



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on February 18, 2014

Chinese Troops to Observe U.S.-led Military Exercises

Mainland China sent 17 troops to join Cobra Gold 2014 — an annual Thai-U.S. co-sponsored joint and multinational military exercise that runs from January 10 through February 22 this year. The exercise includes 9,000 troops from the United States, 4,000 from Thailand, 80 from Singapore, 120 from Japan, 300 from South Korea, 160 from Indonesia, and 120 from Malaysia.



According to the Chinese People's Daily Online, the Chinese soldiers, mainly from the Guangzhou Military Area Command in southern China, will participate in humanitarian relief drills and will not engage in any combat maneuvers. They are taking part in operations at the command and coordination center, providing engineering and medical assistance, and joining discussions and exchanges of information on military medical sciences.

Besides China, Laos, Vietnam, and Myanmar will also participate as observers.

According to an American Forces Press Service article about Cobra Gold 2014, Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III, commander of U.S. Pacific Command, noted at the ceremony kicking off the 33rd Cobra Gold exercise at Camp Akatosarot in Thailand on February 11 that Thailand is the oldest U.S. ally in the region, with the U.S.-Thai alliance entering its 181st year. Locklear called Cobra Gold “the Pacific’s signature exercise” and one of the largest and most important multilateral exercises in which the United States participates.

Locklear also said that in 2012, U.S. and Thai defense leaders signed a joint vision statement to update the defense relationship between the two nations, which have been expanded to include disaster relief missions and operations contributing to global security.

“Events like Cobra Gold allow us to work together multilaterally to exercise those commitments,” added the admiral. “Since 1980, Cobra Gold has served to develop, better respect and understand all the participants. This 33rd annual event, with over 13,000 participants, is no different.”

Statements about the Chinese participation in the exercise coming from China tended to puff up the significance of the Asian giant’s minor role in the annual event, first held as a bilateral exercise between Thailand and the United States in 1982.

“China’s attendance is a ground-breaking move,” Du Wenlong, a senior researcher at the PLA’s Academy of Military Science was quoted by *China Daily*. “China’s role in the massive drill has changed. That means the growth of its military capability, and its regional military impact especially, cannot be ignored,” Du continued.



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China Daily also cited a statement from Li Haidong, a researcher in U.S. studies at China Foreign Affairs University. Li asserted that China's participation in the drill shows that the Chinese military has become more open and confident and will contribute to regional peace and stability.

"Also, as the exercise is led by the U.S. and its ally Thailand, Beijing's participation quenches the suspicion that the drill is targeted at China," Li said. "Beijing has sent the message through this move that it is willing to further communicate in military affairs with the U.S. and its allies," Li said, adding that "great potential still remains to be tapped in terms of building up mutual military trust between China and the U.S."

While the Chinese press presented the Chinese participation in Cobra Gold as a bridge-building exercise that will relieve tensions between China and the United States in the region, a report from Fox News on February 17 suggested that the exercise was designed by the United States to "send a message" to China. That message, reported Fox, "was to demonstrate to Beijing's communist leadership how fast and effective the U.S. can be in supporting its Asian allies."

The need for such a demonstration of strength, suggests the report, is that with China increasing its military spending — developing an anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) that can strike U.S. aircraft carriers and other vessels at a range of 1,200 miles, and presumably, China's launching of its first aircraft carrier in 2012 — the United States fears that our Asian allies will "suffer instability." Cobra Gold, and in particular, a drill that involved the United States parachuting an airborne task force to seize and secure an airfield 90 miles north of Bangkok, was meant to show the Chinese that we mean business. The 400 parachutists involved in the drill were from the 4th Brigade Combat Team (Airborne), 25th Infantry Division, known as "4-25," based at Fort Richardson, Alaska.

"It sent a message in terms of our capability of combat to our allies concerned about those who threaten peace and stability to the region," Fox quoted Army Col. Matt McFarlane, 4-25's commander, who spoke to Fox News by phone from Lop Buri.

"We're an established contingency force for when there's an operational requirement to get a large amount of force combat power anywhere at any time [in the Asia Pacific] and to reassure our allies we can be there to support them."

Fox also quoted a statement from retired Gen. Jack Keane, a national security analyst and former acting U.S. Army chief of staff: "It's a powerful message that the U.S. is putting boots on the ground because they have the entire U.S. military standing behind them. Every country in the region recognizes that."

"We've put parachuting forces into places and taken an amount of risk before and the U.S. will continue to do that," Keane added.

Considering that China is the largest openly Communist-ruled nation in the world, and with the designs of communists to engage in world domination plainly revealed by their own words, a healthy respect for the billion-person giant's military might is undoubtedly called for. What the Fox report (like many others) does not distinguish, however, is the difference between threats against the United States and threats against other nations that we have formed alliances with.

History shows that weakness invites attack, as we learned at Pearl Harbor. Therefore, when Fox reported that China is in the process of developing a Mach 10-speed anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) that can strike U.S. ships at a range of 1,200 miles, a weapon we presently have no defense against, it is a clarion call that U.S. missile defenses must be upgraded.



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“We are going to have to have early defenses against ballistic missiles if we’re going to remain dominant in the western Pacific,” Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-Calif.) told Fox News at the Reagan National Defense Forum held in California in November.

While Hunter is certainly correct in stating that we need early defenses against ballistic missiles, it is more difficult to defend his assertion that we must “remain dominant in the western Pacific.” It is likewise difficult to defend the position that the United States is responsible for going to war to defend a host of nations we have formed entangling alliances with around the globe.

If the military might of the United States were limited to defending our own nation and our own interests, we might find that we would not be drawn into never-ending small wars that deplete our manpower and our finances. What is the purpose of demonstrating that we can drop 400 paratroopers into Thailand on a moment’s notice if not to send the message that we are willing to engage in another war in that part of the world? (As if Vietnam wasn’t enough.)

On July 4, 1821, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams delivered an historic address on U.S. foreign policy, in which he stated an important principle that bears frequent repeating:

[America] goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will recommend the general cause, by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example.

She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself, beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom.

Photo of Chinese soldiers



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