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States and Indo-Pacific Allies and Partners"

Japanese Perspective on and Responses to China's Growing Counter-Intervention Capabilities

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Vice Chair Reva Price and Commissioner Randall Schriver, all the members and staff of the Commission, thank you for the invitation to testify before the Commission. In my testimony today, I would like to provide a Japanese perspective on China's growing counter-intervention capabilities.

Overview

In March 1996, Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducted a missile exercise near Taiwan in attempt to disrupt the island's first-ever democratic presidential election. In response, the United States dispatched two carrier strike groups in the vicinity of Taiwan forcing China to suspend the missile exercise. Humiliated by Washington's show of force, Beijing started to improve the PLA's counter-intervention capabilities by purchasing Soviet-era fighters, destroyers, submarines, and an aircraft carrier. Over the past twenty-five years, the PLA has developed modern and indigenous aircraft carriers, new surface combatant ships, large amphibious assault ships, quieter submarines, combat support ships, strategic bombers, fifth-generation fighters, and massive missile forces—capabilities which extends beyond the second island chain covering the entire western Pacific.

China's growing counter-intervention capabilities pose a great threat to Japan. Over the last decade, the PLA's operational areas expanded from the East China Sea to the Philippine Sea, the Sea of Japan, and the Sea of Okhotsk as part of the counter-intervention strategy. The PLA now regularly circumnavigates the Japanese archipelago with the Russian Navy, while the PLA strategic bombers conduct patrol in the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea with Russian bombers. The PLA has rapidly increased its operations near Taiwan as well. In addition, as China rapidly increases its strategic nuclear arsenal, a "stability-instability paradox" scenario, in which China initiates a conventional war against Taiwan and Japan without fearing a nuclear war with the United States, might arise.

In response to then-US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taipei in August 2022, the PLA conducted a series of intensive blockade exercises around Taiwan. The PLA designated several exercise zones around Taiwan and launched at least nine ballistic missiles, five of which fell into Japan's exclusive economic zones. The PLA also mobilized more than 100 fighters and bombers and more than 10 destroyers and frigates to exercise a blockade of Taiwan. China's first aircraft carrier, Liaoning, joined the exercise.¹ The PLA exercises showed a real possibility that Japan would be directly involved in a Taiwan contingency due to China's counter-intervention strategy.

A War Game

¹ China Power Team. "Tracking the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis" China Power. August 5, 2022. Updated November 8, 2023. Accessed November 23, 2023. <https://chinapower.csis.org/tracking-the-fourth-taiwan-strait-crisis/>

The Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) conducted a war game to understand how a Taiwan contingency could affect Japan's security. The war game demonstrated that Japan could be attacked by the PLA's cyber, missile, naval, air, and amphibious forces.²

The JIIA war game assumed a naval blockade by the PLA against Taiwan. In response, Japan and the United States decided to deploy naval assets near Taiwan. Then, the PLA launched cyber-attacks against Japanese infrastructures, followed by ballistic missile attacks against US and Japanese military bases in Japan. China made a nuclear threat to Japan after a series of failed ballistic missile attacks on a base in Okinawa. The PLA then deployed naval and air assets in the East China Sea to take air and maritime superiorities and occupy some of the key Japanese southwestern islands. The allied forces continued to maintain their naval forces in the East China Sea to prevent PLA's amphibious operation against Japan and in the east of Taiwan to maintain communication lines with the island. Meanwhile, the PLA dominated the Taiwan Strait and started amphibious invasion of Taiwan. The United States also deployed ground forces to Taiwan to support Taiwanese military's resistance. Then the war became deadlocked.

PLA's ballistic missile attacks neutralized Japanese and US bases initially, while the allied forces rapidly recovered the damaged airfields and obtained access to the bases in the Philippines. Australian, British, and French navies also joined the allied forces at a later phase, changing the military balance more favorable to the allied forces. Both the PLA and the allied forces lost most of their surface combatant ships and fourth-generation aircraft, while maintaining fifth-generation fighters almost intact. The PLA lost most of its submarines, while the allied forces lost only a few submarines and continued land attack and sea denial by remaining submarine forces.

