

China's Overstretched Military

Despite the dramatic growth of China's military power since the early 1990s, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), as all branches of China's armed forces are collectively known, remains overstretched as it seeks to address the wide range of missions it is called upon to perform. "China threat" theorists worry that the PLA poses a more significant challenge to the United States and China's neighbors than it did twenty years ago, and they are right. Yet the Chinese military is far from able to successfully carry out all its most pressing military tasks within China's borders and in its immediate neighborhood, and has only begun to project significant force beyond the Asia-Pacific.¹ The real test for the PLA will be how adept it proves to be at bringing together new weapon systems, equipment, and formations in response to one or more serious instances of wartime or peacetime contingencies—a broad set of requirements the Chinese have dubbed "Diversified Military Tasks."²

Since its earliest days, the PLA has been more than just a fighting force. It is often expected to shoulder economic and political responsibilities. Until a major 2004 speech by China's commander-in-chief Hu Jintao, however, there had never been a coherent initiative to integrate noncombat missions into the corpus of PLA doctrine. Addressing the Central Military Commission (CMC), Hu formally articulated a set of four extremely broad mission areas for the armed forces, subsequently dubbed the "New Historic Missions": "guarantee" the "ruling position" of the Chinese Communist Party; safeguard China's "national development"; protect China's "national interests"; and preserve "world peace."³ These quickly became part of the lexicon of official Chinese defense documents and authoritative writings.

Andrew Scobell is a Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation. Andrew J. Nathan is the Class of 1919 Professor of Political Science, Columbia University. This article is drawn from their forthcoming book, *China's Search for Security* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

Copyright © 2012 Center for Strategic and International Studies
The Washington Quarterly • 35:4 pp. 135–148
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2012.726438>

“New” was a misnomer in the sense that these missions were not really new to China’s military. The new part came in that these peacetime responsibilities were no longer relegated to a residual category, as the PLA focused in the 21st century on preparing to fight “Local Wars Under Conditions of Informatization,” or how China’s military forces are to supposed to wage limited wars in the information age. Indeed, many soldiers were concerned that these “new” missions meant the PLA would be pulled in too many different directions. Senior leaders, from CMC Chair Hu on down, made a coordinated effort to reassure their subordinates that greater attention to non-war-fighting missions would not detract from their combat readiness: warfare would remain the PLA’s “core” task.⁴

The expansive tasks Hu outlined can be better understood when recast as three specific missions the PLA is expected to perform, plus a possible fourth in the future. Firstly, within China’s borders, the PLA must be able to participate with other agencies to maintain domestic stability. Secondly, at the borders, the PLA must be prepared to defend the country’s territorial integrity, which means defending territory that the PRC already holds from being attacked. It also involves preventing moves by rival claimants to consolidate control over territory that the PLA claims but does not hold, such as Taiwan. Thirdly, beyond the borders, the PLA is charged with maintaining the capability to deter nuclear attack by the United States or any other nuclear power. As these three sets of capabilities are consolidated, the PLA is likely to assume a fourth mission of projecting power into regions beyond China’s immediate periphery. How future leaders define this fourth mission will depend on their assessment of the geostrategic challenges China faces at that time.

These missions are all top priorities for the PLA. However, in carrying them out, the PLA is expected to assume numerous duties at or well beyond the country’s borders. The overall effect is mission overload and military overstretch.

The PLA’s “Domestic Drag”

Starting in the 1980s, the PLA’s domestic security role was codified in legal documents. The 1982 Constitution allowed the State Council or the National People’s Congress (NPC) Standing Committee to *impose* martial law, but gave no further guidance about the operations of troops to *maintain* martial law. In 1996 and 1997, the NPC adopted the Law on Martial Law and the National Defense Law, respectively. The former authorized the imposition of martial law in cases of “serious turmoil, riots or disturbances that endanger national unity, security, or public security.” The latter highlighted that the People’s Armed Police (PAP) had the primary mission for maintaining order, but said that the PLA “may assist in maintaining public order.” In 2004, a constitutional amendment replaced the legal term martial law, burdened with negative

baggage from 1989, with the more innocuous-sounding state of emergency. Three years later, the NPC adopted the Emergency Response Law, which defines emergencies broadly enough to include not only nonpolitical events but also threats to social stability. The law authorizes the PLA as necessary to set up security cordons and checkpoints; control traffic; guard key installations; control fuel, power, and water supplies; and use force to quell resistance.

