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Staff Research Report



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China's Efforts to Counter U.S. Forward Presence in the Asia Pacific

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Background: China’s Security Environment and Threat Perception.....	3
Environment Shaping: Engagement, Coercion, and Alliance Splitting	5
Current Challenges	8
Opportunities Prevent Erosion of U.S. Influence and Access in the Asia Pacific.....	11
Endnotes	12

Executive Summary

While China benefits from the security and stability the United States and U.S. allies bring to Asia, China is seeking to reduce the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) vulnerability to U.S. forces in the region should a conflict occur. China continues to build anti-access/area denial (A2/AD)* capabilities to deter or delay a U.S. military response to a conflict. Beijing also appears to be pursuing other options—including nonmilitary options prior to a conflict—likely intended to erode the United States' strategic position, freedom of action, and operational space. These other options are engagement, coercion, and alliance splitting:

- China engages states within the region through military-to-military exchanges to create leverage for applying pressure on U.S. allies and partners.
- China uses economic engagement and economic coercion to attempt to shape the behavior of U.S. allies and partners Beijing considers instrumental to supporting U.S. presence and force projection capability within the U.S. Pacific Command's area of responsibility.
- China conducts activities intended to drive a wedge between U.S. allies and partners to undermine the development of a unified, U.S.-led security architecture in the Asia Pacific, and hinder U.S. presence and force projection capability should a conflict occur.

Background: China's Security Environment and Threat Perception

China's Perceived Position in Asia: China is seeking to become the dominant power in Asia and a counter or balancing power to the presence of the United States in the Asia Pacific.¹ China intends to achieve this goal by expanding its comprehensive national power during what Chinese leaders see as a “period of strategic opportunity,” which Beijing believes will allow China to better shape its security environment and defend its core interests.² Chinese President and General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party Xi Jinping articulated these efforts in his 2014 foreign policy directive, which calls for a mix of soft and hard power to achieve Beijing's foreign policy goals and address security challenges.^{† 3}

China's Security Challenges and Concerns: The most salient challenge[‡] to Chinese interests perceived by leaders in Beijing relates to sovereignty vis-à-vis Taiwan and in the East and South China seas. Should Chinese leaders decide to employ military force to address these sovereignty concerns, it would destabilize the region, put pressure on the United States to respond, and would affect American allies.[§] In planning military campaigns, the PLA has

* According to the U.S. Department of Defense, “anti-access” actions are intended to slow the deployment of an adversary's forces into a theater or cause them to operate at distances farther from the conflict than they would prefer. “Area denial” actions affect maneuvers within a theater, and are intended to impede an adversary's operations within areas where friendly forces cannot or will not prevent access. China, however, uses the term “counterintervention,” reflecting its perception that such operations are reactive. U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2013*, 2013, i, 32, 33. http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/2013_China_Report_FINAL.pdf; U.S. Department of Defense, *Air-Sea Battle: Service Collaboration to Address Anti-Access & Area Denial Challenges*, May 2013, 2. <http://archive.defense.gov/pubs/ASB-ConceptImplementation-Summary-May-2013.pdf>.

† Timothy Heath, a senior international defense research analyst at the RAND Corporation, testified to the Commission that China's 2015 defense white paper provides insight into China's “‘new requirements’ for the military to help build a ‘favorable strategic posture’ and ‘guarantee the country's peaceful development.’ It highlighted ... the need to better protect the country's ‘growing strategic interests.’ To shape the international order, the paper outlined requirements to ‘actively expand military and security cooperation’ and ‘promote the establishment of a regional framework for security and cooperation.’” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Hearing on Developments in China's Military Force Projection and Expeditionary Capabilities*, written testimony of Timothy Heath, January 21, 2016.

‡ China's 2015 defense white paper outlines sovereignty challenges, a Taiwan contingency, space and cyberspace challenges, overseas contingencies, and separatism as major security concerns. Open Source Enterprise, “China Daily: China's Military Strategy,” May 26, 2015. ID: CHR2015052612653330.

