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# Strategic Digest

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## US DOD Annual Report on Chinese Military Power (2020)

The 2020 edition of the annual report that the United States Department of Defense (DOD) prepares for the United States Congress reaches striking conclusions about the Chinese military's meteoric progress in recent years. It acknowledges that China's military has not only narrowed the gap with US armed forces in some areas but has actually outstripped the latter in areas such as warship construction, land-based conventional and cruise missiles, and integrated air defence systems. Further, China, at the end of 2019, possessed the world's largest standing army, largest air force, largest conventional missile force, largest navy with 350 ships and submarines, largest Coast Guard, leading maritime militia, and a sophisticated surface-to-air missile force as part of an Integrated Air Defence System. On the nuclear front, China's international ballistic missile force is expected to grow to some 200 in the next five years even as the numbers of the DF-26 intermediate range ballistic missile are continue to expand.



According to the Report, the People's Liberation Army's Strategic Support Force (SSF) is the lynchpin of China's space, cyber, electronic, and psychological warfare missions and capabilities. The SSF runs tracking, telemetry, and command stations in Namibia,

Pakistan, and Argentina. Further, in addition to the current base in Djibouti, China may be considering the establishment of military logistics facilities in Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan.

The Report assesses the PLA's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities as very robust within the First Island Chain, even as China continues to strengthen capabilities to conduct offensive operations within the Second Island Chain, in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and even globally. It argues that China is much closer to realising the objective of building a "world-class" military, as part of the grand strategic goal of becoming the world's foremost power – a development with serious implications for US national interests and the liberal rules-based international order.

How much of the assessment is aimed at building a case for enhanced funding for the US military remains unclear, although there is no doubt that the PLA has been making exponential progress in recent years.

## US Space Policy Directive on Space Cybersecurity

President Donald Trump has signed the Space Policy Directive 5 (SPD 5) on space cyber security which lays down a set of guiding principles to protect American space assets from cyber threats. In light of the rising offensive cyber capabilities of adversaries, SPD-5 is intended to thwart threats to space assets by integrating cybersecurity measures with all the stages of development and operation of space systems.



Although Space is not a designated critical infrastructure sector in the United States, it underpins some key functions including communications, weather monitoring, observation, positioning, navigation, timing, and surveillance. Right from their design phase to flight, space systems depend heavily on information systems and

networks. Wireless communication channels enable command and control as well as communication between space vehicles and the ground network. Information systems, computer networks and communication channels are all vulnerable to malicious cyber acts which can disrupt or degrade space missions, deny access to space systems, or even destroy space vehicles and satellites.

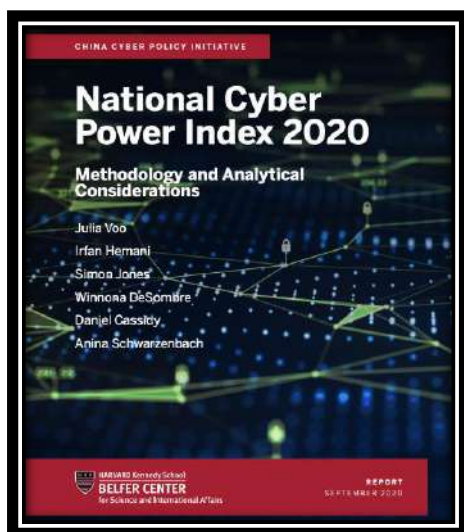
SPD-5 proposes adherence to five principles: 1) Software engineering practices for the development, operation, and monitoring of space systems and their supporting infrastructure. 2) Protection against unauthorised access to critical functions as well as jamming and spoofing of communications. 3) Cyber security best practices and norms of behaviour. 4) Collaboration, sharing threat information, early warning and incident reporting within the space industry. And 5) Managing risk without imposing undue burden on mission requirements.

This is fifth in the series of policy directives for space signed by President Trump since 2017. SPD-1 (2017) reinvigorated the human space exploration programme. SPD-2 (2018) eased regulations on the commercial use of space. SPD-3 (2018) dealt with the management of space traffic. And, SPD-4 (2019) established the US Space Force as a new branch of the US Armed Forces.

