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CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

**The Security Challenges Posed by
the People's Republic of China**

**Testimony before
House Foreign Affairs Committee
United States House of Representatives**

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**Dean Cheng
Research Fellow
The Heritage Foundation**

My name is Dean Cheng. I am the Research Fellow for Chinese Political and Security Affairs at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own, and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

Thank you Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman and distinguished members of the Committee for the opportunity to be here this morning.

My comments today discuss the issue of the threats posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the United States. They will focus on the security aspect of the threat, but I would like to emphasize that the Chinese concept of national security is a holistic one, rooted in the idea of "comprehensive national power." Comprehensive national power assumes that a nation's standing, and its relative power, is rooted not solely in its military, but must also take into account its economic capabilities, its scientific and technical capacity, the diplomatic respect it receives, and its political unity. There is even a cultural component, as Chinese President Hu Jintao noted in a speech last year.¹

This is not to equate "comprehensive national power" with "threat." Indeed, Chinese economic growth and prosperity cannot be properly called a threat in any direct sense; China's economic development does not, in and of itself, jeopardize American security. But it is a part of the security calculus because it enables China's military modernization as currently conceived, and because it represents, as the Chinese phrase it, part of the overall military *potential* of a nation.

In terms of the military-security aspect, there are many visible elements. That being said, the military-security aspect is, in many ways, the most visible element of the China threat. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the world's largest military, numbering

¹ Edward Wong, "China's President Lashes Out at Western Culture," *New York Times* (January 3, 2012). http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/04/world/asia/chinas-president-pushes-back-against-western-culture.html?_r=1

approximately 2.3 million troops.² By contrast, the United States active duty military is approximately 1.5 million.³ The recently concluded National People's Congress (NPC) declared that the PLA budget would increase by 11.2% in 2012, continuing a two-decade long pattern of double-digit increases, which has seen the official spending figures more than double. These figures, widely acknowledged to be substantially understating China's actual defense spending, have now passed the \$100 billion mark.⁴

The PLA military has been steadily modernizing across a range of capabilities, including land, sea, air, and space forces. This effort gained impetus in the wake of the first Gulf War, when the Coalition performance took the Chinese by surprise. The direction of that effort was codified in the "Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period." These guidelines, issued in 1993, introduced the concept of "local wars under modern, high-tech conditions." These guidelines constitute "the highest level of national guidance and direction" to the Chinese armed forces.⁵

In a December 1995 speech by then Party General Secretary and Chinese President Jiang Zemin to the Central Military Commission further clarified the direction of Chinese military modernization. In that speech, Jiang emphasized the importance of the new guidelines, and charged the PLA with undertaking the "Two Transformations (*liangge zhuanbian*; 两个转变)." These entailed a shift from a military focused on quantity to one focused on quality, and from a military preparing for "local wars under modern

² International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010* (London, UK: Routledge Press, 2010), p. 399.

³ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2010* (London, UK: Routledge Press, 2010), p. 31.

⁴ Keith Richburg, "China's Military Spending to Top \$100 Billion in 2012, Alarming Neighbors," *Washington Post* (March 4, 2012)

⁵ David Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines,'" in *Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military* ed. by Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), p. 82.

conditions,” to one that was preparing for “local wars under modern, high-tech conditions.”⁶

This modernization is reflected in the steady acquisition of a range of new systems by the PLA Air Force, PLA Navy, and Second Artillery, which are growing in importance relative to the ground forces, the traditional senior service in the PLA, due to their greater reliance on technology.

For the PLA Air Force, the modernization effort has seen the steady introduction of new fighters, including Su-27s and Su-30s acquired from Russia, as well as the indigenously developed J-10. The new J-20 stealthy combat aircraft was tested on the eve of Secretary of Defense Gates’ visit in 2010. Other PLA acquisitions include tanker, transport, and electronic warfare aircraft, reflecting the broad modernization of PLAAF capabilities extending to the combat support functions. The PLA XV Airborne Corps, under the control of the PLAAF, has also seen its equipment modernized, including new airborne combat vehicles.

For the PLA Navy, the modernization effort has seen the introduction of at least two new submarine classes, including the domestically designed *Yuan*-class diesel-electric boat, and continued work on a new nuclear-powered attack submarine.

