

# **What Does China Want?**

***Why, as China grows more powerful, does it become more  
bellicose?***

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Testimony submitted for a Hearing on  
"China's Maritime and other Geographic Threats"  
to be held before the  
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats

10:00 a.m. on Wednesday,  
October 30, 2013,  
Room 2255, Rayburn House Office Building.

I commend the Chairman for this timely hearing. Less than 48 hours ago, Chinese vessels recklessly entered Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands. Seemingly everywhere we look, we see evidence of China's increasing aggressiveness and it is past time to ask, Why this ongoing military buildup when China faces no external threat? Why these provocative acts? What, after all, does China want?.

Since last September, China has been vigorously asserting its new--and historically groundless--claim to the Senkaku Islands by sending a constant stream of naval vessels and planes to harass Japanese patrol boats there. The most recent such encounter, as I mentioned, occurred a mere two days ago. No only that, but a top Chinese general has questioned the legitimacy of Japanese claims not just to the tiny Senkakus, but to the entire Ryukyu Island chain, including Okinawa with its U.S. military bases.

Then in May, Chinese troops intruded nearly 12 miles into Indian territory, withdrawing only after India agreed to withdraw its own troops from the area. The high-altitude frontier dispute, which has been simmering since the Sino-Indian War of 1962, involves territory the size of Greece with a population of over a million. India is apparently prepared to sign a border cooperation agreement on Chinese terms, an exercise in coercive military diplomacy that Brahma Chellaney, an Indian analyst, calls [bullying](#).

And then there is the South China Sea, where China has been aggressively asserting its sovereignty over the 1.4 million-square-mile stretch of open ocean. Last November, Beijing announced that Chinese authorities will board and seize control of foreign ships that “illegally enter” the area that it claims is part of the province of Hainan. Seizing ships in international waters is an act of war under international law.

China has also sowed new seeds of conflict by continuing to expand its military presence in the area. Last year it seized the Scarborough Shoal, which lies off the coast of the Philippines, by force. When that country protested, the PRC reacted by saying that the Philippines' claims were illegal, and that it would never agree to international arbitration over the Shoal or any other claims. In January it issued a new map that, for the first time, precisely delineates its grandiose new claim. What it shows is the largest attempted land grab since the Second World War. It is rather as if Nazi Germany had claimed the entire Mediterranean Sea as sovereign territory.

And so it goes. Nearly every month China is making a new territorial claim or bullying its neighbors over an existing one. Worse yet, it is defining these new claims, like its longstanding claims to Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, as “core interests,” vital to national survival and are emphatically *not* up for negotiation.

The Obama administration has proven extremely reluctant to back U.S. allies in the face of such Chinese aggression. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, for example, offered only tacit backing to the Philippines' efforts to seek UN assistance against China, saying only that all countries had a right to seek arbitration to resolve competing [territorial claims](#). Perhaps they had imagined that China's opening to the West would result in a modernizing, democratizing China that would willingly take its place in the existing international system. A younger, foreign-educated leadership would renounce force in favor of negotiation. The kinds of armed conflict that marred the PRC's first three decades would be a thing of the past, and any remaining territorial disputes would be resolved peaceably.

But China's integration into the world economy has apparently not defanged the Chinese Party-State, nor led it, metaphorically speaking, to beat its swords into plowshares. Instead, it is taking the money that it has made from selling cheap, state-subsidized “plowshares” around the world and using it to make “swords,” which it is now brandishing with increasing frequency.

I see China's behavior as reflecting something fundamental about the nature of the Chinese Party-State. A government that rules its own people by brute force--remember Tiananmen--is naturally inclined to treat its smaller, weaker neighbors the same way. Especially if they were, in the past, tributary states. This accounts in part for the palpable disdain with which it treats the other claimants in the South China Sea dispute, including Vietnam and The Philippines, both of which have stronger claims to the Spratlys and Paracels than does China itself.

Only the continued presence of the U.S. Seventh Fleet in the Far East stays China's hand. Were that force to be withdrawn to Hawaii, as China has suggested, there is little doubt that China would then occupy the remaining islands in the South China Sea by force, ejecting the garrisons of other nations, and begin to demand that ships transiting its "interior waters" first seek permission to do so or run the risk of being boarded and quarantined.

Deng Xiaoping once advised his immediate successors, who ruled a much weaker China, to "bide your time and hide your capabilities." But that was then. Now China capabilities are on track to approach parity with the U.S. in the Pacific theater in a few years, and already far, far exceed those of all of its nearest maritime neighbors except Japan.

Continuing double-digit increases in the PLA's budget are fueling China's military buildup. While the exact amount that China spends on its military is unclear, what is obvious is that the more funding the PLA receives, the sooner it will achieve parity with the U.S. military. China is building a nuclear arsenal, along with a range of delivery systems, that could match or even exceed that of the United States in the coming decades. A blue water navy, along with components of China's first indigenously produced aircraft carrier, is under construction, and naval bases in Burma, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka will enable its resupply. As the latest Pentagon report confirms, China already "has the largest force of major combatants, submarines, and amphibious warfare ships in Asia." Moreover, China is constructing its own GPS satellite network, has developed a ground-launched anti-satellite missile to improve its counter-space capabilities, and is building the Shenlong spaceplane with advanced propulsion characteristics for possible military use.

Emboldened by their new capabilities, and firmly in control of the Chinese polity, the next generation of Chinese leaders have apparently decided that it no longer has to bide its time although it still prefers to hide its capabilities.

I have long believed that the Chinese leadership holds an expansive view of Chinese place in the world, and that it is interested in reestablishing its historical role as the Hegemon of Asia. It is imperative that we educate the American people in this regard.

An open society relies on comprehensive and accurate information to inform both its citizens and its allies of the common threats that they face. The annual *Pentagon Report on Chinese Military Developments* does not go far enough in this regard. In a

time of economic uncertainty, and in the face of an ongoing Chinese military build-up, it is especially important that U.S. taxpayers understand the importance maintaining both a quantitative and qualitative lead in military capabilities over China. It is equally important that allied and friendly governments, along with their citizens, be informed of military developments in China. China needs to know that its continuing military buildup has not gone unnoticed, and that the U.S. and its allies are well aware of its larger designs.

Ascertaining both China's capabilities and its intentions is critical. I therefore recommend that the U.S. Congress establish a commission to review, evaluate and, if necessary, correct any shortcomings in the Pentagon Report. Such a "check" on the current administration consensus on China would be invaluable, as such reviews proved to be during the Soviet era when a number of independent commissions reviewed Soviet military capabilities and intentions.

Such a review would be a timely and substantive way to get an independent, overall assessment of China's military development. The public hearings that it would hold, not less than its annual report, would add to the constructive debate over China's intentions, as continues to engineer double digit increases in its military budget, and develop specific capabilities that not only put U.S. allies and assets in Asia at risk, but the American homeland as well.