The PLA's top mission and highest priority for China's communist leaders—listed first in the New Historic Missions—is to serve as the ultimate backup for other security forces to protect the ruling regime against domestic challenges. This responsibility constitutes a “domestic drag” in that it inhibits the PLA's ability to concentrate on external missions. Despite significant cuts in PLA land power over the course of several decades, China's military in 2012 remains manpower-intensive and ground heavy, attributes which make little sense for a PLA preparing for high-tech warfare in which air, naval, space, and cyber assets have increasing import. According to official Chinese figures, personnel costs comprise approximately one-third of the total defense budget.

The prominence of the PLA's internal mission shows in its deployment. The ground forces comprise approximately 70 percent of total manpower (1.6 of 2.25 million). Even though each of China's seven military regions faces a potential battlefield directly across its borders, including India and Russia among others, most troops are not deployed close to the borders but distributed widely across the landscape in camps located in and around China's major population centers. Within each major municipality, a garrison command liaisons with local civilian authorities and coordinates units stationed in and around the city, including paramilitary PAP units, reserve components, and militia forces.⁵

Other agencies have more direct responsibilities in this mission, such as the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of State Security, and the paramilitary PAP (the military had gladly relinquished its internal security duties to the PAP under Deng Xiaoping's leadership in the 1980s) but the PLA still serves as the final line of domestic defense. It is the ultimate bulwark of regime survival. For example, the military has repeatedly been mobilized for action or placed on alert to back up the PAP. This occurred in 1989 when the PLA supported paramilitary units that suppressed demonstrations in Lhasa (Tibet), and then again in Beijing. In the latter case, PLA troops replaced PAP riot-control units who failed to manage the situation. The paramilitary police have since been strengthened and are routinely called upon to deal with disturbances in locales across China. Nevertheless, in

Protecting against domestic challenges inhibits the PLA's ability to concentrate on external missions.

particularly serious cases, such as the 2008 unrest in Lhasa and the 2009 disturbances in Urumqi, Xinjiang, the PAP continues to call upon the PLA.

These security duties within China's borders, and the boots on the ground they require, serve to internally overburden and overstretch the PLA. This in turn creates a distraction from missions at or beyond China's borders by reducing the military units and funding available for such contingencies.

Spread Thin to Defend National Territory

The PLA must defend nearly 14,000 miles of land border and 9,000 miles of coastline.

The PLA also faces a variety of challenges in carrying out missions at China's borders. Because of the length and contested nature of those borders and China's

formidable array of potential enemies, the PLA must defend Beijing's claims to a host of territories all around China's periphery—this equates to nearly 14,000 miles of land border and 9,000 miles of coastline.

The first challenge comes in the PLA's historic defense-in-depth mission, which occupied its primary attention during the Cold War, including the Sino-Soviet

dispute, and continues to hold an important place on the PLA's agenda. The potential future enemy—most likely the United States reacting to a PRC assault on Taiwan, but perhaps a scenario involving Japan, India, or even Russia—is considered less likely to invade with ground troops and more likely to use air power to strike air and naval bases, missile sites, and other targets deep within Chinese territory. The military regions accordingly give great attention to training in the use of anti-aircraft artillery and developing integrated air defenses. Through a nationwide system of National Defense Mobilization Commissions, established in 1994, local governments as well as their counterparts in the military regions coordinate the militia with PAP and PLA forces in training to resist attack or invasion.

The second challenge involves preemptive strike preparation. The PLA is prepared to strike at forces beyond China's borders, which are perceived to present an imminent threat of attack, or are already conducting probes on territory that China controls. During the Cold War, the PLA employed such preemptive force four times: against U.S. troops in Korea in 1950; India in 1962; the USSR in 1969; and Vietnam in 1979. Today, land border threats remain, although they have been noticeably reduced. While relations between Beijing and New Delhi have thawed and confidence-building measures have lowered tensions, territorial disputes are unresolved and border incidents occur

periodically. China is also sensitive over its border with North Korea, which has been extremely porous in recent years. Furthermore, Beijing must stand ready to conduct at least a limited military intervention into North Korea to protect China's interests if the Pyongyang regime collapses. Other land borders must also be protected against infiltrators and refugees, including those with the three Central Asian states that adjoin Xinjiang—Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—and with Burma, Laos, and Nepal. Primary responsibility for border security in peacetime lies with the Ministry of Public Security and the PAP, but again, the PLA plays a key support role. Each military region must maintain the capability to deal with more serious contingencies by responding either defensively or preemptively. Limited interventions in countries around China's periphery are conceivable if vital interests—such as the safety of Chinese citizens or access to energy resources—come under threat.

