

U.S.-China Disaster Management: Expanding the Engagement

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Background

In January 2015, the U.S. Army held its 10th annual Disaster Management Exchange (DME) with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). The 18-person U.S. military-civilian team was headed by Maj. Gen. Edward Dorman, commanding general of the 8th Theater Sustainment Command, U.S. Army Pacific. They were welcomed to China by Maj. Gen. Xu Jinlin, deputy director general of the PLA Guangzhou Military Region Political Department. The American team later met with PLA counterparts in Haikou, Hainan Province, to conduct a table top exercise and practical field exchanges in which the two countries responded to hypothetical large-scale flooding from a typhoon impacting a fictional third country. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, Commanding General of U.S. Army Pacific, and Gen. Xu Fenlin, commanding general of the PLA Guangzhou Military Region, toured practical field exchanges during the DME.

The DME is one of the most substantial U.S. military engagements with the PLA. As noted by Maj. Gen. Dorman, "This long established exchange underscores the commitment of the U.S. and the People's Republic of China to a comprehensive and strong military-to-military relationship in order to address security cooperation and humanitarian and disaster relief challenges across the region."¹

U.S. Civil-Military Operations

The DME is part of a broad U.S. civil-military program based on extensive policy and strategic guidance.² One thread is the Civil-Military Emergency Preparedness (CMEP) Program under the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) stemming from the 1996 Warsaw Initiative. Originally focused on Europe,

¹ Angela Kershner, "U.S., China Conduct Disaster Management Exchange," *Army.mil* (January 14, 2015), http://www.army.mil/article/141137/U_S_China_Conduct_Disaster_Management_Exchange/; and "Disaster Management Exchange 2015 Concludes in China," January 26, 2015, http://www.army.mil/article/141698/Disaster_Management_Exchange_2015_concludes_in_China/. In addition to U.S. Army Pacific, 8th Theater Sustainment Command, other American participants included the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 18th Medical Command, Special Operations Command Pacific, U.S. Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, the Hawaii Army National Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Marines, U.S. Embassy in Beijing, U.S. Consulate in Guangzhou, and other organizations with a stake in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Asia-Pacific region.

² Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, "Strategy to Task Analysis," <https://www.cfe-dmha.org/About-CFE-DMHA/Hierarchy-of-Strategies-Plans-and-Doctrine-for-DMHA>.

the Warsaw Initiative was collaboratively managed by the Departments of Defense (DoD) and State to advance closer relations and military interoperability between NATO and countries committed to democratic principles.³ In recent years, OSD has wanted to expand the CMEP program worldwide.

The other thread is the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DMHA). Congress established the Center in 1994 to enhance civil-military coordination in international disaster management response efforts and to advance DoD DMHA capacity. In 2001, the Center became a reporting unit under the U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), receiving direction and guidance from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict. In Fiscal Year 2015, the CFE-DMHA was to assume leadership and management over the CMEP, so that both threads of the U.S. international civil-military mission could be brought together. The Center currently is directed by Joseph D. Martin and is headquartered at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii.⁴

Although a small unit, CFE-DMHA serves an important role as USPACOM's coordinating authority for pre-crisis DMHA engagements and activities in the Asia-Pacific region. It also serves as DoD's focal point for DMHA best practices, information sharing, and coordination for the building of capacity for disaster management including mitigation, preparedness, and response. The Center leverages its programs through a large number of partnerships with U.S. government entities, regional governmental organizations, academic institutions, and other Asia-Pacific stakeholders.⁵ As CFE-DMHA assumes leadership of the CMEP program in FY 2015, there is an opportunity to expand the Center's outreach.

USPACOM – PLA Coordination on DMHA

One possible area of CFE-DMHA outreach would be for greater coordination with the PLA and other Chinese civil-military organizations involved with disaster management and response activities. China has a huge stake in DMHA, both domestically and regionally. The PLA has received wide international acclaim for its disaster relief efforts within China.⁶ The PLA's involvement in foreign disaster relief efforts is still evolving. As explained by one scholar:⁷

In a 2013 white paper on China's armed forces, the State Council listed military operations other than war (MOOTW) as the PLA's third priority, after "safeguarding national sovereignty, security

³ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Inspector General, "DoD Execution of the Warsaw Initiative Program – Report No. D-2005-085," July 1, 2005, <http://www.dodig.mil/audit/reports/FY05/05-085.pdf>.

