

1-9-2017

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Recommended Citation

Bert Chapman. "U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission: Emerging Factor in Western Pacific Strategic Policy Analysis." *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 10 (1)(2018): 7-29.

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Geopolitics, History, and International Relations 10(1)
2018, pp. 7–29, ISSN 1948-9145, eISSN 2374-4383

U.S.–CHINA ECONOMIC AND SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION: EMERGING FACTOR IN WESTERN PACIFIC STRATEGIC POLICY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT. Those studying and analyzing Western Pacific strategic trends and developments have access to multiple unclassified analyses of security trends in this region covering these waters and adjacent countries. These information resources are produced by military and government agencies from multiple countries, multinational public policy research institutions, popular and scholarly journals, and Internet resources featuring text, data, webcasts, and imagery. One of these resources is the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission established in the 2001 National Defense Authorization Act. This article argues that this organization’s analyses should be considered essential reading by civilian and military policymakers and individuals and organizations interested in understanding the continually developing and evolving factors making the Western Pacific an increasingly important factor in U.S. and international geopolitical interests. Contents of this work include scrutiny of commission annual reports, hearings, and studies produced by commission professional staff and contractors covering Western Pacific strategic issues. This bipartisan commission has achieved relative unanimity in its conclusions and its work should be consulted by all interested in Western Pacific strategic and economic issues.

Keywords: U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission; Western Pacific; China; geopolitics; Chinese military strategy; strategic analysis; U.S. national security policy

How to cite: Chapman, Bert (2018), “U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission: Emerging Factor in Western Pacific Strategic Policy Analysis,” *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 10(1): 7–29.

Received 14 December 2016 • Received in revised form 5 January 2017
Accepted 5 January 2017 • Available online 25 January 2017

Introduction

Individuals and organizations studying Western Pacific strategic trends and developments have access to multiple unclassified analyses of these waters and the countries adjacent to them. These information resources are produced by military and government agencies from multiple countries, a multinational variety of public policy research institutions, and popular and scholarly journals and Internet resources. One of these resources is the U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission and this paper argues that its analyses should be considered essential reading by civilian and military policymakers and individuals and organizations interested in understanding the continually developing and evolving factors making the Western Pacific an increasingly important factor for U.S. and international economic and geopolitical interests.

This commission was established in Section 1238 of the 2001 National Defense Authorization Act. This statute directed this organization to “monitor, investigate, and report to Congress on the national security implications of the bilateral trade and economic relationship between the United States and the People’s Republic of China.”¹ Its organic statute mandated that the Commission’s membership consist of 12 members appointed by the Speaker of the House and the Senate President Pro Tempore based on consultations with each chambers majority and minority leaders and from the chairs of these chambers Armed Services and international trade oversight committees. Commission members serve two year terms; are required to have expertise in U.S.–China relations and national security matters; they may be reappointed for additional terms of service; are provided with professional staff to carry out their responsibilities; each member has one vote; and the commission is required to submit annual classified and unclassified reports by March 1 of each year.²

Annual report contents concerning military matters are to address Sino–U.S. trade covering military systems or dual use items that can be used for military purposes; Chinese acquisition of military or dual-use technologies from the U.S. by trade, purchase, or technology transfer which may produce weapons of mass destruction proliferation or undermine international agreements or U.S. laws dealing with nonproliferation, analysis of official Chinese statements and writings concerning China’s military competition with the U.S. and Beijing’s desire to gain leverage over or cooperation with the U.S. and its Asian allies, military actions taken by China that may affect U.S. national security and the security of the U.S.’ Asian allies; the extent that China’s trade surplus with the U.S. enhances its military budget; and an overall assessment of the status of security challenges presented by China to the U.S. and whether these security challenges are increasing or decreasing from previous years.³

The Commission’s Fiscal Year 2016 budget was \$3.5 million and its 12 members were augmented by a professional support staff of 18.⁴ Its membership as of October 2016 consists of Chair Dennis C. Shea; Vice-Chair Carolyn Bartholomew; Peter Brookes; Robin Cleveland; former Senator Byron Dorgan; Jeffrey Fiedler;

former Senator Carte Goodwin; Daniel Slane, former Senator James Talent, Katherine Tobin, Michael Wessel, Dr. Larry Worzel, and Executive Director Michael Danis.⁵

During its existence, the commission has issued numerous annual reports, conducted multiple public hearings, and its staff have issued several reports documenting Western Pacific strategic developments which are accessible through its website www.uscc.gov/. Content from these annual reports, hearings, and commissioned reports will now be described and analyzed.

Annual Reports

The commission, like many U.S. Government agencies, issues annual reports documenting its work activities and containing policy recommendations as part of its congressional reporting requirements. The commission's first annual report, issued in July 2002, contains chapters on Chinese Perceptions of the United States and Strategic Thinking; Proliferation and Chinese Relations with Terrorist Sponsoring States; Cross-Strait Security Issues; The Defense Budget and the Military Economy; and Technology Transfers and Military Acquisitions Policy.⁶

Multiple recommendations were made by commissioners on the panoply of issues affecting these countries bilateral relationship including Western Pacific security interests. These recommendations include:

