

## EXPAND U.S.-CHINA MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION

<p><b>ISSUE</b></p>	<p>Military-to-military (mil-mil) communications remain an effective means to de-escalate a crisis or conflict. The United States and China have built a robust set of channels within their respective defense departments and military commands, including a new channel between the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Southern Theater Command and restarting the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement (MMCA).</p>
<p><b>SIGNIFICANCE</b></p>	<p>Robust mil-mil channels enhance stability and increase trust during peacetime and may allow the two countries to reduce tensions during conflicts or crises. This is a low-risk, high-reward policy that the Trump administration can continue, especially the new channel between USINDOPACOM and the Southern Theater Command leaders, which allows operators of both militaries to communicate directly and in a timely fashion. Such channels help the United States gain insight into the PLA's thinking as well as reinforce President Trump's message of resolve in the face of increasing PLA assertiveness.</p>
<p><b>EXPECTATIONS IN THE REGION</b></p>	<p>China's PLA appears to be committed to sustaining mil-mil channels with the United States. U.S. allies and partners in the region similarly expect both countries to utilize channels to avoid conflict and communicate intentions.</p>
<p><b>RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION</b></p>	<p>Soon after his inauguration, President Trump should initiate a phone call with President Xi Jinping and signal his commitment to mil-mil interactions with China by communicating that he has directed his senior military officers to maintain open lines of communication with the PLA. Doing so would showcase Trump's intention to maintain such channels and may likely be reciprocated by China.</p>