1.

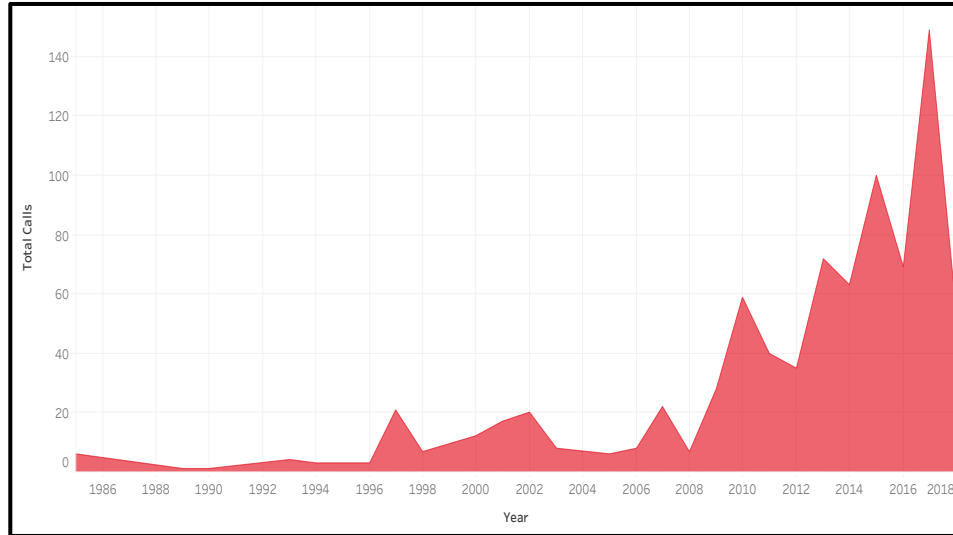


Figure 1.2 – PLAN Port Visits (1985-2018)

In some ways, this behavior is unsurprising. Spurred on by expectant populations—eager for greater prosperity and esteem—ascending states often build powerful navies and deploy them abroad on diplomatic missions to protect growing interests and expand influence. These rising states are eager to display newly acquired wealth and military prowess.

According to Plutarch, Pericles dispatched his fleet into the Aegean and Black Seas around 436 BC to reassure allies, deter rivals, and secure the vital grain imports from the Black Sea region that life in Athens depended on.<sup>5</sup> In the modern era, Japan sent its first domestically built and Japanese-crewed warship, the *Seiki*, to London via the Suez Canal in 1878 to exhibit Japan’s technological prowess.<sup>6</sup> Admiral Tirpitz built up Germany’s navy in anticipation of a new “global order,” deploying his fleet for prestige and diplomatic advantage—to achieve Kaiser Wilhelm II’s rightful “place in the sun.”<sup>7</sup> In 1907, the United States sailed the Great White Fleet around the

<sup>5</sup> John Nash, “Sea Power in the Peloponnesian War,” *Naval War College Review* Vol. 71, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 130.

<sup>6</sup> Staff, “A Japanese Naval Reception in London,” *The Tokio Times*, December 14, 1878.

<sup>7</sup> Holger H. Herwig, “Imperial Germany: Continental Titan, Global Aspirant,” in *China Goes to Sea*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2009).

world to announce its great power status and deter Japanese aggression. And, during the Cold War, the Soviet Navy under Admiral Gorshkov made frequent visits to the developing world to exhibit “the achievements of Soviet science, technology and industry.”<sup>8</sup> However, with few exceptions, these acts of naval diplomacy rarely convey their purported messages without unintended consequences. In fact, they typically increase the likelihood of rivalry, balancing, and even major power war.

Beijing’s higher profile in foreign ports is riskier than it might appear. Rising powers are warned to avoid provocative displays of military capability to escape the costs of balancing and war. Beyond the more familiar Thucydides trap, history demonstrates that building navies and showing them off is potentially perilous to the long-term prospects of these states. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, great powers such as Britain, Germany, Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union obsessed over improving their position in the naval hierarchy. China’s situation is most often compared to that of Imperial Germany’s at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when German leaders chose to build a fleet that provoked a naval arms race with Great Britain and eventually great power war.

As Robert Ross explains:

“There is perhaps no more momentous great-power strategic decision, short of launching a war, than to develop a power-projection, war-winning maritime capability—thereby challenging, and risking heightened conflict with, an established maritime power.”<sup>9</sup>

According to Ross, these costs include the long-term financial burden of building and maintaining a fleet, the diversion of resources away from more immediate domestic needs, the “predictable societal, economic, and security impacts of heightened and protracted great-power conflict,” the costs of preparations for war, and the risk and consequences of losing a great-power war.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979), 63.

<sup>9</sup> Robert S Ross, “Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Naval Expansionism from the Nineteenth Century to the Rise of China,” *Naval War College Review* 71, no. No 4 (Autumn) (2018): 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ross, 11.

The potential domestic hazards are particularly relevant for Beijing. After all, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) political project that began in 1949 is fundamentally about improving the welfare of the Chinese people through economic rejuvenation. Arguably, it has succeeded in lifting hundreds of millions out of abject poverty, but this progress has come at the cost of government control and intrusion in the private sphere. The bargain between the CCP and the Chinese people—economic development in exchange for public acquiescence—means that the Party's legitimacy is linked to its ability to deliver ever increasing prosperity. Because the vast majority of challenges to China's rise are domestic—economic, political, social, and environmental—any crisis that draws resources and attention away from domestic issues is potentially dangerous for the CCP.<sup>11</sup>

This context suggests that displays of PLAN capability would likely produce a negative outcome for China. Naval demonstrations, or any implied threat of naval force to coerce other states, have the potential to elicit the balancing and containment that Beijing fears most. Despite Chinese and international recognition of the obvious parallels, Beijing's economic success has insulated it from direct international pressure and allowed it to modernize the PLAN from a marginal, coastal navy to arguably the world's largest force.<sup>12</sup> Despite Beijing's insistence that, "this time is different," the dangers are certainly apparent. Beijing insists that ship visits are a straightforward attempt to reassure other states of China's benign intentions and deepen international relationships; however, it is far from clear why Beijing would intensify port call diplomacy after 2008. This inherent tension in Beijing's strategy creates a series of puzzles: (1) Why did ship visits increase so dramatically after 2008? (2) What does Beijing hope to achieve through port call diplomacy? And, most importantly, (3) is it succeeding?

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Glosny, "The Grand Strategies of Rising Powers: Reassurance, Coercion, and Balancing Responses" (London, England, Kings College London, 2012), 170–74.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Peck, "China Has The World's Largest Navy. And It's Getting Better, Pentagon Warns," *Forbes*, accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelpeck/2020/09/01/china-has-the-worlds-largest-navy-and-its-getting-better-pentagon-warns/>.

My answer to the first question is largely rooted in Chinese domestic politics. While the United States and Europe succumbed to the global financial crisis (2007-2009), China's relative stability and continued economic growth led to domestic expectations for more influence and protection of core interests abroad. Other events such as the Beijing Olympics amplified this shift in China's global image and a desire among leaders and the Chinese public for higher international status and respect. A turning point in the South China Sea disputes in 2009 also added to pressures on Beijing to do more not only to protect, but also to promote, China's interests overseas. These domestic political currents eventually cascaded down to the PLAN with Beijing's decision to join Combined Task Force 51 (CTF-51), a multinational naval task force established to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. Task force deployments extended the reach and frequency of PLAN port calls, which were then fully integrated into Beijing's larger strategy.

In answer to the second question, I argue that the purpose of a port visit is to support tangible Chinese policy goals in the host country and ultimately encourage economic and political alignment with Beijing. There are certainly overlapping motivations behind these visits, but the essential aim is to induce accommodation for Beijing's policy preferences by revising upward a foreign leader's perception of Chinese power and status, as well as the potential benefits that may accrue from closer ties with Beijing.

Leaders are central to this theory. As the port call in Peru illustrates, national-level decision-makers care about naval visits and the signals they convey. This is true for the leaders who deploy and carefully choreograph their ship's visits, as well as the foreign hosts who must factor the ship's implications into their strategic cost-benefit analysis. In other words, the *Shijiazhuang's* stop in Callao forced President Garcia to update his perception of Chinese power, but it also likely gratified President Hu by reflecting back the status and legitimacy that Chinese leaders desire most.

In keeping with Jervis, a ship's persuasive power is due in part to the idiosyncratic nature of human decision-making and the specific cognitive limitations of the leaders involved. Confirmation biases and cognitive dissonance are only a few of the vulnerabilities that port visits may exploit. A leader's personal experience or misguided lessons from naval history can also play a part.<sup>13</sup> A brand-new warship simplifies and makes plain most difficult questions of relative power and national trajectory. The ship is a potent symbol with the potential to convince foreign leaders of China's new status and likely success in a visceral way that GDP figures and monthly steel production do not. However, this disproportionate influence on leader perception can lead to unpredictable outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

Throughout, I test the importance of leaders by examining individual PLAN port calls and the diplomatic activity that surrounds them. This level of analysis also allows me to assess the relationship between ship visits and indications of positive or negative alignment with Beijing. My first finding is that calls are in fact linked to high-level leadership engagements. After initially examining the association between port calls and country specific characteristic such as GDP, or trade with China, I discovered that a state visit by the Chinese Premier is actually a far better predictor of ship arrivals.

Finally, to answer the critical question of the policy's success, I provide a series of case studies after Beijing's strategic shift in 2009 to determine whether port calls helped achieve positive outcomes for Beijing or elicited a negative reaction. The cases are grouped by the essential CCP goal that they support— economic expansion, sovereignty issues, and national unification. It is worth noting that all three of these objectives are necessary to sustain the CCP's overarching strategic goal—its own legitimacy. In addition to the diplomatic activity surrounding each port visit, I pay close attention to three markers of positive alignment with Beijing: (1) military-to-military

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Booth famously said, "one man's goodwill visit may well be another man's gunboat diplomacy."

cooperation in the form of multilateral and bilateral exercises; (2) Chinese port deals now under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); (3) and bilateral partnership agreements. Military exercises are a reasonable elevation in military relations that could occur as the result of a ship visit. Chinese port projects and partnership agreements are admittedly higher-order events, but they provide measurable way-points of success in Beijing's diplomatic strategy to induce closer ties to China.

I find there is indeed a positive association between calls, military exercises, port deals, and partnership agreements. To generalize these findings, I also provide statistical analysis of port calls and my three measures of alignment with Beijing. That said, this is not a causal claim—port visits do not cause these larger events to happen, but they do contribute to Beijing's positive diplomatic momentum toward them.

In most cases, port visits do further Beijing's policy objectives in host countries. This is particularly true in the realm of economic expansion and port deals due to the obvious financial incentives for other countries to participate. One support for this claim comes from observing the absence of ship visits. It is worth mentioning up front that there is no evidence of any port visits to Taiwan or countries that recognize the Republic of China. And ship visits to China's rival claimants in the South China Sea are all but absent during times of acute tensions. Beijing has been cautious to avoid crossing the coercive threshold. In that case, how can PLAN ship visits support national unification? I demonstrate that Beijing is using its most benevolent naval signals—along with economic incentives—in Oceania and North America to entice the remaining hold-outs in a fear-of-missing out (FOMO) strategy.

The field of international relations has evolved in its understanding of the varied and complicated responses to accumulations of power. What began as a binary choice between bandwagoning and balancing has expanded to include a wider range of hedging activities. This is a start, but does not go far enough. In reality, the potential reactions—between balancing and



bandwagoning—are nearly infinite and exist along a spectrum of relative economic, security, and political proximity.

These smaller shifts along the continuum are discoverable by examining specific port visits and the leader engagements that coincide with them. And, using this subtler scale, it is possible to see that PLAN port visits move other states incrementally closer to Beijing in a way that is distinct from “win-win” economic cooperation. In short, political context matters most.<sup>15</sup> I find that most port calls take place within weeks or several months of high-level leadership engagements, and the vast majority occur within periods of diplomatic progress rather than deteriorating relations. Weeks and months may seem substantial, but when one considers competing requirements for leader time and attention, compounded by the time-distance constraints of ships at sea, the proximity of ship visits and leader engagements is extraordinary.

The project’s initial contribution is a dataset that offers a more granular and complete picture of PLAN port call diplomacy between 1985 and 2018. This comprehensive record of PLAN port visits documents the phenomenon of Chinese naval diplomacy in a way that has not been done before and thus opens new streams of future research. The dataset builds on multiple existing compilations of PLAN visits, including *China’s Navy 2007*, an unclassified publication by the Office of Naval Intelligence that lists PLAN port visits at the ship level from 1985-2006.<sup>16</sup> The National Defense University subsequently published *China’s Military Diplomacy, 2003-2016*, along with a dataset of Chinese military exercises, senior leader engagements, and PLAN port visits.<sup>17</sup> There are also Chinese sources that aggregate PLAN port visits, including a special report by China Military

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<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Tim Heath for this essential insight.

<sup>16</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *China’s Navy 2007* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2007), <https://fas.org/irp/agency/oni/chinanavy2007.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Allen, Phillip C Saunders, and John Chen, “CHINA STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES 11,” 2017, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/1249864/chinese-military-diplomacy-20032016-trends-and-implications/>.

Online, entitled *Open and Transparent*, which lists PLAN port visits between 2009-2014.<sup>18</sup> Multiple secondary sources, including Erickson and Strange, contain lists of visits, especially those associated with the PLAN's counter-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa.<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup>One of the greatest resources to accomplish this task was publicly available data from *SeaWaves Magazine*, a naval enthusiast website that has compiled port arrivals by naval vessels worldwide.<sup>21</sup> Finally, an abundance of Chinese and international press reporting helped fill in the gaps and provide additional context surrounding PLAN visits. Since this is a story Beijing wants to tell, most if not all “friendly visits” are covered by Chinese state media. When aggregated, the result is a dataset of over 820 individual PLAN ships and the foreign ports they visited between 1985 and 2018. Calls after 2018 are included in the qualitative analysis at the country level when available. Booth draws a distinction between goodwill visits and operational calls that are driven by the needs of the ship, but I avoid this potentially subjective delineation. I include all ship visits, including those in conjunction with naval exercises, because all PLAN presence in foreign ports has the ability to affect foreign leader perceptions. Due to the extremely limited number of PLAN calls before 2000, as well as data constraints on other covariates, all statistical analysis is based on data between 1998 and 2018.

The dataset's ship-level detail also allows for more precise analysis of PLAN signals. Beyond choreographing ship visits around country specific agendas, Beijing is obviously adjusting its “voice,” with different naval platforms, including its cadet-training ships and China's single hospital ship. Beijing uses its cadet-training ships to send more cooperative, reassurance signals to neighbors and potential security partners. The *Zheng He*—named after the Ming Dynasty Admiral of the

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<sup>18</sup> “Chinese Military Open and Transparent,” accessed February 11, 2021, [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2007zgjdjtm/node\\_15383.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2007zgjdjtm/node_15383.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Andrew S Erickson and Austin M Strange, *Six Years at Sea ... and Counting: Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China's Maritime Commons Presence* (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2016), 123–34, <https://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4604259>;

<sup>20</sup> Kamerling and Putten, “An Overseas Naval Presence without Overseas Bases.”

<sup>21</sup> “SeaWaves Magazine,” n.d., <https://seawaves.com/>.

“treasure fleet,” who peacefully expanded China’s tributary system (1405-1433)—has done most of this diplomatic work.<sup>22</sup> At 433 feet long, the *Zheng He* accommodates roughly 200 cadets from multiple Chinese service academies and 30 instructors.<sup>23</sup> A smaller number of foreign cadets have also participated in the *Zheng He*’s training voyages. The Dalian Naval Academy increased its training and diplomatic capacity when it added the *Shichang* and the *Qi Jiguang* to its fleet of training ships in 1997 and 2017 respectively.

In December 2008, China’s first Anwei class hospital ship, *Daishandao* (“*Peace Ark*”), added another non-threatening tone to Beijing’s signaling repertoire. The *Daishandao* is 583 feet long and painted white with large red crosses in accordance with the Geneva Convention. It has 300 regular hospital beds and 20 intensive care unit beds along with eight operating theaters that allow the medical staff to perform 40 major operations per day.<sup>24</sup> Of note, patients can be treated with both Western and traditional Chinese medicine. Since 2010, the *Daishandao* has deployed to every region of the globe except the Middle East on what Beijing calls *Harmonious Missions*, bringing free medical care to under-served populations, as well as support to humanitarian and disaster relief operations. The *Daishandao* is an obvious symbol of benevolent great power capability and largess, which the PLAN has used for diplomatic effect. To this end, the PLAN commissioned two smaller, *Nanyi* class hospital ships in 2020.

The dissertation’s findings are somewhat counter-intuitive. China’s increased economic and military power—made highly visible by the sharp increase in PLAN ship visits after 2008—might be expected to produce a balancing response from host states. Or, some might predict that port calls

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<sup>22</sup> Claude Zanardi, “China’s Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: The Cases of Confucius Institutes and Chinese Naval Diplomacy,” *Journal of Political Power* 9, no. 3 (September 2016): 440, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2016.1232289>.

<sup>23</sup> “Type 679 Training Ship,” in *Wikipedia*, January 8, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Type\\_679\\_training\\_ship&oldid=999083912](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Type_679_training_ship&oldid=999083912).

<sup>24</sup> “Peace Ark: Onboard China’s Hospital Ship,” *USNI News* (blog), July 23, 2014, <https://news.usni.org/2014/07/23/peace-ark-onboard-chinas-hospital-ship>.

would be more prevalent during times of increased tension or crises, as a way to intimidate the host country into compliance with Chinese demands. However, I find that Beijing is attempting to manage the unpredictability of leader perception through inducements rather than overt coercion. By properly sequencing ship visits with leadership meetings—and the potential economic incentives that they bring—Beijing has shrewdly revealed its growing military capability. And by doing so, it has received the tangible benefits that come from demonstrations of military power, while managing and mitigating the potential costs. In the remainder of this introduction, I will review the existing naval diplomacy literature that informs my theories of port call diplomacy, its policy implications, and provide chapter summaries.

### *China's Port Call Diplomacy*

At its core, naval diplomacy is a form of signaling. Rowlands defines it as, “the use of naval and maritime assets as communicative instruments in international power relationships to further the interests of the actors involved.”<sup>25</sup> Le Mière uses the term *maritime* diplomacy in similar ways to Rowlands, but then boils down its purpose to “a form of signaling to allies and rivals of one’s intent and capabilities.”<sup>26</sup> Both Rowlands and Le Mière rightly identify that naval diplomacy is a means of communication, but others offer additional nuance. Robert Rubel explains that naval ships are imbued with geopolitical meaning: “they are big and expensive, and thus nations can afford relatively few of them. They thus represent both commitment and risk.”<sup>27</sup> Rubel asserts that the presence of naval forces abroad provides “*Voice*,” defined as, “the nation’s ability to make itself heard in

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<sup>25</sup> Kevin Rowlands, “Naval Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War Global Order” (Kings Collage London, 2015), 48; Kevin Rowlands, “Decided Preponderance at Sea: Naval Diplomacy in Strategic Thought,” *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 4 (2012), Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol65/iss4/9>.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*, Cass Series: Naval Policy and History (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 28.

<sup>27</sup> Robert C Rubel, “National Policy and the Post-Systemic Navy,” *Naval War College Review* 66, no. 4 (2013): 24.

international forums of various kinds, as well as credibility, based on the perceived legitimacy of the country, of the pronouncements, and policies of national leaders.”<sup>28</sup> Luttwak describes the gravity that naval ships possess and the process by which they affect a leader’s calculations. “The necessary (but by no means sufficient) condition is that the parties concerned *perceive* (correctly or otherwise) the capabilities deployed, thus allowing these capabilities to intrude on their view of the political environment and to affect their decisions.”<sup>29</sup>

“Port call diplomacy” is a particular type of naval diplomacy that allows a state to demonstrate its capability and make its “voice” heard under relatively cordial conditions. Throughout history navy ships have visited foreign ports for necessities, but also for diplomatic effect. A port visit, or port call, is an intermediate stop made by a ship, usually for supplies, repairs, or crew rest. However, for naval vessels, there are layers of custom and political meaning that guide protocol when visiting a foreign port. First and foremost, a navy ship is sovereign territory, a mobile fragment of its country of origin. This fact creates an unusual situation in which the national sovereignty of the ship’s country is temporarily contiguous with that of the host nation.<sup>30</sup> In other words, during a PLAN port call to places such as Tanzania, Spain, or Peru, China’s sovereign territory shares a border with countries that would otherwise be geographically impossible.

The PLAN port calls included in this project are distinct from “gunboat diplomacy,” which refers to the coercive use of limited naval force. Cable defines the term as: “the use or threat of limited naval force, otherwise than as an act of war, in order to secure advantage or to avert loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the

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<sup>28</sup> Rubel, 12–13.

<sup>29</sup> Edward Luttwak, *The Political Uses of Sea Power*, Studies in International Affairs, No. 23 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 6.

<sup>30</sup> Laurence W. Martin, *The Sea in Modern Strategy*, Studies in International Security 11. (New York: Praeger, 1967), 138–39; Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 35.

territory or the jurisdiction of their own state.”<sup>31</sup> Cable, along with Booth and Luttwak, pioneered a resurgence in the naval diplomacy literature, which emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s as a response to Cold War coercion scholars such as Schelling and George.

Port calls also require diplomatic and bureaucratic coordination before and during the visit. Maritime custom further organizes these interactions by creating reciprocal gestures of respect. For example, a warship must ask for and be granted permission to enter the host port just as host country officials must ask for and be granted permission before they come aboard the visiting warship. Receptions are often held onboard for the benefit of host country military officers and political elites. It is also a rare opportunity for public access to foreign warships and their crews, which has the potential to build mutual goodwill and mute threat perceptions. Together, these layers of coordination and custom involved in a port visit create something akin to a political ceremony, visible to the domestic audience in the ship’s country of origin, the host country’s public officials and citizens, as well as the international community.

The first wave of naval diplomacy scholars saw dramatically different degrees of significance in these visits. Cable, the subject’s most prominent writer, categorizes them as a form of *expressive force*, which he includes begrudgingly in his taxonomy as, “the last and least of the uses of limited naval force.”<sup>32</sup> Cable explains:

The reader must excuse these frivolities. In its expressive form, limited naval force resembles the ceremonial and representational aspects of ordinary diplomacy: equally rich in anecdotes, equally unproductive of identifiable advantages, equally dear to the romantic schoolboys who become politicians, diplomats and naval officers.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> James Cable, *Gunboat Diplomacy 1919-1991*, Studies in International Security (Macmillan Press) ; 16., Political Applications of Limited Naval Force (Basingstoke: Macmillan in association with the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1994), 14.

<sup>32</sup> Cable, 62.

<sup>33</sup> Cable, 64.

However, other scholars grant the port call more attention and consequence. Booth divides them into operational calls and specific goodwill visits. Operational calls are driven exclusively by the ship's requirements for replenishment and crew rest, but may also contribute to the "prestige and standing of the visiting power."<sup>34</sup> Goodwill visits, on the other hand, are intended for specific political effect. As Booth explains:

"In a ceremonial visit the naval power uses one or more of its warships to make an outward and formal linkage between its own policy and some event, policy or circumstance associated with the host state. Such visits have an inherently symbolic nature, because of the particularly expressive nature of war ships. Goodwill visits of whatever type involve a specific attempt to cultivate the host country, with the hope of accumulating diplomatic capital."<sup>35</sup>

Prior scholars shared Booth's appreciation for the humble port visit. In *Politics Among Nations*, Morgenthau provides perhaps the most ringing endorsement—whether he meant to or not—in his explanation of two naval visits between France and Russia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Morgenthau, a visit by the French Navy to the Russian port of Kronstadt in 1891, and a reciprocal visit by the Russian Navy to Toulon in 1893, marked "a turning-point in the political history of the world, for these mutual visits demonstrated to the world a political and military solidarity between France and Russia which was not long in crystalizing into a political and military alliance."<sup>36</sup> In more general terms, he saw the port visit as a type of naval demonstration, "a favorite instrument of the policy of prestige." Particularly relevant for China's goals, Morgenthau argues that prestige can make force unnecessary to achieve policy goals: "A policy of prestige attains its very triumph when it gives the nation pursuing it such a reputation for power as to enable it to forego the actual employment of power."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> Booth, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, Second (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1956), 72.

<sup>37</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, 75.

For hundreds of years, a visiting warship has been a universal symbol of great power status—a distillate of multiple power variables, including a state’s wealth, industrial capacity, and military capability. Only the most prosperous, dominant states could afford to build and deploy blue water navies, capable of reaching overseas ports. While he advocated for decisive naval battle, Mahan was sensitive to prestige, influence, and its relationship to naval standing in the international hierarchy. This is apparent in his assessment that English sea power not only brought territorial gains, but also, “the prestige and position achieved in the eyes of the nations, now fully opened to her great resources and mighty power.”<sup>38</sup>

More recent scholars have written on the Chinese understanding and application of naval diplomacy. In 2020, Heath provided analysis of the doctrinal and operational underpinnings of “Chinese naval diplomacy,” based on Chinese academic and military texts. He defines it as the “set of non-combat missions and tasks performed by the PLAN that aim primarily to persuade or dissuade foreign political actors in accordance with the CCP’s foreign policy goals within a specific domestic and international context. Of note, Heath highlights the fact that PLAN naval diplomacy serves the CCP’s goals first and foremost rather than the nation’s interests. Second, since Beijing’s territorial disputes are in Asia, both coercive and cooperative naval activities are used in the region, whereas Chinese naval diplomacy is overwhelmingly cooperative outside of Asia.”<sup>39</sup> Among other contributions, Heath assesses that PLAN leaders see port visits in support of higher-level naval foreign affairs tasks such as the promotion of “new-type naval relationships,” trust, favorable security environments (especially along the periphery), and a “favorable public opinion environment.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> A. T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987), 323.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy R Heath, “China Maritime Report No. 8: Winning Friends and Influencing People: Naval Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics,” n.d., 4–5.

<sup>40</sup> Heath, 10–11.



### *Historical Case Comparisons*

There are two cases that help differentiate China's port call diplomacy from similar naval activities undertaken by previous rising powers. By the turn of the twentieth century, both Imperial Germany and the United States had shifted their strategic orientation from agrarian isolationism to that of ascending states keen to protect and further global interests abroad. These interests included seaborne trade, overseas possessions and investments, as well as the great power status both countries coveted—all of which was underwritten by a blue-water navy. In both cases, naval port visits were initially used to reveal capability for obvious coercive purposes; however, by 1907 Theodore Roosevelt's understanding of port call diplomacy had evolved in subtlety and scope. The Great White Fleet's circumnavigation of the globe was in many ways a conceptual precursor to Beijing's form of port call diplomacy. A century later, the PLAN has refined this subtlety still further in an attempt to reveal military capability without eliciting a negative response.

Leaders were similarly central to German and U.S. naval development. In Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm II adhered to A.T. Mahan's theories with complete devotion and incorporated them into German strategic thought. Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz made the conceptual shift into a reality through domestic maneuvering and a dramatic naval buildup with a focus on large capital ships that inevitably threatened British security.<sup>41</sup> In the United States, President Theodore Roosevelt also believed whole-heartedly in Mahanian theories and was determined to transform the U.S. Navy into a formidable global force. While not solely responsible, these assertive views of sea power strategy—coupled with impressive navy fleets—put Germany and the United States on collision courses with their respective rivals Great Britain and Japan.

With obvious parallels to China today, German strategy was traditionally anchored in a continental mindset, focused on the Reich's place among European powers rather than overseas

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<sup>41</sup> Holger H. Herwig, "Imperial Germany: Continental Titan, Global Aspirant."

trade and empire. German leaders perceived Germany as a late arrival to the great power race abroad, resulting in urgency to achieve the great power status it deserved. However, when it came to developing a blue water fleet, Tirpitz built up Germany's capability incrementally, selling the new navy as a "risk fleet" (Risikoflotte) to deter British aggression. Alternatively, he branded German combatants as an "alliance fleet" (Bündnisfähigkeit) that would attract other smaller naval powers to Germany's side in any contest against British domination. To his domestic audience, Tirpitz promised employment opportunities and greater respect abroad. He would show the flag overseas as a symbol of German scientific and industrial progress, national unity, and the Reich's improved standing in the international order.<sup>42</sup>

From this starting point it is unsurprising that Kaiser Wilhelm II and Admiral Tirpitz deployed the German fleet on missions to defend the Reich's growing interests and status abroad in a way that risked escalation and crises among other European powers and the United States. Interests often came in the form of overseas investments and loans, especially in Africa and the Americas, which brought potential financial and reputational costs. By the turn of the twentieth century, Venezuela had borrowed more money from European creditors than it could pay back, and with General Cipriano Castro occupying the presidential office, repayment seemed less and less likely. This brought the unstable republic into conflict with Great Britain, Germany and Italy, but it also tested the U.S. Monroe Doctrine, which sought to keep European powers from further involvement and territorial expansion in the Americas.<sup>43</sup>

By 1901, Venezuela's creditors were impatient with Castro's delaying tactics, and in May of that year, a German warship arrived off Margarita, Venezuela, to survey the harbor.<sup>44</sup> This was a

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<sup>42</sup> Holger H. Herwig, 178.

<sup>43</sup> Henry J. Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy: The U.S. Navy and the Birth of the American Century* (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 28–29.

<sup>44</sup> Hendrix, 28.

clear signal of Germany's resolve to collect, but also an early use of naval signaling by the Reich. The details of the Venezuela crisis have been discussed elsewhere, but for the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note that the Kaiser dismissed diplomatic warnings from Washington and eventually joined Great Britain in a naval blockade of Venezuela's major ports. It was only when the United States amassed a locally superior force in the Caribbean that the European powers accepted arbitration and withdrew.<sup>45</sup>

Given the Kaiser's willingness to use naval coercion, it is unsurprising that German port visits sparked two international crises in Morocco at the beginning of the twentieth century. The "First Moroccan Crisis" began in 1905, when Kaiser Wilhelm II arrived in the port of Tangier aboard his imperial yacht to assert German claims. By 1904, France had consolidated much of its power in Morocco as a result of a partition treaty with Spain and an understanding with Britain that balanced French autonomy in Morocco for British activities in Egypt. The Kaiser, however, did not agree to any of it. As a signal of his displeasure, the Kaiser arrived in Tangier on 31 March 1905 to declare Morocco independent, which resulted in a crisis that led many in Europe to prepare for war. The crisis was only resolved in 1906 at the Algeiras Conference, which acknowledged Germany's economic interests in Morocco, but left France and Spain in control.<sup>46</sup>

The "Second Moroccan Crisis" once again involved a German port visit, which risked conflict with the other European great powers. On 1 July 1911, Imperial Germany's *SMS Panther* arrived in Agadir, Morocco, under the guise of protecting German citizens from local unrest. The 219-foot gunboat was commissioned in 1902 with a complement of nine officers and 121 enlisted sailors. Of note, as one of Germany's most modern vessels, the *Panther* also took part in the

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<sup>45</sup> Hendrix, 42.

<sup>46</sup> "Moroccan Crises -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia," accessed September 22, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/print/article/392599>.

blockade of Venezuela in December of the same year.<sup>47</sup> The *Panther's* arrival in the port of Agadir was a reassertion of Germany interests in Morocco, as well as a signal meant to intimidate France. Once more the presence of a German vessel abroad plunged Europe into crisis and preparations for war. However, negotiations prevailed again and Germany was given territory in French Congo in exchange for a French protectorate in Morocco.<sup>48</sup> Military hostilities was averted for the time being, but the crisis that the *Panther's* presence sparked, moved the European powers closer to eventual conflict during the first world war.

The United States was also a rising great power at the turn of the twentieth century with growing interests and a desire for greater status abroad. Similar to Imperial Germany, the U.S. turn to sea power only occurred because of leader interest and bureaucratic intervention. President Roosevelt was a true navalist, a devotee of A.T. Mahan and a respected naval writer in his own right. In 1882, he published *The Naval War of 1812*, which established the future president as a naval historian and strategist. He later served as undersecretary of the Navy before resigning to fight in the Spanish American War. While in office, President Roosevelt advocated for a larger more modern U.S. fleet and personally directed its movements during several crises. Roosevelt certainly saw naval diplomacy's value in terms of coercion, however, he understood it with greater subtlety than his German counterpart. During the Venezuelan crisis he prepared the fleet for combat with a "winter exercise" in the Caribbean, but kept negotiations with Germany out of the public domain, which allowed the European powers to withdraw with honor and avoided a naval confrontation.<sup>49</sup>

Roosevelt similarly used naval coercion as a prominent instrument of statecraft to ensure Panama's independence and the construction of a canal across the Central American isthmus in

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<sup>47</sup> "SMS *Panther*," in *Wikipedia*, July 21, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=SMS\\_Panther&oldid=1034708795](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=SMS_Panther&oldid=1034708795).

<sup>48</sup> "Moroccan Crises -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia."

<sup>49</sup> Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy*, 52.

1903—ultimately to serve American naval ambitions. However, Hendrix argues that Roosevelt’s understanding of naval diplomacy evolved after these two crises. The next year, in 1904, Roosevelt planned to send a large task force of battleships comprised of several squadrons into the Mediterranean to “show the flag” in European ports and along the North African coast before a contingent of ships split off to transit the Suez Canal and sail along the East Coast of Africa. Roosevelt’s insight was that demonstrating U.S. naval capabilities abroad was necessary to manage great power relationships in Europe. The planned voyage was also intended to deter any harm against U.S. interests or citizens in the Mediterranean, especially in Turkey. However, the summer and fall cruise of 1904 never occurred due to the kidnapping of an American citizen in Morocco and Roosevelt’s deployment of the fleet to the port of Tangiers to use as coercive leverage against the Sultan.<sup>50</sup>

On 16 December 1907, Roosevelt finally fulfilled his desire to show the flag abroad with the deployment of 16 battleships on a round-the-world cruise intended to demonstrate U.S. goodwill, elevate American status as a global sea power, improve fleet proficiency, deter Japanese aggression, and build domestic support for further naval expenditures.<sup>51</sup> At the time, the Great White Fleet (named for its bright white paint to keep the inside of the ship cooler in hot climates) was the largest fleet to circumnavigate the globe.

The U.S. battleships traveled south to the British territory of Trinidad, where they stopped for coal and provisions before continuing on to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In Rio, the officers and crew were welcomed by thousands of Brazilian citizens, during what turned out to be a diplomatically successful visit and closer relations between Brazil and the United States. An off-shore rendezvous with the Argentine Navy, and port visits to Chile, Peru, and Mexico completed the fleet’s tour of

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<sup>50</sup> Hendrix, 83.

<sup>51</sup> Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt’s Naval Diplomacy*.

south and central America. The signal sent to local and international audiences was that the United States was ready to underwrite the Monroe doctrine with naval force if necessary.<sup>52</sup>

A stop in San Francisco coincided with deliberations over several naval appropriation bills in the U.S. Congress, illustrating the fact that leaders and their domestic political agendas are never absent from port visits. As Hendrix explains, Roosevelt used the Great White Fleet's visit to build popular support for the Navy in western states and increase leverage on their representatives.<sup>53</sup> The fleet then set out into the Pacific with visits to Hawaii, New Zealand, three ports in Australia, the Philippines, and Japan. The visit to Japan was fraught with diplomatic risk, but both the American visitors and Japanese hosts expended great effort to leave a positive impression on the other. After a stop by one squadron of battleships in Amoy, China (Xiamen, Fujian Province), the fleet reunited in the Philippines before sailing for Sri Lanka, and then Egypt. When an earth quake struck the Mediterranean, the fleet departed for Sicily to offer assistance before paying visits to Naples and Gibraltar. The fleet sailed across the Atlantic and arrived at Hampton Roads on 22 February 1909, two weeks before Roosevelt left the presidency.<sup>54 55</sup>

Like Germany and the United States before it, Beijing has adopted a Mahanian understanding on sea power. However, PLAN port visits have explicitly avoided overt coercion, which is likely a result of Beijing's study of previous rising powers. Similar to the Great White Fleet's port call diplomacy, PLAN visits are a subtle and shrewd way to demonstrate China's power without eliciting a negative response.

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<sup>52</sup> Hendrix, 156–57.

<sup>53</sup> Hendrix, 159.

<sup>54</sup> "Great White Fleet," in *Wikipedia*, October 23, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Great\\_White\\_Fleet&oldid=1051369650](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Great_White_Fleet&oldid=1051369650).

<sup>55</sup> Hendrix, *Theodore Roosevelt's Naval Diplomacy*, 160–61.

### *Policy Implications*

China's port call diplomacy plays an increasingly important role in how Beijing manages its power relationships worldwide. It is also relevant to the U.S.-China rivalry, a relationship that will likely shape international politics and determine great power war and peace during the twenty-first century. The stakes in this competition are high. The fact that both the United States and China are nuclear powers, separated by the Pacific Ocean, makes it very unlikely that ground forces or air forces would be brought to bear in the event of hostilities. After all, ground invasion, or the employment of strategic bombing against either homeland, is almost certain to fail, as well as push the conflict past the nuclear threshold. This reality bounds the conventional military options available to Beijing and Washington and pushes the competition into the maritime domain, making a naval conflict the most likely scenario.

As the world's two most important trading nations, both the U.S. and China require unrestricted use of the global commons—especially the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) that provide access to raw materials and foreign markets. As Beijing's overseas interests continue to expand, there is a greater likelihood that these interests will collide with U.S. interests. The maritime disputes in the South China Sea provide another potential flashpoint between China and its neighbors, as well as great power rivalry and conflict. As the United States and China compete for global influence, port call diplomacy will be an increasingly important tool to signal interest and intentions during peacetime and potential crises.

Power is the primary driver of international relations; however, as the utility of using military force to achieve policy outcomes has decreased—it is the perception of power that matters most. Within this context, port call diplomacy is important to great power rivalry under globalized conditions and the ways states effectively use military capability to achieve policy goals short of war. After all, China's naval diplomacy is not "soft-power," but rather hard power employed for

economic and political advantage in the space between peace and war. Going forward, great powers such as the U.S. and China will find it increasingly difficult to achieve policy goals through the use of actual military force. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated, even the largest and most sophisticated military could not achieve its political ends in the Middle East and Central Asia. It is similarly unlikely that military force will produce policy success at an acceptable cost in any conflict between China and the United States.

Beijing cannot achieve global power status, or a return to primacy in Asia, without both economic and military power. PLAN visits reveal both and oblige other states to reassess their position vis-à-vis China, but also China's positive trajectory relative to the United States. Beijing is using port visits to grapple for advantage and position, shifting and maintaining power relationships in China's favor. In Asia, port visits signal China's willingness to provide would-be supplicants with discount security goods, as well as a desire to establish a new security architecture under Beijing's authority.

Short of violent conflict, the U.S-China rivalry could manifest itself in an intense naval status competition in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in which port call diplomacy is a central part. This is not to say that such a bounded contest would have limited implications. The outcome could reinforce U.S. regional and global preeminence for the foreseeable future or result in a global power transition in China's favor. From a policy perspective, the success or failure of Chinese port call diplomacy will be determined by Beijing's ability to reveal China's growing military capability without provoking a balancing response. If port call diplomacy can shift enough states along the continuum toward alignment, Beijing may realize the ultimate strategic achievement—victory over its rivals without fighting.



## *Dissertation Plan*

This dissertation proceeds in five additional chapters. Chapter two presents the theoretical basis for my explanation of Chinese port call diplomacy. I draw on multiple literatures, including status and status signaling, leader perception, and state responses to accumulations of power to clarify how and why port visits affect leaders in Beijing and the countries that PLAN ships visit. I then propose a theory that explains Beijing's relative success in revealing military capability with limited negative responses when ship visits are linked to leadership engagements and incentives rather than overt coercion.

Chapter three documents the evolution of Beijing's port call diplomacy from 1993 (when port visits became a meaningful political activity) until the global financial crisis in 2008. The chapter is written at the level of individual ship voyages to reveal Beijing's intentionality and awareness of the signals sent by different ship platforms. These early years illustrate increasing sophistication in terms of PLAN coordination with senior leader engagements—especially the Chinese premiers Zhu Rongji and Wen Jiabao. It also becomes apparent that ship visits are a reliable indicator of strategic interest. In a sense, port calls telegraph future diplomatic and economic activities years in advance.

In chapter four, I provide detail on all port visits during 2009 and 2010 to demonstrate not only the dramatic increase in the number of calls, but also the expansion in destinations and platform type. The chapter outlines the impact of Beijing's shift in strategic thought, and the subsequent PLAN deployments in support of Combined Task Force 51 (CTF-51) antipiracy patrols off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden. The antipiracy patrols provided much needed operational experience for the PLAN, but also the opportunity to incorporate consistent and

increasing numbers of diplomatic visits.<sup>56</sup> With expansion to every region of the globe, port visits become explicitly linked to overseas Chinese interests.

Chapter five looks at the years that follow this pivot to assess Beijing's success or failure in terms of the CCP's overarching goals of economic expansion, maritime sovereignty, and national reunification with Taiwan. The analysis focuses on key regions and PLAN ship visits that support these macro-objectives. Africa and Europe are key regions for Chinese economic expansion, while Asia is clearly the crucial region for Beijing's sovereignty disputes in the East and South China Seas. I focus on North America—the Caribbean in particular—to demonstrate how Beijing uses port call diplomacy to isolate and induce the remaining states with diplomatic ties to Taiwan. Finally, the chapter concludes with statistical analysis, which generalizes the findings and indicates a positive association between PLAN port visits and the three measures of alignment with Beijing.

In Chapter six, I conclude that Beijing has in fact received political benefits by revealing military capability during port visits. That said, the connections between port visits, leadership meetings, and financial incentives does not preclude other linkages to less favorable geopolitical events. Beijing's decision to militarize islands in the South China Sea, as well as several high-profile cases in which countries were forced to give up assets as a result of defaults on Chinese loans, inevitably undermine Beijing's port call diplomacy. As status signals, PLAN calls are also inherently competitive, and are already showing signs of a response from the U.S. Navy. While Beijing has been successful in mitigating negative responses from host countries, port visits are likely to increase the US-China rivalry in the future.

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<sup>56</sup> Erickson and Strange, *Six Years at Sea ... and Counting*. Erickson and Strange provide an overview of PLAN anti-piracy activities. Specific task force ships found on page 68.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *A Theory of Chinese Port Call Diplomacy*

In his analysis of the existing literature, Widen offers that a workable theory of naval diplomacy must possess four basic components—the political aim, naval means, diplomatic method, and geopolitical context. On political aims, he writes: “In essence all diplomacy aims to influence foreign Powers to abide or not threaten one’s interests. Such a course means influencing the minds of foreign leaders.”<sup>57</sup> He describes naval means as the characteristics of the ships involved. The methods of naval diplomacy include different types of activities such as demonstrations of naval power, specific operational deployments, naval aid, and naval visits, all of which depend greatly on the fourth element—the political context that surrounds them.

I take all four of Widen’s elements into consideration. In the aggregate, PLAN port visits are aimed to further Beijing’s specific economic and security policy goals in the host country, which in turn support the CCP’s overarching objectives. Previous literature recognizes that leaders have a role, but I explain the specific mechanisms through which port visits affect leader perceptions, both in Beijing and foreign capitals worldwide. Naval means are also important to the project. The original dataset disaggregates port visits by combatant ships (and their support vessels), training ships, and hospital ships, which are treated as different types of signals, consciously chosen by Beijing for specific diplomatic effect. It is worth mentioning at the outset that this theory does not address all the methods of naval diplomacy that Widen includes in his analysis. Instead, I focus only on the naval visit—the most frequent and least considered type of naval diplomatic activity in

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<sup>57</sup> J. J. Widen, “Naval Diplomacy—A Theoretical Approach,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22, no. 4 (December 2011): 727, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2011.625830>.

international affairs. In keeping with Widen's fourth element, PLAN port calls are situated and explained within their specific diplomatic and geopolitical context whenever possible.

What makes PLAN port visits so theoretically challenging is their ambiguity. There is something inherently ominous about the presence of foreign warships—they are built to impress and intimidate. It is only natural for onlookers to contemplate the destructive power of these vessels, or speculate on their chances of success in a future naval engagement. These visits are demonstrations of military power; however, the vast majority are explicitly positive interactions without the potential for imminent harm or hostilities. It is therefore difficult to claim that they deter or compel in the short-term. That said, these weapons still have power to persuade without the threat of pending violence.

There are obviously overlapping motivations and mechanisms, but the theory proposed here is that PLAN port visits induce accommodation for Beijing's policy preferences by raising a foreign leader's perception of Chinese power and status, as well as the potential benefits that may accrue from further alignment with Beijing. Leaders are central to this explanation. The meaning of a port visit—and its success or failure in supporting policy outcomes—ultimately resides in the minds of those with decision-making authority. This is true for the leaders in Beijing, as well as the foreign leaders who must factor PLAN visits into their strategic cost-benefit analysis. Put another way, a port visit is an inter-subjective event that is only as meaningful to state interactions as the high-level leaders involved perceive them to be.

As Jervis explains, leaders and the decision-making process are notoriously susceptible to biases and cognitive limitations. This is what makes port call diplomacy so potentially effective. A ship is the ultimate heuristic, capable of constructing a psychological shortcut that instantly updates a foreign leader's perception and strategic calculus. A warship simplifies and makes plain most questions of relative power or national trajectory. A visit from one state's navy—or the absence of a

visit—may have a disproportionate, even illogical, impact on leader perceptions of another state’s regional interests and resolve. However, leader perception can be unpredictable. The ship is an omnidirectional signal, a symbol of power that can evoke the potential for future military consequences if the preferences of the ship’s sender are not heeded. Or, it can simply raise the sender’s relative status, suggesting the benefits— both national and personal— that will come to a leader who accommodates and aligns with the sender.

Second, the success or failure of PLAN port visits is due to the ways in which Beijing manages this unpredictability by linking PLAN port visits to leader engagements and positive incentives rather than overt coercion. When port calls are examined along with other Chinese diplomatic activities, it becomes apparent that a ship visit is a purposeful act, well-coordinated with Beijing’s larger diplomatic strategy. This is evident in the fact that most port calls occur in relatively close proximity to high-level leadership engagements, or at least within a continuum of positive diplomatic progress rather than deteriorating relations. By sequencing ship visits with leader meetings— and the potential economic incentives that they bring— Beijing has shrewdly revealed its growing military capability, while mitigating the potential costs of a balancing coalition or military confrontation.

### *The Leaders in Beijing*

Before 2008, Beijing’s diplomatic focus was on increasing China’s global status without provoking a counterbalancing response. This was achieved through partnerships with countries that Beijing deemed important, and diplomatic activities that improved China’s reputation as a responsible, indispensable, member of the international community, rather than a threat.<sup>58</sup> All this

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<sup>58</sup> Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security*, Studies in Asian Security (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005), 12.

was underpinned by the appeal of access to China's powerful economy and considerable capital. This desire for international and domestic status, as well as efforts to assuage foreign threat perceptions are clearly evident in PLAN port visits through 2008.

However, after 2008, China's leaders evidently experienced a shift in strategic thought, which cascaded down to PLAN port call diplomacy. Beijing's diplomatic transition was in part a product of the global economic crisis that began in 2007 and did not abate until 2009. While countries like the United States succumbed to the economic disaster, China's relative stability and continued growth led to higher domestic expectations and positive international reactions to China's increased relative power. Domestically, the crisis undermined the inevitability of Western dominance over the global economic system and highlighted China's growing centrality to it. China's relative success compared to other countries also increased the disparity between itself and smaller states— especially its neighbors—while narrowing the gap with the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Other factors in 2008 contributed to Beijing's newfound confidence. The 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing brought international attention and inevitably elevated China's self-image and global aspirations. The games also boosted domestic expectations that the country's international standing would improve commensurate with its new wealth and refurbished global brand. But this optimistic outlook also brought increased domestic pressures on Beijing to do more. The Chinese public expected Beijing to not only protect Chinese interests, but to promote them. This was true economically, as well as in the security realm, particularly in maritime sovereignty disputes.

According to Shambaugh, a "golden decade" of China-ASEAN relations from 1998-2008 was followed by the "year of assertiveness" in 2009-2010. Hu Bo also writes that 2009 was a pivotal year for claimants in the South China Sea dispute for three reasons. First, China's growing relative

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<sup>59</sup> Brantly Womack, "Beyond Win-Win: Rethinking China's International Relationships in an Era of Economic Uncertainty," *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 916, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12051>.

power incentivized other claimants to act before it was too late. Second, countries such as Vietnam, Philippines, and Malaysia sought to strengthen their maritime claims before the U.N. deadline of 13 May 2009. Finally, the forthcoming U.S. rebalancing strategy had already emboldened countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines to be more aggressive in the South China Sea. A similar analysis by Navin Rajagopal concludes that Vietnam and Malaysia's submission to the UN was the turning point for the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, especially in terms of China's more assertive behavior.

Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), coastal states may apply to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) for an extension of their continental shelf out to 360 nautical miles. On 6 May Vietnam and Malaysia made a joint submission to the CLCS, which removed the previous ambiguity in their claims.<sup>60</sup> The next day China responded with a rebuttal, claiming: "China has indisputable sovereignty over the islands in the South China Sea and the adjacent waters, and enjoys sovereign rights and jurisdiction over the relevant waters as well as the seabed and subsoil thereof (see attached map)."<sup>61</sup> The map was the first time Beijing had officially included its nine-dash-line claim, which hardened diplomatic positions on all sides.<sup>62</sup>

It is no surprise that a desire for greater status among Beijing's leaders and the Chinese public should manifest itself in PLAN presence abroad. This, and the events at the UN and in the South China Sea, provided incentives for Beijing to act. Seen through this lens, port call diplomacy was a highly visible expression of Beijing's responsiveness to domestic concerns over status and interests.

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<sup>60</sup> Navin Rajagopal, "The 2009 Claims That Changed the Dynamics in the South China Sea," Text, The Straits Times, July 12, 2016, <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/the-2009-claims-that-changed-dynamics-in-the-s-china-sea>.

<sup>61</sup> The Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations, "China Rebuttal to the Malaysia-Vietnam CLCS Submission," May 7, 2009, [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/mysvnm33\\_09/chn\\_2009re\\_mys\\_vnm\\_e.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/mysvnm33_09/chn_2009re_mys_vnm_e.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Navin Rajagopal, "The 2009 Claims That Changed the Dynamics in the South China Sea."