§ The United States maintains five collective defense arrangements in the Asia Pacific which include the Agreement between the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (ANZUS); Philippine Treaty; Southeast Asia Treaty; Japanese Treaty; and the Republic of Korea Treaty. U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Collective Defense Arrangements.” <http://www.state.gov/s/l/treaty/collectivedefense/>.

adopted a series of contingency measures designed to counter potential military intervention in the region by the United States.⁴ Oriana Mastro, a professor at Georgetown University, argues that “Chinese official statements, white papers, and semi-official writings suggest China ... sees U.S. military presence [and its proximity to the Mainland] as a destabilizing factor in the region that threatens China’s ability to return to its rightful place of regional preeminence.”⁵ To illustrate Professor Mastro’s point, China’s 2015 defense white paper states that the United States is enhancing military alliances and presence in this region, meddling in South China Sea affairs, and maintaining “constant close-in air and sea surveillance and reconnaissance,” all of which negatively impact China’s perceived security.⁶

The reality of the situation is that because of its own assertive and aggressive actions, China has been the primary driver of instability in the region. One recent example of this is Beijing’s island-building campaign in the South China Sea, which has been widely criticized by the United States, the region, and the wider community.⁷ Another example is the stationing of batteries of long-range surface to air missiles on Woody Island in the Paracel Island chain.⁸ The perceived threat to China from the U.S. and its allies is perhaps best summed up by Senior Captain Xu Qi, a PLA naval officer writing in an authoritative PLA military journal, stating that “China’s heartland faces the sea ... [and the] United States has deployed strong forces in the Western Pacific and has formed a system of military bases [in] the First and Second Island Chains* with a strategic posture involving Japan and South Korea as the northern anchors, Australia and the Philippines as the southern anchors, and with Guam positioned as the forward base.”⁹ He continues, “some maritime powers may employ long-range strike weapons to attack into the depths of China ... [and] precision attacks ... [from] beyond the first island chain ... threaten important political, economic, and military targets....”¹⁰

Mitigating U.S. Presence in the Asia Pacific: Beijing’s concern about the U.S. military presence in the region and the ability of the United States to intervene in areas considered core interests have led China to pursue capabilities that would enable the PLA to deny U.S. intervention or to (complicate) U.S. intervention during a conflict should denial efforts fail. However, in addition to kinetic A2/AD capabilities,[†] Beijing also appears to be pursuing preemptive options well before a conflict, with the intention of eroding the United States’ strategic position, freedom of action, and operational space in the region.¹¹ The first edition of *The Science of Military Strategy*, published by the PLA Academy of Military Science in 2001,[‡] states that “war is not just a competition of military forces, but an overall contest of political, economic, diplomatic, cultural and other forces. The competitions in the nonmilitary fields such as politics, economy, diplomatic and culture coordinate directly or indirectly with military operations ... [and] military operations cannot [achieve] ... victory without ... support of the ... nonmilitary field.”¹² David Berteau, director of the National Security Program on Industry and Resources at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and Michael Green, senior vice president for Asia and Japan Chair at CSIS, note that “counterintervention [capabilities] are usually thought of in terms of A2/AD military capabilities ... but also include diplomatic, information, and economic sources of leverage against the U.S. political system and particularly weaker ... states in order to complicate U.S. intervention in Taiwan, South China Sea, or other regional crises that could involve China.”¹³ Mr. Berteau and Mr. Green likewise note the “aim ... [is] weakening U.S. alignment with other states in the region and involv[ing] instruments that range from trade agreements and diplomacy to bribery and individual coercion.”¹⁴ Further, another CSIS report on the U.S. “rebalance” strategy asserts one of the methods

* The first island chain refers to a line of islands running through the Kurile Islands, Japan and the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines, Borneo, and Natuna Besar. The second island chain is farther east, running through the Kurile Islands, Japan, the Bonin Islands, the Mariana Islands, and the Caroline Islands. PLA strategists and academics have long asserted the United States relies primarily on the first island chain and the second island chain to strategically “encircle” or “contain” China and prevent the PLA Navy from operating freely in the Western Pacific. Open Source Enterprise, “PRC Article Surveys China’s Naval Rivals, Challenges,” January 6, 2012. ID: CPP20120109671003; Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea* (Second Edition), Naval Institute Press, 2010, 174–176.

† Eric Heginbotham and Jacob Heim, a senior political scientist and an associate policy analyst, respectively, at the RAND Corporation, note that China’s A2/AD capabilities “would make it difficult for the United States to deploy to, and operate in, conflict areas. A large inventory of accurate ballistic and cruise missiles, a growing fleet of modern submarines, sophisticated air defense systems, as well as counterspace and electronic warfare capabilities, all combine to complicate U.S. intervention. Together with modern combat aircraft and surface ships, China can challenge U.S. military dominance at an increasing distance from the Chinese coast.” Eric Heginbotham and Jacob L. Heim, “Deterring without Dominance: Discouraging Chinese Adventurism under Austerity,” *Washington Quarterly* 38:1 (Spring 2015): 186.

