

**China's Strategic Vision and Regional Security in the Asia-Pacific
--Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Tong Xiaoling
At the 26th Asia-Pacific Roundtable**

Kuala Lumpur, 28 May 2012

Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. Please allow me to begin by thanking the ISIS Malaysia for the gracious invitation to me to attend the 26th Asia-Pacific Roundtable (APR), which has been a valuable platform for officials and academics in the Asia-Pacific to conduct security dialogues over the years, and one of the most influential of its kind in the region.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to share with you China's strategic vision and its views on regional security in the Asia-Pacific, which breaks down into three questions: How does China look at the current security situation in the Asia-Pacific? What is China's security concept and security policy toward the Asia-Pacific? And what has China done to maintain security in the Asia-Pacific?

The Asia-Pacific, with the highest concentration of Chinese interests and the most direct impact on China, has always been a priority of China's diplomacy. In our view, the region has maintained stability on the whole while the current international situation undergoes profound changes. Peace, development and cooperation are still the mainstream of the regional security situation while complexity and fragility in the situation becomes more acute with new and old problems interplaying, traditional and non-traditional security challenges intertwining and unrest and tension propping up here and there.

To be specific, we see the following positive trends in the security situation in our region.

First, the region is becoming most dynamic in the world and an increasingly important engine for global economic development. Emerging countries in the Asia-Pacific are showing strong momentum of growth, playing greater roles and enjoying higher standing in global

affairs. There is more intraregional trade and investment, deeper economic collaboration, stronger pragmatic cooperation and faster integration.

Second, major countries in the region have generally stable relations and stronger coordination and cooperation among them and between them. Economic globalization has increased interdependence and common interests among the major countries, and prompted them to engage primarily in dialogue and cooperation, thus making the cost for military confrontation increasingly too high to bear. The salient global challenges have also made it more necessary for major countries to engage in cooperation and collaboration.

Third, regional security cooperation mechanisms are growing. Over the past two decades, a number of security dialogue and cooperation mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific have come to live alongside with one other. There are security cooperation mechanisms led by the government such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus (ADMM+). There are also track one and a half or track two security dialogue platforms such as the Shangri-la Dialogue and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific (CSCAP) as well as the major Asia-Pacific Roundtable we are having today. These mechanisms have been crucial for the enhancement of mutual trust and security dialogue and cooperation among Asia-Pacific nations as well as the promotion of stability in this area.

On the other hand, we should also be aware of the negative side in the regional security situation, in particular, the following aspects:

First, there are still rivalry and frictions between countries, especially major countries, due to their differences in interests and mentality. Some countries, as we see it, still cling onto the “cold war mentality”, habitually look for or even create an “enemy” and “threat”, and tilt their defense capacity-building towards military confrontation by reinforcing military armament. Such moves have exacerbated the security dilemma in our region, undermined strategic mutual trust between countries concerned, and affected security and stability in the region.

Second, regional hot spot issues keep propping up. The Korean Peninsula issue has remained a flash point in recent years, and become particularly “feverish” since the beginning of this year. Security situation in South Asia is also rather grave. With the strong comeback of the

Taliban in Afghanistan, there has been a surge of terrorist attacks.

Third, disputes over land and sea territory become acute from time to time. There are land and maritime disputes between quite a few countries in the Asia-Pacific. Border disputes between India and Pakistan, China and India, and Cambodia and Thailand remain unsolved while Japan and the ROK, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and China and some of its neighbors still have maritime disputes. As many of these disputes are related to the colonial past, these historical issues touch on the sentiments of domestic publics and are difficult to resolve in a short period of time. They tend to harm bilateral ties or even regional stability if they are not well managed and become prevalent.

