

Hearing statement
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Hearing on “China's Active Defense Strategy and its Regional Impact”

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this hearing on China’s active defense strategy and its regional impact. In my testimony I will explain the Chinese concept of “active defense.” I will then discuss how the United States is currently responding to these challenges, and what more can be done. I will argue that we need to look beyond the technological components of what the US calls China’s “anti-access and area-denial” strategy to appropriately counter other components of that strategy designed to erode US credibility as a Pacific power. I will address three balancing acts the US must master if it is to successfully counter a Chinese anti-access strategy at acceptable costs.

But first I should note that while I have several professional affiliations, the views I will express today are entirely my own and do not reflect the opinions of any organization or government agency.

The term active defense (*jiji fangyu*) appears in the National Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period (*xin shiqi guojia junshi zhanlue fangzhen*), which are basically overall principles and guidance to plan and manage the development of the armed forces. Active defense is the operational component of the guidelines, which posit that China will only engage in wars to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹ From the point of view of a relatively weak but growing military power such as China who wants to assume regional hegemony, it makes sense to adopt an asymmetric strategy. Consequently, China is fielding capabilities designed to deter, deny, disrupt and delay the deployment of US 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. For example, China seeks to deny the U.S. military’s ability to physically maneuver and engage Chinese forces with mass or precision. They seek to target U.S. networks, fixed targets like bases throughout East Asia, and U.S. ships and aircraft in the region. Chinese leaders could also exploit less physical vulnerabilities, such as a perceived lack of U.S. resolve and casualty aversion, an issue I cover later. US observers and strategists therefore conceptualize China’s active defense strategy as an anti-access and area denial strategy.

¹ *The Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense 2010), 22. Available at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf.

This is all just to say that China's 'active defense' strategy covers a broad range of Chinese strategic thinking designed to raise the costs of military intervention in a conflict with China, prevent us from operating from certain bases in theater, force us to operate a farther distance from the theater of operations than we would prefer, or delay U.S. deployment from outside theater. I find it useful to conceptualize four interrelated pillars of China's strategy: (1) political, (exploiting perceived weaknesses in political support and resolve of U.S. allies and friends, keeping the U.S. out because countries will not allow us to base there), (2) geographic, (increasing the distance and time required for U.S. forces to arrive in theater from areas of safety before China achieves its political objectives), (3) military (degrading the U.S. military's ability to penetrate anti-access environments with 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 C4ISR and computerized networks) and (4) *for lack of a better term, self-restraint* (making involvement so costly that the U.S. opts out of responding in a given contingency).

For several years, U.S. analysts have focused on the geographic and military aspects of anti-access. Chinese advances directed at holding U.S. military forces at risk have been some of the most dramatic aspects of their rapid militarization over the past decade. In terms of the geographic pillar, the focus of Chinese writings on network attack, as well as China's testing of an antisatellite (ASAT) weapon in 2007, may imply an enhanced ability to delay U.S. forces. China has also moved more forces deeper inland, burying and hardening them in an obvious attempt to create greater geographic dilemmas for U.S. forces in the region.

Aspects of the military pillar of China's active defense have changed as well. We have already seen China's burgeoning military capabilities change its thinking about possible military contingencies. Five years ago China may have been solely focused on developing a force that can deter, delay, or degrade U.S. intervention in a conflict involving Taiwan. But it seems they have extended the same logic to potential conflicts in the South or East China Seas. The *2010 Annual Report to Congress on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* released by the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense claims that China is developing new platforms and capabilities that will extend its operational reach possibly as far as the Indian Ocean.² And though I do not think China's active defense focus has reached this point, South Korean counterparts have articulated a concern that if China continues down this path, it may go so far as to attempt to thwart U.S. intervention from air or sea in support of a Korean peninsula campaign. The key to all of this is that the PLA's expanding military capacity allows them to plan seriously for a much broader range of contingencies, all of which will likely feature ways to keep U.S. forces at bay.