The Chinese public has been extremely supportive of China’s naval modernization and higher diplomatic profile abroad. In the very first sentence of his authoritative book on Chinese sea power, Hu Bo draws a direct linkage between naval ambitions and domestic politics: “From 1840 onward, becoming a maritime power has been the dream and pursuit of generations of Chinese elites.”<sup>63</sup> Chinese state media reporting on PLAN port calls highlight several narratives that are important to the Chinese domestic audience. Ship visits demonstrate China’s rising international clout and provide examples of foreign hosts welcoming Chinese armed forces with respect and admiration. Interviews with members of the local Chinese community always include the pride they feel seeing the Chinese fleet, and often include pictures of Chinese citizens waving Chinese flags and generally validating the CCP narrative that Chinese interests and citizens enjoy Beijing’s support and protection abroad.



Figure 2.1 – Chinese Community at the Port of Civitavecchia, Italy, 12 July 2017  
(Photo: military.cnr.cn)

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<sup>63</sup> Hu Bo, Zhang Yanpei, and Geoffrey Till, *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century: Strategic Planning, Policy and Predictions*, Cass Series: Naval Policy and History 64 (London, New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 1.



The Chinese public is also sensitive to issues of sovereignty and mistreatment in the maritime domain. Along with remembered historical abuses by the British Navy, and current disputes in the South China Sea, the *Yinbe* incident in 1993 is an important event that still casts a long shadow in China today. Hu Bo mentions the *Yinbe* in his book and the story came up on several occasions during interviews with Chinese academics. In August 1993, the Chinese freighter, *Yinbe* (Galaxy) was diverted by the US Navy to the Saudi Arabian port of Damman after U.S. intelligence allegations that the ship was transporting chemical weapons to Iran. The ship was ultimately inspected and no illicit cargoes were found.<sup>64</sup> On 5 September, Beijing officials demanded a formal apology and \$13 million in damages, which was followed by a front-page editorial in *People's Daily* denouncing the indignity of the situation.<sup>65</sup> Interviews with Chinese academics suggest that the *Yinbe* incident represented a turning point for Beijing and the PLAN in response to public dissatisfaction. Both recognized that a similar situation could not happen again. In light of these experiences, China's domestic audience responds well to abundant press coverage of overseas PLAN port visits and more aggressive behavior in the South China Sea.

The *Yinbe* incident is a reminder that even the leaders in Beijing must be cautious of public, and more importantly, elite opinion. This notion is supported by Weeks, who argues that regime elites do in fact have the ability to punish autocratic leaders, especially if they back down.<sup>66</sup> Institutions in some forms of dictatorships allow regime insiders to hold leaders accountable. This ability varies depending on the type of regime—military or civilian.<sup>67</sup> From the liberal perspective, Beijing's leaders can be seen expressing individual and group preferences and interests from within

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<sup>64</sup> Patrick E. Tyler, "NO CHEMICAL ARMS ABOARD CHINA SHIP," *The New York Times*, September 6, 1993, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/09/06/world/no-chemical-arms-aboard-china-ship.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Facebook et al., "China Asks U.S. Apology, Damages for Search of Ship," *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-09-06-mn-32214-story.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Jessica L. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization* 62, no. 01 (January 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818308080028>.

<sup>67</sup> Jessica L. Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (May 2012): 326–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000111>.

the state.<sup>68</sup> There are also signs that they are part of a two-level game, satisfying domestic pressures, while minimizing international consequences.<sup>69</sup>

Based on these insights, it follows that PLAN port visits should serve the interests of CCP leadership above all else. Fravel explains that China's growing military power supports five strategic goals: regime security, territorial integrity, national unification, maritime security, and regional stability. Unlike most other modern armed forces, he points out that the PLA's primary mission is to maintain the CCP's "monopoly on political power."<sup>70</sup> Territorial integrity is a basic military function, just as national unification with Taiwan—or at least the prevention of Taiwanese independence—is a political necessity for the CCP. Maritime security encompasses China's maritime rights and sovereignty disputes, while regional stability describes "a stable external environment within which to continue economic development."<sup>71</sup>

After 2008, I believe the configuration of these goals shifted in relative position and importance. The CCP's most basic aim is regime security—driven by domestic politics—and enabled by the other objectives that Fravel identifies. In other words, CCP regime security requires domestic support, which in turn is sustained by three basic elements: China's continued economic expansion overseas; Beijing's defense of Chinese maritime sovereignty; and national unification with Taiwan. Therefore, port call diplomacy must ultimately further these three goals in order to safeguard the ultimate objective—regime security. See figure 2.

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<sup>68</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 513–53, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081897550447>.

<sup>69</sup> Robert D Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organizations* 42 (Summer), no. 3 (1988): 427–60.

<sup>70</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Search for Military Power," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (July 2008): 127, <https://doi.org/10.1162/wash.2008.31.3.125>.

<sup>71</sup> Fravel, 129.

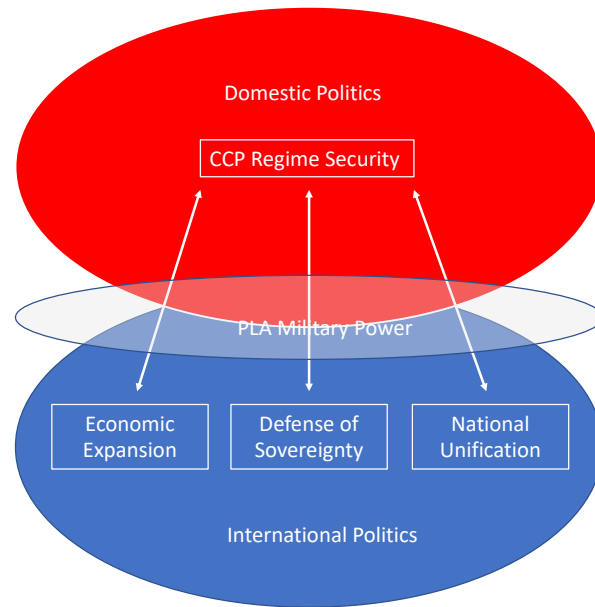


Figure 2.2 – Chinese Communist Party Strategic Goals

On the contrary, Chinese leaders insist that PLAN “friendly visits” are a straightforward attempt to reassure other states of China’s benign intentions and to mitigate the security dilemma created by China’s naval build-up. The language used by Colonel Zhang Leyi to explain a port visit to Vietnam in 2009 is emblematic of Beijing’s narrative: “the visit offers a good opportunity for Chinese naval forces to understand more about Vietnamese culture and customs, thus promoting friendly relationship between the two countries and increasing mutual confidence.”<sup>72</sup> Beijing’s argument finds some measure of support within the international relations literature. Lebow was the first to coin the term “reassurance” as a state’s strategy to convince others of its benign intent.<sup>73</sup> According to Lebow and Stein, states signal their non-aggressiveness to “reduce the fear, misunderstanding, and insecurity that are often responsible for unintended escalation to war.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> People’s Daily Online, “Chinese Naval Forces Visit Vietnam,” *People’s Daily Online*, December 5, 2009, [en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/6833025.html](http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/6833025.html).

<sup>73</sup> Richard Ned Lebow, “The Deterrence Deadlock: Is There a Way Out?,” *Political Psychology* 4, no. 2 (June 1983): 333, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3790944>.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Led Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, “Beyond Deterrence,” *Journal of Social Issues* 43, no. 4 (1987): 5–71.

Other scholars, such as Jervis and Glaser have argued that uncertainty can be reduced, and the security dilemma mitigated, when security seekers can differentiate themselves from aggressive states.<sup>75</sup>

Security seeking states can use defense policy and costly signals to communicate information about their motives and nonaggressive intentions.<sup>76 77</sup> In addition, Kydd asserts that states that are trustworthy should be capable of reassuring one another.<sup>78</sup> Elsewhere in the international relations literature, costly signals are situated within the context of crisis bargaining, in which leaders demonstrate resolve or credibility.<sup>79</sup> From this perspective, the theoretical question might seem to be whether or not PLAN port visits represent costly signals, and whether they are costly enough to convey Beijing's benign intentions. However, I believe there are more salient explanations. This dissertation does not scrutinize the costliness of the signal sent by PLAN port visits, or China's trustworthiness.

### *Port Visits as Status Signals*

A more likely explanation is the Chinese leadership's desire for status. According to Yong Deng, "the People's Republic of China may very well be the most status-conscious country in the world."<sup>80</sup> This is due in part to the country's loss of standing in the Asian hierarchy after 1842 and the subordination to European powers which lasted until the 1940s. As Deng explains, more recent events have also called into question Beijing's status in a western dominated world order. After the

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<sup>75</sup> Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," n.d., 49.

<sup>76</sup> Charles L. Glaser, "Realists as Optimists," *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter /95 1994): 50–90.

<sup>77</sup> Charles L. Glaser, "The Security Dilemma Revisited," *World Politics* 50, no. 1 (October 1997): 171–201, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100014763>.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Kydd, "Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation," *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (2000): 325–57, <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551190>.

<sup>79</sup> James D. Fearon, "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41, no. 1 (February 1997): 68–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002797041001004>.

<sup>80</sup> Yong Deng, *China's Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

violence in Tiananmen Square in 1989, China was an international pariah, grouped with countries such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, forced to endure economic sanctions and arms embargos by western, democratic powers that linked domestic human rights violations with international legitimacy. The CCP's autocratic form of government further relegated it to the "out-group" within the international status community.<sup>81</sup> By displaying its navy abroad, Beijing is signaling a desire for greater legitimacy and recognition for its place among the "in-group" of great powers both at home and overseas.

Within a growing international relations literature, status is defined as "collective beliefs about a state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout."<sup>82</sup> Renshon adds, "status in international politics is standing, or rank, in a status community. It has three critical attributes—it is positional, perceptual, and social—that combine to make any actor's position a function of the higher-order, collective beliefs of a given community of actors."<sup>83</sup> Status is dependent in part on resources and capabilities; however, it is ultimately a matter of recognition by others of one's place within the hierarchy of states that matters most. Beyond capabilities, states pursue status because "it is a valuable resource for coordinating expectations of dominance and deference in strategic interactions."<sup>84</sup> Lake explains, "it is this relational and intersubjective element of status that renders the concept different from the distribution of capabilities as defined by neorealism."<sup>85</sup> According to Wohlforth:

"High status confers tangible benefits in the form of decision-making autonomy and deference on the part of others concerning issues of importance to one's security and prosperity. The higher the given state's status, the more other states

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<sup>81</sup> Deng, 77.

<sup>82</sup> T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William Curti Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 4.

<sup>84</sup> Renshon, 33.

<sup>85</sup> David A. Lake, "Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century," in *Status in World Politics*, ed. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William Curti Wohlforth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 250.

adjust their policies to accommodate its interests...The success or failure of all international politics, however grandiose or mundane, is crucially dependent on status.”<sup>86 87</sup>

From a domestic perspective, PLAN port visits satisfy Beijing’s need for greater status at home and abroad. Pu and Schweller explain, “status signaling transmits information with the aim of changing or maintaining perceptions of the sender’s standing (its position relative to others) held by targeted actors within domestic and international audiences.”<sup>88</sup> The authors contend that states invest in nuclear weapons, space programs, and aircraft carriers to signal their great power status, which represents a “two-level game” for domestic support, as well as the economic and political rewards that higher status conveys in the international system.<sup>89</sup> By this account, PLAN port visits are highly visible, frequent, and quantifiable status signals, which gratify the Chinese public and bolster Beijing’s domestic legitimacy.

Hu Bo makes the importance of international status explicit in the maritime domain. “One of the essential goals pursued for the development of China’s maritime power is to gain required international political support and the international status it deserves.”<sup>90</sup> PLAN port visits oblige foreign audiences, both host countries and other great powers alike, to acknowledge the elevated status of the PLAN and therefore of China itself.

In many ways, China’s strong economy and President Xi’s diplomatic strategy have already drawn other states closer to Beijing. Xi has articulated his “China Dream,” and now invites these states to join in a larger “Asia Dream,” even a “Community of Shared Destiny” in which China

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<sup>86</sup> Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Xiaoyu Pu and Randall Schweller, “Status Signaling, Multiple Audiences, and China’s Blue-Water Naval Ambition,” in *Status in World Politics*, ed. T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William Curti Wohlforth (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 144–45.

<sup>89</sup> Pu and Schweller, 145.

<sup>90</sup> Hu Bo, Yanpei, and Till, *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century*, 20.

naturally plays a central role. In President Xi's telling, China represents the future in stark contrast to the declining West. And, rather than directly confronting the United States, or using overt military coercion against smaller states, China has focused on positive inducements in the form of "win-win" economic opportunities, as well as alternative institutions and infrastructure connectivity such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRI. Beijing appears to be using multiple financial and diplomatic tools to induce others to "jump on the Chinese bandwagon." So why bother introducing displays of naval might?

First, it has become apparent that Beijing cannot attain the deference it desires, or achieve President Xi's vision, by simply maintaining its reputation as the "workshop of the world," or by offering potential partners economic incentives. Beijing's essential goal is to regain China's lost authority in Asia. Money and status alone will not ensure China's return to primacy in Asia, or guarantee its vital interests such as reunification with Taiwan or sovereignty claims in the South China Sea. For that China needs military power.

According to Lake, authority is the legitimate right to command. It is a type of power, "a claim by dominant states coupled with recognition by subordinate states that the former has the legitimate right to issue and enforce certain limited commands."<sup>91</sup> Authority hierarchies are relational and intersubjective, but instead of equality, the "glue" that keeps authority relationships together is the "gains relative to each state's next best alternative."<sup>92</sup> There is thus little doubt that status signaling is only an intermediate step.

Beyond raw military capability, Beijing needs the international community to perceive its forces—and potential use of force—as legitimate. The other liberal-democratic great powers remain skeptical of the CCP's authoritarian control and recent militarization of islands in the South China

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<sup>91</sup> David A. Lake, "Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century," 251.

<sup>92</sup> David A. Lake, 252.

Sea. Currently, any Chinese use of force against Taiwan or a rival claimant would be seen as illegitimate by the majority of the international community and would result in severe costs for Beijing. Without authority and the ability to legitimately use military force, Beijing cannot ensure its core interests or reclaim its place at the top of the Asian hierarchy. As Hu Bo concludes, “if China still cannot decide Taiwan’s future, then any sea power ambitions eventually amount to foam.”<sup>93</sup> For Beijing, the challenge is to convince a constituency of states that their interests will be better served through alignment with China. It must also make the argument that China represents the future—the likely victor of an ongoing great power competition—without actually fighting a costly war against the United States or triggering a balancing coalition in Asia.

PLAN visits are intended to do just that—to thread this strategic needle. On the one hand, they reveal China’s growing military muscle and relative economic dominance over other states. On the other hand, PLAN visits are self-consciously amiable events that cater to host country elites often in conjunction with economic deals. Their accompanying message of “friendship” and “deeper cooperation” is an obvious appeal to those that hope to benefit from future Chinese largess. Furthermore, port visits stay well below any coercive threshold that might frighten away already wary neighbors or justify a hostile response from the United States. This helps explain *why* Beijing has increased its use of port call diplomacy, but *how* PLAN port visits encourage alignment with China requires further clarification.

### *Foreign Leaders*

If a state’s foreign policy is determined by estimations of current and future power relationships, PLAN port visits obligate foreign leaders to acknowledge and reassess their own

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<sup>93</sup> Hu Bo, Yanpei, and Till, *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century*, 6.



position relative to China, as well as China's positive trajectory relative to the United States.<sup>94</sup>

Foreign leaders—and their perception of Chinese power—are the key intervening variable between PLAN port calls and Chinese policy goals. As previously explained, a Chinese warship is a powerful symbol of Chinese economic, technological, and political ascendance that has the potential to shock a foreign leader into updating his or her image of China beyond the “lender-of-last-resort” to that of an economic and military great power. A port visit signals this elevation in Chinese status, linking potential benefits for foreign leaders who conform to Beijing's policy preferences. This is also one way to convince foreign leaders of China's ascendance and the inevitability of a power transition with the United States.

This insight builds on existing literature that supports the role of leaders and their centrality in perceiving power variables and relative power. It is worth noting, however, that leader perception of both is notoriously sub-optimal, rife with limitations and cognitive pathologies.<sup>95</sup> That said, both power transition theory and Copeland's dynamic differentials theory predict different outcomes when a rising challenger reaches parity with the dominant state. But how are relative power or parity actually measured? Leaders are the ones who perceive or misperceive these important structural changes in the international system, as well as the severity of any security dilemma. Copeland rightly points out that perception matters, as the probability of war increases when decline is perceived as “deep and inevitable.”<sup>96</sup> Only leaders can decide when decline is “deep and inevitable,” based on their perceptions and misperceptions of the world around them.

By displaying PLAN ships abroad, Beijing is signaling its economic and military power with the expectation that foreign leaders will move closer to Beijing for benefits in a future China-centric

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<sup>94</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 74.

<sup>95</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.

<sup>96</sup> Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 15.

order. This argument builds on Schweller's insight that states will bandwagon with a rising, revisionist power in expectation of future gains, rather than balance against it. Diverging from Waltz and Walt, Schweller points out that, "The phrase 'to climb aboard the bandwagon' implies following a current or fashionable trend or joining the side that appears likely to win," rather than allying with the greater concentration of power or threat.<sup>97</sup> States will align themselves for profit in order to "share in the spoils of victory" or to benefit from catching the "wave of the future." Schweller also explains that positive inducements are the key to encouraging bandwagoning, not coercion: "States, like party delegates, are lured to the winning side by the promise of future rewards."<sup>98</sup>

More recent literature shows that state behavior often falls between bandwagoning and balancing, the two opposite responses to accumulations of power. Kang identifies a middle ground by adding *accommodation*—strategies for cooperation and stability—that avoid the potential subjugation of bandwagoning, as well as *hedging*, which reflects a skeptical response without resorting to military balancing.<sup>99</sup> He rightly points out that interests, above material power, will dictate where a state's alignment policy falls within this range of responses. Over the past two decades, it has become clear that many states are reacting to China's rise with a mixed strategy of economic engagement and security hedging. As of 2020, scholars have further parsed the hedging concept to include multiple definitions, as well as economic, political and security applications. As with bandwagoning, there are gains to be made in hedging. According to Gerstl, "A hedger can therefore pursue both 'risk contingency' and 'returns-maximizing' options within a single strategy."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Randell L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (Summer 1994): 81.

<sup>98</sup> Randell L. Schweller, 88.

<sup>99</sup> David C. Kang, "Between Balancing and Bandwagoning: South Korea's Response to China," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 9, no. 1 (April 2009): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S159824080002794>.

<sup>100</sup> Alfred Gerstl, "Malaysia's Hedging Strategy Towards China Under Mahathir Mohamad (2018–2020): Direct Engagement, Limited Balancing, and Limited Bandwagoning," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 49, no. 1 (April 2020): 110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868102620964219>.

Shambaugh and Kuik both address alignment decisions in South East Asia specifically. Shambaugh offers a spectrum of “relative closeness to China” to illustrate where Southeast Asian countries have positioned themselves as of 2018. In closest proximity to China, Cambodia is described as a “capitulationist,” a state that has completely aligned with Beijing. As “chafers” Laos and Myanmar have serious dependencies on China, but are not yet client states like Cambodia. Further along the scale, Malaysia and Thailand are “aligned accommodationists,” who are comfortable with close ties and a preference for Beijing, but also have close relationships with other partners. Brunei and the Philippines are “tilters” who are leaning toward Beijing but not as heavily due to long-standing suspicions and maritime disputes. “Balanced hedgers” include Singapore and Vietnam, who for different reasons maintain strong ties to both Washington and Beijing. Finally, Indonesia is considered an “outlier,” due to its lack of interest in cultivating close ties to China or the United States.<sup>101</sup> Also important to my theory and its focus on leaders in Kuik’s Regime Legitimation (RL) framework. He argues that a smaller state’s alignment strategy is not driven by the larger state’s increase in relative power, but rather, “it is motivated more by an internal process of regime legitimation in which the ruling elite evaluate—and then utilize—the opportunities and challenges of the rising power for their ultimate goal of consolidating their authority to govern at home.”<sup>102</sup> Once again, domestic politics and authority are key.

The field’s shift from a dichotomous choice between bandwagoning and balancing to the recognition of additional alignment options is certainly warranted, but it does not go far enough. This project continues the progression and assumes that the variations of alignment behavior and increments between bandwagoning and balancing are limitless when a state’s economic, political and

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<sup>101</sup> David Shambaugh, “U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia: Power Shift or Competitive Coexistence?,” *International Security* 42, no. 04 (May 2018): 100–102, [https://doi.org/10.1162/isec\\_a\\_00314](https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00314).

<sup>102</sup> Kuik Cheng-Chwee, “The Essence of Hedging: Malaysia and Singapore’s Response to a Rising China,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 30, no. 2 (August 2008): 161, <https://doi.org/10.1355/CS30-2A>.

security interests are considered. Rather than black and white poles, there is a variegated continuum of state responses to power that takes all these interests into account. From this perspective, PLAN ship visits are not limited to a single desired outcome; they are a means for Beijing to build and manage power relationships—a form of iterative “grappling” for relative position and advantage vis-à-vis other great powers and in the cost-benefit calculations of leaders.

In Asia, PLAN ship visits also remind its leaders that economic, but also security goods, await those who align with China. Beijing is sending a more specific and consequential signal to Asian states: China now has the capability and the willingness to underwrite its authority in the region. As Lake explains, authority obligates dominant states to bear the costs of maintaining order and providing security goods to subordinates while avoiding any perceived abuse of power.<sup>103</sup> China has been reluctant to take on such obligations in the past, but Beijing now appears to be tempting Asian countries into a regional security structure in which it is the dominant partner. This seems unlikely given the skeptical reactions to Beijing’s assertiveness in the South China Sea, but PLAN visits are accompanied by consistent messaging that Beijing desires more military cooperation and deeper security relationships in the region. Many port visits are in conjunction with bilateral or multilateral naval exercises, as well as high-level military-to-military engagements. Since Beijing is most likely to offer meaningful security goods, but also resort to military coercion in its home region, the stakes are highest for states in Asia.

### *Leaders & Perception*

Leaders matter because it is ultimately people who make the decisions that move the direction of international politics. However, leaders are susceptible to a wide range of

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<sup>103</sup> David A. Lake, “Status, Authority, and the End of the American Century,” 253.

misperceptions, cognitive limitations, emotions and other decision-making pathologies.<sup>104</sup> Arguably, most human decisions involve subconscious and idiosyncratic elements. Foreign policy, especially decisions surrounding military capabilities involve incomplete and contradictory evidence. In addition, recent scholarship has looked at leaders cross-nationally. Through time and space, decision-makers show a wide range of capacities and characteristics—from prudent and rational to impulsive, pathological or even murderous.<sup>105</sup>

These human characteristics and limitations are what make port call diplomacy such an efficient instrument of foreign policy. Without the use of force, ships can change leader perceptions in disproportionate ways. They do so because leaders are ill-equipped to process complex and contradictory information, and as a result, must rely on shortcuts, or heuristics, to draw inferences and reach timely decisions.

According to Jervis, leaders often turn to oversimplification, personal experience, or historical metaphor to interpret the confusing events and decisions they face.<sup>106</sup> Powerful foreign warships are perhaps the ultimate facilitators of oversimplification. Policy analysis of China's rise and economic growth is so ubiquitous that it has the potential to lose its impact. This is no longer the case when a PLAN warship, or massive hospital ship, is looming in one's harbor. Suddenly, China's ascent is very real and immediate—it deserves attention and possibly requires a reevaluation of one's priorities. These sorts of visceral reactions are particularly relevant to questions of relative power. A leader who stands on the deck of a PLAN destroyer needs no further information to conclude that China is a global power on par with the United States. And, in the absence of U.S.

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<sup>104</sup> See Jervis 1976, Levy 1992, 1997, Lebow 1981, Crawford 2000, and Mercer 2013.

<sup>105</sup> Michael Horowitz, Allan C. Stam, and Cali M. Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight*, Presidents, Kings, Dictators, and War (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>106</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.

Navy presence, a PLAN visit is not only a potential indicator of US neglect, but also a sign that China has already supplanted the United States and may even be the new regional security guarantor.

Historical metaphor is another way in which naval platforms affect leader perceptions. To most foreign leaders, Chinese warships are reminders of a familiar historical narrative—global powers always have great navies. However, Beijing has been sensitive to the fact that they can also evoke memories of colonialism and the abuses of previous imperial states. In a sense, historical metaphor may be more persuasive to Chinese leaders than foreign leaders.

Hu Bo's assertion that Chinese elites have dreamed of maritime power since the 1840s is telling. Although China was on the receiving end of naval coercion, the historical lesson is that global powers who enjoy international success have strong navies. There is other anecdotal evidence of this widely held belief in China. According to Erikson and Goldstein, the CCP has studied the factors that have enabled previous great powers to rise. One government study, *The Rise of Great Powers*, examined the experiences of Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Russia, and the United States, concluding that success in the maritime domain was essential. The study's findings were a clear reflection of Mahan's central thesis— national power is derived from the prosperity created by foreign trade, which in turn requires a formidable navy. Beyond its impact on the Chinese government, *The Rise of Great Powers* was turned into a twelve-part series on China Central Television (CCTV), as well as an eight-volume set of books. Whether or not these conclusions serve China's interests, the Chinese leadership's decision to build a powerful fleet was based on their understanding of history.<sup>107</sup> Given this context, it is little surprise that Chinese leaders and the public are satisfied by images of Chinese ships in foreign ports.

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<sup>107</sup> Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, "China Studies the Rise of Great Powers," in *China Goes to Sea*, ed. Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord (Annapolis, Md: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 401–3.

Jervis provides other insights that are pertinent to foreign leader perception and Beijing's effect on it. Both are tied to the economic incentives that come with leadership engagements and closer ties to China. There is little doubt that most states that pursue closer ties with China are driven by potential economic gains. This underlying desire for national, and even personal gain, is essential to understand how leaders react to PLAN port visits. Port visits most often come after leader meetings and bilateral agreements. In many cases, the port visit consummates any agreements reached, at the same time elevating relations and expanding them into the military domain. Booth makes the similar point that port visits make relationships more concrete.<sup>108</sup> He cites McConnell's argument that ship visits "cannot create ties but they can cement them, compound and solidify influence, [and] dramatize its existence."<sup>109</sup>

Primed by the potential for economic gains, foreign leaders fall into many of the psychological pitfalls, previously identified by Jervis. During a ship visit, they see what they want to see, subconsciously accepting signals and information that confirms their bias toward further cooperation with China. Immediate concerns ("evoked sets") have a disproportionate influence on perception and may cause foreign leaders to view a port call through the filter of the recent meeting with Chinese leaders, or the Chinese loan that may mitigate their economic woes. In these situations, wishful thinking and self-fulfilling expectations can be presumed. Jervis explains that cognitive dissonance is the theory that, "people seek to justify their own behavior—to reassure themselves that they have made the best possible use of all the information they had or should have had, to believe that they have not used their resources foolishly, to see that their actions are commendable and consistent." all<sup>110</sup> For leaders who have just accepted billions of dollars in Chinese loans—let alone placed sovereign assets as collateral—there is motivation to see China,

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<sup>108</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 40.

<sup>109</sup> Booth, 65.

<sup>110</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 406.

and Chinese naval forces, in the most favorable light possible. This is perhaps the most underappreciated and effective function that PLAN port visits perform.

### *Alternative explanations*

Some might argue that PLAN port calls are simply “what navies do” in peacetime. Navies are expensive and very rarely used in combat, so great powers keep them up as an insurance policy against the worst-case scenarios. In other words, navies sail the globe to maintain proficiency, and as a result, they are required to pull into foreign ports for repairs, provisions, or crew rest with little relevance to larger political affairs. If PLAN port visits are mere byproducts of naval training and readiness, they matter very little to international politics. Empirically, there would be little evidence of purposeful alignment with Beijing’s larger diplomatic initiatives.

There is also an argument to be made that PLAN “friendly visits” are simply precursors to future coercion, no matter how subtle. It is not unreasonable to conclude that Beijing is biding its time, sending ships abroad with a smile until it no longer has to.<sup>111</sup> Although subtle, they are meant to intimidate and coerce both real and potential rivals. If that were true, PLAN port visits would likely target Taiwan and potential opponents such as Japan and the United States, as well as South China Sea claimants during times of increased tensions.

If taken at its word, Beijing’s naval charm offensive would be merely a straight-forward, but misguided, attempt to reassure other states of China’s benign intentions. From the late 1990s until the global financial crisis in 2008, Beijing’s diplomatic strategy certainly contained elements of reassurance, but this narrative has been undermined in the years since by contradictory behavior in the South China Sea and elsewhere. Seeking a deeper rationale seems warranted.

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<sup>111</sup> This insight is based on conversation with Chinese academics



### *Empirical Expectations*

This dissertation's essential expectation is that PLAN port visits serve the interests of the CCP leadership. If this is the case, PLAN port visits should ensure regime security by supporting Chinese economic expansion, Beijing's sovereignty claims, and national unification. They would do so by inducing foreign leaders to align closer to China, and the CCP's policy preferences, in the following specific ways. First, since my theory of Chinese port call diplomacy centers on leader perception—both in Beijing and host country capitals—I expect to see ship visits coincide with high-level leadership engagements. Second, I have maintained that Beijing has avoided most negative reactions because port calls are linked to inducements rather than overt coercion. If this is true, the vast majority of PLAN ship visits will occur during periods of diplomatic activity that is relatively positive, or at least productive. Port visits will be rare when bilateral relations are deteriorating to the point of crisis. During times of heightened tension, there is little doubt that a port call would be perceived as a threat, which would elicit a negative response from the host state, as well as other great powers.

Third, I have offered that port call diplomacy has a distinct place in Chinese domestic politics. I anticipate that Beijing will optimize PLAN port visits for domestic consumption. This will largely occur in Chinese state media, but there will also be obvious signs of coordination among members of the overseas Chinese community.

Finally, this dissertation addresses a simple question: does PLAN port call diplomacy work? There are certainly reasons it would not. At the very least, PLAN presence could be expected to raise concerns—or release antibodies of sorts within the host country and even the international community. Evidence of a negative reaction could take many forms, including a reluctance to advance diplomatic relations past win-win economic cooperation. States might avoid military-to-military engagements with China, limiting follow-on PLAN visits and involvement in bilateral

military exercises. Trade is unlikely to be affected, but host nations might shy away from riskier entanglements such as infrastructure deals that give China any semblance of control over domestic transportation networks. Furthermore, if PLAN visits are perceived as precursors to Chinese aggression, they should fuel host country hedging and increased engagement with the United States.

Evidence of a positive response would be the opposite—the advancement of diplomatic relations, military-to-military cooperation, and a willingness to give China access and control of domestic infrastructure projects. Frequent port calls would also indicate that Beijing is receiving positive feedback from PLAN visits and is gaining traction in its efforts to induce alignment behavior.

If successful, other states will acknowledge China's global power status and adapt their own goals around Chinese policy preferences. Rather than hedging or balancing, they will embrace Chinese institutions and become further enmeshed in China's economy. As other states learn to profit from China's growing interests, those that still recognize Taiwan will switch their allegiance to Beijing, and criticism over human rights violations will dissipate. States in Asia will accede to Chinese authority in exchange for economic and security benefits in a new regional order. With China in charge, Taiwan's reunification and rival claims in the South China Sea would inevitably resolve themselves in Beijing's favor without the need for military coercion or conflict with the United States. If PLAN port call diplomacy works to its fullest potential, Beijing could realize Sun Tzu's ultimate goal—to win without fighting.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Premier's Naval Retinue (1985-2008)*

The PLAN's first port visits abroad took place in November, 1985, when the Chinese destroyer *Hefei* and its replenishment ship *Fengcang* made stops in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. It wasn't until March, 1989, that the PLAN made its next overseas visits; this time with an inaugural call at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by the cadet-training ship *Zheng He*. This visit was an early indicator of Beijing's focus on cooperative, great power diplomacy during the 1990s. The *Zheng He* accounted for all six Chinese port visits between 1989 and May of 1994, when the destroyer *Zhuhai*, frigate *Huainan*, and the submarine support ship *Changxingdao*, visited Vladivostok, Russia for the first time.<sup>112 113</sup>

PLAN ships ventured as far as South America in 1997 with two Chinese destroyers, *Harbin* and *Zhuhai*, making visits to Chile, Mexico, and Peru. And by 2000, China's second cadet-training ship, the *Shichang*, reached Australia and New Zealand, while the destroyer *Shenzhen* made initial visits to the African continent in South Africa and Tanzania. The *Shenzhen* then sailed for Europe in 2001, making calls in France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. These regional deployments culminated in 2002 with the PLAN's first circumnavigation of the globe, which included ten stops by the destroyer *Qingdao* and its replenishment ship *Taicang*.<sup>114</sup>

Between 1985 and 1999, the average number of PLAN ships to visit overseas ports was just over three per year. From 2000 to 2008, the average increased to roughly 11 ships. This chapter provides ship-level analysis of PLAN port visits prior to the global financial crisis in 2008. The initial

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<sup>112</sup> Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*, 114.

<sup>113</sup> China Military Online, "Chinese Military Open and Transparent," August 11, 2014, [http://english.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2007zgjdjtm/2014-08/11/content\\_6100039.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2007zgjdjtm/2014-08/11/content_6100039.htm).

<sup>114</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Fleet Arrives in Singapore for Goodwill Visit (2002)," May 24, 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/May/33182.htm>; Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*; "Chinese Military Open and Transparent."

goal is to document Chinese naval behavior during these early years, but also demonstrate that port call diplomacy has never been a frivolous activity. Individual ship visits reveal Beijing's intentionality, not only in the platforms chosen, but in the patterns that emerge.

Prior to 2009, PLAN visits were first and foremost status signals that announced China's arrival as a great power. Beijing always sent its newest and most advanced ships on diplomatic missions. This is not surprising given the PLAN's need to gain operational experience with new platforms; however, it is also a sign that Beijing wanted to impress foreign audiences, especially among the other great powers. There is a clear prioritization of visits to Russia and the United States during the first wave—the two most influential actors in Beijing's strategic environment. This focus on Russia and the United States also reflects Beijing's attempts to regain international standing after the damage done to Beijing's reputation after the violence in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Second, early ship visits were undoubtedly meant for domestic consumption. This is most evident in the Chinese state media coverage, as well as the consistent themes during the visits themselves. Third, beyond expanding geographical reach, PLAN port visits evolved in terms of frequency, but also coordination with other Chinese diplomatic activity. Ship visits increasingly coincided with senior leadership meetings and became a predictor of future Chinese economic and diplomatic activities.

#### *The First Wave (1993-1998)*

Starting in 1993, the PLAN began a consistent series of voyages and diplomatic visits that began with the deployment of the training ship *Zheng He* into the Indian Ocean with port visits in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Thailand. Beijing's focus on great powers began the following year, when two of China's most advanced ships—the destroyer *Zhuhai*, frigate *Huainan*, and the submarine support ship, *Changxingdao*—visited Vladivostok, Russia. The same combatants, *Zhuhai* and *Huainan*, set out for Indonesia in 1995 to mark five years since Beijing and Jakarta resumed

diplomatic relations, while the frigate *Huaibei* returned to Vladivostok, Russia. The *Huaibei*, commissioned in 1993, was an updated version of the *Huainan*, which highlighted further PLAN advances with the Jiangwei I class.<sup>115</sup>

The next meaningful progression in terms of platforms and signals occurred when the destroyer *Harbin* visited North Korea and Russia in 1996. Commissioned in 1994, the 468-foot destroyer was China's first indigenously produced, modern warship. It represented the new face of the PLAN—the largest, newest, and most formidable Chinese warship ever built. The *Harbin* was also emblematic of China's increased prosperity and technological prowess. This was an achievement worth showing off, and Beijing chose to reveal it to Russia and North Korea first. The *Harbin's* visit in 1996 culminated three years of annual port calls to Russia; the same year Beijing and Moscow entered into the Shanghai Five, along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.<sup>116</sup> However, the PLAN did not return to Russia again until 2007.

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<sup>115</sup> “Type 053H2G Frigate,” in *Wikipedia*, January 20, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Type\\_053H2G\\_frigate&oldid=1001542052](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Type_053H2G_frigate&oldid=1001542052).

<sup>116</sup> Bates Gill, “Shanghai Five: An Attempt to Counter U.S. Influence in Asia?,” *Brookings* (blog), November 30, 1AD, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/shanghai-five-an-attempt-to-counter-u-s-influence-in-asia/>.

Table 3.1 – China’s “First Wave” Port Call Diplomacy (1993-1998)							
Country	Region	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Asia	<i>Zheng He</i>					
<b>India</b>	Asia	<i>Zheng He</i>					
<b>Indonesia</b>	Asia			<i>Zhubai &amp; Huainan</i>			
<b>Malaysia</b>	Asia					<i>Qingdao &amp; Tongling</i>	
<b>Pakistan</b>	Asia	<i>Zheng He</i>					
<b>Philippines</b>	Asia					<i>Qingdao &amp; Tongling</i>	<i>Qingdao</i>
<b>Thailand</b>	Asia	<i>Zheng He</i>				<i>Qingdao &amp; Tongling</i>	
<b>North Korea</b>	Asia				<i>Harbin &amp; Xining</i>		
<b>Russia</b>	Europe		<i>Zhubai &amp; Huainan</i>	<i>Huaipei</i>	<i>Harbin</i>		
<b>Mexico</b>	North America					<i>Harbin &amp; Zhubai</i>	
<b>United States</b>	North America					<i>Harbin &amp; Zhubai</i>	
<b>Australia</b>	Oceania						<i>Qingdao &amp; Shichang</i>
<b>New Zealand</b>	Oceania						<i>Qingdao &amp; Shichang</i>
<b>Chile</b>	South America					<i>Harbin &amp; Zhubai</i>	
<b>Peru</b>	South America					<i>Harbin &amp; Zhubai</i>	

An increase in diplomatic activity accompanied the destroyer *Qingdao* and frigate *Tongling*'s visits to and Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand in 1997.<sup>117</sup> Of note, the *Qingdao* is the *Harbin*'s sister ship and the only other Luhu class destroyer in the Chinese fleet. Together, they would account for roughly half of all ship visits during the PLAN's first wave of port call diplomacy. The same year, destroyers *Harbin* and *Zhubai*, along with replenishment ship *Nancang*, voyaged to the Western Hemisphere, stopping at Hawaii and San Diego before sailing on to Chile, Mexico, and Peru for the PLAN's first visits to Central and South America.

<sup>117</sup> ONI published an alternate spelling, “Tongqing,” for the name of FFG 542.

The call at Pearl Harbor was only the second to the United States by a PLAN ship since 1989, and the visit to San Diego was the first time the PLAN had sailed to the continental United States. It is also worth mentioning that the *Harbin* had been involved in the stand-off with the U.S. Navy during the Taiwan Straits Crisis only a year before the visit to Hawaii. When the PLAN ships entered Pearl Harbor, they were welcomed by a U.S. Navy band and roughly 300 members of the local Chinese community. A banner in Chinese hung on a chain link fence that read, “We warmly welcome our navy sailors and officers from the motherland.” It was hung there by four Chinese journalists on fellowships to the University of Hawaii and the East West Center. Zhu Xiao Hui, a graduate student from Hebei Province, was also present to welcome the ships. “I’m very excited, and I’m very proud of this visit...In a foreign land I can see the ship(s) from our own country.” Clearly, the imagery and press coverage of the *Harbin’s* visit was meant for Chinese domestic consumption, as well as those in the United States. China’s ambassador, Da You Li, concluded: “It’s an important event in the relations between our two nations.” During the visit, Chinese sailors participated in cultural events and athletic matches, including a soccer match against the crew of the *USS Crommelin*, which ended in a 2-2 tie.<sup>118</sup>

The visit to San Diego was similar in content and symbolism. While the three Chinese ships appeared modest when moored beside the U.S. Navy aircraft carrier, *USS Constellation*, the purpose of the visit was clear to many—it was China’s “coming-out party.”<sup>119</sup> Beijing was eager to show the world that it had modernized the PLAN and established a blue water navy.

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<sup>118</sup> Harold Morse, “Honolulu Star-Bulletin Local News,” March 10, 1997, <http://archives.starbulletin.com/97/03/10/news/story3.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Los Angeles Times, “Chinese Navy Scores a First in U.S. Visit,” Los Angeles Times, March 22, 1997, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-03-22-mn-40955-story.html>.



Figure 3.1 – *Harbin* at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 9 March 1997.<sup>120</sup>

These early instances of port call diplomacy were already well integrated into Beijing’s larger diplomatic strategy. Kurlantzick points to the year 1997 as the beginning of Beijing’s first “charm offensive,” an expansion of Chinese soft power activities to include a successful response to the Asian currency crisis.<sup>121</sup> The end of the 1990s saw a dramatic shift in Beijing’s posture toward economic integration and diplomatic cooperation, which produced results by the early 2000s. China became a member of the World Trade Organization in 2001, a watershed moment for China’s economy and Beijing’s place in international politics. The same year, China announced its intention to form the Shanghai Cooperation Organization along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>122</sup> In 2002, China signed the Declaration on Conduct agreement with the

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<sup>120</sup> “PLAN Destroyer Harbin Arrives at Pearl Harbor,” accessed March 4, 2021, [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Defense.gov\\_News\\_Photo\\_970309-N-9815L-005.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Defense.gov_News_Photo_970309-N-9815L-005.jpg).

<sup>121</sup> Josh Kurlantzick, “China’s Charm Offensive in Southeast Asia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed February 23, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2006/09/01/china-s-charm-offensive-in-southeast-asia-pub-18678>.

<sup>122</sup> Womack, “Beyond Win-Win.”



Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to manage territorial disputes in the Spratly Islands, as well as an ASEAN free-trade deal and the Treaty of Amity. These diplomatic accomplishments fit neatly under Beijing's narrative of "peaceful rise," and more specifically, its "good neighbor policy," which sought to assuage regional fears over China's growing power.<sup>123</sup>

*The Second Wave (2000-2003)*

Unsurprisingly, the early 2000s saw the PLAN's "second wave" of global port call diplomacy after a lull in activity in 1998 and 1999.<sup>124</sup> In Africa, the destroyer *Shenzhen* paid inaugural visits to South Africa and Tanzania in 2001, representing the first Chinese naval presence on the continent since the fifteenth century. In keeping with Beijing's "good neighbor" narrative, PLAN voyages increased dramatically in Asia as well. Chinese warships returned to Malaysia in 2000, and India and Pakistan in 2001. Inaugural visits were made to Vietnam in 2001, Singapore, and South Korea in 2002, and Brunei in 2003. The *Shenzhen* sailed to Europe in 2001 with stops in Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom, while the *Qingdao* returned the following year to visit Greece, Portugal, and Ukraine. These were all first-time European destinations for the PLAN. The *Qingdao's* voyage in 2002 was also significant because it was the first circumnavigation of the globe by the PLAN.

Beyond stops in Asia and Europe, the *Qingdao* made initial calls to Egypt, Turkey, Tahiti (French Polynesia), Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. The PLAN also resumed its port call diplomacy with the United States. In 2000, the *Qingdao* called at Pearl Harbor and Seattle, as well as Victoria, Canada,

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<sup>123</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, "Things Fall Apart: Maritime Disputes and China's Regional Diplomacy," in *China's Challenges*, ed. Jacques deLisle and Avery Goldstein, 1st ed (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 208.

<sup>124</sup> After the PLAN visits to the Western Hemisphere in 1997, overall levels of port call diplomacy decreased. In 1998, the *Qingdao* visited the Philippines and escorted the PLAN training ship *Shichang* (hull 82) on visits to Australia and New Zealand. There were no PLAN port visits in 1999.

followed by a visit by the Shenzhen to the U.S. base at Guam in 2003. Finally, the PLAN returned to Australia in 2001 and New Zealand in 2001 and 2003.

As with the 1997 visits to the United States, the naval platforms chosen for the second wave indicate China's desire for recognition as a modern power. All overseas port calls between 2000-2003 were led by just five combatants (each accompanied by a replenishment ship). *Harbin* and *Qingdao* handled the bulk of the diplomatic work, until they were joined by the destroyer *Shenzhen*, commissioned in 1999. The Luhai class *Shenzhen* was even larger and more technologically advanced than the *Harbin* and *Qingdao*. Beyond the new destroyers, Beijing sent its less imposing, but also most modern Jiangwei II class frigates, *Yulin* and *Yichang*, on diplomatic missions to Vietnam, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>125</sup> It is unclear why Beijing chose not to show-off its newest and largest destroyers; however, it was likely an effort to avoid stoking the "China threat" narrative in these three countries, none of which had destroyers at the time. Rather than dwarfing the host nation's frigates, the PLAN may have sent its own frigates to avoid any uncomfortable comparisons.

Three important patterns emerged from the PLAN's second wave. First, Beijing expanded its focus on major power relationships to all regions of the globe. The United States remained a top priority; however, Beijing used the PLAN to signal its intent to build closer ties with regional powers, including Australia, South Africa, Germany, the United Kingdom, Egypt, and Brazil. Second, port calls became clearly linked to high-level diplomatic meetings. In some cases, PLAN visits merely fit within a sequence of diplomatic engagements, preceding or following state visits. For example, the *Harbin's* visit to Ukraine in May, 2002, followed a state visit by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in July, 2001, and preceded a reciprocal visit to China by Chairman Ivan Plyushch of

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<sup>125</sup> Chinese Navy FFG has gone through several name changes. Yulin was renamed to Sanya in 2008, then changed to current name, Huludao, in April 2013 and transferred to North Sea Fleet (Wikipedia).

the Supreme Council of Ukraine in February, 2002.<sup>126 127</sup> In other cases, however, there are signs of closer coordination. On 12 May, 2001, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji met with Pakistani President Rafiq Tarar and Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf during a visit to Pakistan to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan. The same month, the *Harbin* and its replenishment ship *Taicang* arrived in Karachi. In November, 2001, a meeting between Premier Zhu Rongji and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai occurred within weeks of the Chinese frigate *Yulin*'s inaugural visit to Vietnam.<sup>128 129</sup>

In 2001, the frigate *Yichang* and replenishment ship *Taicang* made a diplomatic voyage to Oceania where they visited Australia and New Zealand—the two leading states in the region. The *Yichang*'s call to Australia took place 2-7 October, led by PLAN Rear Admiral Yang Fucheng, the Deputy Commander of the South Sea Fleet. More importantly, the frigate departed less than two weeks before Australian Prime Minister John Howard traveled to Shanghai for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), where he met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin.<sup>130</sup> There is less information available regarding the *Yichang*'s visit to New Zealand on the same trip, but it similarly coincided with Jiang Zemin's meeting with New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark on 19

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<sup>126</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peoples Republic of China, "President Jiang Zemin Meets Ukrainian Prime Minister Anatoly Kinakh," July 24, 2001, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/dozys\\_664276/gjlb\\_664280/3205\\_664342/3207\\_664346/t16711.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3205_664342/3207_664346/t16711.shtml).

<sup>127</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President Jiang Zemin Met with Visiting Chairman Plyushch of the Supreme Council of Ukraine," February 28, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/dozys\\_664276/gjlb\\_664280/3250\\_664382/3252\\_664386/t16840.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/dozys_664276/gjlb_664280/3250_664382/3252_664386/t16840.shtml).

<sup>128</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peoples Republic of China, "Premier Zhu Rongji Met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai," November 7, 2001, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t16265.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t16265.shtml).

<sup>129</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "PLA Navy Vessel Concludes Visit to Vietnam," China.org, November 21, 2001, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/22530.htm>.

<sup>130</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President Jiang Zemin Met with Australian Prime Minister," October 20, 2001, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyys\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3377\\_664820/3379\\_664824/t17030.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyys_664814/gjlb_664818/3377_664820/3379_664824/t17030.shtml).

October in Shanghai during the same APEC forum.<sup>131</sup> According to the Chinese Consulate General in Auckland, when the *Yichang* returned to New Zealand in 2003, again under the command of Rear Admiral Yang Fucheng, the destroyer was greeted by over 1000 people, including New Zealand defense leaders, Chinese diplomats, Chinese students, and members of the local Chinese community. Rear Admiral Yang met with the Rear Admiral Peter McHaffie, the New Zealand Chief of Naval Staff, during a reception on board the *Yichang*.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President Jiang Zemin Met with New Zealand Prime Minister," October 20, 2001, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gilb\\_664818/3412\\_664880/3414\\_664884/t17077.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gilb_664818/3412_664880/3414_664884/t17077.shtml).

<sup>132</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-Auckland, "Chinese P.L.A. Navy Ships Visit New Zealand," November 19, 2003, <http://auckland.chineseconsulate.org/eng/zlgxw/t44148.htm>.

Table 3.2 – China’s “Second Wave” Port Call Diplomacy (2000-2003)							
Country	Region	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
South Africa	Africa		<i>Shenzhen</i>				
Tanzania	Africa		<i>Shenzhen</i>				
Brunei	Asia					<i>Shenzhen</i>	
India	Asia			<i>Harbin</i>			
Malaysia	Asia		<i>Shenzhen</i>				
Pakistan	Asia			<i>Harbin</i>			
Singapore	Asia				<i>Qingdao</i>	<i>Shenzhen</i>	
South Korea	Asia				<i>Jiaxing &amp; Lianyungang</i>		
Vietnam	Asia			<i>Yulin</i>			
France	Europe			<i>Shenzhen</i>			
Germany	Europe			<i>Shenzhen</i>			
Greece	Europe				<i>Qingdao</i>		
Italy	Europe			<i>Shenzhen</i>			
Portugal	Europe				<i>Qingdao</i>		
Ukraine	Europe				<i>Qingdao</i>		
United Kingdom	Europe			<i>Shenzhen</i>			
Egypt	Middle East				<i>Qingdao</i>		
Turkey	Middle East				<i>Qingdao</i>		
Canada	North America		<i>Qingdao</i>				
United States	North America		<i>Qingdao</i>			<i>Shenzhen</i>	
Australia	Oceania			<i>Yichang</i>			
Tahiti (F.P)	Oceania				<i>Qingdao</i>		
New Zealand	Oceania			<i>Yichang</i>		<i>Yichang</i>	
Brazil	South America				<i>Qingdao</i>		
Ecuador	South America				<i>Qingdao</i>		
Peru	South America				<i>Qingdao</i>		

\*There were no PLAN overseas port visits in 1999 or 2004.  
Replenishment ships are not shown in this table.

The *Qingdao*'s global voyage in 2002 was another mile-marker in the evolution of the PLAN's port call diplomacy. The destroyer, along with its replenishment ship *Taicang*, set out from the *Qingdao*'s namesake city on 15 May 2002 with 506 officers and crew on board.<sup>133 134</sup> The first stop

<sup>133</sup> Ships often enjoy local support from their namesake cities. It is not surprising that the Qingdao (DDG 113) left from the city of Qingdao on this historic voyage.

