

China's Growing Military Might

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What many in the West at first dismissed as a tantrum thrown by Beijing over the unauthorized visit of US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan appears instead to be a carefully thought-out strategy designed to incrementally reassert Chinese sovereignty over the island territory. Beijing's ability to do this is underwritten by the nation's growing military might.

Through a unique and powerful missile arsenal to a capable and growing air force, navy, and ground force, China has created the means through which to reverse decades of injustice, encroachment, and encirclement by the West against the Chinese people and their territory. Even Western analysts and military experts admit that China's military capabilities have grown to world-class levels. These capabilities will be key to achieving and defending Chinese sovereignty now and into the future, through deterrence if possible, or through force if necessary.

The Long Sword: China's Missile Force

Throughout human history weapons have been used to give a fighting force a greater reach than their adversaries. Be it sword, spear, or arrow, those with the longest and most effective reach often dominate the battlefield. On today's battlefield, this reach is achieved through missiles.

China's modern missile forces are the largest and most capable on Earth according to even Western analysts. Through a combination of long, medium, intermediate, and short range missiles as well as a variety of cruise missiles, China has the ability to hit targets near and far.

The US government and arms industry-funded Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) through its “China Power” project wrote a [paper](#) titled, “How Are China's Land-based Conventional Missile Forces Evolving?,” which admitted:

Conventionally armed (non-nuclear) missiles have become an increasingly important component of military power. They can be employed to deter threats or project power hundreds or thousands of kilometers away. As part of sweeping efforts to modernize the People's Liberation Army (PLA), China has developed one of the most powerful land-based conventional missile arsenals in the world.

The same paper would also admit:

According to the US Department of Defense (DoD), China's missile forces in 2000 "were generally of short range and modest accuracy." In the years since then, China has developed the world's "largest and most diverse" arsenal of ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles.

The PLA Rocket Force, which maintains and operates China's land-based conventional and nuclear missiles, has fielded multiple new missile systems over the last several years. Many of these missiles are capable of carrying both conventional and nuclear payloads.

The paper describes cruise missiles able to hit land targets anywhere on potential battlefields like Taiwan, carrier-killer missiles reportedly able to target and destroy US carrier groups, and hypersonic missiles that can penetrate the most advanced Western missile defense systems. Even without the ability to penetrate Western missile defenses, the sheer number of Chinese missiles could saturate and overwhelm them.

China's missile forces have been built up specifically to keep the United States and its allies from building up military forces along its periphery and thus threaten Chinese territorial integrity. Together with Chinese air defenses and anti-ship systems, China has assembled formidable anti-access, area denial (A2AD) capabilities that would prevent US military forces from even reaching Chinese targets let alone engaging them.

It is also worth noting that China has developed significantly capable multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) in the form of its Type PCL191. It fires more rockets than its US counterparts, fires them further, and with at least as much accuracy guided by China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System.

A Business Insider [article](#) titled, "China's new rocket launcher system is its most powerful ever, and it's looming over the Taiwan Strait," would note:

The system is capable of firing eight 370 mm rockets a distance of 350 km or two 750 mm ballistic missiles 500 km.

This means that China's MLRS capabilities can reach any location in or around Taiwan from the mainland. In fact the bulk of any potential Chinese military operation regarding Taiwan and potential US intervention can be carried out from the mainland with China's extensive and capable missile and rocket forces.

The Shield: Chinese A2AD

Russian military operations in Ukraine have been defined by Russia's own long range fires as well as A2AD. It's premier S-400 air defense system exists at the top of an ecosystem of other shorter range air defenses that when networked and layered make the air space they protect virtually impenetrable. Together with long range strike weapons like artillery and

short-range ballistic missiles like the Iskander, there is nowhere for Ukrainian forces to hide and certainly no way for them to advance into Russia positions. By moving these capabilities forward, Russia has been incrementally securing territory from the regime in Kiev.

Not only has China emulated many tactics and strategies from Russia, it has also outright purchased the best the Russian Federation has to offer. Between 2018-2020 China purchased two regiments of Russia's S-400 systems. China also produces a wide variety of its own air defense systems based on the Russian S-300, Russia's Tor system, as well as systems incorporating certain aspects of the US Patriot missile system.

While Chinese air defenses have not been put to the test like their Russian counterparts, it stands to reason they would perform with similar efficiency and prevent US forces and other potential interlopers from entering Chinese airspace let alone cause damage within it.

The Dagger: Chinese Airpower

The People's Liberation Army Airforce employs hundreds of modern warplanes including the Chengdu J-10, the Shenyang J-11 and J-16, as well as scores of its newest warplane, the Chengdu J-20.