The lessons from the war game can be summarized as follows:

1. It is urgent for the allied forces to fill the missile gap with China, while enhancing combined integrated air and missile defense capabilities.
2. The diversification and resiliency of air and naval assets are critical, especially in the initial phase.
3. It is important to maintain underwater superiority.
4. Reinforcements from other allies and friends make a difference.
5. Be prepared for a Chinese nuclear threat.

PLA's Growing Counter-Intervention Capabilities

In reality, what PLA capabilities could threaten Japan's security? Let's look at the missile capabilities

² A brief summary of the war game is available at <https://www.jiia.or.jp/research-report/security-fy2022-04.html> (only in Japanese).

first. The Pentagon estimates the PLA possesses 500 MRBMs (DF-21 and DF-17) with 300 launchers, which could target anywhere in Japan. The DF-21D gives the PLA to strike ships underway and the DF-17 is hypersonic glide vehicle capable possibly targeting at both enemy bases and fleets.³ The PLA is estimated to enhance its capability to locate enemy fleets in the Pacific by using OTH radar, satellites, and drones.⁴ AI analysis of satellite photos may also enable near real-time location identification.⁵ The PLA also possesses the CJ- 20 long-range land-attack cruise missile launched from the H-6 bomber.⁶ The PLA may develop low-yield nuclear warhead capabilities to reduce the cost of war, while it rapidly increased the strategic nuclear weapons from hundreds to 1,500 by 2035.⁷

On the other hand, the PLA is believed to enhance missile defense capabilities. Reportedly the PLA has deployed two S-400 systems and at least three early warning satellites in orbit.⁸ China's homegrown HQ-9 surface-to-air missile, believed to be modeled after the Soviet-made S-300, is mobile and highly survivable, and is capable of dealing with aircraft and cruise missiles within 300 kilometers.⁹

The PLA has replaced old-generation Soviet-produced ships with new types of indigenous surface combatant ships. The PLA has introduced at least 8 new large stealth destroyers, or cruisers, Renhai-class (Type 055).¹⁰ This new type of ships are believed to be equipped with vertical launch cells twice more than the latest Luyang III-class (Type-052D) destroyer (called China's Aegis destroyer). The Renhai-class will provide improved fleet air-defense and anti-ship attack capabilities to the PLA.¹¹ The PLA has commissioned its second (and the first indigenous) aircraft carrier Shandong in 2019, and is reportedly constructing a third aircraft carrier, Fujian, with an electromagnetic catapult system.¹² Those carriers are not considered as effective platforms vis-à-vis the US and other advanced navies

³ Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress; Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic and China, October 2023, 66-67.

⁴ Kelley Saylor, "Red Alert: The Growing Threat to U.S. Aircraft Carriers," Center for a New American Security, February 2016, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/red-alert-the-growing-threat-to-u-s-aircraft-carriers>.

⁵ Brian Wong, "AI and Satellite Imaging Make Aircraft Carriers Vulnerable," *Next Big Future*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.nextbigfuture.com/2017/08/ai-and-satellite-imaging-make-aircraft-carriers-vulnerable.html>.

⁶ Ministry of Defense of Japan, Defense of Japan 2023, 61.

⁷ Annual Report to Congress; Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic and China, 111-112.

⁸ Defense of Japan, 62.

⁹ Charlie Gao, "China's HQ-9 vs. Russia's S-300 Air Defense System: What's the Difference?," *The National Interest*, November 10, 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/chinas-hq-9-vs-russias-s-300-air-defense-system-whats-difference-35777>.

¹⁰ Defense of Japan, 64.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

due to their vulnerability, but they pose a grave threat to smaller states.¹³ China is also expected to introduce unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs), which will further enhance PLA's asymmetric capabilities.¹⁴

The PLA is producing more quieter Yuan-class diesel-electric air-independent-powered submarines and Shang-class nuclear-powered attack submarines. Those submarines are armed with anti-ship cruise missiles, wire-guided and wake-homing torpedoes—which is difficult decoy—, and advanced mines. China is expected to introduce a new type of nuclear-powered submarine with land-attack cruise missile.¹⁵ While the PLA has been enhancing its ASW capabilities, but the Pentagon estimates the PLA's ASW capabilities in deep water is not sufficient yet.¹⁶

