# Asia

#### Threats to the Homeland

Threats to the U.S. homeland that stem from Asia include terrorist threats from non-state actors resident in ungoverned areas of South Asia, an active and growing North Korean ballistic missile capability, and a credible Chinese nuclear missile capability that supports other elements of China's national power.

**Terrorism Originating from Afghani**stan and Pakistan (AfPak). Terrorist groups operating from Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland. Pakistan is home to a host of terrorist groups that keep the region unstable and contribute to the spread of global terrorism. The killing of Osama bin Laden at his hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in May 2011 and an intensive drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal areas bordering Afghanistan from 2010-2012 have helped to degrade the al-Qaeda threat, but the residual presence of al-Qaeda and the emergence of ISIS in Afghanistan remain serious concerns. This is a deadly region. According to General John W. Nicholson, then commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, "there are 98 U.S.-designated terrorist groups globally. Twenty of them are in the AfPak region. This represents the highest concentration of terrorist groups anywhere in the world...13 in Afghanistan, seven in Pakistan."1

ISIS efforts to make inroads into Pakistan and Afghanistan have met with only limited success, most likely because of al-Qaeda's well-established roots in the region, ability to maintain the loyalty of the various South Asian terrorist groups, and careful nurturing of its relationship with the Afghan Taliban. The Afghan Taliban views ISIS as a direct competitor for financial resources, recruits, and ideological influence. This competition was evident in a June 16, 2015, letter sent by the Taliban to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, urging his group not to take actions that could lead to "division of the Mujahideen's command."<sup>2</sup> There also have been reports of clashes between ISIS militants and the Taliban in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

Reports of an ISIS presence in Afghanistan first began to surface in 2014, and the group has slowly gained a small foothold in the country. Though its actual numbers remain modest, its high-profile, high-casualty terrorist attacks have helped it to attract followers. In 2017 and 2018, several high-profile attacks in the Afghan capital and elsewhere targeted cultural centers, global charities, voter registration centers, and Afghan military and intelligence facilities, although they still pale in comparison to the number of attacks launched by the Taliban.

In April 2017, the U.S. military claimed there were 700 ISIS fighters in Afghanistan; in November, however, General Nicholson said that 1,600 ISIS fighters had been "remov[ed]" from the battlefield since March.<sup>3</sup> In June 2017, a U.S. airstrike killed the head of ISIS-Khorasan, Abu Sayed.

Experts believe there is little coordination between the ISIS-Khorasan branch operating in Afghanistan and the central command structure of the group located in the Middle East. Instead, it draws recruits from disaffected members of the Pakistani Taliban and other radicalized Afghans and has frequently found itself at odds with the Afghan Taliban, with which it competes for resources, territory, and recruits.

Pakistan's continued support for terrorist groups that have links to al-Qaeda undermines U.S. counterterrorism goals in the region. Pakistan's military and intelligence leaders maintain a short-term tactical approach of fighting some terrorist groups that are deemed to be a threat to the state while supporting others that are aligned with Pakistan's goal of extending its influence and curbing India's.

A December 16, 2014, terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar that killed over 150 people, mostly children, shocked the Pakistani public and prompted the government led by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to introduce a National Action Plan (NAP) to reinvigorate the country's fight against terrorism. The action plan includes steps like lifting the moratorium on the death penalty for terrorists, establishing special military courts to try terrorists, curbing the spread of extremist literature and propaganda on social media, freezing the assets of terrorist organizations, and forming special committees of army and political leaders in the provinces to implement the NAP. The NAP has been criticized for being poorly implemented, but in the summer of 2018, the leaders of the PPP and PTI opposition parties, Bilawal Bhutto and Imran Khan, called for the NAP to be strengthened and extended across the country.

Implementation of the NAP and the Pakistani military's operations against TTP (Pakistani Taliban) hideouts in North Waziristan have helped to reduce Pakistan's internal terrorist threat to some degree. According to the India-based South Asia Terrorism Portal, total terrorist attack fatalities inside Pakistan have been on a steady decline since 2009, when they peaked at 11,704. Since then, they have fallen to 5,496 in 2014, 1,803 in 2016, 1,260 in 2017, and just 281 in the first half of 2018.<sup>4</sup>

There are few signs that Pakistan's crackdown on terrorism extends to groups that target India, such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which was responsible for the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), which carried out an attack on the Indian airbase at Pathankot on January 2, 2016. In early April 2015, Pakistan released on bail the mastermind of the Mumbai attacks, Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, who had been in Pakistani custody since 2009.

In April 2012, the U.S. issued a \$10 million reward for information leading to the arrest or conviction of LeT founder Hafez Muhammad Saeed. The LeT has engaged in recruitment and fundraising activities in the U.S. In September 2011, for instance, U.S. authorities arrested Jubair Ahmad, an American permanent resident born in Pakistan, for providing material support to the LeT by producing LeT propaganda and uploading it to the Internet. Ahmad reportedly attended an LeT training camp in Pakistan before moving to the U.S. in 2007.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. trial of Pakistani American David Coleman Headley, who was arrested in Chicago in 2009 for his involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks, led to striking revelations about the LeT's international reach and close connections to Pakistani intelligence. Headley had traveled frequently to Pakistan, where he received terrorist training from the LeT, and to India, where he scouted the sites of the Mumbai attacks. In four days of testimony and cross-examination, Headley provided details about his meetings with a Pakistani intelligence officer, a former army major, and a navy frogman who were among the key players in orchestrating the Mumbai assault.<sup>6</sup>

The possibility that terrorists could gain effective access to Pakistani nuclear weapons is contingent on a complex chain of circumstances. In terms of consequence, however, it is the most dangerous regional threat scenario. Concern about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons increases when India–Pakistan tensions increase. During the 1999 Kargil crisis, for example, U.S. intelligence indicated that Pakistan had made "nuclear preparations," and this spurred greater U.S. diplomatic involvement in defusing the crisis.<sup>7</sup>

If Pakistan were to move around its nuclear assets or, worse, take steps to mate weapons with delivery systems, the likelihood of terrorist theft or infiltration would increase. Increased reliance on tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) is of particular concern because launch authorities for TNWs are typically delegated to lower-tier field commanders far from the central authority in Islamabad. Another concern is the possibility that miscalculations could lead to regional nuclear war if top Indian leaders were to lose confidence that nuclear weapons in Pakistan are under government control or, conversely, were to assume that they were under Pakistani government control after they ceased to be.

There is concern that Islamist extremist groups with links to the Pakistan security establishment could exploit those links to gain access to nuclear weapons technology, facilities, and/or materials. The realization that Osama bin Laden stayed for six years within a half-mile of Pakistan's premier defense academy has fueled concern that al-Qaeda can operate relatively freely in parts of Pakistan and might eventually gain access to Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) Nuclear Security Index ranks 24 countries with "weapons useable nuclear material" for their susceptibility to theft. Pakistan's weapons-grade materials are the 22nd least secure, with only Iran's and North Korea's ranking lower. In the NTI's broader survey of 44 countries with nuclear power and related facilities, Pakistan ranks 36th least secure against sabotage.8

There is the additional, though less likely, scenario of extremists gaining access through a collapse of the state. While Pakistan remains unstable because of its weak economy, regular terrorist attacks, sectarian violence, civil-military tensions, and the growing influence of religious extremist groups, it is unlikely that the Pakistani state will collapse altogether. The country's most powerful institution, the 550,000-strong army that has ruled Pakistan for almost half of its existence, would almost certainly intervene and take charge once again if the political situation began to unravel. The potential breakup of the Pakistani state would have to be preceded by the disintegration of the army, which currently is not plausible.9

*WWTA:* The 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community (WWTA) does not reference any threat to the homeland from AfPak-based terrorism. The 2017 assessment, however, cited "[p]lotting against the US homeland" by individual members within terrorist groups.<sup>10</sup>

*Summary:* The threat to the American homeland emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan is diverse, complex, and mostly indirect, largely involving non-state actors. The intentions of non-state terrorist groups like the TTP, al-Qaeda, and ISIS toward the U.S. are demonstrably hostile. Despite the broad and deep U.S. relationships with Pakistan's governing elites and military, however, it is likely that the political-military interplay in Pakistan and instability in Afghanistan will continue to result in an active threat to the American homeland.

**Missile Threat: North Korea and China.** The two sources of the ballistic missile threat to the U.S. (North Korea and China) are very different in terms of their sophistication and integration into broader strategies for achieving national goals. The threats from these two countries are therefore very different in nature.

North Korea. In 2017, North Korea conducted three successful tests of two variants of road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). All launches were flown in an elevated trajectory so as not to fly over Japan and to allow testing of a reentry vehicle to protect a nuclear warhead during an attack. Experts assess that the Hwasong-14 ICBM has the capability to fly 10,000 or perhaps 11,000 kilometers. At that range, Los Angeles, Denver, and Chicago (and possibly New York City, Boston, and Washington, D.C.) are within range.<sup>11</sup> The Hwasong-15 has a range of 13,000 kilometers and could reach the entire continental United States. North Korea conducted its fourth and fifth nuclear tests in 2016 and its most recent -the first test of a much more powerful hydrogen bomb-in 2017.

North Korea has declared that it already has a full nuclear strike capability, even altering its constitution to enshrine itself as a nuclear-armed state.<sup>12</sup> In late 2017, Kim Jong-un

# **North Korean Missiles**

North Korean missiles can target South Korea, Japan, and U.S. bases in Guam and now can reach the United States.



