

## SECTION 2: CHINA'S "AREA CONTROL MILITARY STRATEGY"

### Introduction

During the 2011 report cycle, the Commission examined China's military strategy. At its core, this strategy provides guidance to the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on how to defeat a technologically superior opponent and can be summarized as having three themes. First, it emphasizes degrading an opponent's technological advances in an effort to level the playing field. Second, it is a military strategy that prioritizes striking first in a conflict to seize the initiative. Third, its geographic focus centers on controlling China's periphery, especially the western Pacific Ocean. Over the past decade, these themes have been reflected in China's military modernization efforts. As a result, it appears that the PLA is acquiring improved capacities to counter U.S. military capabilities and exploit U.S. military weaknesses. Furthermore, because the focus of China's military strategy has expanded beyond just a Taiwan scenario, it increasingly impacts China's neighbors, especially those in the western Pacific Ocean. Finally, the strategy's emphasis on striking first opens the door to the possibility of miscalculations and inadvertent conflict.

As a note of clarification, although China's military strategy is commonly referred to as an "antiaccess" or "area denial" strategy in western writings,<sup>157</sup> this Report will refer to this strategy as an "Area Control Strategy." Referring to China's strategy as an "antiaccess" or "area denial" strategy posits an overly U.S.-centric viewpoint, giving the impression that this strategy is intended solely to prevent U.S. forces from approaching China in the event of a conflict. While deterring, delaying, or denying U.S. forces from operating along China's periphery is still a key PLA goal, the Commission's *2009 Annual Report to Congress* demonstrated that PLA missions have expanded.<sup>158</sup> Additional contingencies now include, for example, the defense of China's disputed territorial claims in the East and South China Seas.\* As such, a continued U.S.-centric approach downplays the point that China's military strategy can be just as effectively used against other militaries throughout East Asia. Conventionally armed missiles that can target U.S. bases and forces in East Asia can just as easily strike Japanese, Philippine, or even Vietnamese bases and forces in the event of a conflict.

Summarizing the Commission's findings from a hearing, fact-finding trips to the U.S. Pacific Command and Asia, and staff research, this section of the Report describes the PLA's Area Control Strategy and the implications for the United States and East Asia.

---

\*For more on recent PLA activities in the South and East China Seas, see section 1 of this chapter.

It concludes with summary points and recommendations for Congress.

**Congressional Remarks on  
China's Area Control Military Strategy**

Presenting his views to the Commission on China's Area Control Strategy, Congressman Robert J. Wittman (R-VA) noted that "China's military policies are aimed at translating the nation's growing economic resources into a world-class war fighting organization" and that the rapid pace of its military modernization has "already [put] regional military balances at risks." The congressman also described his view that China's Area Control Strategy could deny the United States the ability to project power into the region, without which "the integrity of U.S. alliances and security partnerships could be called into question, reducing U.S. security and influence and increasing the possibility of conflict." In order to prevent this from occurring, the congressman recommended that the United States needs to focus "on force posture, maintaining alliances, and maintaining the current footprint of strategically located bases in the western Pacific."<sup>159</sup>

Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) submitted a written statement to the Commission, stating that China has "increased the size of [its] navy, created formidable cyber warfare capabilities, developed new anti-ship and anti-satellite missiles, initiated a new stealth fighter, and begun construction of an aircraft carrier." The senator also expressed his concern that the PLA is "investing so heavily in anti-access weapons, almost certainly to counter our power projection capabilities." However, he also stated that it is important to look at China's military developments through the prism of capabilities the U.S. military is developing and not solely "those we currently possess." In order to maintain stability in the region, Senator Inouye suggested that the United States should continue to reassure its friends and allies in the region, maintain a strong forward military presence, and promote improved ties between the mainland and Taiwan.<sup>160</sup>

**China's Area Control Military Strategy**

At its core, the PLA's Area Control Strategy is a set of guidelines to help the PLA win in a conflict with a technologically superior military.<sup>161</sup> As Roger Cliff, then senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, concluded, China's military strategy embodies "ways in which a country with less-advanced military capabilities might seek to diminish the advantage enjoyed by a country with greater military capabilities."<sup>162</sup> Cortez A. Cooper, a senior international relations analyst at the RAND Corporation, testified that "[t]he PLA's most authoritative modern work on military strategy, *The Science of Military Strategy*, states that in the current threat environment, preparing for a local war against a technologically superior adversary is 'the center of gravity of strategy'."<sup>163</sup> This influential book continues, noting that China's strategic guidance fo-

cuses on how “to defeat a technically superior enemy equipped with high-tech weaponry in the background of relative [Chinese] lag of military technology” [sic].<sup>164</sup> Official PLA regulations, such as Beijing’s annual training guidance to the PLA, codify the notion of being able to defeat a better-equipped enemy.<sup>165</sup> As Oriana Skylar Mastro, a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University and a visiting fellow at The George Washington University, testified, China’s strategists believe that “not all wars are won by the strongest side,” a view fueled in part by their belief that China successfully overcame technologically superior U.S. forces during the Korean War.<sup>166</sup>

In an effort to defeat a superior military, China’s Area Control Strategy can be summarized as having three themes:

- It emphasizes degrading a superior opponent’s technological advances;
- It stresses striking first in order to seize the initiative; and
- It centers on controlling China’s periphery, especially the western Pacific Ocean.

