

February 2, 2007

By: Tom Ehrhard, Senior Fellow

Title: Maintaining an Effective Deterrent Posture in the Pacific

Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission

Hearing: US-China Relationship: Economics and Security in Perspective

INTRODUCTION:

Thank you, Chairman Bartholomew and Vice Chairman Blumenthal for the invitation to speak before your commission, a commission charged with examining one of this nation's most compelling strategic challenges. Today I will discuss the complex, accelerating security relationship between the United States and China, a relationship that has taken some ominous turns in recent months.

One determinant of US behavior in the US-China relationship will be the degree to which the national discussion can achieve some balance and integration between economic and security concerns. Today, that debate tends to lurch between vague fears about turning China into an adversary and utopian, wishful views about China rising economically but somehow remaining benign militarily, views which seem unshakeable even with the recent anti-satellite test that created both figurative and literal space debris. In short, the debate could use a solid dose of strategic pragmatism and balance, and I very much appreciate the Commission's role in promoting that outcome.

Today I hope to contribute to that pragmatism by discussing some fundamental issues impacting the US-China relationship.

THE ISSUES

The Military Balance. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the requirement for the US and her allies to maintain a strong deterrent posture in East Asia. "Maintain" sounds static, but given the pace of Chinese military development, maintaining an adequate deterrent requires that the US and her allies account for the effects of these developments and act accordingly. Many key measures in the military balance vis-à-vis China are moving in a negative direction from a US

point of view, especially in the Taiwan Strait, and that movement is occurring at a pace that may expose this nation and our allies to more destabilizing Chinese actions in the future, generate greater capacity for coercion by PRC leaders, and present an increasing risk of miscalculation owing to the erosion of deterrence.

Lost in much of the debate, however, is the opportunity, through preserving a favorable military balance, to incentivize China to become a true regional partner when mutual interests coincide, such as in the war on terror, peacekeeping operations, or humanitarian relief. But this will also require an effort on China's part, to include greater transparency in its military buildup. One of the best ways for China's military to become more transparent, for instance, would be to engage in substantive talks with the US military about how to operate together in humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts. China clearly would benefit from such exchanges, as evidenced by the September 2006 visit to the US by the Chinese Air Force. At that time, their aviators had difficulty filing appropriate international flight plans, and received assistance from their American counterparts. This sort of cooperation and coordination in the context of internationally recognized conventions may help avoid unfortunate encounters like the P-3 incident, and could lead to greater understanding and mutual respect.

Unfortunately, these positive developments remain overshadowed by the worrisome trends in the military balance chronicled in the Defense Department's most recent "Military Power of the People's Republic of China" report to Congress. While some have criticized the report as overly pessimistic regarding Chinese intentions and capabilities, the recent successful test of a Chinese direct-ascent anti-satellite weapon represents a conscious and provocative act by the Chinese leadership. Clearly, this test was designed for international consumption, knowing as the Chinese do that civilian space aficionados across the globe monitor satellite movements with the enthusiasm of trainspotters. In fact, civilian space blogs noticed that the position of the target, an expired Chinese weather satellite (FY-1C), was not being updated by NORAD soon after the test.

What signal was China sending? It is likely a message consistent with other military maneuvers like the ongoing buildup of offensive forces across the Taiwan Strait, the P-3 incident or the Song-class submarine that surfaced near a US carrier strike group recently. Despite official statements about its "peaceful rise," China seems to be systematically challenging the internationally-recognized sanctity and neutrality of "the global commons"—international waters, airspace, cyberspace, and space itself—that the world relies upon to sustain the global economic infrastructure. Rather than taking measured, justifiable, transparent efforts to defend its homeland and participate in internationally accepted ways of securing global stability and prosperity, it appears Beijing prefers to challenge the international system as a means of asserting its status as an emerging regional hegemon and budding world power.