- The U.S. Government expanding its collection, translation, and analysis of open source Chinese language materials and making them widely available;
- The Commission recommending Congress encouraging the Defense Department to renew efforts to develop military-to-military confidence building measures in context of a strategic dialogue with China based on reciprocity, transparency; consistency, and mutual benefit;
- The U.S. should continue prohibiting satellite launch cooperation with China until Beijing implements an effective export control system consistent with its November 2000 commitment to restrict WMD proliferation and associated technologies to other countries and entities;
- DOD continuing substantive military dialogue with Taiwan and conduct exchanges on threat analysis, doctrine, and force planning;
- DOD preparing a biannual report on critical elements of the U.S. defense industrial base becoming dependent on Chinese imports or Chinese-owned companies; and
- DOD and the FBI jointly assessing Chinese targeting of sensitive U.S. weapons-related technologies, the means used for gaining access to these technologies; and the steps that have or should be taken to deny China such access to and acquisition of these technologies and capabilities.⁷

The Commission's June 1, 2007 annual report also included significant assessments of China's Western Pacific military developments. Findings included China being

likely to use irregular warfare strategies including special operations and cyber attacks against U.S. regional bases in South Korea and Taiwan and potential cyber attacks against the U.S. homeland directed against U.S. financial, energy, industry, and communications infrastructures. It noted continuing increases in Beijing's military spending which the Pentagon believes totals \$90–\$135 billion with the majority of its military expenditures targeting its naval and air forces.

Naval force augmentations include enhancing air defense and surface warfare capabilities and developing blue water naval capabilities by launching ten nuclear powered Shang class submarines. Air Force enhancements include increasing its number of SU-27 and SU-30 fighter fleet to gain air superiority over Taiwan and developing a fleet capable of integration into theater wide command, control, computers, communications, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) system.⁸

Commissioners also toured China between April 22 and May 1, 2007 that year. Their report noted that China's Deputy Foreign Minister for North American Affairs Xie Feng noted that Beijing's January 2007 destruction of a satellite claiming that this test was not conducted for changing Beijing's policies on outer space or air space. Commissioners also met with People's Liberation Army (PLA) scholars and strategists at the Academy of Military Sciences. These officers maintained that Beijing's military transformation would continue stressing informatization and focusing on modernizing air, naval, and strategic missile forces. They claimed U.S. concerns about China's modernization and lack of transparency are misplaced while maintaining that the U.S.' global strike concept is destabilizing because it threatens instead of strengthens the nuclear threshold. PLA personnel also disagreed over whether computer network attacks are an act of war.⁹

Topics addressed in the 2014 *Annual Report* include Chinese military and security issues, Beijing's military modernization, China and Asia's evolving security architecture, and recent developments in China's relationships with North Korea, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Commission conclusions from this report on Western Pacific security issues include:

- Beijing concluding the U.S.-led security East Asia security architecture does not benefit its core interests of regime preservation, economic, and social development, and territorial integrity. During 2014 Beijing's leaders began promoting a regional security vision marginalizing the U.S. and seeking to give Asians greater say in their security affairs as opposed to the existing strong network of U.S. alliances and partnerships in East Asia.
- China engaging in a sustained and substantial military buildup to shift the regional balance of power and using its increasing military advantage to gain a dominant East Asian sphere of influence.
- Beijing's security relations with Japan are deteriorating over the Senkaku Islands and grievances over Japan's wartime past. However, Beijing's relations with South Korea are improving as China seeks increased cooperation over North Korea.

Japan balances against China by increasing its military capabilities while South Korea seeks to hedge its security relations with both Washington and Beijing.

- Increasing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea (SCS) has caused Southeast Asia and Australia to build new defense relationships, strengthen military and paramilitary capabilities, and emphasize the role of regional institutions and international law to manage disputes.
- Both China and the U.S. are seeking to increase their security ties with Australia with Beijing seeking to counteract the alliance between Canberra and Washington.¹⁰

Concerning the Korean Peninsula, the commission report noted increasing tension between Beijing and Pyongyang, China's concern with the North's nuclear program and concomitant concern with possible U.S. military intervention which could be inimical to Beijing's interests, and increase refugee flows into China. This document also stressed concern about the lack of trilateral contingency communication between Beijing, Seoul, and Washington being insufficient to void accidents, miscalculations, and conflict.¹¹

Security and strategic recommendations made by the Commission for this region include Congress funding naval shipbuilding and operational efforts to increase its Asia-Pacific presence to at least 67 ships and rebalance regional homeports to 60% by 2020 in order to gain regional capacity and presence to counterbalance Beijing's increasing military capabilities and surge naval assets if a contingency occurs; Congress appointing an outside expert panel to conduct a net assessment of the Sino-American military balance and recommending the sufficiency of current U.S. military plans and budgets to address emerging security requirements; insure the sufficiency of open source collection, production, and dissemination capabilities on Chinese security issues; directing U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) to brief Congress on People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) participation in the 2014 Rim of the Pacific exercise; requiring DOD to tell Congress the reason for its military-to-military engagement planning with the PLA including future proposed programs; and directing the Government Accountability Office to compile an unclassified report, with classified annex, examining Chinese conventional and nuclear ballistic missile capabilities, intentions, and force structures.¹²

The Commission's 2015 annual report section on Sino-U.S. security relations addressed overall security and foreign affairs developments, Chinese space and counterspace programs, and its offensive missile forces.¹³ Cybersecurity received particular notice in this report with its contents noting that China has been conducting the world's largest and most intensive foreign intelligence gathering effort since at least 2009 with Beijing exfiltrating large volumes of data from U.S. networks and sharing it with Chinese competitors. Examples of sectors targeted by Chinese cyber hackers include electronics, telecommunications, robotics, data services, and satellite communications and imagery. PLA digital spy network Unit 61398 was charged by Mandiant Corporation in 2013 with systematically stealing hundreds of terabytes of data spanning 20 major industries with many of these attacks striking U.S. military, industrial, and educational targets.¹⁴

