



Hearing on “China’s Evolving Counter-Intervention Capabilities and Implications for the United States and Indo-Pacific Allies and Partners”

March 21, 2024

Opening Statement of Commissioner Randall Schriver

Thank you, Vice Chair Price. And let me add my thanks to all the witnesses who will testify today. We know you put a great deal of time and effort into your statements and we very much appreciate that. I know our Commission—and by extension, the U.S. Congress—benefit tremendously from your expertise.

The Chinese Communist Party just announced another significant increase in the annual budget that funds the armed wing of the party, the People’s Liberation Army, or PLA. Such a budgetary commitment at a time of economic distress for China is further evidence that the CCP sees military modernization and the further development of a more lethal, offensive minded PLA as key to achieving its’ national ambitions.

PLA power projection across services and military domains has been a primary focus of China’s military modernization for nearly three decades. Most prominent among the capabilities the PLA has developed to project power are the lethal and highly accurate ballistic and cruise missiles, and the associated C4ISR architecture that the PLA has fielded. And much of this weaponry targets U.S. forward deployed forces in the region.

U.S. forward deployed forces in the Western Pacific largely remain in a legacy posture from World War Two and the Korean War. Though the Defense Department can claim nearly 100,000 forward deployed forces on a given day counting forces afloat, the fact of the matter is our forces are highly concentrated in a handful of locations. Between one quarter and one third of U.S. forces forward deployed in the Western Pacific are stationed in Okinawa alone. Such a concentrated posture makes us highly vulnerable to Chinese missile strikes.

Not surprisingly, the PLA has developed a strategy to hold our forward deployed forces at risk to deter us from potential involvement in a range of known contingencies. American analysts often refer to the Chinese strategy as Anti-Access, Area Denial or A2/AD. But a more useful description of China’s approach is “counter-intervention.” I think this description is more telling of their objectives. They seek to keep us out of the fight if they decide to employ military means for territorial grabs whether that be in the East China Sea, Taiwan, or the South China Sea.

Recent U.S. efforts to mitigate the vulnerabilities the Chinese counter intervention strategy creates have focused on plans to expand regional access so that we can fight and sustain combat in a contested environment. The concept that we need the ability to fight from a dispersed, distributed posture is now widely endorsed. And important political-military initiatives have followed to serve as enablers for such a posture in the early stages of conflict. Initiatives such as additional EDCA sites in the Philippines, construction of air strips for diversion opportunities in the Pacific Islands, greater presence in Australia, and expanded training at more sites throughout Japan's Southwest Island chain all represent progress for the United States toward realizing its goal of complicating the battle space for China.

But China is watching these developments and can evolve their own strategy. This potentially creates an opportunity for the PLA to adapt to our moves at a time when the United States and allies are still in the early stages of implementing a variety of posture initiatives. Several important questions thus need to be explored. Is there a PLA counter-intervention strategy 2.0, and what are its contours? Are the posture initiatives being implemented in a timely manner, or do they appear to be agreements on paper only? Are we developing other capabilities to complicate the battle space for China beyond posture, for example, disaggregating the PLA kill chain and having the ability to disrupt at key nodes? And how are partners and allies themselves adapting as we seek greater access opportunities which, if realized, would potentially put more allied territory in harm's way in the event of a conflict.

We have three excellent panels with outstanding witnesses to help us unpack these issues and more, and I very much look forward to this hearing today.