The United States and the international community must respond to these actions in a way that causes China to understand that these provocations lead to a loss of influence and respect. The Chinese must realize that they destroyed more than a defunct satellite with their test; they raised further doubts that Beijing can manage its rise without engaging in spasms of provocative, destabilizing behavior.

How should a US and allied force posture result in a more stable configuration vis-à-vis China over the long haul? In a three words, it requires **bases**, **range**, and **stealth**.

Bases. Basing issues have changed dramatically since the end of the Cold War, but as Chinese conventional and nuclear long-range threats proliferate, forward deployed US forces will find themselves increasingly vulnerable in ways they have not been since the Cold War. Consequently, we may need to rediscover some fundamentals of a defensive posture demonstrated during our long competition with the Soviet Union. The four characteristics required to protect a force that is increasingly falling under the kind of air and missile threat being developed by the Chinese are:

1. **Dispersal** (access to more bases and forces postured to scatter quickly)
2. **Hardening** (measures taken to reduce damage when under attack)
3. **Warning** (timely notification of attack)
4. **Active defenses** (e.g., forward ballistic missile defenses)

Air forces in the region, in particular, must come to terms with this requirement as more bases fall inside an increasingly dense PRC cruise and ballistic missile strike arc. Restructuring the United States' forward basing posture will require emphasis on consistent, long-term diplomatic and military engagement and investment aimed at creating and preserving a new and more flexible US base structure, one that relies less on old-style mega-bases of the Cold War era.

Long Range. Long-range forces and a more dispersed basing structure will work in tandem to improve US deterrent capabilities while complicating an adversary's planning. China's enormous size (it is the world's fourth largest country) provides it with great strategic depth, a problem US defense planners have not had to address since the Cold War. US forces must possess enough endurance to cause difficulties for Chinese offensive forces aiming to keep them outside meaningful operating ranges (i.e., so-called "anti-access" forces), yet must also hold critical targets at risk throughout the depth and breadth of China's substantial landmass. Many of those targets will be mobile, adding to the requirement for persistence and endurance.

Failure to hold critical targets at risk would have the effect of creating sanctuaries for key Chinese political, economic and military assets, thereby eroding deterrence and encouraging potentially disastrous miscalculation on Beijing's part. The US Navy, for example, must come to terms with the growing vulnerability of its aircraft carriers, which for purposes of survivability may need to be stationed progressively farther from China's shores and from key US allies and partners in East Asia. But the short range of the current carrier air wing will limit their effectiveness at these "stand-off" ranges. As naval aviation expert Owen Cote' from MIT says, "There is no substitute for range in naval warfare." Although the Super Hornet and F-35 programs represent a modest increase in endurance over the legacy F-18C fleet, even their endurance may need to double or triple in scenarios that require a 1,000 nautical mile carrier stand-off range. More capable missile defenses and improved carrier air wing endurance could allow for effective carrier operations in that more lethal, long-range environment. Under such conditions, fully funding current long-range surveillance and strike programs such as the Navy's unmanned, long-range UCAS-N and the Air Force's next-generation long-range strike system will likely prove to be wise investments as a hedge against expanding Chinese offensive strike capabilities.

Stealth. Stealthy submarine and aircraft systems are expected to prove increasingly valuable in encouraging China to take a more positive role in preserving and enhancing regional and global

security. Because they diminish detection ranges, stealthy strike aircraft incentivize China to invest heavily in defensive systems, which in turn helps stabilize the military balance in the region. In order to counter that capability, air defense investments must expand dramatically, creating an opportunity cost that limits the amount of more dangerous, offensive systems Beijing might have otherwise fielded. Submarines will also arguably play an expanded deterrent role in the Pacific region. Not knowing where they are lurking in the open seas can often be a more effective “presence” than a surface ship, and could also serve to moderate Chinese behavior.

All of this requires prompt action. The expanding military threat posed by the PRC requires prudent, practical measures in the near term due to long developmental timelines. The irony is that our strategic myopia has seen the war in Iraq lead to a greater emphasis on our ground forces to the potential detriment of the Navy and Air Force, the two services most important to the defense of the Pacific Rim’s principal flashpoint: Taiwan. This geopolitical shortsightedness risks creating an imbalance in our efforts to enhance America’s global defense posture, both in the near and longer term.