This report also noted the 2015 Chinese defense white paper and its elevation of the maritime domain in Chinese strategic thinking, placing acute emphasis on open seas protection, developing an increasingly incremental approach to attain desired territorial ambitions while avoiding conflict and limiting forceful reactions from opposing actors, that space and cyberspace have become commanding heights in emerging strategic competition, and the need for greater unification, coordination, and streamlining in civilian and military integration and defense policymaking.¹⁵

Satellite imagery referenced in this document from January 2015 indicated Chinese upgrading of existing military infrastructure on Nanji Island, which is part of an island chain of the coast of Zhejiang Province approximately 160 nautical miles from the disputed Senkaku Islands. It appears Nanji hosts a heliport with ten landing pads and wind turbines along with previously existing radar and communications infrastructure. This makes it capable of enforcing China's East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone and serve power projection purposes for coastal defense purposes.¹⁶

Commission conclusions on these security developments include continuing deterioration in Sino-U.S. Western Pacific security relations due to Beijing's aggressive behavior in the SCS, relentless cyberespionage against the U.S., and continued development of anti-access aerial denial (A2AD) capabilities seeking to restrict U.S. military freedom of movement; Beijing bolstering its ECS dispute with Japan by constructing 16 structures to facilitate natural gas exploitation in disputed waters, rapid growth in Chinese international arms exports making them competitive with those of Washington and Moscow; and a shift in the regional balance of power from Washington and its allies to Beijing.¹⁷

Subsequent conclusions derived from the commission's 2015 report include gradual acceleration of Chinese space program capability while Russian and U.S. space programs have dwindling resources and goals, Beijing's belief that its space power involves commercial, defense industry, military, and political components supporting Chinese military space, counterspace, and conventional capabilities, that advancing counterspace capabilities increases the likelihood of jeopardizing U.S. national security satellites in all orbital regimes, that China is building a foundation for future co-orbital antisatellite systems including jammers, robotic arms, kinetic kill vehicles, and lasers; and that Beijing wants to increase its ability to monitor and strike U.S. aircraft, ships, and bases as far away as Guam along with eventually extending its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capability to reach the eastern Pacific Ocean and Indian Ocean.¹⁸

Assessments derived from this treatise on Chinese missile forces are having its nuclear arsenal deter adversaries from engaging in a nuclear first strike by dissuading risk taking by such an adversary due to nuclear escalation concerns; striving to pursue a theater nuclear capability to flexibly use nuclear weapons to deescalate or favorably shape conflict direction; developing a credible second strike capability to emphasize surviving a first strike by diversifying from land-based silo systems to absorbing nuclear strikes and retaliating through ICBM's, SLBMs, and

ALBM's, developing cruise missiles that are increasingly difficult for the U.S. to detect and defend against including missiles capable of challenging U.S. Navy defenses; attempting to develop measures to improve its abilities to penetrate opposing missile defenses such as MIRV's, maneuverable reentry vehicles, and hypersonic weapons.¹⁹

Key commission force structure and strategic posture recommendations include:

- Continuing congressional support of DOD efforts to cost-effectively reduce the vulnerability of U.S. space assets by developing smaller, harder and more distributed satellites, and non-space intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets such as unmanned vehicles.
- Congress directing DOD, the Air Force, and intelligence community to jointly prepare a classified report conducting a net assessment of Chinese and U.S. counterspace capabilities. This document should include a strategic plan for deterring strikes against U.S. assets, using active and passive systems, given other countries rapid advances in kinetic and non-kinetic counterspace technology.
- Congress directing DOD to provide an unclassified assessment of PLA Second Artillery Force missile and launch inventory by type in future editions of DOD's annual reports on Chinese military power.
- Congress directing DOD to report on the potential benefits and costs of incorporating ground-launched short, medium, and intermediate conventional cruise and ballistic missile systems into the U.S.' Asia-Pacific defense force structure while also exploring how such systems could help the U.S. military sustain a cost-effective deterrence posture.
- Continuing congressional support of initiatives to harden U.S. Asia-Pacific bases, including the Pacific Airpower Resiliency Initiative, to increase the cost and uncertainty of conventional ballistic and cruise missile strikes against these targets and encourage regional stability.
- Continuing congressional support of emerging missile defense initiatives including directed energy and rail gun technologies and requiring DOD report to relevant jurisdictional committees on the status of current component sourcing plans for developing and producing directed energy weapons.²⁰

Hearings

Commission hearings are also a method where information is obtained by congressional, independent, or other executive agencies to gather information about government agency activities, expose operational failures, see congressional committees exercise their constitutional oversight and funding responsibilities, and lead to legislative revisions and recommendations enabling agencies to more effectively carry out their responsibilities.²¹

The Commission regularly conducts hearings examining how Chinese military and strategic developments impact the Western Pacific. A January 17, 2002 commission hearing examined the impact of military and dual-use technology exports

to China. George Scalise maintained that Cold War era export controls on China were counterproductive to U.S. policy goals such as democratizing China and integrating it into the global economy.²² However, Paul Godwin warned that China's lack of transparency makes assessing Chinese manufacturing and technological capabilities very tentative, asserting that China wants to threaten U.S. bases in the Western Pacific by keeping us as far away from China as possible, and asserted that over the next 50 years China wants to restrict U.S. military capabilities to approach within 600 miles of China's coast without being vulnerable to Beijing's retaliation.²³

A February 6, 2004 hearing was the commission's first of a periodic series of hearings examining China's military modernization and the cross-strait military balance with Taiwan. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Affairs Richard P. Lawless noted the U.S. provides articles and services to Taiwan enabling it to maintain sufficient self-defense capability, address perceived shortcomings in Taiwan's readiness, and maintains capabilities to assist in Taipei's defense if required. He went on to add that the U.S. opposed Taiwanese independence and China using military force to transform Taiwan's status.²⁴