‡ The English-language edition of *The Science of Military Strategy* quoted is a translation of the 2001 first edition edited by Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi and published by the Military Science Publishing House in Beijing in 2005.

pursued by China to counter U.S. basing is maintaining a PLA strike capability to make U.S. “allies targets instead of sanctuaries, complicating the calculation for host governments....”¹⁵

Environment Shaping: Engagement, Coercion, and Alliance Splitting

China is managing its security interests in the Asia Pacific through a combination of engagement, coercion, and alliance splitting. Beijing is using economic engagement and military-to-military cooperation to try to burnish its “peaceful rise/peaceful development”^{*} image to create conditions that enhance its security environment.¹⁶ Beijing has been willing to use coercion to shape its security environment as well.¹⁷ Beijing employs coercion to—among other things—warn U.S. allies and partners against supporting the presence of U.S. forces. It employs alliance splitting to undermine the development of a unified, U.S.-led security architecture in the region and impede U.S. capabilities enabled by its alliance relationships.¹⁸ The aforementioned CSIS report on the “U.S. Force Posture Strategy in the Asia Pacific Region” describes how these efforts could significantly undermine U.S. freedom of action in the region:

*China is pursuing diplomatic, informational, military and economic instruments for countercontainment in peacetime and counterintervention in a crisis. Japan and Australia are probably least susceptible to Chinese coercion, but defections by any ally or partner could undermine efforts for dissuasion and possibly undermine operational planning as well. In the absence of crisis or contingency operations, a U.S. request to a partner nation for access, bases, or strategic flexibility with already deployed forces has the potential to cause visible public concern and even rejection, which could undermine U.S. shaping strategies within the region.*¹⁹

The U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) similarly notes that “some countries, including [U.S.] allies, have raised doubts at times about their support for U.S. forces in a possible conflict between the United States and China,”²⁰ and Dr. Mastro notes China may seek to exploit “perceived weaknesses in political support and resolve of U.S. allies and friends, thereby keeping the United States out because countries will not allow it to base there.”²¹

Engagement: China’s economic, diplomatic, and security cooperation with countries in the Asia Pacific have implications for U.S. influence. China is engaging countries the United States considers to be strategically important (i.e., for supporting military operations through economic and military-to-military cooperation) in an effort to complicate relationships between the United States and those strategically important countries.

- China uses economic engagement to achieve geostrategic and security objectives, and as Dr. Mastro notes, “Xi Jinping has also emphasized the importance of prioritizing the economic interests of countries that support Chinese core interests, even if it comes at a relative cost economically.”²² Senior Captain Xu illustrates the ways in which engagement with Asian countries has advanced China’s geostrategic interests, particularly in the maritime sphere:

Through cooperation with nearby countries, during the 1990s, China constructed harbor wharves in the eastern Indian Ocean in Burma and cleared the Mekong waterways, in order to gain access to the sea in China’s southwest.... On the Makran seacoast of southwest Pakistan, China invested U.S. \$1 billion to construct a deep water port at

^{*} Established in the 1990s, China’s “peaceful rise” strategy, which became “peaceful development,” emphasized Chinese modernization and sought to downplay fears of Chinese regional hegemonic ambitions, often referred to in Beijing as the “China threat theory.” Beijing continues to reassure its neighbors of China’s peaceful rise; however, Chinese actions to enforce its territorial and jurisdictional claims in the East and South China seas have resulted in contradiction between Beijing’s words and deeds. Robert G. Sutter, Michael E. Brown, and Timothy J. A. Adamson, “Balancing Acts: The U.S. Rebalance and Asia-Pacific Stability,” *Elliot School of International Affairs, George Washington University*, August 2013, 7. http://www2.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/BalancingActs_Compiled1.pdf; Ian Storey, “The South China Sea Dispute (Part 2): Friction to Remain the Status Quo,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, June 21, 2013. http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41053&typo3%3BcHash=2f0805964a1826cd2f35d0fb8357517#.Vq9vuXnMsdu; and Yun Sun, “PacNet #25: China’s Peaceful Rise: Peace through strength?” *Pacific Forum CSIS*, March 31, 2014. <http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1425.pdf>.

*Gwadar, in order to establish a trade and transport hub for Central Asian nations and simultaneously expand China's geostrategic influence. For the past few years, China has provided aid to the South Pacific region and also strengthened economic and trade ties.... These achievements have all contributed to the development of China's maritime geostrategic relationships.*²³

