

**Fixing the “Missile Gap”:  
Munitions, War, and the Defense Industrial Base**

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**Before the U.S. House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party  
Hearing on Rebuilding the Arsenal of Democracy: The Imperative to Strengthen America's  
Defense Industrial Base and Workforce**

**December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

**Introduction**

The threat to the United States from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is multifaceted, long term, and aggressive. Whether it’s from military modernization to economic coercion, cyber warfare to space competition, the PRC’s national security challenge is global and targets U.S. interests, values, security, and standing in the world. The goals of the PRC in the Indo-Pacific as well as in the world are driven by the priorities of the Chinese Communist Party and, most fundamentally, by their leader Xi Jinping. Elected President of the People’s Republic of China by the CCP in 2013, Jinping has been the primary force behind China’s more aggressive stance. The central impetus to his policies is a view that China has historically suffered various “humiliations,” even referring to the period of 1839 to 1949 as the “Century of Humiliation,” and that these indignities require a “national rejuvenation” or the “China Dream.”<sup>2</sup>

The “China Dream” entails not just growth in the economic, political, and military power of China but also, as one author put it, “a resurgent China that would reclaim its rightful place atop the global hierarchy.”<sup>3</sup> It also requires, as Jinping himself has expressed it, “the unification of the

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Kroenig, *The Return of Great Power Rivalry, Democracy versus Autocracy from the Ancient World to the U.S. and China*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2020), pg. 171.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, (Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York, 2015), pg. 17

motherland” or the absorption of Taiwan.<sup>4</sup> He further elaborated on these goals in 2017 at the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress when he stated that “by the middle of the twenty-first century, the PLA [will be] fully transformed into a world-class military” allowing the PRC to “move closer to the world’s center stage” and “become a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence.”<sup>5</sup> The PRC’s leadership targets the year of “2049 as the date the dream will be realized – one hundred years after Mao Zedong’s ascension in China and the formation of the Communist state.”<sup>6</sup> This end goal of national rejuvenation, the achievement of the “China Dream,” can rightly be seen as Beijing’s “grand strategy” and the organizing end state of its political, economic, diplomatic, and military strategies.<sup>7</sup>

In response to the strategic pivot by the United States to the Indo-Pacific which began in 2017 and the start of the building of credible deterrent forces in the region, among other policies, Xi Jinping and PRC senior leaders have become more vocal about their own plans and their views on U.S. intentions. At the 20<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress in October 2022, for example, Xi Jinping vowed to “never commit to abandoning the use of force” and pledged “to take all necessary measures” to prevent Taiwanese Independence.<sup>8</sup> He warned that “Western countries headed by the United States have implemented containment from all directions, encirclement and suppression against us, which has brought unprecedented severe challenges to our country’s development” and that “[i]n the coming period, the risks and challenges we face will only increase and become more

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<sup>4</sup> John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, Xi Jinping Says He is Preparing China for War,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023

<sup>5</sup> Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China’s Grand Strategy to Displace American Order*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2021), pg. 292

<sup>6</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*, (Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York, 2015), pg. 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Scobell, Edmund J. Burke, Cortez A. Cooper III, Sale Lilly, Chad J.R. Ohlandt, Eric Warner, J.D. Williams, *China’s Grand Strategy: Trends, Trajectories, and Long-Term Competition*, RAND Corporation, 2020, pg. 18

<sup>8</sup> Ellen Nakashima, “Congress seeks to arm Taiwan quickly as China threat grows,” *The Washington Post*, November 12, 2022

severe.”<sup>9</sup> He further exhorted his military to “dare to struggle.”<sup>10</sup> A press statement by China’s Eastern Theatre Command, which is situated directly across from Taiwan, echoed these sentiments: “The theatre’s troops are ready to fight at all times and can fight at any time to resolutely smash any form of ‘Taiwan independence’ and foreign interference attempts.”<sup>11</sup> This more bellicose statement reflects a broader shift in the statements of China’s leaders with the PRC’s Foreign Minister Qin Gang having one of the most explicit: “If the United States does not hit the brake but continues to speed down the wrong path, no amount of guardrails can prevent derailing, and there will surely be conflict and confrontation.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Missile Gap & Integrated Deterrence**

The broader strategic orientation of U.S. military forces to the Indo-Pacific region embraces several tenets of the Biden Administration’s strategic concept of Integrated Deterrence. The core of the approach is to, in the words of a Biden administration official, develop “a constellation of coalitions to address emerging threats.”<sup>13</sup> This strategy entails not just building robust unilateral alliances between the U.S. and select countries in the region but using U.S. influence to foster multi-national coalitions between countries; to become, in a way, the indispensable ally in the Indo-Pacific. Other components of Integrated Deterrence include the growth of U.S. capabilities in general that are needed to deter PRC aggression, while also deploying select elements forward as part of a deterrent strategy, merging their functions more holistically to enhance deterrent effects, and deploying these forces by using asymmetric strategies, structures, and concepts.