Each theme will be discussed in turn below.

#### **Historical Legacy of China’s Military Strategy: The “Active Defense”**

Officially, China refers to its military strategy as the “Active Defense.” This term has evolved from its original usage in a 1936 Mao Zedong article, where Communist Party Chairman Mao severely critiqued the communist forces’ strategy used to fight the then ruling Nationalist Party during China’s civil war. According to Chairman Mao, the communists had been fighting a passive, defensive war against the much better-equipped Nationalist Army, which resulted in frequent and severe losses for the communists. Instead of defensive operations, Chairman Mao urged the communists to take the initiative and bring the fight to the nationalists at a time and place best suited to the communists. This strategy would allow the inferior communist forces to overcome their technological disadvantages when confronting the nationalist forces. He referred to such a strategy as the Active Defense, noting that:

*The active defense is also known as offensive defense, or defense through decisive engagements. Passive defense is also known as purely defensive defense or pure defense. Passive defense is actually a spurious kind of defense, and the only real defense is active defense, defense for the purpose of counter-attacking and taking the offensive.*<sup>167</sup>

#### **Theme 1: It Is a Strategy that Focuses on Degrading an Opponent’s Technological Advantages**

As several expert witnesses described to the Commission, China’s Area Control Strategy heavily emphasizes the necessity of degrading an opponent’s technological advantages.<sup>168</sup> Ms. Mastro noted that in order to hinder a superior military from operating off of

China's periphery, the PLA seeks to employ "an enhanced conventional precision strike system consisting mainly of cruise and ballistic missiles as well as attacks on key enabling capabilities, such as space-based [command, control, and surveillance systems] and computerized networks."<sup>169</sup> The PLA's *The Science of Military Strategy*, for example, instructs senior PLA commanders that:

*In order to win the future local war under high-tech conditions, the PLA must take 'destruction war' or 'paralysis and destruction warfare' as the overall and basic forms of war. The so-called 'destruction warfare' is to employ several kinds of means to disrupt the integrity of the enemy's operational systems and the sequence of his operations, to change the balance of strength in the battlefield by making the enemy lose his combat capabilities as a whole, and to create situation and conditions which are beneficial to preserve ourselves and destroy the enemy. [sic]<sup>170</sup>*

One way the PLA seeks to degrade an opponent's technological advantages is to target the vulnerable, yet important, nodes that undergird the opponent's technologically based combat capabilities.<sup>171</sup> For example, the authoritative PLA textbook on military campaigns, *The Science of Campaigns*, notes that:

*The enemy's combat system depends upon the various systems comprised of high technology equipment, closely linked to each other, whose mutual dependency is strong, thus having a certain weakness. Whenever a key part or key segment is destroyed, this can influence the entire system, even causing the entire system to be paralyzed. Therefore, we need to be good at grasping the key parts of the enemy's combat system and destroying them, like assaulting and destroying the enemy's command and control system, information system, weapons system, and important support system.<sup>172</sup>*

Dr. Cliff provided an example of a target set that Chinese defense writings discuss when mentioning striking an opponent's logistics system. Such targets could include, at a minimum:<sup>173</sup>

- Air bases, especially runways
- Naval ports
- Fuel, munitions, and other storage facilities
- Fuel pipelines
- Support facilities
- Transport and aerial refueling aircraft
- Naval troop transports
- Tankers and underway replenishment ships
- Railroads
- Bridges

### ***Theme 2: It Is a Strategy that Emphasizes Striking First***

Despite Beijing's claim that its military strategy is defensive, the PLA's Area Control Strategy places a high priority on carrying out the first strike against an opponent in a conflict. Officially, China's national security policy is "defensive in nature," and China does not initiate military operations.<sup>174</sup> Instead, China "adheres to the principle of implementing defensive operations, self-defense and gaining mastery by counterattacking" after its interests are at-

tacked.\*<sup>175</sup> However, this claim downplays the offensive nature of the PLA's Area Control Strategy. This is partly due to Beijing's ambiguous views on what it perceives as an infringement on its interests. The DoD in 2010 wrote:

*[T]he authoritative work, The Science of Military Strategy, makes it clear that the definition of an enemy strike is not limited to conventional, kinetic military operations. Rather, an enemy 'strike' may also be defined in political terms. Thus: 'Striking only after the enemy has struck' does not mean waiting for the enemy's strike passively. . . . It doesn't mean to give up the 'advantageous chances' in campaign or tactical operations, for the 'first shot' on the plane of politics must be differentiated from the 'first shot' on that of tactics. [This section continues] if any country or organization violates the other country's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the other side will have the right to 'fire the first shot on the plane of tactics.' [emphasis added]*<sup>176</sup>

