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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

CHRISTIAN D. BROSE, STAFF DIRECTOR
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May 21, 2015

The Honorable Ashton Carter
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

It has come to our attention that the U.S. Pacific Fleet has extended an invitation to the People's Republic of China (PRC) to participate in the 2016 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) military exercise in Hawaii. We think this decision is misguided. Given the PRC's provocative actions in the East and South China Seas, our government should be considering policy options that impose costs on China's disruptive behavior, not reward it.

The PRC and its People's Liberation Army (PLA) and State Oceanic Administration are actively working to establish operational control in the East and South China Sea using a variety of methods of coercion. As you will recall, China's first participation in the RIMPAC exercise in 2014 was accompanied by the deployment of a Dongdiao-class auxiliary general intelligence (AGI) ship to monitor the exercise. Despite our best efforts to build trust and cooperation, the pace and scope of China's maritime sovereignty activities have only increased. Foremost among these is an effort to reclaim vast amounts of territory across the Spratly Island chain with the goal of altering the status quo in the South China Sea. In addition, China continues to employ coast guard and fishing ships to maintain a continued presence in these waters and occasionally uses naval ships to back its territorial claims with military power.

While a sustained and substantive military-to-military relationship with China is in our interests, our desire for continued engagement with the PRC cannot be the main driver of the relationship. Given China's behavior in the past year alone, including its disregard for the interests of our allies, international law, and established norms, we do not believe Beijing should have been invited to this prestigious U.S.-led military exercise in 2016. China appears more intent on waging a maritime sovereignty competition and bullying its neighbors than contributing in a substantive manner to regional peace. Furthermore, some of the very countries that China continues to coerce with its growing power, including Japan and the Philippines, are regular participants at this exercise. For these reasons, we believe the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)'s invitation to attend RIMPAC 2016 should be revoked.

We also believe our government should be doing far more to raise the costs of China's behavior, including more publicly supporting the Philippine United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) arbitration case regarding the legality of China's nine-dash line claim, enhancing freedom of navigation patrols in the East and South China Sea, especially joint

patrols with allied states, and a more robust train and equip program to help build the maritime domain awareness and coastal sea-denial capabilities of states like the Philippines.

We look forward to your response and continued commitment to upholding the rules-based order that we have worked so hard to build and sustain in the Asia-Pacific region.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
Ranking Member



John McCain
Chairman