

f. Communist China Flaunts Its Military Ambitions

At the 2018 Zhuhai Airshow in China, the debut of the CH-7 Rainbow drone caught the attention of military experts. The Rainbow series signifies that China has caught up in the technology for developing armed drones. A large number of CH-4 Rainbows have taken over the military markets of Jordan, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan, countries that were restricted from purchasing armed drones from the United States. [94] The latest CH-7 Rainbow, in some ways, is as well-equipped as X-47B, the best the United States has to offer. An observer noticed that the latest CH-7 was revealed at the 2018 Airshow in China before it was tested by the PLA. [95] The video played at the airshow simulated the drones combating the enemy, which was clearly the U.S. military. [96] All of these moves clearly show China's ambition to challenge the U.S. hegemony.

In recent years, as China's military power became more developed, its ambition couldn't stay unnoticed. Chinese vessels followed and harassed a U.S. surveillance ship (USNS Impeccable) in the South China Sea while it was conducting routine operations in international waters [97].

A similar incident took place later in Yellow Sea international waters. The Chinese vessels repeatedly came close to the USNS Victorious. They came within 30 yards of the U.S. ship, forcing it to make a dangerous sudden stop. [98] The most recent incident happened in September 2018, when a Chinese warship conducted aggressive maneuvers warning the USS Decatur to depart the area. The Chinese ship approached within 45 yards of the bow of the

American vessel, forcing the Decatur to maneuver to prevent a collision. [99]

The CCP regime revealed its military ambitions long ago. Its strategy is to move from being a land power to being a maritime superpower and eventually establishing hegemony on both land and sea. In 1980, Beijing's strategy was to perform active defense, and its focus was mainly on defending its own borders. At the time, its main adversary was the Soviet Army. In 2013, Beijing's frontline defense turned into active offense for the purpose of expanding its frontline. It proposed "strategic offense as an important type of active defense." [100]

In 2015, a Chinese military theorist and author of *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America* made the following statements: "One Belt, One Road policy requires the army to have expeditionary ability." "The Chinese land forces must take a flying leap and revolutionize itself." "The national interests that come with One Belt, One Road are an enormous incentive for the Chinese army to reform." [101] All this fuels Beijing's aim to become a land-based superpower.

The U.S. Department of Defense said in its Annual Report to Congress in 2018:

China's maritime emphasis and attention to missions guarding its overseas interests have increasingly propelled the PLA beyond China's borders and its immediate periphery. The PLAN's [the Chinese navy] evolving focus — from "offshore waters defense" to a mix of "offshore waters defense" and "open seas protection" —

reflects the high command's expanding interest in a wider operational reach. China's military strategy and ongoing PLA reform reflect the abandonment of its historically land-centric mentality. Similarly, doctrinal references to "forward edge defense" that would move potential conflicts far from China's territory suggest PLA strategists envision an increasingly global role. [102]

China's goal is to first break through the boundaries of the first island chain and head to the open waters of the Pacific and Indian oceans. The first island chain stretches from the Kuril Islands in the north to the islands of Taiwan and Borneo in the south. The chain surrounds the Yellow Sea, the East China Sea, and the western Pacific Ocean.

The purpose of China's expansion in the South China Sea was to break through the first island chain. China built islands and militarized reef islets in the South China Sea. It equipped them with airports, shore-based aircraft, and missiles. Currently three strategically important islets in the South China Sea, namely Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef, and Mischief Reef, have been fortified with anti-ship cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles, and airfields. The islands have essentially formed stationary aircraft carriers that can be used in the event of military conflict. At the strategic level, the Chinese navy is capable of breaking through the boundaries of the first island chain and has the capability to fight in the open ocean.