\* First tested May 2017. \*\* First tested July 2017. SOURCES: Heritage Foundation research and media reports.

heritage.org

declared that North Korea had completed development of a nuclear ICBM to threaten the American homeland and vowed to "bolster up the nuclear force in quality and quantity."<sup>13</sup> Among North Korea's many direct verbal threats to the U.S., the regime warned in March 2016 that it would "reduce all bases and strongholds of the U.S. and South Korean warmongers for provocation and aggression into ashes in a moment, without giving them any breathing spell."<sup>14</sup>

The United States and South Korea have revised their estimates and now see a more dire North Korean threat. In January 2018, then-CIA Director Mike Pompeo assessed that North Korea would attain an ICBM capability within a "handful of months."<sup>15</sup> Vice Admiral James Syring, then head of the U.S. Missile Defense Agency, has testified that "[i]t is incumbent on us to assume that North Korea today can range the United States with an ICBM carrying a nuclear warhead."<sup>16</sup> In April 2016, Admiral William Gortney, head of U.S. Northern Command, stated that "[i]t's the prudent decision on my part to assume that North Korea has the capability to miniaturize a nuclear weapon and put it on an ICBM."<sup>17</sup>

Most non-government experts assess that North Korea has perhaps 30 or more nuclear weapons. However, an April 2017 assessment by David Albright of the Institute for Science and International Security concluded that Pyongyang could have had "13–30 nuclear weapons as of the end of 2016, based on the estimates of North Korea's production and use of plutonium and WGU [weapon-grade uranium]," and "is currently expanding its nuclear weapons at a rate of about 3–5 weapons per year."<sup>18</sup> An earlier study by Joel S. Witt and Sun Young Ahn that was published in February 2015 by the Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins University's Nitze School of Advanced International Studies included a worst-case scenario in which Pyongyang could have "100 [nuclear] weapons by 2020."<sup>19</sup>

In 2016 and 2017, North Korea had breakthrough successes with many missiles in development. It successfully test-launched the Hwasong 12 intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), which can target critical U.S. bases in Guam, and both the Pukguksong-2 road-mobile medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) and the Pukguksong-1 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM). In June 2017, in written testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense James Mattis called North Korea "the most urgent and dangerous threat to peace and security."<sup>20</sup>

In June 2018, President Donald Trump met with Kim Jong-un in Singapore and subsequently declared both that "[t]here is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea"21 and that "total denuclearization...has already started taking place."22 The Singapore Communique may be the first step toward North Korea's denuclearization after eight failed diplomatic attempts during the past 27 years, but as of July 2018, there has been no decrease in North Korea's WMD arsenal or production capabilities. To the contrary, the U.S. Intelligence Community assessed that Pyongyang had increased production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, and satellite imagery showed upgrades to missile, reentry vehicle, missile launcher, and nuclear weapon production facilities.<sup>23</sup>

*China*. Chinese nuclear forces are the responsibility of the People's Liberation Army Rocket Forces (PLARF), one of three new services created on December 31, 2015. China's nuclear ballistic missile forces include land-based missiles with a range of 13,000 kilometers that can reach the U.S. (CSS-4) and submarine-based missiles that can reach the U.S. when the submarine is deployed within missile range.

The PRC became a nuclear power in 1964 when it exploded its first atomic bomb as part of its "two bombs, one satellite" effort. In quick succession, China then exploded its first thermonuclear bomb in 1967 and orbited its first satellite in 1970, demonstrating the capability to build a delivery system that can reach the ends of the Earth. China chose to rely primarily on a land-based nuclear deterrent instead of developing two or three different basing systems as the United States did.

Furthermore, unlike the United States or the Soviet Union, China chose to pursue only a limited nuclear deterrent. The PRC fielded only a small number of nuclear weapons, with estimates of about 100–150 weapons on MRBMs and about 60 ICBMs. Its only ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) conducted relatively few deterrence patrols (perhaps none),<sup>24</sup> and its first-generation SLBM, the JL-1, if it ever attained full operational capability, had limited reach.

While China's nuclear force remained stable for several decades, it has been part of the modernization effort of the past 20 years. The result has been modernization and some expansion of the Chinese nuclear deterrent. The core of China's ICBM force today is the DF-31 series, a solid-fueled, road-mobile system, along with a growing number of longer-range DF-41 missiles (also rail mobile) that may be in the PLA operational inventory. The DF-41 may be deployed with multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs). China's medium-range nuclear forces have similarly shifted to mobile, solid-rocket systems so that they are both more survivable and more easily maintained.

Notably, the Chinese are expanding their ballistic missile submarine fleet. Replacing the one Type 092 *Xia*-class SSBN are several Type 094 *Jin*-class SSBNs, four of which are already operational. These are expected to

be equipped with the new, longer-range JL-2 SLBM. Such a system would give the PRC a "secure second-strike" capability, substantially enhancing its nuclear deterrent. There is also some possibility that the Chinese nuclear arsenal now contains land-attack cruise missiles. The CJ-20, a long-range, air-launched cruise missile carried on China's H-6 bomber, may be nuclear tipped, although there is not much evidence that China has pursued such a capability. China is also believed to be working on a cruise missile submarine that, if equipped with nuclear cruise missiles, would further expand the range of its nuclear attack options.<sup>25</sup>

As a result of its modernization efforts, China's nuclear forces appear to be shifting from a minimal deterrent posture (one suited only to responding to an attack and even then with only limited numbers) to a more robust but still limited deterrent posture. While the PRC will still likely field fewer nuclear weapons than either the United States or Russia, it will field a more modern and diverse set of capabilities than India or Pakistan (or North Korea), its nuclear-armed neighbors, are capable of fielding. If there are corresponding changes in doctrine, modernization will enable China to engage in limited nuclear options in the event of a conflict.

China has also been working on an array of hypersonic weapons. Undersecretary of Defense Michael Griffin and General John Hyten, head of U.S. Strategic Command, have testified that China and Russia are working aggressively to develop hypersonic weapons. Both have warned that China is at or ahead of the American level of development. General Hyten, for example, warned that "we don't have any defense that could deny the employment of such a weapon against us, so our response would be our deterrent force, which would be the triad and the nuclear capabilities that we have to respond to such a threat."<sup>26</sup>

*WWTA:* The language of the WWTA has changed slightly in its description of the North Korean nuclear threat, from a "serious threat to US interests and to the security environment in East Asia"<sup>27</sup> to "among the most volatile and confrontational WMD threats to the United States."<sup>28</sup> However, it again reports that North Korea is "committed to developing a long-range, nuclear-armed missile that is capable of posing a direct threat to the United States."<sup>29</sup> With respect to the broader threat from North Korea's "weapons of mass destruction program, public threats, defiance of the international community, confrontational military posturing, cyber activities, and potential for internal instability," the WWTA warns that they "pose a complex and increasing threat to US national security and interests."<sup>30</sup> Last year, it described this same mix of factors as an "increasingly grave threat."<sup>31</sup>

The WWTA's assessment of the Chinese nuclear missile threat is unchanged from 2016 and 2017: China "continues to modernize its nuclear missile force by adding more survivable road-mobile systems and enhancing its silo-based systems. This new generation of missiles is intended to ensure the viability of China's strategic deterrent by providing a second-strike capability."<sup>32</sup> The 2018 assessment adds the observation that the Chinese are intent on forming a "triad by developing a nuclear-capable next generation bomber."<sup>33</sup>

*Summary:* The respective missile threats to the American homeland from North Korea and China are very different. China has many more nuclear weapons, multiple demonstrated and tested means of delivery, and more mature systems, but it is a more stable actor with a variety of interests, including relations with the United States and its extensive interaction with the international system. North Korea has fewer weapons and questionable means of delivery, but it is less stable and less predictable, with a vastly lower stake in the international system. There is also a widely acknowledged difference in intentions: China seeks a stable second-strike capability and, unlike North Korea, is not actively and directly threatening the United States.

#### **Threat of Regional War**

America's forward-deployed military at bases throughout the Western Pacific, five treaty

allies, security partners in Taiwan and Singapore, and growing security partnership with India are keys to the U.S. strategic footprint in Asia. One of its critical allies, South Korea, remains under active threat of attack and invasion from the North, and Japan faces both intimidation attacks intended to deny the U.S. its base access to Japan and nuclear attacks on U.S. bases in the case of conflict on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>34</sup> Taiwan is under a long-standing, well-equipped, purposely positioned, and increasingly active military threat from China. Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, by virtue of maritime territorial disputes, are under paramilitary, military, and political pressure from China.

In South Asia, India is geographically positioned between two major security threats: Pakistan to its west and China to its northeast. From Pakistan, India faces the additional threat of terrorism, whether state-enabled or carried out without state knowledge or control.

