

Statement of

Ehsan M. Ahrari, Ph.D.

**Professor, Security Studies (Counterterrorism)
Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS)**

**“China’s Military Modernization and Its Impact on
the United States and The Asia-Pacific”¹**

Hearing

**Before the
U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission**

March 30, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, thank you for inviting me to share with you my views on what appears to be a new and very significant wrinkle in the conduct of information war by the People’s Republic of China addressing the world of Islam.

In the last two years of the post-9/11 era, China seems to have realized that the United States is facing an uphill battle in its war on terrorism in the world of Islam. This is decidedly a situation which, in the estimation of China’s leadership, provides ripe opportunities for gaining new friends, and new strategic openings to sell weapons, to sign energy contracts, and, above all, to develop spheres of influence.

In addition, I wish to bring to your attention a recent “asymmetric war” that was fought between the Hezbollah of Lebanon and Israel in July-August 2006. Given the import of asymmetric warfare to the People’s Republic of China, the Hezbollah-Israeli war of 2006 was a critical development. In my detailed testimony, I have focused on what I consider to be some major lessons learned from the military conflict by the Peoples’ Republic of China.

My premise is that, considering the fledgling strategic partnership between China and Iran, the chances are high that China’s asymmetric warfare specialists not only carefully studied the Hezbollah-Israeli war, but also consulted with their counterparts from Iran and Hezbollah about what worked and what did not work. That type of information will be incorporated in China’s own operational and tactical countermeasures for any future potential military conflict with a powerful adversary.

No one is more voracious a reader of the most recent trends in America’s warfighting capabilities, in the America’s military and civilian officials’ handling of information

¹ Views expressed herein are private and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Asia-Pacific Center, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

warfare, public diplomacy, and asymmetric war than China's strategic community.² As a result of these studies, they attempt not only to adopt into their strategic repertoire what they consider to be some of the most relevant trends, but also to focus on developing proficient countermeasures.

In the realm of information war and public diplomacy, China's strategic thinkers are closely studying America's vulnerabilities related to its global war on terrorism (GWOT) in the world of Islam, and are eager to adopt strategies that would make their own country look sympathetic to the Muslim plight.

In the domain of asymmetric war, an important aspect of China's strategy is to arm surrogates and let them do the fighting with the United States or its allies. In this context, special attention should be paid not only to what they are supplying to Iran, but what Iran, in turn, is supplying to the Hezbollah of Lebanon. This is a generic description of China's asymmetric war and information war strategies. Its specifics are spelled out in my detailed testimony.

We must watch with rapt attention China's own innovative approaches to information war and public diplomacy, its interpretation of our strategic thinking, and especially its capabilities and approaches to asymmetric war. The underlying purpose in all these realms is to look for openings, points of vulnerabilities, and then maximize China's advantages.

Looking Toward the Future

A long-term, if not permanent, aspect of China's approach to information warfare and public diplomacy is to enhance its strategic presence in the world of Islam, regardless of what happens in Iraq and Afghanistan. China seems to have recognized the power of political Islam, and the implications of the struggle within Islam, to the stability of a number of Muslim countries in the Middle East, South Asia, as well as Indonesia. Criticizing America's approach to the war on terror—which China has originally supported, but about which it might be in the process of developing a nuanced position—emerges as a new dimension of China's public diplomacy.

As China sees it, the Muslim world—especially the Middle East—is a region where the U.S. presence and influence is likely to experience increasing challenges in the coming years. New alignments are likely to emerge as a Shia-dominated Iraq and Shia Iran are seeking new avenues of cooperation and rapprochement. The Sunni states of the Middle East—despite the fact that Sunnis greatly outnumber the Shias all over the world of Islam—are on the defensive in the wake of the rising influence of Iran, both inside and outside the Middle East. They are seeking new avenues of resolving the Palestinian-

² Public Diplomacy is defined as, “the strategic planning and execution of informational, cultural and educational programming by an advocate country to create a public opinion environment in a target country or countries that will enable target country political leaders to make decisions that are supportive of advocate country's foreign policy objectives. <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/45.htm>

Israeli conflict as well as of creating a rapprochement with Iran. China seems to have decided that it will no longer leave the increasingly significant strategic affairs of the Middle East and that of the world of Islam largely for the U.S. presence and influence. This appears to be an extremely important development in China's continuing emergence as a power of global significance, presence, and influence.

From the Chinese perspective, improving its capabilities in asymmetric war is a tool that sustains at a high level the concern of American strategic thinkers and warfighters. As long as the United States and China do not start a military conflict, China envisions the asymmetric war-related research and development of new operational and tactical maneuvers as an ongoing chess game with the lone superpower. China may not come out and say it; however, as an ancient civilization, it considers itself as one of the great champions of this game.