⁴ See the CFE-DMHA homepage, <https://www.cfe-dmha.org/>. The Center provides a wealth of information about DMHA activities in the USPACOM area of responsibility. Partners with the Center include the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Australian Civil-Military Centre, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, InterAction, International Committee of the Red Cross, International Medical Corps, Marine Forces Pacific, National Disaster Preparedness Training Center, Naval Postgraduate School, Pacific Disaster Center, RedR Australia, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, U.S. Agency for International Development, University of Hawai'i Office of Public Health Studies, and World Food Programme.

⁵ CFE-DMHA, *Strategy FY14-18* (Hawaii: Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, 27 January 2014), https://www.cfe-dmha.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=Y_TPmmK5_b8%3d&portalid=0.

⁶ For example, James Mulvenon, "The Chinese Military's Earthquake Response Leadership Team," *China Leadership Monitor* 25 (June 27, 2008), <http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM25JM.pdf>.

⁷ Shannon Tiezzi, "The Softer Side of China's Military," *The Diplomat* (August 8, 2014).

and territorial integrity” and “aiming to win local wars”... [A]ccording to the 2013 white paper, China has participated in eight international rescue missions since 2001, and 36 humanitarian assistance missions since 2002. That includes PLA responses to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and 2011 floods in both Thailand and Pakistan.

China’s collaboration with the United States in international DMHA planning activities has been limited to date. The Army’s DME program has been described above, and in November 2013 the PLA participated in its first joint military exercise with the United States and several other nations to better coordinate relief efforts in the event of a typhoon in the Asia-Pacific region.⁸ There are several reasons why more should be done to include the PLA and other Chinese stakeholders in regional disaster planning.

1. The cooperation would strengthen Sino-American relations in general.
2. The Asia-Pacific region as a whole would benefit.
3. The PLA has significant experience in disaster management that would provide important lessons learned for all DMHA stakeholders.

This possible area of greater U.S.-China cooperation should be seen in the broader context of Sino-American relations, where both opportunities as well as challenges seem to abound.

The State of Sino-American Relations

At the present time, U.S.-China relations are characterized by both extensive engagements and strategic competition.

Areas of Engagement. The Chinese note they are engaged with the United States through more than 90 bilateral mechanisms. A few of these are:⁹

- Annual Strategic and Economic Dialogue
- U.S.-China Human Rights Dialogue
- Strategic Security Dialogue
- U.S-China Consultation on People-to-People Exchange
- Joint Commission on Commerce and Trade
- Ten-Year Framework on Energy and Environmental Cooperation
- Joint Committee on Environmental Cooperation
- U.S.-China Governors Forum
- Initiative on City-Level Economic Cooperation

⁸ Stephanie Gaskell, “Chinese Military Mimics U.S., Looks to Disaster Relief to Change Perceptions,” *DefenseOne.com* (November 18, 2013), <http://www.defenseone.com/politics/2013/11/chinese-military-mimics-us-looks-disaster-relief-change-perceptions/74054/>

⁹ Yang Jiechi’s Remarks on the Results of the Presidential Meeting between Xi Jinping and Obama at the Annenberg Estate, press release of June 9, 2012, as cited by Susan V. Lawrence, *U.S.-China Relations: An Overview of Policy Issues* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013): 10-11.

- Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (through April 2011, when the AAP formally concluded)

One scholar described the goal of these and other Sino-American engagements as being to “strengthen the foundation of the relationship, build strategic trust, and work in tandem (or in parallel) on global issues of mutual concern.”¹⁰

Through these engagements, both the United States and China demonstrate they do not wish their strategic competition to deteriorate into confrontation. Nonetheless, the areas of competition between the two countries are serious and pose major challenges to their relationship. A few of these areas of competition are noted below.

Competing Views of International System. President Xi Jinping’s “New Type of Great Power Relations” and President Barack Obama’s *National Security Strategy* are based on quite different ideas of how the international system should be managed.

