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Session V: Enhancing Transparency: Military to Military Cooperation and Strategic Dialogues

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Military Transparency involving China and the United States: A Chinese Military Officer's Perception

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Overview

Military transparency is a process as well as a mechanism employed by sovereign states to continuously reveal such accurate information as strategic intentions, military capabilities and activities to prevent and control wars or achieve special political or military purposes. It is an important instrument to strengthen state-to-state relations, avoid misjudgment and miscalculation, enhance mutual trust and improve international security cooperation. Military transparency as an institutionalized mechanism, including the practice of military transparency stipulated by international treaties and regulations of respective countries on the release of domestic information, was mainly formed in the area of arms control and disarmament. Military transparency constitutes the fundamental principle and an important component part of confidence building measures (CBMs) between countries. The institutionalized framework of military transparency was developed during the two world wars and improved during the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in negotiations on nuclear disarmament. The history of the development of military transparency indicates that world powers were usually the advocates of this concept as well as the makers of rules in this area. On the one hand, military transparency involves the common practice endorsed by most developed countries. On the other, it is not hard to observe that military transparency is an important tool employed by stronger countries to contain weaker or potential opponents.¹

Since the end of the Cold War, the international security situation underwent significant changes and the practice of military transparency gradually expanded beyond the area of arms control to the broader areas of military-to-military contacts and cooperation, and was gradually accepted by more and more countries. The practice of military transparency by the United States, as the only superpower in the world, has its distinctive and unique features as well as limitations. China's practice of military transparency as an institutionalized mechanism started at a later stage. However, with the needs of the defense modernization drive in recent years, China

1 The concept concerning military transparency, refer to Liu Huaqiu, the Handbook of Arms Control and Disarmament;, p429-463, the Publishing House of National Defense Industry, 2000; Pan Zhengqiang, International Disarmament and Arms Control,, p306-309, the National Defense University Press, 1996; Joseph Goldblatt, An Introduction to Arms Control,, translated and edited by Institute of Arms Control and Disarmament,, p11, Junshi Yiwen Press, 2004.

has developed a more profound perception of military transparency and is now taking an active part in the practice of military transparency in accordance with China's national interests.

I. The major practice of military transparency by the United States

The United States is the main advocator and facilitator of important military transparency issues since World War One. Its practice, based on an institutionalized framework, is materialized through concrete measures. According to the requirement of domestic laws, such as *the Law of Information Freedom*², which was enacted in 1966, all departments of the US government, including its defense department, should take varieties of measures to satisfy the requirements of the public as well as the congress for military information. In the meantime, the United States regards the enhancement of military transparency as a long-standing and strategic measure, practices it in a much broader international context and has established a series of standardized practice.

The practice of the United States to enhance military transparency has following distinctive features:

To establish a well-developed system to release military information. The United States 1) releases military information through government reports; 2) organizes press conferences to release military information and appoints the assistant secretary of defense for public affairs to be the spokesman of the Department of Defense; 3) sets up public relations agencies to release military information, and all US military services, theatre commands, fleets and divisions, have all established offices of public affairs and assigned officers to be in charge; 4) established websites to release military information. As early as in 1994, the website of defense and military information was established to be a part of the US Department of Defense website; 5) published military periodicals to release military information.

To respond to media and public inquiries. This practice is done to comply with relevant laws and engage in public relations work, and also constitutes an important aspect of improving military transparency. On the one hand, the US military attaches

2 The essence of the act is that, in principle, all government documents should be released to the public and all US citizens are entitled to have access to government documents, irrespective of their purposes. Therefore, all departments of the US government (including the defense department) have established offices to execute this Law of Information Freedom. Anybody can ask for any government work reports within the legal boundaries. The FOLA website (<http://www.state.gov/m/a/ips/>) also directly recommends ways and means to access information and material. Refer to the Right to Know and the Law of Information Freedom, p94, Qinghua University Press, 2005.

great importance to establishing good relations with the media as well as a sound connection network, so as to avoid passive situation. On the other hand, in accordance with *the Freedom of Information Act* (FOIA), the US Department of Defense processes tens of thousands of inquiries for military information and answers questions from military personnel or the general public through Internet or other channels.

To engage in military contacts with other countries in different forms. The US military believes that the U.S. engages in military-to-military contacts with many countries for better understanding the security strategy of the other side, so as to avoid conflicts resulting from misjudgment and miscalculation and enhance military transparency³. The main forms are but not only limited to visits, exchange of visiting scholars and military students, seminars, military facility tours and observing military exercises.