<sup>134</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Ship Formation's First Global Navigation," September 28, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200209/28/eng20020928\\_104085.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200209/28/eng20020928_104085.shtml).

was an inaugural call to Singapore on 23 May, where the ships' commanding officer, Ding Yiping, Commander of the North China Sea Fleet, met with senior Singaporean military officials.<sup>135</sup> After transiting the Strait of Malacca and crossing the Indian Ocean, the PLAN flotilla made its way into the Red Sea via the Bab-el-Mandeb and through the Suez Canal before making a first-time call at Alexandria, Egypt, in mid-June. As in Singapore, Ding Yiping met with local officials and the Egyptian Navy's most senior officer.<sup>136</sup>

More importantly, the *Qingdao's* stop in Alexandria came less than two months after a high-profile visit from Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, part of a diplomatic trip to Egypt, Turkey, and Kenya. On the morning of 20 April, 2002, Zhu Rongji met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the Presidential Palace, followed by talks with Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Obeid at his residence in Cairo.<sup>137 138</sup>

The *Qingdao's* next port of call was Turkey's Aksaz naval base, due north of Alexandria. The visit kept to the Chinese script—engagement with Turkish military counterparts, soccer and tennis matches, as well as interactions with the local Chinese community.<sup>139</sup> Again, the ship's arrival followed on the heels of Premier Zhu Rongji's April trip, during which he met with Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit to discuss increased economic and political cooperation. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Turkish leaders affirmed their commitment to the One China

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<sup>135</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Fleet Arrives in Singapore for Goodwill Visit," May 24, 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/May/33182.htm>.

<sup>136</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Fleet Calls at Alexandria Port of Egypt," June 15, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200206/14/eng20020614\\_97854.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200206/14/eng20020614_97854.shtml).

<sup>137</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Premier Zhu Rongji Held Talks with Egyptian Prime Minister," April 22, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xybfs\\_663590/gjlb\\_663594/2813\\_663616/2815\\_663620/t16309.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2813_663616/2815_663620/t16309.shtml).

<sup>138</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Premier Zhu Rongji Met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak," April 22, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xybfs\\_663590/gjlb\\_663594/2813\\_663616/2815\\_663620/t16310.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2813_663616/2815_663620/t16310.shtml).

<sup>139</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Fleet Concludes Visit to Turkey," June 24, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200206/23/eng20020623\\_98395.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200206/23/eng20020623_98395.shtml).

Policy and China's peaceful reunification with Taiwan. In addition, Turkey's leaders emphasized that Xinjiang is an inseparable part of China, and that they opposed any anti-China separatist activities in Turkey.<sup>140</sup>

After sailing north through the Aegean, the Chinese ships transited the Bosphorus Strait and entered the Black Sea for an inaugural visit to Sevastopol, Ukraine on 29 June. The three-day call included all the diplomatic and public components of the previous stops.<sup>141</sup> While the visit was not as tightly linked to a specific diplomatic meeting, the *Qingdao's* visit once again fit within a choreographed sequence of high-level diplomatic engagements. On 21 July 2001, President Jiang Zemin met with Ukrainian Prime Minister Anatoly Kinakh during a state visit to Ukraine.<sup>142</sup> Then on 28 January 2002, Zhu Rongji hosted the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Anatoly Maximovich Zlenko at Zhongnanhai, the Chinese Communist Party and State Council headquarters in Beijing's Imperial City. Finally, on 26 February 2002 Jiang Zemin met with Chairman Ivan Plyushch of the Supreme Council of Ukraine and his entourage at Zhongnanhai.

The *Qingdao* and *Taicang* then sailed for the Greek port of Piraeus.<sup>143</sup> Greece had not been part of Zhu Rongji's April, 2002, trip to the region; however, the Chinese Premier had hosted the Greek Prime Minister Constantine Simitis in Beijing earlier in June. Simitis met with Premier Zhu and Chinese President Jiang Zemin on 3 June 2002 in the Great Hall of the People, where they discussed enhancing bilateral relations. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Simitis

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<sup>140</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Premier Zhu Rongji's Visit to Turkey, Egypt and Kenya Scored Complete Success," April 28, 2002,

[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/3736\\_666024/t19127.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/3736_666024/t19127.shtml).

<sup>141</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Ships End Visit to Ukraine," June 29, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200206/28/eng20020628\\_98743.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200206/28/eng20020628_98743.shtml).

<sup>142</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Peoples Republic of China, "President Jiang Zemin Meets Ukrainian Prime Minister Anatoly Kinakh."

<sup>143</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Ship Formation's First Global Navigation."

affirmed his commitment to the One China Policy and offered that Greece would actively promote closer ties between the EU and China as the rotating chair of the EU.<sup>144 145</sup>

There is less information available on diplomatic activity surrounding the *Qingdao's* stops in Portugal and Brazil, but both involved military-to-military exchanges and interaction with the overseas Chinese community.<sup>146 147</sup> However, once the Chinese ships transited the Panama Canal and reached Ecuador, the familiar pattern resumed. Ecuadorian President Novoa had been in Beijing in late March to meet with Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji. On 21 March, Zhu Rongji indicated that the visit had a “profound influence on the development of China-Ecuador relations.” The two countries signed multiple agreements on economic, diplomatic, and technological cooperation.<sup>148 149</sup>

The final stop in South America was Peru, the only country on the *Qingdao's* global voyage that the PLAN had previously visited. Destroyers *Harbin* and *Zhubai*, along with their replenishment ship *Nancang*, had stopped in Peru in 1997. As in Ecuador, there were high-level diplomatic engagements in late May prior to the *Qingdao's* visit. On the afternoon of May 27, 2002, Chinese

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<sup>144</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “President Jiang Held Talks with Greek Prime Minister Simitis,” June 6, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t16950.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t16950.shtml).

<sup>145</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Premier Zhu Rongji Held Talks with Greek Prime Minister Simitis,” June 6, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t16951.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t16951.shtml).

<sup>146</sup> People's Daily, “Chinese Naval Ships Start Visit to Portugal,” July 11, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200207/11/eng20020711\\_99494.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200207/11/eng20020711_99494.shtml).

<sup>147</sup> People's Daily, “Chinese Naval Fleet Arrives in Brazil for Visit,” July 24, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200207/24/eng20020724\\_100272.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200207/24/eng20020724_100272.shtml).

<sup>148</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “President Jiang Zemin and Ecuadorian President Novoa Held Talks,” March 21, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/lmzms\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3493\\_665068/3495\\_665072/t17377.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/lmzms_664952/gjlb_664956/3493_665068/3495_665072/t17377.shtml).

<sup>149</sup> People's Daily, “Premier Zhu Meets Ecuadorian President,” March 22, 2002, [http://en.people.cn/200203/22/eng20020322\\_92561.shtml](http://en.people.cn/200203/22/eng20020322_92561.shtml).



Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan met with Peru's Foreign Minister Diego Garcia-Sayan at the Foreign Ministry building in Beijing, where they signed a series of bilateral agreements.<sup>150</sup>

After leaving Peru, the Chinese ships headed across the Pacific, stopping at Tahiti (French Polynesia) on 3 September, which appears to be an unplanned visit due to the fact that it was not included in Xinhua's coverage of the *Qingdao's* departure in May.<sup>151</sup> In any case, even if this was an operational call driven by ship requirements, Beijing used the opportunity for maximum diplomatic effect. According to Radio New Zealand International, the three-day stopover at Pape'ete, Tahiti, coincided with a visit from Wu Jianmin, the Chinese ambassador to France. The ambassador was there to convey a government mandate to Robert Wan, a wealthy and prominent pearl merchant of Chinese descent, to build a Chinese cultural center in French Polynesia. Most importantly, the *Qingdao's* presence in Pape'ete preceded a scheduled visit by French Polynesia's President, Gaston Flosse, to Beijing a month later.<sup>152</sup> On the morning of 8 October, President Flosse met with Chinese President Jiang Zemin at Zhongnagai, a rather high-level meeting for the president of a territorial government. However, Jiang Zemin reportedly expressed his gratitude for the hospitality he received during a stop-over in Tahiti on his way to a series of state visits in South America the year before.<sup>153 154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan Held Talks with Peruvian Foreign Minister Diego Garcia-Sayan," May 29, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3513\\_665118/3515\\_665122/t17398.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3513_665118/3515_665122/t17398.shtml).

<sup>151</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Chinese Fleet Starts First Ever Round-the-World Voyage," May 16, 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/May/32675.htm>.

<sup>152</sup> East West Center, Pacific Island Report, "CHINESE NAVY ON FIRST EVER VISIT TO FRENCH POLYNESIA | Pacific Islands Report," September 3, 2002, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2002/09/03/chinese-navy-first-ever-visit-french-polynesia>.

<sup>153</sup> In 2001, Jiang Zemin made state visits to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Uruguay, and Venezuela. He visited Mexico in 2002.

<sup>154</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President Jiang Met With President of the Territorial Government of French Polynesia," October 15, 2002, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3291\\_664540/3293\\_664544/t16903.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3291_664540/3293_664544/t16903.shtml).

When the *Qingdao* and *Taicang* returned to Qingdao, China, on 23 September they were greeted by two thousand military personnel, local officials, residents, and the family members of the crew during an elaborate welcoming ceremony. Over the course of the 132-day voyage, the flotilla traveled 33,000 nautical miles to ten countries and five continents. The Chinese media coverage of the ships' return highlighted several prominent narratives for the domestic audience. First, the voyage elevated China's standing as a global sea power. According to People's Daily, it "fulfilled the thousand-year-old dream of the Chinese nation...a symbol of the growing overall national strength of China as expressed in the development of the national economy, science and technology, it concerns the reputation of our Party, State and nation, as well as the image of the people's armed forces..."<sup>155</sup> International recognition was also a necessary part of this elevation of status. Domestic coverage reiterated how well the ships were received, and how other militaries acknowledged the PLAN's modernization and professionalism. Second, the visiting ships reportedly elicited a strong response from overseas Chinese nationals and people of Chinese origin. Chinese media highlighted the number of overseas Chinese that welcomed the ships with pride and enthusiasm at every port. This too has potent meaning for the Chinese domestic audience. According to People's Daily, the ships "sparked the patriotism of the broad masses of Chinese nationals and their aspirations and national cohesion for the reunification of the motherland."<sup>156</sup>

The PLAN's second wave concluded in 2003 when the destroyer *Shenzhen* and its replenishment ship *Qinghaihu* visited the U.S. Navy base on Guam, Brunei, and Singapore during a 37-day voyage. The four-day stay at Guam in late October was particularly significant for Beijing. China Daily reported that the "visit to the U.S. Navy's "military fortress" in the Pacific was a sign of warming relations since, "military exchange is like a 'wind vane' most capable of reflecting changes

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<sup>155</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Naval Ship Formation's First Global Navigation."

<sup>156</sup> People's Daily.

in the relations between the two nations.” The visit was also timely given the fact that Chinese Defense Minister, Cao Gangchuan, arrived in New York on 24 October for talks with U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. This was the first time a Chinese defense minister was invited to the Pentagon since 1996.<sup>157</sup>

There is less detail available regarding the *Shenzhen's* stopovers in Brunei and Singapore, but they continued the pattern of visits that coincide with high-level diplomatic engagements involving the Chinese Premier. When Zhu Rongji left the premiership in March 2003, he was succeeded by his vice premier and protégé, Wen Jiabao. On October 6, 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao met with Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, and Myanmar Prime Minister Khin Nyunt on separate occasions at Bali, Indonesia.<sup>158</sup> The *Shenzhen* arrived in Brunei several weeks later. In the case of Singapore, the *Shenzhen's* visit was situated in a sequence of diplomatic meetings involving Wen Jiabao and Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Cho Tong. They first met in Bangkok during the China-ASEAN Leaders' Special Meeting on SARS on 29 April, 2003.<sup>159</sup> However, the *Shenzhen's* port call in November likely took place during a Singaporean state visit to China in which the prime minister again met with Wen Jiabao. On 18 November the two leaders met in the Great Hall of the People for talks on increased economic and scientific cooperation, as well as formalizing a comprehensive economic partnership.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> China Daily, “Navy Fleet Visit Heart of US Forces in the Pacific,” November 2, 2003, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-11/02/content\\_277636.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-11/02/content_277636.htm).

<sup>158</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Premier Wen Jiabao Meets Brunei, Vietnamese and Myanmar Leaders,” October 2003, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2691\\_663386/2693\\_663390/t26574.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2691_663386/2693_663390/t26574.shtml).

<sup>159</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Premier Wen Jiabao Meets Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Cho Tong,” April 30, 2003, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2777\\_663548/2779\\_663552/t22879.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2777_663548/2779_663552/t22879.shtml).

<sup>160</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong,” November 19, 2003, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2777\\_663548/2779\\_663552/t44023.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2777_663548/2779_663552/t44023.shtml).

Overall, the second wave of PLAN port call diplomacy reflects the larger themes of Chinese diplomacy at the turn of the twenty-first century. Faced with a unipolar environment dominated by the United States, ship visits sought to improve Beijing's global standing by exhibiting China's modern, indigenously built navy. At the same time, the majority of these diplomatic visits were focused on engaging major international and regional powers in order to build closer relationships and mitigate potential balancing reactions.<sup>161</sup> Not surprisingly, 2003 was also the year that Beijing articulated the state's goal to become a maritime power for the first time.<sup>162</sup>

Not only did the frequency and reach of PLAN visits increase during the second wave, but the countries where PLAN calls took place reveal Beijing's diplomatic priorities and strategic direction. Many of the destinations between 2000-2003 would become the PLAN's most frequently visited ports in the coming decades. For example, the *Shenzhen's* calls to Tanzania and South Africa were the first PLAN visits to the African continent, indicating Beijing's interest in both countries. As of 2020, no other countries in Africa (excluding the resupply base at Djibouti) have received as many PLAN ships as South Africa and Tanzania. Furthermore, these early visits signaled Beijing's interest in closer bilateral relationships that would continue to deepen across economic, political and eventually military dimensions.

The *Shenzhen's* voyage to South Africa in August, 2000, becomes more meaningful when placed in the larger context of bilateral relations between the two countries. Once South Africa ended apartheid in 1994—and renounced its recognition of Taiwan in 1997—the two countries established diplomatic relations on 01 January 1998.<sup>163</sup> In April, 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin traveled to South Africa for an official state visit, during which he signed the Pretoria

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<sup>161</sup> Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge*, 12.

<sup>162</sup> Hu Bo, Yanpei, and Till, *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century*, 1.

<sup>163</sup> Foreign Ministry of the Peoples Republic of China, "China - South Africa Relations," January 1, 2004, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceza/eng/zghfz/zngx/t165290.htm>.

Agreement, an early form of partnership to promote economic and political cooperation. The agreement established a commission to support closer bilateral relations, as well as a mutual pledge to support one another in the creation of “a new international economic and political order.”<sup>164</sup> The *Shenzhen’s* visit in August was the first PLA presence in South Africa; however, less than a month later, Deputy Chief of the General Armament Department of the PLA, Chen Dazhi, met with South African Minister of Defense Lekota and General Niyanda, Commander of the South African Armed Forces.<sup>165</sup> The PLAN visit was an important step toward military-to-military relations beyond the economic and political spheres.

#### *The Third Wave (2005-2008)*

The end of the second wave was delineated by a period of relatively low PLAN diplomatic activity. There were no international PLAN port visits in 2004,<sup>166</sup> followed by a single voyage by the *Shenzhen* to the Indian Ocean in late November, 2005, and the *Qingdao’s* return to North America in September, 2006. The number of calls was muted; however, Beijing’s port call diplomacy was more specific in its regional focus. When the *Shenzhen* and her replenishment ship *Weishanhu* arrived in Karachi on 21 November, 2005, the ships were greeted by a twenty-one-gun salute from Pakistani Naval Station Qasim and a military band accompanied by a local folk music and dance troupe. School children waved Chinese and Pakistani flags, and members of the local Chinese community cheered and waved banners. The *Shenzhen’s* commanding officer, Rear Admiral Han Linzhi, was welcomed by Pakistani naval leaders, as well as the Chinese Consul general in Karachi and the

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<sup>164</sup> “Pretoria Declaration on the Partnership between the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa,” April 25, 2000, <http://za.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/tenthanniversary/t388680.htm>.

<sup>165</sup> “China and South Africa,” accessed March 17, 2021, <http://johannesburg.china-consulate.org/eng/sbgx/t179821.htm>.

<sup>166</sup> The PLAN did make calls to Hong Kong, but since Hong Kong is technically part of China, these visits are outside the scope of the project.

embassy's military attaché. During his stay, Admiral Han Linzhi met with Pakistani military leaders and civilian officials, including Governor Sindh.<sup>167 168</sup>

Beyond these familiar features of the *Shenzhen's* stay, the Chinese destroyer was also in Karachi to participate in the PLAN's first at-sea naval exercise with the Pakistan Navy. This was an elevation of military cooperation that would only continue to deepen in the following years. The visit also fit into Beijing's larger diplomatic playbook. Unsurprisingly, the *Shenzhen's* voyage to the Indian Ocean followed Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's trip to the region in April, during which he met with Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf at the presidential residence to discuss further economic and political cooperation.<sup>169</sup>

On the same trip Wen Jiabao visited India and met with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to sign an extensive series of cultural, economic, and political agreements, including a way forward to settle Chinese-Indian border disputes. The two sides released a joint statement in which they also established a strategic partnership for peace and prosperity.<sup>170 171</sup> Following the *Shenzhen's* exercises in the Arabian Sea with the Pakistani Navy, the PLAN flotilla sailed to Cochin, India, where Rear Admiral Han Linzhi received a similar welcome from Indian military leaders and Chinese embassy staff. After a three-day port visit, the *Shenzhen* participated in naval exercises with the Indian Navy

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<sup>167</sup> Dawn, "Chinese Ships Arrive for Wargame (Karachi, Pakistan)," DAWN.COM, November 22, 2005, <http://beta.dawn.com/news/166660/chinese-ships-arrive-for-wargame>.

<sup>168</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "People's Daily Online -- Chinese Naval Fleet Leaves Pakistan," November 24, 2005, [http://en.people.cn/200511/24/eng20051124\\_223683.html](http://en.people.cn/200511/24/eng20051124_223683.html).

<sup>169</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, "Pakistani President Meets with Wen Jiabao, Emphasizing Bilateral Coordination and Cooperation," April 6, 2005, <http://pk.china-embassy.org/eng/zbgs/t191416.htm>.

<sup>170</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with His Indian Counterpart Manmohan Singh," April 11, 2005, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/wzlcfly\\_665842/t191395.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/wzlcfly_665842/t191395.shtml).

<sup>171</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Synopsis of Agreements/MOUs/Memoranda - Visit of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to India, April 9-12, 2005," April 11, 2005, <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6563/Synopses+of+AgreementsMOUsMemoranda++Visit+of+Chinese++Wen+Jiabao+to+India+April+9+12+2005>.

centered around search and rescue.<sup>172 173</sup> The Shenzhen's diplomatic voyage ended with a visit to Sattahip, Thailand, and the PLAN's first joint military exercise with the Royal Thai Navy in the Gulf of Thailand.<sup>174</sup>

The *Qingdao's* 2006 voyage began with a stop at Pearl Harbor on 6 September, but culminated in a one-day joint-exercise focused on search and rescue—the first of its kind held between the PLAN and the U.S. Navy.<sup>175</sup> The *Qingdao* then sailed to San Diego for a follow-on visit to the U.S. mainland with a similar agenda. Rear Admiral Len Hering officially welcomed the Chinese officers and crew: “With this visit, China and the United States have an important opportunity to develop and build through our sailors’ relationships for cooperation in maintaining a peaceful and stable region... This is a longstanding role that navies play, and we are very proud to be a part of this process.”<sup>176</sup>

When the *Qingdao* arrived in Esquimalt, British Columbia, on 25 September, 2006, for a five-day-visit, relations between Canada and China were less sanguine. The conservative party, which assumed power in January 2006 under Prime Minister Stephen Harper made it clear that Canada would not placate Beijing for financial gains. The government instead affirmed its commitment to human rights and even granted the Dalai Lama honorary Canadian citizenship on 9 September.<sup>177</sup> According to Canadian and Chinese press accounts, the agenda for the *Qingdao's* visit was fairly

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<sup>172</sup> Times of India, “Chinese Ships Arrive for Joint Naval Exercises (Cochin, India),” November 28, 2005, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/rest-of-world/Chinese-ships-arrive-for-joint-naval-exercises/articleshow/1310673.cms>.

<sup>173</sup> People's Daily, “People's Daily Online -- Chinese Navy Fleet Ends India Visit,” December 2, 2005, [http://en.people.cn/200512/02/eng20051202\\_225285.html](http://en.people.cn/200512/02/eng20051202_225285.html).

<sup>174</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Chinese Naval Fleet Arrives in Thailand for Visit,” found on China.org, December 9, 2005, [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2005-12/09/content\\_122791.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2005-12/09/content_122791.htm).

<sup>175</sup> China Daily, “Chinese Naval Ships Visit Pearl Harbor,” September 7, 2006, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-09/07/content\\_683626.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-09/07/content_683626.htm).

<sup>176</sup> Tony Perry and Mark Magnier, “Two Chinese Warships Pay Visit to San Diego,” Los Angeles Times, September 19, 2006, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-sep-19-me-china19-story.html>.

<sup>177</sup> “Canada–China Relations,” in *Wikipedia*, March 24, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Canada%E2%80%93China\\_relations&oldid=1014045231](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Canada%E2%80%93China_relations&oldid=1014045231).

typical; however, the welcome was hardly ebullient. Commodore Bruce Donaldson, commander of the Canadian Pacific Fleet, offered: “We have a very good professional relationship between the two nations.” The Chinese flotilla commander, Rear Admiral Wang Fushang, deputy commander of the Chinese Navy North Sea Fleet, stated that the purpose of the visit was to enhance the mutual friendship and trust between Canada and China. He offered, “We cherish the traditional friendship between the two peoples and the two militaries.” Notably, the Chinese ships were not open to the public.<sup>178 179</sup>

However, when diplomatic dialog did resume, there was a link back to British Columbia. A meeting took place in Beijing between the Premier of British Columbia, Gordon Campbell, and Wen Jiabao’s vice foreign minister Yang Jiechi on 20 November. They met at the Chinese Foreign Ministry, to discuss “China’s friendly relations with British Columbia and other issues.”<sup>180</sup>

The *Qingdao*’s final call was to Manila, Philippines, where the political climate and reception was more commensurate with the PLAN’s new status. It is also worth mentioning that this was only the PLAN’s third visit to the Philippines (1997, 1998, and 2006); however, the *Qingdao* was the lead boat during all three engagements. When he arrived, Rear Admiral Wang Fushang was welcomed by Philippines government officials, military leaders, Chinese embassy staff, representatives from Chinese companies, and Chinese students. Roughly 40 senior PLAN officers attended the reception held in the Philippines Naval headquarters. Beyond the usual soccer and basketball games, Admiral Wang met with civilian political leaders, as well as his military counterparts to press for closer

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<sup>178</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Chinese Navy Ships Visit Canada,” September 25, 2006, [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-09/26/content\\_399234.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-09/26/content_399234.htm).

<sup>179</sup> CBC News · Posted: Sep 25, 2006 1:17 PM PT | Last Updated: September 25, and 2006, “Chinese Navy Visits B.C. | CBC News,” CBC, September 25, 2006, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/chinese-navy-visits-b-c-1.607103>.

<sup>180</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Vice Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Meets with Premier Gordon Campbell of the Province of British Columbia of Canada,” November 21, 2006, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3382\\_664830/3384\\_664834/t281559.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3382_664830/3384_664834/t281559.shtml).



defense relations between China and the Philippines. According to the Chinese embassy, Jose De Venecia, the speaker of the house of representatives, said that the two countries were in a “golden age of partnership” and that the PLAN visit was significant in boosting defense relations between China and the Philippines.

The PLAN visit was also part of a larger Chinese diplomatic effort to improve bilateral relations. President Hu Jintao paid a state visit to Manila in April, 2005, on the last leg of a diplomatic trip that also included Brunei and Indonesia.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, on the last day of the *Qingdao's* visit, Wen Jiabao met with Philippines President Arroyo for bilateral talks during the China-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, which marked the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of “dialog relations” between China and ASEAN. The meeting between Chinese and ASEAN leaders took place in Nanning, China.<sup>182</sup> Wen Jiabao followed up several months later with a state visit to the Philippines, during which he again met with President Arroyo and signed multiple agreements worth billions of dollars.<sup>183</sup>

In 2007, PLAN port call diplomacy increased with voyages to Europe, Oceania, Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean region, as well as Japan. This marked the first time a Chinese warship entered a Japanese port since the end of World War II.

In early March of 2007, two Jiangwei II frigates, the *Sanming* and *Lianyungang*, arrived in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for replenishment and crew rest before sailing on to Pakistan to participate in AMAN-07, an inaugural multinational naval exercise held in Karachi. Once again, the timing of the visit was enmeshed with larger diplomatic events. In fact, the Sri Lankan president, Mahinda

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<sup>181</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of the Philippines, “Hu Jintao Arrives at Manila for a State Visit to the Philippines,” April 26, 2005, <http://ph.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/1/t193981.htm>.

<sup>182</sup> People's Daily, “Premier Wen Jiabao Meets Philippine President,” October 30, 2006, [http://en.people.cn/200610/30/eng20061030\\_316465.html](http://en.people.cn/200610/30/eng20061030_316465.html).

<sup>183</sup> China Daily, “Premier Wen Starts State Visit to Philippines,” January 15, 2007, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2007-01/15/content\\_784079\\_4.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2007-01/15/content_784079_4.htm).

Rajapaksa, was in Beijing at the time, meeting with Chinese president Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao.<sup>184 185</sup> The joint communique from the visit celebrated 50 years of friendship between the two countries and announced multiple agreements—including the Hambantota harbor development and the implementation of the cooperative partnership agreement signed in 2005. It also included Sri Lanka’s steadfast support for Beijing’s principal core interest.

Sri Lanka remains firmly committed to the one China policy, opposes any form of “Taiwan independence” including “de jure independence” and opposes participation of Taiwan in any international and regional organizations which are composed of sovereign states...The Chinese side highly appreciates the above position of Sri Lanka.<sup>186</sup>

Afterward, China followed through with increased military aid and political support for the Rajapaksa government, providing weapons that helped Sri Lanka annihilate the opposition in its ongoing civil war. It was also at this time that Beijing and Sri Lanka began signing a series of agreements for future infrastructure projects. This all took place as the United States and India were growing pessimistic about the Sri Lankan government’s human rights abuses, which would result in a halt to military aid that year.<sup>187</sup> The PLAN port call in Colombo did not cause these larger events to happen, but the presence of Chinese warships likely signaled Beijing’s willingness to fill the military void left by the United States and India.

At first it may appear odd that the PLAN sent two Jiangwei II frigates to its first multinational exercise rather than the most impressive destroyers, or at least its newest frigates;

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<sup>184</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with Sri Lankan President Rajapakse,” February 28, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2782\\_663558/2784\\_663562/t300532.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2782_663558/2784_663562/t300532.shtml).

<sup>185</sup> Dan Kosteka, “Places and Bases: The Chinese Navy’s Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean,” *Naval War College Review* 64, no. 1 (2011): 21.

<sup>186</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “JOINT PRESS COMMUNIQUE OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF SRI LANKA,” March 4, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2782\\_663558/2784\\_663562/t301565.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2782_663558/2784_663562/t301565.shtml).

<sup>187</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “The Sri Lankan Conflict,” Council on Foreign Relations, May 18, 2009, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/sri-lankan-conflict>.

however, the *Sanming* (commissioned in 2000) and the *Lianyungang* (commissioned in 1998) served another purpose. Beijing and Pakistan had signed a \$750 million deal in 2005, which obligated China Shipbuilding Trading Co (CSTC) to design and build four F-22P (Zulfiqar class) frigates for the Pakistani Navy based on the Chinese Jinagwei II.<sup>188</sup> Apparently, Beijing wanted to highlight the ship class already on order. The first Pakistani frigate, the *Zulifquar*, was delivered a year later in 2008.

After participating in AMAN-07, the two Chinese warships sailed home, stopping over in Jakarta, Indonesia, for a typically scripted visit. It was the PLAN's first visit to Indonesia in twelve years. However, unlike most other PLAN calls during this period, the ships preceded the high-level diplomatic engagements that began in July when Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in the presidential palace in Jakarta.<sup>189</sup> Later in the year, Wen Jiabao continued the dialog with the Indonesian President when they met on 20 November in Singapore.<sup>190</sup>

When the Luyang I class destroyer, *Guangzhou* (DDG 168) was commissioned in July 2004, it represented another step forward for PLAN modernization. The ship was larger and more technologically advanced than the destroyers *Harbin*, *Qingdao*, and *Shenzhen*, which had done most of the diplomatic work for the PLAN. On 24 July, 2007, the *Guangzhou* and its resupply ship *Weishanhu* sailed for Europe on the ship's first diplomatic voyage, including calls to Russia, the United Kingdom, Spain, and France. When the *Guangzhou* arrived in St. Petersburg, Russia, on 27 August,

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<sup>188</sup> "Sword / F-22P Class Frigates - Naval Technology," accessed April 2, 2021, <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/sword-f22p/>.

<sup>189</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Indonesian President Meets with Yang Jiechi," July 5, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2716\\_663436/2718\\_663440/t337465.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2716_663436/2718_663440/t337465.shtml).

<sup>190</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Meets Respectively with Leaders of ROK, Japan, Indonesia, New Zealand and Philippines," November 21, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2711\\_663426/2713\\_663430/t383177.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2711_663426/2713_663430/t383177.shtml).

it was the first time a PLAN ship had entered the Baltic Sea.<sup>191</sup> It was also the first PLAN visit to Russian territory since the *Harbin's* 1996 call to Vladivostok—a clear sign of an ongoing political turn for China-Russia relations.

The diplomatic context for the call began with Hu Jintao's state visit to Russia from 26 to 28 March 2007, during which he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The two leaders held official talks in Moscow and attended the "Year of China" opening ceremonies along with a Chinese National Exhibition in Russia.<sup>192</sup> The *Guangzhou's* call to St. Petersburg in late August followed two other significant events in China-Russia affairs. From 9-17 August, all six members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—participated in *Peace-Mission 2007*, an unprecedented joint military exercise held in Russia. It was also in conjunction with the annual SCO summit meeting, where member states signed a "Treaty of Long-Term Good-Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation among SCO Member States."<sup>193</sup> A series of high-level talks followed the *Guangzhou's* stay in St. Petersburg to include a visit by Wen Jiabao, who arrived in Moscow on the afternoon of 5 November, 2007. This was the final stop on Wen Jiabao's four-nation tour to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Belarus and Russia. He had also participated in the sixth SCO Prime Ministers meeting in Tashkent before arriving in Moscow to meet with President Putin and his Russian counterpart Viktor Zubkov. Finally, Wen Jiabao attended the closing ceremony of Russia's "Year of China."<sup>194</sup>

The *Guangzhou* and *Weishanbu* then sailed for Portsmouth to begin a five-day visit to the United Kingdom. When they arrived, the Chinese ships were welcomed by the Royal Navy's

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<sup>191</sup> China Daily, "Two Chinese Naval Ships Leave for Russia, Britain, Spain, France," July 25, 2007, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/25/content\\_5442822.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/25/content_5442822.htm).

<sup>192</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-San Francisco, "Joint Statement Between The People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation," April 6, 2007, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t309361.htm>.

<sup>193</sup> Yu Bin, "Between Cooperation and Competition," Comparative Connections, October 15, 2007, <http://cc.pacforum.org/2007/10/between-cooperation-and-competition/>.

<sup>194</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-San Francisco, "Wen Jiabao Arrives in Moscow for Official Visit to Russia," November 5, 2007, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t379113.htm>.

Portsmouth Squadron, local Chinese residents, students, and staff from the Chinese embassy.

According to the Chinese embassy in London, the Chinese military attaché, Zhang Jianguo, presided over the ceremony, which included speeches by the Chinese ambassador Fu Ying, Dr. Shan Sheng (Chairman of the British Federation of Overseas Chinese for Promoting Unification of China), and the task force's commanding officer, Rear Admiral Su Zhiqian, all spoke at the ceremony.

Fu Ying offered that, "the exchanges of the two navies had a very important position in the exchanges of the two countries...they are the 'barometer' of the bilateral relationship to a certain extent. Speaking for the benefit of the Chinese audience both in Portsmouth and back in China, Dr. Shang declared that "the Chinese Naval Task Force in the UK proved that the Chinese could do anything that the foreigners could do and could even do better...he was proud to be a Chinese!" Admiral Su explained that the port call was a result of an earlier visit by Admiral Wu Shengli, Commander of the Chinese Navy, who traveled to the UK in April, 2007, to meet with leaders of the Royal Navy. He also announced that the task force would participate in the first military exercises with the Royal Navy, which demonstrated that "the pragmatic relationship between the two navies had entered a new stage."<sup>195</sup>

The *Guangzhou* and *Weishanbu* made a similar port visit to Cadiz, Spain, on 14 September, the first PLAN presence in Spain, which included a low-level naval exercise with the Spanish Navy.<sup>196</sup> Beijing's relationship with Spain was relatively nascent at the time; however, Spain's King, Juan Carlos I, had traveled to Beijing in late April to meet with President Hu Jintao. After affirming Spain's adherence to the One China policy, the two leaders discussed deepening their strategic partnership and expanding cooperation across economic and cultural areas. Just as Russia had

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<sup>195</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, "Chinese Naval Task Force Visits UK," September 12, 2007, <http://www.chinese-embassy.org.uk/eng/ambassador/dshd/2007a/t377941.htm>.

<sup>196</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Chinese Warships Arrive in Spain to Conduct Joint Military Exercise," September 14, 2007, [http://www.gov.cn/misc/2007-09/14/content\\_749738.htm](http://www.gov.cn/misc/2007-09/14/content_749738.htm).

declared the “Year of China” to coincide with Hu’s visit in March, 2007, Juan Carlos I’s trip to Beijing coincided with China’s “Year of Spain” festivities. For example, Hu Jintao, his wife Liu Yongqing, King Juan Carlos I, and Queen Sofia visited Beijing’s National Art Museum of China to see an exhibit entitled “From Titian to Goya: Great Masters of the Museum of Prado.”<sup>197</sup>

The flotilla’s last stop in Europe was Toulon, France. The Chinese officers and crew spent four days participating in military-to-military exchanges, sporting events, and reciprocal ship visits. According to Xinhua, the cooperation between the two navies “entered a new stage” as a result of the exchange. The Chinese ships finished up their European trip by participating in a naval exercise with the French navy (“China-France Friendship 2007”) in the Mediterranean Sea before sailing back to China.<sup>198</sup> Less than a month later, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao hosted French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner in Beijing’s Zhongnanhai for meetings intended to “deepen and expand mutual-beneficial cooperation and promote the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.”<sup>199</sup> After 87 days underway, the *Guangzhou* and *Weishanhu* returned to the PLAN South Sea Fleet’s home port on Hainan Island.

The third diplomatic cruise of the year took place when the guided missile destroyer *Harbin* and replenishment ship *Hongzhu* departed Qingdao for Australia and New Zealand in late September, 2007. The Chinese ships arrived in Sydney on the 28th to an unusually high-level diplomatic welcome by the Australian Defense Minister Brendan Nelson. The events earlier that month had left the defense minister looking to mend fences with Beijing. Beginning on 04 September, the navies of the United States, Japan, India, Australia and Singapore held a large-scale

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<sup>197</sup> Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China-San Francisco, “Hu Jintao Meets with Spain’s King Juan Carlos I,” June 26, 2007, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t334962.htm>.

<sup>198</sup> China Daily, “China, France Hold Joint Naval Exercise in Mediterranean -- China.Org.Cn,” September 26, 2007, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/military/2007-09/26/content\\_1225847.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/military/2007-09/26/content_1225847.htm).

<sup>199</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with French Foreign Minister Kouchner,” October 31, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3291\\_664540/3293\\_664544/t378000.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3291_664540/3293_664544/t378000.shtml).

naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal, known as Malabar-07. With thirty-four ships and submarines, this was the largest peace-time, multilateral naval exercise ever held in Asia. This was also the first naval show of force by the newly established “Quadrilateral Initiative” or “Quad,” a democratic coalition (United States, Japan, India and Australia) clearly intended as a response to China’s growing military power in the region. The Quad countries insisted their “strategic partnership” had nothing to do with containing China, but the exercise still brought formal diplomatic protests from Beijing to all four countries.<sup>200 201</sup>

Diplomatic matters were made more uncomfortable in Australia by the fact that *Malabar-07* commenced just as Hu Jintao arrived in Australia for a state visit (4-9 September) to acknowledge thirty-five years of diplomatic relations between the two countries. On 6 September, the Chinese President and Australian Prime Minister John Howard held talks in Sydney to promote closer cooperation across a wide spectrum of issues. After the meeting, the two leaders attended a signing ceremony, where six bilateral cooperation agreements were formalized in the areas of trade, energy, justice, and culture.<sup>202</sup>

Australia may be a close U.S. partner, but Canberra was well aware of Australian economic dependence on China, as well as Beijing’s growing clout. In reciprocal fashion, Beijing was keen to keep Australia close to ensure stability and to complicate any potential balancing coalition involving the United States. The *Harbin’s* visit and its participation in the low-level, naval exercises that followed with ships from the Australian and New Zealand navies, represented a naval reconciliation

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<sup>200</sup> BBC, “New ‘strategic Partnership’ against China,” September 3, 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6968412.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6968412.stm).

<sup>201</sup> BBC, “Five-Nation Naval Exercise Begins,” September 4, 2007, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/6977376.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6977376.stm).

<sup>202</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Chinese President Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Australian Prime Minister Howard,” September 6, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3377\\_664820/3379\\_664824/t360594.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3377_664820/3379_664824/t360594.shtml).

and reaffirmation of bilateral cooperation. Consequently, Australia did not participate in the Malabar exercise again until 2020.<sup>203</sup>

The *Harbin* and *Weishanbu* then sailed for two port visits in Auckland and Wellington, New Zealand. In addition to all the usual components—a welcome from local Chinese, students, and embassy staff—a combined Royal New Zealand Navy band and PLAN band performed for the public in Auckland.<sup>204</sup> The timing of the *Harbin's* visit was right on the heels of a meeting between Hu Jintao and New Zealand's Prime Minister Helen Clark, which took place on 7 September in Sydney during Hu's state visit to Australia. During the meeting, President Hu indicated that Beijing was interested in a relationship with New Zealand from a "strategic perspective," and that "China is willing to push forward bilateral comprehensive ties of cooperation to a higher level."<sup>205</sup> It appears the *Harbin's* presence in New Zealand was emblematic of such a relationship. Roughly a month after the ship departed, Wen Jiabao met with Prime Minister Clark in Singapore; the two leaders discussed progress on bilateral relations, as well as ongoing negotiations around a China-New Zealand free trade zone. This was not a new acquaintance. Wen Jiabao and Prime Minister Clarke had met before during Wen's state visit to New Zealand in April of 2006—the first visit by a Chinese Premier in eighteen years.<sup>206</sup>

The most significant PLAN port call in 2007 was the destroyer *Shenzhen's* four-day visit to Tokyo at the end of November. This was the first time a Chinese warship had entered a Japanese

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<sup>203</sup> Ankit Panda, "Australia Returns to the Malabar Exercise," October 1, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/australia-returns-to-the-malabar-exercise/>.

<sup>204</sup> Scoop News, "Peoples Liberation Army Navy Visits NZ," October 8, 2007, <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0710/S00088.htm>.

<sup>205</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President Hu Jintao Meets with New Zealand Prime Minister Clark," September 7, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3412\\_664880/3414\\_664884/t361096.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3412_664880/3414_664884/t361096.shtml).

<sup>206</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Arrives in Wellington, Kicking off Official Visit to New Zealand," April 5, 2006, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3412\\_664880/3414\\_664884/t244802.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3412_664880/3414_664884/t244802.shtml).



port since the end of World War II.<sup>207</sup> The diplomatic lead-up was once again led by Premier Wen Jiabao, who paid a state visit to Japan in April, 2007, the first of its kind since his predecessor, Premier Zhu Rongji, traveled to Tokyo in 2000 to meet Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori.<sup>208</sup> The pivotal political moment was likely the resignation of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on 12 September and a meeting between Wen Jiabao and the new Japanese Prime Minister, Yasua Fukuda on 20 November.<sup>209</sup> The following day, the *Shenzhen* left the port of Zhanjiang in Guangdong Province for Japan, arriving on 28 November. The visit included meetings between officers from the PLAN and Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), sporting matches, and sight-seeing trips for the crew. When the *Shenzhen* departed Tokyo on 01 December, the ship was escorted by a Japanese frigate and cheered on by several hundred members of the local Chinese community.<sup>210</sup> PLAN port calls to Japan have been extremely rare. In fact, after the *Shenzhen*, only two other PLAN ships have visited. The training ship *Zheng He* arrived two years later, indicating that this was indeed a period of thawing relations between China and Japan. However, after the *Zheng He's* visit in November 2009, the PLAN did not return until 2019. Both these visits were very closely linked to high-level diplomatic visits. Since Japan and China are fierce rivals and the most likely combatants in any naval class in the East China Sea, it is notable that the PLAN has not used more port call diplomacy to reveal capability or manage relations with Tokyo.

In 2008 the PLAN reintroduced its cadet-training ships into Beijing's port call diplomacy efforts after nine years of inactivity. The training ship *Sichang* had visited Australia and New Zealand in 1998, and before that, the *Zheng He* voyaged to the Indian Ocean region in 1993. The *Zheng He*

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<sup>207</sup> David Lague, "Chinese Warship Visits Japan," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2007, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/22/world/asia/22china.html>.

<sup>208</sup> Howard W. French, "China's Premier, on Japan Visit, Wears a Friendly Face," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2000, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/16/world/china-s-premier-on-japan-visit-wears-a-friendly-face.html>.

<sup>209</sup> China Daily, "Chinese Premier Meets Japanese PM," November 20, 2007, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-11/20/content\\_6266961.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-11/20/content_6266961.htm).

<sup>210</sup> People's Daily, "China's Warship Concludes Goodwill Visit to Japan," December 1, 2007, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/6313002.html>.

visited Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam in November 2008, initiating a new phase of naval engagement with greater regional security implications.

When the *Zheng He* arrived in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, on 5 November, it was the first time a PLAN ship had visited the Kingdom. The *Zheng He*'s 411 officers, cadets, and crew were under the command of Rear Admiral Yang Junfei, who led the Military Training Department at PLA Navy Headquarters until 2008, when he was appointed as the Commandant of the Dalian Naval Vessel Academy, a position that allowed him to train up-and-coming PLAN leaders. In 2011, Admiral Yang was promoted to deputy-chief of staff of the North Sea Fleet.<sup>211</sup> This is significant because beyond the volleyball and soccer matches, the port call allowed high-level exchanges between Admiral Yang and the top military leaders in Cambodia. For example, during the visit, Cambodian Minister of Defense, Tea Banh, and Commander in Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), Ke Kim Yan, attended a reception banquet held to celebrate the arrival of the ship.<sup>212 213</sup>

In 1997, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen staged a coup and took over the government, which alienated him from most of the international community—but not Beijing. China immediately recognized the new regime and began to pour hundreds of millions of dollars into Cambodia in aid, investments, and loans. China's defense patronage has also grown to include millions of dollars in defense equipment and infrastructure improvements. This included a \$60 million loan for the purchase of six naval patrol boats in 2005 and upgrades to the naval base at Ream in southern Cambodia. PLAN access to Ream and Sihanoukville would provide Beijing with increased leverage against Vietnam in the event of a crisis or open hostilities.<sup>214</sup> High-level engagements included visits

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<sup>211</sup> Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, "Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy," n.d., 291.

<sup>212</sup> MarineBuzz, "First Goodwill Visit of Chinese Navy Ship to Cambodia," November 9, 2008, <http://www.marinebuzz.com/2008/11/09/first-goodwill-visit-of-chinese-navy-ship-to-cambodia/>.

<sup>213</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Chinese Military Vessel Makes 1st Ever Visit to Cambodia," November 5, 2008.

<sup>214</sup> Ian Storey, "China's Tightening Relationship with Cambodia," June 16, 2006, [https://web.archive.org/web/20070616041520/http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=415&issue\\_id=3704&article\\_id=2371023](https://web.archive.org/web/20070616041520/http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=415&issue_id=3704&article_id=2371023).

from Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 2000, Premier Zhu Rongji in 2002, and his successor, Wen Jiabao in April, 2006. However, Wen Jiabao had also met with Hun Sen just over a week before the *Zheng He* arrived in Sihanoukville. The two met in Beijing at the Great Hall of the People during the seventh Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on 24-25 October to discuss an extensive list of projects and cooperative deals during what the two described as the “Year of China-Cambodia Friendship.”<sup>215</sup>

Wen Jiabao also met with Thai Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat on the sidelines of the ASEM meeting. During their discussion, Wen proposed deeper economic and cultural ties. He also suggested that Thailand and China cooperate further in regional and international affairs to include an East Asian meeting on cooperation to be held in Bangkok later in the year.<sup>216</sup> It should be no surprise that the *Zheng He*'s next port of call was Bangkok, Thailand on 10 November, 2008.

After four days in Thailand, The *Zheng He* sailed for its final diplomatic stop at Danang, Vietnam, arriving on 18 November for a five-day visit. During a meeting with his Vietnamese counterparts, Rear Admiral Yang Junfei stated that the “significant visit would enhance the understanding and friendship between Chinese and Vietnamese armies, especially the two navies.” But then Admiral Yang offered that, “The visit will make a positive contribution to pushing forward the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries.”<sup>217</sup> This was a significant diplomatic linkage for a naval officer to make, but 2008 was no ordinary year for China-Vietnam relations.

From 30 May to 2 June, 2008, President Hu Jintao hosted Nong Duc Manh, General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), in Beijing. The

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<sup>215</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with Foreign Leaders Attending ASEM Summit,” October 24, 2008, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/xwlb\\_663352/t519762.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/xwlb_663352/t519762.shtml).

<sup>216</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China.

<sup>217</sup> “Chinese Naval Ship Visits Vietnam - China News - SINA English,” November 18, 2008, <http://english.sina.com/china/2008/1118/198940.html>.

General Secretary also met with Wen Jiabao and Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping. During his stay, Nong Duc Manh toured the Beijing Olympic venues and visited Jiangsu Province. In a joint statement released in conjunction with the visit, both sides agreed to develop the China-Vietnam comprehensive strategic partnership, a significant elevation in bilateral relations.<sup>218</sup>

It was a meeting in Beijing on 22 October that is more pertinent to the *Zheng He's* visit in November. Several days before the Asian and European leaders met for ASEM, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung at the Great Hall of the People. Both sides again reiterated their commitment to developing the comprehensive strategic partnership, along with resolving lingering border disputes. Following the talks, both premiers attended a signing ceremony for a wide array of cooperative deals.<sup>219</sup> Finally, on 24 October, it was announced that China Merchants Holdings International (CMHI) had negotiated a second port deal in Vietnam. The \$60 million joint venture with Sao Mai Ben Dinh Petroleum Investment—in which CMHI took a 65 percent share—paved the way for the construction of a Sao Mai Ben Dinh port complex.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Joint Statement Between China and Vietnam," June 1, 2008, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/xwlb\\_663352/t472321.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/xwlb_663352/t472321.shtml).

<sup>219</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-Lithuania, "Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung," October 22, 2008, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/celt/eng/xwtd/t519407.htm>.

<sup>220</sup> SeaTrade Maritime, "China Merchants Scores Second Vietnam Deal," SeaTrade Maritime, October 24, 2008, <https://www.seatrade-maritime.com/asia/china-merchants-scores-second-vietnam-deal>.

Table 3.3 – China’s “Third Wave” Port Call Diplomacy (2005-2008)					
Country	Region	2005	2006	2007	2008
<b>Brunei</b>	Asia				
<b>Cambodia</b>	Asia				<i>Zheng He</i>
<b>India</b>	Asia	<i>Shenzhen</i>			
<b>Indonesia</b>	Asia			<i>Sanming &amp; Lianyungang</i>	
<b>Japan</b>	Asia			<i>Shenzhen</i>	
<b>Pakistan</b>	Asia	<i>Shenzhen</i>		<i>Sanming &amp; Lianyungang</i>	
<b>Philippines</b>	Asia		<i>Qingdao</i>		
<b>Singapore</b>	Asia			<i>Xiangfan</i>	
<b>South Korea</b>	Asia				<i>Harbin &amp; Louyang</i>
<b>Sri Lanka</b>				<i>Sanming &amp; Lianyungang</i>	
<b>Thailand</b>	Asia	<i>Shenzhen</i>			<i>Zheng He</i>
<b>Vietnam</b>	Asia				<i>Zheng He</i>
<b>France</b>	Europe			<i>Guangzhou</i>	
<b>Russia</b>	Europe			<i>Guangzhou</i>	<i>Taizhou &amp; Ma'anshan</i>
<b>Spain</b>	Europe			<i>Guangzhou</i>	
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Europe			<i>Guangzhou</i>	
<b>Canada</b>	North America		<i>Qingdao</i>		
<b>United States</b>	North America		<i>Qingdao</i>		
<b>Australia</b>	Oceania			<i>Harbin</i>	
<b>New Zealand</b>	Oceania			<i>Harbin</i>	

In early October, 2008, the destroyer *Harbin* and frigate *Louyang* arrived in Busan, South Korea, to take part in an International Fleet Review of over fifty warships from thirteen nations to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the South Korean armed forces.<sup>221</sup> The *Louyang*, commissioned in 2005, was among the PLAN’s newest and most modern frigates. This voyage was a significant diplomatic gesture for the PLAN, but one that punctuated a stunning series of high-level diplomatic events involving Beijing and Seoul that year. First, Hu Jintao hosted his counterpart Republic of Korea President Lee Myung-bak in Beijing for a state visit in May. During a joint press conference on 28 May, the leaders announced that they would upgrade their relationship from a “comprehensive cooperative partnership” to a “strategic cooperative partnership,” to

<sup>221</sup> Jung Sung-ki, “50 Warships on Display at Int’l Fleet Review in Busan (Korea-ROK),” Korea Times, October 6, 2008, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/10/116\\_32251.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2008/10/116_32251.html).

facilitate greater cooperation within security, economic and people-to-people exchanges.<sup>222</sup>

According to the Chinese Consulate, the leaders met again on 25 August during Hu Jintao's reciprocal state visit to Seoul to reach consensus on furthering bilateral relations, as well as regional and international issues.<sup>223</sup> The joint communique that followed enumerated a sweeping series of agreements across economic, security, and cultural areas.<sup>224</sup> Finally, just weeks before the *Harbin* and *Louyang* sailed for Busan, Wen Jiabao hosted his counterpart, Republic of Korea Premier Han Seung Soo, on 7 September in Beijing's Zhongnanhai complex, in conjunction with the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games.<sup>225</sup>

The PLAN's only diplomatic voyage outside of Asia in 2008 was to Vladivostok, Russia. Once again, the platforms chosen for the task indicate intent and purpose behind PLAN port calls. On 14 October, the modified Sovremenny class destroyer *Taizhou*, along with Jiangkai I class frigate *Ma'anshan*, arrived in Vladivostok for a four-day visit to "enhance communication between the two navies."<sup>226</sup> The *Taizhou* was the third of four Sovremenny class destroyers the PLAN bought from Russia's Severnaya Verf shipyard in St. Petersburg between 1999 and 2006. With a displacement of over 8400 tons, the *Taizhou* was among the largest PLAN destroyers in service until the introduction of the Renhai class in 2020. In terms of military diplomacy, the significance of a Chinese-owned and Russian-built destroyer returning to Russia was not lost on anyone. The *Taizhou* and *Ma'anshan* were welcomed by senior officials from the Russian Navy's Pacific Fleet. The visit included the usual

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<sup>222</sup> China Daily, "Strategic Partnership with ROK Announced," May 28, 2008, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/28/content\\_6716070.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2008-05/28/content_6716070.htm).