As described by President Xi in July 2012, the international system should be governed by certain principles:¹¹

- No conflict or confrontation
- Emphasis on dialogue and objectively considering each other’s strategic intentions
- Mutual respect for each other’s core interests and major concerns
- Mutually beneficial cooperation, including abandonment of a zero-sum game mentality and advancing areas of mutual interest

President Xi’s approach is designed to support China’s foremost interest in peaceful national development.¹² The approach assumes the world is moving toward greater integration and that the historic pattern of great power – emerging power confrontation can be avoided. At the same time, China seeks to level the playing field between Beijing and Washington. By insisting that the United States recognize and respect China’s “core interests,” Beijing pushes forward its agenda on territorial claims, including contested areas in the South China Sea and East China Sea.

China may wish to level the playing field, but President Barack Obama’s 2015 *National Security Strategy* is characterized by a determination that the United States should continue to lead the international system and to play a predominant role in Asian-Pacific affairs.¹³ The President wrote in his introduction to the document:

¹⁰ David Shambaugh, “China, U.S. Should Make New Ties” (Washington, DC: *Brookings Opinion*, January 7, 2015).

¹¹ Cheng Li and Lucy Xu, “Chinese Enthusiasm and American Cynicism Over the ‘New Type of Great Power Relations’” (Washington, DC: *Brookings Opinion*, December 4, 2014). Also, Christopher K. Johnson, et al., *Decoding China’s Emerging “Great Power” Strategy in Asia* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014), especially Chapter 4 “Toward a New Foreign Policy Paradigm.”

¹² “China’s Peaceful Development,” *Xinhuanet.com* (September 6, 2011).

¹³ White House, *National Security Strategy* (2015). Quotes taken from the President’s introduction and pages 24 and 29.

Any successful strategy to ensure the safety of the American people and advance our national security interests must begin with an undeniable truth—America must lead. Strong and sustained American leadership is essential to a rules-based international order that promotes global security and prosperity as well as the dignity and human rights of all peoples. The question is never whether America should lead, but how we lead.

Specifically as it relates to China, the *Strategy* said:

The United States welcomes the rise of a stable, peaceful, and prosperous China. We seek to develop a constructive relationship with China that delivers benefits for our two peoples and promotes security and prosperity in Asia and around the world. We seek cooperation on shared regional and global challenges such as climate change, public health, economic growth, and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. While there will be competition, we reject the inevitability of confrontation. At the same time, we will manage competition from a position of strength while insisting that China uphold international rules and norms on issues ranging from maritime security to trade and human rights. We will closely monitor China's military modernization and expanding presence in Asia, while seeking ways to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation. On cybersecurity, we will take necessary actions to protect our businesses and defend our networks against cyber-theft of trade secrets for commercial gain whether by private actors or the Chinese government.

And to emphasize the point, the *Strategy* concluded:

We will deter and defeat any adversary that threatens our national security and that of our allies. We confidently welcome the peaceful rise of other countries as partners to share the burdens for maintaining a more peaceful and prosperous world. We will continue to collaborate with established and emerging powers to promote our shared security and defend our common humanity, even as we compete with them in economic and other realms. We will uphold and refresh the international rules and norms that set the parameters for such collaboration and competition. We will do all of this and more with confidence that the international system whose creation we led in the aftermath of World War II will continue to serve America and the world well.

When Chinese and American approaches to the international system are compared, it seems clear that Beijing wishes to see a less predominant role for the United States in the Asia Pacific, while Washington wants to reinforce its leadership in the region. At the same time, the United States extends (what it hopes to be perceived as) a welcoming hand to China as an emerging major power that can have an important role – as long as it plays by the rules of the U.S.-led international system.

Competing Spheres of Influence. The competition between China and the United States over preferences for an international order is greatly intensified in the Asia-Pacific region, where there are overlapping spheres of influence. As one scholar put it:¹⁴

[I]t is in the maritime Asia-Pacific region that the clash of U.S. and Chinese designs is most serious. A Chinese sphere of influence here would require the eviction of American strategic leadership, including U.S. military bases and alliances in Japan and South Korea, U.S. “regional policeman” duties, and most of the security cooperation between America and friends in the region that now occurs. Washington is not ready to give up this role, seeing a strong presence in the western Pacific rim and the ability to shape regional affairs as crucial to American security.