Richard D. Fisher, Jr. noted that acquiring Russian military weaponry enables China wage war with the ability to increase pressure on the U.S. to sustain Western Pacific deterrence, that the PLA has now become the world's largest arms importer, and that these purchases may enhance its ability to launch successful operations against Taiwan.²⁵ Vincent Wei-Cheng Wang noted the increasing importance of asymmetric warfare in Chinese military thought stressing that technological integration and globalization creates a new type of war transcending all boundaries and limits and that China's military is developing strategies and techniques using deception, shock, and surprise to conquer Taiwan by gaining control of its information networks.²⁶

Lyle J. Goldstein noted China's significant undersea warfare expenditures, that submarines are a critical part of Beijing's ongoing naval modernization, the increasing relevance of cruise missiles in their striking power capabilities, significant enhancements in China's ballistic missile capability due to acquisition of Russian technology, and contending that Taiwan cannot defend itself from a concerted Chinese submarine campaign. Goldstein also contended that China was following the historical examples of Germany and the Soviet Union in using submarines to challenge the existing maritime preponderance of status quo naval powers.²⁷

March 29–30, 2007 commission hearings on Chinese military modernization and its effect on the U.S. and the Asia-Pacific addressed a plethora of relevant themes including PLA modernization in traditional warfare capabilities, the Taiwan Strait military balance, the PLA's information warfare, cyber operations, and other disruptive warfare capabilities, and PLA objectives in space. Testifying during this hearing Michael Vickers stressed China was likely to employ asymmetric warfare in any conflict including special operations and cyberattack against Taiwan and potentially U.S. bases and forces in that region. He went on to maintain that

emerging disruptive capabilities in nanotechnology and bioscience technology could augment new methods of clandestine and covert strategic attack.²⁸

William Schneider made the following declaration about the direction of Chinese military acquisitions:

China is acquiring modern capabilities that mimic those found in other contemporary defense establishments. China is modernizing its long-range nuclear weapons delivery systems in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The mobile land-based intercontinental DF-31 series – its upgraded land-based ICBMs – and the JL-1 submarine launched ballistic missile are counterparts to systems deployed by other major powers, though at present on a smaller scale.

The military and strategic significance of these platforms will be magnified if they are equipped with multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles. The general purpose forces, especially those suitable for expeditionary campaigns and combined ground-air operations, are also being recapitalized and modernized. Two aircraft carriers are being acquired as are the current generation of Russian combat aircraft, diesel-electric submarines, surface naval combatants, strategic airlift, airborne warning and control systems, and aerial tankers.

More advanced indigenous aircraft will soon be deployed that lever the PRC's access to advanced dual-use technologies from the United States, Europe and Japan.²⁹

U.S. Strategic Command Commander General James E. Cartwright stressed that China was “building what I would call a continuum of capability in space, all the way from low end temporary and reversible effects through kinetic effects through potentially nuclear capabilities. What is of note here is at the low end, they are not just looking at these and developing them, they have fielded a broad range of jamming anti-satellite type capabilities, position navigation and timing, and also ISR type capabilities, and they have proliferated them out in their forces to be routinized in their training and doctrine.”³⁰

Andrew Erickson stressed his belief that the PLA seeks to dominate the battle space of littorals around China with particular emphasis on the area around Taiwan. In his view this mindset is reflected in PLA developments in ballistic missile submarines, nuclear powered submarines, and landing program docks. Erickson also asserts that newer Chinese ships and aircraft give it the ability to extend its combat power further into the SCS and some of the Western Pacific and that Beijing's emerging surface combatant classes possess sophisticated air and missile guidance radars with advanced long-range surface-to-air missiles.³¹

James Lewis noted China has spent considerable effort on anti-satellite weapons and information operations which he believes Beijing intends to use to attack U.S. aircraft carriers and information operations. He also believes Chinese efforts in these areas aspire to enhance their deception and denial efforts including jamming satellite signals and spoofing targets.³²

Ehsan Ahrari stressed that China would not catch up with the U.S. in military research and development. Instead it sees asymmetric warfare as its niche and will continue looking for vulnerabilities in U.S. and allied military postures while focusing on offensive capabilities to inflict maximum military damage in the event of war.³³

The Commission's May 20, 2008 hearing addressed Chinese space and cyberspace capabilities and proliferation practices. James Mulvenon noted he regularly receives Chinese emails with malware and that Chinese military literature regularly focuses on attacking U.S. reliance on computer networks to enhance the Western Pacific's "Tyranny of Distance" by disrupting PACOM communication procedures and force response along with exploiting a perceived U.S. reluctance to incur casualties.³⁴

Henry Sokolski warned that changes China makes to its nuclear policy or nuclear modernization program could induce other Asia-Pacific nations to acquire nuclear weapons ranging from Japan to Pakistan, India, and Saudi Arabia. He went on to recommend that the U.S. encourage China to cap further production of nuclear weapons usable fuels, that the State Department pressure China to stop producing fissile materials for nuclear purposes, and that China stop producing fissionable materials for military purposes.³⁵

June 11, 2009 saw a commission hearing on the implications of China's naval modernization. Specific topics addressed included the strategic impact of PLAN modernization, operational activities, technical developments, and views from members of Congress and former Secretaries of the Navy. This hearing noted that since at least 2004, PLAN had acquired multiple new vessels and aircraft including 21 submarines, 8 destroyers, and 24 advanced fighters. Evidence was also presented of forthcoming aircraft carrier acquisition and purchases of anti-ship cruise missiles, land attack cruise missiles, and advanced naval mines. China's apparent desire to develop anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) intended to degrade the force multiplying capabilities of U.S. aircraft carriers is particularly germane to U.S. strategic and operational planning.³⁶