The PLA has introduced the Su-27 and Su-30 fighters from Russia as its fourth-generation modern fighters, as well as the Su-35 fighter, which is considered the newest fourth-generation fighter. It is also developing modern domestically produced fighters, including the J-11B fighter, which is said to have been copied from the Su-27 fighter, the J-16 fighter, which is said to have been copied from the Su-30 fighter, and the domestically produced J-10 fighter. The PLA also deploys J-20 fifth-generation fighters.¹⁷ The PLA is increasing the size of H-6 bomber fleet, while introducing H-6U and IL-78M aerial refueling tankers and the KJ-500 and KJ-2000 early warning and control aircraft.¹⁸ The PLA is rapidly developing a variety of domestic unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), including high-altitude, long-endurance (HALE) UAVs for reconnaissance as well as those capable of carrying missiles.¹⁹

In addition, recent PLA reforms, including the establishment of the five Theater Commands and the Strategic Support Force, have huge impact on the capabilities of the PLA. Those reforms are expected to enhance PLA's joint operations in cyber, space, and electro-magnetic spectrum as well as in land, sea, and air.²⁰

Those PLA counter-intervention capabilities could restrict Japanese and American air, naval, and amphibious operations in the western Pacific. On the other hand, ground troops and ground-based missiles are not necessarily vulnerable against the PLA.

¹³ Congressional Research Service, "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress," January 27, 2021, 16-17.

¹⁴ Defense of Japan 2023, 64-65.

¹⁵ Congressional Research Service, "China Naval Modernization," 9-10.

¹⁶ Defense of Japan 2023, 65.

¹⁷ Ibid, 66-67.

¹⁸ Ibid., 67

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 59.

Japan's Response

To deal with the growing threats from the PLA, Tokyo prioritized the defense of the southwestern islands and introduced the concept of a dynamic joint defense force in 2013. The dynamic joint defense force envisioned air and maritime superiority with active and regular intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), stand-off missiles, multi-mission frigates (FFMs), reinforced submarine fleet as well as the rapid deployment of amphibious troops, armored vehicles, air-defense and anti-ship missile launchers with hypersonic missiles for the defense of the southwestern islands. In addition, Tokyo decided to introduce the Aegis Ashore ground-based missile defense system to intercept North Korean ballistic missiles 24/7, while enabling Aegis-destroyers to provide fleet air-defense vis-à-vis the PLA.

Given the advancement in PLA's missile forces and capabilities in the new domain of cyber, space, and electromagnetic spectrum, Tokyo adopted the concept of multi-domain defense force in 2018, which no longer assumes superiority in air and sea, and instead seeks synergy of cross-domain operations. It also called for "comprehensive" air-defense to intercept various airborne threats and the conversion of the Izumo-class helicopter carrier into a light aircraft carrier for air-defense in the Pacific. Tokyo also decided to extend the range of stand-off missiles to be launched from ground-based launchers as well as ships and aircraft.²¹

On December 16, 2022, the Japanese government adopted three national security documents: "National Security Strategy (NSS)," "National Defense Strategy (NDS)," and "Defense Buildup Program (DBP)."²² In the strategic documents, China is regarded as the "greatest challenge" to Japan's security and the international order.

The key to the realization of the new strategy is an increase in defense spending. Japan's defense spending, which has been effectively kept at around 1 percent of GDP since the 1970s, is to be raised to 2 percent, and the Cabinet has approved a total defense budget of 43 trillion yen for the five years through FY2027, which is 1.6 times the size of the previous medium-term defense force development plan. This enables Japan to realize the existing multi-domain defense concepts and upgrade its indigenous stand-off missiles as a denial, not punishment, capability, integrated air and defense missile defense, unmanned asset defense, and sustainability and resilience in preparation for the "new battles" of missile attacks, hybrid warfare, asymmetric attacks, and nuclear threats, as indicated in the NDS.

²¹ Tetsuo Kotani, "The Multi-Domain Defense Force: Assessment and Challenges," *JIIA Strategic Comments*, No. 6, December 28, 2018, http://www2.jiia.or.jp/en/article_page.php?id=15.

²² The provisional translations of Japan's new National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy are available at <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000120031.pdf>; and <https://japan.kantei.go.jp/content/000120033.pdf>.