- China's more recent "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" initiative also employs economic engagement—primarily through infrastructure investment—to advance China's broader geostrategic goals.²⁴
- China uses diplomatic engagement to try to advance its strategic objectives as well. For example, in October 2015, China hosted the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-China Defense Ministers' Informal Meeting in addition to the Sixth Xiangshan Forum to improve defense ties and security relationships with Southeast Asian countries.²⁵ Additionally, during the Fourth Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), President Xi proposed that CICA become a platform for security dialogue and cooperation for Asia, with China taking a leading role in exploring regional and Asian security partnership programs.²⁶
- China for several years* has conducted multilateral and bilateral exercises to build capacity to conduct multinational humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations as well as to ease anxieties among China's neighbors concerning the PLA's growing capabilities and expanding missions.²⁷ However, these exercises also support President Xi's foreign policy by seeking to ease regional concerns while attempting to shape the international system and improve the security environment along China's periphery.²⁸ Many of China's recent bilateral and multilateral military exercises have been with U.S. allies or partners, which might offer the PLA insight into U.S. equipment and training procedures, and provide an opportunity to work with and pursue closer ties with U.S. allies and partners. The following bilateral and multilateral exercises occurred in 2015:
 - **Cobra Gold (January 2015):** A combined U.S., Chinese, and Thai military engineer force built a school in Thailand.²⁹
 - **ASEAN Regional Forum Disaster Relief Exercise (May 2015):** This China- and Malaysia-led HA/DR exercise, which included the United States and 24 other participants, simulated a response to a typhoon striking Malaysia.³⁰
 - **Khaan Quest (June 2015):** China participated for the first time in the annual peacekeeping drill (this time including 25 countries) led by Mongolia and the United States.³¹
 - **Kowari (August–September 2015):** The United States, China, and Australia conducted their second trilateral "Kowari" exercise, which included survival skill training near Darwin, Australia.³²
 - **Tropic Twilight (August–October 2015):** China, the United States, and the United Kingdom sent troops to participate in the New Zealand-led "Tropic Twilight" HA/DR response exercise, which involved infrastructure construction and upgrades for schools and clinics at outlying Cook Islands atolls.³³
 - **Falcon Strike 2015 (November 2015):** China sent six PLA Air Force Su-27 fighters along with the August 1st Aerobatic Team to Thailand to conduct its first joint air exercise and an air exhibition with the Royal Thai Air Force at Nakhon Ratchasima Air Base.³⁴

Coercion: Beijing also uses coercion to shape China's security environment. According to a Center for New American Security (CNAS) report coauthored by Patrick Cronin, a senior director of the Asia-Pacific Security Program at CNAS, "as China seeks to exercise further influence over its periphery – and in the process, effectively challenge the United States' postwar dominance in security and governance over regional rules of the road – it is increasingly seeking to use coercive diplomacy."³⁵ China has used both veiled threats concerning the use of force

* For a year review of bilateral and multilateral military exercises involving the PLA between 2008 and 2014, see U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015*, May 2015, 76–77. www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf.

as well as economic punishment in efforts to shape the behavior of countries on its periphery. For example, Beijing has employed punitive economic actions against Japan and the Philippines—both U.S. allies—following confrontations in 2010 between the Japanese Coast Guard and a Chinese fishing vessel in the East China Sea, and in 2012 between the Philippine Coast Guard and Chinese maritime law enforcement ships at Scarborough Reef in the South China Sea, both over illegal Chinese fishing activities.³⁶ In the case of Japan, China temporarily banned exports of rare earth elements to Japan, and in the case of the Philippines unofficially imposed import restrictions on Philippine bananas.³⁷

China is likewise applying coercion through the implied threat of the use of force in its maritime disputes. While China currently is relying on civilian maritime law enforcement agencies to assert its claims in disputed seas, Beijing is also using the PLA Navy in a protective monitoring capacity for the China Coast Guard and maritime militia units.³⁸ In May 2014, this PLA Navy monitoring mission allowed China to use China Coast Guard and maritime militia ships to establish a security cordon around a China National Offshore Oil Corporation-owned exploratory hydrocarbon rig, *Haiyang Shiyou 981*, within Vietnam's claimed exclusive economic zone[†] (EEZ) near the Paracel Islands, claimed by both Vietnam and China, resulting in a standoff between the two countries.³⁹ In its 2015 annual report to Congress on China's military, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) notes that when Vietnam attempted to assert its sovereignty claim, "Chinese paramilitary ships ... resorted to ramming and use of water cannons to deter Vietnamese ships and enforce the security cordons around the rig" with "PLA Navy ships support[ing] operations in ... [a monitoring] capacity and PLA fighters, helicopters, and reconnaissance aircraft patrol[ing] overhead."⁴⁰ The same report provides another example of Beijing's coercive use of the PLA Navy in conjunction with the China Coast Guard to shape the security environment in the East China Sea, noting that China's