These developments are augmented by China's improving C4ISR capabilities, increasing professionalism and skills by Chinese military personnel, China's growing ability to deny U.S. military access to its littoral waters and the Western Pacific, and increasing advances in its naval platforms and personnel training quality increase the dangers facing forward-deployed U.S. forces requiring them to operate at greater distances to maintain operational safety. Additional implications of increasing Chinese maritime strategic reach include Beijing's failure to adhere to international maritime norms and Exclusive Economic Zones; the possibility of conflict due to misinterpretation of Beijing's view of international maritime law, and China's growing qualitative superiority over most East Asian navies.³⁷

A May 20, 2010 hearing analyzed China's emerging military aerospace and commercial aviation capabilities including their potential military implications for the U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of the Air Force Bruce Lemkin mentioned China's

determination to increase its military capabilities including those of its aerospace and ballistic missile forces. Noting that while China technologically lags behind the U.S., it is rapidly improving its long-range air defense systems, electronic warfare, computer network attack efforts, and offensive strike capabilities while concluding that the U.S. must “stay ahead of the game” and maintain its ability to deter, defeat, and attack.³⁸

Roger Cliff noted many Chinese fighters are beyond visual range capable, that their fighters and bombers carry precision guided munitions, and that their exercises are more realistic and conducted in unfamiliar airspace at night and over water. He also noted that the PLAAF does not have stealthy aircraft, has minimal area refueling and strategic airlift capabilities, and that its training is inferior to the U.S.’. Mark Stokes noted China is placing acute reliance on ballistic missiles because they are hard to defend against and because all Taiwanese residents live within seven minutes of destruction from a ballistic missile.³⁹

Rebecca Grant observed that the previous 15 years have seen China advance from a regional actor to a power with nascent cross-Pacific military capability. She also stressed that China currently has the capability to significantly interfere with U.S. air and naval operations in the Taiwan Strait and beyond and that Beijing can achieve military success from counterattacks on U.S. aircraft, cyberlinks, satellites, and ships to disrupt operations. Jeff Hagen stated that U.S. power projection is most adversely affected by Chinese anti-access threats to U.S. bases with only Guam’s Andersen Air Force Base being excluded, state-of-the-art surface-to-air missiles, and a fourth generation air force with precision air-to-air and air-to-ground capabilities. Consequently, he urged the U.S. be prepared for a broad range of contingencies involving China.⁴⁰

A March 10, 2011 hearing focused on Chinese national security policy narratives. Topics addressed in this forum include narratives and policy debates on East Asian geopolitics and China’s emergence as a great power; how the PRC formulate national security narratives in media and public diplomacy, and Beijing’s military modernization narratives and the PLA’s foreign policy role. Gilbert Rozman sees Beijing’s rhetoric toward foreign leaders such as George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton becoming increasingly vitriolic as well as toward countries such as Japan and South Korea.⁴¹

Ashley Esarey noted the contrast between China’s Vice-Premier Li Keqiang claiming China had a long history of peaceful development standing in contrast to its volatile 20th century of civil war and upheavals including clashes with India, the Soviet Union, the U.S. and Vietnam during the 20th century. Stokes notes that Beijing uses domestic and foreign media outlets, military-to-military relations; academic exchanges, and business interests to formulate its public diplomacy while engaging in information operations to promote its strategic objectives. John Park stresses the rhetorical importance of “core interests” in Chinese strategic narratives as opposed to “mutual interests” in U.S. strategic narratives. Abraham Denmark maintains that China seeks to restore its position as the dominant Asian power and

that it can use the PLA to enhance the international system's health or success or erode it by emphasizing preemption as a "strategically defensive act."⁴²

The growing influence of maritime disputes in the ECS and SCS were scrutinized during an April 4, 2013 hearing. Michael McDevitt stressed that ECS issues are most important to the U.S. contending these waters are one area in the East Asian littoral where a shooting war is possible. He went on to contend that the cross-straits relationship between China and Taiwan was stable, that the risk of conflict was low, but that conflict could not be ruled out due to China's refusal to renounce the use of force. McDevitt also noted that the ECS and the Yellow Sea are home waters for Chinese, Japanese, North and South Korean and Taiwanese navies, and the U.S. Navy's Seventh Fleet and that commercial traffic in either of these waters can reach six of China's ten largest ports. His remarks also stressed the complexity of SCS jurisdiction to the multiple powers involved, China's nine-dashed maps claims, and the increased willingness of the U.S. to become involved in these waters despite rhetorical claims of neutrality on sovereignty over these waters.⁴³

Michael Swaine noted that increased assertiveness among SCS claimants has occurred since 2007 prompted by increased efforts to explore natural gas and oil resources and increasing deployment of ships and fishing vessels to these waters. He also referenced Beijing's May 2011 cutting of a towed array cable the Vietnamese were pulling; China's seizure of Scarborough Shoal and the ensuing April 2012 dispute; the June 2012 Chinese announcement of exploration blocks within Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone; and the beginning of Chinese incursions into the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands region in October 2012.⁴⁴

A March 13, 2014 hearing examined China and evolving East Asian security dynamics. Robert Sutter mentioned that China has used coercion to gain control of disputed territory and seeks additional geographical aggrandizement, noted its use of coast guard forces augmented by diplomatic pressure and threats, serious economic punishments, and increasing naval and air power features to conduct exercises in contested areas. He also noted that whether Chinese expansionism advances contends on regional response asserting China has long sought to remove great powers from its periphery in order to enhance its security and dominance.⁴⁵

