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# China Requires Close Eye as It Expands Influence, Capability

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WASHINGTON, March 12, 2008 – The top U.S. general in the Pacific told Congress yesterday that he's working to strengthen the U.S.-Sino relationship, but he emphasized the need to keep a close eye on China as it strives to expand its influence in the region.

Navy Adm. Timothy J. Keating told the Senate Armed Services Committee he sees headway in breaking down longstanding divisions between the two countries, but remains troubled by China's lack of transparency about its military programs.

The Defense Department released its 2008 China Military Power Report earlier this month, noting that China spent more than three times its announced defense budget last year and is developing new capabilities that could have global implications.

When he asked the Chinese directly during his visit in January why they are increasing their military capability, Keating said, he was assured that they seek only self-protection. But when the admiral pressed for more specific information about area-denial weapons, anti-satellite tests and other military technological advances, the Chinese were far more closed-mouthed.

And Keating said they're consistently mum when he asks about China's military spending. The China Military Power Report estimates that China spent as much as \$139 billion, more than three times its announced defense budget, last year to modernize its military forces.

"The transparency that they profess is insufficient, from our view," Keating told the Senate panel. "Being able to see what they have doesn't tell us what they intend to do with that equipment."

Keating said there's still a great deal for both countries to learn so they can better understand each other's intentions.

He called his most recent trip to China a big step forward in improving dialogue. "We want a mature, constructive, cooperative relationship. We are making progress, but as I said, we have a long way to go," he said. "The breakdown of decades-old mistrust and custom is going to take a lot more effort."

While much remains unclear about China, Keating said, it's evident the Chinese want a bigger role on the world stage and are expanding their military capabilities to secure it.

China appears to be developing more maritime capability, weapons that make it harder for other military forces to operate near Chinese borders, and is demonstrating a capability to exercise some control in space, Keating reported.

"It is overall, I believe, a desire to improve their position strategically in the world," he said. "They view themselves as a rising military power, and it is something that, in our view, merits close observation."

Keating described what he thinks, but isn't sure, was a tongue-in-cheek comment a senior Chinese officer made during the admiral's first visit there as PACOM commander. With a straight face, Chinese officer said, "As we develop our aircraft carriers," -- a remark Keating said he found interesting in itself -- "why don't we reach an agreement, you and I?"

Then came the Chinese proposal: "You take Hawaii east. We'll take Hawaii west. We'll share information, and we'll save you all the trouble of deploying your naval forces west of Hawaii."

Keating called the statement telling. "Even if in jest, it indicates some consideration of the strategic vision that the People's Liberation Army, navy and air force might have," he said. "While not necessarily hegemonic, they clearly want to expand their areas of influence.

"And those strategic goals of theirs, ... while not necessarily counter to ours, ... (are) at least of concern to us," he said.

That's among the reasons the United States continues to stress its forward engagement, the readiness of its forces within the region, and its multilateral engagement with other Pacific nations, Keating said. Collectively, these efforts help to offset the Chinese presence in the area and the pressure it applies internationally through economic aid and investment -- so-called "checkbook diplomacy."

"So we're watching very carefully," Keating said. "We are actively engaged in activities that we think serve as an effective foil to this increased Chinese presence and pressure."

Meanwhile, Keating said, he continues pressing to improve dialogue between the U.S. and China. He told the senators he plans to send his senior noncommissioned officer advisor, Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Jim Roy, to China to talk with the People's Liberation Army about the role of the NCO corps in the U.S. military. "We hope that opens the door a little bit more to the kind of dialogue we're looking to not just initiate, but sustain and enhance with the People's Republic of China," he said.