In part, this stems from the lack of an adequate analytical base for monitoring and projecting the military balance in the Pacific region. As a nation, we tend to suffer from strategic attention deficit disorder, and I would like to turn to that issue now.

The US Attention Deficit Disorder. The US suffers from a strategic asymmetry that influences how we deal with China. Beijing is like the proverbial hedgehog, who knows one thing very well—that the world’s lone superpower is the United States. It is clear from the preponderance of their writings that they are focused on America, both as a model and as a potential adversary. We, on the other hand, are the fox trying to know many things, only one of which is China, and we keep getting distracted. In fact, the distractions at times become so compelling that wishful thinking creeps into the debate.

The resulting shallowness of our analytical base vis-à-vis China cannot persist in its current state, and must be addressed by the broader national security community. This Commission performs the Herculean task of analyzing this issue area with relatively sparse resources. While this is laudable, it is not unusual. Other China security analysts toil in dusty corners of their bureaucracies with relatively sparse resources and tenuous sources of funding. One particularly astute analyst, Dr. Lyle Goldstein at the Naval War College, runs a small, efficient operation that studies Chinese submarine developments. His group often steals a march on government analysts in accurately forecasting Chinese submarine advances. We have only one Lyle Goldstein, however, and we need fifty more.

The area most in need of attention, however, is not necessarily counting numbers of aircraft or ships, but doing the difficult interpretive work of trying to understand Chinese strategic behavior. Our understanding about Chinese strategic behavior and decision-making dynamics remains woefully short of what is required by their increasing global importance. At the height of the Cold War, we had a comprehensive, diverse set of Sovietologists and Kremlinologists who analyzed every hand gesture and *Pravda* nuance. We have nothing like that with China. Granted, China presents a daunting analytical target because she is half closed, making access problematic; and at the same time half open and monstrously large, presenting the problem of making sense out of a mass of information.

One must therefore take a classically American approach—generate incentives and intellectual competition between governmental and non-governmental agencies, think-tanks, and academic

centers, the result of which is a body of knowledge that enhances our ability to shape the competition in ways conducive to our security interests. Our analytical deficit cannot be closed simply by creating institutions or divisions to address each critical dimension of Chinese comprehensive military power. Rather, we should develop a comprehensive, competitive analytical enterprise where elements of the intelligence community must contend with (and benefit from) the formulations of numerous analytical groups from various extra-governmental organizations. The idea of an “optimal” analytical organization is a chimera, and some overlap and redundancy must be created as a natural part of a healthy, competitive analytical environment.

Technology Matters. I would like to share one last thought before I turn to the specific questions put before the group today. Various technological breakthroughs in areas such as super-computing, autonomous systems, directed energy, nanotechnology, and biotechnology will inevitably affect how the East Asian military balance—and security environment—evolves, and how well deterrence can be sustained. Technological innovation can be quite disruptive, and has a poor record of leading to greater security. For that reason, these areas require special attention, both by defense planners and intelligence analysts. The real technological wild card seems to be nanotechnology, the manipulation of materials on the molecular scale that yields materials, devices, and systems with novel properties. Nanotechnology should prove to be a critical enabler that will yield a variety of unsettling economic and security challenges, and as a result many nations are aggressively pursuing research and development in this area. It stands to reason that the US should both pursue its own nanotechnology initiatives and also closely monitor similar developments in China.

Now allow me to address some specific questions the Commission has put before the group:

QUESTIONS BEFORE THE COMMISSION

What new security challenges should the U.S. military address in future exchanges with China? What recommendations can be made to improve U.S.-China military relations in the next five years?