*enforcement of its East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone ... against Japanese aircraft and ... maritime activity near the Senkaku Islands reflects Chinese efforts to normalize its presence near the islands and demonstrate its intent to defend its claims.... The PLA Navy primarily plays a deterrence role in China's use of 'low intensity coercion' and refrains from becoming directly involved in territorial and maritime disputes to avoid escalation. Although the PLA Navy remains at a distance, its deployed surface combatants are ready to respond to a deteriorating security environment.*⁴¹

Alliance Splitting: In addition to engagement and coercion, Beijing is engaging in attempts to split alliances and exploit seams in relationships between and among the United States and its partners and allies in the Asia Pacific to improve China's security environment. Some of the most notable examples of China's alliance splitting efforts are directed at South Korea, which finds itself torn between the promise of economic engagement with China and its security relationship with the United States which Han Suk-hee, a professor at Yonsei University in Seoul, notes "puts South Korea in a strategic dilemma between the United States and China."⁴² Furthermore, Beijing seeks to exploit seams in relationships and has attempted to drive a wedge between Tokyo and Seoul, U.S. allies whose alignment on key security issues is crucial to the success of Washington's security strategy in Northeast Asia. A George Washington University (GWU) report coauthored by Robert Sutter, a professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at GWU, assesses this friction between South Korea and Japan has "frustrated U.S. efforts to forge a coherent security policy in Northeast Asia. The two countries continue to clash over the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islands in the Sea of Japan, while rising nationalism in both countries threatens trilateral cooperation with the United States."⁴³ Evidence suggests China is also seeking to encourage the sentiment among some Australian strategists that Canberra must "choose" between the United States and China.⁴⁴

* According to U.S. Naval War College professor Andrew Erickson and research fellow Conor Kennedy, China employs a "maritime militia, a dual hatted force of specially registered fishing vessels with fisherman soldier crews. Portions of these coastal militias are organized by local military and government officials along the nation's many ports, providing China with small tactical units designed to execute specific missions in support of the country's more professional military and maritime interests." China's maritime militias receive military training, including in the use of light weapons. China is training these maritime militias to support the activities of the PLA Navy and China's maritime law enforcement forces in the South China Sea. Andrew S. Erickson and Conor M. Kennedy, "China's Island Builders," *Foreign Affairs*, April 9, 2015. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2015-04-09/china-s-island-builders>; and Andrew Erickson and Conor Kennedy, "Meet the Chinese Maritime Militia Waging a 'People's War at Sea,'" *China Real Time* (Blog), March 31, 2015. <http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2015/03/31/meet-the-chinese-maritime-militia-waging-a-peoples-war-at-sea/>.

† A coastal state is entitled to an exclusive economic zone extending 200 nautical miles from its coastline within which that state can exercise exclusive sovereign rights and jurisdiction over living and nonliving resources, but not full sovereignty. UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, "Part 5: Exclusive Economic Zone." http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part5.htm.

China's Application of the "Three Warfares"

The activities noted above can all be viewed as complementary to China's use of "three warfares" aimed at countering U.S. presence and influence in Asia prior to any potential kinetic conflict and putting China in a position to control and shape its security environment. Dr. Cronin testified to the Commission that the three warfares tactic is "decidedly an indirect approach when it comes to military defenses."⁴⁵ DOD's 2011 annual report to Congress on China's military states that in 2003, China's leaders endorsed the three warfares concept, "reflecting China's recognition that as a global actor, it will benefit from learning to effectively utilize the tools of public opinion, messaging, and influence."⁴⁶ The report goes on to note that "China likely hopes to employ these three concepts in unison, particularly during the early stages of a crisis, as they have a tendency to bolster one another."⁴⁷

The components of the three warfares are as follows:

- *Psychological warfare* "seeks to undermine an enemy's ability to conduct combat operations through operations aimed at deterring, shocking, and demoralizing enemy military personnel and supporting civilian populations."⁴⁸

Example: China's espionage campaign against Taiwan could constitute, among other things, a form of psychological warfare. Aside from traditional reasons for espionage, China also seeks to weaken the morale of the Taiwan military. Each spy case uncovered and revealed by Taiwan has the potential to achieve psychological benefits for Beijing, creating an environment where China's capture of Taiwan's defense secrets could be perceived as an inevitability.⁴⁹

- *Media warfare* "is aimed at influencing domestic and international public opinion to build support for China's military actions and dissuade an adversary from pursuing actions contrary to China's interests."⁵⁰

Example: In September 2012, China took out a two page advertisement in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* titled "Diaou (Senkaku) Islands Belong to China" after the Government of Japan purchased three of the islands from a private owner.⁵¹ The placement of the advertisements was probably intended to shape U.S. public perceptions concerning Beijing's stance that the islands are China's while increasing pressure on Tokyo.