As with Chinese air defenses, Chinese airpower has been heavily influenced by Russian military aviation. Over the years in addition to its own warplanes, China has purchased a number of advanced Russian warplanes including the SU-27, SU-30, and most recently, the SU-35 according to the Diplomat in its 2019 [article](#), "Russia Offers China Another Batch of Su-35 Fighter Jets."

While China's airforce has not seen combat, the fact that it possesses a large number of Russian warplanes hints they will perform in a similar manner to Russian airpower as demonstrated in Syria from 2015 onward and now in military operations in Ukraine.

The warplanes themselves are merely platforms for advanced avionics and weapons, the latter of which is a central factor defining the success of any nation's airforce. The US government and arms industry-funded International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in a [paper](#) titled, "Chinese and Russian air-launched weapons: a test for Western air dominance," would note the advancements of Chinese air-to-air missiles (AAMs) stating:

The extent of Chinese progress in the air-to-air guided-weapons arena was apparent with the introduction of the PL-10 AAM. This weapon provided a marked improvement in performance over the previous generation of short-range missiles operated by the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF), and its development has placed China among the handful of nations with a defence-industrial base capable of producing such a weapon.

The paper would also note:

China is also developing a very-long-range AAM intended to be used to attack high-value targets such as tanker, airborne early-warning, and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft. Furthermore, Beijing appears to be pursuing two or more configurations of rocket-ramjet AAMs.

By the early to mid-2020s, China will clearly have a broader – and far more capable – range of air-to-air weapons to complement the combat aircraft that are now in

development. These will likely force the US and its regional allies to re-examine not only their tactics, techniques and procedures, but also the direction of their own combat-aerospace development programmes.

Chinese airpower when coupled together with its formidable A2AD capabilities creates a modern day sword and shield able to take on virtually any threat.

Other Critical Factors

One area in which the US still dominates is through its submarine fleet. While China possesses a large number of submarines with improving capabilities, the US is still thought to have an advantage in this field. US submarines could disrupt cross-strait shipping as well as threaten Chinese ground targets with submarine-launched cruise missiles.

US submarines would be one of the few platforms able to potentially breach Chinese A2AD capabilities. Because modern submarine warfare is rare, it is difficult to draw from recent examples to predict possible outcomes regarding submarine warfare between the US and China and is a critical factor that only time will fully reveal.

Chinese media, cyber and space-based military capabilities would also be critical in any potential conflict and are areas the US clearly understands parity is nearly reached with its own capabilities or has already been reached.

Other critical factors that would come into play during the most likely conflicts China faces would be the capabilities of its ground forces. Chinese tanks and armored vehicles have been developed through lessons learned from Russian platforms and are admittedly on par with their Western counterparts in terms of fire control, armor, and countermeasures against anti-tank missiles. Chinese artillery also follows the Russian model, a model proving itself deadly and effective in Ukraine.

Underwriting all of these capabilities is China's massive industrial base. Western experts including those at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in a paper titled, "The Return of Industrial Warfare," would note that the West has fallen behind Russia in this regard.

The paper claims:

This situation is especially critical because behind the Russian invasion stands the world's manufacturing capital – China. As the US begins to expend more and more of its stockpiles to keep Ukraine in the war, China has yet to provide any meaningful military assistance to Russia. The West must assume that China will not allow Russia to be defeated, especially due to a lack of ammunition. If competition between autocracies and democracies has really entered a military phase, then the arsenal of democracy must first radically improve its approach to the production of materiel in wartime.

If it is true that the West lags behind Russia in terms of its military industrial production, it is many times more true in regards to China. While the RUSI paper admits this is a problem the West must rectify, it is unlikely able to. Whatever steps the West takes to improve its military industrial capacity, both Russia and China will not only match such steps but ensure they remain far ahead of them.

Even should US capabilities match those of China, the fact that it is provoking a conflict halfway around the world particularly in regards to Taiwan puts it at a disadvantage

logistically. It is a fight the US holds multiple disadvantages in and a fight the US should not be picking in the first place.

China has carefully for decades cultivated its military capabilities to defend China from foreign aggression, subjugation, and the humiliation associated with it, all of which the Chinese people have suffered at the hands of Western powers in the past.

With the US military itself admitting Chinese military capabilities are in some ways reaching parity with US military capabilities and in other areas surpassing them, the notion of the US using military force with impunity in or around Chinese territory has significantly diminished. In fact, the desperate, reckless urgency that has taken hold of Washington in recent years in regards to China and Washington's growing inability to "contain" it is at the center of US provocations like Pelosi's recent visit to Taiwan.

It will now be a matter of Beijing managing additional and increasingly desperate provocations by the US against China to defend Chinese national security while avoiding a potentially destructive conflict with the United States. The most logical decision Washington could make is to adopt a multipolar mindset allowing it to peacefully coexist alongside China and other nations rather than its current continued attempts to assert itself above all other nations.

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