Historical PLA military operations reflect this ambiguity. For example, in 1979 China initiated a short, intense border war with Vietnam after Vietnam invaded the then Chinese client state of Cambodia. Although China initiated combat operations, Beijing's view is that this was a defensive operation and officially labels it the "Self-Defense Counter-Attack Against Vietnam."<sup>177</sup> Beijing similarly describes PLA operations during the Korean War (1950–53) and during China's border conflicts with India (1962) and Russia (1969).<sup>178</sup> One well-respected scholar on the PLA referred to China's frequent labeling of offensive military operations as defensive as a "Chinese cult of the defense," where Beijing engages in "offensive military operations as a primary alternative in pursuit of national goals, while simultaneously rationalizing them as being defensive and a last resort."<sup>179</sup>

Regardless of the ambiguity at the political level, once Beijing determines that China's interests have been infringed upon, the strategy takes a clear offensive focus. According to David A. Deptula, U.S. Air Force lieutenant general (retired):

*Once hostilities have begun, the essence of [China's military strategy] is to take the initiative and to annihilate the enemy. Strategically, the guidelines emphasize active defense, in military campaigns the emphasis is placed on taking the initiative in 'active offense.' [emphasis as in original]*<sup>180</sup>

PLA writings stress striking first in order to ensure the advantage of surprise over the opponent.<sup>181</sup> According to Dr. Cliff, one reason why the PLA values the element of surprise is because the PLA sees modern warfare as "one of rapid-paced, short-duration conflicts," where defeat or victory can quickly occur.<sup>182</sup> While the PLA views the U.S. experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq as evidence that some wars may be protracted, in general the PLA focuses on being able to conclude a conflict as rapidly as possible.<sup>183</sup>

\*For more on the political narratives of China's defense policy, see chapter 4 of this Report, "China's Public Diplomacy Initiatives Regarding Foreign and National Security Policy."

Therefore, the PLA maintains the view that it is imperative to seize the initiative from the outset of a conflict.<sup>184</sup> This concept is reflected in *The Science of Military Strategy*, which posits that the PLA “should do all [it] can to dominate the enemy by striking first.”<sup>185</sup>

Of note is the PLA’s predisposition to attack while the opponent is still building up its forces. According to Dr. Cliff:

*Preemption [i.e., striking first] is seen as an excellent way of seizing the initiative as well as of achieving surprise. Preemption also strongly supports the concept of employing access-denial measures as, if an adversary is allowed time to fully build its forces up in theater, the effectiveness of access-denial measures will be greatly reduced. If, on the other hand, a preemptive attack is launched well before the adversary is fully prepared for conflict, then anti-access measures can lengthen the amount of time that the local military advantage preemption provides will last.*<sup>186</sup>

The notion of striking first is extensive throughout Chinese military writings. *The Science of Campaigns* writes, for example, that:

*It is now possible to achieve our operational goals through rapid and sudden activities before the enemy can react. Compared to using concealment to achieve suddenness, rapid actions are not only capable of using firepower damage and troop attack activities to directly weaken the enemy’s combat capabilities, but are also able to catch the enemy unaware, causing psychological fear and awe in the enemy—and thus dominating and destroying the enemy’s will to resist. . . . If the PLA is in combat with a high-tech and strong enemy, then there is a large gap between their weapons and equipment and ours. If we want to achieve operational suddenness, in addition to retaining traditional concealment, camouflage, and deception, we need to stress even more the PLA’s traditional specialties of maneuver warfare and flexible tactics, require the breaking of norms in operational distance, speed, and combat methods; and strike the enemy unprepared through rapid actions and asymmetric methods and means.*<sup>187</sup>

***Theme 3: It Is a Strategy that Stresses the Need to Control China’s Periphery, Especially the Western Pacific Ocean***