Thirdly, the PLA must be prepared to defend PRC claims to disputed territories. Although some of these are on land (such as Arunachal Pradesh, held by India but claimed by China), most are in the East and South China Seas. The Navy clashed with Vietnamese forces over disputed territory in the South China Sea in 1974 and 1988, confronted Filipino forces in the 1990s, conducted maneuvers in the vicinity of the Senkaku Islands in the 1990s and the 2000s, and conducted a range of other operations in the South China Sea throughout the past decade. A recent standoff also occurred between Chinese and Philippine maritime vessels in mid-2012 near Scarborough Shoal.

Assisting the PLA Navy in this mission is an array of other entities, including the Coast Guard, the State Fisheries Administration, the State Oceanographic Administration, and the Marine Surveillance Service (and sometimes commercial vessels that some analysts think may be under PLA Navy command). An important priority along the coast has been to push back against what China believes are illegitimate incursions by U.S. Navy and Air Force craft in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The PRC takes the position that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) forbids another power to conduct military surveillance anywhere within China's 200-nautical-mile EEZ or along its continental shelf, which according to Beijing extends all the way west past Okinawa. The United States, which has not ratified the convention but says it observes its provisions, holds that UNCLOS gives it the broad freedom to conduct surveillance operations throughout these same waters. Differing interpretations of UNCLOS have also triggered a series of confrontations between Chinese security forces and U.S. air as well as sea craft. The highest profile incidents have been the 2001 mid-air collision between a Chinese jet fighter and a U.S. Navy EP-3 surveillance aircraft 70 miles from Hainan Island, and the 2009 harassment of USNS *Impeccable* by an array of Chinese security vessels some 75 miles off the Chinese coast.

China lives in a difficult neighborhood: twenty countries sit immediately adjacent. No other country except Russia has as many contiguous neighbors. These neighbors include seven of the fifteen most populous countries in the world (India, Pakistan, Russia, Japan, Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam—each having a population of over 89 million) and five countries with which China has been at war in the last 70 years (Russia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and India). China has also had border disputes of some kind since 1949 with every one of its twenty immediate neighbors. With no formal allies save one (a self-absorbed North Korea), the PLA cannot count on the help of others in defending Chinese territory.

Taking Taiwan: A Bridge Too Far?

Perhaps most challenging of all for the PLA is that it must singlehandedly prepare to assert the PRC's sovereignty over Taiwan, in case Beijing's long-term peaceful unification strategy fails to work.

Until it is resolved, the PLA considers Taiwan its primary warfighting scenario.

Until the Taiwan problem is resolved, the PLA considers Taiwan its primary warfighting scenario. Preparation for this task has absorbed the lion's share of the military modernization effort since the mid-1990s.

The challenge is daunting. Geography poses the first obstacle. Winning control of the air, securing sea access across the turbulent 100-mile wide Taiwan Strait—which is characterized by idiosyncratic tides and frequent bad weather—and conducting amphibious landings on Taiwan's rocky shores all present significant operational challenges.