Fourth, non-traditional security threats are more severe. Non-traditional security issues including terrorism, nuclear proliferation, transnational crimes, energy security, cyber safety, major natural disasters and maritime safety have become the focus of attention. These security issues are increasingly sporadic. And they interplay and interact with each other more than ever.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a major country in the Asia-Pacific, China has maintained steady economic and social development for almost three decades that has culminated to a substantial increase in overall national strength. China stands proudly as the world's second largest economy today. How will China use its growing strength? What impact will China's rapid growth have on security in the region and beyond? Countries in the Asia-Pacific have contemplated questions like these. Some of them have doubts, suspicions and even worries about China. There have also been many versions of the so-called "China threat" theory. We have taken note of these sentiments and are ready to take responsible actions in line with our understanding of security in the region so as to contribute our share to peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific. I hope that my answer to the question on China's security concept and security policy towards the Asia-Pacific will help the audience dispel some of those worries and suspicions.

In as early as the late 20th century, based on the new features of international security situation and actual circumstances in the Asia-Pacific after the cold war, China proposed that the traditional cold war security concept characterizing military alliance, military show-up and coercion and power politics be discarded in the region, and that a new security concept featuring mutual trust, mutual benefits, equality and

coordination be fostered. China submitted its position paper on the new security concept to the ARF in 2002, in which China's new security concept was expounded. Over the past ten years, Chinese leaders have called repeatedly on both bilateral and multilateral occasions for efforts to be made to build a new type of security partnership anchored on integrated security, common security, inclusive security, cooperative security and evolving security. More than a decade later, this new security concept has become a fundamental guiding philosophy for China to address international security issues, and it has been included in many international documents as it is accepted and practiced increasingly and gradually by the international community.

China has formulated a series of Asia-Pacific security policies in the past decade pursuing this new security concept. As I see it, there are four major policy pillars.

First, we practice the diplomacy of "building friendship and partnership with neighboring countries". China is committed to the path of peaceful development. China does not engage in expansion in the Asia-Pacific, nor seek any sphere of influence. China respects the right of other peoples to choose their own path of development, and holds that countries should be equals regardless of their size and respect each other and treat each other as equals in a joint endeavor to build a harmonious political and security environment in the Asia-Pacific.

Second, we pursue an opening-up strategy for mutual benefits, win-win results, cooperation and development. China is committed to the principles of equality and mutual benefits, and believes that our own development could be integrated with that of the Asia-Pacific so that we can benefit from the economic prosperity of the region, and at the same time, contribute to the common development in the region. We are committed to the building of a community of common destiny in which countries in the region are closely interconnected. We believe that the many security challenges to our region such as terrorism, maritime safety and security, food security, energy and resources security, climate change and economic security can only be addressed through common development.

Third, we are devoted to the building of an open, transparent, inclusive and representative Asia-Pacific security structure that also takes into consideration the comfort level of all parties concerned. China is a proponent of multi-tiered and multi-channeled multilateral security dialogue and cooperation, and has taken an active part in the

institutionalization of multilateral security cooperation mechanisms. China suggests that existing mechanisms and platforms such as the ARF and ADMM+ be made good use of, and enthusiasm of parties concerned and countries in this region be stimulated to jointly promote security dialogue and cooperation, enhance political mutual trust and safeguard common security in the region.

Fourth, we pursue a national defense policy that is defensive in nature. China's armed forces advocate security cooperation with other armed forces featuring non-alliance, non-confrontation and no targeting of third parties. China's military, like our diplomacy, is aimed at building good-neighborly relations and fostering a stable neighboring and international environment. China's defensive national defense policy is grounded on the country's *Constitution* and the *National Defense Law*, and will not change even when China enters higher development stages. China has never irresponsibly resorted to the use of force to settle international disputes. In the past 63 years since the founding of the People's Republic, the Chinese military has never used force on its own initiation against any other country in the Asia-Pacific except for a few small-scaled border conflicts it was forced to fight to defend itself. China is also the only nuclear power in the world to have pronounced the commitment of no use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states and no first use of nuclear weapons.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Guided by the new security concept, China has actively conducted strategic security dialogues with other countries in the region in recent years, promoted exchanges between the militaries and defense agencies, and advanced defense cooperation in the belief that what we have done will help maintain security in the Asia-Pacific.