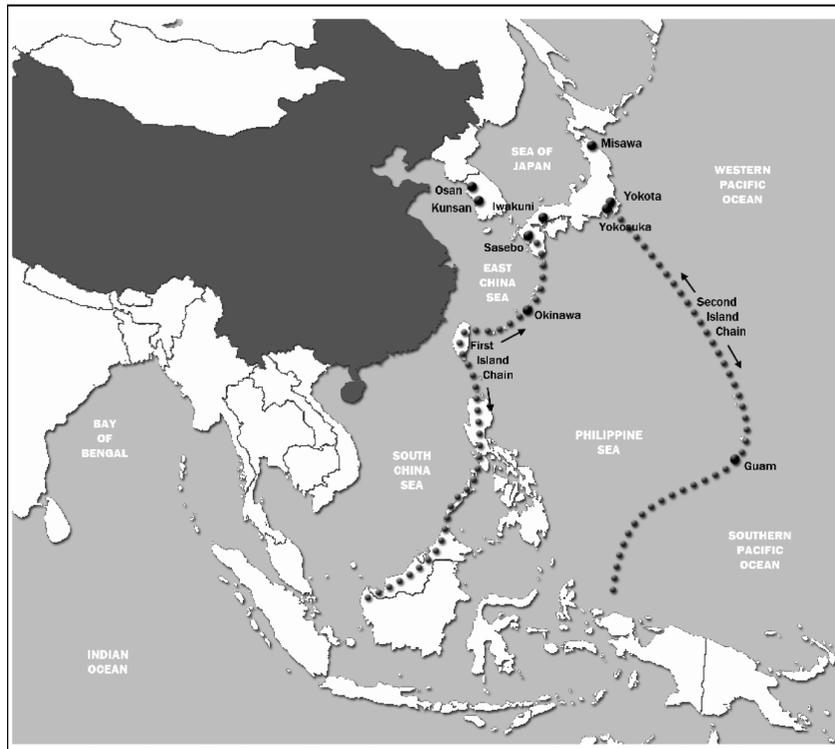
China’s Area Control Strategy has a specific geographic focus, seeking to establish a defensive zone of control around China’s territory. The primary focus of this zone of control concentrates on the maritime region off of China’s eastern seaboard, especially within what is referred to as the “First Island Chain” [see figure 1, below].\*<sup>188</sup> For China, there are at least three reasons why control over this region is critical. First, it provides important benefits to China’s economy: China’s most economically developed areas are located along its coast; China’s economy is heavily dependent upon the trade and energy sea lanes that transverse this region; and en-

\*The “First Island Chain” represents a line of islands running from Japan, the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands, Taiwan, and the west coast of Borneo to Vietnam.

ergy and natural resources in the region are necessary for China's continued economic growth. Second, China has several disputed territorial claims in this region, the most important of which is its sovereignty claim over Taiwan, an island that enjoys de facto, albeit disputed, independence from Beijing.\* Several nations also dispute Beijing's maritime territorial claims, and the accompanying resources, in the South and East China Seas.†<sup>189</sup> Third, China's understanding of modern warfare posits the importance of preventing an enemy from being able to operate freely close to China's territory. According to *The Science of Military Strategy*:

*As long as the battlefield is concerned, we should not passively fight against the enemy in our border regions, coastal regions and related air space. On the contrary, after the launching of the war, we should try our best to fight against the enemy as far away as possible, to lead the war to enemy's operational base, even to his source of war, and to actively strike all the effective strength forming the enemy's war system. [sic]*<sup>190</sup>

**Figure 1: The First and Second Island Chains**



Source: Jan Van Tol et al., *AirSea Battle: A Point of Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), p. 13.

\*For more on the Sino-Taiwan dispute, see chapter 3, section 3, of this Report.

†In the South China Sea, China has maritime territorial disputes with Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam. In the East China Sea, Japan disputes China's claim to the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands.

Of import, the PLA's geographic focus is expanding. Over the past five years, the PLA has expanded its mission beyond a Taiwan contingency also to cover potential conflicts in the East and South China Seas.<sup>191</sup> This change was highlighted during Commissioners' discussions with senior Singaporean officials in December 2010.<sup>192</sup> The Commission concluded in both its 2009 and 2010 Reports that the Chinese leadership has tasked the PLA to be capable of conducting operations increasingly farther from China's territory,<sup>193</sup> a point underscored in several of China's defense white papers.<sup>194</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense, in its most recent assessment of the PLA, goes so far as to state that "the PLA has been developing new platforms and capabilities that will extend its operational reach to address other concerns within the East and South China Seas, and possibly to the Indian Ocean and beyond the second island chain in the western Pacific."<sup>195</sup> According to Stacy A. Pedrozo, a captain in the U.S. Navy and military fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, this expansion reflects the influence of the PLA's strategy to extend its control gradually out past what is often referred to as the "Second Island Chain."\* Said Captain Pedrozo:

*In the first stage, from 2000 to 2010, China was to establish control of waters within the First Island Chain that links Okinawa Prefecture, Taiwan, and the Philippines. In the second stage, from 2010 to 2020, China would seek to establish control of waters within the Second Island Chain that links the Ogasawara Island chain, Guam, and Indonesia. In the final stage, from 2020 until 2040, China would put an end to U.S. military dominance in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, using aircraft carriers as a key component of their military force.*<sup>196</sup>

### **The Implementation of the PLA's Area Control Strategy**

Fueled by decades of strong economic growth, China has been able to ramp up spending on its military modernization efforts (see sec. 1 of this chapter for more on China's military budget). Many of these efforts closely mirror the requirements for China's Area Control Strategy. Below are detailed briefly the PLA's military developments that are most relevant to its Area Control Strategy.