To take the lead in establishing or participating in bilateral and multilateral military transparency mechanisms. Since the end of World War One, the United States became a world power with super military strength. After the War, the entente countries headed by the United States signed *the 1919 Treaty of Versailles*. And the first part of the treaty, entitled *The Covenant of the League of Nations*, bears upon the issue of military transparency in Article 8: The Members of the League undertake to interchange full and frank information as to the scale of their armaments, their military, naval and air programs and the condition of such of their industries as are adaptable to war-like purposes.⁴ After that, the United States almost played a leading role in all the bilateral and multilateral treaties on arms control and disarmament. In all those important documents, the issue of military transparency exists as an important part of a standardized and operable mechanism.

To adopt various forms of verification measures as an important means to enhance military transparency. Concerning some important issues, such as the development and deployment of strategic weapons, verification can be done to ensure unilateral or bilateral transparency. There are mainly three scenarios: 1) Verification based on bilateral or multilateral treaties. For example, after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union signed a series of treaties to avoid miscalculation and enhancing CBMs. The *Treaty on Open Skies* was co-signed by 34 countries including the United States and the Soviet Union (now Russia). As one of the most wide-ranging international efforts for promoting openness and transparency of military forces and activities, it established a program of unarmed aerial

3 David Shambaugh, *China Engages Asia*, International Security, Vol.29, Issue 3, winter 2004.

4 The full text of the treaty, see <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/6CB59816195E58350525654F007624BF>.

surveillance flights over the entire territory of its participants⁵. 2) Verification in accordance with UN resolutions or on the pretext of executing UN Security Council resolutions. For example, on April 3rd, 1991, the United States urged the UN Security Council to pass Resolution No. 687, which authorized the verification of Iraq's weapons. 3) Verification organized by multi-country teams. During the Six Party Talk process, after consulting with China, ROK, Japan and Russia, the United States managed to persuade DPRK to accept the verification conducted by IAEA.

II. The major practice of military transparency by China

As compared with the practice of military transparency of major countries in the world, there are similarities and differences in the practice of China. With China's accelerated pace of reform and opening-up, China's practice of military transparency is also on a fast lane. China has employed a variety of ways and means to enhance military transparency and have taken more and more substantial measures.

The main features of China's practice of military transparency are as follows:

To timely release military policy documents. Firstly, based on the changing external and domestic situation, China has timely released documents on its different types of policies and adjusted its focuses of information release. Since 1998, China has published seven editions of white papers on *China's National Defense* and some other white papers, such as *China's Endeavors for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation*, *China's Peaceful Development* and also the white paper on *China's Space Activities in 2011*. On the Taiwan question, China enacted *the Anti-Secession Law*, which defines China's rights to resort to non-peaceful means to recover Taiwan under three circumstances, thus clearly showing the international community as well as Taiwan province China's position and determination on the Taiwan question. Secondly, China has established platforms for releasing military information. Spokesmen of the Ministry of National Defense were appointed and press conferences were held. In 2009, the website of the Ministry of National Defense went into operation and in 2011, regular press conferences were in operation.

To engage in dialogue and consultations in a proactive way. In recent years, the Chinese military conducted defense and security consultations and dialogue with the United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, France and Germany, and later expanded the mechanisms to some neighboring countries, such as Pakistan, Mongolia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines. Such consultations and dialogue enhanced the understanding of each other's policy considerations, reduced

5 See <http://www.state.gov/www/global/arms/treaties/openski1.html>.

misjudgment and miscalculation and played a positive role in enhancing China's military transparency. Moreover, since 2008, the Chinese military established defense hotlines with Russia and the United States, and operational level hotlines with ROK. Those hotlines were very conducive to maintaining contact, sharing intentions, reducing miscalculation and resolving crisis through dialogue and consultation.

To increase the degree of openness in China's military contacts and cooperation with other countries. Firstly, the Chinese military has been enhancing its military contacts with other countries. The Chinese military regards its military exchanges and cooperation with other countries as an important means to enhance bilateral and multilateral military transparency and mutual trust. Since the Chinese warships made the first overseas port call in the middle of the 1980s, Chinese naval ships or task groups have sailed across the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean to visit over 30 countries in the five continents. Since 2002, the Chinese military has held more than 30 major joint exercises with other countries, for the purpose of strengthening practical military-to-military exchanges and cooperation in the result that Chinese military transparency has been increased. In recent years, China has on many occasions invited observers from foreign countries to observe training and exercises conducted by the Chinese military. In 2006, a Chinese naval task group visited the United States, Canada and the Philippines. During that visit, the Chinese and the US navy conducted their first joint search and rescue exercise, marking a new record in the history of bilateral naval exchanges. Secondly, China has demonstrated its major military equipment and opened some key military sites to foreign defense and military leaders, such as advanced weapon systems of the three services, the headquarters of the Second Artillery Force, armor troops, air force and naval bases and military academies.