Second, the PLA expects to face the resistance of Republic of China (ROC) forces. Despite personnel reductions, Taiwan's military remains one of the twenty largest armed forces in the world, with some 270,000 active-duty troops and a defense budget of some \$10 billion. Several hundred sophisticated, U.S.-built PAC-2 and PAC-3 surface-to-air missiles defend the island against missile attack. Taiwan possesses more than 50 French *Mirage* fighter jets, approximately 150 U.S. F-16s, and 130 Indigenous Defense Fighters to protect the island's air space. The ROC Navy continues to develop more advanced versions of its own *Hsiung-Feng* III antiship missile and to acquire from the United States electronic warfare and early-warning/reconnaissance planes. It also possesses a modest but capable force of U.S. and French-built destroyers (4) and frigates (22), missile boats (61), and a handful of diesel submarines.⁶

Third, the PLA anticipates an American intervention, which despite a U.S. policy of “strategic ambiguity,” is understood by most Washington decisionmakers to be mandated by the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act and other policy statements. At a minimum, this intervention would presumably include dispatching aircraft carrier strike groups and aircraft from U.S. bases in the Asia–Pacific to repel an attack on Taiwan. Nor can the PLA overlook the possibility of unintended escalation beyond the confines of the Taiwan Strait to parts of the mainland or neighboring countries allied with the United States. To counter the expected U.S. intervention, China has developed what the Pentagon calls an “anti-access/area denial” (A2AD) strategy which uses a variety of modern weaponry to deny U.S. forces access to the Western Pacific.⁷ Although Chinese A2AD would present a real challenge to American forces, its strategies are difficult to implement and will be countered by upgraded U.S. capabilities that are taking shape under the Pentagon’s recently announced concept of “AirSea Battle.”⁸

Facing these obstacles, if it must attack Taiwan, the PLA has prepared itself to use a mixture of elements from three generic campaign options: a blockade of the island, missile attacks, and an amphibious landing. Some believe the PLA may also have prepared a decapitation option—a coup against the ROC’s leadership by agents prepositioned on the island—but there is no way to know.⁹ Any combination of the four strategies presents not only tremendous military difficulties but grave political risks for China including turning the Taiwanese public irrevocably against any form of unification, spurring a U.S. shift to a policy tilted more to containment than engagement, contributing to the remilitarization of Japan, driving most of Southeast Asia into the arms of the United States, and putting India decisively on its guard. Chinese policymakers still prefer, and indeed expect, the political, diplomatic, and economic prongs of their strategy to work, but do not believe they will achieve success without a robust and fully credible military option which the PLA must prepare.

Stretching “Beyond Taiwan”¹⁰

If and when the Taiwan issue is settled in China’s favor, the PLA’s position will look very different: it will possess whatever remains of the impressive military capabilities created for the battle over the island, and the primary obstacle to projecting naval and air power south and east from the mainland will be gone. Depending on the nature of its arrangement with the Taiwan authorities, the PLA may be able to use Taiwan’s ports and airfields to extend the reach of its navy and air force 200 miles farther out into the western Pacific. The PLA might be able to cooperate with—or even absorb—the ROC’s armed forces, including

its fighter planes and pilots, anti-ship and other missiles, frigates, and advanced communications technology. In all, as PRC strategists would see it, a decades-long American policy to constrain China (whether intentionally or not) would at this point come to an end.

How China uses this potential opportunity will depend on how the Taiwan problem is settled. If it is by force, many PLA and Taiwan assets will be destroyed. China's neighbors and the United States will likely view China as dangerous and will unite more strongly to resist Beijing's next moves. If the Taiwan question is settled peacefully by negotiation—the outcome that PRC strategy aims for—the PLA assets which were built up for the attack on Taiwan will be fully available. China's neighbors and the United States may likely accept the leap forward in China's strategic position as inevitable and legitimate.

The PLA has been looking beyond Taiwan for some three decades already. Some of its naval strategists envisioned future uses for an increasingly capable maritime service—for example, in 1982 then-commander of the PLA Navy, Admiral Liu Huaqing, articulated a grand strategic vision whereby the Chinese navy would expand its reach into the western Pacific and beyond.¹¹ Liu insisted that the goals of this strategy were defensive, to protect China from coastal attack and to defend its maritime territorial claims. He suggested that in a first phase, by 2000, the PLA Navy would extend its area of operations in the near

seas to reach the “First Island Chain,” comprising the Kuril Islands, Japan, the Ryukyus, Taiwan, the Philippines, Borneo, and Natuna Besar. In the second phase, by 2020, the PLA Navy would extend its operational reach to the “Second Island Chain,” reaching to the Bonins, the Marianas, and the Carolines. Finally, by 2050, China would become a global sea power on

For the foreseeable future, military power projection will likely entail a largely symbolic presence.

par with the U.S. Navy. To date, the PLA Navy's activities and actual presence beyond the East and South China seas have kept with the timeline Liu projected. For the foreseeable future, military power projection into the Pacific and beyond will likely entail a largely symbolic presence—showing the flag through periodic port visits and humanitarian assistance on a modest scale.