*Submarines:* As noted by General Deptula, "China's submarine force is a key component of their sea denial strategy."<sup>197</sup> Of particular importance are the PLA Navy's diesel-electric attack submarines, which have the requisite stealth capabilities for sea control operations. Although the submarines were originally acquired from Russia, China is now able to produce its own modern diesel-electric submarines.<sup>198</sup> Since 1995, China has deployed 27 modern diesel-electric attack submarines with advanced capabilities. For example, China's most modern submarine, a *Yuan*-class launched in September 2010, is almost as difficult to detect as the most advanced Russian diesel-electric submarine. In addition, this submarine likely employs an air-independent propulsion system, allowing it to stay submerged for longer periods of time.<sup>199</sup>

\*The "Second Island Chain" concept denotes the set of islands that run in a north-south line from Japan, the Bonin (Ogasawara) Islands, the Mariana Islands, and Indonesia.

*Conventional ballistic missiles:* China has the most active missile development program in the world. In its 2010 report, the Commission described in detail the growing capabilities of China's conventional ballistic missile forces, noting that the PLA has over 1,100 short-range ballistic missiles\* as well as over 100 medium-range ballistic missiles, most of which are deployed opposite Taiwan.<sup>200</sup> According to General Deptula, China's ballistic missiles "have a variety of ranges, payloads, and capabilities to strike aircraft carriers, airfields, command and control facilities, logistics nodes, ports, and military bases."<sup>201</sup> Of significance to the PLA's Area Control Strategy is China's antiship ballistic missile, the DF-21D. According to the U.S. Department of Defense's 2011 report to Congress on China's military power, the DF-21D "is intended to provide the PLA [with] the capability to attack ships, including aircraft carriers, in the western Pacific Ocean."<sup>202</sup> When deployed, this missile will provide the PLA with the ability to strike naval targets within all of the First Island Chain and large portions of the Second Island Chain. (For more information on recent developments of the DF-21D, see sec. 1 of this chapter.)

*Conventional land-attack cruise missiles:* The PLA augments its ballistic missile forces with a growing arsenal of conventional land-attack cruise missiles.† In particular is the PLA's DH-10, a land-attack cruise missile, which can be launched by ground or air. When outfitted on a Chinese H-6H medium bomber, the DH-10 provides the PLA with the capability to hit targets up to 3,700 kilometers away, more than sufficient to strike Andersen Air Force Base on the island of Guam.<sup>203</sup> The U.S. Department of Defense writes in its 2011 report to Congress that China currently possesses between 200 and 500 such missiles.<sup>204</sup>

*Naval mine warfare capabilities:* China's growing naval mine warfare capabilities provide a cheap and efficient means for controlling maritime territories around China's periphery.<sup>205</sup> According to Ronald O'Rourke, a naval specialist at the Congressional Research Service, the PLA Navy's mine warfare ships went from zero in 2005 to 40 in 2009.<sup>206</sup> Augmenting China's dedicated mine warfare vessels are surface warships, submarines, aircraft, and converted civilian merchant or fishing vessels that can also deliver naval mines.<sup>207</sup>

*Air strike capabilities:* The Commission's 2010 Report noted that the PLA Air Force is undergoing a major transformation and is currently developing the ability to conduct offensive strikes outside China's territory, a sea change from a decade ago. In recent years,

\* Ballistic missiles are missiles fired from ground launchers or submarines in an arc to its target, usually exiting and reentering the earth's atmosphere along its flight path. Ballistic missiles are usually classified according to their range: short range (<1,000 kilometers [km]), medium range (1,000–3,000 km), intermediate range (3,000–5,500 km) and intercontinental ballistic missiles (>5,500 km). National Air and Space Intelligence Center, *Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat* (Dayton, OH: Department of the Air Force, April 2009), pp. 6–7.

† Cruise missiles are self-propelled missiles that fly along a direct trajectory to the target and can be fired from an aircraft, ship, submarine, or ground-based launcher. Cruise missiles are classified according to mission: land-attack or antiship cruise missiles. National Air and Space Intelligence Center, *Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat* (Dayton, OH: Department of the Air Force, April 2010), pp. 26–27.

the PLA Air Force has developed two advanced 4th generation\* fighters, the J-10 and the J-11B. Earlier this year, the PLA Air Force also revealed a developmental 5th generation stealth fighter, the J-20 (For more on China's J-20 stealth fighter, see sec. 1 of this chapter.). These operational fighters (J-10 and J-11B) provide Beijing with both the ability for precision strikes along China's periphery and an advanced capability to defend against an opponent's air attacks.<sup>208</sup>

*Advanced air defense capabilities:* As noted in the Commission's 2010 Annual Report, Beijing has prioritized "strengthening China's air defense capabilities." To that effect, the PLA is constructing a highly capable integrated air defense system, comprised of a growing number of advanced air defense missile launchers deployed in overlapping rings. China has also deployed a national air defense network to integrate these various individual launchers.<sup>209</sup> When coupled with improvements in China's combat fighter capabilities discussed above, China acquires "one of the most sophisticated and densely integrated air defense systems (IADS) in the world,"<sup>210</sup> according to General Deptula.