<sup>223</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-Kolkata, "Hu Jintao Holds Talks with His ROK Counterpart Lee Myung-Bak," August 25, 2008, <http://kolkata.china-consulate.org/eng/zgbd/t509098.htm>.

<sup>224</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "China-ROK Joint Communiqué," August 25, 2008, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t513632.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t513632.shtml).

<sup>225</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Meets with ROK Counterpart," September 7, 2008, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2767\\_663538/2769\\_663542/t511648.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2767_663538/2769_663542/t511648.shtml).

<sup>226</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Chinese Warships Visit Russian Port -- China.Org.Cn," October 16, 2008, [http://www.china.org.cn/international/2008-10/16/content\\_16620646.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/international/2008-10/16/content_16620646.htm).

athletic matches and sight-seeing trips for the Chinese crews, as well as senior meetings with Vice Admiral Sergei Viktorovich Avramenko, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet, and Alexander Zubritskiy, vice mayor of Vladivostok.<sup>227</sup>

The *Taizhou* and *Ma'anshan's* visit represented a single link in a longer chain of diplomatic events that continued the positive momentum in China-Russia relations. It also built upon the *Guangzhou's* voyage to the Baltic and visit to St. Petersburg the year before. And, just as the *Guangzhou's* stop was bracketed by high-level engagements involving Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao, the *Taizhou* and *Ma'anshan's* 2008 stop was ensconced in a larger diplomatic continuum. It began in May 2008 when newly elected Russian President Dmitry Medvedev traveled to China on his first trip abroad as president. After a stop in Kazakhstan, President Medvedev landed in Beijing for talks with Hu Jintao on 23 May in the Great Hall of the People. The fact that Medvedev prioritized China as his first visit outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a strong indication of his intentions to move the China-Russia relationship forward. Among the topics discussed was ways to strengthen their twelve-year old strategic partnership.<sup>228 229</sup> The two leaders met again at the G8 Summit on 9 July, 2008, in Toyako, Hokkaido.<sup>230</sup>

Later that summer, Hu Jintao met with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin at Yingtai, Zhongnanhai in conjunction with the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. Less than two weeks after the *Taizhou* and *Ma'anshan* departed Vladivostok, Premier Wen Jiabao arrived in Moscow for an official visit. On 28 October, Wen Jiabao met with President Dmitry Medvedev at the

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<sup>227</sup> Xinhua News Agency.

<sup>228</sup> Mission of the Peoples Republic of China to the European Union, "President Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Russian President Medvedev," May 24, 2008, <http://www.chinamission.be/eng/jd/t459357.htm>.

<sup>229</sup> "Medvedev's First Visit to China as Russia's President," Jamestown, June 6, 2008, <https://jamestown.org/program/medvedevs-first-visit-to-china-as-russias-president/>.

<sup>230</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-San Francisco, "President Hu Jintao Meets with His Russian Counterpart Medvedev," July 9, 2008, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t455687.htm>.

Kremlin Palace.<sup>231</sup> According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Wen suggested that Russia and China maintain close contact and coordination on major world and regional affairs so as to preserve the two countries' security interests and safeguard world peace and stability."<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-San Francisco, "Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao Arrives in Moscow, Kicking Off His Official Visit to Russia," October 28, 2008, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t519925.htm>.

<sup>232</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Russian President Medvedev Meets with Wen Jiabao," October 28, 2008, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/wshd\\_665389/t520192.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/t520192.shtml).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The PLAN “Steps Out” (2009-2010)*

According to Hu Bo, the term “stepping out” describes the deployment of PLAN forces outside of Chinese territory to safeguard overseas interests, assume great power responsibilities, and exert influence. To Beijing, overseas interests include the safety of Chinese citizens, assets, access to resources, and the expansion of foreign markets. After all, China’s continued prosperity and economic development rely on Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and the free flow of raw material inputs and manufactured exports to overseas markets. Beijing also recognizes that China’s status as a great power obligates it to provide naval forces as a public good to maintain maritime order and security against a diverse array of threats, including terrorism, narcotics trafficking, piracy and environmental disasters worldwide. Beyond deterrence, Professor Hu explains that China’s maritime power is meant to elicit global political support and the great power status China deserves. Influence or “vocal power” is meant to persuade other countries to “recognize China’s successes, accept the development of China’s maritime power objectives, and the consequences of its rise.”<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, Hu explicitly identifies “ship visits, peacekeeping missions, escort operations, and joint drills,” as the means by which Chinese military influence is exerted.<sup>234</sup>

The PLAN began “stepping out” in unprecedented ways in 2009 and 2010. These years marked the most dramatic acceleration in port call activity since Beijing began deploying warships overseas in 1985. In 2008, a total of seven PLAN ships made calls to foreign ports, all of which were in Asia with the exception of the *Ma’anshan* and *Taizhou’s* voyage to Vladivostok, Russia. The next year, PLAN activity increased 400 percent with 28 calls to ports in Asia, the Middle East, and South

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<sup>233</sup> Hu Bo, Yanpei, and Till, *Chinese Maritime Power in the 21st Century*, 20.

<sup>234</sup> Hu Bo, Yanpei, and Till, 65.

America. In 2010, the number doubled again with 59 calls to Africa, Asia, Europe, and Oceania — an 842 percent increase from 2008 levels. Notably, Beijing sent PLAN ships to every region of the world except North America in those two years. Despite the PLAN’s global surge, there was a five-year gap between the *Qingdao’s* last visit to Canada and the United States in 2006 and the next North American call in 2011 by the PLAN’s new hospital ship, *Daishandao*, to Trinidad and Tobago. The PLAN did not return to the United States until 2013.

The 2009-2010 surge was also significant in terms of enhanced PLAN capabilities. The hospital ship *Daishandao’s* first voyage in 2010 was itself an evolution in PLAN naval diplomacy—a third platform type and signaling mechanism. If Beijing was choosing its most modern combatants to reveal increased status and capability, and its training ship, *Zheng He*, to send cooperative signals to neighbors and other regional powers, the *Daishandao* was a new benevolent tone in Beijing’s naval “voice” abroad. Not only had Beijing expanded its platform repertoire and reach by 2010, but it also shifted its strategic priorities toward developing countries worldwide. See Figure 3.

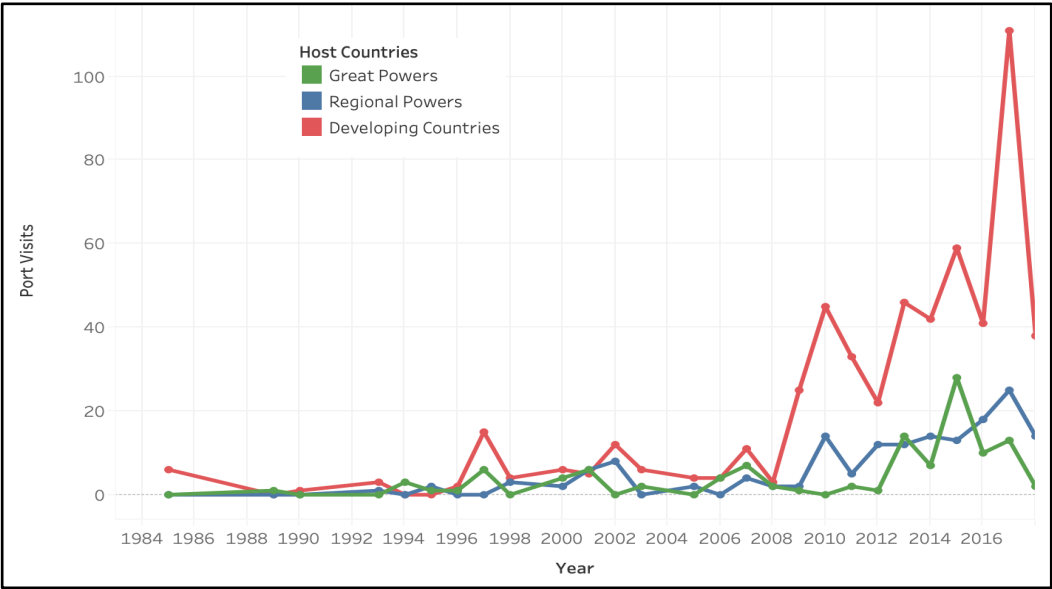


Figure 4.1: PLAN Visits by Host Country Type (1985-2018)

In keeping with Professor Hu's concept of stepping out, these changes indicate a purposeful alignment of PLAN port visits with Chinese economic and security interests. More specifically, port visit data suggests that Beijing began to use port call diplomacy to further core Chinese interests such as economic expansion, sovereignty claims in the South China Sea, and degrading support for Taiwan's independence. These priorities are reflected in heightened visits to South China Sea claimants, calls to countries where China is pursuing economic deals and infrastructure projects, and visits to states in close proximity (politically and geographically) to countries that still recognize Taiwan. As previously mentioned, the larger strategic drivers behind this naval activity were likely Chinese domestic reactions to the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 and a perception in Beijing that other South China Sea claimants were upsetting the status quo.

In operational terms, there is no greater example of the PLAN's "stepping out" policy than Beijing's decision to join Combined Task Force 51 (CTF-51), a multinational naval task force established to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. This was the first time the PLAN had deployed its forces outside of Asia for actual naval operations. As other scholars have noted, the goal of PLAN involvement was fourfold: (1) safeguard Chinese interests abroad (most notably Chinese shipping); (2) improve Beijing's image as a responsible stakeholder; (3) enhance military capabilities through improved operational proficiency; and (4) increase PLAN military diplomacy.<sup>235</sup> These explanations for Beijing's participation, and the operational implications for the PLAN, have been covered elsewhere; however, this project examines the ways in which PLAN anti-piracy operations facilitated Beijing's expanded use of port call diplomacy.<sup>236</sup>

First, the platforms chosen matter. In typical fashion, the PLAN allocated its most capable ships to the first anti-piracy task force. Commissioned in 2005, the destroyer, *Haikou*, was the

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<sup>235</sup> Erickson and Strange, *Six Years at Sea ... and Counting*, 24. This is a modified explanation provided by PLA National Defense University Professor Tang Yongsheng, which appears in Erickson and Strange.

<sup>236</sup> Erickson and Strange, *Six Years at Sea ... and Counting*.

newest addition to the Luyang II class—the PLAN’s premium destroyers at the time. The *Haikou* was joined by the slightly older Luyang I class destroyer, *Wuhan*, along with replenishment ship, *Weishanbu*. The three-ship task force departed China on 26 December 2008 and remained on station in the Gulf of Aden from 26 January until 15 April 2009.<sup>237</sup> During this time, the combatants did not enter any foreign ports, and the only calls were made by *Weishanbu* to Salalah, Oman, and Aden, Yemen, for resupply. At 0600 on 16 April, the destroyer *Shenzhen* and frigate *Huangshan* relieved the *Haikou* and *Wuhan*, and assumed escort responsibilities as the PLAN task force in the Gulf of Aden. The *Haikou* and *Wuhan* arrived back in Sanya on Hainan Island on 28 April 2009 to a hero’s welcome. According to Xinhua, the task force sailed more than 33,000 nautical miles in 124 days and escorted 41 convoys (166 ships), provided 46 “regional escorts,” and performed three successful rescues.<sup>238</sup>

By many accounts the first task force encountered operational difficulties during their inaugural voyage, but the strategic significance of the PLAN’s accomplishment outweighed the strain on ships and crews. The senior leaders in attendance included Li Jinai, a member of the Central Military Commission and Director of the General Political Department, and Wu Shengli, another member of the Central Military Commission and Commander of the PLAN.<sup>239</sup> Xinhua’s reporting included remarks from Li Jinai during the welcoming ceremony:

“Li Jinai emphasized that sending naval warship formations to carry out escort missions is a major strategic decision made by the Party Central Committee and Chairman Hu... The escort operation is the first time for the Chinese navy to go overseas to safeguard national strategic interests, to organize the maritime combat forces to fulfill international humanitarian obligations overseas, to protect the safety of important transportation lines in the open sea for the first time, and is of great strategic

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<sup>237</sup> “People’s Liberation Army Navy,” in *Wikipedia*, April 19, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=People%27s\\_Liberation\\_Army\\_Navy&oldid=1018710061](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=People%27s_Liberation_Army_Navy&oldid=1018710061).

<sup>238</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “The First Batch of Naval Escort Formations Successfully Completed the Escort Mission and Successfully Returned to Sanya,” April 28, 2009, [www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-04/28/content\\_1297883.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2009-04/28/content_1297883.htm).

<sup>239</sup> Xinhua News Agency.

importance in the history of construction and development of the People's Navy and our army."<sup>240</sup>

The successful return of the *Wuhan* and *Haikou* was certainly a momentous occasion for the PLAN, both in terms of its modernization program and Beijing's international standing. The first task force may not have made any diplomatic port visits; however, PLAN presence in the Gulf of Aden, as well as the operational calls made by the *Weishanbu* did establish a new operational pattern for the PLAN. And, at the local level, these calls helped build relationships and reciprocal expectations with overseas port operators, which facilitated future task force requirements.

In 2009 and 2010, the PLAN deployed seven task forces to the Gulf of Aden, each comprised of two combatants and a replenishment ship. The second task force combatants (*Shenzhen* and *Huangshan*) made calls to Salalah, while the replenishment ship *Weishanbu* called at Salalah, as well as Aden. For the first two years of anti-piracy operations, Salalah became the port of choice for each escort task force that rotated through the Gulf of Aden, while Aden received only the replenishment ships, presumably for fuel and stores. However, the most significant operational calls began in January, 2010, when the PLAN arranged resupply in Djibouti—a relationship that would support all future task forces, but more importantly, result in China's first overseas logistics base in 2017. From 2010 on, the PLAN made regular port visits to Salalah and Djibouti, enabling all PLAN task force operations in the Gulf of Aden.

These resupply calls routinized PLAN presence and created de facto resupply hubs in Salalah and Djibouti, which led to a seismic shift and increase in PLAN global operations. With footholds in both countries, the PLAN could conduct sustained operations in the Gulf of Aden, gaining tactical proficiency and regional familiarity. Escort operations, along with stable shore-based support, also provided a jumping-off point for Chinese warships to engage in meaningful and vastly

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<sup>240</sup> Xinhua News Agency.

expanded port call diplomacy. By the deployment of the second task force, a new operational pattern began to emerge. Once relieved of its escort responsibilities in the Gulf of Aden, all or one of the ships in the task force made port visits on the return voyage to China. This design emerged slowly, but grew consistently over time.

Before returning to China, the second task force split up for diplomatic duties; the frigate *Huangshan* and replenishment ship *Weishanbu* stopped in Karachi, Pakistan, while the destroyer *Shenzhen* made a four-day visit to Kochi, India. Each subsequent task force in 2009 and 2010 continued this pattern, expanding Beijing's diplomatic reach. The fifth task force, led by the destroyer *Guangzhou*, transited the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean with visits to Egypt, Greece, and Italy, followed by calls in Myanmar and Singapore as the ships returned to Asia. By the end of 2010, the sixth task force, led by the amphibious dock landing ship *Kunlunshan*, made inaugural visits to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain before stopping in Sri Lanka and Indonesia on the voyage back to China.

## *Part II: Regional Deployments*

### *Middle East (2010)*

The PLAN's new foothold, and the operational patterns it facilitated were most evident in the Middle East, where PLAN operations in the Gulf of Aden had, in a sense, shortened the distance to port call destinations in the Persian Gulf. Until the fourth escort task force, The PLAN had never transited the Strait of Hormuz into the Persian Gulf. This changed in March 2010, when the frigate *Ma'anshan*, and its replenishment ship *Qiandaobu*, completed their escort duties and sailed to Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE), to make the PLAN's first port visit to a Gulf state. When the ships arrived, they were greeted by UAE Navy Rear Admiral Sheikh Saeed bin Hamdan Al Nahyan, along with the Chinese Ambassador to the UAE Gao Yusheng, Chinese Consul-

General to Dubai Gao Youzhen, and roughly 400 members of the local Chinese community. Senior Captain Qiu Yanpeng, commander of the task force and Deputy Chief of the Chinese Navy's East Sea Fleet, spoke during the welcome ceremony:

“Ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the UAE, our bilateral ties have grown steadily and both sides favored each other with valuable support and cooperation on international and regional affairs...The aim of the first-ever visit to the UAE by the Chinese Navy warships today is to further promote the friendly relations between the navies of China and the UAE...We come for peace and friendship, for deeper mutual understanding, and for expanded mutual exchange.”<sup>241</sup>

The presence of the warships in Abu Dhabi may have been a visit of opportunity, but it came at a time when relations between China and the UAE were beginning to accelerate. Beijing was interested in closer ties with the Emirates due to the country's location and status as a global transshipment hub, especially for Chinese Exports to the Middle East and Africa. The UAE was also the commercial center for Chinese businesses in the region, as well as the home of 200,000 Chinese nationals.<sup>242</sup> The choice of port may not have been coincidental either given the fact that Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the United Arab Emirates Armed Forces, had been in Beijing the year before. During his two-day visit to China, the Crown Prince met with Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, and Vice President Xi Jinping.

Two months after the port call, Wen Jiabao and Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi welcomed leaders from the Middle East, including the UAE's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah Bin

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<sup>241</sup> SINA English, “Chinese Naval Warships Pay First-Ever Visit to UAE,” March 25, 2010, <http://english.sina.com/china/p/2010/0324/310655.html>.

<sup>242</sup> (Part I: Interview with Chang Hua by Faryal Leghari), “China Deeply Appreciative of the UAE's Peaceful Diplomatic Policy,” Khaleej Times, June 4, 2010, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/business/china-deeply-appreciative-of-the-uae-s-peaceful-diplomatic-policy>.

Zayed Al Nahyan, to Beijing for the fourth Ministerial Meeting of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum.<sup>243 244</sup>

The PLAN made two other inaugural port visits to Middle East countries in 2010. On 27 November, the sixth escort task force, made up of the destroyer *Lanzhou*, replenishment ship *Weishanhu*, and the amphibious dock landing ship *Kunlunshan*, arrived in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for a five-day port visit. It is worth mentioning that the *Kunlunshan* was the PLAN's largest surface combatant, perhaps chosen for its formidable size and mission capability in a region well familiar with US aircraft carriers and large-deck amphibious assault ships. Jeddah is an important commercial port, located on the Kingdom's Red Sea coast, which is in closer proximity to PLAN resupply ports of Djibouti and Salalah than Saudi Arabia's ports in the Persian Gulf.<sup>245 246</sup> The task force was under the command of Rear Admiral Wei Xueyi, Chief of Staff of the PLAN South Sea Fleet, who hosted a reception on the *Kunlunshan's* deck for Saudi naval leadership and members of the business community. Those in attendance included Rear Admiral Abdullah Al Sultan, the commander of the Saudi Navy's Western Fleet, Chinese Ambassador Yang Honglin, and Consul General Wang Yong.

The timing of the visit once again aligns with Chinese interests and diplomatic activity in the host country. At the most strategic level, PLAN presence in Saudi Arabia is about oil and China's continued access to it. China's oil imports doubled between 2000 and 2009 to roughly 8.5 million barrels per day; however, it was the global recession that resulted in a fundamental shift in the global energy market in Beijing's direction. With consumption in the United States falling by 10 percent,

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<sup>243</sup> Emirates News Agency, "Abdullah Bin Zayed Heads UAE Delegation to the Ministerial Meeting of China-Arab Cooperation Forum," wam, May 14, 2010, <http://wam.ae/en/details/1395228655040>.

<sup>244</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States, "Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Meets with His Counterparts from Arab Countries and Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Attending the Fourth Ministerial Meeting of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum," May 12, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t694512.htm>.

<sup>245</sup> According to SeaWaves Magazine, the *Kunlunshan* made resupply calls to Djibouti in September and November, as well as Salalah in October.

<sup>246</sup> Kamerling and Putten, "An Overseas Naval Presence without Overseas Bases."



Saudi Arabia began shipping more crude to China than the U.S for the first time in 2009. In fact, U.S imports from Saudi Arabia fell below 1 million barrels a day while Chinese imports doubled from 2008 levels to cross the 1 million barrel a day threshold, representing roughly 25 percent of Chinese imports. In addition, Saudi Arabia and China were jointly developing refinery projects in both countries, including the massive refinery in Fujian province that opened in 2009.<sup>247 248</sup>

Diplomatically, the years 2009 and 2010 saw several high-level engagements that indicate Saudi Arabia's growing importance to Beijing. On 10 February 2009, President Hu Jintao met with Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz in Riyadh. According to Hu, "China-Saudi Arabia ties have developed rapidly and reached an all-time high since the heads of state exchanged their visits in 2006." With a nod to China's oil interests, Hu acknowledged the role Saudi Arabia played in "safeguarding regional peace and stability and ensuring international energy security." President Hu then summed up the underlying geopolitical context. "China has always dealt with its relations with Saudi Arabia from a strategic point of view...The international situation is undergoing complicated and profound changes. In particular, the global financial crisis has posed severe challenges to us. Under such circumstances, strengthening bilateral cooperation is of greater significance."<sup>249</sup>

2010 began with an official visit to Riyadh by Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on 12-14 January 2010, during which he met with Saudi Arabian King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz and Foreign Minister Saud bin al-Faisal, as well as leaders of the Saudi business community.<sup>250</sup> In May of 2010, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and Yang Jiechi hosted Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud bin al-Faisal at the Great Hall of the People prior to the fourth ministerial meeting of China-Arab Cooperation Forum

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<sup>247</sup> Jad Mouawad, "China's Growth Shifts the Geopolitics of Oil," *The New York Times*, March 20, 2010, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/20/business/energy-environment/20saudi.html>.

<sup>248</sup> Reuters Staff, "Saudi Ships First Crude to China Fujian Refinery," *Reuters*, February 25, 2009, <https://www.reuters.com/article/saudi-china-crude-idUSLP83381520090225>.

<sup>249</sup> Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union, "Chinese President Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Saudi Arabian King Abdullah," February 11, 2009, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cebe/eng/zxxx/t536649.htm>.

<sup>250</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Saudi Arabian King Abdullah Meets with Yang Jiechi," January 14, 2010, <http://www.chinaembassy.org.sa/eng/zsgx/zzw1/t704306.htm>.

in Tianjin.<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, 2010 was significant because it was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-Saudi diplomatic relations. On 21 July, Hu Jintao and King Abdullah exchanged “congratulatory messages” to commemorate the day, while Vice President Xi Jinping and Yang Jiechi also communicated with their counterparts in Riyadh.<sup>252</sup>

The *Kunlunshan*'s inaugural port visit to Jeddah is also noteworthy in light of the strong ties between Riyadh and the United States—the traditional security guarantor of Saudi sovereignty and its oil exports. The timing likely reflects Beijing's growing confidence in the region within the context of the global financial crisis and the shift in American reliance on Saudi oil, which along with escort operations in the Gulf of Aden, opened the door for PLAN presence for the first time. In addition, any notion that the PLAN chose Jeddah to avoid a high-profile visit to the Persian Gulf, where the U.S. Navy holds sway, seems implausible given the fact that when the *Kunlunshan* departed Jeddah, it passed through the Strait of Hormuz and arrived in the island Kingdom of Bahrain on 9 December, another U.S. partner and home of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT). In fact, beyond the fact that this was the first visit to Bahrain by a Chinese warship, the U.S. Navy was an integral part of the agenda. On 10 December, Rear Admiral Wei Xueyi paid a visit to Fifth Fleet Headquarters before hosting a U.S. military delegation onboard the *Kunlunshan*.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with Qatari Prime Minister and Saudi Foreign Minister,” May 12, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xybfs\\_663590/gjlb\\_663594/2873\\_663736/2875\\_663740/t694502.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2873_663736/2875_663740/t694502.shtml).

<sup>252</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Saudi Arabia, “Chinese, Saudi Leaders Celebrate 20 Years of Diplomatic Ties,” July 22, 2010, <http://www.chinaembassy.org.sa/eng/zsgx/zzwl/t718820.htm>.

<sup>253</sup> Shirley A Kan, “U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress,” October 27, 2014, 86.

*Africa (2010)*

The PLAN's supply hubs and presence around the Horn of Africa radically change Beijing's use of port call diplomacy elsewhere on the continent. It had been a decade since the destroyer *Shenzhen* stopped in Tanzania and South Africa. When the PLAN returned, it had a larger diplomatic agenda, as well as important new capabilities.

Beijing introduced the PLAN's custom-built hospital ship *Daishandao* ("Peace Ark") in April 2009 at the Qingdao international fleet review to commemorate the PLAN's sixtieth anniversary. The fleet review included ships from fourteen countries, including the United States. It is worth mentioning that the U.S. Navy's Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gary Roughead, was among the senior naval officers from 29 countries allowed to tour the ship. Beijing's motivations for building the *Daishandao* are complicated and overlapping. The 1974 naval skirmish against Vietnam in the Paracel Islands led to unnecessary casualties due to lack of medical treatment. In response, Beijing began building its first Nan Kang class hospital ship, which was commissioned in 1991. Another impetus was China's underwhelming response to the earthquake and tsunami that devastated the Indian Ocean region in 2004. However, the *Daishandao* is much more than a reaction to these events. After the U.S. Navy's *USNS Comfort* and *Mercy*, the *Daishandao* is the world's largest and most capable hospital ship. More importantly, it is a symbol of Chinese national power and pride, which enhances Beijing's soft power as a provider of public goods, as well as the PLAN's military diplomacy.<sup>254</sup>

During its first overseas voyage, *Harmonious Mission 2010*, the *Daishandao* carried 428 medical personnel and provided services for 15,537 people, including 97 operations on patients in Djibouti,

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<sup>254</sup> Peter W. Mackenzie, "Red Crosses, Blue Water: Hospital Ships and China's Expanding Naval Presence," *Center for Naval Analysis*, CNA China Studies, September 2011, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a552566.pdf>.

Kenya, Tanzania, the Seychelles, and Bangladesh.<sup>255</sup> The ship began its work in the Gulf of Aden, offering care for the PLAN sailors onboard the ships of the anti-piracy task force and treating the public during a seven-day port visit in Djibouti. When the ship arrived on 22 September, it was welcomed by local leaders, including the Speaker of Djibouti's National Assembly, Idriss Arnaoud Ali.<sup>256</sup> The potential diplomatic value of the *Daishandao's* visit should not be underestimated. According to the *Daishandao's* Dr. Ye Xia, patients arrived from as far away as Somalia to receive care. With only two optometrists in Djibouti, Chinese medical personnel worked “almost 24 hours a day” to cure 41 cataract patients during the ship's stay. In Kenya, people lined-up overnight to see Chinese doctors onboard the *Daishandao*, while political leaders in all host countries made ceremonious visits to the ship, including the President of Bangladesh.<sup>257</sup>

As with other naval port visits, the countries visited during *Harmonious Mission 2010* were well integrated into Beijing's larger diplomatic strategy. Beijing's decision to send the *Daishandao* to Djibouti was certainly an attempt to cultivate political and public support for increased PLAN presence, which began in early 2010 with operational calls by the fourth anti-piracy task force. In the years to come Djibouti would become the PLAN's main resupply hub and eventually the site of its first overseas military base. In Kenya, the ship's visit came in the midst of a Chinese lending and investment boom. It also came months after a state visit by Kenyan President Kibaki to Shanghai for the opening ceremony of the Shanghai world Expo, which included talks with Hu Jintao on 01 May.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> China Daily, “Chinese Hospital Ship Back after Treating Thousands,” November 27, 2010, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-11/27/content\\_11618141.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-11/27/content_11618141.htm).

<sup>256</sup> People's Daily, “Chinese Navy Hospital Ship ‘Peace Ark’ Arrives in Djibouti (7) - People's Daily Online,” September 23, 2010, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90783/91300/7148324.html>.

<sup>257</sup> China Daily, “Chinese Hospital Ship Back after Treating Thousands.”

<sup>258</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-San Francisco, “Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Kenyan President Kibaki,” May 1, 2010, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t689889.htm>.



Figure 4.2 – *Daishandao* in Mombasa, Kenya, on 13 October 2010 (China Daily).

The *Daishandao* arrived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on 19 October for a five-day stay, during which it provided medical services for the local population. Similar to Kenya, Beijing had been active in Tanzania, investing hundreds of millions of dollars in agriculture and infrastructure. In 2010, trade between the two countries jumped 40 percent from 2009 levels.<sup>259</sup> Furthermore, China's interest in Tanzania soon included the port of Bagamoyo. In 2013, Tanzania signed a preliminary agreement with China Merchants Holdings to build a port and special economic zone intended to become an East African regional trade and transportation hub.<sup>260</sup>

The ship's last stop in Africa was a call to Victoria, Seychelles, where the crew of the *Daishandao* provided free medical services during a five-day visit.<sup>261</sup> This was the PLAN's first of many visits to Victoria, but not the first Chinese diplomatic engagement. For such a small island nation, the Seychelles has received extraordinary attention from Beijing due to its strategic location

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<sup>259</sup> Reuters Reuters Staff, "Chinese Firms Eye Tanzanian Farmland, Export Market," *Reuters*, August 26, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/tanzania-china-trade-and-investments-idAFL5E7JQ0IX20110826>.

<sup>260</sup> Reuters Staff, "Tanzania's China-Backed \$10 Billion Port Plan Stalls over Terms: Official," *Reuters*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tanzania-port-idUSKCN1ST084>.

<sup>261</sup> People's Daily, "China's 'Peace Ark' Mission Proves Success in Seychelles - China.Org.Cn," October 30, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-10/30/content\\_21236231.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-10/30/content_21236231.htm).

astride the sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. In November 2006 Hu Jintao hosted Seychelles President, James Alix Michel, for talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing in conjunction with the Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.<sup>262</sup> President Michel returned the favor in February 2007 when he welcomed Hu Jintao to the Seychelles for a state visit as part of President Hu's tour of eight African states.<sup>263</sup> Months prior to the *Daishandao's* visit, President Michel received another high-level Chinese guest. In July 2010, Chinese State Councilor, Dai Bingguo, arrived in Victoria for talks on enhancing Chinese support and cooperation with the Seychelles. In a clear nod to China's interest in expanded security cooperation and PLAN presence, Dai Bingguo offered China's gratitude for "Seychelles' readiness to provide a platform for China-Africa friendly cooperation by making use of its own advantageous geographic location. China also supports Seychelles' efforts to combat piracy and safeguard peace and stability of the island country's adjacent waters."<sup>264</sup>

On the return voyage to China, the *Daishandao* made a final visit to Chittagong, Bangladesh on 10 November 2010. It had been a significant year for China-Bangladesh relations, which included a state visit by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to China in March. During his stay in Beijing, the Prime Minister met with Hu Jintao and held official talks with Wen Jiabao. The meetings resulted in a joint communiqué, outlining an extensive array of cooperative agreements, including trade and investment, infrastructure projects, concessional loans, cultural exchanges, and security cooperation.

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<sup>262</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Holds Talks with President of Seychelles Michel," November 2, 2006, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3079\\_664184/3081\\_664188/t279648.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3079_664184/3081_664188/t279648.shtml).

<sup>263</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Arrives in Victoria for State Visit to the Seychelles," February 10, 2007, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3079\\_664184/3081\\_664188/t297669.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3079_664184/3081_664188/t297669.shtml).

<sup>264</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States, "Seychelles President Meets with Dai Bingguo," July 28, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t720622.htm>.

The statement also commemorated the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations, which would occur in October—a month before the *Daishandao's* arrival.<sup>265</sup>

### *Europe*

PLAN task forces also sailed north through the Suez Canal to destinations in the Mediterranean and Europe. The global financial crisis was an acute catalyst for diplomatic relations between Beijing and Europe from 2008 onward. Europe's financial decline, including several sovereign debt crises, opened the door for Chinese investment and infrastructure projects. The inaugural PLAN port visits to France, Germany, Italy, and Greece between 2001 and 2002 provided early indications of the countries Beijing was most interested in cultivating. A port call to France in 2007 was the only other PLAN visit to a European country before the destroyer *Guangzhou* and frigate *Chaohu* arrived in the Mediterranean in the summer of 2010 to make calls at Taranto, Italy, and Piraeus, Greece. In choosing Italy and Greece, Beijing was once again telegraphing its strategic intentions. By 2010, Beijing was buying up distressed assets across Europe, especially in hard-hit countries like Italy and Greece, where it was establishing a foothold through ports in Piraeus and Naples, which would eventually be linked to other transportation projects, connecting Eastern Europe to Germany and Turkey.<sup>266</sup>

When the *Guangzhou* and *Chaohu* arrived in Taranto, Italy, on 2 August 2010, the Chinese warships were welcomed by the Chinese ambassador Ding Wei and several hundred members of the Chinese community in Italy. The *Guangzhou* and *Chaohu* were part of the fifth naval escort task force, under the command of Rear Admiral Zhang Wendan, which had sailed through the Suez Canal and

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<sup>265</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the People's Republic of Bangladesh," March 22, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/2649\\_665393/t674421.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t674421.shtml).

<sup>266</sup> Liz Alderman, "Looking for Investments, China Turns to Europe," *The New York Times*, November 1, 2010, sec. Business, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/02/business/global/02euro.html>.

into the Mediterranean after completing escort operations in the Gulf of Aden. Chinese press reporting focused heavily on the local Chinese reaction. “This is my first time on a Chinese naval warship,” said Guo Chao. “I came all the way from Rome for this celebration and it fills me with joy.” Chen Zhiru explained that the PLAN ships symbolized his family and home country. The head of the Southern Italy Chinese Association, Chen Zhengxi, said: “Today, it’s an important day for me, the arrival of the ships fills me with pride.”<sup>267</sup>

The Chinese ambassador offered that the ship’s visit was intended to, “further improve military exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and Italian navies,” but he also added that he “looked forward to increasing cooperation between the two countries in all sectors.” After the ceremony, the PLAN officers met with local Italian officials, including the provincial deputy president, Emanuele Fisicaro, who spoke of the importance of the Italy-China relationship. “Our town is a strategic entrance hub for Chinese products in Italy and we look forward to increasing Chinese integration and entrepreneurial activities in our area.” During their week-long stay, the Chinese sailors participated in athletic matches and sightseeing, as well as a joint exercise with the Italian Navy in the Gulf of Taranto later in the week.<sup>268</sup>

After their stay in Taranto, the *Guangzhou* and *Chaohu* sailed across the Ionian Sea and arrived in Greece’s main port of Piraeus on 9 August. The Chinese press reporting of the visit is nearly identical to that of the Italy call. The Chinese ambassador and hundreds of proud Chinese nationals were there to welcome the ships. “I feel very much proud as a Chinese and so happy to see China is developing fast,” said Zhang Buren. The Chinese ambassador, Luo Linqun, claimed that the PLAN task forces had escorted 20 Greek commercial ships off Somalia, adding: “The Greek shipowners will come to visit the Chinese naval fleet and express their gratitude to the help from the Chinese

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<sup>267</sup> Global Times, “Feature: Chinese Naval Warships Welcomed in Italy,” August 3, 2010, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/558909.shtml>.

<sup>268</sup> Global Times.



navy.” He also added that the Greek government and Navy, “attach great importance to the visit of the Chinese naval fleet.” In typical fashion, the five-day visit included exchanges with the Greek Navy and sightseeing in Athens.<sup>269</sup>

Chinese press reporting is as predictable as it is repetitive. However, what is most revealing about the coverage of these two European calls is that it paints a picture of how Beijing sees itself and wants to be seen by others. The routine set pieces expose Beijing’s perception of port visits and what it hopes to gain from them. Overseas Chinese, waving flags with pride and gratitude, are a clear sign of support for the CCP and its domestic legitimacy. Similarly, Italian and Greek hosts treat their important guests with respect and appreciation, especially for the protection the PLAN task force provides to international shipping. The Italian and Greek navies demonstrate trust in the PLAN and welcome the warships to their bases, as a signal that they wish to elevate military-to-military relations. For Beijing, this is one step closer to the status and ultimately authority it craves.

There was, however, one part of the Chinese script that was out of sequence. PLAN port visits most often follow high level engagements. In the case of Italy and Greece, the warships preceded the arrival of Wen Jiabao by several months. When he arrived in Athens on 2 October, Wen Jiabao was the first Chinese premier to visit Greece in 24 years. It was also the first stop in a four-country tour, which included Belgium, Italy, and Turkey, as well as the 8th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the 13th China-European Union (EU) summit in Brussels.<sup>270</sup> While in Greece, Wen met with Greek President Karolos Papoulias and Prime Minister George Papandreou. The leaders signed a series of agreements and issued a joint statement on deepening their comprehensive strategic partnership. Premier Wen also addressed Parliament with a speech entitled, “Reinforce

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<sup>269</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Chinese Naval Flotilla Visits Greece,” China.org, August 10, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-08/10/content\\_20676338.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-08/10/content_20676338.htm).

<sup>270</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the United States of America, “Wen Jiabao Arrives in Athens, Kicking off His Four-Nation Tour,” October 2, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t759203.htm>.

Confidence to Overcome the Current Difficulties,” and announced that China would buy Greek bonds to stabilize the country’s debt. In Italy, Wen met with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano and Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, before overseeing the signing of 17 agreements.<sup>271 272</sup>

### *Northeast Asia*

On 26 October 2009, the PLAN training ship, *Zheng He*, departed Lüshun (near Dalian) at the southwest end of the Kuan-tung Peninsula, formerly known as Port Arthur. With a crew of 365, including 230 cadets from the PLA navy's four academies, the *Zheng He* headed to Jinhae (Chinhae), Republic of Korea (ROK), and Etajima, Japan. The ship’s commanding officer, Rear Admiral Liu Yi, explained the purpose as, “a variety of professional exchanges with their South Korean and Japanese counterparts... We will use the training to show the good image of our Navy officer cadets and enhance the friendship among the military academies in the three countries.”<sup>273</sup>

The *Zheng He* arrived at Jinhae Naval Base, west of Busan, on 29 October 2009.<sup>274</sup> There is little detail available regarding the specific components of the ship’s stay; however, the port call likely followed the PLAN script of officer exchanges, athletic matches, and cultural trips for the entire crew to the surrounding area. What is known, however, is that the *Zheng He’s* visit occurred during a period of intense diplomatic activity involving Seoul and Beijing. On 23 September 2009, Hu Jintao met with his ROK counterpart, Lee Myung-bak, at the United Nations in New York. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hu spoke favorable about the positive momentum in China-ROK

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<sup>271</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Premier Wen Jiabao Heads Out to China after Concluding His Four-Nation Tour,” October 10, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/wenjiabaozonglifangwenouyasiguo\\_665782/t760306.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/wenjiabaozonglifangwenouyasiguo_665782/t760306.shtml).

<sup>272</sup> Ingrid Melander Papachristou Harry, “China’s Wen Offers to Buy Greek Debt,” *Reuters*, October 2, 2010, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-china-idUSTRE69112L20101002>.

<sup>273</sup> CCTV-International, “Chinese Navy Vessel ‘Zhenghe’ to Visit ROK, Japan,” October 27, 2009, <http://english.cctv.com/program/chinatoday/20091027/103238.shtml>.

<sup>274</sup> There is very little detail available on the visit; however, the date of the visit was found on seawaves.com and then referenced in People’s Daily coverage of the Zheng He’s visit to South Korea in 2013.

relations: “Amid the profound changes in the international and regional situation, China is ready to join hands with the Republic of Korea (ROK) to strengthen strategic communication, expand mutually beneficial cooperation and continuously enrich the China-ROK strategic cooperative partnership.”<sup>275</sup>

Additional high-level engagements continued in the lead up to the *Zheng He’s* visit to Jinhae. Hu Jintao’s meeting with Lee Myung-bak was followed by a meeting in Shanghai on 29 September between the foreign ministers from China, Japan and the ROK to discuss regional affairs and closer cooperation to combat the global financial crisis. This was also an opportunity for Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi to meet with his ROK counterpart Yu Myung Hwan.<sup>276</sup> Less than two weeks later, on 10 October, Wen Jiabao hosted Lee Myung-bak and Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama in the Great Hall of the People as the chairman of the second trilateral summit meeting between China, Japan and the ROK. That afternoon, Hu Jintao met with the two visiting leaders and congratulated them on the progress achieved during the summit: “...currently China-ROK and China-Japan relations have maintained a sound momentum of development.”<sup>277</sup> Sixteen days later the *Zheng He* departed Lüshun and began its voyage across Korea Bay for Jinhae.

Following its visit to Jinhae, the *Zheng He* sailed for the Japanese port of Etajima in Hiroshima Prefecture, arriving on 5 November. According to a Chinese Navy source quoted in the *Japan Times*, “We wanted to make a port call in Tokyo but ended up requesting to dock in

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<sup>275</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Chinese President Hu Jintao Meets with His ROK Counterpart Lee Myung-Bak,” September 23, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2767\\_663538/2769\\_663542/t606752.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2767_663538/2769_663542/t606752.shtml).

<sup>276</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao Chairs the Second Trilateral Summit Meeting among China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK),” October 10, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2767\\_663538/2769\\_663542/t620327.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2767_663538/2769_663542/t620327.shtml).

<sup>277</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Chinese President Hu Jintao Meets with His ROK Counterpart Lee Myung-Bak.”

Hiroshima out of consideration over the relationship between the two governments.”<sup>278</sup> This change in ports was apparently a result of larger diplomatic forces. After the Chinese destroyer *Shenzhen* made the PLAN’s inaugural visit to Tokyo in November 2007, a Japanese destroyer made a reciprocal visit to China in June, 2008, to deliver aid supplies for victims of the Sichuan earthquake—the first Japanese naval vessel in China since the end of World War II. However, after Tokyo issued a visa to Rebiya Kadeer, leader of the World Uyghur Congress, Beijing refused to allow three Japanese warships to stop in Hong Kong in August, 2009. As a result, the *Zheng He* arrived in Etajima rather than Tokyo with over 350 crewmembers and cadets for a visit billed to promote friendly relations between the two navies. During their stay, the Chinese crew members met with counterparts from Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force, participated in athletic matches, and visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.<sup>279</sup>

Both of the PLAN’s visits to Japan occurred within a period of “thawing” relations between Tokyo and Beijing, which included diplomatic engagement at the highest levels. Wen Jiabao’s official visit to Japan in April, 2007, was followed in May of 2008 by Hu Jintao’s state visit—the first by a Chinese paramount leader since Jiang Zemin’s trip to Japan in 1998. The diplomatic thaw that led to the *Zheng He* visit included a meeting on 1 March, 2009, between Wen Jiabao and Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone in Beijing. Chinese Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, and other officials were also in attendance.<sup>280</sup> Then in April, 2009, Hu Jintao met with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso in London, while Wen Jiabao followed up with Prime Minister Aso during the East Asia Summit in Pattaya, Thailand on 11, April. “I welcome Prime Minister Aso's visit to China in the near

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<sup>278</sup> “China Naval Vessel Makes Port Call | The Japan Times,” November 6, 2009, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2009/11/06/national/china-naval-vessel-makes-port-call/>.

<sup>279</sup> “China Naval Vessel Makes Port Call | The Japan Times.”

<sup>280</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with Japanese Foreign Minister Hirofumi Nakasone,” March 1, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2721\\_663446/2724\\_663452/t540031.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2721_663446/2724_663452/t540031.shtml).

future. I'm also looking forward to the second tripartite summit among China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) to be held in China later this year," offered Wen Jiabao after their meeting.<sup>281 282</sup> The same day, Premier Wen also met with South Korean President Lee Myung-bak.<sup>283</sup>

On 21 September 2009, Hu Jintao met with newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama in New York within a week of Hatoyama's victory.<sup>284</sup> The intensity of diplomatic activity continued through the second tripartite summit in Beijing that October, as well as a visit to Japan by Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi on 19 November. During his visit, Yang met with his Japanese counterpart, Foreign Minister Okada, as well as parliamentary leaders before a weekend trip to Kyoto.<sup>285</sup> Following the *Zheng He's* port visit, the high-level Chinese engagements culminated in Vice President Xi Jinping's visit to Tokyo, where he met Prime Minister Hatoyama at his official residence. On 15 December, vice president Xi was given the honor of an audience with the Japanese Emperor at the Imperial Palace in what many believed to be a breach of protocol.<sup>286</sup>

What is most interesting about the *Zheng He's* visit is that it happened at all given the high-stakes diplomatic grappling underway between Beijing and Tokyo. It also demonstrates how sensitive a port call can be, and that Beijing is well aware that the platform chosen for the visit matters as much as its timing.

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<sup>281</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Chinese President Hu Jintao Meets with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso," April 3, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2721\\_663446/2724\\_663452/t556203.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2721_663446/2724_663452/t556203.shtml).

<sup>282</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao Meets with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso," April 11, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2721\\_663446/2724\\_663452/t557422.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2721_663446/2724_663452/t557422.shtml).

<sup>283</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China-Lithuania, "Wen Jiabao Meets with South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak," April 11, 2009, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/celt/eng/xwtd/t557423.htm>.

<sup>284</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Chinese President Hu Jintao Meets with Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama," September 22, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/hujintaoG20fenghui\\_665788/t605899.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/hujintaoG20fenghui_665788/t605899.shtml).

<sup>285</sup> Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Press Conference by the Press Secretary of MOFA, 19 November 2009," November 19, 2009, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/2009/11/1119.html>.

<sup>286</sup> "CSIS: Comparative Connections (4Q2009)," 111–12, accessed April 25, 2021, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/0904q.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/0904q.pdf).

*Southeast Asia*

In the case of Brunei, high-level diplomatic engagements remained muted until Wen Jiabao's first visit in 2011. However, on 11 August 2009, the destroyer, *Guangzhou*, arrived in Brunei's Muara Port to participate in the Brunei International Defense Exhibition (BRIDEX), a defense exhibition and conference, as well as a routine port visit. This was only the second visit by the PLAN (*Shenzhen* was the first in 2003), but after 2009, Chinese warships began regular stops in Maura, including consecutive annual visits in 2011, 2012, and 2013.

Once relieved, the third escort task force, made up of frigates *Zhoushan* and *Xuzhou*, split up in order to make separate stops in Malaysia and Singapore on their return voyages to China. There is little available detail on the *Xuzhou's* visit to Malaysia in December; however, the timing did fit within the continuum of high-level Chinese engagements. On 3 June 2009, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak was in Beijing to meet with Wen Jiabao—roughly a month after Malaysia and Vietnam's joint submission to the UN, claiming an extension to their continental shelves. This was also the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations, and the prime minister's first non-ASEAN visit since he took office in April, which he explained, “shows that Malaysia attaches great importance to the development of Malaysia-China relations.” According to the Chinese embassy in Malaysia, Premier Wen addressed the South China Sea directly: “On the South China Sea issue, Wen pointed out that the Declaration on the Code of Conduct on the South China Sea should be strictly followed. China and Malaysia should beef up dialogue and cooperation and handle relevant issues in a proper way to jointly safeguard peace and stability on the South China Sea.” In return, the prime minister offered that, “Malaysia has recognized the complexity of the issue of the South China Sea

and would like to address the issue through friendly consultation under the guidance of international laws.”<sup>287 288</sup>

Hu Jintao followed up with a state visit to Kuala Lumpur on 10 November and meetings with Supreme Head of State Mizan Abidin and Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak in order to “build up mutual understanding and friendship, enhance mutually beneficial cooperation and push bilateral strategic cooperative relations to a new level.” After Malaysia, President Hu flew to Singapore for a state visit to celebrate 20 years of diplomatic relations, as well as to attend the APAC Economic Leaders Meeting<sup>289</sup> While in Singapore he met with Singaporean President S. R. Nathan and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to discuss further cooperation.<sup>290</sup> Roughly three weeks later, the *Zhoushan* arrived at Changi Naval Base for a four-day visit and exchange with the Singapore Navy.<sup>291</sup>

The China-Vietnam relationship showed signs of momentum and progress in 2008. Frequent leadership engagements and negotiations on border demarcation had led the two countries to officially announce a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement on 1 June. Two port deals between Chinese and Vietnamese firms were further evidence of growing economic cooperation. And, in November, the *Zheng He* (Beijing’s most cooperative naval signal) visited Danang for five-days of military-to-military exchanges. The year ended with meetings between Vietnamese Prime

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<sup>287</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Malaysia, “Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Najib,” June 3, 2009, <http://my.china-embassy.org/eng/sbgx/t579238.htm>.

<sup>288</sup> China Daily, “Malaysia PM Wants Friendly Talks,” June 4, 2009, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009malaysia/2009-06/04/content\\_8246814.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009malaysia/2009-06/04/content_8246814.htm).

<sup>289</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Hu Jintao Arrives in Kuala Lumpur for State Visit to Malaysia,” November 10, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjw\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2732\\_663468/2734\\_663472/t627426.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjw_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2732_663468/2734_663472/t627426.shtml).

<sup>290</sup> CCTV-International, “Highlights of Chinese President Hu Jintao’s Visit to Singapore,” November 12, 2009, <http://english.cctv.com/20091112/104145.shtml>.

