

A Rising China and East Asian Security: Implications for the United States

Oral Remarks before the Committee on Foreign Affairs

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By

Dr. Larry M. Wortzel

Commissioner

U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Berman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to brief you today. The views I present are my own, informed by my service in the U.S. Army, on the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, my own research.

In late 2004, Chinese Communist Party Chairman Hu Jintao set out a new set of missions for the People's Liberation Army, or PLA. These new "Historic Missions" provide the basis for future defense research and weapons acquisition plans. They also set the stage for a more assertive use of the armed forces inside and outside of Asia in pursuit of expanding national interests.

The PLA's military modernization efforts provide the means for the armed forces to fulfill these new missions. China's military modernization efforts are comprehensive, affecting all the domains of war, including space and cyber operations. In recent years, China has acquired advanced surface ships and submarines, modern combat aircraft, ballistic and cruise missiles, and advanced command and control systems that tie everything together. In addition, as Admiral Willard, the PACOM Commander, recently stated, China will field an antiship ballistic missile, a potential threat against U.S. aircraft carriers in the region. The PLA is also the fallback force of repression for the Communist Party against the populace.

The combination of these new missions and new means to carry them out have already brought about observable changes in China's military operations. Traditionally, the PLA focused on domestic response and local contingencies. It is now a military with a wider range of missions and activities. The dispatch of Chinese naval vessels in support of the anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa is but one example. China's national interests are global and the PLA is becoming a force capable of acting beyond China's periphery.

A more capable Chinese military has also resulted in a more assertive Chinese foreign policy. This can be seen in China's recent provocative activities concerning its disputed territorial claims in the South and East China Seas in its exclusive economic zones.

China's military capabilities also stoke Beijing's confidence. China's officials stridently complained about U.S. and allied operations in the Western Pacific. Beijing failed to condemn North Korean attacks on South Korea, and strongly objected to joint military exercises in the region between the United States and South Korea.

In military-to-military relations between China and the United States, Beijing continues to circumscribe the range of discussions, refusing to address strategic issues such as cyber warfare and space operations. I am pleased to see that some discussion of nuclear doctrine and a visit to the PLA Second Artillery Corps occurred during Secretary Gate's visit to China last week.

Despite a noticeable improvement in overall cross-Strait relations, Beijing continues to insist on the right to use force should it interpret Taiwan's activities as moves towards independence. The cross-Strait military balance increasingly favors China, and Beijing has deployed over 1,100 short-range ballistic missiles opposite the island. In my view, Taiwan's most pressing need is for new or modernized fighter aircraft.

China continues arms sales and support to international pariah states, such as North Korea, Burma, and Iran. In addition, the food, energy, and foreign investment that China provides to North Korea indirectly enable Pyongyang to continue its nuclear efforts.

Madame Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I look forward to your questions.