The PLA has also begun to look beyond combat operations to give attention to non-war-fighting tasks inside and outside its borders which produce political influence and foster goodwill. For these operations, it has adopted the term “Military Operations Other Than War” (MOOTW), coined by the U.S. military, but has interpreted the concept even more broadly to encompass significant domestic duties consistent with PLA traditions. Military leaders have

seized upon MOOTW as a means of reminding the CCP and the Chinese citizenry of the PLA's central place in China's rise. At home, the PLA has toiled in humanitarian assistance efforts in disasters such as floods, snowstorms, and the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Abroad, MOOTW help to justify continued sizeable defense outlays even as the likelihood of war has decreased, promote a positive image for the PLA to counter foreign perceptions of a growing Chinese military threat, contribute to dealing with non-traditional security threats, and provide valuable peacetime operational experience. For example, a 300-bed hospital ship, the *Peace Ark*, commissioned in 2008, plied the coasts of South Asia and East Africa in 2010 and journeyed to Latin America in 2011, treating locals and spreading goodwill.

Chinese leaders may want the PLA to conduct armed operations around the country's periphery in the future. Unrest, civil war, or state failure in Korea, Burma, or Central Asia may draw China in to evacuate its citizens, protect its investments in oil fields or gas pipelines deemed vital to national security, prevent flows of refugees, or stabilize local regimes. Or the PRC might intervene to prevent another major power—the United States, India, or Russia—from taking advantage of a crisis or change of government somewhere on China's periphery.

Increasingly, the PLA may be ordered on missions far away from China—perhaps even outside of Asia—to protect economic interests and concentrations of citizens. Since 1992, China has deployed more than 17,000 personnel to participate in nineteen peacekeeping missions around the world. Although these units are small, they have developed some initial expertise in operating at great distances from the homeland. In 2006, the Foreign Ministry chartered four aircraft to pick up some four hundred PRC citizens stranded in the Solomon Islands by civil unrest. In 2008, China deployed two destroyers and a supply ship to participate in a multinational mission to protect Chinese and other countries' oil tankers and merchant shipping as they entered and exited the Gulf of Aden. In 2011, it used several PLA Air Force transports as well as dozens of chartered commercial aircraft and ships to evacuate some thirty thousand Chinese construction workers from strife-torn Libya. All these missions were modest in scope, involved no fighting, and sought only to protect economic interests and personnel. But as China's investments increase outside of Asia, there may be more locations where such missions become necessary, and these missions may require force.

Moreover, the PLA may find itself tasked with securing China's energy imports and the rest of its foreign trade. This flow of commerce depends on sea lanes that reach China all the way from the Middle East and the coast of Africa to the west, as well as from the North and South American coasts to the east. Most vulnerable to disruption—as well as closest to China—are the Straits

of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok, through which traffic from the west normally enters the South China Sea. Of course, ships might circumnavigate this body of water, but travel time would be lengthened by many days. For its sea-lane security, China depends on the U.S. Navy, aided by the maritime services of the littoral states (Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore) and Australia. Passing across the Indian Ocean, Chinese shipping depends on the U.S. and Indian navies for protection. It would not be realistic for China to replace these other navies, but Chinese policymakers may see reasons to try to play a role in protecting their own routes of commerce, as they are doing in the antipiracy mission in the Gulf of Aden. The Chinese navy might increase its influence in the Indian Ocean by using what are now commercial ports that China is building in Kyaukphyu in Burma, Hambantota in Sri Lanka, and Gwadar in Pakistan—a series of facilities that U.S. analysts have labeled the “string of pearls.”

None of these “pearls” compares in magnitude or sophistication to the U.S. military base maintained on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, nor are they nearly as numerous as the ports to which the U.S. Navy has access throughout the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The PLA Navy’s first aircraft carrier, the *Varyag*, likely to be commissioned soon, will be nowhere near as capable as U.S. Navy carriers. The *Varyag* will likely serve initially only as a training vessel, and in the coming years will probably only operate in nearby waters. For the foreseeable future, despite Chinese attempts to expand its naval reach, the United States will continue to dominate.