Walter Lohman noted the complications in U.S. interactions with regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) observing that ASEAN's autonomy is not necessarily in U.S. interests. Lohman mentioned that ASEAN's strategic objectives toward the (SCS) are not congruent with U.S. interests which seek to maintain freedom of navigation and security of its allies while ASEAN seeks to engage China.⁴⁶

Chinese space and counterspace programs were reviewed during a February 18, 2015 hearing. Matters addressed included Beijing's civilian/dual-use and military space programs, China space program inputs, and implications for the U.S. Joan Johnson-Freese contended that the U.S. could not control Chinese space ambitions the way it can control airspace and that the U.S. space strategies must include space

situational awareness, resiliency, increased transparency, and confidence-building measures. Dean Cheng announced that future wars will involve land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace domains incorporating joint operations and that establishing information dominance is a hallmark objective of Chinese warfighting strategy with space dominance being a key Chinese military aspirational objective.⁴⁷

Tate Nurkin stressed the critical importance of espionage in Chinese technology acquisition efforts and Stokes stressed the highly centralized role exerted by the PLA in Chinese space program activities while also detailing the highly critical role of espionage in Beijing's space technology efforts by referencing a March 2014 Justice Department report covering the theft of controlled U.S. items pertinent to Chinese space and aerospace programs between January 2008–March 2014 including thermal imaging cameras; electronics used in military radar and electronic warfare; radiation hardened materials and gyroscopes; military optics; and rocket/space launch technical data.⁴⁸

Beijing's increasing offensive missile forces was addressed during an April 1, 2015 commission hearing. Topics covered during this forum included China's conventional missiles, nuclear weapons and emerging missile technologies, and implications of these developments for the U.S. Dennis Gormley contended the U.S. should focus on modest responses to cruise missile defenses where we respond to massive attacks by enemies emphasizing hardening airfields, C4I facilities in the Asia-Pacific region, and diversifying aircraft placement emphasizing survivability instead of efficiency to complicate adversary planning. He also recommended denying China a "free-ride" for its most precise means of delivering land-attack cruise missiles by complicating the delicate timing inherent in Beijing's coordination of first-wave ballistic and cruise missile strikes and the timing of subsequent follow-up air operations.⁴⁹

Christopher Twomey emphasized its diversifying, growing, and modernizing nuclear forces including deployment of modern survivable DF-31 and DF-31A ICBM's, the forthcoming mating of JL-2 missiles with Jin Class submarines, and the potential of 200-300 MIRVed ICBM warheads targeted at the U.S. in the next decade. Christopher Yeaw commented that China continues emphasizing survivability and penetrability in its strategic forces including road-mobile, sea-based, and dispersed air forces, maneuvering reentry vehicles, and stealth, and hypersonic assets. Independent Special Operations Command contractor Robert Haddick noted that China's rapid military modernization increases the cost of the U.S. sustaining its post-World War II Asia-Pacific forward presence strategy, but that the U.S. has no alternative to maintaining this strategy due to the region's paramount importance to U.S. national living standards and role as premier global power.⁵⁰

The commission addressed Chinese military force projection and expeditionary capabilities in a January 21, 2016 hearing. Topics addressed examined included driving factors for Chinese expeditionary capabilities, preparing for joint operations, and implications of these developments. Oriana Skyler Mastro observed that Chinese official statements, white papers, and semi-official writings suggest China

sees the U.S.' regional presence as a destabilizing factor and a key hindrance in its rise to what Xi Jinping views as China's rightful place as the regionally dominant power. She also noted the increasing international travel of Chinese nationals is placing increasing emphasis on China providing physical security for them as a result of Chinese citizens being threatened in other countries by being willing to engage in overseas operations.⁵¹

Timothy Heath noted Sino-U.S. cooperation against piracy off the Horn of Africa in 2009 while also stressing that subsequent decades will see Beijing enhance its expeditionary capabilities by deploying aircraft carrier and other naval task forces, strategic airlift, special operations units, counterterrorism teams, and strategic bomber or fighter aircraft to areas of concern to Chinese strategic interests. David Finkelstein noted that Beijing's national security policymakers are disestablishing military regions and replacing them with standing joint war zones or theaters of operation and increasing joint operational capability which will include the newly created PLA Rocket Force responsible for conventional and nuclear missiles and a reorganized Central Military Commission.⁵²

Mark Cozad stressed that while none of PLA's joint exercises have addressed expeditionary capabilities, Beijing has tested joint exercise operational concepts for Taiwan-centered operations and chain reactions along China's periphery while also noting the need for expeditionary capabilities will increase as China's overseas interests continue expanding. Christopher D. Yung maintains that the PLAN will eventually master the "tyranny of distance" in its out of area operations and sustain the logistics infrastructure and sustainment capacity necessary to acquire power projection capabilities which may threaten U.S. interests and assets.⁵³

Kristen Guinness commented that an increasing Chinese expeditionary capability in the SCS and beyond could produce increased contact and risk of miscalculation and escalation with U.S. forces and that China may use the PLA as an expeditionary force to shape the security environment and increase competition with the U.S. and involve itself in regional topics and beyond that are against or restrict U.S. goals and objectives. She also noted that such capabilities could enable China to provide faster international humanitarian assistance and disaster response and make Asian nations more receptive to U.S. efforts to shape the security environment and supporting U.S. objectives in this region.⁵⁴