- *Legal warfare* "uses international and domestic law to claim the legal high ground or assert Chinese interests. It can be employed to hamstring an adversary's operational freedom and shape the operational space. Legal warfare is also intended to build international support and manage possible political repercussions of China's military actions. China has attempted to employ legal warfare in the maritime domain and in international airspace in pursuit of a security buffer zone."⁵²

Example: China has employed legal warfare to attempt to restrict the activities of foreign ships and aircraft operating in or flying over China's EEZ. While the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) entitles foreign military ships and aircraft to conduct freedom of navigation and overflight in the EEZ, China's expansive and unusual interpretation of international law asserts the right to require foreign ships to obtain permission or provide notification before conducting innocent passage, though UNCLOS does not include such a provision. China's efforts to reinterpret UNCLOS to the disadvantage of foreign militaries operating in its periphery is an example of an effort to use legal warfare.

Current Challenges

Examples of China's efforts to employ the aforementioned tools:

Australia: As noted above, one of Beijing's aims of engagement, particularly in the economic realm, with Canberra appears to be seeking to complicate the close relationship between the United States and Australia. Australia's strong economic growth in recent years has been largely reliant on exports of raw materials to China.⁵³ CRS suggests this could lead to "reticence to adopt policies that could anger China."⁵⁴

China's involvement in the development of Darwin Port illustrates this challenge. Landbridge Group, a Chinese company linked to the PLA, acquired a 99-year lease of the Australian port of Darwin in October 2015.⁵⁵ The announcement of the lease raised some security concerns within defense circles in both Australia and the United States, and could lead to a review regarding foreign investment practices and national security issues in Australia.⁵⁶

As the port is used by the Australian defense forces and also supports U.S. Marine Corps as a rotational training base, there is cause for concern about the potential vulnerability of Australian and U.S. troops to clandestine surveillance operations by China.⁵⁷

While China has pursued economic engagement with Australia, Beijing has occasionally opted to employ political coercion as well. Following the 2011 announcement that the United States would station U.S. Marines in northern Australia, a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson reportedly said “Australia cannot play China for a fool,” and the *People’s Daily* English edition ran an article arguing that it is “impossible for China to remain detached no matter what Australia does to undermine its security. One thing is certain - if Australia uses its military bases to help the U.S. harm Chinese interests, then Australia itself will be caught in the crossfire.”⁵⁸

Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands: Guam is a critical location for the forward deployment of air, naval, missile defense, and ground forces for any contingency operation the United States may need to respond to within the Asia Pacific region.* Furthermore, the U.S. military has shifted much of its aviation training to Guam, and will develop training areas in Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).⁵⁹ Beijing is concerned the redeployment of U.S. troops to Guam and the development of a training range† in the CNMI is directed against China.⁶⁰ While Beijing is concerned about the U.S. military footprint, China’s tourism industry has been acquiring hotels and apartment buildings in Palau and hotel and casino development projects in Saipan, as well as establishing Chinese-operated tour organizations in the CNMI.⁶¹ There is some concern within the CNMI business community that the presence of U.S. military training on three of the islands in the chain could discourage investment by the Chinese-backed tourism-casino industry, as investors behind the casinos have indicated they may pull out if plans for the training range progress.⁶² This has resulted in the CNMI considering legal action to contest the Pentagon’s plan to develop the range.”⁶³

Chinese investments in real estate in the CNMI and the presence of Chinese workers, tourists, or businesspeople could provide cover for clandestine surveillance of U.S. facilities, training, logistics, or troop rotations. The United States can expect continued Chinese investments in the region if Beijing perceives that some amount of access, influence, and information acquisition is being achieved.

Okinawa: As with Guam, Beijing is likewise concerned about the U.S. force projection capability on Okinawa. However, China’s attempts to shape Japanese behavior through economic coercion have not been very successful. James Reilly, a senior lecturer in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney, notes that in response to Chinese “consumer boycotts and economic pressure, Japan has refused to back down over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands ... [and] strengthened its cooperation with other Asian neighbors, signed a fisheries accord with Taiwan, and secured statements of support from the United States.”⁶⁴

Japanese press reporting indicates Chinese investors have acquired property near U.S. DOD facilities on Okinawa.⁶⁵ China likely maintains a presence of intelligence officers and agitators to both collect intelligence against the U.S. military presence on the island and complicate aspects of the U.S.-Japan alliance by participating in anti-base activities. Fumio Ota, a retired Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force vice admiral and a former director of the Japan Defense Intelligence Headquarters, notes “China has ... supported Okinawa’s independence activities, which were developed by pro-Chinese Okinawans and probably Chinese ... agents as well.”⁶⁶ Dr. Ota goes on to say that the Chinese press in September 2012 “reported the result of ... [a] 2006 referendum of Ryukyu citizens [that indicated]

* For a range of air, naval, missile defense, ground, and logistical capabilities forward deployed to Guam, see Shirley A. Kan, “Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments,” *U.S. Congressional Research Service*, November 26, 2014, 2–3. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22570.pdf>.