*Electronic warfare capabilities:* As the U.S. Department of Defense notes, the PLA emphasizes the importance of warfare in the electromagnetic spectrum† for conducting modern military operations. To that end, the PLA seeks to improve its capacity to conduct both defensive and offensive electronic warfare.‡<sup>211</sup> Defensively, the PLA has been hardening its various computer-based systems to withstand an opponent's electronic attacks.<sup>212</sup> For example, China's recent defense white paper notes that the PLA developed a networked communication system that relies more on fiber optical cable rather than on satellite or radio communications, thus weakening a potential opponent's ability to intercept PLA communications.<sup>213</sup> Offensively, the PLA is developing advanced electronic warfare capabilities in order to render a technologically superior opponent "deaf, dumb, and blind."<sup>214</sup> In addition, the PLA increasingly conducts field training exercises that emphasize the use of offensive and defensive electronic operations in order to improve the troops' ability to conduct and withstand electronic warfare operations.<sup>215</sup>

---

\* Jet engine combat fighters are generally categorized by generations according to their capabilities: 4th generation fighters (c. 1980s and 1990s) are equipped with sophisticated avionics and weapons systems and emphasize maneuverability over speed; 5th generation fighters (c. 2000) have a combination of advanced capabilities such as stealth, advanced radar, high-capacity data links, and supercruise capability. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2010 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2010), p. 77.

† The electromagnetic spectrum includes radio waves, microwaves, infrared, visible light, ultraviolet light, x-rays, and gamma rays.

‡ Although a precise definition of electronic warfare is elusive, it generally implies any contested military action that involves the use of the electromagnetic spectrum. Electronic warfare is a crucial feature of military operations given the growing reliance of modern militaries on the electromagnetic spectrum for communications with friendly forces and identification, surveillance, and targeting of enemy forces. See, for example, Secretary of the Air Force, *Electronic Warfare*, Air Force Doctrine Document 2-5.1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Air Force, November 5, 2002); and Secretary of the Army, *Electronic Warfare in Operations*, Field Manual 3-36 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army, February 2009).

*Cyber warfare capabilities:* As a Commission-sponsored report previously noted, the PLA has a growing cyber warfare capability fueled in part by a belief that modern militaries, including the U.S. military, are overly reliant on networked computer systems to conduct combat operations. In the PLA's view, this creates an opening to be exploited in an effort to paralyze or degrade a superior opponent's combat capabilities.<sup>216</sup> A recent study by a U.S. think tank, the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, described how Chinese defense writings emphasize cyber attacks "against U.S. battle networks aimed at disrupting logistics, corrupting [command and control] systems, degrading fire control radars, denying essential services, and degrading U.S. counter-space control, space situational awareness and space ground control stations."<sup>217</sup>

*Counterspace capabilities:* As section 3 of this chapter details, the PLA has sought to develop its abilities to deny the use of space to a technologically superior opponent. Describing the reasoning behind the PLA's drive for counterspace capabilities, General Deptula wrote:

*China recognizes the overwhelming advantage the US has in the space domain and its key role in our ability to collect, analyze and rapidly share data. They understand how dependent U.S. warfighters have become upon space products and services for commanding deployed troops, passing [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] data, and enabling precision targeting and engagement. China views that reliance as a significant, exploitable vulnerability and has written extensively about the subject in both open source journals and military doctrine. As a result, they are actively pursuing a comprehensive array of space and counterspace programs intended to degrade, disrupt, deny, or destroy our ability to gain and maintain access to the region in the event of a conflict.*<sup>218</sup>

*Joint operations:* According to Mr. Cooper, in 1999 the Chinese Communist Party emphasized that the PLA focuses on acquiring the ability to conduct joint operations\* as a means successfully to counter a more capable enemy.<sup>219</sup> In General Deptula's assessment, the ability successfully to conduct joint operations will strongly improve the PLA's overall combat capacity.<sup>220</sup> Currently, the PLA's ability to conduct joint operations remains a work in progress. However, Mr. Cooper described in detail three ways in which the PLA is currently attempting to improve its ability to do so:

- Deploy a command system that integrates into one networked system the PLA's disparate command and control, communications, electronic warfare, targeting, and logistics systems.

\* Joint operations are a form of military operations that involve two or more separate military services working to conduct highly integrated combat operations where the synthesized combat power is more than the individual capabilities simply added together. A textbook example of a joint operation is Operation Desert Storm (1991), where the U.S. military and coalition forces expelled occupying Iraqi forces from Kuwait. See, for example, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Military Operations Historical Collection* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, July 15, 1997), pp. V-1—V-15.

