

Military Modernization

WHAT IS DRIVING CHINA'S MILITARY BUILDUP?

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Background

- China has justified its military modernization as the reasonable action of a major power seeking to update antiquated weapons systems and equipment and rationalize an outdated military to parallel the country's economic advances.
- China's military modernization has been driven by
 - the need to ensure the protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, which has translated in large part into preparations for a Taiwan scenario; and
 - observations of U.S. military operations over the last decade, including the 1991 Gulf War and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, which were wake-up calls to the Chinese leadership and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) concerning their ability to handle short duration, high-intensity military campaigns.
- In 1993, Jiang Zemin, then Chinese Communist Party secretary general and chairman of the Central Military Commission, promulgated a new national military strategy that launched China into a period of focused and sustained military modernization that continues today.
- China's leadership has taken a holistic approach to its military modernization that cuts across every facet of activity within the armed forces. Beijing's approach can be divided into three pillars of reform and modernization:
 - Development, procurement, acquisitions, and fielding of new weapons systems, technologies, and combat capabilities;
 - Institutional and systemic reforms; and
 - Development of new warfighting doctrines.

Current Situation

- China's 2008 defense white paper (released January 2009) reaffirmed the concept of preparing to fight "local wars under conditions of informationization," demonstrating Beijing's recognition of information technology's growing importance in modern warfare as reflected in U.S. military operations over the past decade.
- The 2008 white paper also affirmed China's "no first use" and minimum deterrence (assured counterattack) nuclear weapons policy, and revealed some new details about the PLA's nuclear arsenal and strategic doctrine, a subject about which Beijing remains largely nontransparent.
- China is focusing on anti-access, area-denial strategies, procuring platforms with the capability and intention to deter, prevent, or complicate the intervention of the United States (or others) in a Taiwan scenario.
 - Recent advancements in China's space capabilities, including communications, navigation, reconnaissance, satellite, and anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, are part of ongoing efforts to be able to attack critical nodes of U.S. (and perhaps other nations') military capability, particularly in the command and control and information-related arena.
- China's security focus has shifted from continental concerns to its maritime periphery, leading to a growing emphasis on its air and naval capabilities and strategic missile forces (Second Artillery).
 - The PLA is upgrading its longer-range missiles on land and (under)sea by extending their reach, shifting from liquid- to solid-fuel, and improving precision guidance. China's long-range missiles are expected to be able to reach the entire continental United States as early as 2010.
 - The PLA has acquired advanced fighter aircraft and submarines that can play a key role in anti-access/area denial capabilities, as well as guided missile destroyers, air defense systems, and communications equipment.

Implications

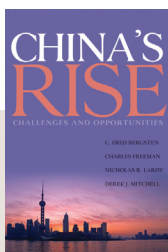
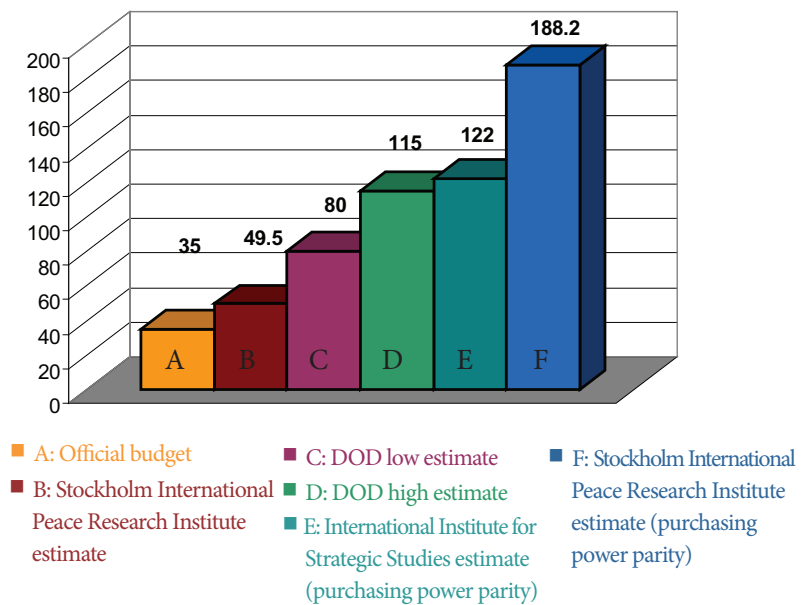
- Chinese leaders know that the PLA is not likely to become a “peer competitor” or overtake the U.S. armed forces in operational capability any time soon.
- China does seek to focus on niche capabilities and vulnerabilities of the United States at least to deter, complicate, and delay, if not defeat, U.S. intervention in a Taiwan scenario, while more broadly preventing the United States and its allies from containing China’s development through military action or intimidation.
- Although a Taiwan scenario may serve as a leading motivator for China’s military modernization, operational capabilities developed in the process need not be confined to Taiwan but may have broader applications to assert Chinese interests beyond the Taiwan Strait. For instance, the PLA Navy sent ships to the coast of Somalia in 2008-2009 in response to piracy, its first operational deployment outside Asia.
- The current trajectory of China’s modernization puts the PLA on a potential path of becoming for the first time one of the most operationally capable military forces in the Asia-Pacific region, yet one whose ultimate strategic goals remain uncertain. The impact on the regional balance of power will require, at least, greater transparency to reassure other states concerned about the rising giant.

FACTS

- China’s official 2008 defense budget: \$58.8 billion (+17.6 percent change over 2007)
- China’s military comprises four services (distributed across seven military regions): the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), the PLA Navy (PLAN), the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), and the Second Artillery (nuclear weapons and missiles).
- China’s active-duty military personnel numbered 2.1 million in 2007, down from more than 3 million in 1990. Reductions are ongoing as China puts priority attention on technology over numbers. Nonetheless, the paramilitary People’s Armed Police, which can support ground force operations, number approximately 660,000.
- China also has around 10 million–15 million organized militia members throughout the country.
- Leading sources of China’s arms imports for 2000–2007: Russia, Ukraine, France, UK, and Germany (according to SIPRI data)
- Leading recipients of China’s arms exports for 2000–2007: Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Burma (according to SIPRI data)

China’s military budget is open to significant debate, given the lack of transparency in the country’s military establishment and its tendency to underreport defense spending. Beijing excludes a number of defense items from the budget: foreign arms procurement expenditures, expenses related to the People’s Armed Police, funding for nuclear weapons stockpiles and the Second Artillery, earnings from military commercial ventures and foreign arms sales, defense industry and conversion rate subsidies, defense-related R&D, and operations and maintenance costs shared with local, provincial, or regional governments.

COMPETING STATISTICS ON CHINA’S MILITARY EXPENDITURES, 2006 (US\$ BILLIONS)



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:
SEE CHAPTER 9: “CHINA’S MILITARY MODERNIZATION”
IN *CHINA’S RISE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES*
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