<sup>291</sup> SINA English, “Chinese Naval Fleet to Depart from Singapore - China News - SINA English,” December 10, 2009, <http://english.sina.com/china/p/2009/1210/292103.html>.

Minister Nguyen Tan Dung and Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei in Hanoi to discuss the final stages of the border survey efforts.<sup>292</sup>

The joint submission with Malaysia to the UN CLCS on 6 May 2009 introduced a significant point of contention in the South China Sea, but both sides continued to move forward with border demarcation. After ten years of work, the signing ceremony that marked completion took place on 18 November 2009 in Beijing. Both sides agreed to “maintain peace and stability of the South China Sea” while working toward a solution to the last maritime dispute between them.<sup>293</sup> On 4 December, two older Chinese frigates, *Cheng Hai* and *Chao Yang*, arrived in the northern Vietnamese city of Hai Phong for a four-day visit in conjunction with annual joint patrols in the Beibu Gulf (Gulf of Tonkin) in place since 2006. According to People’s Daily, the ship’s crew received a warm welcome from the local people and government of Hai Phong. What is noteworthy is the fact that Beijing continued its joint patrols, but did not send an escort task force or its larger, more modern ships. In addition, it sent ships to Hai Phong, near the Chinese border for the first time.<sup>294</sup> The next year, Beijing sent a single frigate, *Xiangyang*, to participate in the joint patrols. This time the ship made a port call to Danang on 3 December. The visit included a volleyball match, sightseeing and officer meetings with local municipal and military officials.<sup>295</sup> The PLAN did not return to the Gulf of Tonkin the next year due to worsening relations over the South China Sea.

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<sup>292</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung Meets with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei,” December 30, 2008, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t530189.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t530189.shtml).

<sup>293</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Chinese and Vietnamese Governments Sign Land Border Demarcation Documents,” November 19, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t628682.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t628682.shtml).

<sup>294</sup> People’s Daily Online, “Chinese Naval Forces Visit Vietnam.”

<sup>295</sup> Nhan Dan, “Chinese Navy Ship Visits Da Nang (Vietnam),” December 3, 2010, <https://en.nhandan.com.vn/politics/external-relations/item/64702-.html>.



A month before the port visit, Wen Jiabao had been in Hanoi for separate meeting with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, and General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, during which Wen brought up the South China Sea dispute with both Vietnamese leaders. During his meeting with Manh, Wen said, “both countries had acquired precious experience from the successful settlement of their difference on the land border and the Beibu Gulf. Hence for their disputes on the South China Sea, bilateral negotiation and consultation should be the right way for a solution.” Both Dung and Manh agreed with Wen’s statement.<sup>296297</sup>

2010 marked the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-Indonesia relations. PLAN port visits are often associated with anniversaries, so it was no surprise that the 6<sup>th</sup> naval escort task force arrived in Tanjung Priok on 27 December 2010 after completing their mission in the Gulf of Aden. The task force was made up of the amphibious landing ship *Kunlunshan*, destroyer *Lanzhou*, and resupply ship *Weishanshu* and over 1,000 crew members. The welcome ceremony was attended by Chinese Ambassador Zhang Qiyue and Brigadier General Arif Suherman, commanding officer of Indonesia's third navy base, as well as members of the local Chinese community.<sup>298</sup> Rather than being linked to a single diplomatic event, the port visit was sequenced at the end of what can only be described as a relentless series of high-level engagements and cultural events that year. Among the most prominent, Hu Jintao and Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono met at the G20 summit in Canada on 26 June. The Indonesian President was in China for the Shanghai World Expo in late October, and then held talks two weeks later with Chairman Wu Bangguo back in Indonesia. On 20 October

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<sup>296</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with Nong Duc Manh, General-Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party,” October 30, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t765849.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t765849.shtml).

<sup>297</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with His Vietnamese Counterpart Nguyen Tan Dung,” October 29, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t765532.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t765532.shtml).

<sup>298</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Chinese Navy Fleet Visits Indonesia,” China.org, December 27, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-12/27/content\\_21624964.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-12/27/content_21624964.htm).

2010, Indonesian Vice President Boediono was in Nanning, China, to attend the opening ceremony of the 7th China-ASEAN Expo, where he met Wen Jiabao and Vice President Xi Jinping.<sup>299</sup>

There was one port visit in 2010 that does not fit Beijing's usual playbook. On 13 April, the ships of the 4th naval escort task force entered Manila's South Harbor for a five-day visit after four months of operations in the Gulf of Aden. Chinese media coverage includes pictures of the two frigates, *Ma'anshan* and *Wenzhou*, and special operations personnel on deck, as the ships arrive pier-side. This is all very typical for port visits and Chinese media coverage of them. What is unusual, however, is the fact that the visit was not linked to a high-level leadership engagement. The last meaningful meeting between leaders from China and the Philippines took place on 29 October 2009, when President Arroyo met with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, who was on a state visit to Manila. Yang also met with his counterpart Foreign Minister Alberto Romulo, as well as the Speaker of the Philippines House of Representatives.<sup>300</sup>

The timing was unusual because of the upcoming presidential election to be held on 10 May, in which former senator Benigno Aquino III, son of former president Corazon Aquino, was expected to win. With no real leader to engage and induce, was this simply a display of Chinese military power? What makes the question more important is the fact that Senator Aquino was known to be wary of China and eager for closer relations with the United States. A show of force

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<sup>299</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Pictures of the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of China-Indonesia Diplomatic Ties and Year of Friendship Part I," January 10, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2716\\_663436/2718\\_663440/t784650.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2716_663436/2718_663440/t784650.shtml).

<sup>300</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Philippine President Arroyo Meets with Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi," October 30, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2762\\_663528/2764\\_663532/t624091.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2762_663528/2764_663532/t624091.shtml).

prior to an election seems unusually direct for Beijing, but there is no further definitive information available.<sup>301 302</sup>

### *South Asia & Indian Ocean*

The years 2009-2010 were a turning point for Beijing's maritime interests in the Indian Ocean. In May 2009, the fighting in Sri Lanka came to a bloody end with the death of the Tamil Tiger leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, in the final jungle battle of a 26-year civil war.<sup>303</sup> The Sri Lankan Civil War had presented an opportunity for Beijing. As the West sought to reign in the Sri Lankan government through diplomatic isolation and an end to military assistance, Beijing filled the void with political support and a large number of advanced weapons. It also sent the destroyer, *Guangzhou*, to Colombo on its way to participate in Pakistan's AMAN-09 exercise, as well as on the return trip to China in March 2009.<sup>304</sup> This was likely both a stop to refuel, but also a sign of support for the Sri Lankan government in the final months of the civil war when many international observers were calling for an end to mounting atrocities and a growing humanitarian crisis. It is of unsurprising that when the fighting stopped, Beijing moved quickly to strengthen its position in Sri Lanka.

On 3 July 2009, Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi hosted his Sri Lankan counterpart Rohitha Bogollagama for talks in Beijing. Foreign Minister Yang offered that China "stands ready to work with Sri Lanka to consolidate the traditional bilateral friendship and expand mutually beneficial

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<sup>301</sup> Ernest Z. Bower, "Philippine Elections: Aquino to Become 15th President of the Republic of the Philippines," CSIS, May 11, 2010, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/philippine-elections-aquino-become-15th-president-republic-philippines>.

<sup>302</sup> Keith Bradsher, "Philippine Leader Sounds Alarm on China," *The New York Times*, February 4, 2014, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/05/world/asia/philippine-leader-urges-international-help-in-resisting-chinas-sea-claims.html>.

<sup>303</sup> Mark McDonald, "Tamil Tigers Confirm Death of Their Leader," *The New York Times*, May 25, 2009, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/26/world/asia/26lanka.html>.

<sup>304</sup> "The Chinese Navy's Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean," Jamestown, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-chinese-navys-emerging-support-network-in-the-indian-ocean/>.

cooperation so as to inject new vitality into the comprehensive cooperative partnership”<sup>305</sup> Then in October, Premier Wen Jiabao met with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickremanayake in Chengdu, China, to discuss greater cooperation, including ways in which Chinese companies could take a greater part in Sri Lanka’s post-war reconstruction. Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, Minister of Commerce Chen Deming, Secretary of the CCP Sichuan Provincial Committee Liu Qibao, and Governor of Sichuan Province Jiang Jufeng, were also present during the meetings.<sup>306</sup>

2010 began with a visit from the frigate *Wenzhou*, of the 4<sup>th</sup> escort task force in January, during which the ship’s officers held meetings with the Commander-in-Chief and Chief-of-Staff of the Sri Lankan Navy.<sup>307</sup> <sup>308</sup> Economic cooperation continued as well to include the announcement in August that China Merchant Holdings would have a 55 percent stake in the \$500 million Colombo port project due to commence within six months.<sup>309</sup> Beijing also continued its support for Sri Lanka’s president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who was facing war-crimes allegations in the West. Hu Jintao’s special envoy, Sang Guowei, traveled to Sri Lanka in November to attend Rajapaksa’s second inauguration, but more importantly, the launching ceremony for the Colombo port

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<sup>305</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Yang Jiechi Holds Talks with Sri Lankan Counterpart,” July 3, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2782\\_663558/2784\\_663562/t571609.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2782_663558/2784_663562/t571609.shtml).

<sup>306</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Meets with Foreign Leaders Attending the 10th Western China International Economy & Trade Fair,” October 16, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2706\\_663416/2708\\_663420/t621368.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2706_663416/2708_663420/t621368.shtml).

<sup>307</sup> “The Chinese Navy’s Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean.”

<sup>308</sup> “Sri Lanka Navy Commander Visits Wenzhou Warship - China Navy in Sri Lanka,” Pakistan Defence, accessed May 30, 2021, <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/sri-lanka-navy-commander-visits-wenzhou-warship-china-navy-in-sri-lanka.43910/>.

<sup>309</sup> “China Merchants, Spence Picked for Colombo Port Deal,” *Bloomberg.Com*, August 30, 2010, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-08-30/china-merchants-aitken-spence-may-win-colombo-terminal-deal-silva-says>.

project.<sup>310</sup> Less than three weeks later, the destroyer *Lanzhou* arrived at the Colombo port for a five-day visit to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sri Lankan Navy.<sup>311</sup>

As mentioned above, when the second escort task force was relieved on 1 August 2009, the frigate *Huangshan* and replenishment ship *Weishanhu* sailed to Karachi, Pakistan for a four-day visit.<sup>312</sup> By 2009, Karachi had emerged as an important waypoint for PLAN ships. Frequent port calls had also facilitated closer military-to-military ties between Pakistan's navy and the PLAN, which was evident in March of the same year when the *Guangzhou* participated in the two-week long AMAN-09 naval exercises in the Arabian Sea for the second time.<sup>313</sup> During this period, Pakistan also solidified itself as one of Beijing's most dependent clients. The global financial crisis left Pakistan in need of billions of dollars to sure up its sovereign debt, which was partially provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF); however, Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani traveled to Beijing in February 2009 to ask for Chinese assistance in order to stave off default.<sup>314</sup>

In the lead up to the August port visit, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari was also extremely active in pleading his case to Beijing. On 17 April 2009, he met with Wen Jiabao in Sanya, Hainan Province.<sup>315</sup> According to the Chinese embassy, Premier Wen said, "consolidation and development of China-Pakistan relations serve as a priority of China's foreign policy. As an all-weather friend of Pakistan, China is ready to offer help within its ability for the country's stability and development, and also welcomes the international community's constructive role in this

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<sup>310</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, "Special Envoy of President Hu Jintao to Visit Sri Lanka," November 11, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t769458.htm>.

<sup>311</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Chinese Destroyer Lanzhou Arrives in Sri Lanka - China.Org.Cn," December 8, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-12/08/content\\_21500615.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-12/08/content_21500615.htm).

<sup>312</sup> Kosteka, "Places and Bases: The Chinese Navy's Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean," 72.

<sup>313</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Second Phase of AMAN 09 Military Exercises Begins," March 10, 2009, <http://english.sina.com/world/p/2009/0309/224471.html>.

<sup>314</sup> Michael F. Martin and K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan's Capital Crisis: Implications for U.S. Policy," *Congressional Research Service Report to Congress*, March 6, 2009, 2.

<sup>315</sup> In an unusual departure from diplomatic norms, Zardari declared that he would visit a different Chinese province each quarter during his time in office—naturally at Beijing's expense. One of these visits occurred after the August port visit in Guangdong. For details see, [http://www.china.org.cn/international/2009-08/25/content\\_18400489.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/international/2009-08/25/content_18400489.htm)

regard.”<sup>316</sup> Zardari also met with Hu Jintao in Yekaterinburg, Russia, on 15 June, where President Hu provided similar assurance, repeating the term “all-weather friendship” to describe China-Pakistan relations. “The China-Pakistan friendship will grow ever more solid no matter how the international situation and the domestic circumstances of the two countries evolve.”<sup>317</sup>

Within this context, the port visit by the *Huangshan* and *Weishanhu* can be seen as an operational necessity, but also as a signal of Beijing’s support through naval signaling.

The decision to split up the task force was significant since the *Shenzhen* made a near simultaneous visit to Pakistan’s traditional rival, India. Arriving on 8 August, the warship made a four-day stop at Kochi (Cochin) naval air station on India’s southwest coast. It is also worth noting that the *Shenzhen* had been the last PLAN ship to visit India in 2005, also at Kochi. The ship’s return coincided with the 13th China-India Boundary Talks, which took place in New Delhi on 7-8 August 2009. China’s State Councilor Dai Bingguo and Indian Special Representative, M.K. Narayanan, agreed to continue the negotiation process in future talks to be held in China, as well as ways to further develop China-India Strategic Cooperative Partnership.<sup>318</sup> The dates of the Boundary Talks had been announced in June when Hu Jintao met with Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, during bilateral talks in Yekaterinburg, Russia—the same day President Hu met with Pakistan’s President Zardari.<sup>319 320</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Ireland, “Chinese Premier Meets with Pakistani President,” April 18, 2009, <http://ie.china-embassy.org/eng/NewsPress/t558272.htm>.

<sup>317</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Chinese President Hu Jintao Meets with Pakistani Counterpart Zardari,” June 15, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2757\\_663518/2759\\_663522/t568479.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2757_663518/2759_663522/t568479.shtml).

<sup>318</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “China, India Hold 13th Boundary Talks,” August 10, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2711\\_663426/2713\\_663430/t577823.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2711_663426/2713_663430/t577823.shtml).

<sup>319</sup> Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China in San Francisco, “Chinese President Hu Jintao Meets with Indian Prime Minister Singh,” June 15, 2009, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t568483.htm>.

<sup>320</sup> “Manmohan Meets Hu Jintao, Boundary Talks Set for Aug 7-8,” Hindustan Times, June 15, 2009, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/manmohan-meets-hu-jintao-boundary-talks-set-for-aug-7-8/story-gxSgI6yE2P6yELeQtW0tzH.html>.

The timing of the *Shenzhen's* visit was potentially fraught with diplomatic risk given that its overlap with the boundary talks could have been interpreted as a show of force rather than a signal of assurance. However, it appears that the steady beat of leadership engagements continued apace with meetings between Wen Jiabao and Prime Minister Singh in October and December, 2009.<sup>321 322</sup>

### *South America (2009)*

One of the PLAN's significant regional deployments took place in 2009 when the destroyer *Shijiazhuang* and replenishment ship *Hongzhu* sailed to South America, making visits to Chile, Peru, and Ecuador.<sup>323</sup> At the time, the *Shijiazhuang* was the newest destroyer in the PLAN fleet. The last PLAN presence in South America was in 2002 during the *Guangzhou's* round-the-world voyage, which included stops in Peru, Ecuador, and Brazil. Previous visits had been to host countries that were among China's largest trade partners and recipients of Chinese investment in South America, particularly raw material suppliers. Beyond trade, the PLAN port visits indicate Beijing's diplomatic priorities and broader interest in the region. Hu Jintao's trip's in 2004 and 2008 were certainly representative of this shift, as were the reciprocal visits by South American leaders.

The *Shijiazhuang* and *Hongzhu* arrived in the Chilean port of Valparaiso on 23 November for a typical four-day exchange with the Chilean Navy. However, only ten days earlier, Hu Jintao met with Chile's President Michelle Bachelet Jeria in Singapore, during that year's APEC summit. According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President Bachelet offered that, "Chile is ready to

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<sup>321</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Indian Counterpart Singh," October 24, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2711\\_663426/2713\\_663430/t623101.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2711_663426/2713_663430/t623101.shtml).

<sup>322</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in San Francisco, "Wen Jiabao Meets with Indian Prime Minister Singh," December 18, 2009, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t647041.htm>.

<sup>323</sup> People's Daily, "Chinese Navy Fleet Arrives in Ecuador for Goodwill Visit." According to Xinhua's reporting on the Ecuador port visit, the ships were headed to French Polynesia; however, there is no other information available about this potential stop.

play an active role in advancing China-Latin America relations.” Following their meeting, the two heads-of-state attended a signing ceremony in which multiple agreements were formalized.<sup>324</sup>

Callao, Peru, was the PLAN’s next port of call, which appears to be the most momentous diplomatic visit of the voyage. It ended with the enactment of the Peru-China free trade agreement and steadfast Peruvian support for Chinese activities in South America. It was also memorable due to Hu Jintao’s meeting with Peruvian president, Alan Garcia, on 13 November in Singapore, in which president Hu specifically mentioned the port visit.

After Peru, the *Shijiazhuang* and *Hongzhu* arrived in Guayaquil, Ecuador, on 11 December for a four-day visit. The China-Ecuador relationship developed dramatically after Rafael Correa became president in January 2007, shifting Ecuador sharply toward the political left. He was invited to Beijing in November 2007 for an elaborate welcome ceremony and meetings with Hu Jintao.<sup>325</sup> When Ecuador defaulted on its global debt obligations in 2008, Beijing became the country’s lender of last resort. But Chinese state banks were not willing to lend to the recalcitrant debtor for high interest rates alone—Beijing wanted Ecuador’s oil. In July 2009, PetroEcuador signed an agreement with PetroChina to pay back Ecuador’s loans with Orient and Napa crude. In August, Ecuador received a \$1 billion advance at a 7.25% interest rate.<sup>326 327</sup> President Correa also received a visit from Sun Zhengcai, Minister of Agriculture and Special Envoy of the Chinese Government, on 10 August, who was in Quito to attend the Ecuadorian President’s inauguration after being reelected in

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<sup>324</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Hu Jintao Meets with Chilean President Bachelet,” November 13, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3478\\_665028/3480\\_665032/t627716.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3478_665028/3480_665032/t627716.shtml).

<sup>325</sup> Consulate-General of the People’s Republic of China-San Francisco, “Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Ecuadorian President Correa,” November 20, 2007, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/xw/t383174.htm>.

<sup>326</sup> “Ecuador Negotiates \$1 Billion Loan With China,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2010, sec. Business, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704898504575342731104821918>.

<sup>327</sup> Mercedes Alvaro, “China, Ecuador Sign \$2 Billion Loan Deal,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2011, sec. World News, <https://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304314404576412373916029508.html>.



April.<sup>328</sup> Just prior to the December 2009 port visit, Jia Qinglin, Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) National Committee, flew to Quito for meetings with President Correa and Speaker of the Ecuadorian National Congress Fernando Cordero on 24 November 2009, reportedly to discuss deepening cooperation.<sup>329</sup>

Three weeks later, *Shijiazhuang* and *Hongzhu* arrived, led by Wang Fushan, vice-commander of the North Sea Fleet. The PLAN had not paid a visit to Ecuador since the *Qingdao* and *Taicang* made a call in 2002. During his remarks, Rear Admiral Wang offered, “the visit would be conducive to deepening the friendship and understanding between the two countries’ militaries.” Two months later, in February, the port visit was followed by more high-level engagement in South America and the Caribbean, including Ecuador. Vice-premier, Hui Liangyu, made stops in Argentina, Barbados, Ecuador, and the Bahamas, while China’s Vice-President Xi Jinping made official visits to Jamaica, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Mexico.<sup>330</sup>

### *Oceania*

In the late summer of 2010, the *Zheng He*, along with the frigate *Mianyang*, departed for a three-month deployment to Oceania, which included port visits to Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Tonga, New Zealand, and Australia. The 360 crew members and 208 cadets onboard were commanded by Rear Admiral Leng Zhenqing, PLAN Deputy Chief of Staff. Beyond the ambitious number of countries visited, the voyage was significant in multiple ways. First, it was the first time the *Zheng He* made a cadet cruise accompanied by a combatant warship. Commissioned in 2005, the *Mianyang* was a highly capable Jiangwei II class frigate, emblematic of the PLAN’s successful

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<sup>328</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Nepal, “Ecuadorian President Correa Meets with Sun Zhengcai, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government,” August 12, 2009, <http://np.china-embassy.org/eng/zgwj/t578642.htm>.

<sup>329</sup> People’s Daily, “China, Ecuador Pledge Further Cooperation of Mutual Benefit,” November 25, 2009, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/6823848.html>.

<sup>330</sup> Jamestown Foundation, “China’s Maturing Relationship with Latin America.”

modernization program. Second, the *Zheng He* hosted midshipmen from the Royal New Zealand Navy and Royal Australian Navy for onboard training during one leg of the trip, along with 208 cadets from all four PLA naval academies (Dalian Naval Command College, the Naval Engineering University, Naval Aviation Engineering College and Bengbu Naval Training School), including 20 female cadets.<sup>331 332</sup>

More importantly, the voyage was a noteworthy example of the PLAN “stepping out” in support of one of Beijing’s core interests—national unification with Taiwan. By 2010, only a few states in Africa still recognized Taiwan, with the bulk of the holdouts concentrated in Oceania and the Americas. It may seem intuitive that Beijing would use port call diplomacy as a display of naval strength to coerce these holdouts into abandoning Taiwan; however, that is not the case. Instead, Beijing has rewarded states that switch recognition from Taiwan to Beijing with various forms of financial inducements— even direct bribes. The *Zheng He* and *Mianyang’s* presence was in part to enhance relations with Oceania’s most important states, but it was also a signal to the region’s remaining holdouts. Beyond well-known financial incentives, the *Zheng He* and *Mianyang’s* presence provided visible evidence of China’s naval power and willingness to use it for the benefit of those states that support Beijing. Viewed through this lens, Beijing’s use of port call diplomacy in regions with a significant number of states that still support Taiwan might be described as a “fear of missing out” or FOMO strategy.

The task force’s first port of call was Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG), in late August. During a deck-reception onboard the *Zheng He*, the Chinese Ambassador, Qiu Bohua, welcomed a distinguished group of local guests, including the Deputy Prime Minister, Governor of

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<sup>331</sup> New Zealand Defense Force Media Center, “Chinese Ships to Visit Auckland,” September 10, 2010, [www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/feature-stories/2010/20100909-cstva.htm](http://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/feature-stories/2010/20100909-cstva.htm).

<sup>332</sup> China.org, “Chinese Navy Ships Visit New Zealand,” September 11, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-09/11/content\\_20910137.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-09/11/content_20910137.htm).

the national capital district, and several high-ranking officers from the PNG Defense Forces, such as its commanding officer, chief-of-staff, and chief of operations. Naturally, the ambassador made the obligatory connection between the training ship's name and Zheng He, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Chinese naval hero. "China was the most powerful country in the world with 30 percent of the global GDP at the time," Qiu Bohua offered. "Leading the most powerful fleet in the world, Zheng He made seven voyages to the Western Seas, bringing porcelain, silk and tea, rather than bloodshed, plundering or colonialism. They also brought those countries tranquility and wellbeing by helping them fight pirates."<sup>333</sup>

It is impossible to know whether this overly-simplified analogy resonated with the audience onboard the *Zheng He*, but Beijing had already demonstrated its willingness to invest money and diplomatic capital to ensure PNG's adherence to the One China Policy.

Papua New Guinea was long seen as a prize for both Beijing and Taipei given its prominent role among Pacific island nations. In May 2008, Taiwan's foreign minister, vice premier, and vice-defense minister all resigned after the disclosure that Taiwan had lost \$30 million it intended to pay PNG for the country's diplomatic recognition to Taipei.<sup>334</sup> Beijing followed up with a military aid package to PNG that included up to three years of training in China for PNG Defense Force officers and the money to refurbish the Defense Force's headquarters in Port Moresby. This was also significant because Australia, New Zealand, and the United States have traditionally provided this sort of military aid and training.<sup>335</sup> A year later, on 14 April 2009, Hu Jintao met with Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Michael Thomas Somare in the Great Hall of the People, during an

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<sup>333</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Papua New Guinea, "Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Mr. Qiu Bohua at the Deck-Reception," August 23, 2010, <http://pg.china-embassy.org/eng/xwdt/t726103.htm>.

<sup>334</sup> Jonathan Adams, "3 Taiwan Officials Quit in Diplomatic Furor," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2008, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/07/world/asia/07taiwan.html>.

<sup>335</sup> "Concern in PNG at Defence Training Links with China," RNZ, May 19, 2008, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/177211/concern-in-png-at-defence-training-links-with-china>.

official visit to attend the Bo'ao Forum for Asia (BFA) in China's Hainan province. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Hu appreciated Papua New Guinea's unswerving adherence to the one-China policy and support for China's peaceful reunification." President Hu also proposed greater cooperation across "trade, agriculture, forestry, fishery, telecommunications, transportation, resources and energy for the benefit of both countries and their peoples." For his part, Somare stated that PNG, "respected China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and adhered to the one-China policy. He also thanked China for its "disinterested assistance."<sup>336</sup> The next day, the prime minister met with Wen Jiabao and signed a series of cooperative agreements.<sup>337</sup>

The visit by the PLAN task force was an escalation in the relationship from Chinese built roads, and free medical supplies into the security realm. Only weeks after the *Zheng He* and *Mianyang* left Port Morsby, Wen Jiabao again made time to meet with Prime Minister Somara, who was in Tianjin, China, for the Summer Davos forum. As if speaking to the wider region, Premier Wen offered, "As a friend and partner of Pacific island countries, China will continue to provide assistance within its capacity for this region's development," In response, Somare indicated that he was ready to accept larger Chinese involvement in PNG. "Applauding China's unselfish help for Papua New Guinea's national construction, Somare said his country welcomes the investment by Chinese enterprises to push forward bilateral friendly cooperation."<sup>338</sup>

The *Zheng He* and *Mianyang* arrived in Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, on 27 August 2010 for a four-day visit. During his meeting with Vanuatu Prime Minister Edward Natapei, Rear Admiral

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<sup>336</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Meets with Papua New Guinea's Prime Minister Somare," April 14, 2009, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gilb\\_664818/3417\\_664890/3419\\_664894/t557597.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gilb_664818/3417_664890/3419_664894/t557597.shtml).

<sup>337</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with His Papua New Guinean Counterpart Somare," April 15, 2009, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceie/eng/NewsPress/t557785.htm>.

<sup>338</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Meets with Foreign Leaders Attending the Summer Davos Forum," September 13, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gilb\\_664818/3417\\_664890/3419\\_664894/t752929.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gilb_664818/3417_664890/3419_664894/t752929.shtml).

Leng Zhenqing explained that the visit, “is aimed at enhancing friendship and strengthening military cooperation between China and Vanuatu.” In addition, the timing of the call was intended to coincide with Vanuatu’s 30th anniversary of independence.<sup>339</sup> Like Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu is among the Pacific island nations that Taipei and Beijing have fought over for diplomatic recognition. Vanuatu has traditionally aligned with the PRC, but on 3 November 2004, Vanuatu's Prime Minister Serge Vohor announced that he was switching recognition to Taipei. “We do not refuse to be friends with China, but the decision was made based on the welfare of our people,” he explained during a news conference in Taipei.<sup>340</sup> One week later, the prime minister was ousted from office in a no confidence vote and a new government nullified all agreements with Taiwan.<sup>341</sup>

Since 2004, Beijing has increased its investments and diplomatic interest in Vanuatu, leading many to speculate that the island may be a future site for a permanent PLA base, from which to project naval power into the Pacific.<sup>342</sup> Despite denials on all sides, Vanuatu receives disproportionate diplomatic attention from Beijing. For example, just four months before Vanuatu Prime Minister Edward Natapei welcomed Rear Admiral Leng, he was Wen Jiabao’s guest in the Great Hall of the People, where the two met to discuss further Chinese support, and of course, reaffirm Vanuatu’s recognition of Beijing. Premier Wen offered that “China would continue to provide aid to Vanuatu without political strings attached for Vanuatu's economic development.” For his part, Natapei stated that “Vanuatu cherished its friendship with China and would continue to adhere to the one-China policy.” He also thanked China “for showing understanding and support

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<sup>339</sup> China.org, “Chinese Navy Ships Makes First Visit to Vanuatu - China.Org.Cn,” August 27, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-08/27/content\\_20808896.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-08/27/content_20808896.htm).

<sup>340</sup> BBC, “Taiwan Forges Ties with Vanuatu,” November 3, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3977205.stm>.

<sup>341</sup> BBC, “Vanuatu Scraps Deal with Taiwan,” December 16, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4101169.stm>.

<sup>342</sup> Greg Torode Wen Philip, “Explainer: Possible Chinese Military Base in S.Pacific Fills Gap, Sends Strong Message to U.S. and Allies,” *Reuters*, April 10, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-defence-vanuatu-base-explainer-idUSKBN1HH1B4>.

for the development of Pacific small island states over the years.”<sup>343</sup> According to Vanuatu’s acting Internal Affairs Minister at the time, it was during this visit to Beijing that Natapei requested that China send its warships to commemorate Vanuatu’s 30th anniversary of independence.<sup>344</sup>

When the *Zheng He* and *Mianyang* arrived in Nuku‘alufa on 3 September, it was the PLAN’s first visit to the Kingdom of Tonga. As in Vanuatu, Rear-Admiral Leng had access to Tonga’s top leadership, including the prime minister, foreign minister, and commander of the Tongan Defense Forces. Nuku‘alufa and Beijing only established diplomatic ties in 1998, but Beijing had maintained high-level engagement since the mid-2000s, including a meeting on 18 October 2004 between Hu Jintao and Tongan King Taufa‘ahau Tupou IV at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.<sup>345</sup>

In April 2006, Wen Jiabao became the first Chinese premier to visit the Pacific island nations. When he arrived in Fiji, Wen was accompanied by a large contingent of government officials and business leaders, as part of a “diplomatic offensive” in the Pacific. Wen met with Fiji’s Prime Minister Qarase and signed five bilateral aid and cooperation agreements with Fiji before opening the first China-Pacific Islands Countries Economic Development and Cooperation Forum of which Tonga is a member.<sup>346</sup> Two years later, Wen Jiabao hosted Tongan Prime Minister Feleti Vaka'uta Sevele at the Great Hall of the People, where the two leaders oversaw a signing ceremony for additional cooperative agreements. And in 2008, Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao both met with the new King of Tonga, King Tupou V. President Hu held a lavish welcome ceremony for the King in

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<sup>343</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Vanuatu Prime Minister Natapei,” April 12, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3442\\_664940/3444\\_664944/t679439.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3442_664940/3444_664944/t679439.shtml).

<sup>344</sup> Radio New Zealand, “Chinese Navy Makes First Vanuatu Visit,” RNZ, August 27, 2010, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/192254/chinese-navy-makes-first-vanuatu-visit>.

<sup>345</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Hu Jintao Meets with Tongan King Taufa‘ahau Tupou IV,” October 19, 2004, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3427\\_664910/3429\\_664914/t166067.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3427_664910/3429_664914/t166067.shtml).

<sup>346</sup> Radio New Zealand, “Wen Jiabao Makes First Ever Visit Chinese Leader to Fiji,” RNZ, April 4, 2006, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/161269/wen-jiabao-makes-first-ever-visit-chinese-leader-to-fiji>.

Sanya, Hainan Province (Also the location of one China's largest naval bases), after which another signing ceremony took place. During his remarks, King Tupou V declared, "On the Taiwan question, Tonga firmly adhered to the one-China policy. It also supported the measures adopted by China to handle the incident that sabotaged social order in Lhasa, capital of the southwest Tibet Autonomous Region. China's affairs can only be tackled by China and no interference from any foreign country was acceptable." According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "President Hu thanked the king for his remarks."<sup>347 348</sup>

As usual, when the Chinese warships arrived in September 2010, they were warmly welcomed by the local Chinese community. However, the presence of the PLAN in Nuku'alufa must have been particularly reassuring to the small ethnic Chinese minority of Tonga, in light of persistent anti-Chinese sentiment. The number of Chinese immigrants in Tonga was artificially elevated during the 1990s when Tonga began selling passports to Chinese citizens in anticipation of the Hong Kong turn-over in 1997. However, most were bought by rural Chinese, who came to Tonga for greater opportunity. The new businesses they built in Nuku'alufa's eventually led to competition with the local population and widespread resentment.<sup>349</sup> In November 2006, rioting took place in the capital in response to a lack of political reforms, which led to looting and assaults against ethnic Chinese and their businesses. Eventually Beijing sent an Air China plane to evacuate 200 Chinese nationals<sup>350</sup> However, Beijing remained engaged and provided \$108 million in loans to rebuild the capital, as well as an \$11 million government building that came as a gift from Beijing.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Tonga, "Wen Jiabao Meets with Tongan King Tupou V," April 14, 2008, <http://to.chineseembassy.org/eng/tjjs/t425801.htm>.

<sup>348</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Tonga, "President Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Tongan King Tupou V," April 10, 2008, <http://to.chineseembassy.org/eng/tjjs/t424817.htm>.

<sup>349</sup> Nick Perry, "China Comes to Tonga," *The Diplomat*, July 1, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/china-comes-to-tonga/>.

<sup>350</sup> China Daily, "Chinese Citizens Evacuated in Tonga," November 23, 2006, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-11/23/content\\_740382.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2006-11/23/content_740382.htm).

<sup>351</sup> Nick Perry, "China Comes to Tonga."

To China's domestic audience and the Chinese on Tonga, the *Zheng He* and *Mianyang* were obvious reminders that China now had the power to protect its people in the event their safety was threatened again.

The PLAN had been making port calls to New Zealand since the guided missile destroyer *Qingdao* and the training ship, *Shichang*, first paid a visit in 1998. Chinese combatants had made calls in 2001, 2003, and 2007, as Beijing made steady progress bringing New Zealand into its economic and diplomatic orbit. New Zealand's economic dependence on Chinese trade was apparent in the country's "three firsts" with China as described by Prime Minister Helen Clarke during an interview with People's Daily in 2005: "New Zealand was the first developed country to conclude a bilateral market access agreement with China for its entry to the World Trade Organization; the first to recognize China's status as a market economy, and the first country to enter FTA negotiations with China."<sup>352</sup> In April 2008, Prime Minister Clark flew to China to sign the China-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA), another first for a developed country. The reciprocal leader engagements continued with a 2009 visit by Clark's successor, Prime Minister John Key, and a visit to New Zealand by Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping in June 2010.<sup>353</sup>

Just two months prior to the *Zheng He's* arrival, Key again traveled to Beijing to meet with Wen Jiabao on 7 July 2010. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Wen "called on the two countries to cement trust and coordination on the basis of mutual respect, mutual benefits and seeking common grounds while putting aside differences in a bid to push bilateral ties to a higher level." He also offered that they should "explore new mechanisms and ways of cooperation." Prime Minister Key replied that "New Zealand is ready to work with China to push forward bilateral ties."

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<sup>352</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, "NEW ZEALAND-CHINA RELATIONS: COMMON POINTS AND DIFFERENCES," *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 10, no. 2 (December 1, 2008): 16, <https://www.nzasia.org.nz/journal.html#allissues>.

<sup>353</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "A Model of Country-to-Country Relations: 'Our Firsts' in History of China-New Zealand Ties - Xinhua | English.News.Cn," March 1, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/25/c\\_136156771.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/25/c_136156771.htm).



As usual, the meeting was followed by a signing ceremony during which New Zealand and China entered into further cooperative agreements in the areas of culture, science and technology.<sup>354</sup>

Within this larger, permissive context, the PLAN was warmly received in Auckland on 11 September 2010. The Chinese ships were open to the public, and the PLAN band played a public concert, as well as a performance at the Edmund Hillary Retirement Village. The Chinese cadets visited Devonport Naval Base and competed against their counterparts from the Royal New Zealand Navy (RNZN) in basketball, soccer and tug of war. Finally, Rear Admiral Leng held a reception onboard the *Zheng He* and gave interviews to the local media.<sup>355</sup> As mentioned above, two RNZN midshipmen and two others from the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) joined the *Zheng He's* cadets and crew for at-sea training when the Chinese task force departed on 15 September for Sydney, Australia.

When the task force arrived on 20 September, they were greeted by a navy band, lion dancers, and members of the Chinese community in Sydney, who cheered and waved Chinese and Australian flags. According to Xinhua, Rear Admiral Stephen Gilmore of the RAN offered: "This visit ... is a sign of the growing maturity in our defense relationship with China... We have similar strategic views on many things ...we certainly wish to exchange ideas and thoughts and visit on a more routine basis."<sup>356</sup> During their stay, the PLAN personnel visited Australian Navy ships and bases, before sailing on to the northern city of Darwin, where the Chinese officers met with the RAN's acting commander of Northern Headquarters and Chief Minister Paul Henderson.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with New Zealand Prime Minister John Key," July 7, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3412\\_664880/3414\\_664884/t715091.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3412_664880/3414_664884/t715091.shtml).

<sup>355</sup> New Zealand Defense Force Media Center, "Chinese Ships to Visit Auckland."

<sup>356</sup> China.org, "Chinese Navy Ships Receive Warm Welcome in Sydney - China.Org.Cn," September 20, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-09/20/content\\_20975104.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2010-09/20/content_20975104.htm).

<sup>357</sup> "Chinese Sailors Hit Darwin Streets," Text, ABC News, October 3, 2010, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2010-10-03/chinese-sailors-hit-darwin-streets/2283050>.

However, the real maturation in military relations was taking place simultaneously in the Yellow Sea off China's Shandong Peninsula, where the RAN and PLAN held a naval exercise, which included the use of live ammunition for the first time. The *HMAS Warramunga* and the Chinese frigate, *Louyang*, conducted simulated helicopter missions, search and rescue operations, as well as the "live-fire" portion of the exercise. According to media reports, the commanding officer of the *HMAS Warramunga*, Commander Bruce Legge, said "the war games were an effective way to build trust and friendship." He dismissed concerns that the United States Navy was not invited.<sup>358</sup> Only weeks after the *Zheng He* and *Mianyang* departed Darwin, Wen Jiabao met with Australia's newly elected Prime Minister, Julia Gillard in Hanoi, Vietnam, to discuss further cooperation.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> "Australia, China Conduct Live-Fire Naval Exercise in Yellow Sea," Voice of America, September 20, 2010, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia/australia-china-conduct-live-fire-naval-exercise-yellow-sea>.

<sup>359</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, "Wen Jiabao Meets with His Australian Counterpart Gillard," October 30, 2010, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zgyw/t765848.htm>.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Saturation (2010-2018)*

In chapters two, three, and four, I've addressed how and why Beijing increased its use of port call diplomacy as part of its diplomatic strategy. In this chapter, I explore the question of whether or not it is succeeding. By success, I mean that PLAN port visits are associated with the progression or elevation of bilateral relations between Beijing and a host country. In other words, there is evidence of further incremental movement toward alignment with Beijing. Failure would be a negative reaction, including a downturn in relations or any indications that a host country is moving in the opposite direction, wary of Chinese power and future coercion. This is accomplished by looking at case studies of port visits and diplomatic activity surrounding them. Fine grained detail is necessary to evaluate the direction of relations before and after a ship visit. However, one of the primary pursuits of this project is to uncover any potential systematic relationship between PLAN visits and alignment behavior by the states that receive Chinese ships. To do so, I conclude the chapter with statistical analysis to determine the association between PLAN visits and alignment with Beijing along political, economic, and security dimensions.

It is worth noting up front that the dramatic expansion of PLAN port call diplomacy that occurred in 2009-2010 only continued in the years through 2018, along with the previously identified patterns. First, PLAN visits were fully integrated into Beijing's larger diplomatic strategy with several meaningful pivot points. The number of individual ship visits increased again between 2013-2015, likely in response to China's diplomatic turn toward "peripheral diplomacy," which emerged from the "Peripheral Diplomacy Work Conference" in October 2013. As Shambaugh explains, the fact that peripheral diplomacy was discussed at the Central Committee level with Xi Jinping chairing the

conference speaks to its importance.<sup>360</sup> <sup>361</sup> Elsewhere, Heath explains that the core tasks of PLAN naval diplomacy were outlined during the February 2015 PLAN Foreign Affairs Work Conference, which brought PLAN efforts in line with previous conferences.<sup>362</sup> With this doctrinal clarity, it is no surprise that PLAN port visits reached a new peak in 2015 and then skyrocketed further in 2017, evidently in support of BRI projects worldwide.

Second, the linkage between port visits and high-level leadership engagements remained intact when Xi Jinping succeeded Hu Jintao, first as General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman of the Central Military Commission in November, 2012, and then President of the People's Republic of China in March, 2013. The same year, Li Keqiang succeeded Wen Jiabao as premier and Wang Yi assumed the role of foreign minister previously held by Yang Jiechi, who was elevated to Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission (often referred to as State Councilor).

Third, after 2010 the PLAN used its full complement of platforms, including combatants, the hospital ship *Daishandao*, and the training ship *Zheng He* on diplomatic missions. The naval escort mission in the Gulf of Aden, and resupply points established at Salalah, Djibouti, and Aden, PLAN task forces expanded the reach of diplomatic voyages. After the *Daishandao's* maiden voyage in 2010, the ship deployed most years on what Beijing called *Harmonious Missions*, which included voyages to every region of the world except the Middle East. The *Zheng He's* operational tempo also increased to include the PLAN's first single ship voyage around the globe in 2012. With increasing consistency, PLAN port calls were linked to leadership engagements in pursuit of specific Chinese

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<sup>360</sup> Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," 96.

<sup>361</sup> Timothy Heath, "Diplomacy Work Forum: Xi Steps Up Efforts to Shape a China-Centered Regional Order," Jamestown, November 7, 2013, <https://jamestown.org/program/diplomacy-work-forum-xi-steps-up-efforts-to-shape-a-china-centered-regional-order/>.

<sup>362</sup> Heath, "China Maritime Report No. 8: Winning Friends and Influencing People: Naval Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics," 10.

foreign policy objectives. The surge in port calls between 2009 and 2018 represented a dramatic projection of naval power worldwide with uncertain outcomes for Beijing.

Throughout this chapter, I pay particular attention to three measures of alignment with Beijing—military exercises, port deals now under the BRI, and partnership agreements. Militaries are a means of last resort—the final guarantor of sovereignty, territorial integrity and ultimately state survival, so collaboration between militaries is a higher form of signaling, and in many cases, it connotes the strengthening of political ties. When a state deploys its capability in the context of a military exercise, its leaders are revealing power, but also signaling some measure of trust in the exercise partner, or shared interests. This cooperation is also visible to a wider audience of states, which may alter their assessment of the relationship between the exercise partners with implications in their own cost-benefit analysis. It is worth mentioning that a bilateral exercise is a more realistic sign of a relationship than multilateral exercises. It is therefore more significant for China to hold a bilateral exercise with the visited country.

In most cases, a port visit is the initial military-to-military engagement between the PLA and the defense forces of other states. The port visit is relatively low risk for host militaries, but it opens the door to follow-on military diplomacy, including senior officer visits and joint exercises. By making the jump from the economic sphere to the military domain, a port visit can transform Beijing's image from lender-of-last-resort to great power partner. As Beijing's military power grows, it will increase the asymmetry in these military-to-military engagements, making China the dominant partner in the relationship.

The BRI is a second Chinese framework that helps measure incremental movement toward Beijing—particularly port projects. In 2013, President Xi unveiled the concept during a speech at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan. The proposal was purported to enhance mutual trust,

friendship, cooperation, development, and prosperity for the people of Central Asia.<sup>363</sup> President Xi's speech in Astana was followed by another before the Indonesian Parliament to announce China's 21<sup>st</sup>- Century Maritime Silk Road with similar stated goals. Taken together, the BRI will likely provide the vehicle for China's foreign policy efforts for the duration of President Xi's tenure. If Beijing's plan works, the BRI could affect 4.4 billion people, or 63 percent of the world's population, which accounts for \$21 trillion, or 29 percent of global wealth.<sup>364</sup> This increased connectivity would have profound implications for China's economic, diplomatic, and security relationships worldwide. While advertised as a "win-win" to build cooperation and integration with neighbors and distant partners, there is little doubt that Beijing's underlying motivation is to ensure economic access and restore its own centrality in Asia as an alternative to the U.S. dominated order.

Port projects are particularly consequential in this regard because they involve the physical entry of trade goods, as well as access to a country's internal distribution network. For this reason, port deals are coveted by Beijing and politically complicated for states that enter into agreements with Chinese state-owned enterprises. There is also heightened sensitivity around Chinese port projects and host-nation sovereignty due to global media coverage of high-profile defaults and the subsequent loss of collateral assets to Beijing. The Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, which is now under a 99-year lease to Beijing, is most often used as a cautionary tale to illustrate what many have branded "debt-trap diplomacy." Within this context, a state's decision to allow a Chinese state-owned enterprise to fund, build, and especially operate one of its ports, is a sign of closer ties with Beijing. However, Chinese investments are notoriously hard to track due to high volume and opacity; however, the data here contain over 100 individual port projects in 63 different countries

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<sup>363</sup> People's Republic of China, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries," found at: [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh\\_665686/t1076334.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml)

<sup>364</sup> Christopher K. Johnson, "President Xi Jinping's 'Belt and Road' Initiative," found at <http://csis.org/publication/president-xi-jinpings-belt-and-road-initiative>

based on press reporting and secondary sources. In this analysis the term “project” encompasses increased Chinese involvement in foreign ports from construction, to operations, and finally long-term commercial or military lease agreements.

The third measure of movement toward Beijing is the bilateral partnership agreement. Partnerships, rather than formal alliances, are at the center of Beijing’s approach to diplomacy and state relations in general. China’s first partnership agreement came in 1993, when it formed a “strategic partnership” with Brazil, most likely an attempt to revive its reputation after the violence at Tiananmen in 1989. China’s partnership initiative initially focused on Russia and the United States, as a means to manage relations with the two most influential countries in a changing global hierarchy.<sup>365</sup> Since then Beijing’s partnership framework has expanded and formalized into a four-tiered system. At the bottom are countries without any partnership with Beijing. The first tier is made up of a variety of *cooperative partnerships* that focus mostly on economic opportunities with China. *Strategic partnerships* are more expansive in the areas of cooperation they codify. Finally, *comprehensive strategic partnerships* represent the top rung of the ladder, reserved for countries China holds worthy of deepest economic and diplomatic engagement. In 1998, China had only twelve partnership agreements in place; but by 2008 this number had almost tripled to thirty-four. Wen Jiabao’s 2004 speech at the China-EU Investment and Trade Forum is often cited to explain Beijing’s conception of these partnerships.<sup>366</sup>

“It is a shared view of the two sides to work for a comprehensive strategic partnership. By ‘comprehensive,’ it means that the cooperation should be all-dimensional, wide-ranging and multi-layered. It covers economic, scientific, technological, political and cultural fields, contains both bilateral and multilateral levels, and is conducted by both governments and non-governmental groups. By ‘strategic,’ it means that the cooperation should be long-term and stable, bearing on the larger picture of China-EU relations. It transcends the differences in ideology and social system and is not subjected to the impacts of individual events that occur

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<sup>365</sup> Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, “China’s Strategic Partnership Diplomacy: Engaging with a Changing World,” no. 8 (2014): 7–8.

<sup>366</sup> Zhongping and Jing, 7–8.

from time to time. By ‘partnership,’ it means that the cooperation should be equal-footed, mutually beneficial and win-win. The two sides should base themselves on mutual respect and mutual trust, endeavor to expand converging interests and seek common ground on the major issues while shelving differences on the minor ones.”<sup>367</sup>

In a sense, Beijing has created its own diplomatic framework to measure and stratify states that choose to align with China. More specifically, these agreements obligate other states to acknowledge Beijing’s elevated status—to formally recognize Beijing the way it wants to be seen. According to Yong Deng, strategic partnerships represent: “mutual acceptance of the partner states importance to each other and to the world at large. The characterization thus signals a partner’s political willingness to recognize China’s legitimate rise, to manage areas of disagreement in order to steadily improve the overall bilateral relationship, and if possible to enhance coordination in promoting their common preferences in the international arena.”<sup>368</sup>

It is this willingness to recognize China’s legitimacy that Beijing covets most. Partnership agreements codify China’s standing, as well as acknowledge China’s core interests with specific, obligatory language, usually regarding Taiwan, which is a proxy for Beijing’s legitimacy and authority. When South Africa signed a comprehensive strategic partnership with China in 2010, the joint communique captured this essential language: “South Africa also reiterated its adherence to the one-China policy and its support for the peaceful development of cross-Taiwan Straits relations and the cause of China’s national reunification.”<sup>369</sup> Even states in military alliances with the United States, such as New Zealand, are not exempt from this obligation. “New Zealand is committed to working with China to consolidate the comprehensive strategic partnership, and will continue supporting

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<sup>367</sup> Wen Jiabao, “Speech by H.E. Wen Jiabao, Premier of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China,” <http://www.chinamission.be/eng/zt/t101949.htm>.

<sup>368</sup> Deng, *China’s Struggle for Status*, 128.

<sup>369</sup> “China, South Africa Ink ‘Strategic Partnership,’” accessed October 23, 2021, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/24/content\\_11197384.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-08/24/content_11197384.htm).



Beijing on issues regarding China’s core interests and major concerns,” offered New Zealand Prime Minister John Key, after elevating his country’s relationship with Beijing.<sup>370</sup>

Due to the dramatic increase in ship visits after 2009-2010, the following analysis will remain at a higher level of abstraction than in previous chapters. It will focus on key case studies and trends in the data rather than every ship voyage and call. The chapter is also broken up by the CCP’s overarching goals of economic expansion, maritime sovereignty, and national reunification with Taiwan to demonstrate how port visits are integrated into Beijing’s larger diplomatic strategy and can actually support macro-goals. Africa and Europe are key regions for Chinese economic expansion, while Asia is clearly the crucial region for Beijing’s sovereignty disputes in the East and South China Seas. I focus on North America—the Caribbean in particular—to demonstrate how Beijing uses port call diplomacy to isolate and induce the remaining states with diplomatic ties to Taiwan. Finally, the chapter concludes with statistical analysis, which generalizes the findings and indicates a positive association between PLAN port visits and the three measures of alignment with Beijing.