- Implement the necessary organizational changes for joint operations, such as developing a more flexible command and control structure.
- Develop a cohort of military personnel capable of conducting joint operations. For example, in its 12th Five Year Plan (2011–2015), the PLA leadership determined that joint training would be a major goal for the military.<sup>221</sup>

*“Three Warfares” Strategy:* Since 2003, the PLA has been developing the ability to integrate public media, international law, and psychological warfare in support of its Area Control Strategy. Dean Cheng, a research fellow at The Heritage Foundation, described to the Commission how this strategy, collectively referred to in Chinese defense writings as the “Three Warfares,” seeks to undermine the opponent’s will to fight, weaken international support for the opponent’s cause, and reinforce China’s domestic support for military operations. Reflecting the PLA’s emphasis on offensive operations, Mr. Cheng noted that this strategy would likely be deployed prior to the actual outbreak of hostilities.<sup>222</sup> The three individual components of this strategy include the following:

- Psychological warfare, which targets the leadership and population of the opponent, of third parties, and domestically in China;
- Public opinion warfare, where China would use “various mass information channels, including the Internet, television, radio, newspapers, movies, and other forms of media” to guide domestic and international public opinion in a way favorable to Beijing; and
- Legal warfare, which relies on the “use of domestic law, the laws of armed conflict, and international law” to demonstrate that China actions are legal, and the opponent is violating the law.<sup>223</sup>

### **Implications for the United States**

China’s Area Control Strategy has several implications for the United States and the Asia-Pacific Region. First, because the central tenet of the PLA’s Area Control Strategy is to provide a means to defeat a superior military, many of the PLA’s emerging capabilities appear intended directly to counter U.S. and allied military capabilities and exploit an opposing military’s weaknesses. As Ms. Mastro noted:

*China is fielding capabilities designed to deter, deny, disrupt, and delay the deployment of U.S. forces into the theater in the case of a conflict. China seeks to capitalize on U.S. vulnerabilities, specifically the great distances the U.S. needs to travel to engage China militarily as well as U.S. reliance on unimpeded access to and use of ports, airfields, air and sea bases, and littoral waters.*<sup>224</sup>

U.S. military capabilities and military bases long thought to be beyond the PLA’s reach are increasingly vulnerable without proper countermeasures. According to Mr. Cooper, “China’s greatly im-

proved detection, tracking, targeting, and long-range missile systems will soon pose a very real threat to U.S. carrier groups operating to the west of Guam.”<sup>225</sup> Jim Thomas, vice president for Studies, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, described how “the steady expansion of China’s maritime reconnaissance-strike complex is creating ‘no-go zones’ in the Western Pacific, gradually eroding America’s ability to project military power into a region of longstanding vital interest.”<sup>226</sup> The Commission noted in its 2010 Report that all six U.S. air bases in East Asia are vulnerable to PLA air and missile attacks.\*<sup>227</sup> Summarizing the effects of what improved PLA area control capabilities could mean for U.S. military operations in East Asia, General Deptula provided the following prediction:

*U.S. operations, both air, missile and maritime, from mainland Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines will be severely impacted. The PLA will likely be able to degrade and/or deny U.S. air- and space-based surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities in the region. Command and control of deployed U.S. forces will likely be disrupted, and it will be more difficult to logistically support operations in the western Pacific. It is also likely that U.S. aircraft carriers will be forced to operate at distances far from the PRC [People’s Republic of China] mainland.*<sup>228</sup>

#### **Example of a Possible PLA Cyber Attack Against the U.S. Military**

In testimony to the Commission, Martin C. Libicki, a senior management analyst at the RAND Corporation and a well-known expert on cyber warfare, described to the Commission a plausible scenario where the PLA undertakes offensive cyber operations against the U.S. military in an attempt to disrupt U.S. deployment of forces to the western Pacific. In his scenario, the Chinese Communist Party decides to retake Taiwan forcefully and anticipates that the United States will intervene on behalf of the island. According to Dr. Libicki:

*China takes steps to complicate and hence delay the U.S. transit of the Pacific, so that by the time the United States does arrive, the war [with Taiwan] will be over, or at least the Chinese will have a secure lodgment on the island. So, [PLA forces] carry out a full-fledged operational cyberattack on the United States military information systems with the hopes of turning data into unusable nonsense.*<sup>229</sup>

\*These bases include Osan and Kunsan Air Bases in South Korea; Kadena, Misawa, and Yokota Air Bases in Japan; and Andersen Air Force Base on Guam. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2010 Annual Report to Congress* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2010), p. 90.