China’s missile forces, meanwhile, are believed to be steadily acquiring both ballistic and cruise missiles. They are also believed to have reached initial operational capability with the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile system.⁷

More important than individual weapons is the steady Chinese effort to improve their command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and

⁶ Zhang Qinsheng and Li Bingyan, “Complete New Historical Transformations—Understanding Gained from Studying CMC Strategic Thinking on ‘Two Transformations,’” *People’s Liberation Army Daily* (January 14, 1997), in FBIS-CHI.

⁷ Ronald O’Rourke, *China’s Naval Modernization: Implications for US Navy Capabilities: Background and Issues for Congress*, RL33153 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, April 22, 2011), p. 10.

reconnaissance, or C4ISR, capabilities. This is a reflection of the shift in focus from “local wars under modern, high-technology conditions” to “local wars under informationized conditions.” In essence, the PLA has made clear that it consider the most important high technology areas were those associated with information, i.e., communications, computers, advance sensors, space systems. Moreover, Chinese military writings regularly note that future warfare will not be platform against platform, or even system (*xitong*) against system, but a contest between systems-of-systems (*tixi*). Thus, the creation of networks of sensors and communications is at least as important as the acquisition of particular weapons.

In this regard, the recent Chinese space white paper highlighted the plan to field, in the next five years or so, a constellation of high-resolution, multispectral earth observation satellites—in short, China is entering the “spy satellite” business, to provide the PLA with global surveillance and tracking capabilities.⁸ At the same time, Chinese tests of anti-satellite capabilities, not only in 2007, but in 2010, underscore the growing ability of the PLA to deny opponents the same C4ISR capabilities that the PLA is acquiring.

Additional Threat Considerations

While much of the discussion of the potential threat from China tends to focus on hardware, this “bean count” type of analysis can be somewhat misleading. It is important to recognize that China, as the world’s most populous country, and also the second largest economy, is bound to have a very large military. It has more people to draw upon, and an increasing portfolio of interests that require defending. And, as has been noted, there is nothing more expensive, and more useless, than a second-best military.

Chinese defense spending, too, needs to be seen in the context of Chinese strategy. China’s defense spending is generally accepted to be significantly higher than its official figures, but that is not to say that China is necessarily spending for defense on the scale of

⁸ PRC State Council Information Office, *China’s Space Activities in 2011* (Beijing, PRC: State Council Information Office, 2012). http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-12/30/content_14354558.htm

the former Soviet Union. Indeed, as close students of the collapse of the USSR, it is mistaken to expect that China will follow the Soviet path and bankrupt itself on defense spending while neglecting the other components of comprehensive national power.

Instead, the Chinese leadership regularly emphasizes that national economic construction continues to hold higher priority than army-building. This emphasis on building up national economic power, and keeping military spending on a relatively lower priority, was reiterated in Hu Jintao's December 2004 speech, when he laid out the "historic missions of the PLA in the new phase of the new century," often referred to as the "New Historic Missions" of the PLA.

What should worry us about the PRC, and in particular about its military build-up, are the underlying context within which we should be examining China's military modernization effort. The first issue is that the Chinese do not think the way we do. By this, I am referring to the issues of deterrence and also of crisis management. The American outlook on both has been shaped in no small part by the Cuban Missile Crisis, itself affected by President Kennedy's lessons drawn from World War I. The great fear has been that war would result from inadvertent escalation; thus, Kennedy worried about pushing the Russians too far, paralleling the path to World War I.⁹ The President's ambassador-at-large, Chester Bowles, meanwhile recommended Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* to Ambassador Dobrynin in the midst of the crisis, in order to avoid a repetition of the "pattern of politico-military action and counter-action."¹⁰ Consequently, there is a common belief on the part of many American analysts that "nuclear armed nations do not go to war with each other." This conclusion implies that the main danger is accidental conflict, rather than deliberate action.

⁹ Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis* (NY: WW Norton, 1969), p. 127.

¹⁰ Chester Bowles, "Memorandum from the Ambassador at Large (Bowles) to President Kennedy, 13 October 1962," from *Foreign Relations of the United States 1961-1963*, Vol. XI Cuban Missile Crisis and Aftermath (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1996).
<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bowles.htm>

It is not at all clear, however, that the PRC necessarily subscribes to a comparable view. In this regard, it is important to recognize that, whereas the western focus of deterrence has tended to be on dissuasion, the Chinese term *weishe*, which is commonly translated into “deterrence” in fact embodies not only dissuasion, but also coercion. This is not simply a terminological difference or issue of translation; rather, it indicates that, at a fundamental, conceptual level, American and Chinese policy-makers approach the concept of deterrence, and therefore international relations, from wholly different starting points.

