DOD Report Details Chinese Efforts to Build Military Power



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The People's Republic of China is continuing its efforts to overturn the international rules-based order and is building an increasingly effective military to further these aims, said a senior defense official speaking on background.

Spotlight: 2023 China Military Power Report

The official gave reporters a preview of the 2023 China Military Power Report that DOD delivered to Congress today. The annual report to Congress is based on the National Defense Strategy's premise that China is the only competitor with the

intent, will and capability to reshape the international order, said the official. “The 2022 National Defense Strategy identifies the PRC as increasingly capable military as the department’s top pacing challenge,” he said.

The report “charts the current course of the PRC’s national economic and military strategies, and offers insight into the strategy, its current capabilities, some of its operational activities, as well as its future modernization goals,” he said.

Communist leaders seek “the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation,” by 2049 – the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party’s takeover of the world’s largest country.

Part of this effort is China is increasing military coercion, the official said. An example of this is the increasing numbers of unsafe intercepts of U.S., allied and partner vessels and aircraft operating in international air and seaways of the Indo-Pacific region. “Between the fall of 2021 and the fall of 2023, the United States documented over 180 instances of coercive and risky air intercepts against U.S. aircraft in the region,” the official said. When allies and partners are included, this jumps to more than 300 instances.

Spotlight: Focus on Indo-Pacific

The report also covers China’s intensifying pressure campaign against Taiwan including Chinese ballistic missile overflights of Taiwan, increased flights into Taiwan’s self-declared air defense identification zone and the large-scale simulated joint blockade and simulated joint firepower strike operations done after a visit to the island by a U.S. congressional delegation.

Additionally, China’s deepening security ties with Russia are covered. In fact, as the official was detailing the content of the report, Chinese President Xi Jinping was meeting Russian

President Vladimir Putin at a ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative in China. The senior defense official said China sees its emergence as a great power as tied to the alliance with Russia.

The report also looks at the continued development of the Chinese military's nuclear, space and cyberspace capabilities. "We see the PRC continuing to quite rapidly modernize and diversify and expand its nuclear forces," he said. "They are expanding and investing in their land, sea and air-based nuclear delivery platforms, as well as the infrastructure that's required to support this."

The report estimates the Chinese had more than 500 operational nuclear warheads as of May 2023. "That is on track to exceed some of our previous predictions," he said.

China is developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles. These may also be conventionally-armed missiles. "If developed and fielded, such capabilities would allow the PRC to threaten conventional strikes against targets in the continental United States, Hawaii and Alaska," the official said.

According to the report, Chinese leaders are seeking to modernize People's Liberation Army capabilities in all domains of warfare.

On the land, the PLA continues to modernize its equipment and focus on combined arms and joint training, the official said. The Chinese military is still a conscript force with two intakes a year. The military is working to field long-range fires and incorporate the capability into their doctrine.

At sea, China has the world's largest navy with a battle force of more than 370 ships and submarines. The Chinese launched their third aircraft carrier in the past year and commissioned their third amphibious assault ship.

The PLA Air Force "is rapidly catching up to western air

forces," the official said. The air force continues to build up manned and unmanned aircraft and the Chinese announced the fielding of the H-6N – its first nuclear-capable, air-to-air refueled bomber.

The Chinese military has not been involved in a shooting war since 1979 and "this actually is one of the shortcomings that the PRC highlights and a lot of their own self assessments," the official said. "They tried to address that, I think, by attempting to make their training and their exercises more realistic, to more closely approximate … actual combat type conditions.

"I think they tried to address it as well, by learning whatever lessons they can from other countries' involvement in military conflicts," he continued.

Chinese military leaders carefully studied military conflicts involving U.S. forces, Russian forces and others over the years. That is one of the key sources they draw upon to better understand how they need to prepare themselves for future combat operations. "Certainly, they're watching very closely Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine," the official said.

The Chinese military is looking for bases overseas and looking to develop the resources needed to be a globally relevant force. They have established an overall logistics command and they are working hand-in-glove with the Belt and Road Initiative to gain access.

Finally, the report also discusses the dearth of contacts between U.S. and Chinese defense officials. "The PLA's refusal to engage in military-to-military communications with the United States, combined with the PLA's increasingly coercive and risky operational behavior, raises the risk of an operational incident or miscalculation spiraling into crisis or conflict," the official said.