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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

DAVID McKEAN, STAFF DIRECTOR
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July 14, 2011

His Excellency, State Councilor Dai Bingguo
C/O Ambassador Zhang Yesui
Embassy of the People's Republic of China
3505 International Place, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20008

Dear Councilor Dai:

Thank you very much for your letter of June 3, 2011 reiterating your commitment to building a U.S.-China partnership based on mutual respect and mutual benefit. We share your goal of deepening and broadening our areas of cooperation, and value our ability to have in-depth and candid discussions with you on issues of shared interest.

We are writing to follow-up on our conversation last May and to express our concerns regarding recent developments in the South China Sea. As you know, the United States does not take a position on the overlapping territorial claims in this region, but we do maintain a deep and abiding interest in ensuring freedom of navigation, commerce, and economic exploration; maintaining U.S. commitments to our allies and partners; and supporting peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. For this reason, we are concerned that a series of naval incidents in recent months has raised tensions in the region. If appropriate steps are not taken to calm the situation, future incidents could escalate, jeopardizing the vital national interests of the United States.

We appreciate China's public statements in support of peace, stability, and established international law, and are deeply-committed to these goals and principles ourselves. However, the assertive measures taken by China against foreign vessels in the South China Sea, coupled with expansive claims of "indisputable sovereignty" over those waters, seem at odds with China's clearly expressed preference for a peaceful, negotiated resolution of South China Sea disputes.

In the coming months, we hope China will find opportunities to assume a leadership role in helping to reduce tensions and enhance dialogue and cooperation on regional security issues. Prudent measures, such as clarifying the nature of China's claims in the South China Sea at upcoming regional meetings and redoubling efforts within the China-ASEAN joint working group to implement the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, would help reassure China's neighbors and build trust and

confidence. ASEAN countries should be able to consult freely with each other, with China, and with other nations. For our part, we will continue to encourage all interested parties to exercise good judgment and restraint and to pursue a peaceful resolution of all claims through multilateral negotiations.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this matter. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with you on this and other subjects of mutual interest.



John McCain
U.S. Senator

Sincerely,



John F. Kerry
Chairman

Cc: Zhang Yesui, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the United States of America