North Korean Attack on American Bases and Allies. North Korea's conventional and nuclear missile forces threaten U.S. bases in South Korea, Japan, and Guam. Beyond its nuclear weapons programs, North Korea poses additional risks to its neighbors. North Korea has an extensive ballistic missile force. Pyongyang has deployed approximately 800 Scud short-range tactical ballistic missiles, 300 Nodong medium-range missiles, and 50 Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The Scud missiles threaten South Korea, the No-dong can target all of Japan and South Korea, and the Musudan and Hwasong-12 IRBMs can hit U.S. bases on Okinawa and Guam. Pyongyang continues its development of several different ICBMs with enough range to hit the continental U.S.35

North Korea has approximately 1 million people in its military, with reserves numbering several million more. Pyongyang has forward-deployed 70 percent of its ground forces within 90 miles of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), making it possible to attack with little or no warning. This is of particular concern because South Korea's capital, Seoul, is only 30 miles south of the DMZ.<sup>36</sup> In addition to three conventional corps alongside the DMZ, Pyongyang has deployed two mechanized corps, an armor corps, and an artillery corps.<sup>37</sup>

The April 2018 inter-Korean summit led to bilateral pledges of nonaggression and mutual force reduction. However, similar pledges were contained in the 1972, 1992, 2000, and 2007 joint statements, all of which Pyongyang subsequently violated or abrogated.

In the Panmunjom Declaration that marked the 2018 summit, South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un committed their countries to "completely cease all hostile acts against each other." The two leaders "pledged that 'there will be no more war on the Korean Peninsula and thus a new era of peace has begun.""38 In 1972, however, the Koreas futilely agreed to "implement appropriate measures to stop military provocation which may lead to unintended armed conflicts."39 In 1992, they vowed that they would "not use force against each other" and would "not undertake armed aggression against each other."40 And in 2007, Seoul and Pyongyang agreed to "adhere strictly to their obligation to nonaggression."41

None of those pledges prevented North Korea from conducting assassination attempts on the South Korean president, terrorist acts, military and cyber-attacks, and acts of war. For this reason, as of July 2018, there have been no changes in either North Korea's or South Korea's force posture.

After the June 2018 U.S.–North Korea summit, Washington and Seoul unilaterally canceled the annual Ulchi Freedom Guardian joint exercise, as well as South Korea's Taeguk command-post exercise, and suspended the joint Marine Exercise Program.<sup>42</sup> North Korea did not announce any reciprocal suspensions of its conventional military exercises, including its large-scale annual Winter and Summer Training Cycles.

South Korea remains North Korea's principal target. In 2005, South Korea initiated a comprehensive defense reform strategy to transform its military into a smaller but more

capable force to deal with the North Korean threat and a predicted shortfall of 18 year olds by 2025 to fully staff the military. The defense reform program has gone through a number of iterations but remains a goal in 2018. Overall, South Korean military manpower would be reduced approximately 25 percent, from 681,000 to 500,000. The army would face the largest cuts, disbanding four corps and 23 divisions and cutting troops from 560,000 in 2004 to 370,000 in 2020. Seoul planned to compensate for decreased troop levels by procuring advanced fighter and surveillance aircraft, naval platforms, and ground combat vehicles.43 Some Moon Jae-in administration advisers have suggested that force levels could be reduced further if progress is made in improving inter-Korean relations.

That North Korea's conventional forces are a very real threat to South Korea was clearly demonstrated by two deadly attacks in 2010. In March, a North Korean submarine sank the South Korean naval corvette *Cheonan* in South Korean waters, killing 46 sailors. In November, North Korean artillery shelled Yeonpyeong Island, killing four South Koreans.

Since the North Korean military is predominantly equipped with older ground force equipment, Pyongyang has prioritized deployment of strong asymmetric capabilities, including special operations forces, long-range artillery, and missiles. As noted, North Korea has deployed hundreds of Scud short-range ballistic missiles that can target all of South Korea with explosive, chemical, and biological warheads. The land and sea borders between North and South Korea remain unsettled, heavily armed, and actively subject to occasional, limited armed conflict.

North Korea's September 2017 hydrogen bomb test—in excess of 150 kilotons—demonstrated a thermonuclear hydrogen bomb capability. It is unknown whether the warhead has been miniaturized for an ICBM, but then-CIA Director Michael Pompeo said in January 2018 that North Korea would have the ability to carry out a nuclear attack on the mainland U.S. in a mere "handful of months."<sup>44</sup> North Korea is already assessed as having the ability to target South Korea and Japan with nuclear-capable missiles.

In March 2016, the Korean Central News Agency declared that Pyongyang has a "military operation plan...to liberate south Korea and strike the U.S. mainland," that "offensive means have been deployed to put major strike targets in the operation theatres of south Korea within the firing range," and that "the powerful nuclear strike means targeting the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces bases in the Asia–Pacific region and the U.S. mainland are always ready to fire."<sup>45</sup>

In May 2018, North Korea blew up the entrance adits to its Punggye-ri nuclear test site. Foreign reporters were able to confirm the explosive closure of the entrances to six test tunnels but could not confirm overall damage to the tunnels. In April 2018, Kim Jong-un had declared that "under the proven condition of complete nuclear weapons, we no longer need any nuclear tests, mid-range and intercontinental ballistic rocket tests" and that "the nuclear test site in [the] northern area has also completed its mission."<sup>46</sup>

*WWTA:* The WWTA specifically cites Pyongyang's "serious and growing threat to South Korea and Japan" and the expanded "conventional strike options...that improve North Korea's ability to strike regional US and allied targets with little warning."<sup>47</sup>

*Summary:* North Korean forces arrayed against American allies in South Korea and Japan are substantial, and North Korea's history of provocation is a consistent indicator of its intent to achieve its political objectives by threat of force.

**Chinese Threat to Taiwan.** China's long-standing threat to end the de facto independence of Taiwan and ultimately to bring it under the authority of Beijing—if necessary, by force—is both a threat to a major American security partner and a threat to the American interest in peace and stability in the Western Pacific.

After easing for eight years, tensions across the Taiwan Strait resumed as a result

of Beijing's reaction to the outcome of Taiwan's 2016 presidential election. Regardless of the state of the relationship at any given time, however, Chinese leaders from Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping have consistently emphasized the importance of ultimately reclaiming Taiwan. The island, along with Tibet, is the clearest example of a geographical "core interest" in Chinese policy. China has never renounced the use of force, and it continues to employ political warfare against Taiwan's political and military leadership.

For the Chinese leadership, the failure to effect unification, whether peacefully or through the use of force, would reflect fundamental political weakness in the PRC. For this reason, there is no realistic means by which any Chinese leadership can back away from the stance of having to unify the island with the mainland. As a result, the island remains an essential part of the People's Liberation Army's "new historic missions," shaping PLA acquisitions and military planning.

Two decades of double-digit increases in China's announced defense budget have produced a significantly more modern PLA, much of which remains focused on a Taiwan contingency. This modernized force includes more than 1,000 ballistic missiles, a modernized air force, and growing numbers of modern surface combatants and diesel-electric submarines capable of mounting a blockade. As the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis demonstrated. Beijing is prepared at least to use open displays of force. Accordingly, over the last year, the Chinese have sought to intimidate Taiwan with a growing number of military exercises, including live-fire drills and bomber flights around the island.48 In the absence of a strong American presence, it might be willing to go farther than this.

It is widely posited that China's counterintervention strategy—the deployment of an array of overlapping capabilities, including anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs), submarines, and long-range cruise missiles, satellites, and cyber weapons, that Americans refer to as an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy—is aimed largely at forestalling American intervention in support of friends and allies in the Western Pacific, including Taiwan. By holding at risk key American platforms and systems such as aircraft carriers, the Chinese seek to delay or even deter American intervention in support of key friends and allies, allowing the PRC to achieve a fait accompli. The growth of China's military capabilities is specifically oriented toward countering America's ability to assist in the defense of Taiwan.

Chinese efforts to reclaim Taiwan are not limited to overt military means. The doctrine of "three warfares"<sup>49</sup> highlights Chinese political warfare methods, including legal warfare/ lawfare, public opinion warfare, and psychological warfare. The PRC employs such approaches to undermine both Taiwan's will to resist and America's willingness to support Taiwan. The Chinese goal would be to "win without fighting"—to take Taiwan without firing a shot or with only minimal resistance before the United States could organize an effective response.

*WWTA:* The WWTA does not reference the threat that China poses to Taiwan but does again reference Beijing's "firm stance" with regard to Taipei.<sup>50</sup>

*Summary:* The Chinese threat to Taiwan is a long-standing one. After an extended lull in apparent tensions, its reaction to the new government in Taipei has once again brought the threat to the fore. China's ability to execute a military action against Taiwan, albeit at high economic, political, and military cost, is improving. Its intent to unify Taiwan with the mainland under the full authority of the PRC central government and to end the island's de facto independence has been consistent over time.

Major Pakistan-Backed Terrorist Attack on India Leading to Open Warfare Between India and Pakistan. An India–Pakistan conflict would jeopardize multiple U.S. interests in the region and potentially increase the threat of global terrorism if Pakistan were destabilized. Pakistan would rely on militant non-state actors to help it fight India, potentially creating a more permissive environment in which various terrorist groups could operate freely. The potential for a nuclear conflict would threaten U.S. businesses in the region and disrupt investment and trade flows, mainly between the U.S. and India, whose bilateral trade in goods and services currently totals well over \$100 billion annually.51 A conflict would also potentially strain America's ties with one or both of the combatants at a time when Pakistan-U.S. ties are already under severe stress and America is trying to build a stronger partnership with India. The effects of an actual nuclear exchange-both the human lives lost and the long-term economic damage-would be devastating.