Bilaterally, China has established security dialogue, defense consultation and other mechanisms at various levels with the majority of Asia-Pacific countries, including the United States, Japan, India and Indonesia. China has signed the agreement with Russia on the notification of the launch of ballistic missiles, and set up hotlines between Chinese and US defense authorities. China's armed forces have conducted over 40 joint exercises and drills with counterparts of over 20 countries including Russia, Pakistan, India, Indonesia and Central Asian countries with themes like counter terrorism and disaster relief. China's minister of national defense started his informal consultation with his ten ASEAN counterparts in Jakarta last year, and as I am aware, will meet them again this year in Phnom Penh. These dialogues, consultations and joint

exercises have enhanced mutual understanding and trust between China and those countries, and helped to prevent miscalculation and misunderstanding.

Multilaterally, China vigorously promotes the development of security dialogue and cooperation in the region, and takes an active part in cooperation within the framework of regional and international security mechanisms such as the SCO, ARF, ADMM+, Information Sharing Center of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), and the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum. Take the ARF as an example. China has proposed the creation of the ARF Security Policy Conference (ASPC) at the vice-defense ministerial level, actively supported the ARF to strengthen cooperation against terrorism, trans-boundary crimes and disaster prevention and reduction, and undertaken over 20 cooperative projects.

China is willing to take up more international security obligations and provide more public security products as it grows in strength. For instance, China started to dispatch navy ships on escort mission in the Gulf of Aden off the Somalia coast pursuant to relevant UN Security Council resolutions. By the end of April this year, China has sent a total of ten groups of navy ships on escort mission for over 4500 ships from various countries and international organizations including the United Nations Food Program. 40% of the escorted ships are non-Chinese. China's navy has also joined the "Shared Awareness and De-confliction" (SHADE) mechanism for navies to share information and reduce confrontation, and engaged in cooperation with other members on escort mission in the sharing of information and intelligence and escorting operations in different zones.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There has been criticism recently against China that the country is a "selective stakeholder" in the international community, implying that China has not fulfilled the international responsibilities and obligations as a major country should. This criticism is very unfair. First of all, although China is now the second largest economy in the world on aggregate terms, it remains a developing country that is still confronted with too many constraints for it to over-commit itself to international obligations that go beyond its capabilities. Since different countries have different capabilities, one should not take one-size-fits-all approaches and impose on China responsibilities beyond its capabilities. Therefore, this question is more about "could" than about "would". We would certainly do more if

we could. Secondly, China has always been a responsible nation. China upholds justice and principles, and says “no” to erroneous actions that are against basic norms of international relations. For example, certain countries have attempted to copy the Libyan model and impose regime change in Syria under the pretext of “responsibility to protect”. But look at the lessons from the “Ground Zero” operation in Libya: over 20,000 civilian deaths, 900,000 displacements, and on-going anarchy, violence and killings in the country until today. Such protection is what some would describe as “a successful yet fatal operation”. Obviously, to say “no” to such irresponsible interventionism is being responsible. We need not only the responsibility to protect, but also responsible protection.

There has also been another allegation in recent years that China is too assertive and aggressive in handling its disputes with neighboring countries over territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, giving too little care to international law. Such an allegation is even more unfair. China has followed the principles of mutual accommodation, mutual understanding, fairness and justice, and engaged in consultation with countries concerned to jointly look for fair and responsible solutions to disputes over boundary, territory and the sea that have been left over from the history. China has the longest border in the world, trailing over 22,000 km with 14 countries on land. After decades of efforts, China has successfully resolved land demarcation with almost all its neighbors on land except India and Bhutan. China has also successfully resolved the issue of delineation of the Beibu Bay with Viet Nam. For disputes over the sea that cannot be resolved for the time being, China proposes to shelve those differences for joint development so that differences do not stand in the way of state-to-state relations between China and its neighbors.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the South China Sea issue has drawn wide attention from countries in the region and even beyond, let me elaborate a little bit on the issue. The so-called South China Sea issue concerns primarily two matters. One is dispute between China and some claimant countries over sovereignty over the Nansha Islands (Spratly Islands), which was triggered off by the moves made by some countries bordering the South China Sea claiming for sovereignty over the islands concerned and sending troops to occupy some of them since 1970’s. The other is dispute over maritime rights and interests, which needs negotiations to clarify the jurisdiction over certain waters in the South China Sea between China and certain claimant countries.