This is reflected in Chinese historical behavior. It is useful to recall that the PRC chose to precipitate a conflict with the USSR in 1969, when both were nuclear-armed, over the disputed border.¹¹ That conflict not only suggests that the Chinese view of what successfully deters is different from our own, but also betrays a very different sense of crisis management. The Chinese seem to believe that crises are fundamentally controllable. Thus, in recent discussions to limit the potential for aerial or maritime incidents, the Chinese stance has been to reject “the possibility of accidents, blaming continued US operations for any risks.”¹²

This stance is especially disturbing, as recent crises suggest a reluctance to engage in communications during a crisis. Thus, during the EP-3 incident in 2001, Chinese officials could not be contacted for some time. The commander of the US Seventh Fleet has also indicated that Chinese naval forces currently tend to ignore ship-to-ship communications in the Asian region.¹³ Indeed, Chinese crisis response often seems to be sluggish, with officials reacting at telex-speeds in an increasingly Twitter-based world.

¹¹ American policy-makers at the time had concluded that it was the Soviets that were the probable aggressors. Henry Kissinger, *On China* (NY: Penguin Press, 2011), p. 217.

¹² Shirley Kan, *US-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*, RL 32496 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), p. 25.

¹³ Shirley Kan, *US-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress*, RL32496 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012), pp. 25-26.

This fundamentally different approach to deterrence and crisis management would not be so worrisome, but for the reality that China is such a major player on the world stage. Indeed, by dint of its population, economy, and technological base, as well as its military, China is different from all other post-Cold War antagonists of the United States. Unlike Iraq, Serbia, or Afghanistan, China has a substantial indigenous military industrial base, and possesses space and cyber capabilities on a rough par with the United States, as well as a substantial nuclear arsenal. In any threat assessment of the PRC, then, one must consider not only China's substantial actual capabilities, but its approach to crises which is potentially destabilizing. Thus, in assessing the potential risks of conflict, the PLA poses a fundamentally different scale of threat than have other states in the past, or even than North Korea or Iran would in any calculation of the future.

This is further exacerbated by the choices the PRC has made in terms of what programs to pursue, which would not suggest benignant intentions. US analysts have characterized China's military approach as one of anti-access/area denial. In essence, the PLA's efforts appear aimed at preventing the United States from deploying to the western Pacific, and therefore jeopardize the ability of the United States to support its allies, assist its friends, or otherwise fulfill its security obligations. Some of the programs that recent DOD reports on Chinese military capabilities have highlighted in this regard include anti-ship ballistic missiles, anti-ship cruise missiles, and modernization of various Chinese strike aircraft.

But Chinese efforts opposing American access extend beyond simply the acquisition of systems, and involve strategic and operational activities, which are equally problematic in their effect on US abilities to operate in the western Pacific.

At the strategic level, the Chinese write regularly about the importance of political warfare, which is aimed at fundamentally altering the framework of regional activity, raising doubts about the very legitimacy of the American presence. This includes the pursuit of the so-called three warfares, i.e., public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare.

Public opinion/media warfare is the venue for implementing psychological and legal warfare. It refers to the use of various mass information channels, including the Internet, television, radio, newspapers, movies, and other forms of media, in accordance with an overall plan and with set objectives in mind, to transmit selected news and other materials to the intended audience. The goal is to generate public support both at home and abroad for one's own position and create opposition to one's enemy. It seeks to guide public perceptions and opinion so as to effect shifts in the overall balance of strength between oneself and one's opponent.¹⁴

Public opinion warfare is seen as a stand-alone form of warfare or conflict, as it may occur independent of whether there is an actual outbreak of hostilities. Indeed, it is perhaps best seen as a constant, ongoing activity, aimed at long-term influence of perceptions and attitudes. One of the main tools of public opinion/media warfare is the news media, including both domestic and foreign entities. The focus of public opinion/media warfare is not limited to the press, however, but involves all the instruments that inform and influence public opinion (e.g., movies, television programs, books).

