

WU YIXUE

First wave of naval exercises

China and Russia began a joint naval exercise in the Yellow Sea off the coast of Qingdao in eastern China's Shandong province on Sunday. The drill, which is scheduled to last until Friday, will strengthen the two countries' anti-piracy and counter-terrorism cooperation and boost their maritime supply, rescue and assistance capabilities. They are the first Sino-Russian maritime military maneuvers outside the Shanghai Cooperation Organization framework.

Chen Bingde, chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, and his Russian counterpart Nikolai Makarov, agreed on the joint naval drill during his visit to Russia in August 2011, with the aim of deepening mutual understanding and trust between the two militaries.

Chen said that military-to-military cooperation is an important part of the China-Russia strategic partnership and the exercises will be the first of such drills by the two countries' navies.

In fact, military exchanges and cooperation have constituted an important component of the full strategic cooperative partnership established between China and Russia. Both sides have always maintained high-level military exchanges. Since the first joint "Peace Mission" military exercise in 2005, the two countries have held several joint military drills within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which have played a positive role in boosting bilateral military capabilities to deal with emerging uncertain factors.

The exercises are taking place as the United States and the Republic of Korea are conducting their own joint naval exercises. The US and the ROK are in the midst of Foal Eagle, which runs from March 1 to April 30, and involves as many as 200,000 ROK

troops and approximately 11,000 US forces, most of whom traveled to the Korean peninsula specifically for the exercise. Regular military exercises have also been held between the US and the Philippines in the South China Sea over the past years.

Yet the exercises conducted by the Chinese and Russian navies are not aimed at any third party and China and Russia have no intention of forming a military alliance, Chinese military experts say. The exercises, involving destroyers, escort vessels, hospital ships, submarines, warships and supply ships from both navies, will focus on joint air defense and anti-submarine tactics and hijacked vessels and anti-terrorism drills as well as search and rescue simulations.

Some in the United States and Japan have interpreted the naval drill as a Sino-Russian response to US-led military exercises in the Asia-Pacific and their consolidated determination to balance Washington's dominance in the region. However, such misgivings are based on the ingrained Cold War mentality among certain countries and are completely groundless.

China adheres to a peaceful independent foreign policy, which advocates the settlement of international disputes through dialogue. The country's military build-up and exercises aimed at boosting its capabilities are proportionate to its need as a populous nation focused on economic development to defend its national interests and honor its international responsibilities. In recent years, China's military has participated in international peacekeeping missions and efforts to combat organized crimes and piracy to undertake its role as an emerging world power.

China is not seeking hegemony or challeng-

ing the established supremacy of the US, a policy China has maintained since the very beginning of its foundation in 1949. As an original member of the non-alignment movement, it has also never viewed any countries as a perceived adversary or targeted its increased military exchanges and cooperation at any party.

In fact, it is the Cold War mentality and ever-deepening military alliances of some countries in Asia that pose the biggest threat to regional peace and stability. The US' increased military and diplomatic presence in East and Southeast Asia over the past year have emboldened regional countries to take bold actions, sometimes provocative, at the South China Sea instead of adopting a consultative approach toward their disputes on territorial claims, adding uncertainties to the fragile regional situation.

As two permanent UN Security Council members, closer cooperation between China and Russia, including military cooperation, has played an important role in resolving regional disputes and maintaining regional and world peace and stability, as indicated by their concerted efforts to defuse the Syrian crisis, the Iranian nuclear issue and the long-thorny stalemate on the nuclear disarmament of the Korean Peninsula.

China advocates the establishment of friendly military relations with all countries, including the US and Russia. Sino-US military exchanges and cooperation have also achieved remarkable progress in recent years in the context of improved bilateral political ties.

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LETTERS

Unruly passengers

Comment on "Airline, police unite to end tarmac intrusions" (China Daily, April 19)

Flight delays and furious passengers are a fact of life in most airports around the world. Acts of violence or invasion of the airport's tarmac by passengers should be handled firmly by the police with severe punishments. It is incredible to hear that angry passengers in Shanghai who invaded the tarmac have only received compensation instead of being jailed.

Air China has signed a cooperation agreement with the police to give "more attention" to handling such potentially dangerous actions. But in my opinion, the police should have enough personnel at airports to be able to handle such incidents without special requests.

GIORGIO RONZANI, via e-mail

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FROM THE CHINESE PRESS

Reduce the burden on taxpayers

According to the latest explanation by China's State Administration of Taxation, the allowance paid by employers to cover the expenditures incurred from transportation and meals during an employee's business trip should be taxable. The country's tax authorities should have given the matter further consideration, says an article on Xinhua-net. Excerpts:

This is just the latest approach by the tax authorities to elaborate on personal income tax since China's top legislature raised the monthly tax exemption threshold from 2,000 yuan (\$317) to 3,500 yuan last year. An earlier example is the Beijing tax authorities clarified that mooncakes given as gifts by employers to staff members are taxable as part of employees' in-kind income.

The country's personal income tax law stipulates how to levy personal income tax, regardless of the elaborations made by the tax authorities. Prior to these elaborations, many local authorities did not tax work-related reimbursement of meals and transportation, not because they failed to realize it was taxable income, but because they sought to reduce the burden on taxpayers amid price hikes.

Likewise, Shanghai tax authorities levied the disputed "mooncake tax" only when employers reported the gifts, thus striking a balance between legal principles and taxpayers' interests.

However, now that the elaboration has been released, local tax authorities will have to collect the personal income tax due. But statistics from the Ministry of Finance show that national tax revenues rose 22.6 percent year-on-year to 8.97 trillion yuan last year, a much higher growth rate than that of urban residents' disposable income per capita, suggesting more room for tax cuts in the future. Meanwhile the tax authorities should try to reduce the burden on taxpayers to the maximum extent permitted by law.