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan are engaged in a nuclear competition that threatens stability throughout the subcontinent. Both countries tested nuclear weapons in 1998, establishing themselves as overtly nuclear weapons states, although India first conducted a "peaceful" nuclear weapons test in 1974. Both countries also are developing naval nuclear weapons and already possess ballistic missile and aircraft-delivery platforms.<sup>52</sup>

Pakistan has been said to have "the world's fastest-growing nuclear stockpile."<sup>53</sup> Islamabad currently has an estimated 140 nuclear weapons and "has lowered the threshold for nuclear weapons use by developing tactical nuclear weapons capabilities to counter perceived Indian conventional military threats."<sup>54</sup> This in turn affects India's nuclear use threshold, which could affect China and possibly others.

The broader military and strategic dynamic between India and Pakistan remains volatile and has arguably grown more so since the May 2014 election of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Narendra Modi as India's prime minister. While Modi initially sought to extend an olive branch by inviting Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to his swearing-in ceremony, he subsequently called off foreign secretary–level talks that were scheduled for August 2014 to express anger over a Pakistani official's meeting with Kashmiri separatist leaders. During the same month, the two sides engaged in intense firing and shelling along their international border (called the working boundary) and across the Line of Control (LoC) that divides Kashmir. The director of India's Border Security Force noted that the firing across the international border was the worst it had been since the war between India and Pakistan in 1971. A similar escalation in border tensions occurred again in December 2014 when a series of firing incidents over a one-week period resulted in the deaths of at least five Pakistani soldiers and one Indian soldier.

On December 25, 2015, a meeting did occur when Prime Minister Modi made an impromptu visit to Lahore to meet with Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif, the first visit to Pakistan by an Indian leader in 12 years. The visit created enormous goodwill between the two countries and raised hope that official dialogue would soon resume. Again, however, violence marred the new opening. Six days after the meeting, JeM militants attacked the Indian airbase at Pathankot, killing seven Indian security personnel. India has provided information on the attackers to Pakistan and has demanded action against JeM, but to no avail.

As a result, official India–Pakistan dialogue remains deadlocked even though the two sides are reportedly communicating quietly through their foreign secretaries and national security advisers. Since 2015, there has also been an uptick in cross-border firing between the Indian and Pakistani militaries, raising questions about whether a cease-fire that has been in place since 2003 is being rendered ineffective.

As noted, Pakistan continues to harbor terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The latter was responsible for a January 2, 2016, attack on an Indian airbase at Pathankot, as well as a February 2018 attack on an Indian army camp in Jammu.<sup>55</sup> Media reports indicate that some JeM leaders were detained in Pakistan following the Pathankot attack, but no charges were filed.

Hafez Muhammed Saeed, LeT's founder and the leader of its front organization Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), has periodically been placed under arrest, only to be later released. Previously, he had operated freely in Pakistan, often holding press conferences and inciting violence against India during large public rallies. In December 2014, Saeed held a two-day conclave in Lahore that received support from the Pakistani government, including security from 4,000 police officers and government assistance in transporting attendees to the gathering of more than 400,000. India condemned the Pakistani government's support for the gathering as "blatant disregard" of global norms against terrorism.<sup>56</sup>

There is some concern about the impact on Indian–Pakistani relations of an international troop drawdown in Afghanistan. Such a drawdown could enable the Taliban and other extremist groups to strengthen their grip in the region, further undermining stability in Kashmir and raising the chances of another major terrorist attack against India. Afghan security forces thwarted an attack on the Indian consulate in Herat, Afghanistan, in May 2014. However, a successful future attack on Indian interests in Afghanistan along the lines of the bombing of the Indian embassy in Kabul in 2008 would sharpen tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad.

With terrorist groups operating relatively freely in Pakistan and maintaining links to the country's military and intelligence services, there is a moderate risk that the two countries might climb the military escalation ladder and eventually engage in all-out conflict. Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability appears to have acted as a deterrent against Indian military escalation both during the 2001-2002 military crisis and following the 2008 Mumbai attacks, but the Indian government would be under great pressure to react strongly in the face of another major terrorist provocation. Pakistan's recent focus on incorporating tactical nuclear weapons into its warfighting doctrine has also raised concern that if conflict does break out, there is now a higher risk of nuclear exchange.57

*WWTA:* The 2018 WWTA does not reference the threat to American interests from a Pakistani attack on India and potential

escalation, but it does refer to "tense" relations between the two countries and the "risk of escalation" in the event of "another high-profile terrorist attack in India or an uptick in violence on the Line of Control."<sup>58</sup> It also calls attention to the production of "new types of nuclear weapons [that] will introduce new risks for escalation dynamics and security in the region."<sup>59</sup> More broadly, there is significant new language specifying that "Pakistan will continue to threaten US interests by deploying new nuclear weapons capabilities, maintaining its ties to militants, restricting counterterrorism cooperation, and drawing closer to China."<sup>60</sup>

*Summary:* Indian military retaliation against a Pakistan-backed terrorist strike against India could include targeted air strikes on terrorist training camps inside Pakistan. This would likely lead to broader military conflict with some prospect of escalating to a nuclear exchange. Neither side desires another general war. Both countries have limited objectives and have demonstrated their intent to avoid escalation, but this is a delicate calculation.

**Threat of China–India Conflict.** The possibility of armed conflict between India and China, while currently remote, poses an indirect threat to U.S. interests because it could disrupt the territorial status quo and raise nuclear tensions in the region. It would also risk straining the maturing India–U.S. partnership if the level of U.S. support and commitment in a conflict scenario did not meet India's expectations. Meanwhile, a border conflict between India and China could prompt Pakistan to try to take advantage of the situation, further contributing to regional instability.

The Chinese continue to enjoy an advantage over India in terms of military infrastructure and along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory and continue to expand a network of road, rail, and air links in the border areas. To meet these challenges, the government of Prime Minister Modi has committed to expanding infrastructure development along India's disputed border with China, especially in the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, but progress has been slow. Although China currently holds a decisive military edge over India, New Delhi is engaged in an ambitious military modernization program.

Long-standing border disputes that led to a Sino–Indian War in 1962 have been heating up again in recent years. India claims that China occupies more than 14,000 square miles of Indian territory in the Aksai Chin along its northern border in Kashmir, and China lays claim to more than 34,000 square miles of India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh. The issue is also closely related to China's concern for its control of Tibet and the presence in India of the Tibetan government in exile and Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

In April 2013, Chinese troops settled for three weeks several miles inside northern Indian territory on the Depsang Plains in Ladakh, marking a departure from the several hundred minor transgressions reported along the LAC every year, which are generally short-lived. A visit to India by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September 2014 was overshadowed by another flare-up in border tensions when hundreds of Chinese PLA forces reportedly set up camps in the mountainous regions of Ladakh, prompting Indian forces to deploy to forward positions in the region. The border standoff lasted three weeks and was defused when both sides agreed to pull their troops back to previous positions.

The Border Defense and Cooperation Agreement (BDCA) signed during then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to China in October 2013 affirms that neither side will use its military capabilities against the other, proposes a hotline between the two countries' military headquarters, institutes meetings between border personnel in all sectors, and ensures that neither side tails the other's patrols along the LAC.<sup>61</sup> The agreement also includes language stipulating that in the event the two sides come face-to-face, they "shall exercise maximum self-restraint, refrain from any provocative actions, not use force or threaten to use force against the other side, treat each other with courtesy and prevent exchange of armed conflict."<sup>62</sup>

However, the agreement failed to reduce border tensions or restore momentum to border negotiations that have been largely stalled since the mid-2000s. Some analysts have even contended that the Chinese intend to buy time on their border disputes with India through the BDCA while focusing on other territorial claims in the Asia–Pacific.<sup>63</sup>

In the summer of 2017, China and India engaged in a tense and unprecedented standoff in the Doklam Plateau region near the tri-border area linking Bhutan, China, and India. An attempt by Chinese forces to extend a road south into Bhutanese territory claimed by China prompted an intervention by nearby Indian forces to halt construction. As with other recent border incidents, no shots were fired, but tensions ran high, with Chinese officials and media outlets levying unusually direct threats at India and demanding a full Indian withdrawal from "Chinese territory" with no preconditions. Quiet diplomacy eventually produced a mutual phased withdrawal, but Chinese troops remain encamped nearby, expanding local infrastructure and planning for a more permanent presence.

In early 2018, the two sides sought to reduce tensions, and an informal summit between President Xi and Prime Minister Modi was held in April. Despite this nominal charm offensive, however, the two sides face a growing divide along several key geopolitical fault lines.

The first major opponent of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India continues to oppose China's grand infrastructure initiative because one of its subcomponents, the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), traverses Indian-claimed Kashmir. Meanwhile, China has significantly expanded its economic, political, and military footprint in the Indian Ocean and South Asia, contributing to a sense of encirclement in Delhi. Beijing has achieved major diplomatic breakthroughs and landmark investments in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the

## **China's Belt and Road Initiative**

Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China endeavors to reshape the economic and geopolitical landscape of Eurasia and the Indian Ocean with an unprecedented wave of infrastructure investments.



**SOURCES:** "Reviving the Silk Road," Reuters, May 10, 2017, map, https://pictures.reuters.com/archive/CHINA-SILKROAD--C-ETIED5A1MD43P.html (accessed July 3, 2018), and Heritage Foundation research.

