

# WebMemo



Published by The Heritage Foundation

No. 3362  
September 14, 2011

## Does the White House See the Same China DOD Does?

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The Department of Defense (DOD) finally released its 2011 report on Chinese military and security developments, the Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China.<sup>1</sup> The report, which is several months late, details the latest developments in the Chinese security situation, including the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

**Growing PLA Capabilities.** China's Second Artillery force (responsible for missile and nuclear forces) is fielding a variety of new cruise and ballistic missiles. The report suggests that China has deployed between 1,000 and 1,200 ballistic missiles opposite Taiwan alone, as well as longer range systems capable of reaching the western Pacific, anti-ship ballistic missiles intended to deny the U.S. Navy access to the region, and additional intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The PLA Navy (PLAN) has been steadily fielding new surface warships, so its overall capabilities have improved, even as its numbers have dropped. These new vessels incorporate more advanced air defense systems and anti-ship weapons, making them far more lethal even as they operate farther from China's shores. They are complemented by China's expanding submarine fleet and China's first aircraft carrier (the ex-Ukrainian *Varyag*).

The PLA Air Force (PLAAF) has now tested its next-generation, stealthy J-20 fighter—during the visit of then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates—despite Gates's prediction that China was unlikely to have such a system for another decade. In addition,

the DOD report notes that the PLAAF has been improving its aerial surveillance capabilities, as well as producing and importing advanced surface-to-air systems.

The PLA ground forces have also not been neglected, enjoying a comprehensive modernization effort. The army is now fielding new tanks, amphibious assault vehicles, and artillery and rocket systems. The report notes that much of this modernization is focused in the military regions opposite Taiwan.

Apart from modernizing the various services, the PLA has also been expanding its space assets, orbiting a variety of new satellites and refining its anti-satellite systems, and its cyberwarfare capabilities. While the latter has mostly involved obtaining information ("exfiltration") from foreign—including American—computer systems, the DOD report notes that such efforts could have more serious effects, such as delaying response times in time of war. All of this is further complemented by improvements in Chinese military doctrine, training, and recruitment.

**Key Observations.** In surveying the various Chinese military and security developments, the DOD report highlights several key developments.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
<http://report.heritage.org/wm3362>

Produced by the Asian Studies Center

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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### ***Deteriorating Cross-Straits Military Balance.***

Perhaps the single most important is the repeated observation that, despite improved cross-Straits relations, the PLA remains focused on securing Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> Worse, the steady modernization of the PLA has not been matched by Taiwan. Coupled with limitations on U.S. weapons sales (which is not discussed in the report), Taiwan is falling behind, failing “to keep pace with ambitious military developments on the mainland.”<sup>3</sup> This, of course, has implications for the United States, as the PLA seeks to “deter, delay, or deny possible US or allied intervention in a cross-Strait conflict.”<sup>4</sup>

***Chinese Interest in Missile Defense.*** Strikingly, the DOD report specifically notes that China is increasingly interested in ballistic missile defense. China’s massive surface-to-air missile force, one of the largest in the world, already includes some capacity to defend against tactical ballistic missiles. The report notes that China is also engaging in research and development aimed at exo-atmospheric interceptions, including a January 2010 test.

***Continuity in Military Leadership.*** Another factor that may be significant is that three senior officers are expected to retain their positions on the Central Military Commission (which oversees the entire Chinese military) in 2012, as they will not have reached mandatory retirement age:

- General Chang Wanquan, head of the General Armaments Department;
- Admiral Wu Shengli, the commander of the PLAN; and
- General Xu Qiliang, the commander of the PLAAF.

While it is likely that this is coincidental, the resulting effect may nonetheless be substantial, as the three officers are from some of the most technologically oriented parts of the PLA. By retaining their

positions beyond the 2012 power transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping, they are likely to provide continuity both for key research and development projects and for doctrinal shifts within the navy and air force and possibly space forces as well.

***Military-to-Military Contacts.*** The chapter devoted to discussing U.S. military contacts with China provides a very American view of such contacts, noting that the U.S. “sees value in sustained and reliable military ties” and hopes that such contacts will, first, help “build cooperative capacity” between the two militaries and then “dispel misconceptions and encourage common ground.”

The chapter fails, however, to provide much evidence that the Chinese share this view. Indeed, where the rest of the report specifically tries to provide insight into Chinese views on various aspects of military developments and capabilities, that appears to be mostly absent when discussing military-to-military relations.

But even the downplaying cannot avoid that “China has demonstrated occasional signs of assertiveness in Asia” or that “the United States and China continue to hold differing views over the rights of coastal states in the waters and airspace beyond their territorial seas.”<sup>5</sup>

***Implications for the U.S.*** It would be difficult to read the 2011 report and remain sanguine about China’s military capabilities relative to the U.S. or its allies and friends in the region.

- ***Preserve advanced war-fighting capabilities.*** Perhaps the greatest mistake of the Gates era was believing that the U.S. could afford to neglect its capabilities in high-intensity combat. While understandable, given the two conflicts that confronted the U.S., in the end, it merely provided the PRC with an opportunity to close some of the gaps. The growing range of PLA capabilities would argue for revisiting some of the Gates-era

1. U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2011, at [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2011\\_cmpr\\_final.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2011_cmpr_final.pdf) (September 13, 2011).

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 27, 47.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.

decisions, especially ending the F-22 production line even as the less capable F-35's costs have skyrocketed.

- **Sustain research and development.** In this light, the U.S. cannot afford to fall behind China's steadily improving forces. Today's research and development efforts will determine what soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines will field in a decade. As the PRC invests more into space, counterspace, and cyber as well as more traditional air, land, and sea capabilities, the U.S. needs to preserve its own defense industrial base through not only acquisitions but also a robust R&D effort.
- **Maintain alliances and friendships.** A long-standing American economic and security interest has been ensuring that no hegemon rises to dominate East Asia. To that end, a key part of U.S. policy toward the region has been nurturing alliances and building friendships. This has been

facilitated by the fact that most Asian states do not trust each other—least of all the PRC. Washington should take steps—such as selling arms to key American partners such as Japan, the Philippines, and Taiwan—that will help maintain a close U.S. relationship with the region.

**Take Notice.** The 2011 report provides little support for the Obama Administration's reluctance to challenge China's rise, as it enumerates the various ways the PLA's improvements continue unabated. Indeed, the Chinese military "has closed important technological gaps and achieved some capabilities that are on par with or exceed global standards."<sup>6</sup>

Congress and the White House should take notice of this report before they slash the DOD budget. The U.S. cannot afford to ignore a rising China that threatens its neighbors.

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 27.