Another major change in Chinese active defense strategy is the extension of their military reach. The PLA has systems that reportedly can engage adversary surface ships up to 1,000 nautical miles from the PRC coast with surveillance and attack networks featuring terminally-guided anti-ship ballistic missiles; the PLA Navy has conventional and

² Ibid, 33.

nuclear-powered attack subs, surface combatants (guided-missile destroyers and special attack boats with advanced long-range, anti-air and anti-ship missiles) and maritime strike aircraft. Given the right coordination and surveillance networks, Chinese missiles can now strike targets well beyond what Chinese strategists refer to as the first island chain, which is the stretch between China and the Kurile Islands, Japan, the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Indeed, many Chinese capabilities can today range the second island chain, which loops out from the Kuriles to the east of Japan, the Bonins, the Marianas, the Carolines, Guam and Indonesia. In terms of range, the second island chain encompasses maritime areas out to approximately 1,800 nm from China's coast, including most of the East China Sea and East Asian sea lines of communication (SLOCs).

Furthermore, the fact that China has the most active land-based ballistic and cruise missile program in the world is cause for concern. The DoD's 2010 report lays out Chinese capabilities to deny U.S. power projection very clearly; including some 1,050-1,150 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs), as well as medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) that can conduct precision strikes against land targets and naval vessels out to the first island chain.³ According to publicly available analyses, China has approximately twenty liquid-fueled limited range CSS-3 ICBMs which are primarily directed at targets in Russia and Asia; between fifteen and twenty liquid-fueled CSS-2 intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs); and possesses about fifty CSS-5 road mobile, solid-fueled MRBMs, which are relevant for regional deterrence missions.⁴

The current U.S. operational response to these developments relies heavily on the deployment of antiballistic missiles (ABMs) and development of operational concepts such as Air-Sea Battle. To defend ships at sea, the United States is investing in Aegis/Standard Missile ABMs, and to defend air bases ashore, in Patriot PAC-3 ABMs. We have also identified vulnerabilities in fixed basing, but substantial steps to protect and harden assets have yet to be taken. To present a significant, survivable, crisis-stabilizing force posture given the enhanced threat environment, progress in hardening, dispersal, warning and active defense at our regional facilities is required.

In general, while I agree that the United States should try to protect its personnel and assets against missile strikes, I fear we are putting too many eggs in the missile defense basket. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review lists a number of things the U.S. needs to do to address this anti-access threat: expand long-range strike capabilities; exploit advantages in subsurface operations; increase the resiliency of U.S. forward posture and base infrastructure; assure access to space and space assets; improve key intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities; defeat enemy sensors and engagement systems; and increase the presence and responsiveness of U.S. forces abroad.⁵ All these recommendations, with increasing the presence of U.S. forces abroad being a notable

³ Ibid, 31.

⁴ Ibid, 34.

⁵ *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2010) http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf; see pp. 32-34.

exception, address only the military components of China's active defense, or from the U.S. perspective, anti-access strategy.

At the heart China's "active defense" strategy lays Sun Tzu's idiom, "To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." This saying reveals a fundamental truth: while it is necessary to respond to PLA militarization by fielding new aircraft, ships and weapons or even employing new operational concepts such as Air-Sea Battle, those are not sufficient to address the political and self-restraint pillars of China's strategy. The political component refers to the idea that in a conflict, China will pressure countries to limit or deny the U.S. use of facilities necessary for power projection. Self-restraint captures the idea that the U.S. will opt out of responding in a number of contingencies given that China's active defense initiatives exceed the political costs for the U.S. to operate in the region. I would go even farther to argue that U.S. strategy should focus more intensely on these two pillars because China is willing to accept military defeat if it achieves its political objectives in a given contingency.

Ultimately, we need to accept that in a conflict with China we are never going to be able to fully protect American forces and keep them out of harm's way. The global commons will continue to be an increasingly contested environment regardless of our ability to counter new Chinese weapons and platforms. Even with missile defense, China has enough missiles and decoys that they can saturate our defenses. We must decide whether we are willing to operate in a higher threat environment, especially in the case of low-level provocations, or if we are unwilling to take risks, thus voluntarily taking ourselves out of the game.

I fear that by focusing the discussion solely on how we can operate with low costs, we may give off the impression that the fourth pillar, anti-access through compelling self-restraint, is highly effective. This greatly undermines deterrence and creates an environment where the incentive to preempt becomes the central destabilizing feature of any crisis. China's strategists are betting on the fact that not all wars are won by the strongest side – indeed, China's experience in fighting the Korean War proves that a country willing to sacrifice blood and treasure can overcome a technologically superior opponent.