### *Part I: Economic Expansion*

#### *Africa*

The PLAN escort operations in the Gulf of Aden that began in earnest in 2009 have been the most significant catalyst for increased port call diplomacy in Africa. Operational calls built local knowledge and port relationships, especially in Djibouti, Salalah, and Aden. And, as a follow-on to their escort duties, PLAN task forces made diplomatic visits to African countries linked to Chinese policy objectives, many of which have been port projects under the umbrella of Xi Jinping’s BRI. In

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<sup>370</sup> “China, New Zealand Lift Ties to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership - World - Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” accessed October 23, 2021, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014xiattendg20/2014-11/20/content\\_18948215.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014xiattendg20/2014-11/20/content_18948215.htm).

addition to displaying China's most capable surface combatants, Beijing has deployed its hospital ship, *Daishandao*, as a further positive inducement to African partners.

The available data indicates a convergence between PLAN port visits and high-level leader engagements to advance BRI port projects and bilateral partnership agreements. Overall, PLA joint exercises were relatively rare in Africa, but military-to-military cooperation began to increase after 2010. Several case studies below illustrate the sequencing of these events and the positive outcomes that resulted.

In 2013, China and Algeria did not have a partnership of any kind in place and the PLAN had never visited. That all changed when frigates *Hengyang* and *Huangshan* of the 13<sup>th</sup> naval escort task force arrived in Algiers on 2 April 2013 for a four-day visit.<sup>371</sup> Chinese press reporting does not indicate anything unusual, but the timing of the visit was extraordinary. Five days later, on 7 April, President Xi met with Abdelkader Bensalah, Algeria's President of the Council of the Nation, in Hainan province to discuss upgrading their bilateral relations.<sup>372</sup> Coordination continued, including a trip to Algiers by Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, in December to meet with Algerian President, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, to discuss moving forward on the partnership. Then on 7 June 2014, Wang Yi hosted Algeria's Foreign Minister, Ramtane Lamamra, in Beijing to sign a five-year plan for the China-Algeria comprehensive strategic partnership.<sup>373</sup> Then in 2016, Chinese state-owned enterprises China Harbour Engineering Corporation (CHEC) and China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSEC) were awarded the contract as part of a Chinese-Algerian consortium to build a

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<sup>371</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "13th Escort Taskforce of Chinese Navy Arrives at Algiers of Algeria," April 3, 2013, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/772653.shtml>.

<sup>372</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Xi Jinping Meets with President of the Council of the Nation of Algeria Abdelkader Bensalah, Agreeing to Develop Friendly Cooperation and Upgrade China-Algeria Relations," April 7, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xybfs\\_663590/gjlb\\_663594/2798\\_663596/2800\\_663600/t1029677.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2798_663596/2800_663600/t1029677.shtml).

<sup>373</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi: Practical Cooperation Between China and Algeria Enters A New Stage," June 7, 2014, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1164074.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1164074.shtml).

\$3.3 billion deep water port near the Algerian town of Cherchell. Once completed, the port will be operated by state-owned Shanghai International Port Group for a period of 25-years, which was stipulated in the conditions for Chinese financing.<sup>374</sup>

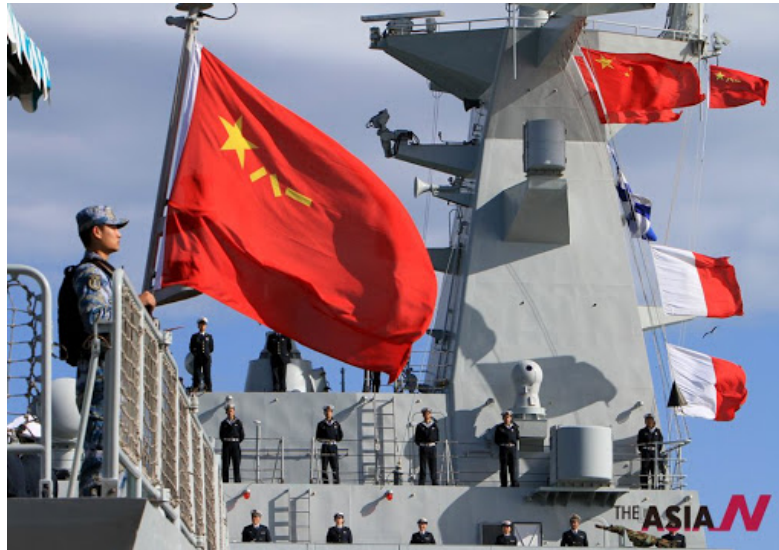


Figure 5.1 – The 13th Naval Escort Task Force in Algiers on 2 April 2013 (Xinhua)

A similar series of events took place in Angola in 2014 when the 16<sup>th</sup> escort task force arrived in Luanda Harbor on 6 June, three weeks after Premier Li Keqiang’s visit to discuss “enhancing” the existing China-Angola strategic partnership.<sup>375</sup> The bilateral agreement had been in place since 2010, the same year the port of Lobito was being developed by CHEC. On June 9, 2015, President Xi hosted Angola’s President José Eduardo dos Santos at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, where the two leaders agreed to “comprehensively deepen” their partnership.<sup>376</sup> While the

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<sup>374</sup> “Construction to Commence on \$3.3 Billion Deep-Water Port in Algeria, Backed by Chinese Financing and Chinese State-Owned Contractors,” *RWR Advisory Group* (blog), March 26, 2021, <https://www.rwradvisory.com/construction-to-commence-on-3-3-billion-deep-water-port-in-algeria-backed-by-chinese-financing-and-chinese-state-owned-contractors/>.

<sup>375</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Li Keqiang’s Visit to Angola Aimed at Enhancing Partnership,” May 16, 2014, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/sp/t1156693.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/sp/t1156693.shtml).

<sup>376</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Holds Talks with President José Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola, Stressing That China-Angola Win-Win Cooperation and Common Development Are Based on Mutual Needs, Advantages and Opportunities,” June 9, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1272383.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1272383.shtml).

language was left vague, construction at the Cabinda port began sometime in 2016, and in January 2017 it was announced that the Export-Import Bank of China was financing \$600 million of the cost.<sup>377 378</sup> Six months later, when the hospital ship, *Daishandao*, returned to Africa on its 155 day mission, it stopped in Djibouti, Sierra Leone, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Tanzania and Angola, where it spent eight days providing free medical care for the local population of Luanda.<sup>379</sup>

In the most intense instances of Beijing's port call diplomacy, a foreign leader personally experiences the PLAN ship, as Sierra Leone's President, Dr Ernest Bai Koroma, did when he came aboard the *Daishandao* on 19 September 2017 during its week-long stay in Freetown.<sup>380</sup> And, even in Namibia, where the PLAN has only made one port call in 24 years of diplomatic relations, the visit by the 16<sup>th</sup> escort task force followed talks between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Hage Geingob in Beijing.<sup>381</sup> A month after the port call, a deal was announced in which CHEC would build a new container terminal at Walvis Bay.<sup>382</sup> In every one of these cases, PLAN port visits were linked to leadership engagements, and ultimately a port to be funded or built under the BRI. See Table X for a list of port visits to African countries by ship type.

It was no coincidence that the PLAN's inaugural port visits to the African continent in 2000 were to Tanzania and South Africa. These two countries have held particular importance to Beijing

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<sup>377</sup> Turloch Mooney, "China Pumps \$600 Million into Deep-Sea Angola Port," *The Journal of Commerce* online, January 25, 2017, [https://www.joc.com/international-trade-news/infrastructure-news/africa-infrastructure-news/china-pumps-600-million-deep-sea-angola-port\\_20170125.html](https://www.joc.com/international-trade-news/infrastructure-news/africa-infrastructure-news/china-pumps-600-million-deep-sea-angola-port_20170125.html).

<sup>378</sup> Economist Intelligence Unit, "FSDEA Invests in Cabinda Port (Angola)," February 10, 2017, <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=255101409>.

<sup>379</sup> China Daily, "Navy's Peace Ark Makes Stop in Angola," October 21, 2017, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-10/21/content\\_33520108.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-10/21/content_33520108.htm).

<sup>380</sup> People's Daily, "China Is a Dependable Friend to Sierra Leone, Says President Koroma - People's Daily Online," September 19, 2017, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0928/c90000-9274935.html>.

<sup>381</sup> "The 16th Chinese Navy Escort Fleet Visit Namibia," accessed May 28, 2021, <http://na.china-embassy.org/eng/zngx/kjywh/t1165184.htm>.

<sup>382</sup> Ship Technology, "Port of Walvis Bay's New Container Terminal," accessed May 28, 2021, <https://www.ship-technology.com/projects/port-walvis-bays-new-container-terminal/>.

and are the most dramatic cases of PLAN port call diplomacy on the continent. China has been heavily involved in Tanzania since the 1970s, when it built the Tazara Railway (also called Tanzam Railway), linking the port city of Dar es Salaam to the Zambian copper belt, which allowed resources to reach the port without going through white-minority controlled South Africa or Rhodesia.<sup>383</sup> In the case of South Africa, it was the last country on the continent to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1998. However, Pretoria and Beijing became fast friends, signing the Pretoria Agreement, which established a nascent partnership in 2000.<sup>384</sup> The destroyer *Shenzhen* arrived two months later. And, when the hospital ship *Daishandao* made its maiden voyage, it should be no surprise that Dar es Salaam was one of its destinations. For Beijing, leader time and attention are perhaps the greatest diplomatic signal. After becoming President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping's first overseas trip in March 2013 included state visits to Russia, South Africa, Tanzania and the Republic of Congo.<sup>385</sup> This was a meaningful signal of Beijing's diplomatic interest in Africa, as well as the importance of African raw material commodities to China's economic future.

After the *Shenzhen's* inaugural visit in 2000, over a decade passed before the PLAN returned to South Africa. When it did, the port calls were tightly linked to the highest leadership engagements. In April 2011, two frigates from the 7<sup>th</sup> escort task force—the *Zhoushan* and the *Xuzhou*—arrived in Durban, following anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia.<sup>386</sup> A week later, Hu Jintao met with South African President, Jacob Zuma, in Sanya for the BRICS Leaders Meeting, the first for South Africa as a BRICS member. In June 2014, all three vessels of the 16<sup>th</sup> escort task force made a call to Cape Town after a voyage around the continent with stops in

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<sup>383</sup> "Tanzania-Zambia Railway: A Bridge to China?," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1971, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1971/01/29/archives/tanzaniazambia-railway-a-bridge-to-china.html>.

<sup>384</sup> "Pretoria Declaration on the Partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of South Africa."

<sup>385</sup> "President Xi Jinping Back to Beijing after State Visits to Russia, Tanzania, South Africa and the Republic of Congo and Attending Fifth BRICS Summit," March 29, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpcf1\\_665694/t1027582.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpcf1_665694/t1027582.shtml).

<sup>386</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Escort Fleet of the Chinese Navy Began Visit to South Africa," April 12, 2011, <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/zflt/eng/zfgx/rwjl/t814475.htm>.

Tunisia, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Cameroon, Angola, Namibia, and South Africa. This time it was President Xi Jinping who met President Jacob Zuma in Fortaleza, Brazil, within weeks of the port visit. From 2016 to 2019, the PLAN made annual visits to South Africa and has deepened relations with the South African Navy.

One of these visits occurred on 4 September, 2017, when a PLAN task force stopped in Cape Town the same day that Xi Jinping was meeting with the BRICS leaders in Xiamen, China. And, in 2018, the lead up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual BRICS summit, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, saw intense Chinese diplomatic activity, as well as PLAN presence. Premier Wang Yi was in Pretoria for meetings with new South African president Cyril Ramaphosa in early June, which preceded a visit by the 29<sup>th</sup> escort task force to Cape Town from 27 June to 1 July. During that time, Yang Jiechi was in Durban for the 8th Meeting of the BRICS High Representatives for Security Issues, which focused on “making political preparations” for the BRICS summit in July. Naturally, Xi Jinping arrived a month later for his third state visit to South Africa and to attend his sixth consecutive BRICSs summit. Finally, on 4 November 2019, President Xi met with President Cyril Ramaphosa in Brasilia, Brazil, to discuss further cooperation and South African support for the BRI. President Ramaphosa explained that South Africa would become the rotating chair of the African Union and pledged his support for Beijing’s core interests. Yang Jiechi and Wang Yi, were among those present.<sup>387</sup> Three weeks later, the PLAN frigate, *Weifang*, was in Cape Town for a port visit and a multinational naval exercise with ships from the Russian and South African Navies. This was the first exercise of its kind hosted by South Africa.<sup>388</sup> (add citations)

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<sup>387</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Meets with President Cyril Ramaphosa of South Africa,” November 15, 2019, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3094\\_664214/3096\\_664218/t1716907.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3094_664214/3096_664218/t1716907.shtml).

<sup>388</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Chinese Naval Warship Open to Public during Maritime Exercise in South Africa,” November 28, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/28/c\\_138589273.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/28/c_138589273.htm).

The *Daishandao's* 2010 visit to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, was followed by a call the next year from the 7<sup>th</sup> escort task force, prior to its stop at Durban, South Africa. During their stay, the Chinese naval personnel visited an elementary school and PLAN special forces conducted training with Tanzanian marines.<sup>389</sup> <sup>390</sup> However, the more significant convergence of port call diplomacy and Chinese activity in Tanzania began in 2013. Xi Jinping's inaugural overseas trip in March resulted in 15 cooperation agreements, including one for the construction of a new port at Bagamoyo, north of Dar es Salaam.<sup>391</sup> Ports are one of Beijing's greatest interests in Tanzania, both for their use in extracting natural resources from the African interior, but also as potential bases for the PLAN. On 31 December 2013, the fifteenth escort task force, which included the amphibious ship *Junggangshan* (one of the PLAN's largest platforms), arrived at the port of Dar es Salaam.<sup>392</sup> The ship's stay was embedded in a series of high-level meetings, both in Beijing and Zanzabar. An October meeting between Premier Li Keqiang and Prime Minister Mizengo Pinda in Beijing preceded the port call, while a visit by Xi Jinping's special envoy to the Presidential Palace in Zanzabar followed it, where he met with President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete on 12 January.<sup>393</sup> The next month, Premier Wang Yi held talks with Tanzania's Foreign Minister, Bernard Kamillius Membe, in Beijing.<sup>394</sup>

However, the \$10 billion port project at Bagamoyo was not supported by all Tanzanians. In fact, the cost and scale of the project became a political issue during the 2015 presidential election,

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<sup>389</sup> SINA English, "Chinese Navy Visits Elementary School in Tanzania," March 28, 2011, <http://english.sina.com/china/p/2011/0328/366337.html>.

<sup>390</sup> China Daily, "China, Tanzania Conduct Naval Joint Military Training - People's Daily Online," March 29, 2011, <http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90883/7335558.html>.

<sup>391</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "China and Tanzania," 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3099\\_664224/](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3099_664224/).

<sup>392</sup> People's Daily, "15th Chinese Naval Escort Fleet Arrives in Tanzania for Visit - People's Daily Online," December 31, 2013, <http://en.people.cn/90786/8499873.html>.

<sup>393</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President of Tanzania Meets with Jiang Weixin, Special Envoy of President Xi Jinping," January 13, 2014, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3099\\_664224/3101\\_664228/t1118963.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3099_664224/3101_664228/t1118963.shtml).

<sup>394</sup> Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in San Francisco, "Wang Yi Holds Talks with Foreign Minister Bernard Kamillius Membe of Tanzania," February 26, 2014, <http://www.chinaconsulatesf.org/eng/zgxw/t1133019.htm>.

and when a new government came into power, the project was suspended in January 2016 due to sovereignty concerns in the agreement.<sup>395</sup> Of note, when the 22<sup>nd</sup> escort task force stopped in Dar es Salaam in May 2016, there were military-to-military exchanges but no corresponding high-level engagements. Unfortunately, further information is unavailable to indicate whether Beijing was putting distance between PLAN presence and political negotiations, or whether the destroyer *Qingdao*, frigate *Daqing*, and replenishment ship *Taihu* were meant as a reminder of Chinese power. Regardless, it was almost a year later when Wang Yi again met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Augustine Philip Mahiga in Dar es Salaam. The coverage by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was full of the requisite language of friendship and cooperation, but it is noteworthy that Premier Yi spoke of infrastructure projects, including the revival of the decrepit Tazara railway, “as a symbol and milestone of China-Africa cooperation.”<sup>396</sup>

Leader engagement resumed in 2017 when both Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi held separate talks with Foreign Minister Mahinga. Port call diplomacy also picked up, first with a visit from a diplomatic task force unrelated to the antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. A Chinese task force (sometimes referred to as Task Group 150 in Chinese press reporting) comprised of destroyer *Changchun*, frigate *Jingzhou*, and replenishment ship *Chaohu*, made a stop in Dar es Salaam on 16 August 2017, as part of a goodwill voyage to 19 countries in Asia, Europe, Africa and Oceania. The visit’s familiar agenda included a welcome ceremony with 350 members of the local Chinese community and embassy officials, as well as cultural and athletic events. Speaking at the ceremony, Chinese Ambassador, Lu Youqing, highlighted the longevity of the China -Tanzania relationship:

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<sup>395</sup> The East African, “Tanzania Suspends Construction of \$10bn Bagamoyo Port,” The East African, January 6, 2016, <https://www.theeastafrican.co.kehttps://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tanzania-suspends-construction-of-10bn-bagamoyo-port-1344854>.

<sup>396</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wang Yi Holds Talks with Minister of Foreign Affairs Augustine Philip Mahiga of Tanzania,” January 10, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3099\\_664224/3101\\_664228/t1429652.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3099_664224/3101_664228/t1429652.shtml).



“Tanzania has been a longtime friend of China since the time of Tanzania's first President Julius Nyerere.”<sup>397</sup> Then on 19 November, hospital ship, *Daishandao*, arrived in Dar es Salaam for an eight-day visit to provide free medical care. At the welcome ceremony, Rear Admiral Guan Bailin said, “the visiting crew will carry out free medical services, humanitarian assistance, and conduct medical training to consolidate and promote friendly relations and deepen professional exchanges between China and Tanzania.”<sup>398</sup>

The same year, the Chinese firm behind the Bagamoyo port project, China Merchants Port, brought in the Oman Sovereign Fund and negotiated a Special Economic Zone at Bagamoyo. Construction finally began in the summer of 2018.<sup>399</sup> On 6 September 2018, President Xi Jinping met with Tanzanian Prime Minister, Kassim Majaliwa, in conjunction with the 2018 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President Xi noted that Tanzania was the first African country he visited after taking office. He also said, “the two countries should jointly promote the implementation of key (fix this) For his part, Prime Minister Majaliwa stated, “Tanzania adheres to the one-China policy, and is willing to actively participate in building the Belt and Road that benefits its infrastructure construction and industrialization, and elevate Tanzania-China relations to a new level.”<sup>400</sup>

### *Europe*

PLAN port visits are a sort of “tell” for Beijing; they telegraph strategic interest and future economic and diplomatic activity. This was certainly true in Europe, where Italy and Greece were

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<sup>397</sup> China Daily, “Chinese Naval Fleet Arrives in Tanzania for Friendly Visit - World - Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” August 18, 2017, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-08/18/content\\_30780566.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-08/18/content_30780566.htm).

<sup>398</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “Chinese Naval Hospital Ship Peace Ark Arrives in Tanzania,” November 19, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/19/c\\_136764321.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-11/19/c_136764321.htm).

<sup>399</sup> “Tanzania Pushes Back on Chinese Port Project,” The Maritime Executive, accessed May 28, 2021, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/tanzania-pushes-back-on-chinese-port-project>.

<sup>400</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Xi Meets Tanzanian Prime Minister,” September 6, 2018, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zjzg\\_663340/fzs\\_663828/gjlb\\_663832/3099\\_664224/3101\\_664228/t1593645.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzg_663340/fzs_663828/gjlb_663832/3099_664224/3101_664228/t1593645.shtml).

chosen as PLAN destinations during the first wave of port visits in 2001-2002. And in 2010, when Beijing's ship visits became truly global, Italy and Greece were again selected—this time, as the only two destinations in Europe. As previously explained, the calls in 2010 were linked to Beijing's interest in acquiring distressed assets in Europe, especially along the southern periphery. However, Beijing's interest in economic cooperation began early on. Italy and Greece were among the very first countries in Europe to elevate bilateral relations to comprehensive strategic partnerships in 2004 and 2006 respectively. Italy also demonstrated its willingness to engage in military cooperation, as seen in 2010 when the Italian Navy and PLAN participated in their first naval exercise. Greece's first naval exercise with the PLAN came in 2015. These are certainly two measures of progress in bilateral relations, but what Beijing really wanted was access to ports, transportation infrastructure, and ultimately European markets.

In Italy, the 2010 visit by the *Guangzhou* and *Chaohu*, and the joint naval exercise held in the Gulf of Taranto, opened the door for the next level of naval cooperation. In 2012, when the *Zheng He* made the PLAN's first single-ship circumnavigation of the globe, the training ship returned to Taranto for a five-day stop on 31 May. The diplomatic lead-up included a meeting between Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and his Italian counterpart, Mario Monti, in Beijing on 31 March.<sup>401</sup> The next day, Monti held talks with Vice Premier, Li Keqiang, in Hainan. Li offered that China would continue to support Italy and the European Union in addressing the ongoing debt crisis, and ask for Italy's help to “promote the China-Europe relationship.”<sup>402</sup> The timing of the *Zheng He*'s visit also coincided with Festa della Repubblica or Italian National Day on 2 June.

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<sup>401</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Premier Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Italian Counterpart Monti,” March 31, 2012, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3311\\_664600/3313\\_664604/t919469.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3311_664600/3313_664604/t919469.shtml).

<sup>402</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Li Keqiang Meets Respectively with Italian Prime Minister Monti, Pakistani Prime Minister Gilani and Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Masimov,” April 1, 2012, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3311\\_664600/3313\\_664604/t920849.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3311_664600/3313_664604/t920849.shtml).

The PLAN maintained a regular presence in Italy with calls by the 19<sup>th</sup> escort task force to Taranto in June 2015, and then a visit from Task Group 150 (destroyer *Changchun*, frigate *Jinzhou*, and replenishment ship *Chaohu*), to the Port of Civitavecchia in July 2017. The stop was part of the small fleet's diplomatic mission to roughly 20 countries that year. It also coincided with high-level meetings in Beijing less than a month earlier. On 16 May 2017, Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni met with Premier Li Keqiang at the Great Hall of the People, followed by talks with President Xi at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse. The Italian Prime Minister was in Beijing to attend the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.<sup>403</sup> <sup>404</sup> Then in October the PLAN's new training ship, *Qi Jiguang*, spent four days in Taranto for military-to-military exchanges and visits with local government officials. Finally, in 2018 the frigate, *Binzhou*, made a three-day operational call to Naples. The ship was part of the 29<sup>th</sup> escort task force and stopped in Naples after participating in Germany's "Kiel Week" and the Centenary Celebration of the Polish Navy in Poland.<sup>405</sup> All this naval attention, and an additional joint exercise in 2017, demonstrate Italy's importance to Beijing, as well as a developing defense relationship.

But in the end, Beijing also achieved its strategic goal of acquiring port assets in Italy. In October 2016, COSCO Shipping purchased a 40 percent stake in a holding company that owns the Vado Ligure port in Liguria, northwest Italy.<sup>406</sup> Of greater importance, Xi Jinping traveled to Rome in March 2019, the first visit to Italy by a Chinese president in ten years. President Xi and Italian

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<sup>403</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Li Keqiang Meets with Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni of Italy," May 16, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3311\\_664600/3313\\_664604/t1463460.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3311_664600/3313_664604/t1463460.shtml).

<sup>404</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni of Italy," May 16, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3311\\_664600/3313\\_664604/t1463441.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3311_664600/3313_664604/t1463441.shtml).

<sup>405</sup> China Military Online, "Chinese Frigate Binzhou Makes Technical Stop in Italy - China Military," July 13, 2018, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-07/13/content\\_8089141.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-07/13/content_8089141.htm).

<sup>406</sup> China Daily, "China's COSCO Acquires 40% Stake in Italy's Vado," October 18, 2016, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-10/18/content\\_27097311.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2016-10/18/content_27097311.htm).

Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which signified Italy's participation in the BRI along with dozens of other cooperative agreements. Joining the BRI was controversial in light of resistance from Germany, France, and the United States, but as the first G7 country to do so, it certainly was in keeping with Li Keqiang's request that Italy promote the China-European relationship. Last but not least, state-owned China Communications Construction Company (CCCC) signed agreements with the port authorities of Trieste and Genoa to facilitate Chinese investments in port and rail infrastructure.<sup>407</sup> Trieste in particular would give China connectivity with rail lines to move Chinese goods into Europe faster and additional customs advantages.<sup>408</sup>

After Italy, Greece was Beijing's greatest prize in Europe. On 16 June 2014, Li Keqiang met with Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, President Karolos Papoulias, and Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Evangelos-Vasileios Meimarakis in Athens. China agreed to buy more Greek government bonds later that summer, and 19 other agreements were signed worth \$4.8 billion. Li also visited the port of Piraeus, where COSCO was operating the container terminal. According to Chinese media, both sides agreed to continue the poor project in "an effective and win-win manner." For Beijing, the port project—sometimes referred to as China's "Lion Head" in Europe—was proceeding according to plan. However, a snap election in January 2015 brought a change of government in Greece, and on 25 January, Alexis Tsipras became the new Greek Prime Minister. Li Keqiang offered his congratulations during a phone call on 11 February and expressed his hopes that both sides would "honor their promises" and move forward with projects at the port. The new prime minister reiterated that Greece welcomes Chinese investment and would fulfill its

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<sup>407</sup> GCR Staff, "China Eyes Trieste and Genoa as Italy Joins Belt and Road Initiative," March 25, 2019, <http://www.globalconstructionreview.com/news/china-eyes-trieste-and-geoa-italy-joins-chinas-be/>.

<sup>408</sup> Jason Horowitz, "A Forgotten Italian Port Could Become a Chinese Gateway to Europe," *The New York Times*, March 18, 2019, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/18/world/europe/italy-trieste-china-belt-road.html>.

commitments. He also told Foreign Minister Li that Greece was “willing to become a bridge for Europe-China cooperation,” but also needed China’s continued support.<sup>409</sup>

Five days later, the PLAN ships of the 18<sup>th</sup> naval escort task force arrived in Piraeus for a four-day visit, made up of the amphibious warfare ship, *Changbaishan*, frigate *Yuncheng*, and replenishment ship, *Chaohu*. The *Changbaishan* in particular is one of the PLAN’s largest and most impressive ships. Beyond sightseeing and a basketball tournament, the visit was geared toward high-level diplomatic engagement. According to China Daily, the task force’s commanding officer, Rear Admiral Zhang Chuanshu, met with “Greek political heavyweights,” including the Hellenic Navy’s Chief of Staff, the Mayor of Piraeus, and Greek President Karolos Papoulias, who had previously never met with the officers of a visiting fleet in ten years as President. The new prime minister, Alexis Tsipras, even attended a deck reception held by Admiral Zhang on 19 February aboard the *Changbaishan* to celebrate the Chinese lunar new year. The Prime Minister was one of many dignitaries, including the Chinese ambassador, Greek Shipping Minister, Defense Minister, and the head of the Piraeus Port Authority.

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<sup>409</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Li Keqiang Holds Telephone Talks with Newly-Elected Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece at Request,” February 12, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t1238069.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t1238069.shtml).



Figure 5.2 –*Changbaishan* Arrives in Portsmouth on 11 January 2015 (UK Ministry of Defense).

The Prime Minister’s attendance was extraordinary, as was the content of his speech. Li Keqiang and the leadership in Beijing could not have asked for more. Tsipras stated that Greece and China would “seek new ways of cooperation,” and that his government would continue to support COSCO’s investments in Piraeus and across Greece more broadly. He offered that the port would become a “key gateway for the delivery of Chinese products to Europe,” but that other potential cooperation still existed in other sector such as transportation, tourism, and culture.<sup>410 411</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> China Daily, “Chinese Naval Escort Fleet Wraps up Visit to Greece,” February 21, 2015, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Military-Watch/2015-02/21/content\\_19629909.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/China-Military-Watch/2015-02/21/content_19629909.htm).

<sup>411</sup> China Daily, “Greece Supports Chinese Investment at Piraeus Port,” February 20, 2015, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/20/content\\_19626055.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015-02/20/content_19626055.htm).



Figure 5.3 – Greek Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, Onboard the *Changbaishan* on 19 February 2015 (China Daily & Week in China)

The next month, Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias was in Beijing to meet with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, who reiterated that the COSCO Piraeus project could be “a model of mutual benefits and win-win results for the two sides.” The Greek minister expressed his appreciation for China’s support during difficult times and signaled the Greek government’s willingness to move forward at Piraeus.<sup>412</sup> The same assurances were conveyed when Premier Li and Prime Minister Tsipras spoke on the phone on 14 April, but the movement the Chinese leadership wanted finally came in January 2016 when COSCO’s offer of roughly \$400 million for a 67 percent stake in the port was accepted.<sup>413</sup> However, by the time the deal was done in August, COSCO was able to buy 51

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<sup>412</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Wang Yi Meets with Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias of Greece,” March 25, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t1249199.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t1249199.shtml).

<sup>413</sup> Stelios Bouras, “China Cosco to Buy Majority Stake in Greek Port for About \$400 Million,” *Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 2016, sec. Business, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-cosco-to-buy-majority-stake-in-greek-port-for-about-400-million-1453316225>.

percent for \$341 million with the provision that it could buy the remaining 16 percent after an additional investment of roughly \$360 million over five years.<sup>414 415</sup>

Diplomatically, the next major event came on 13 May 2017, when Prime Minister Tsipras met with Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang in Beijing during the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.<sup>416</sup> It should be no surprise that Piraeus was on the agenda. President Xi stated that the port project was an important logistics hub under the BRI. He also described it as a potential “sea and land transport bridgehead,” and “an important fulcrum for the China-Europe Land-Sea Express Route.” Prime Minister Tsipras expressed his willingness to participate in the BRI and help promote EU-China cooperation.<sup>417</sup>

The Prime Minister’s support came a month later in early June at a meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, when Greece blocked a statement condemning human rights abuses in multiple countries, including China. The Greek Foreign Ministry claimed the U.N. statement was “unproductive criticism.” This was the first time the European Union has failed to make a statement to the Human Rights Council.<sup>418</sup> Greece had previously refused to criticize China in an earlier European Union statement on the South China Sea, but Greek support for China in the

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<sup>414</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Li Keqiang Holds Telephone Talks with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece at Request,” April 14, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t1256323.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t1256323.shtml).

<sup>415</sup> Angeliki Koutantou, “China’s COSCO Hopes for Greek Deal on Piraeus despite Delay -Official,” *Reuters*, May 28, 2021, sec. Deals, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cosco-ship-hold-greece-piraeus-idUSKCN2D91H7>.

<sup>416</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Li Keqiang Meets with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece,” May 13, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t1464023.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t1464023.shtml).

<sup>417</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece,” May 13, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/xos\\_664404/gjlb\\_664408/3301\\_664560/3303\\_664564/t1463996.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/xos_664404/gjlb_664408/3301_664560/3303_664564/t1463996.shtml).

<sup>418</sup> Nick Cumming-Bruce and Somini Sengupta, “In Greece, China Finds an Ally Against Human Rights Criticism,” *The New York Times*, June 19, 2017, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/19/world/europe/china-human-rights-greece-united-nations.html>.



Human Rights Council was more blatant. However, it did not stop there. Greece also opposed a European initiative for more oversight on potential China's investments.<sup>419</sup>

Task Group 150 arrived at Piraeus on 23 July. The *Changchun*, *Jingzhou*, and *Chaohu*, were welcomed by Greek and Chinese officials, as well as more than 1000 members of the local Chinese community. Gao Wenqi, Charge d'Affaires at the Chinese Embassy, gave a florid speech in which he stated that, "The Piraeus port, which the Task Group 150 is visiting, is a pearl of the Mediterranean, the pride of Greece, the lodestar of China-Greece cooperation, and a place where our joint dreams come true." According to Xinhua, two Greek girls from the Hellenic-Chinese Centre for Entrepreneurship welcomed Rear Admiral Shen Hao with olive branches—a symbol of peace and cooperation—following a martial arts performance by students from the Athens Kung Fu Art Shaolin school.<sup>420</sup>

Xinhua's account of the visit illustrates the performative aspect of many ship visits. It is a strange ceremony, but one that was clearly part of Beijing's strategy to manage its relations with Greece. The specific effect on Prime Minister Tsipras is unknowable; however, all economic and diplomatic outcomes were positive for Beijing.

## *Part II: Maritime Sovereignty*

### *Asia*

Due to geographical proximity and strategic importance, Asia has always received more PLAN visits than any other region. However, the number of individual ship calls between 1998-2008 still only averaged 3.3 per year. This is particularly significant given Beijing's prior concerns

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<sup>419</sup> Jason Horowitz and Liz Alderman, "Chastised by E.U., a Resentful Greece Embraces China's Cash and Interests," *The New York Times*, August 26, 2017, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/26/world/europe/greece-china-piraeus-alexis-tsipras.html>.

<sup>420</sup> Xinhua News Agency, "Chinese Naval Fleet Arrives in Greece for Friendly Visit," July 23, 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/23/c\\_136466322.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/23/c_136466322.htm).

over regional threat perceptions and potential balancing behavior. Beijing's claim has always been that "friendly visits," were a means to build trust and mitigate the China threat narrative; however, in Asia—more than any other region— there is a greater likelihood that Beijing will turn to actual naval coercion. Even if PLAN Port visits do not cross the threshold of coercion, territorial disputes and perennial mistrust of China make it likely that the presence of warships would be perceived as a menacing show of force. Between 2009 and 2018, PLAN Port visits increased to an average of just over 20 annual ship visits. At first glance, such an elevation in naval presence might be expected to elicit a negative response, especially in South East Asia, which represents the toughest test for my explanation of Beijing's port call diplomacy. The following analysis focuses on port visits to countries involved in territorial disputes with Beijing to address two questions. First, does the linkage between leadership engagements and incentives still hold in these cases, or is traditional naval coercion at work? Second, has the increase in PLAN port visits produced an intuitive backlash to Beijing's power or are there signs of alignment?

In many ways Cambodia is the model case for Chinese success in the region. After the *Zheng He's* inaugural call in 2008, military aid and cooperation continued, along with increased Chinese trade and investment. PLAN did not return until 2013, when the *Daishbandao* arrived on 24 September, to provide a week of free medical care to the Cambodian public. The ship's visit followed Foreign Minister Wang Yi's trip to Phnom Penh in late August, where he held talks with Cambodia's senior leaders, including Prime Minister Hun Sen.<sup>421</sup> The timing of the *Daishbandao's* port call and Wang Yi's visit was also significant because Cambodia had just held a controversial and contested general election on 28 July, which triggered mass protests in Phnom Penh, but ultimately

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<sup>421</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia Meets with Foreign Minister Wang Yi Saying That Cambodia and China Share a High Degree of Mutual Trust," August 21, 2013, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2696\\_663396/2698\\_663400/t1068793.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2696_663396/2698_663400/t1068793.shtml).

left Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party in power by a slim majority in the national assembly.<sup>422</sup> The trip provided an opportunity for the new leadership in Beijing to affirm its patronage to the Sen regime and consolidate its influence over Cambodia. Wang Yi offered that the new leadership in Beijing, "will support Cambodia ruling-out external interference to pursue a development path in line with its own national conditions and the interest of the people."<sup>423</sup>

2016 was a pivotal year in the China-Cambodian relationship, which had disastrous diplomatic consequences for the United States. On 22 February, two frigates from the 21<sup>st</sup> naval escort task force arrived in Sihanoukville—the first combatants to visit Cambodia. The ships also participated in the first ever China-Cambodia naval exercises during the week-long stay.

Diplomatically, the port call followed high-level meetings in Beijing earlier that month, but more importantly, it preceded a meeting between Premier Li Keqiang and Prime Minister Hun Sen, who was in Sanya, China, to attend a regional leaders' meeting and the annual Boao Forum.<sup>424</sup>

The diplomatic intensity only increased when Xi Jinping met with Hun Sen in Phnom Penh on 13 October to increase cooperation in line with their comprehensive strategic partnership, which had been in place since 2010, as well as oversee the signing of multiple agreements to include the "joint construction" of the BRI.<sup>425</sup> However, what is more significant for this project is the fact that the 23rd Chinese naval escort taskforce entered Sihanoukville harbor on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Kate Hodal, "Cambodian Election Protests Grip Phnom Penh," the Guardian, September 16, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/16/cambodia-election-protests-phnom-penh>.

<sup>423</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia Meets with Foreign Minister Wang Yi Saying That Cambodia and China Share a High Degree of Mutual Trust."

<sup>424</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Li Keqiang Meets with Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia," March 24, 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2696\\_663396/2698\\_663400/t1350725.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2696_663396/2698_663400/t1350725.shtml).

<sup>425</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Xi Jinping Holds Talks with Prime Minister Hun Sen of Cambodia...," October 14, 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2696\\_663396/2698\\_663400/t1406728.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2696_663396/2698_663400/t1406728.shtml).

<sup>426</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China.

The timing is revealing because it suggests that Xi Jinping—like Hu Jintao before him—finds utility in linking high-level meetings with PLAN port calls. Or, perhaps Chinese leaders simply enjoy the prestige and power that reflects upon themselves from the presence or imminent arrival of warships. Regardless, the events in Cambodia had tangible negative impacts on the United States.

In January 2017 the Cambodian government cancelled the bilateral Angkor Sentinel military exercises that had taken place for eight consecutive years. Then in April, Phnom Penh suspended over twenty humanitarian projects being built by a U.S. Navy Seabees detachment that had deployed to Cambodia since 2008. The exit of the Seabees made room for Beijing's projects and money, which included \$157 million and a new soccer stadium.<sup>427 428</sup> Shambaugh rightly describes Cambodia as a “capitulationist,” the Southeast Asian state aligned closest to China. The case also provides a blueprint for how Beijing can successfully accumulate influence in the region at the expense of the United States by linking leadership engagements to financial incentives and demonstrations of naval power.

It seems apparent that PLAN port visits would be a useful signaling tool to intimidate China's likely military opponents. One would expect to see relatively high numbers of combatant visits to Taiwan, Japan, and the South East Asia countries with rival territorial claims in the South China Sea. In the cases of Taiwan and Japan, the opposite is true. While Taiwan's status is complicated, it is still noteworthy that PLAN ships do not stop in Taiwanese ports or in countries that still recognize Taiwan. Similarly, I can only find evidence of three port visits to Japan. The destroyer *Shenzhen's* visit to Tokyo in 2007 and the training ship *Zheng He's* call to Etajima in 2009

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<sup>427</sup> Reuters Staff, “Cambodia Suspends Annual Military Drill with United States,” *Reuters*, January 16, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cambodia-usa-idUSKBN1501YK>.

<sup>428</sup> Jeremiah Jacques, “Cambodia Kicks U.S. Military Unit Out, Accepts \$157 Million From China,” *The Trumpet.com*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.thetrumpet.com/15686-cambodia-kicks-us-military-unit-out-accepts-157-million-from-china>.

were both accompanied by high-level diplomatic engagements and occurred during a thaw in China-Japan relations.

The only other call to Japan took place in mid-October 2019, when the Luyang III class destroyer *Taiyuan* arrived in Yokosuka harbor prior to the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force International Fleet Review in Sagami Bay. The officers and crew participated in exchanges with their Japanese counterparts, and the ship was open to the public as part of the fleet review.<sup>429</sup> It is worth mentioning that Yokosuka is also the home port of the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet. Naturally, the visit was also linked to a high-level leadership meeting, which took place on 4 November 2019, when Premier Li Keqiang met with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Bangkok, reportedly to stabilize and improve bilateral relations.<sup>430</sup>

Port call diplomacy involving rival claimants in the South China Sea is another story altogether. PLAN visits were frequent and grew steadily from 2009 to 2018. The potential utility to Beijing seems obvious— by revealing China's dominant Navy, Beijing's rivals will conclude that an armed conflict in the South China Sea will end in certain defeat. Therefore, it is in their interests to avoid these costs and inevitably accommodate Beijing's preferences. On the other hand, blatant PLAN coercion would likely inflame domestic outrage in Southeast Asian states and heighten regional resistance to Chinese dominance. It would also create opportunities for the United States, both diplomatically and even militarily.

Shambaugh offers that Beijing's diplomatic behavior in the region has varied over time. He describes 1998-2008 as the "Golden Decade" of positive engagement with Southeast Asia. 2009-

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<sup>429</sup> Christian Lopez, "Chinese Destroyer Arrives in Yokosuka Ahead of Japan's International Fleet Review," Stars and Stripes, October 10, 2019, <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/chinese-destroyer-arrives-in-yokosuka-ahead-of-japan-s-international-fleet-review-1.602472>.

<sup>430</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Li Keqiang Meets with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan," November 4, 2019, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zsjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2721\\_663446/2724\\_663452/t1713655.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zsjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2721_663446/2724_663452/t1713655.shtml).

2010, on the other hand, was a year of Chinese assertiveness, followed by two years in which Beijing again tried to improve relations with Southeast Asian neighbors. The focus on peripheral diplomacy continued this direction, which eventually found its greatest expression in Xi Jinping's BRI, which was announced in 2013 and launched in 2017.<sup>431</sup>

PLAN port visits to rival claimants in the South China Sea provide an opportunity to assess Beijing's brand of port call diplomacy and whether it is linked to incentives or intimidation. Vietnam is perhaps the most likely potential opponent, and therefore, a good place to start. After all, the two countries fought a brief war in 1979 after Vietnam invaded Cambodia and deposed the Chinese-supported Khmer Rouge. On 14 March 1988, their naval forces were involved in a violent skirmish over Johnson Reef, resulting in the destruction of three Vietnamese vessels and 74 sailors dead.<sup>432</sup> The potential for future naval conflict makes Vietnam an important test case because PLAN port visits have a higher likelihood of being actual, or perceived, acts of coercion. During Beijing's period of assertiveness, PLAN presence was surprisingly muted. As previously mentioned, the only calls in 2009 and 2010 were to the northern port of Haiphong and Danang in conjunction with established annual joint patrols in the Tonkin Gulf. They also did not involve the PLAN's newest or most impressive ships.

There were no port calls to Vietnam in 2011, perhaps because of souring relations after a May-June incident in which Chinese surveillance ships cut the cables of a PetroVietnam survey vessel. Both sides spent considerable diplomatic time and effort to slow the deterioration during a series of high-level meetings that fall, which culminated in a trip to Beijing by the Vietnamese general secretary, Nguyen Phu Trong, in early October. During his stay, Nguyen held talks with

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<sup>431</sup> Shambaugh, "U.S.-China Rivalry in Southeast Asia," 96.

<sup>432</sup> Beina Xu, Eleanor Albert, and Lindsay Maizland, "Timeline: China's Maritime Disputes," Council on Foreign Relations, July 15, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/chinas-maritime-disputes>.

China's most senior leaders, including Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao, and Li Keqiang.<sup>433</sup> The meetings produced an agreement on future measures to manage maritime disputes, as well as further engagements between Hu Jintao and Vietnamese President, Truong Tan Sang, in November and Xi Jinping's trip to Hanoi, where he met with Vietnam's president and prime minister in December.<sup>434</sup> Given the tenuous state of relations, it is no surprise that the PLAN's participation in the annual joint patrols in the Tonkin Gulf did not occur that month.

As bilateral relations improved, Beijing sent a more cooperative signal via a three-day visit by the *Zheng He* to the Vietnamese capital of Ho Chi Minh City on 24 April 2012. The training ship had last stopped in Vietnam in 2008 when relations were at a high. The diplomatic lead up to the port call included a meeting between Vice Premier Li Keqiang and Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung on 31 March and a second on 13 April between Vice President Xi Jinping and Vietnamese army chief, Do Ba Ty, and his delegation in Beijing.<sup>435</sup> <sup>436</sup> However, relations soured in June 2012 when Vietnam enacted a maritime law affirming its jurisdictional claims in the Spratly and Paracel Islands, which elicited an angry response from Beijing. The PLAN's next visit to Vietnam in January 2013 was more ambiguous and potentially coercive. This time, Beijing sent the 12<sup>th</sup> naval escort task force, made up of two of the PLAN's most modern frigates, *Yiyang* and

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<sup>433</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Nguyen Phu Trong," October 11, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t866965.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t866965.shtml).

<sup>434</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Vice President Xi Jinping Meets with Vietnamese President Truong Tan Sang," December 21, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t889949.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t889949.shtml).

<sup>435</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Vice Premier Li Keqiang Meets with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Hoang Trung Hai," March 31, 2012, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t921052.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t921052.shtml).

<sup>436</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Vice President Xi Jinping Meets with Vietnamese Army Chief," April 13, 2012, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t923082.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t923082.shtml).

*Chaozhou*, as well as their resupply ship, *Qiandaobu*, following six months of escort operations in the Gulf of Aden. There is little detail available about the visit, but according to China Daily, “The move comes amid reports of rising tensions in the South China Sea over disputed islands.”<sup>437</sup>

Regardless of motive, this was the last PLAN port visit to Vietnam for almost 4 years. The PLAN’s absence coincided with some of the lowest points in China-Vietnam relations. Its nadir was perhaps May 2014, when China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) moved its \$1 billion Hai Yang Shi You 981 offshore oil platform into disputed waters in the Paracel islands. The crisis escalated with Chinese Coast Guard and Vietnamese Sea Guardian vessels ramming each other and using water cannons in an attempt to control the area.<sup>438</sup>

When the PLAN did return in October 2016, it was part of a new phase of diplomatic grappling in the South China Sea, involving other great powers. Vietnam had opened the Cam Ranh International Port earlier that year after extensive renovations. The port’s location roughly 200 miles from the Spratly and Paracel Islands has always had military significance. The United States held airfields and port facilities around Cam Ranh Bay during the Vietnam War. After the U.S. withdrew, the Soviet Union and then Russia leased the port for ship and submarine access. In April 2016, two Japanese destroyers visited the port to signal Japan’s interest in the region. Then, on 4 October, the US Navy destroyer, *USS John S. McCain* and submarine tender *USS Frank Cable* became the first commissioned Navy ships to return to Cam Ranh Bay since the end of the Vietnam War. Not to be outdone, the ships of the 23rd Chinese Naval Escort Task Force, frigates *Xiangtan* and *Zhoushan*, and replenishment ship, *Chaohu*, arrived on 22 October.<sup>439 440</sup>

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<sup>437</sup> China Daily, “Chinese Warships Visit Vietnam,” January 9, 2013, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2013-01/09/content\\_16098063.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2013-01/09/content_16098063.htm).

<sup>438</sup> Edward Wong, “Q & A: M. Taylor Fravel on China’s Dispute With Vietnam,” *Sinosphere Blog* (blog), May 8, 2014, <https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/05/08/q-and-a-m-taylor-fravel-on-chinas-dispute-with-vietnam/>.

<sup>439</sup> Ankit Panda, “3 Chinese Navy Ships Visit Vietnam’s Cam Ranh Bay,” October 24, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/3-chinese-navy-ships-visit-vietnams-cam-ranh-bay/>.

<sup>440</sup> Eric Slavin, “McCain, Cable First Navy Warships to Port at Cam Ranh Bay since War,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.stripes.com/news/mccain-cable-first-navy-warships-to-port-at-cam-ranh-bay-since-war-1.432235>.



In a sign that China-Vietnam relations—and Beijing’s port call diplomacy— were stabilizing, Xi Jinping hosted Vietnam’s Prime Minister, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, less than a month before the Chinese ships arrived.<sup>441</sup> A similar scenario repeated itself the following year when Task Group 150 made up of the destroyer *Changchun* and frigate *Jingzhou*, arrived in Ho Chi Minh City on 6 May 2017 for a four-day visit. Two days after the warships left Vietnam, Xi Jinping hosted the Vietnamese President, Tran Dai Quang, in Beijing to discuss the ways Vietnam and China could “elevate” their comprehensive strategic partnership.<sup>442</sup> It is impossible to know for sure, but the proximity of the destroyer’s visit and the meeting with President Xi and the Great Hall of the People most likely left an indelible impression on President Tran to Beijing’s benefit. To their credit, the leadership in Beijing had managed to find their way back to the well-tested script—demonstrations of naval power in concert with leadership engagements, linked to economic inducements.

The Philippines should be a similarly difficult case for my explanation of Chinese port call diplomacy. The April 2010 call by the 4<sup>th</sup> Naval Escort Task Force to Manila is inconclusive in the absence of further evidence. Intuitively, PLAN port visits to the Philippines are more likely to be displays of power associated with increased tension, crises, and coercion rather than engagement and incentives. But once again, when relations deteriorate, Beijing shows caution in deploying ships on diplomatic missions. After the 2010 election of Benigno Aquino, the Philippines took a more aggressive stance in the South China Sea. In October 2011 the Philippines began referring to the

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<sup>441</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Meets with Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc of Viet Nam,” September 13, 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t1398215.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t1398215.shtml).

<sup>442</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Xi Jinping Holds Talks with President Tran Dai Quang of Viet Nam, Agreeing to Jointly Elevate China-Viet Nam Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to New Highs,” May 11, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2792\\_663578/2794\\_663582/t1462120.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2792_663578/2794_663582/t1462120.shtml).

South China Sea as the West Philippine Sea in all official communications. The Scarborough Shoals incident in April 2012 began when a Philippines warship challenged Chinese fishing boats in the disputed area. Beijing deployed its own coast guard vessels to protect the fisherman, which produced a two-month standoff and a costly Chinese quarantine of imported fruit from the Philippines. Lost banana exports in May alone may have cost the Philippines \$34 million. Finally, as a result of the Scarborough Shoals incident, the Philippines pursued an international arbitration case at the UN under UNCLOS, which Beijing refused to recognize or take part in.<sup>443</sup>

It is unsurprising that there were no PLAN port visits during these years. In fact, the next call to the Philippines wasn't until the hospital ship, *Daishandao*, arrived in November 2013. At first glance, this visit appears problematic for the argument proposed above. Why would Beijing turn to naval diplomacy—let alone send a cooperative signal—in the midst of diplomatic decline? The answer, however, is perfectly straightforward. Beijing was shamed into it. When Typhoon Haiyan hit the Philippines on 8 November, it killed more than 4000 people and affected 11 million, according to UN estimates. Beijing's true disdain for the Philippines was apparent when the Chinese Red Cross pledged only \$100,000 in aid. Beijing only increased its support to \$1 million and pledged to send the *Daishandao* after criticism from Western media.<sup>444</sup> Without this external pressure, there would not have been a port visit to the Philippines between 2010 and 2016 due to poor relations.