The South China Sea has only become an issue in the recent decades. The Chinese government started to include the Nansha Islands into China's territory since late eighth century and early ninth century, and has continued to administer these islands ever since. Successive Chinese governments have taken measures in the exercise of sovereignty over the Nansha Islands since the beginning of the 20th century, and won general recognition in the international community of this fact. For quite some time after the end of the WWII, no country around the South China Sea has ever objected to China's sovereignty over the Nansha Islands. That is to say, until then, the South China Sea issue had not existed.

In the late 1960s and early '70s, a few countries around the South China Sea started to make partial or full claims for sovereignty over China's Nansha Islands as they expedited their development of marine resources. Some have gone even further and sent troops to occupy some of the islands and shoals. In the meantime, as a result of major changes in international laws of the sea that enabled coastal countries to claim much wider jurisdiction over the sea, many coastal countries in the South China Sea made their claims for exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the South China Sea, which has led to the current situation where there are disputes both over sovereignty over the islands and over the delineation of sea territory in the South China Sea.

It is obvious that China has not created the South China Sea issue. On the contrary, China is a victim whose sovereignty and maritime rights and interests have been infringed upon. Nonetheless, in the interest of good-neighborly friendship and regional peace and stability, the Chinese government has taken a reasonable and restraint approach to handle the issue and committed itself to peaceful means for a solution. China insists that parties concerned in this issue engage in direct and friendly consultation in accordance with universally recognized international law and modern law on the sea, including the basic principles and legal regimes set forth in the 1982 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS). China believes that in the process of dispute settlement, parties concerned should exercise restraint and refrain from taking actions that might make the dispute escalate or become more complicated. China advocates that parties concerned try to find provisional and transitional measures before the final solution of the dispute, including "putting aside differences for joint development".

To maintain peace and stability and create favorable conditions for claimant states to finally solve the disputes, China and ASEAN countries signed the *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea*

(DOC) in 2002, which is the first political document on the South China Sea issue. The claimant states should undertake to address territorial and jurisdiction disputes through peaceful means, and not to take actions that may complicate and intensify the situation. Since the signing of the DOC, China has exercised great restraint, kept its promise, and sought to uphold peace and tranquility in the South China Sea through dialogue and cooperation. We have actively promote pragmatic cooperation with ASEAN countries in the South China Sea, and set up a 3-billion-yuan fund for China-ASEAN maritime cooperation for cooperative projects in areas like marine environment protection and marine science and technology. China is also willing to formulate a “code of conduct” (COC) with ASEAN countries on the basis of mutual respect, consensus, fairness and transparency. A ready case about restraint is that China has not unilaterally dug even one oil rig in the disputed areas of the South China Sea to date. By contrast, certain claimant countries have taken a series of unilateral actions to erode China’s sovereignty and maritime rights and interests. Yet at the same time, they accuse China of being assertive. This is neither true nor fair.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Humanity has endured the scourges of many wars. We suffered from two world wars and 40 years of cold war confrontation in the previous century. History has proven that the fundamental way for countries to handle state-to-state relations is to abide by basic norms governing international relations, i.e., respect each other’s sovereignty and core interests, and respect the social system and development path chosen by the nations themselves. Force cannot provide the ultimate solution to conflicts and disputes. As the Prime Minister of Malaysia pointed out in his address last night that Asian countries should undertake to achieve security by working together, should not only be consumers of security but also producers of security. In this spirit, we think mutual respect, dialogue, and peaceful means are always the best ways to settle disputes. In the 21st century when globalization goes in depth and the world becomes increasingly flat, the settlement of security issues in the Asia-Pacific requires countries in the region to abandon the old security philosophy and zero-sum gaming mentality, nurture new security concept, conduct and expand regional security dialogue and cooperation to increase mutual trust and achieve common security in the region.

Thank you.