This brings us to the first balancing act Washington must accomplish: the U.S. needs to learn to accept risk without being reckless. This is obviously easier said than done; China is masterful at chipping away at U.S. credibility through advancing militarization backed by coercive diplomacy. China often uses limited military action as a signaling tactic to establish the credibility of its determination to increase the frequency or intensity of force if its demands are not met. The recent increase in dangerous encounters between Chinese ships and others in the South China Sea is an example of how China increases the risk of day-to-day operations to slice away at the interests of others, in this case to promote its interpretation of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) rights. The great strategist Thomas Schelling captures this strategy aptly when he writes it is "the sheer inability to predict the consequences of our actions and to keep things under control...that can

intimidate the enemy.”⁶ Because China introduces risk for exactly this reason, attempts to reduce risk of escalation, though a necessary U.S. effort, are unlikely to produce a marked change in Chinese behavior. In addition, the U.S. military tends to focus on worst-case “great battle” scenarios, and is less adept at planning for and responding to low-intensity conflicts that characterize Chinese coercive diplomacy.

This is where the second balancing act comes in: permit the possibility of escalation while promoting stability. To credibly signal to China that we will not opt out of a conflict, we must signal the willingness to escalate to higher levels of conflict under certain conditions. Though it seems counterintuitive, only if a threat to escalate vertically to higher levels of violence, or horizontally by involving third parties, is credible, will it be possible to stop armed conflict before it starts, or keep it at an acceptably low level.

Lastly, we need to ensure that our attempts to increase force survivability do not feed into Chinese attempts to limit our political access or convince us to limit ourselves. For example, if our response to the increased threat environment is to station our platforms and personnel farther from the theater, this may reduce the effectiveness of China’s strategy to keep us out with military force, but it puts our commitment to the region in question, strengthening China’s political and geographic anti-access pillars. If countries think we cannot (or will not) protect them, they may begin to bandwagon with China. For our allies, enhancing credibility may mean bolstering their capabilities, diversifying basing for aircraft, strengthening passive defenses at air bases, and being prepared to respond in kind if China launches an attack. However, if we take a tough stance, increasing our observable military presence (and thus our vulnerability), China may react strongly by punishing American allies and partners, many of whom count on China as their number one trading partner. General anxiety about our ability to walk this fine line will reduce our political access in the region, increasing the effectiveness of the political dimension of China’s anti-access strategy.

This brings me to the third balancing act that Washington must accomplish: engagement without encirclement. If China feels encircled, it can be destabilizing. American strategists must reexamine our approach to regional basing to ensure it strengthens America’s relationships with its allies and partners, addresses Chinese concerns of containment, and reliably facilitates the forward deployment and sustainment of American military forces in the region. It is incumbent upon American policymakers to make it clear to our allies and partners that they need not choose between China and the U.S. We seek a positive and constructive with China while maintaining a robust military hedge, and our allies can and should do so as well – with the U.S. military as their guarantor against Chinese aggression and coercion.

In conclusion, in addition to new technology, new platforms, and new operational concepts designed to defeat their anti-access strategies, we need to accept risk without being reckless, permit the possibility of escalation while promoting stability, and promote engagement without encirclement. As Kissinger wrote in his Washington Post op-ed two weeks ago, a perceived containment strategy could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. He

⁶ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1966), 109.

argues that avoiding conflict implies subordinating national aspirations to a vision of a global order. Before this can be done, we need to have a frank conversation on what our vision for the global order is and for the United States as a Pacific power in particular.

The goal must be peace and stability in the region without sacrificing our national interests. A coordinated diplomatic strategy, which signals our resolve and improves our access to third parties, is not only necessary to complement our military strategy, it is also more cost effective. As an American taxpayer, I want the military to have the resources it needs to protect U.S. interests. However, as part of the ‘lost generation’ that is experiencing the highest rate of unemployment since the Great Depression,⁷ I also want the U.S. to get its domestic economic house in order. As a Mandarin speaker and acute China watcher, I am personally invested in ensuring that we stay away from conflict. But the rise of neo-isolationist urges given current economic conditions may prove to be the greatest strategic challenge to our national interests in upcoming years.

⁷ Louis Uchitelle, “American Dream is Elusive for New Generation,” *The New York Times*, 6 July 2010.