Nuclear Deterrence: It’s Getting Complicated

Finally, nuclear deterrence used to be relatively simple for Beijing. During the Cold War, China focused on deterring one or both of the two superpowers; during the first decade after, it focused on deterring the United States. But in the early 21st century, nuclear deterrence has become more complicated. There are more nuclear powers—including India, North Korea, and Pakistan, all of which border China—and more proliferation of ballistic missiles. Japan and Taiwan are fielding missile defense systems. Together, these developments threaten to erode or call into question the robustness and effectiveness of Chinese deterrence capability.

China has developed a small but capable nuclear-tipped ICBM force whose sole function appears to be to deter nuclear attack, most prominently by the United States, but potentially by India, Russia (if relations were to sour), or Japan or Taiwan (if either were to develop a nuclear option). In addition to these, the Second Artillery, the PLA’s strategic rocket force, now controls hundreds of short- and medium-range conventional missiles—more than 1,000 SRBMs are deployed in the vicinity of the Taiwan Strait alone. As a result, along

with the other PLA services, the Second Artillery has multiple and disparate responsibilities.

All of China's effective nuclear arsenal is land-based; as of 2012, the two classes of submarines that might theoretically be used to launch ICBMs do not appear operational. China possesses an estimated 40 ICBMs capable of reaching U.S. territory. The number has remained relatively stable for some time, suggesting that China does not seek to expand the size of its ICBM arsenal, but it is moving forward to harden silos, to use solid fuel (which provides quicker launch times), and to build new types of ICBMs capable of being mounted on mobile launchers with improved guidance and smaller warheads. Once the PLA Navy's upgraded strategic nuclear submarine force is operational, as many as five *Jin*-class nuclear submarines will enhance the country's second-strike capability, possibly extending China's range to 4,000 nautical miles.¹²

Although the intent to deter is clear, Beijing's actual nuclear doctrine is not. The PRC has never produced an official articulation of how it believes deterrence would work. The most accepted view among outside analysts is that it intends to exert what is called "minimum deterrence"—that is, to mount a force just large and survivable enough to prevent a better-armed power from initiating a nuclear attack.¹³ But others argue that China seeks to create what is called a "limited deterrent," one that is large enough to deter the launch or escalation of war in any form—not only nuclear—by an adversary. For example, limited deterrence might prevent the United States from entering a war in the Taiwan Strait. There is also, in theory, the potential for nuclear weapons to be used for actual warfighting in Korea or Taiwan, or as an element of coercive diplomacy against India or even the United States, but these possibilities seem remote. China officially adheres to a no-first-use pledge. Although there is debate within the Chinese military establishment about the merits of this approach and whether it should be reinterpreted, the pledge costs China nothing, promotes a positive image, and makes military sense for a power that has fewer nuclear weapons than its main rivals.

Too Much on the PLA's Plate?

Altogether, the PLA is severely challenged by all that it has to undertake. Domestic security will continue to absorb a significant part of the military's effort, and the army will accordingly be deployed largely within China's borders. Protecting national territory from invasion and supporting territorial claims with credible military options will remain high on the military's task list, Taiwan above all else. Missions beyond Taiwan, whatever they will be, are more likely to focus on areas closer to China's periphery and less likely to develop in a major way in more distant theaters. Nuclear deterrence will remain a priority and become more

Altogether, the PLA is severely challenged by all that it has to undertake.

complicated if China's neighbors continue to develop their arsenals and missile defenses. Even as Chinese military power grows, it is tied down by many nearby challenges. It cannot mount a challenge of geostrategic proportions to the militaries of major rivals unless those rivals make their own decisions to yield.

Even as the PLA modernizes, other militaries in the region and beyond are also improving technology, increasing capabilities, upgrading training, and adjusting strategies. Japan stands out as a country that has quietly developed a suite of cutting-edge space technologies: in addition to Ballistic Missile Defense capabilities developed in cooperation with the United States, Japan is working on reusable launch vehicles (i.e., space planes); multifunctional satellites that provide missile early-warnings and help with navigation, communication, and targeting; warhead reentry technologies that can advance the use of missiles; unmanned aerial vehicles; and technologies for space situational awareness that show concern for possible future conflict in space. South Korea is modernizing its military, including its navy, although focusing its efforts on the threat from North Korea. India is upgrading its navy, although most of its defense efforts are focused on dealing with Pakistan. Vietnam and other member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are upgrading their militaries. The littoral states around the Straits of Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok are improving their navies, reluctant to concede much responsibility to outsiders for security along their shores.

