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China's Military Rise Means End of US Hegemony?

By Doug Bandow



U.S. military spending continues to increase even though conventional threats against the United States are de minimis. China is the leading contender for Enemy Number 1.

But if Beijing poses a threat, it is to U.S. domination of East Asia, not the country itself. Only the latter is worth fighting for. Commonly expressed is fear of growing Chinese military outlays.

The Pentagon highlighted its concern with the latest annual report on the Chinese defense budget. Yet Beijing's armed forces remain dwarfed by America's military, which starts at a vastly higher base and spends several times as much.

The Pentagon report states that the United States "encourages China to participate responsibly in the international system." True enough, but how does Washington define "responsibly"?

One suspects it means accepting American military hegemony in East Asia — something with which Beijing isn't likely to agree.

The Chinese military buildup so far has been significant but measured. "The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is pursuing comprehensive transformation from a mass army designed for protracted wars of attrition on its periphery against high-tech adversaries," explains the Pentagon.

Moreover, China's "armed forces continue to develop and field disruptive military technologies, including those for anti-access/area-denial, as well as for nuclear, space, and cyber warfare, that are changing regional military balances and that have implications beyond the Asia-Pacific region."

Yet this concerted expansion little threatens U.S. security. Only the Chinese nuclear force is theoretically able to strike America today. Beijing possesses about 60 missiles, some of limited range.

In contrast, the U.S. nuclear arsenal includes thousands of sophisticated warheads on hundreds of missiles. Beijing is going to have to spend years to build a modest force simply capable of deterring America.

Of course, China intends to move beyond its own shores. China is "developing longer-range capabilities that have implications beyond Taiwan," which "could allow China to project power to ensure access to resources or enforce claims to disputed territories," warns the Pentagon.

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A naval parade of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy warships and aircraft held in waters off China's port city of Qingdao, east China's Shandong Province, April 23. The parade displays 25 naval vessels and 31 aircraft of the PLA Navy, including at least one of the country's nuclear submarines, as part of a celebration to mark the 60th anniversary of its founding. / Xinhua-Yonhap

However, notes the Department of Defense (DOD), China's military "continues to face deficiencies in inter-service cooperation and actual experience in joint exercises and combat operations." Moreover, Beijing is not yet capable of "defeating a moderate-size adversary."

The Pentagon adds, "China will not be able to project and sustain small military units far beyond China before 2015, and will not be able to project and sustain large forces in combat operations far from China until well into the following decade."

In any case, China has minimal strategic conventional reach. The United States possesses 11 carrier groups to China's none. Beijing also lacks a significant strategic air capability.

East Asian countries may be at greater risk, but defending these nations — which are largely capable of protecting themselves — is not the same as defending the United States.

China's most obvious objective is to create a military capable of enforcing its will on Taiwan. However, tensions in the Taiwan Strait have eased and the DOD admits that "an attempt to invade Taiwan would strain China's untested armed forces and invite international intervention." Taipei also could do significantly more to protect itself.

In fact, Beijing's military buildup is focused on preventing the United States from attacking China. The Pentagon admits as much without explicitly saying that Beijing is focused on deterring Washington.

China has or is acquiring the ability to:

- (1) Hold large surface ships — including aircraft carriers — at risk (via quiet submarines, advanced anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), wire-guided and wake-homing torpedoes, or anti-ship ballistic missiles)
- (2) Deny the use of shore-based airfields, secure bastions and regional logistics hubs (via conventional ballistic missiles with greater ranges and accuracy, and land attack cruise missiles)
- (3) Hold aircraft at risk over or near Chinese territory or forces (via imported and domestic fourth generation aircraft, advanced long-range surface-to-air missile systems, air surveillance systems and ship-borne air defense)

Who would be sending in "large surface ships" using "shore-based airfields, secure bastions and regional logistics hubs," and deploying aircraft against China? Don't ask.

Washington has vital interests to protect, but not all of its interests are vital. Defending American territory, liberties, and people at home is vital; ensuring dominant American influence half a world away is not.

And doing the latter at acceptable cost will grow ever more difficult. By spending a fraction of the United States' defense budget, Beijing is constructing a military able to deter U.S. intervention against China.

To overcome this force Washington will have to spend far more — money which it does not have.

With China on the move, the DOD observes that "the United States continues to work with our allies and friends in the region to monitor these developments and adjust our policies accordingly."

But the resulting policy adjustment should be reducing U.S. international ambitions rather than increasing military spending. Washington should replace dominance with defense as the core of its foreign policy.

Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute. A former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan, he is the author of "Foreign Follies: America's New Global Empire" (Xulon Press). This article is adapted from the National Interest. He can be reached at ChessSet@aol.com.

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China, as is the Russian, are Paper Tigers. They are no threat to the U.S. in any capacity. The U.S. is the Number One, and will stay Number One, -----even on it's own Sick Bed. Don't you ever count America...out, or Second.

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