† Admiral Samuel Locklear in his prepared remarks before the House Armed Services Committee in April 2015 noted that the “Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands ... Joint Military Training initiative (CJMT) is an important posture undertaking. CNMI remains strategically important as a forward and sovereign U.S. location with lease rights until 2033 and extendable to 2083. When the U.S.-Japan Defense Policy Review Initiative moves approximately 4,700 U.S. Marines from Japan to Guam, the CJMT will enable this U.S. Marine force to train and maintain operational readiness. Specifically on the island of Tinian, the CJMT initiative will provide live-fire ranges and training areas. The CJMT will optimize future training ranges for joint and combined exercises with allies and foreign forces. As a part of aviation resiliency initiatives, divert and alternate air fields are also being explored on the islands of Saipan and Tinian along with other locations in the broader Western Pacific.” House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, *Hearing on U.S. Pacific Command Posture*, written testimony of Admiral Samuel J. Locklear, April 15, 2015.

<http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20150415/103307/HHRG-114-AS00-Wstate-LocklearUSNS-20150415.pdf>.

75 percent of them supported independence from Japan and reinstating free trade with China ... [when there] was in fact no referendum by Ryukyu citizens, and the vast majority of Okinawans want to be a part of Japan.”⁶⁷

Aggressive Chinese activities intended to challenge Japan’s administration of the Senkaku Islands and statements by Chinese academics and military officials questioning the status of Okinawa as part of Japan probably will increase concerns about China’s long-term intentions in the region.⁶⁸ China will likely continue both espionage and agitation activities on Okinawa aimed at monitoring U.S. and Japanese force posture and seeking to complicate the U.S.-Japan alliance by attempting to facilitate resentment about the continuing U.S. military presence.⁶⁹

Philippines: Continued tensions between China and the Philippines over disputed territory in the South China Sea have strained relations between the two countries—particularly since the Scarborough Reef incident in 2012—and have resulted in a decline in Chinese economic investment in the Philippines.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the Philippines has contested China’s claims in the South China Sea at the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea, drawing additional Chinese ire.⁷¹ Chinese economic engagement with the Philippines for the purposes of shaping China’s security environment is likely to remain minimal, and coercion will almost certainly continue for the foreseeable future.⁷²

Likely in response to China’s continued assertiveness in the South China Sea, the Philippine Supreme Court in January 2016 approved a defense cooperation deal with the United States that enables U.S. forces to deploy to up to eight bases and pre-position military equipment and supplies within the country.⁷³ The decision will generate additional opportunities for the United States to assist the Philippines in modernizing its military forces, which have lagged behind other states in the region. The agreement to allow the U.S. military to use bases, the pending South China Sea arbitration decision in the Permanent Court of Arbitration at the Hague, potential joint Philippine-U.S. Navy patrols in the South China Sea, and closer political and military-to-military relations between the Philippines and Japan are likely to result in increased Chinese cyber intrusions, intelligence-gathering activities within the Philippines, and the potential for additional economic coercion.⁷⁴ Furthermore, China could seek to restrict tourism to inflict economic damage and use media reporting to frame U.S.-Philippine naval patrols as destabilizing for the region as part of a three warfares campaign.⁷⁵

South Korea: Seoul maintains a positive relationship with Beijing, and China has used economic integration to deepen the relationship between the two countries after China surpassed the United States as South Korea’s largest trading partner in 2004.⁷⁶ Beijing and Seoul share similar security concerns about maritime territorial disputes with Tokyo, the growing capabilities of the Japanese Self Defense Force, and North Korea as a failed state.⁷⁷ According to Andrew Nathan, a professor at Columbia University, and Andrew Scobell, a senior political scientist at the RAND Corporation, China is likely seeking to maintain stable relations with South Korea to “build trust, and eventually ... reassure the Koreans that they would not need American troops on their soil to feel secure.”⁷⁸