Above all, the United States continues to improve its capabilities in the region around China despite the strain imposed by operations elsewhere in the world. During a 2011 visit to East Asia, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta assured U.S. allies that, after a decade of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States "will always maintain a strong presence in the Pacific."¹⁴ Also in 2011, President Barack Obama made even stronger assurances during a visit to Australia, insisting that the United States was a "Pacific power and we are here to stay."¹⁵ He backed the rhetoric with the announcement of an agreement to station U.S. Marines in northern Australia. According to the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), U.S. defense posture in the Asia-Pacific and elsewhere will remain "forward stationed and [with] rotationally deployed forces, capabilities and equipment; [a] supporting network of infrastructure and facilities; [and] a series of treaty, access, transit, and status-protection agreements and arrangements with allies and key partners."¹⁶ Doctrinal and technological innovations coming online significantly enhance the accuracy and expand the reach of U.S. intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and strike capabilities.

In effect, the Asia–Pacific is experiencing a permanent, almost routinized, multilateral arms race of which the much-discussed growth of the Chinese military is only a part. In this environment of change, episodes of friction among militaries will continue to occur and shifts will take place in the relative balance of

The Asia–Pacific is experiencing a multilateral arms race of which China is only a part.

power in various theaters. But unless other nations pull back from their own programs of military development, China's overstretched military simply cannot expel other major militaries from China's own region, still less from regions farther away.

Notes

1. Department of Defense, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2011," Annual Report to Congress, 2011, http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2011_CMPR_Final.pdf.
2. The first authoritative public articulation of "Diversified Military Tasks" was in the 2006 Chinese defense white paper. These have been re-stated in the 2008 and 2010 iterations of this document. The 2006 version can be found at: Information Office of the State Council, People's Republic of China, "China's National Defense in 2006," December 29, 2006, <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/wp2006.html>.
3. The text of Hu Jintao's speech has never been made public, but it has been widely cited. For a succinct summary and analysis, see Daniel Hartnett, "China's Military and Security Activities Abroad," testimony before the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission, 111th Cong. 1st sess., March 4, 2009 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, April 2009), 5–55.
4. See, for example, Staff Commentator, "Emphasize strengthening the building of core military capabilities" [in Chinese], Jiefangjun bao [Liberation Army Daily], March 18, 2009.
5. By comparison, U.S. ground forces compose about 53 percent of total manpower. U.S. forces are deployed in a wide variety of locales across the fifty U.S. states and dependent territories as well as overseas. They are of course geared to undertake or support missions overseas rather than at home.
6. Department of Defense, Military and Security Developments.
7. Roger Cliff et al., *Entering the Dragon's Lair: Chinese Anti access Strategies and Their Implications for the United States* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2007).
8. The most complete explication of this concept to date is Jan van Tol with Mark Gunzinger, Andrew F. Krepinevich and Jim Thomas, *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010).
9. Department of Defense, Military and Security Developments, pp. 18–19.
10. The phrase "beyond Taiwan" comes from Pentagon analyses. For detailed discussion, see Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Beyond the Strait: Chinese*

Military Missions Other Than Taiwan (Carlisle, PA.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2009).

11. Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010), pp. 174–178.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 109,96.
13. Jeffrey Lewis, *The Minimum Means of Reprisal: China's Search for Security in the Nuclear Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007); M. Taylor Fravel and Evan S. Medeiros, "China's Search for Assured Retaliation: The Evolution of China's Nuclear Strategy and Force Structure," *International Security* 35, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 48–87.
14. U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, speech, Yakota Air Base in Japan, October 24, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4911>.
15. Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, "Remarks By President Obama to the Australian Parliament," November 17, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>.
16. Department of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review Report," February 2010, p. 62, http://www.defense.gov/qdr/images/QDR_as_of_12Feb10_1000.pdf.