New Developments for the Alliance

The US-Japan alliance has been strengthened by several developments. First, the US Marine Corps established the Marine Littoral Regiment in Okinawa in 2022 to undertake expeditionary advanced base operations with ISR and missiles capabilities to gain sea-control from the shore.²³ The MLR can work with the Ground Self-Defense Force's anti-ship and air-defense units in the southwestern islands.

Second, Tokyo and Washington have agreed to jointly develop hypersonic missile interceptor.²⁴ This will further enhance bilateral missiles defense capabilities when China is increasing and upgrading the hypersonic missile capabilities. Japan is going to join the US satellite constellation project to monitor and track hypersonic warheads.

Third, Washington and Tokyo are agreeing to allowing Japanese private companies to repair US naval ships.²⁵ This will help the US Navy maintain its readiness to counter China's growing naval capacity, while relaxing the shipbuilding and maintenance capacity in the United States.

Forth, Both the United States and Japan have been expanding their security cooperation with third countries. Washington has expanded the enhanced defense cooperation agreement with the Philippines, while Tokyo is going to negotiate a reciprocal access agreement. These developments could provide access to the Philippine facilities in crisis. The US has established the AUKUS to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, while Japan has agreed a reciprocal access agreement with Australia so that the two countries can expand bilateral and multilateral training and exercises. Japan and the United States also expanded cooperation with UK, France, and Germany in the Pacific.

Recommendations for the Congress

1. Enhance alliance command and control coordination.

The introduction of Japanese counterstrike capability, coupled with US long-range missiles, is

²³ Drew F. Lawrence, "Okinawa-Based Marine Regiment Set to Rebrand as Littoral Unit Next Month After Deal with Japan," *Military.com*, October 17, 2023, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/10/17/okinawa-based-marine-regiment-set-rebrand-littoral-unit-next-month-after-deal-japan.html>.

²⁴ Jen Judson, "US, Japan exploring partnership on hypersonic missile interceptor," *Defense News*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2023/03/20/us-japan-exploring-partnership-on-hypersonic-missile-interceptor/>.

²⁵ Sadayasu Senju and Takumi Kobayashi, "U.S. Navy prepares to conduct extensive repairs at Japan shipyards," *Nikkei Asia*, January 20, 2024, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/U.S.-Navy-prepares-to-conduct-extensive-repairs-at-Japan-shipyards>.

critical to fill the missile gap with China maintain air and maritime superiority. However, it is now urgent for Tokyo and Washington to enhance command and control relationship for targeting and strike coordination. It is desirable to give operational command to the Commander, US Forces Japan, or establish a standing US-Japan joint task force for the mission.

2. Bring US Army to Japan.

As there is a need for more ground-based missiles systems in Japan to deal with China's rapidly increasing medium-range missile forces, it is time to prepare for the permanent deployment of US Army's Multi-Domain Task Force with long-range hypersonic missiles in Japan despite political sensitivity.

3. Invest in directed-energy weapons.

Japan and the United States should make further efforts and cooperation to deal with multiple airborne threats, including unmanned systems. As Japan continues to invest in the development of railgun, Washington and Tokyo should seek joint development of directed-energy weapons to intercept Chinese hypersonic threats to increase point defense options.

4. Continue to fund submarine-launched nuclear cruise missiles.

As China grows its counter-intervention and non-strategic nuclear forces, it is important for the United States to maintain credible non-strategic nuclear options in the Pacific. SLCM-N could provide the United States an important low-yield option when China considers tactical nuclear weapons are useful to control a nuclear war.

5. Allow Japan to invest in US shipbuilding industry.

As the United States Navy faces serious ship repair and shipbuilding delays, Japanese investment for modernizing the US shipbuilding industry is a good way to enhance the alliance. Congress could facilitate such an investment.

6. Pass the supplemental foreign aid package.

With full understanding of the situation surrounding the supplemental foreign aid package, it is urgent for the House of Representatives to pass the bill. The package not only includes aid for Ukraine and Israel, but also includes aid for Taiwan. In addition, it includes funds for modernizing submarine industry which is critical for AUKUS agreement. Do not take aid to Asia hostage to US domestic politics.