To participate in bilateral and multilateral mechanisms of military transparency in a proactive way. So far, China has actively joined almost all the main international arms control and non-proliferation mechanisms. In 2007, the Chinese government announced its decision to join UN Military Budget Transparency System and submitted to the United Nations the basic data of its military expenditure of the previous fiscal year. In the same year, China resumed its submission of the information of import and export of seven types of conventional weapons under *the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms*. Since the beginning of 1990s, China has signed a series of bilateral agreements to enhance mutual trust with such countries as Russia, India, and the United States. China has also signed multilateral agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and with Russia and Mongolia. Several measures of military transparency were included in those agreements.

III. Perspectives on military transparency

Military transparency is not only a trend in the world that has been accepted by many countries, but also a tool for countries to engage or even confront with each other. As a result of long-term practice, the Western countries with the United States as the leader, have accumulated some experience but also have some limitations. In view of all that, here is the vision of the future development of military transparency of a Chinese military officer:

Military transparency should be based on the protection of national interests.

The protection of national interests is the principal rule to abide by when it comes to the issue of military transparency. Military transparency is related to national defense building and armed forces development as well as national security. Therefore, concerning military transparency, national interests, which is the bottom line for national security, should be thoroughly protected. Not a single country can be totally transparent in the military area. Even the United States has very strict criteria for maintaining secrecy, if the issue of transparency is connected with its own security interests. For example, in 1982, the US Department of Defense released in the form of DOD Guidelines the authorized rights of releasing the information of DOD and later issued three revised editions. Moreover, the US Department of Defense also released some other guidelines for information safety, such as *Information Security Project* of DOD and *the Public Information Security and Policy Review* of DOD. After the September 11 incident, the United States tightened its practice of military transparency and deleted some military information data that had already been made public from its websites and also imposed more restrictions on Pentagon personnel concerning the issue of meeting the press and releasing information.⁶

Mutual trust serves as the pre-requisite as well as the foundation of military transparency. Mutual trust and military transparency always complement each other⁷. If the two have to be differentiated, then mutual trust always precedes transparency.

6 After the terrorist attack that took place on September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration imposed strict restrictions on the release of government information. Both government agencies and law-making institutions adopted many policies and measures to maintain secrecy, with the excuse that the United States might suffer more terrorist attacks. Refer to <http://www.ciotimes.com/information/topic/topic200806071526/article/article200806020051.html?currentPage=2>.

And Ma Weining: "the Issue of Transparency in China-US Military-to-Military Relations", *Contemporary International Relations*, Issue 10, 2005.

7 The latest United Nations General Assembly resolution on objective information on military matters asserts that 'a better flow of objective information on military matters can help to relieve international tension and is therefore an important contribution to conflict prevention' and that transparency in military issues is an essential element for building trust among countries. See United Nations, General Assembly Resolution A/RES/60/44, December 8, 2005, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dhl/resguide/r60.htm> cited in Perdomo, C. and Blomstrom A., "the

Some western experts and policy analysts believe that there are no direct connections between mutual trust and transparency, and they do not accept the concept that mutual trust is the pre-requisite and foundation of transparency. By analyzing the practice of major Western powers in establishing institutionalized transparency, one can find that transparency is closely connected with the process of negotiations on confidence-building measures(CBMs) during the Cold War. And the real process of negotiating on an agreement did not begin until after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The negotiations on CBMs were incorporated into the framework of the European Security Council in 1973. And it took the whole length of 20 years for the European Security Council to issue the “Vienna document” in 1992. The negotiation experienced three stages and transparency measures were gradually established, including such measures as information release, information exchange, inspection and verification. Such an institutionalized security arrangement, under the circumstances of lacking mutual trust in both political and military areas, played its role in avoiding accidental conflicts caused by misjudgment of each other’s intentions. With the progress of CBMs at different stages, the level of transparency of the military activities of European countries was enhanced and the scope of openness enlarged. The United States and the Soviet Union and the two largest blocs in the world began to adjust their traditional thinking that was based on competition or deterrence. On their way towards sharing the security responsibilities of Europe as a whole, the Europeans managed to convert their achievements into mutual trust and regional cooperation. ⁸ The history of the establishment of institutionalized transparency indicates that mutual trust and transparency are closely related to each other and this reflects the experience and advantage of Western powers in this area.