Psychological warfare is the most basic of the "three warfares." It is defined as conflict in the spiritual and psychological area; its purpose is to influence, constrain, and/or alter an opponent's thoughts, emotions, and habits, while at the same time strengthening friendly psychology.¹⁵ Although much of the focus is on commanders and key decision-makers, psychological warfare is also aimed at the broader civilian and military populations. It encompasses the range of actions that will affect an opponent's

¹⁴ Academy of Military Sciences Operations Theory and Regulations Research Department and Informationalized Operations Theory Research Office, *Informationalized Operations Theory Study Guide* (Beijing, PRC: AMS Press, November, 2005), p. 405 and Liu Gaoping, *Study Volume on Public Opinion Warfare* (Beijing, PRC: NDU Press, 2005), pp. 16-17.

¹⁵ Academy of Military Sciences Operations Theory and Regulations Research Department and Informationalized Operations Theory Research Office, *Informationalized Operations Theory Study Guide* (Beijing, PRC: AMS Press, November, 2005), p. 404.

population, social groups, military, government, and/or leadership, in terms of their beliefs and attitudes, including their will to resist. Thus, psychological warfare is seen as more than simply military propaganda, but is a reflection of comprehensive national power and overall national strength, in psychological terms.¹⁶

Legal warfare, as one Chinese article defines it, involves “arguing that one’s own side is obeying the law, criticizing the other side for violating the law, and making arguments for one’s own side in cases where there are also violations of the law.”¹⁷ It is one of the key instruments of psychological and public opinion/media warfare, by raising doubts among adversary and neutral military and civilian authorities, as well as the broader population, about the legality of adversary actions, thereby sapping political will and support, and potentially retarding military activity. It also provides material for public opinion/media warfare.

What makes the Chinese conception of legal warfare unique is that it is an offensive, rather than defensive, orientation towards the use of the law in times of crisis or conflict. American JAGs are focused on advising American officers on when their actions may violate the law; the case where a JAG advised against firing a missile against Mullah Omar because of the presence of civilians in his convoy is perhaps the best example.

By contrast, the Chinese conception is to use the law to attack and constrain opponents by seizing the initiative on the legal battlefield and thereby disrupt enemy operations. This includes efforts at legal deterrence or coercion, which would warn an opponent that their every action will be scrutinized for possible violations of international law or the laws of armed conflict, in order to impose self-constraint; legal strikes, which would officially charge the enemy with operational activities that violated the law; and legal counter-

¹⁶ National Defense University Research Section, *New Concepts of the Military Transformation* (Beijing, PRC: PLA Press, 2004), pp. 196-197.

¹⁷ Han Yanrong, “Legal Warfare: Military Legal Work’s High Ground: an Interview with Chinese Politics and Law University Military Legal Research Center Special Researcher Xun Dandong,” *Legal Daily* (PRC), (February 12, 2006)

attacks, which would highlight enemy efforts at slanting or misrepresenting international law in their favor.

At the operational level, Chinese military writings suggest that they are intent upon establishing information superiority or dominance over an opponent, that is, the ability to exploit information more rapidly and effectively, while preventing an adversary from doing so. As one Chinese military textbook observes, the focus of the “campaign basic guiding concept” is to establish superiority, or dominance, over the information realm. Seizing information superiority or dominance (*zhi xinxi quan*) is seen as vital.¹⁸ An essential means of attaining information dominance, in turn, would be through military space operations. “Establishing space dominance, establishing information dominance, and establishing air dominance in a conflict will have influential effects.”¹⁹

By attacking opposing space forces, the PLA would deny an opponent the elements crucial for coordinating forces, targeting advanced weapons, and determining the effectiveness of operations countering China’s anti-access/area denial capabilities. By engaging in computer network attacks, the PLA potentially threatens the entire information infrastructure upon which national militaries and national economies depend. In combination, it would nullify much of the advantage that American forces have enjoyed in previous conflicts.

Again, this suggests that the overall Chinese military development effort is focused on countering the American ability to uphold its alliance commitments and support friends and allies in the region. In a situation where the “three warfares” were already raising doubts about the legitimacy of an American role, the Chinese ability to demonstrate information dominance through the establishment of space and cyber superiority would raise real questions about whether the United States could respond at an acceptable cost.