Confinement nurses

Thanks to a baby boom this year, the cost of hiring a confinement nurse, or yuesao in Chinese, can be more expensive than hiring a doctor. Some people have questioned whether such services are really value for money and call for government supervision, says an article in China Youth Daily. Excerpts:

Compared with medical professionals, the job of a confinement nurse is short-term and less skilled. However, simply comparing the monthly income of a confinement nurse with that of a doctor and jumping to the conclusion that confinement nursing is not a value-for-money service reflects the stereotyped thinking that those undertaking physical labor must be paid less than those doing brainwork.

That is certainly not true. The media should stop overplaying the wages and recognize the demanding nature of the work. In fact, those who have ever employed a confinement nurse know how demanding the job can be, as a confinement nurse has to take care of the mother and the new born infant during the first month after childbirth, day and night. Such demanding work deserves good pay.

This is not just about confinement nurses. Many migrant workers are reported to have earned more than fresh college graduates in recent years, triggering a huge public outcry. It seems that when the stereotyped thinking cannot be reconciled with reality, people start to question whether these people are overpaid, but the truth is our society has no reason to deprive migrant workers and confinement nurses of the pay that they deserve.

Rather, we should ensure confinement nurses are justly paid and find out whether or not high commissions should take the blame for the bubble prices in the industry.

The opinions expressed on this page do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

DANIEL LEVIN

High time for a two-list approach

A visitor from another planet could be excused for walking away with the impression that acrimony and distrust reign supreme in the relations between the United States and China. Driven in no small part by the seemingly irresistible blood-sport of China bashing that dominates most foreign policy debates in the US campaign season, inflammatory rhetoric is accentuating the differences between the two nations and preventing sane voices that focus on the common interests and tangible opportunities for international cooperation from being heard. The rabble-rousing crescendo invokes Cato the Elder and his inability to end a speech without calling for the destruction of Carthage.

The current climate raises specters of the Cold War and its doctrine of mutual assured destruction — a doctrine aptly known by its acronym "MAD". But despite the unpleasant shrillness of headline-seeking polemics that accompany the build up to the presidential election in the US, it is actually the absence of meaningful dialogue that bears far more damaging potential — the silence is deafening.

Both China and the US are faced with significant trials and tribulations on the home front as well as in the global setting. The repercussions of events in remote locations can be felt acutely at home, and economic challenges are by no means the only ones that are swept in by the tides of globalization. All the simplistic clichés and platitudes regarding the quest for regional or global supremacy — again, a Cold War relic that should have been buried alongside the Cold War itself — are drowning the voices of reason that state what should be obvious to all: that in a world with bankrupt countries that run their state budgets like giant Ponzi schemes, in a world with ever-growing and rapidly ageing

populations clamoring for finite resources, in a world suffering the unpredictable consequences of climate change — in short, a world beset by natural and man-made disasters, the US and China can ill-afford to accentuate all that divides them. It is patently absurd to expect any progress in containing threats such as nuclear proliferation, military-technological sabotage, or significant breaches of cyber security, all of which have manifestly global implications, unless the two countries can overcome their lingering distrust and political or cultural differences, and instead focus on the many important areas where their interests are aligned, rather than opposed.

But for that alignment to happen, real dialogue has to take place. We cannot take a timeout from talking, even if these are delicate times of transition for both countries. There needs to be real talking, not the overly formal and scripted interaction that takes place during state visits or in diplomatic communiqués. Real talking takes place when real people with real responsibilities sit down, roll up their sleeves, and get to work. This needs to happen at the economic and commercial level, and it needs to happen at the military level. It needs to happen between professional experts, and it needs to happen between government officials. It needs to happen between the current generation of leaders, and it needs to happen between future leaders and stakeholders. Because in the absence of real talking, each side demonizes the other and conspiracy theories take on a life of their own and threaten to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

To facilitate real dialogue between them, China and the US should adopt a "two-list" approach. One list — we can call it the dark list — would contain all the areas where one country's national standpoint is diametrically and competitively

opposed to the standpoint of the other, and the interests of the two countries cannot be aligned, at least not without major political sacrifices. Interestingly, and hardly coincidentally, the more the actual interests of the two countries resemble one another within their respective orbits, the more they will be perceived by both sides as irreconcilable. This dark list should be kept in a drawer, to be consulted periodically for the sole purpose of examining whether one of its items might be ready to be moved to the other list.

The other list — we can call it the bright list — would contain all the areas where the interests of the two countries are aligned, or where they can be aligned if discussed in good faith. It should go without saying that our goal here is to keep the dark list short and the bright list long. And it should be equally obvious that the more we talk to each other — real talk, far away from cameras and microphones — the more dominant the bright list and the more inconsequential the dark list become.

It is our great challenge to neutralize the voices that only chatter — actually, scream — about the dark list. We have gotten so accustomed to viewing important issues through the prism of negativity, that we are losing the ability to engage in rational, constructive dialogue and base our positions on even-handed arguments and empirical evidence. We should be able to discuss issues that are critical to both countries calmly and sensibly, rather than automatically placing them on the dark list. No matter how insistent some voices call for geopolitical hegemony, nations will have to behave intelligently and harmoniously if they wish to prosper under the yoke of diminishing resources and momentous common threats.

If we sat down and tried to resolve our issues within the win-win proposition of the bright list, then we would realize that politics and ideology lead to dangerous oversimplifications and blatantly ignore the intricate fabric of the two countries' intertwined interests. But once the cantankerous genie is out of the bottle, it becomes well-nigh impossible to put it back.

It is indeed high time for a two-list approach. And if we focus our energy on the bright list, we will replace silence with dialogue, and confrontation with harmony.

The author is a member of the Board of the Liechtenstein Foundation for State Governance.

