

《中国参与环太平洋军演标志着中美军事关系的改善》

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China is participating in the US-led 2014 Rim of Pacific military exercise for the first time since it started in 1971, indicating improved Sino-US military ties. Among the fleet of multiple nations taking part in the joint military exercise are four Chinese navy vessels - the Peace Ark hospital ship, Qiandaohu depot ship, Haikou missile destroyer and Yueyang frigate.

China and the United States established diplomatic relations in 1979, and since then their military ties have gone through several ups and downs. US arms sales to Taiwan, American surveillance planes flying close to the Chinese mainland and certain US laws and regulations that discriminate against China have often thwarted efforts to improve bilateral, especially military, relations. But what actually had been a stumbling block between the two powers is the lack of mutual strategic trust.

That situation changed after the meeting between President Xi Jinping and his US counterpart Barack Obama in Sunnylands, California, in June last year. On the strategic front, Xi and Obama agreed that both sides would make efforts to forge a "new type of major-power relationship" based on "non-conflict and non-confrontation" as well as cooperation, and thus laid the foundation for better bilateral military ties.

It was at the Sunnylands meeting that the US invited China to participate in the 2014 Rim of Pacific joint military drill, highlighting the two countries' common aim of promoting mutual military relations. In many ways, Xi's visit to the US was a path-breaking event.

Traditionally, newcomers to the Rim of Pacific drill only participate as "observers" and do not take part in the operations. But the Chinese fleet will participate in not only disaster relief and diving operations, but also some core exercises like artillery firing, which used to be open only to close allies of the US.

Apart from the four navy vessels, China has also sent some shipboard helicopters, a special force unit and a diving team, making its participating fleet second only to the US in size.

The two navies will hold a medical forum on China's Peace Ark and the USNS Mercy (America's hospital ship), where personnel from the two sides will interact with each other - the first such interaction between Chinese and US military hospital ships. Also, China will host open days on its vessels to enable military personnel from other countries, including the US, to visit them.

These moves will not only demonstrate that China has a transparent military policy, but also deepen other countries' understanding about the People's Liberation Army Navy and signal the start of multilateral cooperation to maintain world peace. The 2014 Rim of Pacific joint drill has offered China a unique opportunity to tell the world that its navy is committed to maintaining regional peace and stability, and not to establishing hegemony.

Responding to rising challenges to its sovereignty over islands and its maritime rights in the East China Sea and the South China Sea in the past couple of years, China has taken some counter-measures that involved its navy. Certain countries have used this as an excuse to promote Washington's "pivot to Asia" policy and drive a wedge between Beijing and Washington. Some senior US officials have even passed improper remarks against China's legal actions, affecting bilateral ties at a time when interactions between the two countries and their militaries are the need of the hour.

As the largest developed and developing countries, the US and China are very important for peaceful global development, and their relationship has a direct impact on global peace and stability. Thanks to mutual efforts, though, the two sides have achieved breakthroughs over the past years. For example, their defense ministers have exchanged visits and the two sides have established a mechanism to report military incidents to each other. In fact, last year saw a record number of military cooperation programs.

The two countries do have differences and disagreements, but they are willing to build mutual trust and clear the misunderstandings. In this sense, China's participation in Rim of Pacific drill can be seen as a result of improved bilateral military relations. The future, it is hoped, will see better Sino-US military relations, which will enable the two sides to better maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

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