



Written by [William P. Hoar](#) on September 27, 2011

## Playing Down the PLA

**Item:** *Han Dongping, a professor of history and political science at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina, writing in China Daily for August 29, blasted the United States for putting China on the “defensive,” requiring Beijing to “make apologetic explanations about its military spending and its peaceful intentions.” China, asserted the professor, “is one of the most peaceful nations in world history.”*



**Correction:** Peace, as it is understood by dedicated communists, is the absence of resistance to communism. Tibetans, among others, have experienced firsthand the nature of the type of “peace” imposed by Communist China and its People’s Liberation Army (PLA) — with estimates of those killed in Tibet ranging from 600,000 to twice that number.

As noted by Jean-Louis Margolin in *The Black Book on Communism* (edited by Stéphane Courtois, et al., Harvard University Press, 1999), the “litany of atrocities” in Tibet “is hair-raising and in many cases unverifiable. But the eyewitness reports concur so precisely that the Dalai Lama’s assessment of this period [in the late 1950s] seems beyond challenge: “Tibetans not only were shot, but also were beaten to death, crucified, burned alive, drowned, mutilated, starved, strangled, hanged, boiled alive, buried alive, drawn and quartered, and beheaded.”

In 2009, on the 50th anniversary of a failed uprising in Tibet, the Dalai Lama rightfully accused the Chinese communists of turning his Himalayan homeland into a “hell on earth.”

While the People’s Republic of China (PRC) invariably throws public tantrums over the issuance of the annual report in Washington, which is required by law, the Pentagon has been pulling its verbal punches more each year. Many military experts, as has been pointed out in *Defense News* and elsewhere, criticize it “for lacking substance”; that publication, for example, recently remarked editorially that the annual report has been “watered down” so as not to offend the Chinese regime.

China’s first aircraft carrier, a former Soviet ship, has begun sea trials. However, even that carrier’s progress is played down, and the potential implications it might have for, say, the Philippines in the South China Sea are ignored altogether. Meanwhile, as *Defense News* put it, China has laid “wholesale claims to the entire South China Sea and all the wealth in and under its waters ... [and] made clear it will use force to assert its hegemony.”

Trying to appease the communists in China is a proven disaster. Consider during the Korean War, when President Harry Truman gave the Chinese what amounted to a free pass from an attack from the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan (also known as Formosa) by having the Seventh Fleet block the sea lanes to and from Taiwan. As pointed out by Frazier Hunt in *The Untold Story of Douglas MacArthur* (1954),



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this gave the Chinese communists and their “Korean war plans a tremendous impetus, because Red China could now enter the Korean war at any time she chose without fear of being attacked on her flank and rear by the Nationalist troops on Formosa.”

What seemed “to the muddled public to be a far-sighted move” by President Truman to save Free Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek “from invasion was actually nullifying all use for the present of the large Nationalist Army on Formosa as a fighting force against Red China,” said Hunt. “In one significant gesture, it banged the door into Chiang’s face, and it opened the door into Korea for the Chinese Communists. Possibly a million Red Chinese could now be released from the mainland opposite Formosa and made available for future assignment in Manchuria.”

Jump ahead five-plus decades and the United States is still denying the Chinese on Taipei the advanced weaponry they need to protect themselves in a military confrontation with mainland China or to be able to stand up diplomatically to Beijing in a potential showdown. Contrary to the propaganda from Beijing and some in its echo chamber in this country, allowing Taiwan to strengthen itself is not destabilizing. Doing so would create a disincentive for aggression from Communist China. Yet, it was recently signaled by the Obama administration and widely publicized (though not announced officially) that Taipei’s purchase request has been turned down once again for needed F-16 C/D fighters.

One wouldn’t want to offend the dictators on the mainland, you understand. Mainland China, for its part, is expected to have 1,800 missiles pointed at Taiwan by the end of next year.

Even the diluted Pentagon report notes that Taiwan has historically relied on a number of factors to deter aggression from the mainland. These include the Chinese military’s “inability to project sufficient power across the 185 km Taiwan Strait; the Taiwan military’s technological superiority; the inherent geographic advantages of island defense; and the possibility of U.S. intervention. China’s increasingly modern weapons and platforms (over a thousand ballistic missiles, an anti-ship ballistic missile program, increasingly modern ships and submarines, combat aircraft, and improved C4ISR [Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance] capabilities) threaten to negate many of those factors upon which Taiwan has depended.”

Unable to ignore the obvious in this case, the Pentagon’s latest annual report acknowledges that China’s military is still focused on Taiwan and “is likely to steadily expand its military options for Taiwan, including those to deter, delay, or deny third-party intervention.”

When the DoD report was released, it was accompanied by a briefing from Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Michael Schiffer. As observed by Dean Cheng of the Heritage Foundation, Schiffer

went to great pains to emphasize that the report reflects “the views and perspectives that are held broadly by the U.S. government.” So, despite a broad view within the U.S. government that the Chinese military is modernizing across a range of capabilities, is intent upon challenging the ability of the U.S. to support friends and allies, and is focused on the use of force across the Taiwan Straits, the Administration nonetheless does not see fit to provide Taiwan with modern systems to replace obsolete ones.