¹⁸ Zhang Yuliang, Chief Editor, *The Science of Campaigns* (Beijing, PRC: National Defense University Publishing House, 2006), p. 81.

¹⁹ Zhang Yuliang, Chief Editor, *The Science of Campaigns* (Beijing, PRC: National Defense University Publishing House, 2006), p. 83.

By raising the cost of American intervention, such efforts also serve to influence other Asian states, by raising doubts about whether the United States can and will fulfill its commitments. Chinese demonstrations of their capabilities, whether the anti-satellite tests of 2007 and 2010, or persistent Chinese cyber intrusions into various nations' networks, serve as a warning to all states, conforming with the old Chinese saying, "Kill the chicken to scare the monkey." By showing that the PLA has the ability to challenge the United States in the most advanced technology domains, space and cyber, the Chinese leadership is making clear that any American intervention will be potentially costly. That Beijing is doing this while simultaneously pushing assertively against its neighbors is likely intended to raise doubts in Tokyo, Seoul, Manila, and Taipei about how effective an American response would be—and therefore whether those states should seek it in the first place. The more longstanding the doubts, the greater the hesitancy to call upon the US in the midst of a crisis.

In this light, the Chinese acquisition of tactical capabilities, such as the anti-ship ballistic missile, reinforces the strategic objectives. The more capable the PLA appears to be in effecting an anti-access/area denial capability, the more likely Chinese strategic political warfare moves are to raise questions about the desirability as well as viability of opposing Beijing. Persuading China's neighbors that it is better to concede to Chinese wishes than to call upon an America that cannot effectively do anything would allow Chinese leaders to obtain victory without fighting. At the same time, if America finds its allies reluctant to provide or request support and assistance, then Washington is less likely to intervene, especially when that intervention is more likely to be costly.

Conclusions

It cannot be emphasized enough that China's approach to its security is not solely focused on military measures, but instead incorporates all the instruments of national power. The PRC conceives of its foreign and security policy in a holistic manner, and is employing all of its available resources, military, science and technology, economic and diplomatic

resources, in order to influence its neighbors, many of which are American allies and friends.

China, for example, has used its space program, not only to create anti-satellite capabilities, but also to demonstrate its technological prowess. As important, it has also employed it as a diplomatic tool, creating the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organization (APSCO) which is headquartered in Beijing.

China has also established a global, 24-hour English language news service as part of Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency, and is opening news bureaus around the world. Meanwhile CCTV has now opened an office here in Washington, DC.

In response, the United States needs to establish a consistent policy, comprising persistent actions across the spectrum of capabilities to make clear that the United States will remain a steadfast partner.

Yet, the Chinese challenge does not appear to be evoking a sufficient American response. Despite NASA's excellent "branding" globally, it is not clear that the United States has been nearly as diligent in utilizing its space assets for terrestrial, political gains. And while China has been expanding its global media presence, the US has tried to cut Chinese language services on Voice of America, and AP, as well as AFP, Reuters and other western news agencies are limiting their news bureaus to a handful of capitals. Thus, around the world, the first and sometimes only view of the news is through Beijing's eyes. In terms of strategic communications, it would seem China has a far better understanding of the myriad ways to influence global opinion than does the nation of Madison Avenue.

Even the much-discussed "pivot to Asia" contained in the recent Defense Strategic Guidance falls short. For all the publicity accorded the phrase, there is a remarkable lack of concrete commitments of resources to match the rhetoric. Both Secretary Panetta and Secretary Clinton have emphasized that the United States still looks to Europe.

“Europe remains America’s partner of first resort,” Mrs. Clinton said, and Mr. Panetta described Europe as the United States’ “security partner of choice for military operations and diplomacy around the world.”²⁰

This raises questions about just how much of a pivot is actually involved, especially as budgetary resources are cut.

The United States remains the predominant power. In Asia, it is far more welcome and far less distrusted than the PRC. The 21st Century can be “America’s Pacific Century” as Secretary of State Clinton has called it, , but it requires a willingness to demonstrate leadership and resolve, to make clear to the region that we are, as Robert Kennedy phrased it, “just friends and brave enemies.”

²⁰ Elisabeth Bumiller and Steve Erlanger, “Panetta and Clinton Seek to Reassure Europe on Defense,” *New York Times* (February 4, 2012). <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/world/europe/panetta-clinton-troops-europe.html>

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