Regarding the question of whether transparency precedes mutual trust or the other way round, since the practice of transparency by major Western powers originated from the Cold War, a period of focused confrontation, it seems that one can make the conclusion that such transparency arrangement is based on mutual mistrust. It was just because of the misjudgment as a result of mutual mistrust between the United States and the Soviet Union as well as that between the two big blocs that led to, firstly, negotiations on CBMs to avoid misjudgment caused by mistrust and, secondly, treaties featuring mutual transparency as a result of negotiations to avoid misjudgment.

reporting of military expenditure data”SIPRI Yearbook 2006 (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2006), pp 364-368.

8 Olaf Palme ed., *Common Security: A Blueprint for Survival*, Report of the Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, New York: Simon&Schuster,1982.

Theoretically that is a logical conclusion. However, practically, that conclusion proves that mutual trust precedes transparency. Before the treaties on transparency were approved, there were negotiations on CBMs. And this suggests that mutual trust precedes transparency. No matter whether the original building of Western institutionalized transparency was on the purpose of building mutual trust, in practice, the procedure has always been the following: negotiations on CBMs first, treaties on implementing institutionalized transparency second. In this respect, it is logical and reasonable to suggest that mutual trust serves as the pre-requisite and foundation of transparency.

As far as those Asian countries including China are concerned, they have a long history of suffering from Western colonialist rule, as countries with inferior national strength. Therefore they have deep concerns and doubts about joining the transparency measures of the Western mode, set by developed Western countries. China is exactly a case in point. China has experienced both glory and humiliation in its history, suffering from the colonial rule and invasion by Western powers in the 100 years of contemporary history. So China highly values sovereignty and national security and has a high sense of self-protection when it comes to interference and invasion by foreign forces, and instinctively adopts a self-protective attitude when it comes to military transparency. This situation has, to some extent, resulted in the impression of lower level transparency on the part of the United States and European countries and affected their objective assessment of China's efforts to enhance transparency.

Moreover, the traditional culture of China has exerted its imperceptibly influence on the building of institutionalized transparency. At the outset, China's understanding of transparency can be summarized by one single Chinese character: 信 (XIN, meaning truth and trust). On the one hand, one should be true to his word. Traditional Chinese culture emphasizes sincerity, trust and harmony, attaches great importance to peace and advocates matching action with words. On the other hand, China believes that the foundation of transparency is strategic and mutual trust. The nature of this kind of mutual trust, different from the CBMs practiced by Western powers, emphasizes mutual trust at the ideaistic and strategic levels. Therefore, as far as China is concerned, the mutual trust in the security and military areas between countries should be the priority, as against the concrete measures of mutual transparency. Therefore, military transparency involving two countries is essentially based on the quality of bilateral political relations. The better the political relationship, the deeper the mutual trust. The stronger the mutual trust, the higher the degree of military transparency. Due to differences in history, culture and institution development, Westerners might not be able to easily understand China's logic of

transparency. However, with the joint efforts to promote worldwide transparency, some countries want to engage in substantive conversation with China in an attempt to reach consensus on the issue of transparency, it is desirable that the country, first and foremost, has some knowledge and understanding of China's history and culture.

To increase military transparency, the transparency of strategic intentions plays the leading role. Military transparency can be classified into two levels: the transparency of strategic intentions and that of military capabilities. The transparency of strategic intentions is more important and achievable than that of military capabilities, since the transparency of strategic intentions emphasizes mutual trust at the strategic level and provides an important direction to enhance military transparency, and the transparency of military capabilities is always restricted by different conditions. If it is not a purely realistic approach, the transparency of strategic intentions emphasizes mutual trust both at conceptual and strategic levels, and functions as an important guideline for enhancing military transparency. Moreover, the transparency of military capabilities is limited by many factors. Whether a country lays emphasis on military might or international systems, the judgment can only be made on the basis of the degree of transparency of intentions. And capabilities can only function well when strategic intentions are transparent.⁹ China has not only demonstrated the transparency of its military capabilities, but also the comprehensive transparency of its strategic intentions. And this position has won appreciations from the international community. Although the United States does not directly admit the fact that China has become more and more transparent, it has to admit that there has been a gradual but modest increase in Chinese military transparency over the last decade.¹⁰ It is fair to say that not a single country can be totally transparent in its military capabilities, and it is all the more difficult for a weaker country to do so. The United States tends to emphasize “the transparency of military capabilities” and holds that the transparency of capabilities has practical significance. It emphasizes the judgment of the degree of transparency of a country by the quantity of weapons and the amount of military expenditure.¹¹

Even transparency itself might be employed as a tool of deterrence by such countries as the United States, a military giant. For weaker countries, maintaining a low degree of transparency or a certain degree of vagueness can serve as a tool of

9 Ni Shixiong: Contemporary Theory of Western International Relations, p134, Fudan University Press, 2001.

10 See Phillip C. Saunders, Assessing Chinese Military Transparency, China Strategic Perspectives, No. 1, www.ndu.edu/inss, and David Shambaugh, China Engages Asia, International Security, Vol, 29, Issue 3, winter 2004. And Michael Kiselycznyk.