Everything changed when Rodrigo Duterte became president of the Philippines on 30 June 2016. His first high-level meeting with Chinese leadership came in September during the Leaders' Meetings on East Asia Cooperation in Vientiane, Laos. In discussions with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Duterte conveyed his interest in closer relations with China. Li Keqiang similarly expressed

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<sup>443</sup> Beina Xu, Eleanor Albert, and Lindsay Maizland, "Timeline."

<sup>444</sup> "Typhoon Haiyan: China Sends Relief Team to Philippines," *BBC News*, November 20, 2013, sec. China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-24997186>.

his preference to get relations, “back to the normal track...”<sup>445</sup> The next month, Duterte was in Beijing to meet President Xi and pledge his fealty during a four-day state visit. In the Great Hall of the People, Duterte made his announcement. “In this venue, your honors, in this venue, I announce my separation from the United States...Both in military, not maybe social, but economics also. America has lost.” The leaders also presided over a signing ceremony for agreements concerning trade, tourism, narcotics, cultural cooperation, and maritime issues. The trade deals alone amounted to \$13.5 billion.<sup>446</sup>

With Duterte well in hand, Beijing could safely reveal its naval capability through port call diplomacy. On 30 April 2017, Task Group 150 (destroyer *Changchun*, frigate *Jinzhou*, and replenishment ship *Chaohu*), arrived in Davao City, a commercial center—and Duterte’s hometown—on the southern island of Mindanao. The choice of Davao City rather than Manila may have been in part due to widespread public anger toward China over the South China Sea dispute. The small Chinese fleet was on a six-month, global voyage to nineteen countries. When they came pier-side at Sasa Wharf, the warships were welcomed by Philippines military and political leaders, as well as members of the overseas Chinese community. The PLAN officers held a reception on the *Changchun*’s deck for the staff of the Chinese embassy and local political elites. Of note, the reception’s most important guest was none other than President Duterte himself.<sup>447</sup> Naturally, the port visit was preceded by Chinese Vice Premier Wang Yang’s official visit, also to Davao City rather than Manila, on 17 March. Vice Premier Wang met with President Duterte, who expressed his gratitude to Beijing and willingness to deepen bilateral relations and resolve differences

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<sup>445</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, “Li Keqiang Talks with President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines,” September 9, 2016, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gjlb\\_663354/2762\\_663528/2764\\_663532/t1396720.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2762_663528/2764_663532/t1396720.shtml).

<sup>446</sup> Ben Blanchard, “Duterte Aligns Philippines with China, Says U.S. Has Lost,” *Reuters*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-philippines-idUSKCN12K0AS>.

<sup>447</sup> China Military Online, “Chinese Naval Fleet Wraps up Visit to Philippines,” May 3, 2017, [english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2017-05/03/content\\_7585798.htm](http://english.pladaily.com.cn/view/2017-05/03/content_7585798.htm) 1/3.

in the South China Sea in a friendly manner. Over the course of the visit, Wang also met with the Philippine Cabinet's economic management team and oversaw the signing of multiple agreements on trade and economic cooperation.<sup>448</sup>

These events culminated on 20 November 2018, when President Xi paid a state visit to Manila, during which he and President Duterte agreed to elevate their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership, while jointly advancing China's BRI.<sup>449</sup> Then, two months later the three ships of the 30<sup>th</sup> naval escort task force arrived in Manila for a five-day visit, following four months of escort operations in the Gulf of Aden. Philippines Commodore, Wilfredo Burgunio, told Xinhua that he welcomed the visit and more like it in the future. "The arrival of our Chinese Navy counterparts underscores the continuing efforts to further strengthen the relationship between our governments and navies. This will further enhance and sustain the promotion of peace, stability, and maritime cooperation through naval diplomacy."<sup>450</sup>

### *Part III: National Unification*

#### *North America*

In 2019, during an interview with a Chinese academic in Shanghai, I asked where Taiwan fit into Beijing's rationale for its ongoing naval buildup and higher profile abroad. He replied without hesitation: "It's always about Taiwan." At first, this appears counterintuitive. There is no evidence of

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<sup>448</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines Meets with Wang Yang," March 18, 2017, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2762\\_663528/2764\\_663532/t1447381.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2762_663528/2764_663532/t1447381.shtml).

<sup>449</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "China, Philippines Agree to Upgrade Ties, Jointly Build Belt and Road," November 20, 2018, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/yzs\\_663350/gilb\\_663354/2762\\_663528/2764\\_663532/t1614970.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gilb_663354/2762_663528/2764_663532/t1614970.shtml).

<sup>450</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Philippines, "Chinese Naval Escort Fleet Pays Friendly Visit to Philippines," January 17, 2019, <http://ph.china-embassy.org/eng/zfgx/gjfy/t1630936.htm>.

a PLAN port visit to any state that diplomatically recognizes Taiwan; however, that does not mean that Beijing's brand of port call diplomacy cannot be used to isolate and induce recognition from the remaining holdouts. It is also noteworthy that the front lines in this struggle for recognition are in the peripheral theaters of Oceania and the Americas. The states that still recognize Taiwan are small and economically insignificant to China, but they still represent a symbolic nuisance to Beijing. But rather than naval coercion, Beijing has once again used financial incentives—along with visits from the PLAN hospital ship *Daishandao*—to reward those who are loyal, and remind those who are not, of the benefits that come from alignment with China. In short, Beijing is using PLAN port call diplomacy to display its economic and military power, as well as the largess that comes to those states that abandon Taipei.

The informal “diplomatic truce” between Beijing and the Kuomintang (KMT) party during the term of Ma Jing-yeou (2008-2016) ended with the election of Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party in 2016. After that, Beijing increased its diplomatic activities to win over the states with persisting ties to Taiwan with notable successes. In Africa, the last two holdouts turned in 2016; Gambia switched its allegiance to the PRC in March and Sao Tome and Principe followed suit in December.<sup>451</sup> Next to go was Panama in June of 2017, which was no surprise after Costa Rica's switch a decade earlier. In May 2018, the Dominican Republic established ties with Beijing, followed by El Salvador in August of the same year. Economic opportunity is the largest driver of these diplomatic pivots to the PRC; however, domestic politics is always important as well. El Salvador's turn took place under the leadership of Salvador Sánchez Cerén, a former guerrilla who fought

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<sup>451</sup> Evan Ellis | Global Americans Contributor, “China Recognizes Dominican Republic — We Should Worry,” *Global Americans* (blog), May 10, 2018, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2018/05/china-recognizes-dominican-republic-worry/>.

against the US-backed junta during El Salvador's Civil War. Beijing showed its gratitude with a gift of 3,000 tons of rice and the promise of \$150 million in loans toward 13 infrastructure projects.<sup>452</sup>

### *Harmonious Mission 2011*

In September 2011, the *Daishbandao* set out on a 100-day voyage to deliver free medical care in Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Costa Rica. This was only the *Daishbandao's* second annual deployment after completing *Harmonious Mission 2010* the previous year with stops in Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, the Seychelles, and Bangladesh. Beijing's choice of region for *Harmonious Mission 2011* is noteworthy, mostly because it signaled that Beijing was comfortable raising its naval profile in the United States' backyard. The Caribbean does offer some economic opportunities for China, but in relative terms they are minor. The real rationale behind these destinations was the fact the region held the largest grouping of states with diplomatic relationships with Taiwan: Guatemala, Honduras, Haiti, Paraguay, Nicaragua, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and Belize. At the time, this list also included Panama, which switched allegiance to the PRC in 2017, and the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, two states that cut ties with Taiwan in 2018. Beyond the well-known financial incentives, the *Daishbandao's* presence provided visible evidence of China's rising power and presence in the region. In light of the global financial crisis, these demonstrations of Chinese largess also showed Beijing's willingness to use its power for the benefit of those states that support Beijing instead of Taipei.

Beijing's diplomatic activities in the Caribbean and Central America were understandably muted given U.S. influence and higher priorities closer to home. However, the *Daishbandao's* port visits were preceded by high-level diplomatic engagements. On 12 September, Trinidad and Tobago

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<sup>452</sup> Evan Ellis | Global Americans Contributor, "China and El Salvador: An Update," *Global Americans* (blog), March 26, 2021, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/03/china-and-el-salvador-an-update/>.

hosted the third China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum, which drew political leaders and entrepreneurs from around the Caribbean. During the opening ceremony, Chinese Vice Premier, Wang Qishan, gave a speech outlining Beijing's policy initiatives in the region, including greater Chinese investment and preferential loans, cooperation on environmental protection and new energy, agriculture and fishing, as well as education, cultural exchanges, and tourism. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vice Premier Wang and his delegation were warmly received. Apparently, Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, explained in her welcoming remarks that the global economic crisis had taught Caribbean countries that they "can no longer rely solely on traditional trading partners and they must develop trade and economic cooperation with China and other emerging countries."<sup>453</sup> The forum also provided Vice Premier Wang with ample opportunities to meet with regional leaders, including Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister, the President of Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister, Jamaica's Prime Minister, Grenada's Prime Minister, and Suriname's Vice President.<sup>454</sup>

The *Daishbandao* arrived in Cuba just over a month later on 21 October. International press was not invited to the welcome ceremony, but the ship's crew provided island residents with free medical services as planned. The ship's visit was also bracketed by visits from Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and Vice Premier Wang.<sup>455 456</sup> Beijing had provided billions in loans and was involved in

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<sup>453</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wang Qishan Pledges to Further Deepen China-Caribbean Cooperation," September 13, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3528\\_665138/3530\\_665142/t858984.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3528_665138/3530_665142/t858984.shtml).

<sup>454</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wang Qishan Meets with Caribbean Leaders," September 13, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3528\\_665138/3530\\_665142/t858982.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3528_665138/3530_665142/t858982.shtml).

<sup>455</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi Meets with Cuban First Deputy Foreign Minister Medina," September 6, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3488\\_665048/3490\\_665052/t856889.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3488_665048/3490_665052/t856889.shtml).

<sup>456</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wang Qishan Meets with Vice Chairman Ricardo Cabrisas of the Council of Ministers of Cuba," December 28, 2011,

Cuban oil exploration, as well as a potential \$6 billion agreement to refurbish a Cuban refinery with Venezuelan financial support.<sup>457</sup>

The next port of call was Kingston, Jamaica, where the hospital ship spent six days. Since leader perception is most vulnerable to personal experience, it is worth highlighting the fact that Jamaica's Deputy Prime Minister came aboard the hospital ship on 29 October.<sup>458</sup> In addition, Chinese Vice Premier, Hui Liangyu, had been in Kingston for talks with Jamaican Prime Minister, Bruce Golding, on 19 September. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister expressed his gratitude for Chinese support and "reiterated his country's firm support of the one-China policy." The two leaders also witnessed the signing of multiple cooperative agreements.<sup>459</sup>

The China-Jamaica relationship was relatively mature before these meetings. Prime Minister Golding had already been to Beijing in 2010 to meet with Premier Wen Jiabao and President Hu Jintao.<sup>460</sup> "Jamaica is one of the first countries in the Caribbean region to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China," stated Premier Wen, "it always adheres to the one-China policy, and the two peoples have friendly feelings toward each other."<sup>461</sup> Jamaica's leaders had shown an early willingness to accept Chinese loans, investments, and infrastructure deals. Further

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[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3488\\_665048/3490\\_665052/t891710.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3488_665048/3490_665052/t891710.shtml).

<sup>457</sup> Jeff Franks, "Chinese Navy Hospital Ship Visits Cuba, Caribbean," *Reuters*, October 21, 2011, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-60058520111021>.

<sup>458</sup> "Chinese Navy 'Peace Ark' Hospital Ship Arrives in Kingston, Jamaica[3]- Chinadaily.Com.Cn," October 30, 2011, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2011-10/30/content\\_14003721\\_3.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/photo/2011-10/30/content_14003721_3.htm).

<sup>459</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hui Liangyu Holds Talks with Jamaican Prime Minister Golding," September 20, 2011, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3503\\_665098/3505\\_665102/t861161.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3503_665098/3505_665102/t861161.shtml).

<sup>460</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Hu Jintao Meets with Jamaican Prime Minister," February 4, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3503\\_665098/3505\\_665102/t656675.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3503_665098/3505_665102/t656675.shtml).

<sup>461</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, "Wen Jiabao Holds Talks with Jamaican Prime Minister Golding," February 3, 2010, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3503\\_665098/3505\\_665102/t656197.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3503_665098/3505_665102/t656197.shtml).



signs of alignment included a partnership agreement in 2005 and a visit from the PLAN training ship, *Zheng He*, in 2012.



Figure 5.4 – Jamaica’s Deputy Prime Minister Onboard *Daishandao*, 29 October 2011 (Xinhua).

The *Daishandao*’s arrived in Trinidad and Tobago’s capital city, Port of Spain, on 8 November. The highest-level meetings in close proximity to the visit were between Vice Premier Wang and Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar during the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum. However, since Trinidad and Tobago hosted the event, there was likely significant coordination with Beijing. It is also noteworthy that Trinidad and Tobago established diplomatic ties with China in 1974 and never recognized Taiwan. The same cannot be said for the hospital ship’s last destination— Costa Rica.

Of all the countries that the *Daishandao* visited during *Harmonious Mission 2011*, only Costa Rica was a recent diplomatic acquisition for Beijing. In June 2007, Costa Rica’s President, Oscar Arias, announced that he had severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan after 60 years in order to attract foreign investment from China. He explained that it did not serve the interests of all Costa

Ricans to turn away from “the most successful emerging economy in the world.”<sup>462</sup> This was a significant loss for Taiwan given the fact that Costa Rica is situated in the cluster of states that support it.

Geography is key to Beijing’s *fear of missing out* strategy. When a neighboring state cuts ties with Taiwan and begins to enjoy the benefits of alignment with China, it increases domestic pressure on a leader to follow suit. As previously mentioned, economic growth figures often tell a compelling story, but not in the same way that a ship visit does. PLAN port call diplomacy—especially a hospital ship visit—is another visceral way to remind holdout states that their support for Taiwan creates opportunity costs that will continue to expand with China’s economic and military rise.

#### *Harmonious Mission 2015*

The *Daishandao* returned to the region during its *Harmonious Mission 2015* voyage, which included stops in Asia and the Americas. Under the command of Senior Captain Guan Bailin, the hospital ship departed Zhoushan, in Zhejiang Province, on 7 September, making stops in Malaysia, Australia, French Polynesia (Tahiti), and San Diego before arriving in Acapulco, Mexico, on 14 November. Mexico was not a frequent destination for the PLAN. In fact, the only previous visit occurred in 1997 when a small flotilla led by the destroyer *Harbin* made the PLAN’s first voyage to the Americas. The *Daishandao*’s visit was significant in several ways. First, it was once again in the United States’ backyard. Second, the timing of the visit coincided with a meeting between Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and President Xi Jinping in Antalya, Turkey on 16 November. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, President Xi reaffirmed his commitment to develop

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<sup>462</sup> BBC, “Taiwan Loses Costa Rica’s Support,” June 7, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6729035.stm>.

the China-Mexico comprehensive strategic partnership, which the two countries formalized in 2013, and expand overall cooperation.<sup>463</sup>

Finally, after such infrequent PLAN presence, it is remarkable that the destroyer *Jinan*, frigate *Yiyang*, and resupply ship *Qiandaobu*, arrived in Acapulco on 24 November. Prior to their arrival, the Chinese ships had been in Cuba to mark the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Beijing and Havana. The flotilla was welcomed by the Chinese ambassador to Mexico and the commanding Admiral of Mexico's 8th naval district, who gave the PLAN officers and crew a warm welcome. In response, Colonel Wang Jianxun, Deputy Chief of Staff of the South Sea Fleet, expressed his appreciation and offered that, "the distance between China and Mexico had not stopped the efforts to strengthen the bonds of friendship, and that commercial and military relations were entering a new phase."<sup>464</sup> As usual, the PLAN personnel participated in cultural activities and sporting events during their stay.

After departing Mexico, the *Daiishandao* arrived in Bridgetown, Barbados, on 27 November for a seven-day visit. During their stay, the senior Chinese officers met with the Acting Prime Minister, Richard Sealy, the Minister of Health, and senior members of the Barbados Defense Force (BDF). Senior Captain Guan and his officers attended the Barbados Independence parade and paid visits to the BDF headquarters and Coast Guard base. The *Daiishandao* also welcomed over 2400 visitors onboard, including government officials, diplomats, members of the Chinese embassy and the local Chinese community. The ship's doctors provided medical services and participated in joint seminars with their Barbadian counterparts before departing on 3 December for Grenada. When the

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<sup>463</sup> "Xi Jinping Meets with President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico," November 17, 2015, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/3508\\_665108/3510\\_665112/t1316306.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/3508_665108/3510_665112/t1316306.shtml).

<sup>464</sup> "Chinese Naval Flotilla Arrives in Mexico - China.Org.Cn," November 25, 2015, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2015-11/25/content\\_37160451.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2015-11/25/content_37160451.htm).

ship arrived, it was welcomed by government officials, China’s ambassador to Grenada, members of the local Chinese community, and “representatives from China-funded enterprises.”

There is less information about the *Daishandao*’s seven-day stop in Grenada, but it likely followed the general script used in Barbados.<sup>465</sup> That said, Grenada is an interesting case for Chinese port called diplomacy, but also the fickle nature of Taiwan relations. After normalizing relations with the PRC in 1985, Grenada switched its recognition back to Taiwan in 1989. Then in 2005, the government of Grenada abandoned Taiwan and returned to the PRC, which inevitably brought financial benefits to the island.<sup>466</sup> However, the *Daishandao*’s 2015 visit demonstrates that Beijing is keen to keep Grenada in its camp, and in its debt.

The specific content of these two visits is arguably less important than the message Beijing was sending to the other surrounding islands in the Lesser Antilles. At first glance, the significance of these port calls—along with the *Daishandao*’s 2011 visit to Trinidad and Tobago—is ambiguous. Why would Beijing deploy a limited and valuable naval commodity to islands with populations in the hundreds of thousands and no economic significance to China? The answer is Taiwan. In reality, the *Daishandao*’s intended audience was actually the leaders on the nearby islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Lucia. See Figure X for PLAN hospital ship visits and states that recognize Taiwan.

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<sup>465</sup> People’s Daily Online, “China’s Naval Hospital Ship Peace Ark Arrives in Grenada for Visit, Service,” December 7, 2015, <http://en.people.cn/n/2015/1207/c90000-8986809.html>.

<sup>466</sup> Heath, “China Maritime Report No. 8: Winning Friends and Influencing People: Naval Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics.”

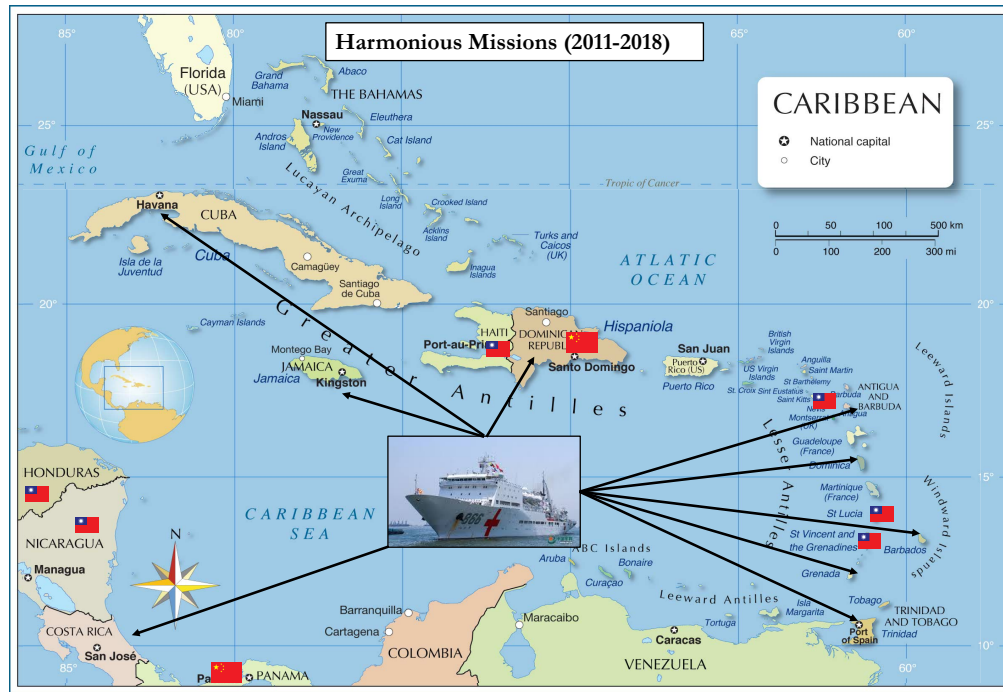


Figure 5.5 – Hospital ship visits to the Caribbean Sea.

### *Harmonious Mission 2018*

Beijing’s campaign in the Lesser Antilles only intensified during *Harmonious Mission 2018*. The Daishandao’s 31,800 nautical mile, 205-day voyage that year included stops in Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, Tonga, Venezuela, Ecuador, Dominica, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, and the Dominican Republic.<sup>467</sup> Its first destination in the Caribbean was a return visit to St. George’s, Grenada, where the Chinese ambassador explained that the second visit in three years was, “...like a reunion of old acquaintances. We are so delighted.”<sup>468</sup> The *Daishandao’s* next port of call was an inaugural visit to Port of Roseau, Dominica, an island with 72,000 residents. The ship stayed for eight days, providing free medical care to local residents and hosting island dignitaries, including the

<sup>467</sup> Xinhua News Agency, “China’s Naval Hospital Ship Concludes 205-Day Overseas Mission,” January 18, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/18/c\\_137755670.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-01/18/c_137755670.htm).

<sup>468</sup> Curlan Campbell, “Ark Peace Receives a Warm Welcome on Second Visit to Grenada,” October 3, 2018, <https://www.nowgrenada.com/2018/10/chinese-naval-hospital-ship-receives-a-warm-welcome-on-its-2nd-visit-to-grenada/>.

Dominica's President and his wife, the Acting Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Health Minister, along with the local Chinese community and "representatives of Chinese-funded institutions."<sup>469</sup>

The ship received a similarly warm welcome when it arrived in the port of St. John's, Antigua and Barbuda, on 22 October. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, Health Minister, and Governor-General were all in attendance. Prime Minister Browne offered that Peace Ark's visit was a great help to the people of Antigua and Barbuda. "China has always been a good friend and partner of Antigua and Barbuda, and Antigua and Barbuda, in turn, is a trustworthy partner of China."<sup>470</sup> Again, Antigua and Barbuda's proximity to St. Kitts and Nevis provides a most likely explanation for this visit.

The *Daishandao's* last call was at the Port of Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic on 1 November 2018. As usual, the hospital ship's eight-day stop began with a welcoming ceremony attended by political and military leaders, as well as the local Chinese community. During the visit, the officers took part in exchanges with their Dominican counterparts and met with military and political leaders. Medical services were provided to the local population.<sup>471</sup> However, the *Daishandao's* visit to the Dominican Republic was noteworthy given the fact that Beijing and Santo Domingo only established diplomatic ties on 1 May, which made the visit extraordinarily early in the relationship. The timing was also significant since the Dominican Republic's President, Danilo Medina, was in China at the time on a state visit, which included attendance at the first China International Import Expo in Shanghai. On 2 November, he was greeted by Xi Jinping in the Great

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<sup>469</sup> China Military Online, "Chinese Hospital Ship Peace Ark Makes Maiden Visit to Dominica - China Military," October 15, 2018, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-10/15/content\\_9313496.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-10/15/content_9313496.htm).

<sup>470</sup> Huang Panyue, "Chinese Hospital Ship Peace Ark Completes 1st Visit to Antigua and Barbuda," *China Military Online*, October 31, 2018, 2.

<sup>471</sup> China Military Online, "Peace Ark's First Visit to Dominican Republic - China Military," November 2, 2018, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-11/02/content\\_9330152.htm](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-11/02/content_9330152.htm).

Hall of the People during a welcome ceremony similar to the one that took place the day before when Salvadoran President Salvador Sanchez Ceren arrived.<sup>472</sup> Later in the day, President Medina met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, who spoke optimistically about bilateral relations since 1 May. In response, the Dominican President offered that diplomatic relations had already brought greater cooperation and positive results. According to the Ministry of Foreign affairs, he also said, “We welcome Chinese enterprises to invest and develop in the Dominican Republic.”<sup>473</sup>

In light of the visit to the Dominican Republic, there is perhaps one country that is missing from the *Daishandao*'s itinerary—Panama. During a private rooftop ceremony on 14 June 2017, Taiwanese embassy employees solemnly lowered the Taiwanese flag over the Panama City embassy for the last time. It had only been one day since the government of Panama abruptly severed diplomatic ties with Taiwan and officially recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC). The televised announcement by Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela two days before was sudden and unequivocal. In a joint statement, Panama and China declared: “The Government of the Republic of Panama recognizes that only one China exists in the world, the Government of the People's Republic of China is the only legitimate government that represents all China, and Taiwan forms an inalienable part of Chinese territory.”<sup>474 475</sup>

Panama's diplomatic shift to the PRC was predictable. In June of 2016, the newly elected Taiwanese President, Tsai Ing-wen, attended the opening ceremony of the Panama Canal's

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<sup>472</sup> “Dominican Republic Leader in China after Cutting Taiwan Ties,” AP NEWS, November 2, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/b4e0035f71834f7984a37d76c80f35d5>.

<sup>473</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China, “Chinese Premier Eyes Closer Ties with Dominican Republic,” November 2, 2018, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/ldmzs\\_664952/gjlb\\_664956/Dominica\\_665058/ActivitiestiesDominica\\_665062/t1610160.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/ldmzs_664952/gjlb_664956/Dominica_665058/ActivitiestiesDominica_665062/t1610160.shtml).

<sup>474</sup> “Panama Cuts Formal Ties with Taiwan in Favour of China,” the Guardian, June 13, 2017, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/13/panama-cuts-diplomatic-ties-with-taiwan-in-favour-of-china>.

<sup>475</sup> IANS, “Taiwan's Embassy in Panama Lowers Flag, Holds Farewell Ceremony,” *Business Standard India*, June 15, 2017, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/taiwan-s-embassy-in-panama-lowers-flag-holds-farewell-ceremony-117061500155\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/taiwan-s-embassy-in-panama-lowers-flag-holds-farewell-ceremony-117061500155_1.html).

expansion project along with dozens of other world leaders.<sup>476</sup> However, signs of Beijing's influence and economic power were on display throughout. Most visible to all in attendance was the fact that the first ship chosen to go through the Canal was the brand-new China Ocean Shipping Company (COSCO) container ship, the M/V PANAMA.<sup>477</sup> Then, in June 2017, less than a week before Panama announced its intention to abandon Taiwan, Panamanian President Juan Carlos Varela took part in the ground-breaking ceremony for the Panama Colon Container Port on Panama's Margarita Island, a \$1 billion Chinese financed and built deep-water port and logistics project on the Atlantic end of the Canal.<sup>478</sup> When completed, the Colon Port would be an important link in Beijing's BRI, and one of many Chinese investments in Panama's logistics and transportation sector.

There are many plausible reasons why the *Daishbandao* did not visit Panama during *Harmonious Mission 2018*, but one likely factor was Beijing's sensitivity to a negative reaction from the United States. After all, U.S. political and naval intervention allowed Panama to break away from Colombia in 1903, making way for the U.S. to finance, build and control the Panama Canal Zone until 1977. After a series of treaties went into effect in 1979 to ensure the Canal's permanent neutrality, the U.S. finally returned control to Panama on 31 December 1999.<sup>479</sup> To enable this physical control, the United States maintained a permanent military presence in Panama from 1903 on to protect and administer the Canal. It wasn't until 1997 that the U.S. Southern Command was relocated from Panama to Miami Florida.<sup>480</sup> And, when U.S. relations with Panamanian President Manuel Noriega deteriorated, the United States did not hesitate to invade Panama in 1989 to remove him. There is

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<sup>476</sup> "President Tsai Attends Inauguration Ceremony for Panama Canal Expansion," June 16, 2016, <https://english.president.gov.tw/NEWS/4928>.

<sup>477</sup> Staff, "The Inaugural Sail of M.V. COSCO SHIPPING PANAMA through the Expanded Panama Canal," June 27, 2016, [http://en.coscoshipping.com/art/2016/6/27/art\\_6923\\_49018.html](http://en.coscoshipping.com/art/2016/6/27/art_6923_49018.html).

<sup>478</sup> "Chinese Firm Starts Work on \$1bn Panamanian Megaport - News - GCR," June 12, 2017, <http://www.globalconstructionreview.com/news/chinese-firm-starts-w7rk-1bn-panama7nian-meg7aport/>.

<sup>479</sup> "U.S. Relations with Panama," *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-panama/>.

<sup>480</sup> "History of U.S. Southern Command," accessed July 13, 2021, <https://www.southcom.mil/About/History/>.



also broader U.S. sensitivity (dating back to the Monroe Doctrine) to outside powers getting involved anywhere in the Western hemisphere, but Panama in particular will be a country to watch as PLAN port call diplomacy continues in the region.

#### *Part IV: Quantitative Analysis*

##### *Operationalizing Alignment with China*

As previously mentioned, the dependent variables in this analysis are three measures of alignment with China: military exercises with the host country, Chinese port deals now under the BRI, and partnership agreements. China's participation in military exercises is captured by an ordinal variable: no military exercise with the host country (0); participation in the same multilateral exercise (1); and participation in a bilateral exercise with the host country (2). The exercises in the dataset build on an existing Chinese military diplomacy dataset published by NDU. The variable is ordinal because bilateral exercises are expected to be a better indicator of close-relations than a large multilateral exercise with multiple countries.

Chinese partnerships are fairly straight-forward based on press reporting and statements from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The partnership variable is ordinal: no partnership agreement (0), partnership (1), strategic partnership (2), and comprehensive strategic partnership (3). Chinese investments are notoriously hard to track due to high volume and opacity; however, the data here contain over 100 individual port projects in 63 different countries based on press reporting and secondary sources. In this analysis the term "project" encompasses increased Chinese involvement in foreign ports from construction, to operations, and finally long-term commercial or military lease agreements. Those in the dataset represent the most mature and arguably influential projects due to their visibility before Chinese and international audiences. The port project variable

is also ordinal: no port project (0), construction investment (1), port operations (2), commercial lease or military agreement (3). Granular data on port calls, military exercises, BRI port projects, and partnership—along with potential economic, security, and ideological covariates—allow statistical analysis and generalizable findings for the first time.

### *Modeling*

To generalize these findings, I used a series of statistical models to test the association between PLAN port visits and the three dependent variables of interest.<sup>481</sup> Again, partnership agreements are coded in ascending order in keeping with the hierarchical framework and practice of China's partnership diplomacy. BRI port projects are not as formally differentiated, but they have different levels of Chinese commitment and control. The notion that bilateral exercises demonstrate closer ties than multilateral exercises is intuitive, but slightly more speculative. In all three the data is ordinal; however, the distance between each ordered category is unknown. For example, a construction investment is clearly a lower tier of involvement than a long-term lease or a military agreement, but it is not possible to say the degree to which they are separated. That said, because the dependent variables are ordinal, ordered and categorical, an ordinal logistic regression was the most appropriate model to choose.

I used a distinct model for each of the dependent variables; however, the same independent and control variables were included in all three. The primary independent variable, *Total\_Ships*, is a count of all PLAN ship visits to a given country at the individual ship level. In other words, if two destroyers and a resupply ship visit a port, the count is three. I also included lagged versions of *Total\_Ships* to evaluate a port call's effect one and two years after the event. The first set of control variables measure potential economic factors that could be driving partnerships and port projects,

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<sup>481</sup> I am extremely grateful to Chen Wang and Chris Dictus for their guidance on methodologies and modeling.

including total trade with China, size of GDP, a measure of economic dependency (trade/GDP) between both China and its trade partner, as well as outbound FDI from China. In addition, China's arms-imports and exports were used as a proxy for security relationships. To account for similarities in political ideology or regime type, the model includes a variable that measures the distance between China and other states in UN General Assembly voting. Finally, I included the distance between Beijing and other capitals to determine whether associations are simply a local effect.

### *Data Analysis*

An initial check for sign and significance confirmed that the total number of PLAN ship visits (lagged and un-lagged) is positive and significant for military exercises, port deals, and partnership agreements. As the number of calls increases, the probability of having more involved exercises, port deals, and partnerships also increases. However, the coefficients for ordinal logistic regressions are difficult to interpret at face value, so I used Monte Carlo simulations to obtain quantities of interest that are more readily understood—in this case predictive probabilities. By running these simulations, I was able to quantitatively state the probability of the host-country obtaining each level of a partnership agreement, port deal, and military exercise.

Figure 5 below presents the graphical results of the simulations when the level of military exercise is the dependent variable and the total ship visits is the primary independent variable. The graph in the upper left quadrant, we are able to see that the predicted probability that the visited country holds no military exercises with China decreases from just under 100% with no port visits to roughly 60% with 13 visits. Therefore, while military exercises with China are still a relative rarity, hosting PLAN ships is a significant way to become a part of such endeavors. Similarly, moving to the upper right quadrant, the predicted probability of a country holding multilateral military exercises with China increases from just over 0% with 0 visits to 20% with 13 visits. Finally, the graph in the

lower left-hand quadrant shows that the probability of bilateral military exercises increases from 0% with no visits to just under 20% with 13 visits. In conclusion, military exercises with China are not a common phenomenon, but hosting PLAN ships with a port visit is a good way to increase the odds of participation.

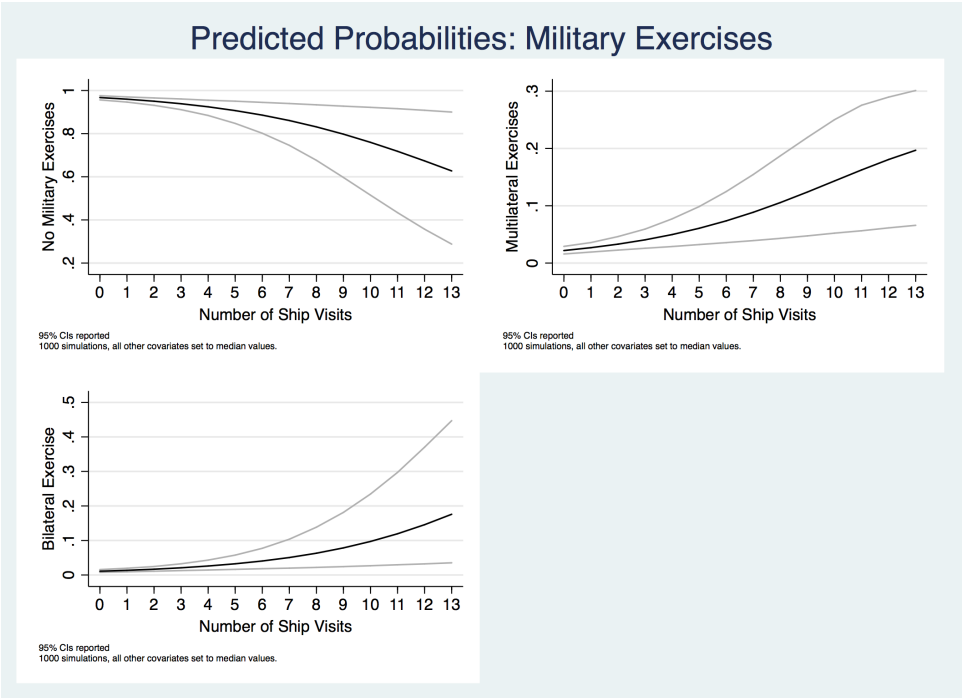


Figure 5.6 – Predicted Probabilities for Military Exercises

Figure 6 presents the graphical results of the simulations when the level of port project is the dependent variable and the total ship visits is the primary independent variable. Once again, all other regressors are held at their median values. As with military exercises, Figure 6 provides support for the expectation that the level of the port project increases as the total number of PLAN ship visits increases. To that end, the upper left quadrant highlights that the probability of having no port deal decreases from over 90% with no port visits, to less than 50% with 13 visits. The upper right panel indicates that the probability of China’s involvement in port construction increases from less than 5% with no port visits to more than 20% with 13 visits. Similarly, the lower left quadrant

demonstrates that the probability of having a port operation deal increases from just over 0% with no port visits, to more than 20% with 13 visits. Finally, the lower right panel indicates that the probability of a commercial lease or military agreement increases from 0% with no port visits, to more than 5% with 13 visits. Overall, the likelihood of higher Chinese involvement and control of foreign ports increases as the total number of ship visits increases.

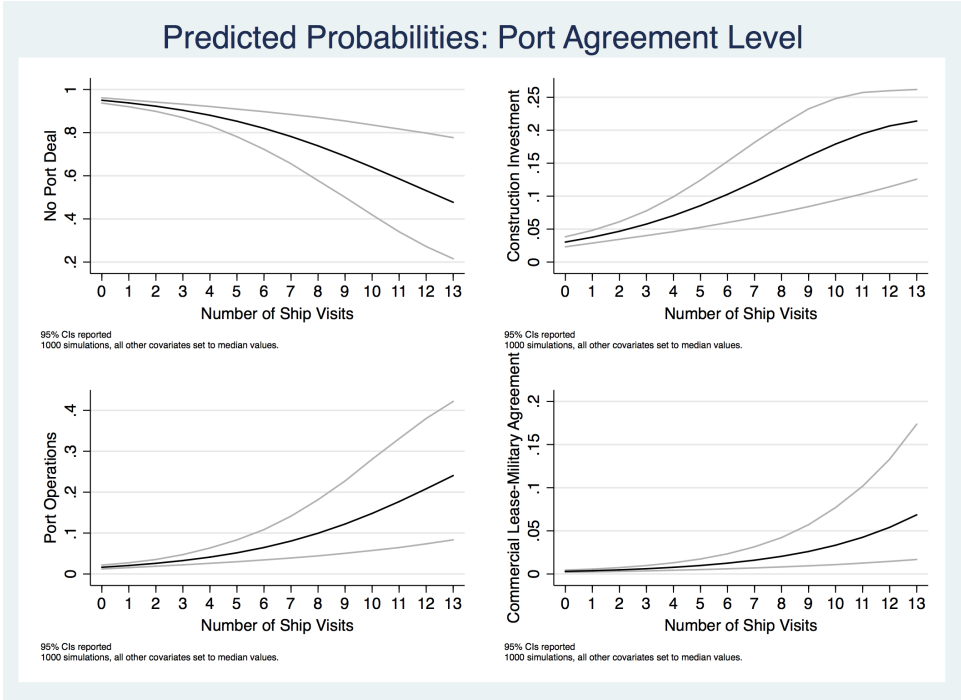


Figure 5.7 – Predicted Probabilities for Level of Port Deal

Figure 7 depicts the graphical results of the simulations with partnership agreement as the dependent variable, and the total number of ship visits as the independent variable. All other covariates are held at their median values. Overall, the results suggest strong support for the association between port visits and partnership agreements. The upper left quadrant of Figure 7 indicates that the probability of having no partnership agreement drops from over 80% with no port visits, to just under 20% with 13 port visits. In other words, the more PLAN ships visit a country, the more likely it is to reach some kind of partnership agreement with Beijing.

The upper right quadrant shows that the probability of having a cooperative partnership peaks at roughly 15% around seven port visits. This is a particularly compelling finding because it suggests that the odds of reaching such an agreement increases as the PLAN visits increase, but tapers off with additional visits potentially because deeper diplomatic arrangements are made. To that end, the bottom left quadrant demonstrates that the probability of obtaining a strategic partnership peaks at roughly 24% around 10 visits. Finally, the lower right quadrant indicates that the probability of reaching a comprehensive strategic partnership increases from just over 0% with 0 port visits to over 50% with 13 visits. Taken as a whole, the results suggest that the probability of a cooperative partnership is greatest around 7 visits, a strategic partnership near 10 visits, and a comprehensive strategic partnership at 13 visits.

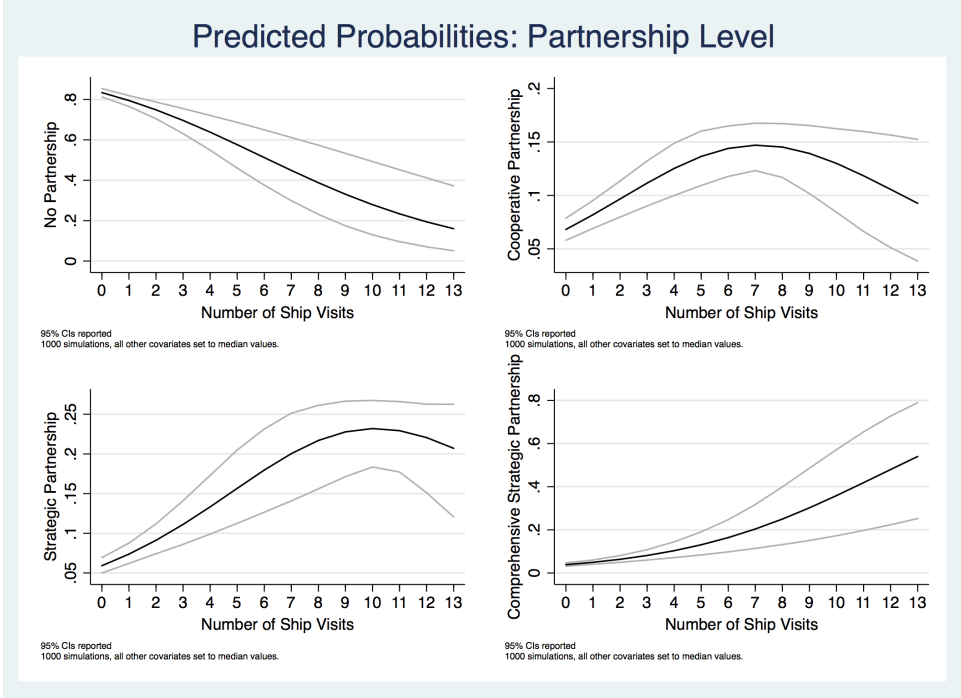


Figure 5.8 – Predicted Probabilities for Partnership Agreements

### *Regression Table*

One potential concern with the regression results is that I am exploring between country variation in the number of port visits and the variety of dependent variables (military exercises, partnership levels, port agreement levels), rather than within country variation. Put another way, the regression results as presented do not consider how Chinese port visits to country X lead to changes in the partnership level with country X. To address this concern, I also estimated the ordered logistic regression with fixed effects. Fixed effects regressions allow me to account for time invariant heterogeneity within the countries receiving the PLAN visits. In other words, I am able to control for potential omitted variable bias.

The results largely accord with those presented early, but with some caveats. Most importantly, the number of total calls is still a statistically significant positive predictor for all dependent variables. However, the lagged variables are not as consistent. In models 1, 3, and 5 (those without the controls) the lagged variables are still positive, statistically significant predictors for more substantial relations. When I introduce controls, the relationship is murkier. With military exercises, the total number of calls is still significant, but neither of the lagged variables are. Furthermore, while insignificant, the sign on the one-year lag is negative. With partnership levels, I had to omit the controls for both China and the visited country's GDP because the model would not converge otherwise. After dropping those variables, the one-year lag is a statistically significant positive predictor for the partnership level, but the two-year lag is not. Finally, I omit the model on port levels with controls entirely. After trying a variety of combinations, the model would not converge without omitting a significant number of the control variables. The need to omit control variables for both partnership levels and port agreements is most likely due to my relatively small sample size. There is simply not sufficient variation in the country-year data to allow the regression

to properly converge. Therefore, while I am sensitive to concerns about the need for fixed effects, the conclusions that I am able to draw after running the models are distinctly limited.



	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Military Exercises	Military Exercises	Partnership Level	Partnership Level	Port Agreement Level	Port Agreement Level
main						
1 Year Lagged Visit	0.447*** [0.338,0.556]	0.213*** [0.098,0.328]	0.480*** [0.386,0.573]	0.259*** [0.166,0.352]	0.421*** [0.331,0.511]	0.233*** [0.136,0.329]
2 Year Lagged Visit	0.408*** [0.275,0.541]	0.257*** [0.117,0.397]	0.355*** [0.246,0.464]	0.163** [0.051,0.274]	0.336*** [0.223,0.448]	0.183** [0.069,0.296]
Total Ship Visits	0.553*** [0.439,0.667]	0.364*** [0.248,0.479]	0.426*** [0.334,0.519]	0.252*** [0.161,0.343]	0.356*** [0.263,0.449]	0.218*** [0.123,0.312]
Total Trade with China		0.000 [-0.000,0.000]		0.000* [0.000,0.000]		0.000* [0.000,0.000]
GDP Visited Country		-0.000 [-0.000,0.000]		-0.000 [-0.000,0.000]		-0.000* [-0.000,-0.000]
China's GDP		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]
Visited Country's Dependency on China		-2.124* [-4.140,-0.109]		-1.384** [-2.393,-0.375]		-0.012 [-0.171,0.147]
China's Dependency on Visited Country		28.209* [0.617,55.801]		36.614*** [17.690,55.538]		39.125** [13.438,64.811]
China's FDI Investment		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		0.000 [-0.000,0.000]
Idealpoint		0.675** [0.214,1.136]		0.026 [-0.198,0.250]		-0.502*** [-0.754,-0.250]
China's Idealpoint		0.676 [-0.446,1.797]		0.498 [-0.143,1.138]		0.014 [-0.777,0.804]
Distance UN Voting Behavior		-0.784** [-1.347,-0.220]		0.360* [0.077,0.643]		0.355* [0.017,0.692]
China's Arms Exports		0.000** [0.000,0.000]		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		-0.000 [-0.000,0.000]
China's Arms Imports		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		0.000*** [0.000,0.000]		-0.000 [-0.000,0.000]
Distance From China		-0.000*** [-0.000,-0.000]		0.000** [0.000,0.000]		0.000 [-0.000,0.000]
cut1						
Constant	3.244*** [3.050,3.437]	1.994** [0.677,3.310]	1.412*** [1.314,1.510]	2.642*** [1.909,3.375]	2.411*** [2.275,2.547]	5.373*** [4.335,6.410]
cut2						
Constant	4.269*** [3.999,4.540]	3.128*** [1.803,4.453]	1.960*** [1.846,2.074]	3.252*** [2.515,3.990]	3.318*** [3.130,3.506]	6.350*** [5.299,7.401]
cut3						
Constant		2.857*** [2.704,3.010]	2.888 [2.704,3.010]	4.250*** [3.500,4.999]	5.192*** [4.804,5.580]	8.258*** [7.152,9.365]
Observations	2888	2298	2888	2298	2888	2298
AIC	1466.788	1226.641	4567.572	3763.151	2500.793	2076.168

95% confidence intervals in brackets  
\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Table 5.1 – PLAN Port Visits and Host State Alignment Behavior

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Conclusion*

These findings are somewhat counter-intuitive. China's increased economic and military power—made highly visible by the sharp increase in PLAN ship visits after 2008—could be expected to produce a balancing response from many host states. Or, port calls might be more frequent during times of increased tension or crises, as a way to intimidate the host country into compliance with Chinese demands. However, I find that Beijing has managed the unpredictability of port visits through inducements rather than overt coercion. By properly sequencing ship visits with leadership meetings—and the potential economic incentives that they bring—Beijing has shrewdly revealed its growing military capability. And by doing so, it has received the tangible benefits that come from demonstrations of military power, while managing and mitigating the potential costs.

The preceding chapters indicate that PLAN port visits are a more purposeful political activity than previously thought. Most are well planned and integrated with other tools of statecraft to further Beijing's larger diplomatic strategy. There are obviously overlapping motivations and mechanisms, but PLAN port visits induce accommodation for Beijing's policy preferences by raising a foreign leader's perception of Chinese power and status, as well as the potential benefits that may accrue from further alignment with Beijing.

Drawing on these insights, there are three primary findings from this project. First, PLAN port visits serve the interests of CCP leadership above all else. Prior to 2008 this largely meant elevating China's global status as a great power, while mitigating perceptions of a China threat. After 2008, however, port call diplomacy served the CCP's most essential goals. By supporting China's continued economic expansion overseas, maritime sovereignty issues, and national unification with Taiwan, PLAN visits furthered Beijing's ultimate objective—regime security. At the

center of this conclusion is the fact that domestic politics are important to our understanding of naval port visits. A desire for greater status among Beijing's leaders and the Chinese public manifested itself in PLAN presence abroad. Seen through this lens, increased port call diplomacy from 2009-2018 was a highly visible expression of Beijing's responsiveness to domestic concerns over status and interests.

Second, leader characteristics and limitations are what make port call diplomacy such an efficient instrument of foreign policy. Without the use of force, ships can change leader perceptions in disproportionate ways. They do so because leaders are ill-equipped to process complex and contradictory information, and as a result, must rely on shortcuts to draw inferences and reach timely decisions, especially in terms of relative power. Imposing warships and massive hospital ships make China's military and economic strength real and immediate. A leader who stands on the deck of a PLAN destroyer needs no further information to conclude that China is a global power that deserves accommodation if not deference.

Third, PLAN ship visits are a means for Beijing to build and manage power relationships—a form of iterative “grappling” for relative position and advantage vis-à-vis other great powers and in the cost-benefit calculations of leaders. This project continues the field's recognition of greater variation in alignment behavior and the increments between bandwagoning and balancing. I believe they are limitless when a state's economic, political and security interests are considered. Rather than black and white poles, there is a variegated continuum of state responses to power that takes all these interests into account. Ship visits support broader Chinese diplomatic activities, which lead to intermediate policy goals such as port deals, military exercises, and partnerships, which incrementally bring host states into alignment with Beijing. If successful, this alignment behavior will ensure China's continued economic expansion, sovereignty claims, and national unification with Taiwan, while avoiding the costs of balancing coalitions and even war.

That said, this dissertation's findings are only the beginning, both in terms of academic research and China's naval interactions abroad. After all, PLAN port call diplomacy is an iterative game; just because Beijing has managed to thread a strategic needle in the time period covered, does not mean that continued success is assured. I have argued that Beijing has succeeded largely because of linkages between port visits, leaders, and inducements rather than overt coercion. However, linkages between port visits and larger externalities cut both ways. If economic incentives do not materialize or mature as expected, foreign leaders may perceive China in a less optimistic light. They may see intimidation tactics in PLAN calls that were once viewed as "friendly visits." This is almost inevitable. China's economic and military power is likely to grow, as is Beijing's ability and willingness to coerce. As one Chinese academic explained, "we come with a smile, but someday we won't have to."<sup>482</sup> If this happens, the gains made over the last 20 years will be reversed and host states will incrementally move back along the continuum of alignment away from Beijing. There are already signs of other narratives being attached to ship visits, as well as negative reactions from other great powers, especially the United States. The case of Sri Lanka has been widely reported as a success for Beijing; however, it is actually a cautionary tale.