This approach only works though if the U.S. can also credibly wage and win a war against China and prevent its regional and global military ambitions; in this respect, the outgoing

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<sup>9</sup> John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, Xi Jinping Says He is Preparing China for War,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 29, 2023

<sup>10</sup> Paul Heer, “Deconstructing the Bipartisan Consensus on the China Threat,” *The National Interest*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

<sup>11</sup> “Chinese military ‘ready to fight’ after completing combat exercises near Taiwan,” *The Associated Press*, April 10, 2023

<sup>12</sup> Paul Heer, “Deconstructing the Bipartisan Consensus on the China Threat,” *The National Interest*, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

<sup>13</sup> Assistant Secretary of Defense for INDO-PACOM Security Affairs Ely S. Ratner, Statement before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, February 9, 2023

administration was far less successful. The central area requiring the most attention is what I refer to as the “missile gap” between the munitions available in the inventory of the United States and those required to successfully prosecute our wars plans against China. While most attention has focused on the munitions required to fight a high-end conflict with the PRC over Taiwan, any such conflict would likely become global in scope and require a global roll back of PRC influence requiring different kinds of munitions capabilities. This mission would include military targets such as overseas military bases (e.g. China’s base in Djibouti, space assets, cyber capabilities), intelligence capabilities such as listening stations (e.g. China’s base in Cuba), terrain features which would be necessary for the flow of U.S. forces into the Indo-Pacific (e.g. China’s control of the Panama Canal), and economic capabilities which enable Chinese military activities (e.g. it’s space monitoring station in Argentina). Other necessary actions would include reducing malign economic influence, curtailing PRC global trade, and tightening what would likely be a robust set of sanctions. Further, various allies and partners, such as Australia, Japan, the Philippines, as well as Taiwan, would also need access to the munitions required for these various missions putting further pressure on existing stocks and industrial capacity. While many types of munitions have been used in the war in Ukraine, the paucity of industrial capacity to build required munitions on a scale necessary for a future possible conflict, in all its dimensions, is alarming. Reindustrializing our military infrastructure will need to be a priority for the new administration and U.S. Congress.

The war in Ukraine has underscored the weaknesses of U.S. munition procurement demonstrating that insufficient industrial capacity exists for even basic items such as artillery rounds. During the war, for example, its armed forces consumed an average of 100,000 rounds of 155mm artillery per month but U.S. defense industry could only replace 14,000 per month.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, these

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<sup>14</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria, “It’s Time to Recognize Sustainment as a Strategic Imperative,” *War on the Rocks*, February 15, 2023

limitations also exist for Stingers, Javelins, and high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) which may play a role in any war with the PRC.<sup>15</sup> As Center for Strategic and International Studies Senior Fellow Seth Jones recently put it: “Certain critical munitions – such as long-range, precision-guided munitions – would likely run out in less than one week” . . . “[T]hese gaps undermine deterrence – the linchpin of the United States’ defense strategy – because they reveal to all that the United States cannot endure a lengthy war.”<sup>16</sup> Lacking multiyear contracts for many munitions, which is quite common for ships and airplane procurement, limits the ability for industry to plan for greater production.<sup>17</sup> The practical effect of these limitations in the defense industrial base is that U.S. war plans against the PRC cannot be achieved with existing stocks and the current industrial infrastructure.

### **Munitions Production & Hard War with China**

The United States Government must significantly and dramatically increase its munitions production. The challenge, however, is that even if production were significantly enlarged, stockpiles will likely not meet war-fighting needs on the timelines required to defeat the People’s Republic of China. There are a number of different ways of addressing the munitions “missile gap” in addition to dedicating additional resources to grow industrial capacity.

- **Munitions Tsar.** An official should be designated to provide additional focused attention to munitions production. This individual should have a team representing key stakeholders and a budget commensurate to the task. This Munitions Tsar would seek to remove roadblocks from production, align separate efforts, reduce the time and cost to production,

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Seth G. Jones, “America’s Looming Munitions Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 31, 2023

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.; Congress has recently given authority to the U.S. Department of Defense for the multi-year acquisition of some munitions.

serve as a source of best practices, and raise the profile of problems that needs to be addressed.

- **Internationalize Production.** While the central focus of reviving the industrial base should be on production within the United States, many allies and partners share similar interests in increasing munitions production and would likely contribute to such an initiative. Efforts should be made to share financial and material burdens with international partners and allies on producing additional munitions.
- **Weaponization of Artificial Intelligence.** Recent experience with artificial intelligence has shown that its use in targeting greatly improves munition delivery and the destruction of enemy capabilities. This enhancing capability could greatly expand the effectiveness of existing munitions prolonging the life of existing stocks.
- **Thinking Asymmetrically.** We should embrace effects-based thinking versus capability-based thinking when it comes to using the more advanced munitions in the inventory of the United States. Low technology (e.g. drones & “dumb” bombs) as well as high technology solutions (e.g. cyber & space) may provide similar results that many munitions create on the battlefield and should be examined as a way to extend the life of current munition stocks.
- **Tax & Regulatory Incentives.** It is imperative that expanded tax and regulatory benefits be expanded to existing munitions companies in order to spur increased production. These efforts should be closely coordinated with state and local officials and agencies who may also have the ability to provide benefits to expand current production lines or allow new ones to be developed.
- **Redesigning Existing Munitions.** Efforts should be undertaken to redesign current munitions so that they are easier to assemble and require less time to produce.

- **Enlisting the Intelligence Community.** The Intelligence Community (IC) has many resources at their disposal to increase munitions production and share the financial burden with the U.S. Department of Defense. A closer collaboration with the IC should be examined.

## **Conclusion**

The centerpiece of effective deterrence is the ability to successfully wage war against an opponent. Central to this approach is having sufficient munitions as well as the ability to build enough armaments in a war-time environment on timelines that benefit the U.S. military. Additionally, a rich variety of munitions must be created to address the spectrum of missions the U.S. military must address to successfully defeat the enemies of the United States. The U.S. must do more to increase munitions production but should also embrace unorthodox approaches as well as adopt unique institutional design features to accelerate production in order to produce similar battlefield effects. It is only by thinking like an organizational insurgent, understanding the stakes of defeat, and doing our utmost to help our fighting men and women can that we overcome the significant barriers which exist to secure victory in the Indo-Pacific.