11 Ma Weining: “the Issue of Transparency in China-US Military-to-Military Relations”, Contemporary International Relations, Issue 10, 2005.

deterrence. Under the situation of unequal military strength, with the stronger side forcing the other side to be equal in the degree of transparency of military capabilities or “increase the degree of transparency”, the weaker side tends to feel less safe and its security interests are harmed. Obviously, such attempts are unacceptable to the weaker side.

The relative nature of military transparency should be recognized. Military transparency can reflect or promote mutual trust in the political and security area. But, meanwhile, it should be observed that in today’s world, the criteria for military transparency are always relative instead of absolute and the strength of a country as well as its historical traditions and cultural differences all have a long-standing and invisible effect on military transparency. Some developed countries, such as the United States and a few European countries, have generated the concept of transparency, bound by treaties and laws and on the basis of the balance of power, as a result of their understanding of world wars and arms race--those past malicious competitions.¹² On the other hand, Asian countries, with China as a representative, have their own perspectives of military transparency. Firstly, their own security should be guaranteed. Most Asian countries suffered from the woes of colonialism and invasion and have a high sense of national dignity. They have very profound consciousness in safeguarding the independence and integrity of their countries and in preventing themselves from external intervention and invasion. As a result, they have developed a natural mentality of protecting themselves from the enforcement of military transparency by big powers. Secondly, domestic cultural traditions should be respected. Take China as an example, the Chinese citizens have always believed in maintaining good relations with its neighbors, longing for peace and does not like to make a show of force. As a country that is traditionally hospitable to guests, the Chinese people always treat guests with respect. When they act as hosts, they tend to demonstrate their best appearance to the guests. For the same reason, when it comes to exposing themselves to foreigners, they tend to show their better side. In view of the special and diversified nature of the historical and cultural traditions, the Western countries should fully respect the relative nature of military transparency.

To increase military transparency between China and the United States needs new thinking. Since the foundation of transparency is mutual trust, it is extremely important to enhance the strategic trust between China and the United States. The logic that there is always competition and confrontation between big powers should

12 The fundamental purpose is to avoid accidental conflicts caused by miscalculation due to the lack of political and military mutual trust. Refer to Zheng Yingping: An Analysis of the Differences of Cooperation Modes in Europe and East Asia, Issue 7, Contemporary International Relations, 2008.

be abolished. China and the United States should make joint efforts to develop cooperative partnership featuring mutual respect and mutual benefit. By means of cooperation instead of confrontation and walking towards, instead of away from, each other, China-US strategic trust will definitely be enhanced. Moreover, China's military strength is far behind the US military and the lack of mutual trust between China and the United States is seriously affected by the three major obstacles between the two militaries. As a matter of fact, it is the extreme mistrust on the part of the United States that shapes the reality in which there is very little interaction between the two sides on the issue of military transparency. In the past years, with the strategic vision of the state-to-state and military-to-military relations between China and the United States, China has been increasing the degree of military transparency to the United States in a responsible and open way. This indicates the sincerity of the Chinese government and the military to develop China-US strategic partnership. General Liang Guanglie, Defense Minister of China, paid an official visit to the United States in May, 2012. He said the following when his plane landed at a US airport: the 40-year history of China-US relationship indicates that China and the United States are not zero-sum competitors but partners of mutual benefit and win-win, and the common interests overwhelm the differences between the two countries. During the visit, the defense and military leaders of the two sides agreed to enhance mutual trust and cooperation and conduct HADR and anti-piracy joint training before the end of this year.¹³ Those practical measures demonstrate China's efforts to enhance military transparency and facilitate the interactions between the two militaries. Such activities, aiming at demonstrating military transparency, have also provided ways for the two militaries to enhance mutual understanding and mutual trust. If the United States can thoroughly change cold war mentality and in both rhetoric and actions does not regard China as its realistic or potential strategic opponent, then a more solid foundation can be laid for further enhancing China-US military transparency.

¹³“ General Liang Guanglie visits US, stressing that China and the United States are not zero-sum competitors.”, www.news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-05-05//092124371765.shtml.