A basic problem, then, is that Beijing wants a sphere of influence, while Washington is not willing to accede it. Unfortunately, therefore, U.S.-China relations are not poised for a breakthrough that could be achieved with a few concessions. American abandonment of Taiwan will not solve this basic dispute over influence in the region. Nor will it go away if Americans stop complaining about human rights abuses in China or the Chinese government’s involvement in organizing cyber attacks against U.S. corporate and government computer systems. The booming bilateral trade relationship and other ties create reasons to avoid war, but these have not solved the security problems that can independently drag the two countries into conflict.

Another analyst well summarized the issue: “In the view of China’s strategic planners, control of the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea and the South China Sea has become critical to China’s defense and security....What makes the maritime domain ever more vital to China is the fact that most of its foreign trade and energy imports are shipped through the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Malacca Strait.” At the same time, however, “the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Malacca Strait are the lifeline of Asia....The seas surrounding China’s coasts have become critical to the country’s growth and defense. And the dominant power in maritime Asia, the United States, is unlikely to accept a subordinate status in a Chinese-led regional order.”¹⁵

Competing Military Postures in East Asia. As noted by the U.S. Department of Defense in its 2014 *Annual Report to Congress*, China “continues to pursue a long-term comprehensive military modernization program designed to improve the capacity of its armed forces to fight and win short-duration, high-intensity regional contingencies,” such as conflict in the Taiwan Strait. However, “as China’s interests, capabilities, and international influence have grown, its military modernization program has also become increasingly focused on military investments for a range of missions beyond China’s coast,” including the South China Sea and the East China Sea.¹⁶

Of particular concern to the United States are China’s efforts to build “a modern and regionally powerful Navy with a modest but growing capability for conducting operations beyond China’s near-seas region.”

¹⁴ Denny Roy, “U.S.-China Relations and the Western Pacific,” *The Diplomat* (January 16, 2014).

¹⁵ Alexander L. Vuving, “U.S. Maritime Dominance in Danger,” *The Diplomat* (April 14, 2012).

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2014* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014): i.

This modernization effort includes acquiring anti-ship ballistic missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, submarines, surface ships, aircraft, and support command and control/communications/computers/intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance systems.¹⁷

To counter the growing power and assertiveness of China, the Obama Administration has turned greater attention to Asia through what was originally referred to as an “Asian pivot” or “back to Asia” strategy but more recently is called “re-balancing.” The latter is described as rebalancing U.S. military assets from other regions to Asia, as well as rebalancing assets within the Asia-Pacific region by reducing the concentration of forces in Northeast Asia and more widely distributing these forces through the entire region.¹⁸

The military problem for the United States is overcoming access denial: having the ability to fight its way into and perform its mission inside of areas where China can mass enough precision firepower to cause great harm to American task forces.¹⁹ The prospects of unacceptable costs to the U.S. military through precision Chinese strikes could be viewed as a possible deterrent to American intervention in East and Southeast Asia and – should armed confrontation occur – as an incentive for Washington to disengage quickly before losses become too costly. Beijing, of course, has its own reasons for wanting to avoid a military conflict with the United States, because the cost to China could be enormously high and perhaps set in motion domestic issues destabilizing to its political system.

Other Examples of Sino-American Competition. There are many other areas of competition between the United States and China. Some of these are:²⁰

- Competing trade regimes. The U.S. sponsored Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement does not include China, and the Chinese sponsored Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific does not include the United States.
- Competing funding sources for Asia-Pacific economic development. The Asia Development Bank and World Bank, and China’s recently proposed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank come to mind here.
- Competing approaches to conflict resolution. In the context of territorial disputes around China’s periphery, the United States favors multilateral forums while China prefers bilateral negotiations.

¹⁷ Ronald O’Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2014): Summary page. For PLA weaknesses, see Dennis J. Blasko, “Ten Reasons Why China Will Have Trouble Fighting a Modern War,” *War on the Rocks blog* (February 18, 2015), <http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/ten-reasons-why-china-will-have-trouble-fighting-a-modern-war/>.

