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## **China continues expanding its military ties**

Besides its ever-growing economic influence, China is expanding its military ties throughout the world. More than 150 countries are listed as being in good terms by the Chinese Defence Ministry and a total of 98 countries have military attaché offices in China.

Recently China's Defence Minister, Chang Wanquan, met with Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces head, Leopoldo Cintra Frias, saying his country placed great value on bilateral relations and will continue to support the growth of Cuba's military. For his part, Cintra Frias stated that Cuba "cherishes" its traditional friendship with China and hopes to bring military cooperation to a new level.

Another recent meeting took place between Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Air Force General Xu Qiliang, vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission who was visiting Saudi Arabia. General Xu said that China and Saudi Arabia always treat each other sincerely and friendly, and are achieving fruitful results in various fields.

Even a small country like Switzerland whose armed forces consist of only 4,200 professional soldiers with the rest being conscripts or volunteers, has attracted the interest of the Chinese military hierarchy. In late March, Guy Parmelin, head of the Swiss Federal Department of Defense, met in Beijing with the Chinese Defence Minister who hailed the smooth development of military-to-military relations with Switzerland and the deepening of exchanges and cooperation in areas such as the exchange of high-level visits, personnel training and international peacekeeping missions.

However, this expansion of China's military ties appears to be driven by internal political considerations rather than military concerns. It's possibly a way for the Chinese government to make the top military ranks feel part of China's increasingly important role on the global stage.

There is, in fact, no evidence of a plan to offset the U.S. military supremacy. Most of China's defence budget is spent for the protection of its borders through a large army and air force. As far as the navy is concerned, China has currently only one second-hand aircraft carrier (bought from Russia while two brand new ones are still being built) and has therefore very little ability to project its power on the high seas. Any effort aimed at establishing greater military influence in the world will take a very long time before coming to any fruition.

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