Should Beijing become concerned about enhanced U.S.-South Korean security cooperation following North Korea’s latest nuclear and missile tests in January and February 2016 respectively,⁷⁹ China may seek to use its economic leverage to pressure South Korea into reducing the American military presence on the Korean Peninsula. The aforementioned CNAS report notes the “Chinese investment on [South Korea’s] Jeju Island could, for instance, help turn the Korean political debate against building a major new naval base that would stand over one of the critical chokepoints for the Chinese fleet.”⁸⁰ The United States’ potential deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea offers another example. South Korean press indicates China is employing diplomatic pressure and may use economic pressure to deter Seoul from agreeing to the deployment of the system, which South Korean and U.S. advocates insist is directed at countering North Korean threats, but which China fears could be used against Chinese missile forces as well.⁸¹ At a press conference in January 2016, a Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson advised that Seoul should consider Chinese security interests.⁸²

Thailand: The U.S. and Thai militaries traditionally have had a strong security relationship by virtue of the U.S.-Thailand alliance, but the United States suspended security assistance to Thailand following its 2014 coup.⁸³ While the U.S.-Thai alliance remains in place and Washington and Bangkok are mending relations after a period of tension, China’s security relations with Thailand are strengthening.⁸⁴ Thailand maintains close economic, military, and diplomatic ties with China. The abovementioned GWU report notes “Thailand is central to China’s efforts to build roads, railways, power lines, and other means to integrate mainland Southeast Asia with China’s growing economy.”⁸⁵ In February 2015, China and Thailand announced a five-year agreement to expand military-to-military

cooperation; the PLA is also pursuing bilateral training with Thailand's military.⁸⁶ CRS notes that some analysts assert without renewed security assistance, "the U.S. may lose access to Thailand's strategically located military facilities and ... China may become even more influential in the region."⁸⁷ Furthermore, China is likely to pursue bilateral training events and exercises to glean information about Thai knowledge of U.S. capabilities or possibly equipment.

New Zealand: China has strengthened relations with New Zealand through both economic and military-to-military engagement. New Zealand's economic ties to China could create circumstances in which Wellington is sensitive to actions that might disturb the nation's trade relationship with China.⁸⁸ In 2013, China became New Zealand's largest trading partner—overtaking Australia—and has conducted bilateral and multilateral exercises with the New Zealand military.⁸⁹ While Wellington continues to pursue an independent foreign policy, there is some concern within New Zealand about China's growing economic influence, particularly after the sale of New Zealand agricultural land by New Zealand agricultural conglomerate Crafar Farms in 2012 to Pengxin International Group Limited, a Shanghai-based company.⁹⁰ The transaction generated some concern among politicians in New Zealand about the sale of land to foreign investors.⁹¹

Continued Alliance Splitting Activities: Beijing's attempts to shape its security environment and limit U.S. force presence in Asia through engagement, coercion, and efforts to split the U.S. alliance structure have produced mixed results. While many U.S. allies and partners are supportive of the U.S. military presence in Asia, none are interested in being forced to choose between the United States and China.⁹² Furthermore, many of China's efforts to improve its security environment through coercive or assertive behavior appear to be driving U.S. allies such as Japan, the Philippines, and Australia closer to the United States.⁹³ This likely will result in the United States maintaining strong security relationships through trilateral cooperation with its allies in the Asia Pacific, particularly with the U.S.-Japan-Australia and U.S.-Japan-South Korea trilaterals.⁹⁴ Despite this, there is little indication Beijing will abandon its efforts to use engagement, coercion, and alliance splitting to complicate the U.S. military presence in the region. And although recent developments concerning Japan's historical WWII legacy have improved relations between Tokyo and Seoul at the government-to-government level,⁹⁵ Beijing may still seek to exploit several seams, including a maritime sovereignty dispute between Japan and South Korea and Seoul's concern about the expanding missions of the Japanese Self Defense Force.

Opportunities to Prevent Erosion of U.S. Influence and Access in the Asia Pacific

China's efforts to erode U.S. influence in the Asia Pacific almost certainly will continue. The United States and its allies must be aware of these efforts and prepared to counter them. To address this ongoing challenge, actions the United States could take include the following:

- Continue to bolster alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Thailand to ensure the United States retains base access and replenishment support for any operation in the Asia Pacific where U.S. forces are required to maintain peace and stability.
- Pursue opportunities to partner with Indonesia, Malaysia, India, and Vietnam to bolster support for U.S. political access and support for U.S. military presence in the region.
- Continue freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea to demonstrate clearly the U.S. commitment to ensuring freedom of maneuver in international waters. U.S. allies and partners are closely monitoring the United States' response to China's aggression in the South China Sea to gauge Washington's commitment to maintaining stability in the region.
- Explore options to improve the military-to-military relationship with Thailand and ensure the U.S.-Thai military relationship remains stronger than Thailand's military relationship with the PLA. Any such approach should be careful not to erode the established U.S. position concerning Thailand returning to civilian rule.
- Continue to work with Vietnam to expand maritime domain awareness and improve logistical support capabilities.

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