A March 21, 2016 hearing addressed China and the U.S.' rebalance to Asia. Dan Blumenthal contended that the U.S. needs to see its Asia-Pacific interests as linked to the post-World War II strategy of maintaining preponderant power across Eurasia, that U.S. security policies and military strategies must operate with a greater diplomatic political framework, and that the U.S. needs a permanent strategic presence southwest of Okinawa. Kathleen Hicks observed the Obama Administration has not clearly, consistently, or coherently articulated a rebalance strategy and needs a single all-encompassing strategic document to achieve this, that defense budget cuts have limited DOD's ability to implement critical rebalancing initiatives, that the threat from Chinese A2AD assets is rising, and that

China's tolerance for risk is exceeding expectations demonstrated by creating artificial features in SCS waters. Mira Raap-Hooper urged the U.S. to recalibrate its regional strategy by clarifying the 1951 treaty commitment to the Philippines, publicly coordinate partner capacity building with countries such as the Philippines and Vietnam, strengthen freedom of navigation programs and increase the frequency of DOD's annual reports on these events to quarterly and detail the nature of challenges to freedom of navigation, and produce an annual interagency report on milestones in meeting the rebalance.⁵⁵

Studies

The Commission, its professional staff, and contractors have also issued numerous studies documenting its work in multiple areas relating to Western Pacific strategic issues. A January 2007 report on China's Anti-Satellite (ASAT), space warfare, policies, and doctrines, contained an extensive literature review and summary of Chinese writings on these topics. Report recommendations included the U.S. initiating and engaging in a dialogue on these issues with China focusing on:

- Reducing Chinese misperceptions of US space policy
- Increasing Chinese space weapons transparency
- Probing Chinese interest in verifiable agreements
- Multilateral vs bilateral approaches on space subjects
- Economic Consequences of Using Space Weapons
- Reconsidering U.S. High Tech Exports to China.⁵⁶

March 2009 saw a report on the PLA's abilities to execute military action in a regional military conflict. Topics addressed in this treatise included the PLA's ability to implement military action against Taiwan while also attacking U.S. and allied military forces and assets. Document conclusions include the PLA being postured to conduct multiple offensive options in a Taiwan crisis and a comparable ability to employ various anti-access measures to complicate U.S. responses in the Taiwan Strait and other East Asian venues; noting that advancing ballistic and cruise missiles, counter C4ISR, counter-space systems and strategies, and modern naval and air strike formations complicating the future direction of Asian security architectures. An additional emphasis is for U.S. forces to retain the ability to rapidly respond to regional events, conduct and sustain operations supporting multiple interests, and the danger of China perceiving that its capabilities restrict U.S. freedom of action could complicate peaceful problem resolution and lead to miscalculation and escalation.⁵⁷

A June 2013 report examined declining Taiwanese defense spending and its potential impact on Taipei's military preparedness. This assessment noted that between 1994 and 2013 Taiwan's defense budget declined from 3.8–2.1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and during this same period it declined from 24.3% of the total government budget to 16.2%. Additional report findings involve Taiwan

transitioning from an active duty conscript military of 270,000 to an all-volunteer force of 215,000. These trends have lead U.S. and other observers to suggest the continuation of current trends may make Taiwan unable to maintain existing operational capabilities, readiness levels, and equipment inventories. It also noted that since 2009, Taipei has focused on improving its asymmetric weapons capabilities including stealthy patrol aircraft and additional mobile missile squadrons and radars which it believes will be less vulnerable to Chinese precision strike capabilities. This assessment concludes that Taiwan may seek closer political ties with the U.S. and acquire additional weapons from Washington while also incentivizing Beijing to take greater risk in its cross-strait policies due to Taipei's diminishing deterrent capability.⁵⁸

January 14, 2014 saw the commission issue a report on China's November 23, 2013 declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over much of the ECS including the Senkaku Islands contested by it and Japan in an effort to strengthen its ability to enforce its expansive ECS claims. This declaration also affects South Korea and the report's authors cautioned that China's inconsistent adherence to international air and maritime operational norms could see it employ tactical methods foreign pilots may interpret as hostile increasing the risk of escalation; the high possibility of escalation risk if China intercepts Japanese military aircraft in the ADIZ; and China's announcement giving adjacent states and the U.S. the opportunity to assert their rights to ECS airspace and increase their aerial patrols.⁵⁹

A June 1, 2015 analysis of China's 2015 defense white paper stressed the ongoing importance of the maritime domain, a complex security environment with multiple traditional and non-traditional external and internal security threats, space and cyberspace as commanding heights in strategic competition, the importance of military professionalism, ideological discipline, and civil-military integration, and the need for readiness and preparing for military struggle by training in realistic conditions to fight and win wars in multiple operational environments.⁶⁰

Less than two weeks later, the commission issued a report documenting U.S. surveillance of Chinese land reclamation projects in the SCS. This document described the May 20, 2015 flight of a Navy P-8A Poseidon surveillance plane from Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines to Subi, Mischief, and Fieri Cross Reefs in the SCS where China has engaged in extensive land reclamation projects to bolster its territorial claims and establish a permanent military presence. An expanded Chinese military presence could enable it to improve its offensive and defensive military capabilities by deploying long-range radars and ISR and developing airstrips for carrier based aircraft enabling them to conduct sustained air operations. The Poseidon's crew received eight radio warnings from the Chinese telling them to leave. CNN reporter Jim Sciutto accompanied the crew and reported on the mission which received significant media coverage.