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Maldives, and the PLA Navy has begun regular conventional and nuclear submarine patrols in the Indian Ocean, complementing the anti-piracy naval task force it regularly rotates through the Indian Ocean. China opened its first "overseas logistics supply facility," which closely resembles a full military base, in Djibouti in 2017 and reportedly has expressed interest in building a naval base in Pakistan near the Chinese-operated Gwadar port. *WWTA:* Unlike the 2016 and 2017 WWTAs, which were silent with respect to India–China relations, the 2018 WWTA assesses that "relations between India and China [are expected] to remain tense and possibly to deteriorate further, despite the negotiated settlement to their three-month border standoff in August, elevating the risk of unintentional escalation."<sup>64</sup>

*Summary:* American interest in India's security is substantial and expanding. Both

India and China apparently want to avoid allowing minor incidents to escalate into a more general war. The Chinese seem to use border tensions for limited diplomatic and political gain vis-à-vis India, and India responds in ways that are intended to contain minor incursions and maximize reputational damage to China. Despite limited aims, however, the unsettled situation and gamesmanship along the border could result in miscalculation, accidents, or overreaction.

#### Threats to the Commons

The U.S. has critical direct interests at stake in the East Asia and South Asia commons that include sea, air, space, and cyber interests. These interests include an economic interest in the free flow of commerce and the military use of the commons to safeguard America's own security and contribute to the security of its allies and partners.

Washington has long provided the security backbone in these areas, which in turn has supported the region's remarkable economic development. However, China is taking increasingly assertive steps to secure its own interests in these areas independent of U.S. efforts to maintain freedom of the commons for all in the region. It cannot be assumed that China shares either a common conception of international space with the United States or an interest in perpetuating American predominance in securing the commons.

Moreover, this concern extends beyond its immediate region. In addition to the aforementioned facility in Djibouti and the possibility of naval access to Gwadar, Chinese submarines have called at Sri Lankan ports, demonstrating China's growing ability to operate far from its shores.

**Maritime and Airspace Commons.** The aggressiveness of the Chinese navy, maritime law enforcement forces, and air forces in and over the waters of the East China Sea and South China Sea, coupled with ambiguous, extralegal territorial claims and assertion of control there, poses an incipient threat to American and overlapping allied interests.

*East China Sea.* Since 2010, China has intensified its efforts to assert claims of sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands of Japan in the East China Sea. Beijing asserts not only exclusive economic rights within the disputed waters, but also recognition of "historic" rights to dominate and control those areas as part of its territory.

Chinese coast guard vessels and military aircraft regularly challenge Japanese administration of the waters surrounding the Senkakus by sailing into and flying over them, prompting reaction from Japanese Self Defense Forces. This raises the potential for miscalculation and escalation into a military clash. In the summer of 2016, China began to deploy naval units into the area.

In November 2013, China declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea that largely aligned with its claimed maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The government declared that it would "adopt defensive emergency measures to respond to aircraft that do not cooperate in the identification or refuse to follow the instructions."<sup>65</sup> The announcement was a provocative act—an attempt to change the status quo unilaterally.

The ADIZ declaration is part of a broader Chinese pattern of using intimidation and coercion to assert expansive extralegal claims of sovereignty and/or control incrementally. In June 2016, a Chinese fighter made an "unsafe" pass near a U.S. RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft in the East China Sea area. In March 2017, Chinese authorities warned the crew of an American B-1B bomber operating in the area of the ADIZ that they were flying illegally in PRC airspace. In response to the incident, the Chinese Foreign Ministry called for the U.S. to respect the ADIZ.66 In May 2017, the Chinese intercepted an American WC-135, also over the East China Sea,<sup>67</sup> and in July, they intercepted an EP-3 surveillance plane.68

*South China Sea*. Roughly half of global trade in goods, a third of trade in oil, and over half of global liquefied natural gas shipments pass through the South China Sea, which also accounts for approximately 10 percent of

global fish catch and may contain massive potential reserves of oil and natural gas. The U.S. Navy also operates in the area and requires access to meet its security and treaty obligations in the region most effectively.

The South China Sea is hotly contested by six countries, including Taiwan. Incidents between Chinese law enforcement vessels and other claimants' fishing boats occur there on a regular basis, as do other Chinese assertions of administrative authority. The most serious intraregional incidents have occurred between China and the Philippines and between China and Vietnam.

In 2012, a Philippine naval ship operating on behalf of the country's coast guard challenged private Chinese poachers in waters around Scarborough Shoal. The resulting escalation left Chinese government ships in control of the shoal, which in turn led the Philippines to bring a wide-ranging case before the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) disputing Chinese activities (not its territorial claims) in the waters around the Spratlys, not limited to Scarborough. The Philippines won the case in July 2016 when the PCA invalidated China's sweeping claims to the waters and found its "island" reclamation to be in violation of commitments under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Although the Chinese have never accepted the authority of the proceedings, they have allowed Filipino fishermen access to Scarborough Shoal in accordance with the PCA award and have refrained from reclaiming land around it. In exchange, the new Duterte government in the Philippines has chosen to set the ruling aside in pursuit of warmer relations with Beijing. This tacit agreement has lowered tensions over the past two years, although Chinese missile deployments to islands in 2018 provoked debate in Manila and a strengthening of Filipino rhetoric.<sup>69</sup> The government's reaction also revealed that the Philippines has formally protested Chinese activity dozens of times during Duterte's presidency.

China–Vietnam tensions in the South China Sea were on starkest display in 2014 when

state-owned China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) deployed an oil rig inside Vietnam's EEZ. The Chinese platform was accompanied by dozens of ships including naval vessels. The resulting escalation saw Chinese ships ramming Vietnamese law enforcement ships and using water cannon against the crews of Vietnamese ships. It also resulted in massive and sometimes violent demonstrations in Vietnam. The oil rig was ultimately withdrawn, and relations were restored, but the occasional reappearance of the same rig has served to underscore the continuing volatility of this issue, which involves the same area over which China and Vietnam engaged in armed battle in 1974. As recently as 2018, the Chinese were still pressing their advantages in areas contested with Vietnam with widely publicized bomber deployments to the Paracel Islands.<sup>70</sup> They also successfully pressured Vietnam to cancel "major oil development" projects in the South China Sea in July 2017 and again in March 2018.71

The U.S. presence also has become an object of Chinese attention, beginning with confrontations with the ocean surveillance ship USNS *Impeccable* and the destroyer USS *John McCain* in 2009. In addition, the Chinese routinely and vigorously protest routine U.S. Navy operations and American "freedom of navigation" operations in the area, which have increased in frequency and intensity during the course of the Trump Administration.

Differences between the U.S. and China in the South China Sea have expanded significantly with Chinese reclamation of land features in the Spratlys that began in 2013. China has reclaimed territory at seven of these manmade islands and has built airstrips on three, thereby expanding the potential reach of its navy. In 2017 and 2018, the Chinese deployed surface-to-air missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles on the "islands" despite a 2015 promise by President Xi to President Barack Obama not to "militarize" them.<sup>72</sup>

In his February 14, 2018, posture statement to the House Committee on Armed Services, Admiral Harry Harris, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, listed the structures on each of the three largest of these islands:

- 10,000 foot runways capable of launching and recovering all military aircraft;
- Fighter aircraft hangers;
- Large aircraft hangars, capable of supporting larger aircraft such as bombers, AWACS, and transports;
- Protected air defense launcher sheds;
- Protected anti-ship missile launcher sheds;
- Water and fuel storage tank farms;
- Barracks, communication systems, deep water pier facilities, military radars.<sup>73</sup>

Admiral Harris went on to say that "[t]hese bases appear to be forward military outposts, built for the military, garrisoned by military forces and designed to project Chinese military power and capability across the breadth of China's disputed South China Sea claims."<sup>74</sup> Most dramatically, in responding to a series of "Advance Policy Questions" in connection with his confirmation hearing in April, Admiral Philip Davidson, who had been nominated to replace Admiral Harris, said that "China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States."<sup>75</sup>

The Chinese could use their current position as a basis for declaring an ADIZ above the South China Sea. This would cause major tensions in the region and could lead to conflict. There also are concerns that in the event of a downturn in its relationship with the Philippines, China will take action against vulnerable targets like Philippines-occupied Second Thomas Shoal or Reed Bank, which are not among the seven reclaimed "islands" but which the PCA determined are part of the Philippines EEZ and continental shelf. Proceeding with reclamation at Scarborough is another destabilizing possibility, as it would facilitate the physical assertion of Beijing's claims and cross what the Philippine government has called a "red line."

In 2018, the situation involving continued militarization of the Spratlys led the U.S. to disinvite China from participation in biannual RIMPAC exercises.<sup>76</sup> In his first visit to China as Secretary of Defense, James Mattis also publicly criticized the Chinese for the militarization and made a point of raising it in his conversations with President and Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping.<sup>77</sup>

*Airpower*. Although China is not yet in a position to enforce an ADIZ consistently in either area, the steady improvement of the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and naval aviation over the past two decades will eventually provide the necessary capabilities. Chinese observations of recent conflicts, including wars in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, and Afghanistan, have emphasized the growing role of airpower and missiles in conducting "non-contact, non-linear, non-symmetrical" warfare.

China also seems to have made a point of publicizing its air force modernization, unveiling new aircraft prototypes, including two new stealth fighters, on the eve of visits by American Secretaries of Defense. (Secretary Chuck Hagel's visit in 2014 was preceded by the unveiling of the J-15 naval fighter.) Those aircraft have been flown much more aggressively, with Chinese fighters flying very close to Japanese aircraft in China's East China Sea ADIZ and conducting armed combat air patrols in the skies over Tibet.<sup>78</sup>

The PLA has shed most of its 1960s-era aircraft, replacing them with much more modern systems. Today's PLAAF is dominated by fourth-generation and 4.5th-generation fighter aircraft. These include the domestically designed and produced J-10 and the Su-27/ Su-30/J-11 system, which is comparable to the F-15 or F-18 and dominates both the fighter and strike missions.<sup>79</sup> Older airframes such as the J-7 are steadily being retired from the fighter inventory. China is also believed to be preparing to field two stealth fifth-generation fighter designs. The J-20 is the larger aircraft, resembling the American F-22 fighter. The J-31 appears to resemble the F-35 but with two engines rather than one. The production of advanced combat aircraft engines remains one of the greatest challenges to Chinese fighter design.