Steve Bannon, former White House chief strategist, said on several occasions that the United States is headed for military conflict with China. "We're going to war in the South China Sea in five to ten years," he said in March 2016. "There's no doubt about that." [103]

Lawrence Sellin, former American colonel and military commentator, believes that “China is now attempting to extend its international influence beyond the South China Sea by linking to a similar framework for dominance in the northern Indian Ocean. If permitted to complete the link, China could be in an unassailable position to exert authority over roughly one-half of the global GDP.” [104]

The dominance of the South China Sea isn't an issue of territory, but of global strategy. Each year, close to US\$5 trillion in merchandise moves through the South China Sea. [105] For China, its Maritime Silk Road begins with the South China Sea, and an estimated 80 percent of its oil imports are projected to travel via the region. [106] Peacekeeping in the South China Sea following World War II fell to the United States and its allies. This poses a big threat to the Chinese regime, which is preparing to go to war with the United States and deems the South China Sea a key area for its economic growth and military expansion.

Taylor Fravel, the Arthur and Ruth Sloan Professor of Political Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), pointed out an interesting fact after figuring out how China has solved its territorial disputes in history. Since 1949, China has engaged in twenty-three territorial disputes with its neighbors. It settled seventeen of these disputes. In fifteen of these settlements, Beijing offered substantial compromises on the allocation of disputed territory. But when it comes to issues in the South China Sea, since the 1950s, even when the Chinese navy was militarily insignificant, it has taken an uncompromising approach and has claimed

indisputable sovereignty over the region. China has never used such absolute language to other land disputes. [107]

Apparently, “fighting every inch” isn’t how China solves its border conflicts. Professor M. Taylor Fravel listed several reasons for China’s strong stand on South China Sea (SCS) issues. “China views offshore islands such as the Spratlys as strategic. From these islands, China can claim jurisdiction over adjacent waters that might contain significant natural resources and even jurisdiction over some activities of foreign naval vessels,” he said. “South China Sea outcrops can also be developed into forward outposts for projecting military power.” “They might also aid China’s submarine force by preventing other states from tracking Chinese submarines that seek to enter the Western Pacific from the South China Sea.” [108]

The Chinese regime’s aggressive and expansionary actions in the South China Sea, especially the steps it has taken in recent years to change the status quo, have heightened military tensions in the greater region. Japan has reversed a decade of declining military expenditures, while India has revived its stalled plans for naval modernization. [109]

Masking its efforts with the excuse of safe passage for energy and freight, China’s active expansion in the South China Sea has tipped the balance of power in the region and increases the possibility of military conflict. One expert pointed out that “Chinese perception of the SCS as a security concern has led to an erosion of security in the region.” [110] This standpoint echoes that of Bannon.

In 2017, the Chinese military established its first overseas military

base in Djibouti. Western scholars believe that Chinese military officials are looking beyond the Western Pacific Region and considering how to project power ever farther abroad. [111] For example, the CCP has recently been active in the Pacific Island countries, regardless of costly investments. Its long-term goal is that in the future, these island countries serve as supply stations for the PLAN's blue-water fleet. [112] The military expansion of the CCP is not limited to the traditional divisions of land, sea, and air; it is also making advances into the realms of space and electromagnetic warfare.

The CCP's military ambitions are backed by vast reserves of manpower, equipment, and funding.

The CCP regime maintains the largest regular army in the world, with two million active military personnel. The People's Liberation Army also has the largest ground force in the world, the largest number of warships, the third-most naval tonnage, and a massive air force. It has a trinity nuclear strike capability consisting of intercontinental ballistic missiles, ballistic-missile submarines, and strategic bombers.

The Chinese regime also has 1.7 million armed police personnel, which are under the unified leadership of the CCP Central Military Commission, and a large number of reserve and militia units. The Party's military doctrine has always stressed the importance of "people's war." Under the CCP's totalitarian system, it can quickly impress all available resources to military use. This means that the CCP has a pool of over a billion people (including overseas Chinese) from which it can draft huge numbers of people into militia service.

China's GDP increased rapidly between 1997 and 2007. The CCP relies on economic power to rapidly expand armaments production and upgrade its arsenal. It is estimated that by 2020, the PLA ground forces will have five thousand modern main battle tanks. The PLAN will have at least two aircraft carriers in its fleet. Ninety percent of PLA Air Force fighters are of the fourth generation, and China has begun to introduce fifth-generation fighters.