As I mentioned, China's ongoing military modernization continues at a rapid pace across multiple domains, and is not being matched by the US and our regional allies. As a result, China continues to not only believe, but see in real terms that its power in the region is growing. As this happens, we should continue to emphasize security interests that coincide, such as the threat posed by radical Islam, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, and the development of rules that depressurize US and Chinese military maneuvers when they occur in international airspace and waters.

How can the U.S. military more effectively assess Chinese military modernization and technological developments? How can China improve its transparency to allow a more accurate analysis of its modernization program?

China clearly does not want to promote transparency in their modernization program, because they have not yet accepted that transparency benefits them. Their military has not come to an understanding, as many advanced nations have, that their role is both to support diplomacy as well as prepare for the use of force. This attitude will not likely be changed over the short term, but may through consistent, principled engagement backed up by a military balance that consistently favors the United States, its allies and partners.

I have already mentioned some suggestions for increased assessment capability, but in addition there should be an elevated importance given to information from third parties such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and India as an alternative means of assessing China's capabilities. Participation in multi-lateral activities with China and these third-parties may lessen the adversarial perception the Chinese have of the US military, especially if those third parties assume leadership roles, and may allow for greater insight into their motivations.

Transparency continues to be a major issue, and the lack of transparency coupled with aggressive behavior continues to jeopardize efforts to lessen tensions and promote peaceful, mutually beneficial economic competition. China's civilian leadership and the People's Liberation Army's senior leadership need to become less opaque and more forthright in addressing a number of areas to include:

- Leadership intent
- Leadership decision making processes
- Relationship between civilian and military leadership
- Notification of/purpose for testing new/advanced systems
- Notification/purpose of large scale exercises
- Intended applications of new and emerging technologies
- How areas of modernization emphasis fit/support national aspirations

What effect will Taiwan's approval of any or all components of the U.S.-offered arms package have on U.S.-China military relations?

Taiwan's acceptance of US-offered arms packages is a necessary part of regional deterrence. One might fret over how certain systems could cross the line from deterrence to provocation, but as a practical matter it is not that difficult to make sensible choices. The weapons packages currently proposed (surface-to-air missiles, patrol aircraft, small submarines and anti-aircraft/anti-submarine warfare ships) constitute no more than basic security fences. These are entirely appropriate and well within the deterrence category, despite China's inevitable protestations that they are provocative.

What are the costs and benefits of military-to-military exchanges between the United States and China? What has the U.S. military gained from its exchanges with Chinese counterparts in 2006?

Military-to-military exchanges continue to be problematic for some of the reasons I have already mentioned. A visit to the Air War College by Chinese Air Force officials in September resulted

in very little candid discussion from the Chinese, for instance. Chinese delegations are still heavily briefed on standard responses and are accompanied by political chaperones who restrict candor. Some opportunity for more open exchanges may be available with mid-level officers and NCOs discussing such non-threatening topics as aero-medical specialists, search and rescue, airspace control, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations and related tactics, techniques, procedures.

How can military-to-military exchanges be designed to ensure a more equitable sharing of information? What are the prospects for improving communication between the U.S. and Chinese military, and for ultimately improving military-to-military relations?

The US military might take a page from State Department-sponsored bilateral diplomatic exchanges—establish a firm agenda, agree to the topics of discussion and have each side brief their views; then provide social situations where personal relationships might emerge. Focus on topics China may see as opportunity to gain proficiency, such as support for international humanitarian missions. We must limit the one-way exchanges and demand at least surface-level reciprocity as the terms of any visit.

A FINAL WORD

The ongoing, long-term challenge for the United States is to encourage China to cooperate in areas where the two states have common security interests, and to convince Beijing that the resolution of its outstanding geopolitical issues should be accomplished within accepted international legal norms. This means creating and maintaining a military balance favorable to the United States and its allies against the kinds of contingencies that might tempt Chinese efforts at coercion or aggression, and could lead to miscalculation and escalation. Bases, range, and stealth constitute the linchpins of an effective deterrent posture in the Pacific, and we must also make analytical investment commensurate with the magnitude of the challenge. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.