China fields some long-range strike aircraft, largely the H-6 bomber based on the Soviet-era Tu-16 Badger. This aircraft has little prospect of penetrating advanced air defenses but is suitable as a cruise missile carrier. China also has used the H-6 as the basis for initial efforts to develop an aerial tanker fleet and seems to be examining other options as well. As it deploys more tankers, China will extend the range and loiter time of its fighter aircraft and be better equipped to enforce its declared East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone and any possible future South China Sea ADIZ.

A variety of modern support aircraft have also entered the PLAAF inventory, including airborne early warning (AEW), command and control (C2), and electronic warfare (EW) aircraft. At the Zhuhai Air Show, Chinese companies have displayed a variety of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that reflect substantial investments and research and development efforts. Chinese drone systems include the CH-5 (Rainbow-5) drone, described in DOD's 2017 report on *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* as China's most heavily armed drone (carrying 16 airto-surface munitions),<sup>80</sup> and the stealthy Lijian.

China's air defenses, which are controlled by the PLAAF, have also been modernizing steadily. China has acquired the advanced S-300 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system (SA-10B/SA-20), which is roughly analogous to the American Patriot SAM system, and is developing its own advanced SAM, the HQ-9, which is deployed both on land and at sea. Early in 2018, Russia delivered to China the first of four to six S-400 SAM systems under a contract concluded between the two governments in 2014. This marks a substantial improvement in PLAAF air defense capabilities.<sup>81</sup> China has deployed these SAM systems in a dense, overlapping belt along its coast, protecting the nation's economic center of gravity. Key industrial and military centers such as Beijing are also heavily defended by SAM systems. Some of these systems have reportedly been deployed to the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea.

A third component of the PLAAF is China's airborne forces. The 15th Airborne Corps is part of the PLAAF and is now organized in approximately six brigades.<sup>82</sup> These are not believed to be assigned to any of the Chinese military regions but are instead a strategic reserve as well as a rapid reaction force. They are believed to be deployed mainly in the Central War Zone. In 2009, in the military review associated with the 60th anniversary of the founding of the PRC, Chinese airborne units paraded through Tiananmen Square with ZBD-03 mechanized airborne combat vehicles. These vehicles provide Chinese airborne forces with tactical mobility as well as some degree of protected fire support from their 30mm autocannon and HJ-73 anti-tank missile (a domestic version of the AT-3 Sagger)-something that American airborne forces continue to lack.

Sea Power. As the world's foremost trading state, China depends on the seas for its economic well-being. China's factories are increasingly powered by imported oil, and Chinese diets include a growing percentage of imported food. China relies on the seas to move its products to markets. At the same time, because its economic center of gravity is now in the coastal region, China has to emphasize maritime power to defend key assets and areas. Consequently, China has steadily expanded its maritime power, including its merchant marine and maritime law enforcement capabilities, but especially the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

The PLAN is no longer an unsophisticated coastal defense force. Instead, since the end of the Cold War, China's navy has moved away from reliance on mass toward incorporating advanced platforms and weapons. Most notably, the Chinese navy is the first in East Asia to deploy its own aircraft carrier since World War II and is now the first to deploy a home-built aircraft carrier. Both *Liaoning* and its Chinese-made sister ship are expected to carry a mixed air group of J-15 fighters (based on the navalized Su-27) and helicopters. China is also reportedly working on a third carrier with a modern flat-top design.

Many obsolete vessels have been decommissioned, including scores of older, missile-armed, fast attack craft. In their place, China has produced a range of more capable combatants and is building each class in significant numbers. These range from the Type 022 Houbei missile-armed catamaran, which is armed with sea-skimming supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles, to the Type-052C Luyang-II destroyer, which is equipped with a phased-array radar for its HQ-9 SAM system. The HQ-9, with its ability to combat most air-breathing systems and a limited anti-ballistic missile capability, is believed to be comparable to early model Patriot missiles. China is also apparently producing a new class of cruisers, the Type 055, which will carry both anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems. Although these new ships are not replacing older Chinese surface combatants on a one-for-one basis, the overall capability of the PLAN surface force is steadily improving.

The PLAN has similarly been modernizing its submarine force. Since 2000, the PLAN has consistently fielded between 50 and 60 diesel-electric submarines, but the age and capability of the force has been improving as older boats, especially 1950s-vintage Romeo-class boats, are replaced with newer designs. These include a dozen Kilo-class submarines purchased from Russia and domestically designed and manufactured Song and Yuan classes. All of these are believed to be capable of firing anti-ship cruise missiles as well as torpedoes. The Chinese have also developed variants of the Yuan with an air-independent propulsion (AIP) system that reduces the boats' vulnerability by removing the need to use noisy diesel engines to recharge batteries.

The PLAN has been augmenting its aerial maritime strike capability as well. In addition to more modern versions of the H-6 twin-engine bombers (a version of the Soviet/Russian Tu-16 Badger), the PLAN's Naval Aviation force has added a range of other strike aircraft to its inventory. These include the JH-7/FBC-1 Flying Leopard, which can carry between two and four YJ-82 anti-ship cruise missiles, and the Su-30 strike fighter. Within Chinese littoral waters, the PLAN Air Force can bring a significant amount of firepower to bear.

Finally, the PLAN has been working to improve its "fleet train." The 2010 PRC defense white paper noted the accelerated construction of "large support vessels." It also specifically noted that the navy is exploring "new methods of logistics support for sustaining long-time maritime missions."<sup>83</sup> Since then, the Chinese have expanded their fleet of logistics support ships, including underway replenishment oilers and cargo ships. Chinese submarine tenders have accompanied submarines into the Indian Ocean, allowing Chinese subs to remain on station longer.

As with other aspects of PLA modernization, even as the PLAN is upgrading its weapons, it is also improving its doctrine and training, including increased emphasis on joint operations and the incorporation of electronic warfare into its training regimen. Such improvements suggest that PLA Air Force assets, space and cyber operations, and even PLA Rocket Force units might support naval aviation strikes. The new anti-ship ballistic missile forces, centered on the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile (now reportedly at initial operational capability) and possibly the longer-range DF-26, should be seen as part of joint Chinese efforts to control the seas, complementing PLAAF and PLAN air, surface, and sub-surface forces.

**Escalation of Territorial Disputes or Incidents at Sea.** Because the PRC and other countries in the region see active disputes over the East and South China Seas not as differences regarding the administration of the commons, but rather as matters of territorial sovereignty, there exists the threat of armed conflict between China and American allies who are also claimants, particularly Japan and the Philippines. Beijing prefers to accomplish its objectives quietly and through nonmilitary means. In both the East and South China Seas, China has sought to exploit "gray zones," gaining control incrementally and deterring others without resort to the lethal use of force. It uses military and economic threats, bombastic language, and enforcement through military bullying. Chinese paramilitary-implemented, military-backed encroachment in support of expansive extralegal claims could lead to an unplanned armed clash.

Rising nationalism is exacerbating tensions, making geostrategic relations in Asia increasingly complex and volatile. In the face of persistent economic challenges, nationalist themes are becoming an increasingly strong undercurrent and affecting policymaking. Although the nationalist phenomenon is not new, it is gaining force and complicating efforts to maintain regional stability.

Governments may choose to exploit nationalism for domestic political purposes, but they also run the risk of being unable to control the genie that they have released. Nationalist rhetoric is mutually reinforcing, which makes countries less likely to back down than in the past. The increasing power that the Internet and social media provide to the populace, largely outside of government control, add elements of unpredictability to future clashes.

In case of armed conflict between China and the Philippines or between China and Japan, either by intention or as a result of an accidental incident at sea, the U.S. could be required to exercise its treaty commitments.<sup>84</sup> Escalation of a direct U.S.–China incident is likewise not unthinkable. Keeping an inadvertent incident from escalating into a broader military confrontation would be difficult. This is particularly true in the East and South China Seas, where naval as well as civilian law enforcement vessels from both China and the U.S. operate in what the U.S. considers to be international waters.

*WWTA:* The WWTA does not address threats to the maritime and airspace commons,

but it does say that "China will continue to pursue an active foreign policy" in the region that is "highlighted by [among other things] a firm stance on competing territorial claims in the East China Sea (ECS) and South China Sea (SCS)."<sup>85</sup> Unlike last year's assessment, the 2018 WWTA does not reference Chinese construction in the South China Sea and offers no judgment with respect to the threat that this poses to American interests or whether largescale conventional conflict in the region is likely to result from Chinese activity.

*Summary:* In both the air and maritime domains, China is ever more capable of challenging American dominance and disrupting the freedom of the commons that benefits the entire region. Both territorial disputes related to what the U.S. and its allies consider the commons and accidental incidents could draw the U.S. into conflict. China probably does not intend to engage in armed conflict with its neighbors, particularly American treaty allies, or with the U.S. itself. However, it will continue to press its territorial claims at sea in ways that, even if inadvertent, cause incidents that could escalate into broader conflict.