¹⁸ Richard Weitz, “Pivot Out, Rebalance In,” *The Diplomat* (May 3, 2012).

¹⁹ James R. Holmes, “U.S. Confronts an Anti-Access World,” *The Diplomat* (March 9, 2012).

²⁰ For the examples, see Office of the United States Trade Representative, “Overview of the Trans Pacific Partnership” and “Outlines of TPP,” <https://ustr.gov/tpp>; Simon Denyer, “China takes a jab at U.S. as Europeans back Asian bank,” *Washington Post* (March 19, 2015): A14; Zheng Wang, “China’s Alternative Diplomacy,” *The Diplomat* (January 20, 2015); Swati Arun, “The Return of Realpolitik,” *The Diplomat* (January 27, 2015); and John Lewis, “Hidden Arena: Cyber Competition and Conflict in Indo-Pacific Asia,” Remarks prepared for the Lowy Institute MacArthur Asia Security Project (n.d.), http://csis.org/files/publication/130307_cyber_Lowy.pdf.

- Diplomatic competition. Washington and Beijing are intensifying efforts to court regional nations to gain advantage in the power game.
- Cyber competition. The United States and China are racing to develop the capacity to overwhelm the other's cyber defenses.

If areas of engagement are compared to areas of competition, it seems self-evident that China and the United States have a fundamental interest in finding opportunities to broaden the positive aspects of their relationship. One possible opportunity might be enhanced USPACOM – PLA cooperation in planning regional response to a mega-disaster impacting many countries bordering the North Pacific.

Planning for Black Swan Events

Most disaster scenarios considered by emergency planners are confined to national or local events. For the United States, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has identified several planning scenarios based on bombings using improvised explosive devices, nuclear devices, and radiological dispersal devices; biological attacks using pathogens such as aerosol anthrax or plague, or using food contamination or foreign animal disease; chemical attacks using such things as blister agent, toxic industrial chemicals, nerve agent, or chlorine tank explosion; cyber attack; and natural disasters involving major earthquakes, hurricanes, and biological disease outbreak such as pandemic influenza.²¹

Because such events generally are not international in scale, they are not likely to become drivers of U.S.-China cooperation. Truly international events include possible geomagnetic disturbances causing widespread interruption of electrical systems²² or cascading effects from superstorms disrupting the global supply chain or critical infrastructure in many countries.²³ Other high-intensity, low-frequency events might include a large meteorite impacting the North Pacific, the eruption of a super volcano such as Yellowstone or the Toba caldera in North Sumatra, or the close occurrence of great earthquakes and volcanic eruptions along the tectonic plates underneath and bordering the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

We tend to dismiss the likelihood of these large scale events, but scientists constantly remind us that these things have happened before and will happen again. And when they do occur – often with little warning – the result is widespread devastation and long-lasting consequences. They are sometimes referred to as “black swan” events.²⁴ There are even statistical methods for measuring the probability of such rare occurrences.²⁵

²¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, “National Planning Scenarios,” <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=683091>.

²² National Infrastructure Advisory Council, *A Framework for Establishing Critical Infrastructure Resilience Goals* (October 19, 2010): 30. This NIAC study also highlighted the importance in exercises of stressing to the breaking point existing plans and procedures. Being faced with unanticipated levels of crisis, planners tend to identify areas where they can improve system resilience, thereby strengthening their overall preparedness, as well as response and recovery and continuity of operations programs. See page 19 of the report for an explanation.

²³ National Infrastructure Advisory Council, *Strengthening Regional Resilience* (November 21, 2013): 68.

²⁴ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, “The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable,” *New York Times* (April 22, 2007).

²⁵ John D. Steinbruner, Paul C. Stern, and Jo L. Husbands, *Climate and Social Stress: Implications for Security Analysis* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2013), especially Appendix D.