Of course, this is the same Administration whose Secretary of Defense had confidently predicted that the Chinese would not be fielding advanced fighter aircraft for at least a decade and had derided the need for as many U.S. aircraft carriers — even as the Chinese were developing the J-20 stealthy fighter and preparing their own aircraft carrier for launch.

Denying the sale of fighter aircraft to Taipei is widely understood as a sellout move. It has, commented



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*Defense News*, sent the “worst possible signal to allies across Asia.” The events “have reinforced perceptions of America’s decline and China’s ascendancy.” This comes at a time when Beijing is stepping up its claims over disputed territories and threatening to turn the South China Sea into a Communist Chinese lake.

Once again, the report was not issued when the law calls for it — by March 1 of each year — a date designed to make it more useful to Congress while debating defense authorization legislation. Last year (and this year as well) the title of the report was changed from “Military Power of the People’s Republic of China” to “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China.”

This, misleadingly, seems to transform China into a passive player. Yet, as Michael Mazza of the American Enterprise Institute put it last year, “China’s development of an anti-satellite (ASAT) capability, for example, is not a military development *involving* China, it is a decision *by* China to enhance its military power.” The report was also stripped of “every mention of ‘grand strategy,’” noted Mazza, and based on perceived ambiguous trends.

Despite the fact that Chinese leaders act as if they are fuming over these reports, they must be laughing among themselves. *Aviation Week* pointed out that there really is “very little new in any category. In fact, some subjects that rated great emphasis in the past — such as directed energy and laser research — have been dropped.”

The *Economist* of London, hardly a hawkish publication, commented that the Pentagon’s report is “diplomatically couched — though from China’s perspective, not nearly enough.” Major advances are downplayed — including the development of a missile with an estimated range of more than 940 miles that is obviously intended to keep the U.S. Navy at bay. The term “aircraft carrier killer” about that ballistic missile is widely used elsewhere, but not in this report. As observed by the *Economist*:

Of the DF-21D missile, it says that it is still being developed. It does not repeat the claim made by Admiral Robert Willard of America’s Pacific Command in December that the missile has reached “initial operational capability.” The J-20, it says, is not expected to reach “effective operational capability” before 2018 (China, it says, has yet to master high-performance jet-engine production). China is likely to build “multiple” aircraft-carriers with support craft over the next decade. But it will take “several additional years” for China to achieve a “minimal level of combat capability” with them, says the report.

There is no mention of the fact that China is the largest foreign holder of U.S. debt, nor of the controversy over denying Taiwan F-16 C/D fighters.

Omissions abound. In one section, the Pentagon says China “may also be developing a new road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missile, possibly capable of carrying a multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV).” Yet, at that point, observe *Defense News* reporters Kate Brannen and Wendell Minnick, “the report drops the issue from discussion. It does not explain the significance of a road-mobile ICBM carrying MIRVed nuclear warheads, or what that potentially could mean to the U.S. West Coast.”

Perhaps the biggest figurative elephant in the middle of the room that is largely ignored by the Pentagon report, or skimmed over with dated information, is how China has been arming itself with the assistance of others, including the United States.

Granted, the Pentagon does cite some previous work from other government departments, as well as a 2008 Defense Security Service report, about how Beijing has acquired vital technologies with obvious



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military applications. But this key document placidly acknowledges that “the PRC’s continuing efforts to acquire U.S. military and dual-use technology are enabling the PRC science and technology base to diminish the U.S. technological edge in areas critical to the development of military weapons and communications systems.”

One telling such case was noted long ago by Bill Gertz, a reporter with the *Washington Times* who has written extensively on military and security matters. (Gertz, for instance, in his 1999 book *Betrayal* (Regnery), revealed how the Clinton administration helped mainland China develop its nuclear weapons targeting American cities.)

We haven’t learned, it seems. In a *Washington Times* piece published on September 1, Gertz reported that Pentagon officials from the Defense Technology Security Administration (DTSA) were set to meet with General Electric Co. officials “to discuss security concerns related to the transfer of jet avionics technology to China. The meeting was called after congressional staff pressed the Pentagon to review whether China could divert U.S. commercial jet technology to military systems, as Beijing has done with missile, jet and satellite know-how.” The meeting stemmed from concerns over GE’s joint venture with the state-run Aviation Industry Corp. of China (AVIC).

A statement from DTSA to Congress earlier this summer acknowledged that “China traditionally has a history of cooperation between civil and military sectors.” Gertz went on:

The GE-AVIC deal also is raising political concerns among some in Congress about possible government favoritism toward GE: Company chief executive Jeffrey R. Immelt heads the Obama administration’s jobs and competitiveness program.

The Pentagon has not formally reviewed the technology transfer involved in the GE-AVIC joint venture because no formal export licenses were sought, and GE insists its safeguards are sufficient to protect any data leakage.

If the Congress and the public are not given the appropriate facts about China’s military ambitions, it is much more difficult to devise appropriate defense strategies before it is too late.

As George Washington observed in his farewell address, “Timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it.”

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