**Space.** One of the key force multipliers for the United States is its extensive array of space-based assets. Through its various satellite constellations, the U.S. military can track opponents, coordinate friendly forces, engage in precision strikes against enemy forces, and conduct battle-damage assessments so that its munitions are expended efficiently.

The American military is more reliant than many others on space-based systems because it is also an expeditionary military (meaning that its wars are conducted far distant from the homeland). Consequently, it requires global rather than regional reconnaissance, communications and data transmission, and meteorological information and support. At this point, only space-based systems can provide this sort of information on a real-time basis. The U.S. can leverage space in ways that no other country can, and this is a major advantage, but this heavy reliance on space systems is also a key American vulnerability.

China fields an array of space capabilities, including its own navigation and timing satellites, the Beidou/Compass system, and has claimed a capacity to refuel satellites.<sup>86</sup> It has three satellite launch centers, and a fourth is under construction. China's interest in space dominance includes not only accessing space, but also denying opponents the ability to do the same. As one Chinese assessment notes, space capabilities provided 70 percent of battlefield communications, over 80 percent of battlefield reconnaissance and surveillance, and 100 percent of meteorological information for American operations in Kosovo. Moreover, 98 percent of precision munitions relied on space for guidance information. In fact, "It may be said that America's victory in the Kosovo War could not [have been] achieved without fully exploiting space."87

The PLA has therefore been developing a range of anti-satellite capabilities that include both hard-kill and soft-kill systems. The former include direct-ascent kinetic-kill vehicles (DA-KKV) but also more advanced systems that are believed to be capable of reaching targets in medium earth orbit (MEO) and even geostationary earth orbit (GEO).88 The latter include anti-satellite lasers for either dazzling or blinding purposes.89 This is consistent with PLA doctrinal writings, which emphasize the need to control space in future conflicts. "Securing space dominance has already become the prerequisite for establishing information, air, and maritime dominance," according to one Chinese teaching manual, "and will directly affect the course and outcome of wars."90

Soft-kill attacks need not come only from dedicated weapons, however. The case of Galaxy-15, a communications satellite owned by Intelsat Corporation, showed how a satellite could effectively disrupt communications simply by being in "switched on" mode all of the time.<sup>91</sup> Before it was finally brought under control, it had drifted through a portion of the geosynchronous belt, forcing other satellite owners to move their assets and juggle frequencies. A deliberate such attempt by China (or any other country) could prove far harder to handle, especially if conducted in conjunction with attacks by kinetic systems or directed-energy weapons.

China has created a single service, the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF), with authority over its space, electronic warfare, and network warfare capabilities. In essence, this is a service that is focused on fighting in the information domain, striving to secure what the PLA terms "information dominance" for itself while denying it to others. This service will probably combine electronic warfare, cyber warfare, and physical attacks against adversary space and information systems in order to deny them the ability to gather, transmit, and exploit information.

WWTA: The WWTA assesses that China "would justify attacks against US and allied satellites as necessary to offset any perceived US military advantage derived from military, civil, or commercial space systems." China "continue[s] to pursue a full range of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons as a means to reduce US and allied military effectiveness" and "aim[s] to have nondestructive and destructive counterspace weapons available for use during a potential future conflict." In addition, "[m]ilitary reforms...in the past few years indicate an increased focus on establishing operational forces designed to integrate attacks against space systems and services with military operations in other domains." China's "destructive ASAT weapons probably will reach initial operating capability in the next few years," and China is "advancing directed-energy weapons technologies for the purpose of fielding ASAT weapons that could blind or damage sensitive space-based optical sensors, such as those used for remote sensing or missile defense."92

Summary: The PRC poses a challenge to the United States that is qualitatively different from the challenge posed by any other potential adversary in the post–Cold War environment. It is the first nation to be capable of accessing space on its own while also jeopardizing America's ability to do the same. This appears to be its intent. **Cyber.** Threats in this area derive primarily from China and North Korea, and the threats posed by both countries are serious.

China. In 2013, the Verizon Risk Center found that China was responsible for the largest percentage (30 percent) of external breaches in which "the threat actor's country of origin was discoverable" and that "96% of espionage cases were attributed to threat actors in China and the remaining 4% were unknown."93 Given the difficulties of attribution, country of origin should not necessarily be conflated with the perpetrator, but forensic efforts have identified at least one Chinese military unit with cyber intrusions.94 Similarly, the Verizon report concluded that China was the source of 95 percent of state-sponsored cyber-espionage attacks. Since the 2015 Xi-Obama summit at which the two sides reached an understanding to reduce cyber economic espionage, Chinese cyber trends have been difficult to discern. While Chinese economic cyber-espionage is reported to have declined, the overall level of cyber activity appears to have remained relatively constant. On the other hand, FireEye, a cyber-security consulting firm, has observed an increase in attacks against U.S. companies in attempts to obtain sensitive business information and warns that this may be due to Chinese activity.95

China's cyber-espionage efforts are often aimed at economic targets, reflecting the much more holistic Chinese view of both security and information. Rather than creating an artificial dividing line between military security and civilian security, much less information, the PLA plays a role in supporting both and seeks to obtain economic intellectual property as well as military electronic information.

This is not to suggest, however, that the PLA has not emphasized the military importance of cyber warfare. Chinese military writings since the 1990s have emphasized a fundamental transformation in global military affairs (*shijie junshi gaige*). Future wars will be conducted through joint operations involving multiple services rather than through combined operations focused on multiple branches within a single service. These future wars will span not only the traditional land, sea, and air domains, but also outer space and cyberspace. The latter two arenas will be of special importance because warfare has shifted from an effort to establish material dominance (characteristic of Industrial Age warfare) to establishing information dominance (*zhi xinxi quan*). This is due to the rise of the information age and the resulting introduction of information technology into all areas of military operations.

Consequently, according to PLA analysis, future wars will most likely be "local wars under informationized conditions." That is, they will be wars in which information and information technology not only will be widely applied, but also will be a key basis of victory. The ability to gather, transmit, analyze, manage, and exploit information will be central to winning such wars: The side that is able to do these things more accurately and more quickly will be the side that wins. This means that future conflicts will no longer be determined by platform-versus-platform performance and not even by system against system (xitong). Rather, conflicts are now clashes between rival arrays of systems of systems (tixi).96

Chinese military writings suggest that a great deal of attention has been focused on developing an integrated computer network and electronic warfare (INEW) capability. This would allow the PLA to reconnoiter a potential adversary's computer systems in peacetime, influence opponent decision-makers by threatening those same systems in times of crisis, and disrupt or destroy information networks and systems by cyber and electronic warfare means in the event of conflict. INEW capabilities would complement psychological warfare and physical attack efforts to secure "information dominance," which Chinese military writings emphasize as essential for fighting and winning future wars.

Attacks on computer networks in particular have the potential to be extremely disruptive. The 2014 indictment of five serving PLA officers on the grounds of cyber espionage highlights how active the Chinese military is in this realm.<sup>97</sup> Since then, the major Chinese military reform announced at the end of 2015 included the establishment of the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF), which brings together China's space, electronic warfare, and network warfare (which includes cyber) forces. This reflects the importance that the PLA is likely placing on computer network operations.

It is essential to recognize, however, that the PLA views computer network operations as part of the larger body of information operations (*xinxi zuozhan*), or information combat. Information operations are specific operational activities that are associated with striving to establish information dominance. They are conducted in both peacetime and wartime, with the peacetime focus on collecting information, improving its flow and application, influencing opposing decision-making, and effecting information deterrence.

Information operations involve four mission areas:

- **Command and Control Missions.** An essential part of information operations is the ability of commanders to control joint operations by disparate forces. Thus, command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance structures constitute a key part of information operations, providing the means for collecting, transmitting, and managing information.
- **Offensive Information Missions.** These are intended to disrupt the enemy's battlefield command and control systems and communications networks, as well as to strike the enemy's psychological defenses.
- **Defensive Information Missions.** Such missions are aimed at ensuring the survival and continued operation of information systems. They include deterring an opponent from attacking one's own information systems, concealing information, and combating attacks when they do occur.

**Information Support and Information-Safeguarding Missions.** The ability to provide the myriad types of information necessary to support extensive joint operations and to do so on a continuous basis is essential to their success.<sup>98</sup>

Computer network operations are integral to all four of these overall mission areas. They can include both strategic and battlefield network operations and can incorporate both offensive and defensive measures. They also include protection not only of data, but also of information hardware and operating software.

Computer network operations will not stand alone, however, but will be integrated with electronic warfare operations, as reflected in the phrase "network and electronics unified [wangdian yiti]." Electronic warfare operations are aimed at weakening or destroying enemy electronic facilities and systems while defending one's own.99 The combination of electronic and computer network attacks will produce synergies that affect everything from finding and assessing the adversary to locating one's own forces to weapons guidance to logistical support and command and control. The creation of the PLASSF is intended to integrate these forces and make them more complementary and effective in future "local wars under informationized conditions."