Certainly, if a mega-disaster were to occur in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States and China – along with other able countries – would cooperate in response and recovery operations. For the purpose of this article, however, we should also consider the possibility of Sino-American planning **before such hypothetical events**. Planning for high-intensity, low-frequency disasters would require the United States and China to cooperate on an unparalleled scale for the common good of the entire region. The required cooperation would reinforce the idea of community in the Asia Pacific and possibly add momentum to other areas of collaboration as well. The mechanism for large-scale planning is important, and few instruments are better suited than partnerships.

Partnerships

Partnerships are a useful paradigm for situations where two or more parties have fundamental differences yet also certain common interests. Many kinds of partnerships exist within the public and private sectors, and they are widely used when more formal arrangements do not seem feasible or appropriate. The flexibility of partnerships, and the relative ease of creating and dissolving them, including joining and withdrawing at will, are advantageous to stakeholders in some instances.²⁶

Sino-American partnerships can be challenging due to a lack of trust, transparency, and compliance with legal requirements.²⁷ Nonetheless, successful Sino-American partnerships to pursue agendas regional in scope could be successful given certain conditions: the right circumstances, leadership, intentions, mechanisms, areas of engagement, and political support. Most of these necessary conditions exist:

- Circumstances: Sino-American relations are in need of positive engagement, and concerns over climate change and extreme weather events are shared widely across the Pacific.
- Leadership: USPACOM and the PLA have the capacity to lead such a large-scale partnership.
- Intentions: Both China and the United States are willing to cooperate whenever possible and when it is in their mutual interests.
- Mechanisms: The 8th Theater Sustainment Command, U.S. Army Pacific, annual Disaster Management Exchange with the PLA, and the broad partnerships of the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance provide existing mechanisms for enhanced USPACOM – PLA exchanges.
- Areas of Engagement: Planning for high-intensity, low-frequency disasters impacting several Asia-Pacific countries almost simultaneously would require much closer U.S.-China cooperation, along with participation from other regional nations.

²⁶ See, for example, Catherine Dale, *In Brief: Clarifying the Concept of 'Partnership' in National Security* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service Report, 2012).

²⁷ Descriptions of what make or break a partnership abound in the literature. Examples include: Community Partnerships Interagency Policy Committee, "Building Partnerships: A Best Practices Guide" (Washington, DC: White House, 2013); Lionel Dupré, Nicole Falessi, and Dimitra Liveri, eds., *Cooperative Models for Effective Public Private Partnerships Good Practice Guide* (Heraklion, Greece: European Network and Information Security Agency, European Union, 2011); United Nations Partnership Frameworks (UNPAF) with several countries, including Thailand (*United Nations Partnership Framework – Thailand 2012-2016: Resilience, Creativity and Equity*, 2011); and the World Bank's Country Partnership Framework.

- Political Support: U.S.-China military cooperation is subject to close political scrutiny in both countries.²⁸ At the same time, exchanges are numerous and generally supported where security will not be compromised.²⁹ Although it cannot be taken for granted, there is room for optimism that political support would be forthcoming on greater U.S.-China cooperation on disaster relief planning, especially if other Asian-Pacific countries were involved.

Conclusion

The United States and China are strategic competitors. There are deep, fundamental differences between the two countries. These differences sometimes make Sino-American cooperation challenging. At the same time, there is strong evidence that neither country wants a conflict with the other. Indeed, many areas of cooperation exist where it is in their mutual interests.

One area of possible expanded cooperation is joint USPACOM – PLA planning for response and recovery from high-intensity, low-frequency catastrophic events impacting large areas of the Asia-Pacific region. If such planning were to occur in the context of existing DME and CFE-DMHA mechanisms, and include other regional militaries and appropriate public-private stakeholders, the Asia-Pacific region would be better prepared to respond to a mega-disaster, individual countries would be better able to recover from catastrophes, and the loss of life, property, and livelihood could be substantially reduced. In the longer-term, building upon the success and experience of the partnership would encourage greater cooperation between all states in the region and possibly advance the concept of a more integrated Asia-Pacific community, thus enhancing regional security and stability.

²⁸ For examples of U.S. congressional concerns, see Susan V. Lawrence, *U.S.-China Relations: An Overview of Policy Issues* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2013), especially Appendices A and B; and Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2014): 62-84.

²⁹ For example, see U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), especially Chapter 6 and Appendix I.