Multiple countries reacted to this incident including Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and Singapore and this flight is considered part of an effort by

Washington to “name and shame” China’s aggressive activities. This offers Southeast Asian countries the opportunity to collectively and publicly seize the international moral high ground and develop a unified position against China.⁶¹

In October 2015 the commission produced an analysis China’s New YJ-18 antiship cruise missile on some PLAN navy submarines and surface ships. The YJ-18 may significantly increase China’s A2AD capabilities against U.S. ships operating in the Western Pacific during potential conflicts, has a subsonic cruise speed of about Mach 0.8 with the capability of accelerating to Mach 3.0, has a 290 nautical mile range, and is capable of flying only few meters above the sea to evade radar detection. This nautical range gives it a threat ring of approximately 264,200 square nautical miles and enables the YJ-18 to potentially hold at risk a Western Pacific carrier strike group.⁶²

A March 2016 commission report on China’s ADIZ in the ECS and SCS made the following assessments on implications for the U.S.:

- The possibility of tense mid-air encounters between U.S. and Chinese aircraft as part of China’s increasing willingness to challenge U.S. military aircraft in contested maritime areas and U.S. willingness to conduct military flights near Chinese occupied land features.
- A Chinese ADIZ in the SCS could complicate state and commercial air operations in the SCS and prompt other claimants to SCS territory to establish their own ADIZs.
- The development of Chinese enforcement capabilities of its SCS ADIZ could challenge the political status quo and give China de facto control over these waters in a scenario short of war.
- Infrastructure and platforms used to enforce an ADIZ could have military applications in an SCS contingency.
- The growth of China’s SCS radar infrastructure increases its ability to collect intelligence on U.S. forces in the region and monitor other countries military and commercial activities.⁶³

Another report that month described China’s efforts to counter the U.S. forward presence in the Asia Pacific. This analysis noted China engages in military-to-military exchanges with regional states to create leverage applying pressure on the U.S. and its partners, Beijing’s using economic engagement and coercion to influence the behavior of U.S. allies and partners China considers critical in supporting U.S. forward presence and force projection capability within the Western Pacific, and China conducting activities to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its allies to undermine deployment of a U.S.-led regional security architecture in the Asia-Pacific and restrict U.S. presence and force projection capability if conflict occurs. China’s application of three warfares: psychological, media, and legal on the international stage are all part of Beijing’s efforts to restrict the U.S.’ Western Pacific forward presence and power projection.⁶⁴

In May 2016 the commission issued a report on China's expanding ability to conduct conventional missile strikes on Guam. This document announced that Chinese weapons capable of attacking targets on militarily important U.S. assets in this territory include the DF-26 IRBM and ASBM, and air and sea launched land attack cruise missiles (LACM). Chinese analysts see Guam as a highly important feature in alleged U.S. containment strategy and see it as an anchor for regional U.S. forces and the second island chain since it contains Apra Naval Base, Andersen Air Force Base, and approximately 6,000 military personnel which are critical for crisis response and large Asia Pacific security contingency operations. Report recommendations for enhancing Guam's security include hardening facilities on Guam to increase the costs and uncertainty of a Chinese attack, dispersing regional U.S. military facilities, investing in new missile defense capabilities, revisiting the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) Treaty by incorporating ground launched short, medium, and intermediate-range cruise and ballistic missile systems into U.S. regional force structure, and maintaining superior regional strike capabilities such as the Long-Range Strike Bomber program and the Virginia class submarine missile payload module.⁶⁵

A July 12, 2016 International Arbitration Panel ruled that China's claims against the Philippines in the SCS had no international legal validity. China's reaction to this ruling was extremely hostile and this analysis stressed China could increase its military presence in these disputed areas, apply economic sanctions on the Philippines, and conduct land reclamation on Scarborough Reef. Implications for the U.S. stressed in this report include that if China fails to abide by the ruling it sends a signal to the world that adhering to international law is optional, that it vital for the U.S. and like-minded countries to make public and concerted efforts to affirm the ruling and enforce it, and that it is vital for the U.S. and ASEAN to push back against Chinese behavior in the SCS.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Commission assessments are regularly cited in congressional debates and national security forums. On July 17, 2002 Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) noted the release of the Commission's 2002 annual report stressing the fragmented nature of U.S. policy toward China, the absence of U.S. institutional mechanisms for monitoring national security concerns involving Chinese efforts to raise capital in U.S. debt and equity markets and Beijing's delivery of technologies and weapons systems to terrorist sponsoring states threatening the U.S. in Asia.⁶⁷ On November 17, 2011 Representative Frank Wolf (R-VA) referenced a Commission report indicating the robust nature of China's military space program with 57 of its 70 orbiting satellites controlled by the PLA.⁶⁸ Current commission member Daniel Slane and former commissioner Patrick Mulloy spoke at a December 7, 2015 forum hosted by the Center for a New American Security discussing the recent publication of Peter Navarro's *Crouching Tiger: What China's Militarism Means for the World*.⁶⁹

The U.S.–China Economic and Security Review Commission has become an essential source for military and civilian policymakers and scholars to understand Western Pacific strategic developments affecting the U.S., its allies, and potential adversaries, the evolving nature of Sino–U.S. bilateral relations, and the significance and impact of Chinese security policy and military capability as the Trump Administration begins. It reflects multiple viewpoints and perspectives and has been able to achieve generally bipartisan consensus in its annual reports with there being only five commissioners dissenting from overall annual report findings during the commission’s 15-year existence.⁷⁰ The Commission has become a valuable contributor to the debate on how developments in this critically important region affect the U.S. and its allies and on the overall multifaceted scope of the bilateral Sino–U.S. relationship. Concerted effort should be made to consult its works by military and civilian policymakers as well as the academic and business communities and individuals interested in gaining enhanced understanding of the critical military and economic importance of the strategic competition between China and the U.S. in the Western Pacific.

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