

*Summary of Remarks by Peter W. Rodman, U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, on the Military Dimensions of China's Future*

---

Peter W. Rodman, United States Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, delivered the afternoon keynote address on the military dimensions of China's future at the University of Chicago's *China and the Future of the World* conference on April 29, 2006. He was introduced by Alexander Graham, the conference vice chair.

Assistant Secretary Rodman began his speech by laying out three themes in the U.S. approach to China's military modernization. The first is the paradox of a Chinese military that is modernizing rapidly in some respects, especially in its strategic forces, but remains far behind in others; the second is the problem of the lack of transparency associated with China's military modernization; and the third is the objective the two parties ought to maintain of "demystifying" the other side through constructive interaction.

While accompanying Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld on his October 2005 trip to China, Assistant Secretary Rodman visited the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army Second Artillery Corps, China's strategic missile command, and was presented with a briefing on the structure, training, and missions of China's strategic forces. On the same trip, important discussions were held on vital issues of nuclear doctrine. Assistant Secretary Rodman said he believed the visit was successful for both sides and reflected the substantial improvement in the bilateral defense relationship since an American EP-3 reconaissance plane was forced down onto a Chinese landing strip in April 2001.

In discussing China's military capabilities, Assistant Secretary Rodman pointed out that in some respects the Chinese military is especially weak or vulnerable, particularly in its inability to project power much beyond its periphery on a sustained basis. The Chinese military budget has been increasing in double-digit percentages for most of the last fifteen years to try to combat these weaknesses, and the Department of Defense currently estimates China's military budget to be between 70 and 105 billion U.S. dollars (two to three times the official Chinese government figures), potentially greater than any other Asian national defense budget.

Assistant Secretary Rodman said that China's military modernization is believed to reflect a doctrine emphasizing preparations to fight and win short-duration, high-intensity conflicts around its immediate periphery (with Taiwan as the near-term objective). China is also working to build military strength to deter or counter possible U.S. intervention in a Taiwan crisis. About 100 new short-range ballistic missiles are deployed opposite Taiwan each year; there are close to 800 currently arrayed across from Taiwan. In the long term, China is developing capabilities that could play a role in contingencies far beyond China's periphery, such as conflicts over resources or territory. The Chinese military's historical emphasis on denial and deception and Deng Xiaoping's 24-Character Strategy suggest a desire to downplay ambition in the near term and while acting under a patient long-term strategy to build up China's power to maximize options for the future.

In his speech, Assistant Secretary Rodman emphasized six particularly important capabilities:

- China has at least ten different kinds of ballistic missiles currently deployed or in development;
- China has at least two land-attack cruise missile programs and twelve types of anti-ship cruise missiles;
- China has five modern submarine programs, including domestically-produced diesel, nuclear attack, and nuclear ballistic missile submarines, plus purchases of very advanced Russian KILo-class submarines;
- China is improving aviation, air and amphibious lift capabilities in order to build expeditionary warfare ability;
- China is developing both offensive and defensive cyber warfare techniques to protect its computer networks and attack those of an adversary; and
- China's emergence as an international space power has also supported its research and development on ground-based anti-satellite lasers.

In an environment where no nation threatens China and the reasons for China's military growth are "unknowns," other military powers must hedge against these unknowns, Assistant Secretary Rodman argued, quoting Secretary Rumsfeld. In the question-and-answer period, the Assistant Secretary elaborated by saying that many U.S. allies in Asia, in particular India, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, and Japan, want the U.S. in the region as a "factor of stability" as they are asking questions about China's military buildup. In his speech, Assistant Secretary Rodman said the American Quadrennial Defense Review was an example of U.S. transparency of strategy and doctrine, which the PRC should emulate to assuage the concerns of the United States and China's neighbors.

The final point of Assistant Secretary Rodman's speech was that the United States hopes to see its military relationship with China evolve in the right direction, with cooperation on common security challenges such as terrorism, proliferation, narcotics, and piracy. Greater military-to-military exchanges have the potential to improve understanding and reduce misunderstanding. The Vice-Chairman of China's Central Military Commission will visit the United States during the summer, following the upcoming visit of the commander of U.S. Pacific Command to China in May; Assistant Secretary Rodman said he would be in China in June for the U.S.-China Defense Consultative Talks.

In concluding his remarks, Assistant Secretary Rodman quoted from the President's National Security Strategy Report, which reads, "our strategy seeks to encourage China to make the right strategic choices for its people, while we hedge against other possibilities." In reference to the "other possibilities," Assistant Secretary Rodman said that as a Pacific power, the United States will defend its vital interests and aim to deter the use of force. Ultimately, the United States hopes to continue building constructive economic and security relations with the Chinese government around areas of common interest.

Assistant Secretary Rodman made an interesting point in response to a question about the U.S. national missile defense program. He said that China is not the target of the program and, further, he speculated that “China may well have the ability to overcome defenses just as the Russians have the ability to overcome defenses.” Instead, the program is targeted at North Korea and possibly Iran.

A question asked by a number of conference attendees was whether the size of the U.S. military budget and U.S. commitments in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly to Taiwan, might have the effect of encouraging greater military competition rather than cooperation between China and the United States. Assistant Secretary Rodman said that this negative outcome is a possibility, but the Department of Defense has a responsibility to ensure the U.S. is prepared to carry out its commitments in Asia. He said that overall U.S. policy towards China, particularly on the Taiwan issue, “doesn’t pre-judge the outcome and certainly does not pre-judge a negative outcome.” The comprehensive national policy on U.S.-China relations hopes for a good outcome, he said, but it also must hedge against other possibilities.