In early 2017, China announced a 6.5 percent inflation-adjusted increase in its annual military budget to US\$154.3 billion. Analysis of data from 2008 through 2017 indicates China's official military budget grew at an annual average of 8 percent in inflation-adjusted terms over that period. [113] Observers estimate that the actual military spending of the CCP is twice as much as what is officially acknowledged. Aside from this, the military strength of the regime is not fully reflected in military spending because its actual military expenditure is higher than the public figures, and the CCP can requisition many civilian resources and manpower at its discretion. The entire industrial system can serve the needs of war, which means its true military capabilities far exceed official data and the usual estimates.

The CCP will build a global system consisting of more than thirty Beidou (Big Dipper) navigation satellites by the end of 2020, with global GPS military positioning capabilities. The mass production of the Rainbow series of military drones serves more tactical considerations for the CCP. For example, in the Taiwan Strait layout, the CCP may gain advantages through its unmanned aircraft machine-sea tactics. [114] A large number of aerial drones can form

clusters under the control of satellites and artificial intelligence, making them useful in regional and asymmetrical conflicts.

The stealth fighter Chinese J-20, which was unveiled at the Zhuhai Air Show, resembles the American F-22, while the Chinese J-31 appears modeled on the F-35. The PLA is closing the gap with the United States in the development of modern jet fighters.

In addition, the CCP uses a broad range of espionage to catch up with the United States in technology. According to some recent estimates, more than 90 percent of espionage against the United States conducted via hacking comes from China, and the CCP's networks infiltrate large American companies and the military, stealing technology and knowledge that the Chinese cannot develop independently. [115] China's drone technology was stolen from the United States.

In terms of tactics, the PLA is keen on asymmetric capabilities: asymmetric warfare, asymmetric strategy, and asymmetric weapons. [116] Adm. Philip S. Davidson, the new commander of the Indo-Pacific Command, described China as a "peer competitor." He said that China is not trying to match America's firepower at a one-to-one ratio; rather, it is trying catch up with the United States by building critical asymmetric capabilities, including the use of anti-ship missiles and capabilities in submarine warfare. He warned that "there is no guarantee that the United States would win a future conflict with China." [117]

The CCP relied on its research and development of Dongfeng 21D missiles (anti-ship ballistic missiles for use against U.S. aircraft

carriers) to conduct similar sniper-mode confrontation. In 2018, the CCP publicly exhibited the land-based Eagle-Attack-12B supersonic anti-ship missile, known as the “aircraft carrier killer.” It has drawn a 550-kilometer “death zone” in the western Pacific, in which American carrier battle groups will be susceptible to ultra low-altitude saturation strikes. These missiles become an important military means of the PLA’s regional denial operations aimed at preventing U.S. military intervention.

Following the rapid expansion of its military power, the CCP regime has become a huge weapons exporter to the world’s authoritarian regimes, such as North Korea and the rogue regimes of the Middle East. On the one hand, the goal is to expand its military alliances, and on the other hand, to disperse and counter U.S. military power. The CCP regime spreads and encourages anti-American sentiment and hatred. It is easy for the CCP to unite with other anti-American regimes to further its hegemonic ambitions.

At the same time, the CCP leadership advocates terrorist military theories such as the aforementioned unrestricted warfare. It advocates the necessity of war by saying that “war is not far from us, it is the birthplace of the Chinese century.” It legitimizes violence and terror with words such as “The dead are the driving force for the advancement of history.” It justifies aggression: “There is no right to development without the right to war,” and “the development of one country poses a threat to another — this is the general rule of world history.” [118]

Zhu Chenghu, dean of the Defense College of the National Defense University of the People’s Republic of China, publicly stated that if

the United States intervenes in a war in the Taiwan Strait, China will preemptively use nuclear weapons to raze hundreds of cities in the United States, even if all of China to the east of Xi'an (a city located at the western edge of China's traditional boundaries) were destroyed as a consequence. [119] Zhu's statements were a public display of the CCP's ambitions and a means of probing reactions by the international community.

It is important to be aware of the fact that the CCP's military strategies are always subordinate to its political needs, and that the regime's military ambitions are only a small part of its overall schemes. The Party's approach is to rely on both economic and military means to impose its communist ideology on the rest of the world. [120]