**Example of a Possible PLA Cyber Attack  
Against the U.S. Military—Continued**

In particular, he suggested that a prime target for the PLA might be the U.S. military's logistics data system, referred to as the time-phased force and deployment data.<sup>230</sup> Although the data are stored and transmitted over unclassified networks, they "provide detailed information about what gets moved, conveyances, routes, and start and stop times."<sup>231</sup> If the PLA were able to intercept, disrupt, or obstruct these data, it could result in serious implications for U.S. warfighters. However, it is important to note that, according to a Commission-contracted study, the PLA appears to be aware that a cyber attack on the U.S. military's logistics system would not cause the military to be unable to function. Rather, it is seen as one method to slow or hinder the deployment of U.S. forces into the region.<sup>232</sup>

Second, because it posits the need to exert control over a growing area of the western Pacific, the PLA's Area Control Strategy increasingly impacts other regional actors, not just the United States and Taiwan. During the Commission's May 2011 meeting with scholars from the East-West Center in Hawaii, the center's Senior Fellow Denny Roy noted that military threats are one way that China seeks to establish a "sphere of influence" in East Asia, especially Southeast Asia.<sup>233</sup> General Deptula pointed out how improved PLA area control capabilities are:

*a growing threat to the U.S. and other countries in the region. These augmented capabilities can be used in coercive diplomacy and to contest territorial disputes by force, or threat of force. Increasingly, the PRC is focusing on developing capabilities that project power throughout the region, enhancing China's position in Asia and the world military hierarchy.*<sup>234</sup>

Robert F. Willard, commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, echoed this sentiment when he stated in December 2010 that:

*[China's] anti-access/area denial systems, more or less, range countries, archipelagos such as Japan, the Philippines and Vietnam, so there are many countries in the region that are falling within the envelope of this, of an [anti-access/area denial] capability of China. That should be concerning, and we know is concerning, to those countries. While it may be largely designed to assure China of its ability to affect military operations within its regional waters, it is an expanded capability that ranges beyond the first island chain and overlaps countries in the region. For that reason, it is concerning to Southeast Asia, and it remains concerning to the United States.*<sup>235</sup>

Furthermore, were the PLA to have the capacity to control major portions of the western Pacific, it could allow China to exert more influence throughout the region (see figure 2, below). Beijing could use PLA area control capabilities to deny states access to regional

maritime resources, such as underwater oil and natural gas in the South and East China Seas. Beijing could also pressure regional actors by threatening or conducting a blockade of major sea lanes traversing the region. Possession of additional land features outside of China's recognized maritime borders could further extend PLA capabilities to project force throughout the region by allowing the PLA to establish military-relevant platforms, such as sensors and supply depots, deeper into the East and South China Seas. In the event of a conflict, China could also use the military's area control capabilities to deny regional and outside actors the ability to operate in the international bodies of water located within the First Island Chain.

**Figure 2: Portions of the Western Pacific Most Vulnerable to Chinese Area Control Capabilities**



Source: Roger Cliff et al., *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Anti-Access Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2007), p. 112.

Finally, the opaque nature of Beijing's views of what constitutes hostilities, coupled with the PLA's inclination toward offensive operations, could result in a serious miscalculation and inadvertent conflict in the region. The crux of this argument centers on the notion of deterrence, which seeks to persuade through the threat of force "a potential enemy that he should in his own interest avoid courses of activity."<sup>236</sup> However, because of the PLA's tendency to strike first, Beijing could cause a conflict to escalate dramatically. For example, General Deptula noted that "Chinese leaders might consider preemptively attacking U.S. forces as they are deploying to a region in what U.S. policymakers intend as an action to *deter* a conflict" [emphasis in original].<sup>237</sup> The 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, where Beijing attempted to intimidate Taiwan to reject fur-

ther moves toward independence, provides the historical backdrop for an example of how this could play out. Beginning in mid-1995, the PLA conducted a series of military exercises a short distance from Taiwan's territory. Just prior to Taiwan's presidential election in March 1996, the PLA again carried out military exercises, this time a series of live-fire missile tests that targeted the waters just outside of two major Taiwan ports. In response, then President Clinton dispatched two aircraft carriers to the region to demonstrate Washington's resolve to maintain stability. Subsequently, tensions between all sides diminished without the outbreak of conflict.<sup>238</sup> If this scenario were repeated today, however, China's capabilities to respond would be much greater than they were in 1996.

### **Conclusions**

- The PLA's military strategy is best described as an Area Control Strategy. At its core, this strategy seeks to provide guidance to the PLA on how to defeat a technologically superior opponent.
- In order to defeat a superior opponent, the Area Control Strategy emphasizes degrading an opponent's technological advantages; striking first in a conflict; and establishing military control over China's periphery, especially the maritime region off of China's eastern coast.
- Many of the PLA's force modernization efforts reflect China's Area Control Strategy. As a result, the PLA is acquiring capabilities that allow it to conduct surprise attacks aimed at degrading a superior military's advantages and preventing an opponent from effectively operating along China's periphery.
- Many of the PLA's evolving capabilities appear aimed at directly countering U.S. military capabilities or to exploit potential weaknesses in U.S. military operations. In addition, as the PLA expands its force projection capabilities, China's Area Control Strategy and supporting means will increasingly impact regional states. Finally, the heavy focus on offensive operations inherent in the PLA's Area Control Strategy could serve to undermine stability in the region.