*North Korea.* In April 2018, North Korea was suspected in a cyber-attack on a Turkish bank as part of a hacking campaign identified as Operation GhostSecret that spanned 17 countries and numerous industries. North Korean hackers were believed to be seeking information from several critical infrastructure sectors, including telecommunications and health care.<sup>100</sup>

In February 2016, North Korea conducted the first government-sponsored digital bank robbery. North Korean hackers gained access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), the system used by central banks to authorize monetary transfers, to steal \$81 million. The regime had attempted to send money transfer requests of \$951 million from the Central Bank of Bangladesh to banks in the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and other parts of Asia.<sup>101</sup> North Korean hackers have also targeted the World Bank, the European Central Bank, 20 Polish banks, and large American banks such as Bank of America,<sup>102</sup> as well as financial institutions in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Gabon, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Poland, Taiwan, Thailand, and Uruguay.<sup>103</sup>

In 2014, North Korea conducted the largest cyber-attack on U.S. soil, targeting Sony Pictures in retaliation for the studio's release of a satirical film depicting the assassination of Kim Jong-un. The cyber-attack was accompanied by physical threats against U.S. theaters and citizens. Contrary to the perception of North Korea as a technologically backward nation, the regime has an active cyber warfare capability. As far back as 2009, North Korea declared that it was "fully ready for any form of high-tech war."<sup>104</sup>

The Reconnaissance General Bureau, North Korea's intelligence agency, oversees Unit 121 with approximately 6,000 "cyber-warriors" dedicated to attacking Pyongyang's enemies. Defectors from the unit have told South Korean intelligence officials that hackers are sent to other countries for training as well as to conduct undercover operations. The unit's hackers never operate primarily within North Korea, and this makes both attribution and retaliation more difficult.<sup>105</sup> North Korea has been "expanding both the scope and sophistication of its cyberweaponry, laying the groundwork for more-devastating attacks," according to a February 2018 report by cybersecurity firm FireEve.106

Seoul concluded that North Korea was behind cyber-attacks using viruses or distributed denial-of-service tactics against South Korean government agencies, businesses, banks, and media organizations in 2009, 2011, 2012, and 2013. The most devastating attack, launched in 2013 against South Korean banks and media outlets, deleted the essential Master Boot Record from 48,000 computers.<sup>107</sup> North Korea also jammed GPS signals in 2012, putting hundreds of airplanes transiting Seoul's Incheon airport at risk. Lieutenant General Bae Deag-sig, head of South Korea's Defense Security Command, stated that "North Korea is attempting to use hackers to infiltrate our military's information system to steal military secrets and to incapacitate the defense information system."<sup>108</sup>

WWTA: The WWTA gives the cyber threat from China and North Korea a new level of priority: "Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea will pose the greatest cyber threats to the United States over the next year."109 It assesses that "China will continue to use cyber espionage and bolster cyber attack capabilities to support national security priorities" but also characterizes the volume of cyber activity as "significantly lower than before the bilateral US-China cyber commitments of September 2015."110 It further assesses that North Korea can be expected to use cyber operations to "raise funds and to gather intelligence or launch attacks on South Korea and the United States" And that North Korea "probably" has the ability to "achieve a range of offensive effects with little or no warning."111

Summary: With obvious implications for the U.S., the PLA emphasizes the need to suppress and destroy an enemy's information systems while preserving one's own, as well as the importance of computer and electronic warfare in both the offensive and defensive roles. Methods to secure information dominance would include establishing an information blockade; deception, including through electronic means; information contamination; and information paralysis.<sup>112</sup> China sees cyber as part of an integrated capability for achieving strategic dominance in the Western Pacific region. For North Korea, cyber security is an area in which even its limited resources can directly support discrete political objectives.

#### **Threat Scores**

**AfPak-Based Terrorism.** A great deal of uncertainty surrounds the threat from the AfPak region. For the U.S., Pakistan is both a security partner and a security challenge. Pakistan provides a home and support to terrorist groups that are hostile to the U.S., other U.S. partners in South Asia like India, and the fledgling government of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is particularly vulnerable to destabilization efforts. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are already among the world's most unstable states, and the instability of the former, given its nuclear arsenal, has a direct bearing on U.S. security.

The IISS *Military Balance* addresses the military capabilities of states. It no longer contains a section on the capabilities of non-state actors. The 2018 edition contains no reference to the possibility that Pakistani nuclear weapons might fall into hands that would threaten the American homeland or interests more broadly. The 2014 edition stated that Pakistan's "nuclear weapons are currently believed to be well-secured against terrorist attack."<sup>113</sup> Pakistan's Army Strategic Forces Command has 30 medium-range ballistic missiles, 30 short-range ballistic missiles, and land-attack cruise missiles.<sup>114</sup> Previous editions of the *Military Balance* have also cited development of "likely nuclear capable" artillery. Pakistan also has "1–2 squadrons of F-16A/B or Mirage 5 attack aircraft that may be assigned a nuclear strike role."<sup>115</sup>

This *Index* assesses the overall threat from AfPak-based terrorists, considering the range of contingencies, as "testing" for level of provocation of behavior and "capable" for level of capability.

### Threats: Af-Pak Terrorism



**China.** China presents the United States with the most comprehensive security challenge in the region. It poses various threat contingencies across all three areas of vital American national interests: homeland; regional war (extending from attacks on overseas U.S. bases or against allies and friends); and the global commons. China's provocative behavior is well documented: It is challenging the U.S. and U.S. allies like Japan at sea and in cyberspace, it has raised concerns on its border with India, and it is a standing threat to Taiwan. While there may be a lack of official transparency, publicly available sources shed considerable light on China's fast-growing military capabilities.

According to the IISS *Military Balance,* among the key weapons in China's inventory

are 70 Chinese ICBMs; 162 medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles; four SSBNs with up to 12 missiles each; 77 satellites; 6,740 main battle tanks; 58 tactical submarines; 83 principal surface combatants (including one aircraft carrier and 23 destroyers); and 2,397 combat-capable aircraft in its air force. There are about two million active duty members of the People's Liberation Army.<sup>116</sup>

The Chinese launched their first homegrown aircraft carrier during the past year and are fielding large numbers of new platforms for their land, sea, air, and outer space forces. The PLA has been staging larger and more comprehensive exercises, including live-fire exercises in the East China Sea near Taiwan, which are improving the Chinese ability to operate their plethora of new systems. It has also continued to conduct probes of both the South Korean and Japanese air defense identification zones, drawing rebukes from both Seoul and Tokyo.

In addition, there is little evidence that Chinese cyber espionage and computer network exploitation have abated. The 2018 *Military Balance* cites "significant amounts of old equipment [remaining in] service," as well as questions about the quality of domestically produced equipment, but also notes that "the restructuring process may see outdated designs finally withdrawn over the next few years."<sup>117</sup>

This *Index* assesses the overall threat from China, considering the range of contingencies, as "aggressive" for level of provocation of behavior and "formidable" for level of capability.

### **Threats: China**

|            | HOSTILE               | AGGRESSIVE   | TESTING | ASSERTIVE    | BENIGN   |
|------------|-----------------------|--|---------|--------------|----------|
| Behavior   |                       | <ul> <li>Image: A second s</li></ul> |         |              |          |
|            |                       |  |         |              |          |
|            | FORMIDABLE            | GATHERING  | CAPABLE | ASPIRATIONAL | MARGINAL |
| Capability | <ul> <li>✓</li> </ul> |  |         |              |          |
|            |                       |  |         |              |          |

**North Korea.** In the first instance, North Korea poses the most acute security challenge for American allies and bases in South Korea. However, it is also a significant challenge to U.S. allies in Japan and American bases there and in Guam.

North Korean authorities are very actively and vocally provocative toward the United States. While North Korea has used its missile and nuclear tests to enhance its prestige and importance—domestically, regionally, and globally—and to extract various concessions from the United States in negotiations over its nuclear program and various aid packages, such developments also improve North Korea's military posture. North Korea likely has already achieved warhead miniaturization, the ability to place nuclear weapons on its medium-range missiles, and an ability to reach the continental United States with a missile.

According to the IISS *Military Balance*, key weapons in North Korea's inventory include 3,500-plus main battle tanks, 560-plus light tanks, and 21,100 pieces of artillery. The navy has 73 tactical submarines, three frigates, and 383 patrol and coastal combatants.<sup>118</sup> The air force has 545 combat-capable aircraft (58 fewer than 2014), including 80 H-5 bombers. The IISS counts 1,100,000 active-duty members of the North Korean army, a reserve of 600,000, and 189,000 paramilitary personnel, as well as 5,700,000 in the "Worker/Peasant Red Guard." Regarding the missile threat in particular, the 2018 Military Balance lists six-plus ICBMs, 12 IRBMs, 10 MRBMs, and 30-plus submarine-launched ballistic missiles. It points out, however, that although the higher frequency of testing in 2016 and 2017 "reveal[ed] four new successfully tested road-mobile systems"-including those listed above-other ICBMs remain untested.<sup>119</sup> With respect to conventional forces, the 2018 Military Balance includes a caveat that they "remain reliant on increasingly obsolete equipment with little evidence of widespread modernization across the armed services."120

This *Index* assesses the overall threat from North Korea, considering the range of contingencies, as "testing" for level of provocation of behavior and "gathering" for level of capability.

## **Threats: North Korea**

|            | HOSTILE    | AGGRESSIVE            | TESTING  | ASSERTIVE    | BENIGN   |
|------------|------------|-----------------------|--|--------------|----------|
| Behavior   |            |                       | <ul> <li>Image: A second s</li></ul> |              |          |
|            |            |                       |  |              |          |
|            | FORMIDABLE | GATHERING             | CAPABLE  | ASPIRATIONAL | MARGINAL |
| Capability |            | <ul> <li>✓</li> </ul> |  |              |          |

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