One of Beijing's most audacious applications of port call diplomacy came in September, 2014, when the Chinese Type 039 submarine *Changzheng-2* pulled into Sri Lanka's Colombo South Container Terminal for resupply and crew rest before joining the rest of the anti-piracy task force in the Gulf of Aden. The *Changzheng-2*'s visit was the first time a Chinese submarine had ventured into the Indian Ocean; however, the larger implications of the submarine's presence were political. First, the *Changzheng-2*'s port call created diplomatic tremors as it coincided with the arrival of Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, to Sri Lanka the very same day. It was similarly not lost on the

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<sup>482</sup> Conversations with Chinese academics in Beijing and Shanghai in 2019.

diplomatic community that the submarine's visit set the stage for Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Colombo a week later.

When he arrived, President Xi drove from the airport on a Chinese built highway; he launched the final phase of a power plant project financed and built by China; and he visited the Colombo South Container Terminal, run by China Merchant Holdings, where the submarine had berthed. Most importantly, President Xi finalized the massive \$1.4 billion Colombo Port City Project that would come to symbolize China's growing influence and presence in Sri Lanka. There were certainly signs that Beijing had used its ships successfully to pull Sri Lanka into China's economic, political, and even security orbit. In 2007, when two PLAN frigates stopped in Colombo, Sri Lanka, for resupply and crew rest, the Sri Lankan president was in Beijing, meeting with China's paramount leader, Hu Jintao. The joint communique from the visit celebrated 50 years of friendship between the two countries and announced multiple agreements—including the implementation of the cooperative partnership agreement signed in 2005.

When the West sought to rein in the Sri Lankan government with an end to military assistance, Beijing filled the void with political support and a large number of advanced weapons. It also sent the destroyer, *Guangzhou*, to Colombo on its way to participate in Pakistan's AMAN-09 exercise, as well as on the return trip to China in March 2009.<sup>483</sup> This was a clear signal of support for the Sri Lankan government in the final months of the civil war. It was no surprise when the fighting stopped and Beijing moved quickly to strengthen its position in Sri Lanka. In January 2010, the frigate *Wenzhou*, of the 4<sup>th</sup> escort task force, paid a call, which included meetings with the Commander-in-Chief and Chief-of-Staff of the Sri Lankan Navy.<sup>484 485</sup> Beijing was succeeding by all three measures of alignment used in this study. Sri Lanka held its first of several bilateral military

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<sup>483</sup> "The Chinese Navy's Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean."

<sup>484</sup> "The Chinese Navy's Emerging Support Network in the Indian Ocean."

<sup>485</sup> "Sri Lanka Navy Commander Visits Wenzhou Warship - China Navy in Sri Lanka."

exercise with China in 2012. Economic progress continued as well with the announcement in August that China Merchant Holdings would obtain a 55 percent stake in the \$500 million Colombo port project due to commence within six months.<sup>486</sup> And, in 2013, Sri Lanka and Beijing elevated their bilateral relationship through an agreement to form a strategic cooperative partnership.<sup>487</sup>

A total of nine PLAN visits occurred in 2014, including two by Chinese submarines. This military presence, along with the port deals—and the mounting debt they created—only added to Sri Lankan opposition to the Rajapaksa administration. Once again domestic politics and leaders are central to understanding the impact of port call diplomacy, both in Beijing and in host states. Two months after the second submarine visit, Rajapaksa was voted out of office and replaced by Maithripala Sirisena, who campaigned on promises to reform Sri Lanka’s corruption and curb Chinese debt and influence.

PLAN visits stopped for over a year after the election, but resumed in 2016 and 2017 as China and Sri Lanka negotiated debt relief and the future of Chinese investments. In July, 2017, unable to repay its debts, the Sri Lankan government accepted a debt-for-equity swap, giving Beijing a 99-year lease on the port. The port’s lease caused a domestic uproar over lost sovereignty and international criticism of Beijing’s business practices. Beyond financial concerns, India and the United States worried that Hambantota would be used as a de facto resupply base for the PLAN, providing Beijing with a permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean.

A month later, the PLAN hospital ship, *Daishandao*, arrived in Sri Lanka as part of *Harmonious Mission-2017* to provide free medical treatment for members of the Sri Lankan military and civilians. This signal of China’s benevolence was clearly aimed to improve China’s image in Sri

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<sup>486</sup> “China Merchants, Spence Picked for Colombo Port Deal.”

<sup>487</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Fiji, “Premier Li Keqiang Meets with President of Sri Lanka Mahinda Rajapakse,” May 29, 2013, <http://fj.china-embassy.org/eng/zgdt/t1046576.htm>.

Lanka and internationally.<sup>488</sup> Then in November, the PLAN's newest cadet training vessel, *Qizhiguang*, arrived in Sri Lanka for a visit that included athletic matches, diplomatic engagements and events with local Chinese nationals.<sup>489</sup> It is unclear whether the PLAN hospital ship and the training ship changed any leader perceptions of Chinese economic involvement, or naval presence, in Sri Lanka, but the PLAN has not returned since. Sri Lanka is a reminder that Beijing's port called diplomacy, and the positive outcomes it supports, are vulnerable to the ebb and flow of domestic politics— especially leadership transitions.

Tanzania has turned out to be a similar case. Beijing invested considerable diplomatic and economic capital, but the planned \$10 billion port project at Bagamoyo has been suspended indefinitely due to disagreements over the investment terms. The deal was originally signed in 2013 during a visit by Xi Jinping; however, the election of President John Magufuli in 2015 brought a reevaluation and renegotiation of foreign investments in resource extraction, telecommunications, and infrastructure projects. Magufuli's victory also reflected a groundswell of nationalist sentiment and resentment toward China and its business practices.<sup>490</sup>

Domestic politics and new, unpredictable leaders have proven capable of damaging even the most well-laid plans in Beijing, but this is not the only danger that Sri Lanka highlights. Even before the BRI, the convergence of PLAN port visits and overseas projects—especially ports— fueled a “String of Pearls” narrative among international security analysts and scholars alike. By this account, several of China's overseas port investments are actually precursors to future PLAN bases. This specific framing of Beijing's intent began with China's investment at the Pakistani port of Gwadar in 2002 and appeared validated in 2017 when the PLA opened its first overseas base in

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<sup>488</sup> China Daily, “China's Naval Hospital Ship Makes First Visit to Sri Lanka[1]- Chinadaily.Com.Cn,” August 7, 2017, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-08/07/content\\_30359994.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017-08/07/content_30359994.htm).

<sup>489</sup> Colombo Page, “Sri Lanka: Chinese PLA Navy Ship Qi Jiguang Arrives at the Port of Colombo in Sri Lanka on a Goodwill Visit,” November 10, 2017, [http://www.colombopage.com/archive\\_17B/Nov10\\_1510326057CH.php](http://www.colombopage.com/archive_17B/Nov10_1510326057CH.php).

<sup>490</sup> Reuters Staff, “Tanzania's China-Backed \$10 Billion Port Plan Stalls over Terms.”

Djibouti. China's take-over of Sri Lanka's Hambantota port has added "Debt Trap Diplomacy" to the list of denunciations against Beijing's overseas deals. In many quarters, PLAN visits in conjunction with "win-win" economic cooperation are now interpreted as a mercantilist plot by a revisionist, rising power.

This is exactly the type of accusation that Beijing set out to blunt with its reassurance campaign and PLAN "friendly visits" in particular. Unfortunately for Beijing, the relationship between port visits and incentives that I believe drives positive outcomes does not preclude additional linkages to China's aggressive behavior in the South China Sea or growing concern over China's illegal, under-reported and unregulated (IUU) fishing practices. These connections will allow critics to assign the worst to Chinese intentions and will inevitably increase resistance to Chinese economic and military power.<sup>491</sup>

Even in the Philippines, where President Duterte publicly separated himself and his country from the United States to become one of Xi Jinping's supplicants, allegiances change quickly. During a 2019 port call to the Philippines, Chinese Rear Admiral Xu Haihua stated, "I believe the visit will enhance military to military exchanges and mutual trust, deepen friendship and strengthen cooperation between our two navies."<sup>492</sup> However, six months later, after a Philippines fishing boat was rammed and sunk by a Chinese vessel in the South China Sea, Philippines President Duterte invoked the US-Philippines mutual defense treaty. "I'm calling now America... I would like America to gather their Seventh Fleet in front of China."<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Edward Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

<sup>492</sup> Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Philippines, "Chinese Naval Escort Fleet Pays Friendly Visit to Philippines."

<sup>493</sup> CNN Philippines Staff, "Duterte Invokes Military Pact with US amid South China Sea Dispute," July 19, 2019, <https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2019/7/17/Duterte-Philippines-US-Mutual-Defense-Treaty-South-China-Sea.html>.



Finally, the signal that Beijing sent when the *Changzheng-2* pulled into Sri Lanka's Colombo South Container Terminal in September 2014, was heard loud and clear in other quarters. That goes for the subsequent PLAN visits in 2017 as well. Admittedly, the China-U.S. rivalry is multifaceted and it is difficult to disentangle multiple causes and effects, but it seems reasonable to accept U.S. Navy port visits to Sri Lanka as a measure of U.S. reaction. The response that came just two months after the *Daishandao* visit was unambiguous and overwhelming. First, the Nimitz carrier strike group pulled into Colombo for a port visit in October, 2017, during which sailors and marines interacted with the Sri Lankan public, met their counterparts in the Sri Lankan Navy, and performed community service projects. The battlegroup's surface combatants included the cruiser, *USS Princeton*, and four destroyers—*USS Howard*, *USS Shoup*, *USS Pinckney* and *USS Kidd*. More importantly, the *USS Nimitz* was the first U.S. aircraft carrier to visit Sri Lanka in thirty years.<sup>494</sup>

In August of 2018, the amphibious transport ship, *USS Anchorage*, along with the 13<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) arrived in Trincomalee, for a similar port visit, as well as exercises with the Sri Lankan Navy and Marines.<sup>495</sup> This was followed up by a second large amphibious ship, *USS Rushmore* with the 13<sup>th</sup> MEU embarked, that arrived in Colombo in December 2018.<sup>496</sup> The same month, the *USS John C. Stennis* aircraft carrier established a logistical hub in Sri Lanka to receive supplies and services at sea.<sup>497</sup> Additionally, in 2018, the US and Sri Lanka began discussing a revised draft of their 1995 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which allows greater military access in and

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<sup>494</sup> Staff, "USS Nimitz Is 1st US Carrier to Visit Sri Lanka in More than 30 Years," Stars and Stripes, October 28, 2017, [https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia\\_pacific/uss-nimitz-is-1st-us-carrier-to-visit-sri-lanka-in-more-than-30-years-1.495126](https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/uss-nimitz-is-1st-us-carrier-to-visit-sri-lanka-in-more-than-30-years-1.495126).

<sup>495</sup> U.S. Embassy Colombo, "USS Anchorage & 13th MEU Arrive in Sri Lanka," U.S. Embassy in Sri Lanka, August 24, 2018, <https://lk.usembassy.gov/uss-anchorage-13th-meu-arrive-in-sri-lanka/>.

<sup>496</sup> "USS Rushmore, 13th MEU Strengthen Partnerships in Sri Lanka," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, December 21, 2018, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1720825/uss-rushmore-13th-meu-strengthen-partnerships-in-sri-lanka/>.

<sup>497</sup> Grant G. Grady, "USS John C. Stennis Leverages Logistics Hub in Sri Lanka," Commander, U.S. 7th Fleet, December 6, 2018, <http://www.c7f.navy.mil/Media/News/Display/Article/1706047/uss-john-c-stennis-leverages-logistics-hub-in-sri-lanka>.

out of Sri Lankan territory.<sup>498</sup> The increase in U.S. naval visits and Sri Lankan cooperation should be considered a negative reaction to Beijing's strategy, and more specifically, its port call diplomacy.

There has been a similar U.S.-China port visit rivalry in Vietnam since 2008. In June, the US hospital ship, *USNS Mercy*, visited Vietnam to deliver free medical care to Vietnamese civilians as part of the US Pacific Partnership initiative, followed by the destroyer *USS Mustin* in October 2008.<sup>499</sup> <sup>500</sup> A month later the PLAN cadet-training ship, *Zhenge He*, arrived in Danang for a five-day visit.<sup>501</sup> In 2009, the United States sent multiple ships to Vietnam, including the destroyer *USS Lassen* and the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet flagship, *USS Blue Ridge*, in November, as well as the first ever “fly out” of Vietnamese visitors to the aircraft carrier *USS John C. Stennis* the same year. However, the overwhelming U.S. response came in 2010 when the U.S. Navy sent the entire George Washington Carrier Strike Group, as well as the destroyer *USS John S. McCain* later that year.<sup>502</sup>

This sort of port call rivalry seems mundane enough—a series of competitive status signals with no real chance of escalation. However, there is a long line of authors back to Thucydides, who believe that status is one of the main drivers of conflict among individuals and states.<sup>503</sup> In other words, status is worth fighting for. Since Beijing's port call diplomacy is a distinctively visible status signal, it is a proxy for the contentious, multi-dimensional status competition that is playing out between China and the United States globally. The status literature provides insights into “status competition” and even the potential for “status dilemmas” that parallel the well-known security dilemma.<sup>504</sup> This hazard is particularly relevant in the maritime domain, where contested naval

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<sup>498</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, “Sri Lankans Up in Arms Over US Military Pacts,” August 15, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/sri-lankans-up-in-arms-over-us-military-pacts/>.

<sup>499</sup> Staff, “Pacific Partnership 2008,” 2008, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/subsite/pp08/photos/june.shtml>.

<sup>500</sup> “USS Mustin (DDG 89) History,” accessed June 26, 2021, <http://www.uscarriers.net/ddg89history.htm>.

<sup>501</sup> “Chinese Naval Ship Visits Vietnam - China News - SINA English.”

<sup>502</sup> Luttwak, *The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy*, 159–61.

<sup>503</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*.

<sup>504</sup> Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*.

hierarchies have a long history of inciting major-power conflict, including the last two world wars. Naval writers have long appreciated the value of status, or prestige, as well as its pitfalls. As Mahan explains, a nation has the right, “to sustain by force, by national efficiency, its ‘position,’ its ‘prestige’ and its influence among states.”<sup>505</sup> Booth warns that “prestige races” create zero-sum games “in which one state may gain only to the extent that its adversary is humbled.”<sup>506</sup>

Unfortunately, PLAN port visits have the potential to incite a more intense competitive response from the U.S. Navy if Beijing and Washington continue on their current course and speed. China’s neighbors—especially those involved in South China Sea disputes—will similarly perceive “friendly visits” as mere displays of force in light of Beijing’s island fortifications and obvious preparations for conflict in the Spratly and Paracel Islands. These states will continue to hedge, deriving as much economic benefit from China as they can, while making arrangements with the United States for any worst-case scenarios. Third, as negative perceptions of Chinese power harden, the linkage between China’s economic activities abroad and PLAN visits may become uncomfortable for domestic audiences. However, there is little doubt that the BRI will continue expanding, and China will certainly establish more overseas bases similar to the one in Djibouti.

In the end, PLAN port visits may turn out to be most meaningful to the leaders in Beijing. Chinese media coverage of ship arrivals provides a window into how Chinese leaders see themselves, and how they want to be seen by others. This is unlikely to change. The Chinese public’s appetite for sea power and PLAN defense of overseas interests is similarly unlikely to abate. Therefore, Beijing would be wise to find an equilibrium, a level and specific type of port call diplomacy that produces positive outcomes based on incentives and an explicit absence of coercion. This may mean a cessation of port calls to rival claimants in the South China Sea and any countries

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<sup>505</sup> A. T. Mahan, *Armaments and Arbitration: Or, The Place of Force in the International Relations of States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), 90.

<sup>506</sup> Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 54.

where tensions lie under the surface. Warship visits may only be appropriate in the most convivial settings. Otherwise, if Beijing is sincere about reassuring wary neighbors through exchanges, it should send a student orchestra rather than a guided missile destroyer.

In the end, it is worth remembering the *Changzheng-2*'s bold visit to Sri Lanka's Colombo South Container Terminal prior to Xi Jinping's state visit in 2014. When he arrived, President Xi received a lavish welcome at Bandaranaike Airport in Colombo. Large crowds cheered, waving Chinese and Sri Lankan flags. There was an honor guard and a military band. President Xi employed a nautical metaphor to express his gratitude and optimism for the future of bilateral relations: "I hope this visit can carry forward the profound feelings between the two peoples and make the ship of China-Sri Lanka friendship ride the waves and wind and move forward on the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century."<sup>507</sup> However, it wasn't the "ship of China-Sri Lanka friendship" that made some observers suspicious that the Hambantota port deal was a mercantilist plot to gain military access in the Indian Ocean and undermine U.S. authority in the region. It wasn't the Chinese built highway, the airport, or the powerplant that provoked the most alarm in capitals such as Washington, Tokyo and Delhi—it was the submarine.

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<sup>507</sup> "Xi Jinping Arrives in Colombo Starting His State Visit to Sri Lanka," September 16, 2014, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/zjpcxshzzcygyslshdsschybdtkstmedfslkydjxgfw/t1192334.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/zjpcxshzzcygyslshdsschybdtkstmedfslkydjxgfw/t1192334.shtml).

APPENDICES

<b>Appendix 1: PLAN Total Ship Visits by Country and Type (1985-2018)</b>				
<b>Africa</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Djibouti	29	1	2	26
South Africa	19	0	0	19
Tanzania	14	0	2	12
Seychelles	7	0	1	6
Tunisia	7	0	0	7
Algeria	6	0	0	6
Cameroon	6	0	0	6
Morocco	6	0	0	6
Angola	4	0	1	3
Gabon	4	0	1	3
Nigeria	4	0	0	4
Ghana	3	0	0	3
Ivory Coast	3	0	0	3
Kenya	3	0	1	2
Madagascar	3	0	0	3
Mozambique	3	0	1	2
Senegal	3	0	0	3
Sudan	3	0	0	3
Namibia	2	0	0	2
Sierra Leone	1	0	1	0
Benin	0	0	0	0
Cape Verde	0	0	0	0
Comoros	0	0	0	0
Democratic Republic of the Congo	0	0	0	0
Equatorial Guinea	0	0	0	0
Eritrea	0	0	0	0
Gambia	0	0	0	0
Guinea	0	0	0	0
Guinea-Bissau	0	0	0	0
Liberia	0	0	0	0
Libya	0	0	0	0
Mauritania	0	0	0	0
Mauritius	0	0	0	0

Republic of the Congo	0	0	0	0
Sao Tome and Principe	0	0	0	0
Somalia	0	0	0	0
Togo	0	0	0	0
Total	130	1	10	119
<b>Asia</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Pakistan	33	1	1	31
Indonesia	27	3	1	23
Singapore	25	0	0	25
Malaysia	23	2	1	20
Sri Lanka	22	1	1	20
Thailand	20	3	0	17
Vietnam	15	2	0	13
India	13	3	1	9
Brunei	12	1	1	10
Philippines	12	0	1	11
Cambodia	10	1	1	8
Myanmar	10	1	1	8
Bangladesh	9	1	2	6
South Korea	9	3	0	6
Maldives	5	0	1	4
East Timor	4	0	1	3
North Korea	4	1	0	3
Bangladesh	2	0	0	2
Japan	2	1	0	1
Pakistan	2	0	0	2
Sri Lanka	2	0	0	2
Thailand	1	1	0	0
Georgia	0	0	0	0
Total	262	25	13	224
<b>Europe</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Russia	35	2	0	33
France	19	1	1	17
Italy	13	2	0	11
Greece	12	0	0	12
United Kingdom	10	0	0	10
Portugal	9	1	0	8

Germany	7	0	0	7
Spain	7	1	1	5
Denmark	6	0	0	6
Finland	6	0	0	6
Poland	4	0	0	4
Belgium	3	0	0	3
Croatia	3	0	0	3
Latvia	3	0	0	3
Malta	3	0	0	3
Netherlands	3	0	0	3
Sweden	3	0	0	3
Ukraine	3	0	0	3
Bulgaria	2	0	0	2
Romania	1	0	0	1
Albania	0	0	0	0
Belarus	0	0	0	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	0	0
Estonia	0	0	0	0
Iceland	0	0	0	0
Ireland	0	0	0	0
Lithuania	0	0	0	0
Macedonia	0	0	0	0
Moldova	0	0	0	0
Monaco	0	0	0	0
Montenegro	0	0	0	0
Norway	0	0	0	0
Slovenia	0	0	0	0
Total	152	7	2	143
<b>Middle East</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Oman	28	0	0	28
Saudi Arabia	14	0	0	14
Turkey	10	0	0	10
Yemen	9	0	0	9
Egypt	7	0	0	7
United Arab Emirates	7	0	0	7
Qatar	6	0	0	6
Iran	5	0	0	5
Kuwait	5	0	0	5

Israel	3	0	0	3
Bahrain	2	0	0	2
Jordan	2	0	0	2
Cyprus	1	0	0	1
Iraq	0	0	0	0
Lebanon	0	0	0	0
Syria	0	0	0	0
Total	99	0	0	99
<b>North America</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
United States	43	1	4	38
Canada	8	1	0	7
Mexico	7	0	1	6
Cuba	4	0	1	3
Grenada	2	0	2	0
Jamaica	2	1	1	0
Antigua and Barbuda	1	0	1	0
Barbados	1	0	1	0
Costa Rica	1	0	1	0
Dominica	1	0	1	0
Dominican Republic	1	0	1	0
Trinidad and Tobago	1	0	1	0
United States	1	1	0	0
Belize	0	0	0	0
El Salvador	0	0	0	0
Guatemala	0	0	0	0
Haiti	0	0	0	0
Honduras	0	0	0	0
Nicaragua	0	0	0	0
Panama	0	0	0	0
Saint Kitts and Nevis	0	0	0	0
Saint Lucia	0	0	0	0
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	0	0	0	0
Bahamas	0	0	0	0
Total	73	4	15	54
<b>Oceania</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Australia	26	5	1	20
New Zealand	23	3	0	20



Vanuatu	7	1	2	4
Tonga	5	2	2	1
Papua New Guinea	4	1	2	1
Fiji	3	1	2	0
Kiribati	0	0	0	0
Marshall Islands	0	0	0	0
Micronesia	0	0	0	0
Nauru	0	0	0	0
Palau	0	0	0	0
Samoa	0	0	0	0
Solomon Islands	0	0	0	0
Tuvalu	0	0	0	0
Total	68	13	9	46
<b>South America</b>				
Country	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Chile	9	0	1	8
Peru	8	0	1	7
Ecuador	6	1	1	4
Brazil	5	0	0	5
Argentina	3	0	0	3
Venezuela	1	0	1	0
Colombia	0	0	0	0
Guyana	0	0	0	0
Suriname	0	0	0	0
Uruguay	0	0	0	0
Total	32	1	4	27
<b>Global Total</b>				
All Countries	Total Ships	Training	Hospital	Combatants
Total	816	51	53	712

<b>Appendix 2: Military Exercises with China</b>		
<b>Africa</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Angola	2016	Multilateral, unknown
Cameroon	2014	Bilateral, anti-piracy exercise
	2016	Ekue Kugbe multilateral, Nigerian-led maritime conference on anti-piracy
Gabon	2009	Bilateral, joint medical rescue exercise
Ghana	2015	Multilateral, unknown
	2016	Ekue Kugbe multilateral, Nigerian-led maritime conference on anti-piracy
	2018	Bilateral, joint exercise
Namibia	2014	Bilateral, fleet formation/communications practice
Nigeria	2014	Bilateral, enhance mutual trust/cooperation
	2016	Ekue Kugbe multilateral, Nigerian-led maritime conference on anti-piracy
South Africa	2019	Mosi, multilateral, joint military drill
	2019	Bilateral, unknown
Tanzania	2014	Beyond/Transcend bilateral, month-long exercise
Togo	2016	Ekue Kugbe multilateral, Nigerian-led maritime conference on anti-piracy
Zimbabwe	2016	Multilateral, unknown
<b>Asia</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Armenia	2020	Caucasus 2020, multilateral, defensive tactics/ encirclement/ battlefield C2
Bangladesh	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	Bilateral and multilateral, unknown
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
Brunei	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
Cambodia	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2016	Dragon Gold 2016 bilateral, humanitarian rescue and disaster relief
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
India	2003	Bilateral, search-and-rescue drill
	2005	Bilateral, communication for casualty evacuation exercise
	2007	Bilateral, anti-terrorism drill
	2008	Bilateral, unknown
	2013	Hand in Hand 2013, anti-terror joint exercise
	2014	Bilateral, joint counter-terrorism exercise
	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas

	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2015	Hand-in-Hand 205 bilateral, anti-terrorism
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2016	Bilateral, unknown
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2017	Hand-in-Hand bilateral, anti-terror
	2019	Hand-in-Hand bilateral, counter-terror and humanitarian assistance
	2019	Center-2019 multilateral, counter-terror
	2020	Cobra Gold multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
Indonesia	2011	Sharp Knife 2011, bilateral exercise, modernization/counter-terror
	2012	Sharp Knife 2012, bilateral exercise, Special Operations
	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2016	RIMPAC 2016
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
	2020	Cobra Gold multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
Japan	2009	Bilateral, first joint exercises, joint search and rescue
	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2020	Cobra Gold, multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
Kazakhstan	2002	Bilateral, cross-border anti-terrorism exercise
	2003	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)/ multilateral, "Coalition 2003"
	2007	Peace Mission 2007, multilateral, first large-scale SCO exercise
	2010	Peace Mission 2010, multilateral, SCO multi-national anti-terror drill
	2012	Peace Mission 2012, multilateral, SCO multi-national anti-terror drill
	2015	Xiamen 2015, multilateral, internet anti-terror exercise
	2016	Peace Mission 2016, multilateral, SCO multi-national anti-terror drill
	2019	Center-2019, multilateral, counter-terror
Kyrgyzstan	2003	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)/ multilateral, anti-terrorism exercise
	2007	Peace Mission 2007, multilateral, first large-scale SCO exercise
	2010	Peace Mission 2010, multilateral, SCO multi-national anti-terror drill
	2015	Xiamen 2015, multilateral, internet anti-terror exercise
	2016	Peace Mission 2016, multilateral, SCO multi-national anti-terror drill
	2019	Center-2019 multilateral, counter-terror

Laos	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
	2018	Peace-Train 2018 bilateral, humanitarian rescue
	2019	Peace-Train 2019 bilateral, humanitarian rescue
Malaysia	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2014	Peace and Friendship 2014 bilateral, table top exercise focused on education ties
	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2015	Bilateral, Strait of Malacca
	2016	ADMM-Plus, multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2016	Exercise Aman Youyi 2016, humanitarian and disaster relief
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
	2018	Peace and Friendship 2018 multilateral, joint and compulsory peace exercise
	2020	Cobra Gold multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
Maldives	2017	IMMSAREX, multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
Mongolia	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
Myanmar	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
Nepal	2015	2015, Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	2016, multilateral, unknown
	2017	2017, Sagarthma Friendship 2017 bilateral, counter-terrorism
	2019	Mt. Everest Friendship 2019 bilateral, anti-terror rescue operations
	2020	Caucasus 2020 multilateral, defensive tactics/ encirclement/ battlefield C2
Pakistan	2003	Bilateral, surface and deep-sea maneuver drills
	2004	Bilateral, anti-terrorism exercise
	2005	Joint naval maneuver operations
	2006	Friendship 2006 exercise, anti-terrorism
	2007	Aman exercise multilateral, building trust
	2009	Peace 09, multilateral exercise, search-and-rescue/anti-piracy/fleet formation drills
	2010	Friendship 2010, bilateral exercise, anti-terror drill
	2011	Aman exercise multilateral, building trust
	2011	Friendship-IV-2011, bilateral, joint exercises for cooperation
	2013	Shaheen-II, bilateral, air wargame
	2014	Shaheen-III, bilateral, hone interoperability
	2015	Shaheen-IV, bilateral, air wargame

	2016	Bilateral, East China Sea
	2017	IMMSAREX, multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2019	Aman 19, multilateral, anti-piracy/ maritime interception
	2019	Center-2019, multilateral, counter-terror
	2019	Warrior bilateral, counter-terror
	2020	Sea Guardians 2020, bilateral, submarines involved for first time
	2020	Caucasus 2020, multilateral, defensive tactics/ encirclement/ battlefield C2
Philippines	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
Singapore	2009	COOPERATION 2009, bilateral exercise, enhance mutual understanding
	2010	COOPERATION 2010, bilateral exercise, enhance mutual understanding
	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2015	Khan Quest 2015, multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2015	China-Singapore Cooperation 2015, air defense/ maritime cooperation
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
	2020	Cobra Gold multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
South Korea	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, trust overseas
	2015	Khan Quest 2015 multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2020	Cobra Gold multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
Sri Lanka	2012	Bilateral exercise, unknown
	2015	Silk Road Cooperation 2015, bilateral, anti-terrorism
	2016	Bilateral exercise, unknown
	2017	IMMSAREX, multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
Tajikistan	2003	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)/ multilateral, "Coalition 2003"
	2005	Bilateral, unknown
	2007	Peace Mission 2007, multilateral, first large-scale SCO exercise
	2015	Khan Quest 2015, multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2015	Xiamen 2015, multilateral, internet anti-terror exercise
	2016	Peace Mission 2016, multilateral, SCO multi-national anti-terror drill
	2016	Sino-Tajik bilateral drills
Timor-Leste	2017	IMMSAREX multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
Thailand	2005	Bilateral, China-Thailand Friendship 2005 bilateral exercise, rescue mission
	2007	Strike 2007, bilateral, Special Forces counter terrorism exercise
	2008	Strike 2008, bilateral, Special Forces counter terrorism exercise

	2010	Strike 2010, bilateral, Blue Strike 2010, Marines counter terrorism exercise
	2011	Cobra Gold, multilateral, regional security exercise
	2012	Blue Strike 2012, bilateral, Marines counter terrorism exercise
	2013	Strike 2013, bilateral, Special Forces drills
	2014	Cobra Gold 2014, multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
	2015	Khan Quest 2015, multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2015	Falcon Strike bilateral, air exercise
	2016	ADMM-Plus, multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2016	Blue Strike 2016
	2016	AM-HEX 2016, multilateral, humanitarian aid/disaster relief/ military medicine
	2017	IMMSAREX, multilateral, enhance Indian Ocean trust
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
	2018	Peace and Friendship 2018, multilateral, joint and compulsory peace exercise
	2020	Cobra Gold, multilateral, humanitarian and civil service
Uzbekistan	2007	Peace Mission 2007, multilateral, first large-scale SCO exercise
	2015	Xiamen 2015, multilateral, internet anti-terror exercise
	2019	Center-2019 multilateral, counter-terror
Vietnam	2015	Khan Quest 2015, multilateral, US PACOM and Mongolia Armed Forces
	2016	ADMM-Plus, multilateral, Maritime Security and Counterterrorism exercise
	2018	China-ASEAN Maritime Exercises, bilateral
<b>Europe</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Belarus	2011	Bilateral, unknown
	2012	Bilateral, unknown
	2014	Multilateral unknown
	2015	Bilateral, unknown
	2015	Multilateral, unknown
	2016	Multilateral, unknown
	2017	Clear Sky 2017, multilateral, air defense competition
	2020	Caucasus 2020, multinational, battlefield C2
	2020	Kavkaz 2020, multilateral, cruise missiles/ UAS
Czech Republic	2015	Multilateral, unknown
Denmark	2015	Bilateral, first joint naval exercise
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
France	2004	Bilateral, search and rescue
	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	Bilateral, joint drills

	2015	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	Eku Kugbe multilateral, Nigerian-led maritime conference on anti-piracy
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
Germany	2014	Multilateral, unknown
	2015	Multilateral, unknown
	2016	Combined Aid 2016, humanitarian rescue exercise
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2019	Combined Aid 2019 bilateral, humanitarian rescue exercise
Greece	2015	Bilateral, unknown
	2016	Multilateral, unknown
	2017	Bilateral, mutual understanding
Hungary	2015	Multilateral, unknown (Same month BRI MoU)
Italy	2010	Bilateral, unknown
	2015	Multilateral, unknown
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2017	Bilateral, joint maritime drills
	2018	Bilateral, joint medical drills
Netherlands	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
Norway	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
Portugal	2016	Eku Kugbe multilateral, Nigerian-led maritime conference on anti-piracy
Romania	2009	Friendship Operation 2009 bilateral, mountain training
	2010	Bilateral, unknown
Russia	2003	Coalition-2003 multilateral, Anti-Terror exercise with SCO
	2005	Peace-Mission 2005 bilateral, joint anti-terror exercise
	2007	Peace-Mission 2007, bilateral, joint anti-terror exercise
	2009	Peace Shield 2009 bilateral, China-Russia maritime maneuver
	2010	Peace Mission 2010 multilateral, SCO anti-terror drill
	2012	Joint Sea 2012 bilateral, joint naval drill
	2012	Peace Mission 2012 multilateral, SCO anti-terror drill
	2013	Joint Sea 2013 bilateral, joint naval drill
	2014	Bilateral, East China Sea drills
	2014	Peace Mission 2014 multilateral, SCO anti-terror drill
	2015	Bilateral, joint exercise in Mediterranean
	2016	Joint Sea 2016 bilateral, joint naval drill
	2016	International Army Games, multilateral

	2016	Bilateral, South China Sea
	2017	Clear Sky 2017 multilateral, air defense competition
	2018	Vostok 2018 bilateral, large wargame
	2019	China-Russia-Iran, Gulf of Oman joint drills
	2019	Mosi multilateral, joint military drill
	2019	Joint Sea 2019, bilateral
	2019	TSEINTR multilateral, large-scale exercises
	2019	Maritime Security Belt 2019, multilateral with Iran, counter-piracy
	2020	Caucasus 2020 multinational, battlefield C2
	2020	Kavkaz 2020 multilateral, cruise missiles/ UAS
Serbia	2016	Multilateral, unknown
Spain	2007	China-Spanish Friendship-2007 bilateral, first joint exercise
	2018	Bilateral, medical exercises
United Kingdom	2004	First joint maritime exercise bilateral, promote friendly exchanges
	2014	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	Joint Evacuation 2016 bilateral, NEO tabletop exercise
	2017	Joint Evacuation 2017 bilateral, NEO tabletop exercise
<b>Middle East</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Egypt	2015	Bilateral, unknown
	2016	Multilateral, unknown
	2017	Clear Sky 2017 multilateral, air defense competition
	2019	Bilateral, Mediterranean maritime security
Iran	2016	Multilateral, unknown
	2019	China-Russia-Iran, Gulf of Oman joint drills
	2019	Maritime Security Belt 2019, multilateral with Iran, counter-piracy
	2020	Caucasus 2020 multinational, battlefield C2
Lebanon	2019	Sector East Angels 2019-1 multilateral, peacekeeping drills
Oman	2016	Multilateral, unknown
	2017	Bilateral, joint task force exercise
Saudi Arabia	2016	Bilateral, anti-terror drills
	2019	Blue Sword 2019 bilateral, mutual trust
Syria	2016	Bilateral, humanitarian training
Turkey	2010	Bilateral, air exercise
	2015	Bilateral, unknown
	2015	Multilateral, unknown



<b>North America</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Canada	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
Mexico	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
United States	2005	Bilateral, unknown
	2006	Bilateral, unknown
	2013	Multilateral, Phoenix Spirit multilateral, humanitarian assistance
	2014	Kowari China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2014	Bilateral anti-piracy drills in Gulf of Aden
	2015	Bilateral, unknown
	2015	Kowari China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	Kowari, China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	Bilateral, natural disaster response
	2019	Kowari, China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2019	Bilateral, joint humanitarian rescue exercise
<b>Oceania</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Australia	2004	Bilateral, joint naval search-and-rescue
	2007	Multilateral, unknown
	2012	China-Australia, New Zealand multilateral, humanitarian assistance
	2013	Multilateral, Phoenix Spirit multilateral, humanitarian assistance
	2014	Kowari, China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	Kowari, China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2015	RIMPAC multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	Bilateral, South China Sea exercises
	2016	Kowari, China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
	2016	Bilateral, unknown
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2017	Pandaroo 2017, bilateral, teamwork/friendship/trust
	2018	Pandaroo 2018, bilateral, teamwork/friendship/trust
	2019	Pandaroo 2019, bilateral, military skills/willpower

	2019	Kowari, China-US-Australia multilateral, survival exercises
New Zealand	2007	Multilateral, unknown
	2012	China-Australia, New Zealand multilateral, humanitarian assistance
	2013	Multilateral, Phoenix Spirit multilateral, humanitarian assistance
	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2018	Exercise Skytrain18, bilateral, air force joint exercise
Tonga	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
<b>South America</b>		
Country	Year	Exercise Type
Brazil	2014	Multilateral, unknown
	2016	Multilateral, international jungle patrol competition
Chile	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
Colombia	2012	2012, bilateral, unknown
	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
Peru	2014	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2015	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
	2016	RIMPAC, multilateral, international maritime exercise
Venezuela	2016	Multilateral, unknown
	2017	Clear Sky 2017 multilateral, air defense competition

<b>Appendix 3: Chinese Port Investments by Country and Year</b>		
<b>Africa</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Algeria	2016	Cherchell
Angola	2013	Lobito
	2017	Cabinda
Cameroon	2014	Douala
	2011	Kribi
Congo	2014	Pointe Noire
Djibouti	2012	Doraleh
	2012	Tadjourah
	2013	Ghoubet
Equatorial Guinea	2014	Bata
Eritrea	2014	Massawa
Gabon	2013	Mole
Ghana	2018	Jamestown
	2012	Takoradi
	2015	Atuabo
	2016	Tema
Guinea	2012	Conakry
Ivory Coast	2013	Abidjan
Kenya	2014	Lamu
Mauritania	2008	Nouakchott
Morocco	2013	Casablanca
	2013	Tangiers
Mozambique	2012	Nacala
	2015	Beira
	2016	Maputo
Namibia	2014	Walvis Bay
Nigeria	2019	Bakassi
	2018	Benin River
	2012	Lekki
	2010	Lagos Tin-Can Island
Sierra Leone	2013	Freetown
South Africa	2013	Richards Bay
Sudan	2011	Port of Sudan
Tanzania	2013	Bagamoyo
	2014	Maruhubi (Zanzibar)
Togo	2012	Lome

Tunisia	2018	Zarzis
<b>Asia</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Cambodia	2019	Koh Kong
	2019	Ream Naval Base
Indonesia	2012	Central Java
Malaysia	2014	Melaka
	2016	Kuala Linggi
	2013	Kuantan
	2017	Panang Port
Myanmar	2018	Kyaukpyu
Singapore	2016	Singapore PSA
South Korea	2013	Busan
Sri Lanka	2017	Hambantota
	2011	Colombo
Taiwan	2012	Kaohsiung
Vietnam	2013	Duyen Hai
	2008	Ben Dinh Sao Mai
	2010	Vung Tau Container Port
<b>Europe</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Belgium	2013	Zeebrugge
	2004	Antwerp
Bulgaria	2019	Varna
France	2013	Le Havre
	2013	Montoir
	2013	Marseille Fos
	2013	Dunkirk
Greece	2009	Piraeus
Italy	2016	Vado
	2019	Trieste
	2019	Genoa
Malta	2013	Marsaxlokk
Netherlands	2016	Rotterdam
Russia	2014	Port Vera
	2014	Zarubino
Spain	2017	Balbao
	2017	Valencia
Ukraine	2018	Chornomorsk

	2017	Yuzhniy
<b>Middle East</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Egypt	2007	Damietta
	2014	Al Sokhna
Israel	2015	Haifa
	2015	Ashdod
Kuwait	2019	Mubarak Al-Kabeer
Oman	2016	Duqm
Pakistan	2017	Gwadar
Qatar	2018	Hamad Port
Saudi Arabia	2015	Jeddah
	2008	Ras al Khair
Turkey	2015	Ambarli
United Arab Emirates	2018	Khalifa Port
Yemen	2013	Aden
	2013	Mokha
<b>North America</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Jamaica	2020	Kingston Freeport
Mexico	2019	Veracruz
Panama	2016	Margarita Island
	2017	Perico Island
Bahamas	2019	Freeport
	2014	North Abaco
United States	2013	Houston
	2013	Miami
	2011	Long Beach
	2017	Los Angeles
	2008	Seattle
<b>Oceania</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Australia	2015	Darwin
	2014	Newcastle
	2016	Melborne
Papua New Guinea	2012	Lae
<b>South America</b>		
Country	Year	Port Name
Brazil	2017	Paranagua

	2019	Sao Luis
Peru	2018	Chancay
Suriname	2011	Paramaribo
Uruguay	2019	Montevideo
Venezuela	2010	Puerto Carbello

<b>Appendix 4: China's Partnership Agreements by Country &amp; Type</b>			
<b>Africa</b>			
Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type
Algeria	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Angola	2010	Strategic partnership	SP
DRC	2013	Comprehensive cooperative partnership of solidarity and mutual assistance	P
Djibouti	2017	Strategic partnership	SP
Equatorial Guinea	2015	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Ethiopia	2003	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Gabon	2016	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Guinea	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation	CSP
Ivory Coast	2018	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
Kenya	2013	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2017	Comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation	CSP
Liberia	2015	All-round cooperative partnership	P
Libya	2020	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	CSP
Madagascar	2017	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Morocco	2016	Strategic partnership	SP
Mozambique	2016	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
Namibia	2018	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
Nigeria	2005	Strategic partnership	SP
Republic of Congo	2016	Comprehensive cooperative partnership of solidarity and mutual assistance	CSP
Senegal	2014	Long-term friendly and cooperative partnership	P
	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Sierra Leone	2016	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
South Africa	2000	Partnership	P
	2004	Strategic partnership	SP
	2010	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Sudan	2015	Strategic partnership	SP
Tanzania	2013	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Uganda	2019	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Zimbabwe	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation	CSP
<b>Asia</b>			
Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type
Afghanistan	2006	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2013	Strategic and cooperative partnership	SP
Bangladesh	2005	Comprehensive partnership of cooperation	P

	2016	Strategic Partnership of Cooperation	SP
Brunei	2018	Strategic cooperative partnership	SP
Cambodia	2006	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2010	Comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation	CSP
East Timor	2014	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
India	1996	Constructive cooperative partnership oriented towards the 21st century	P
	2005	Strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity	SP
Indonesia	2005	Strategic partnership	SP
	2013	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Japan	1998	Partnership of friendship and cooperation for peace and development	P
Kazakhstan	2005	Strategic partnership	SP
	2011	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Kyrgyzstan	2013	Strategic partnership	SP
	2019	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Laos	2009	Comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation	CSP
Malaysia	2013	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Maldives	2014	Future-oriented all-round friendly and cooperative partnership	P
Mongolia	2003	Good-neighborly and mutual trust partnership	P
	2011	Strategic partnership	SP
	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Myanmar	2011	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
Nepal	1996	21st century-oriented good neighborly and friendly partnership	P
Pakistan	1996	21st century-oriented comprehensive and cooperative partnership	P
	2005	Strategic cooperative partnership	SP
Philippines	2018	Comprehensive strategic cooperation	CSP
Singapore	2015	All-round cooperative partnership	P
South Korea	1998	21st century-oriented cooperative partnership	P
	2008	Strategic cooperative partnership	SP
Sri Lanka	2005	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2013	Strategic cooperative partnership	SP
Tajikistan	2013	Strategic partnership	SP
	2017	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Thailand	2012	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
Turkmenistan	2013	Strategic partnership	SP
Uzbekistan	2005	Friendly cooperative partnership	P
	2012	Strategic partnership	SP
	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Vietnam	2008	Comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership	CSP
<b>Europe</b>			



Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type
Austria	2018	Friendly strategic partnership	SP
Belarus	2013	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Belgium	2014	All-around friendly and cooperative partnership	P
Bulgaria	2014	Comprehensive friendly cooperative partnership	P
	2019	Strategic partnership	SP
Czech Republic	2016	Strategic partnership	SP
Croatia	2005	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
Denmark	2008	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Finland	2013	Future-oriented new-type cooperative partnership	P
France	1997	Comprehensive partnership	P
	2004	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Germany	2004	Partnership in global responsibility	SP
	2014	All-around strategic partnership	CSP
Greece	2006	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Hungary	2004	Friendly cooperative partnership	P
	2017	Comprehensive Strategic partnership	CSP
Ireland	2012	Strategic partnership of mutual benefit	SP
Italy	2004	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Netherlands	2014	Open and pragmatic partnership for comprehensive cooperation	P
Poland	2004	Friendly cooperative partnership	P
	2011	Strategic partnership	SP
	2016	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership	CSP
Portugal	2005	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Romania	2004	Comprehensive friendly and cooperative partnership	P
Russia	1994	Constructive partnership	P
	1996	Partnership of strategic cooperation	SP
	2011	Comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination	CSP
Serbia	2009	Strategic partnership	SP
	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Spain	2005	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Switzerland	2016	(innovative) strategic partnership	SP
Ukraine	2011	Strategic partnership	SP
United Kingdom	1998	Comprehensive partnership	P
	2004	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
<b>Middle East</b>			
Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type
Egypt	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Iran	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP

Iraq	2015	Strategic partnership	SP
Israel	2017	innovative comprehensive partnership	P
Jordan	2015	Strategic partnership	SP
Kuwait	2018	Strategic partnership	SP
Oman	2018	Strategic partnership	SP
Qatar	2014	Strategic partnership	SP
Saudi Arabia	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
UAE	2012	Strategic partnership	SP
	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
<b>North America</b>			
Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type
Canada	1997	21st century-oriented comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2005	Strategic partnership	SP
Costa Rica	2015	Strategic partnership	SP
Jamaica	2005	Friendly partnership for common development	P
	2019	Strategic partnership	SP
Mexico	1997	Cross-century comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2003	Strategic partnership	SP
	2013	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
United States	1997	Constructive strategic partnership	SP
	2011	Cooperative partnership of mutual respect and benefit	P
<b>Oceania</b>			
Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type
Australia	2013	Strategic partnership of mutual trust and mutual benefit	SP
	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Fiji	2006	Important cooperative partnership	P
	2014	Strategic partnership of mutual respect and common development	SP
	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Micronesia	2018	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of mutual respect and common development	CSP
New Zealand	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Papua New Guinea	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Samoa	2018	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of mutual respect and common development	CSP
Tonga	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual respect and common development	CSP
Vanuatu	2018	Comprehensive strategic partnership of mutual respect and common development	CSP
<b>South America</b>			
Country	Year	Partnership Name	Type

Argentina	2001	21st century-oriented comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2004	Strategic partnership	SP
	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Bolivia	2018	Strategic partnership	SP
Brazil	1993	Strategic partnership	SP
	2012	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Chile	2004	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2012	Strategic partnership	SP
	2016	Comprehensive strategic partnership and friendly cooperation	CSP
Ecuador	2015	Strategic partnership	SP
	2019	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Peru	2005	Comprehensive cooperative partnership	P
	2008	Strategic partnership	SP
	2013	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP
Suriname	2019	Strategic partnership of cooperation	SP
Uruguay	2016	Strategic partnership based on mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit	SP
Venezuela	2001	Strategic partnership	SP
	2014	Comprehensive strategic partnership	CSP

Appendix 5: PLAN Hospital & Training Ships				
Hospital Ships	Pennant	Commissioned	Displacement	Fleet
Daishandao	866	2007	14,000t	South Sea Fleet
Nanyi-12	12	2020	4,000-5,000t	South Sea Fleet
Nanyi-13	13	2020	4,000-5,000t	South Sea Fleet
Training Ships	Pennant	Commissioned	Displacement	Fleet
Zheng He	81	1986	5,548t	Dalian Naval Academy
Shichang	82	1997	9,700t	Dalian Naval Academy
Qi Jiguang	83	2017	9,000t	Dalian Naval Academy



People's Republic of China, People's Liberation Army (Navy) ship PLA(N) Peace Ark (T-AH 866) steams in close formation as one of 42 ships and submarines representing 15 international partner nations during Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2014 (US Navy Image).<sup>508</sup>

<sup>508</sup> U. S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Shannon Renfro, *English: People's Republic of China, People's Liberation Army (Navy) Ship PLA(N) Peace Ark (T-AH 866) Steams in Close Formation as One of 42 Ships and Submarines Representing 15 International Partner Nations during Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise 2014.*, July 25, 2014, July 25, 2014, This Image was released by the United States Navy with the ID 140725-N-FC670-3242 (next). This tag does not indicate the copyright status of the attached work. A normal copyright tag is still required. See Commons:Licensing. العربية | বাংলা | Deutsch | English | español | euskara | فارسی | français | italiano | 日本語 | 한국어 | македонски | മലയാളം | Plattdüütsch | Nederlands | polski | پشتو | português | svenska | Türkçe | українська | 中文 | 中文（简体） | +/-, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People%27s\\_Liberation\\_Army\\_\(Navy\)\\_ship\\_PLA\(N\)\\_Peace\\_Ark\\_\(T-AH\\_866\)\\_steams\\_in\\_close\\_formation\\_during\\_Rim\\_of\\_the\\_Pacific\\_\(RIMPAC\)\\_Exercise\\_2014.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:People%27s_Liberation_Army_(Navy)_ship_PLA(N)_Peace_Ark_(T-AH_866)_steams_in_close_formation_during_Rim_of_the_Pacific_(RIMPAC)_Exercise_2014.jpg).



The People's Liberation Army Navy midshipmen training ship Zheng He (Type 679, Hull 81) is moored pier-side at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii during a scheduled port visit.<sup>509</sup>



PLAN Training ship Qi Jiguang (June 21, 2019)<sup>510</sup>

<sup>509</sup> Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Laurie Dexter, *English: PEARL HARBOR (Oct. 12, 2015) - The People's Liberation Army Navy Midshipmen Training Ship Zheng He (Type 679, Hull 81) Is Moored Pierside at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii during a Scheduled Port Visit. Personnel from Zheng He Are Scheduled to Participate in Several Exchanges during the Visit with Sailors Assigned to the Guided-Missile Cruiser USS Chosin (CG 65).*, October 14, 2015, October 14, 2015, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/Article/623103/chinese-peoples-liberation-army-navy-ship-visits-pearl-harbor/>, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zheng\\_He\\_Pearl\\_Harbor.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zheng_He_Pearl_Harbor.jpg).

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