## National Cyber Policy Index 2020

Which is the most powerful cyber power in the world today? This is the question that the Belfer Centre's China Cyber Policy Initiative seeks to answer through its National Cyber Policy Index 2020. The Index was by a Cyber Power Index Primer titled "Reconceptualizing Cyber Power" in April 2020, which highlighted the

importance of assessing an array of indicators to convey the full spectrum of cyber capabilities.



The Index grades 30 countries by drawing up a score based on how well they score on two broad parameters, intent and capability, to undertake seven broad objectives: 1. Surveilling and Monitoring Domestic Groups; 2. Strengthening and Enhancing National Cyber Defences; 3. Controlling and Manipulating the Information Environment; 4. Foreign Intelligence Collection for National Security; 5. Commercial Gain or Enhancing Domestic Industry Growth; 6. Destroying or Disabling an Adversary’s Infrastructure and Capabilities; and, 7. Defining International Cyber Norms and

Technical Standards. The more a state is seen to strive to improve intent and capability to achieve each of these objectives, the higher its standing would be in the Index.

The report is visually rich in graphs, charts and matrixes which serve to highlight the gaps between intent and capabilities with respect to the countries surveyed as well as their current standing on the various objectives given above. The matrix summarising the Index highlights this well especially when juxtaposed against the chart ranking countries by objectives. While the United States still enjoys pole position, China is forging ahead by narrowing the gap between its intent and capabilities. China, the authors of the Index note, “is in the top 5 for every single objective.”

The complexity of a concept such as cyber power means that many of the variables that go into measuring it cannot be equally and objectively determined across countries. A particular anomaly is North Korea not finding a place in the graphs despite being mentioned as one of the 30 countries analysed. Nevertheless, the Index is a valuable contribution not just to understanding where countries stand on the totem pole, but also to comprehending the complexities of cyber power and further distilling its nuances.

### **The Greece-Turkey Maritime Dispute**

The decades-long maritime dispute between Greece and Turkey has risen to the surface after Turkey deployed an oil and gas exploration vessel backed by a flotilla of warships in the eastern Mediterranean between Cyprus and the Greek islands of Kastellorizo and Crete. A few days later, a Greek naval vessel grazed one of the Turkish frigates. That led President Erdogan to launch a tirade against

Greece, warning it that any “attack” on Turkish ships would result in “a high price”. For its part, Greece has accused Turkey of drilling in its territorial waters, and rejected a NATO proposal for holding technical talks to avoid naval accidents. Cyprus has also accused Turkey of drilling for oil in Cypriot territorial waters.



All sides have now deployed air and naval assets to stake competing claims. Turkey has also reportedly deployed 40 tanks at Edirne close to the land border with Greece, although a Turkish official denied that the move was linked to the maritime dispute.

Greece has conducted naval exercises with France in the waters between Cyprus and Crete. The French contingent for the exercise included a warship and fighter jets. France is concerned about Turkey’s growing military activities in the region and is forging defence cooperation with Egypt, Cyprus and Greece.

Greece also conducted joint air force training exercises with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which had sent nine F-16s for the event. UAE has come to see Turkey and its recent actions in the Middle East including defence cooperation with and establishing a base in Qatar as a challenge to its security and interests.

Greece is also concerned about an upcoming Russian naval exercise near Cyprus. Moscow has, however, reassured Athens that the exercise does not constitute a show of support for Turkey.

Competing maritime claims between Greece and Turkey arose when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea legitimised the expansion in the extent of territorial waters from three to 12 nautical miles and recognised an Exclusive Economic Zone extending 200 nautical miles from the shore. This adversely affected Turkey because Greek islands are scattered all over the Aegean with some smaller islands located a mere 1,300 metres from the Turkish coast. As it is, Greece and Turkey are old adversaries whose polarisation has impacted the long-standing Cyprus dispute.

### **Israel-UAE Normalisation and the F-35 Issue**

On 25 August, Israel's Defence Minister Benny Gantz and the Minister of State for Defence Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Mohammed Al-Bawardi conducted the first publicly acknowledged telephone conversation between their countries over prospective security cooperation. This is part of the normalisation process and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. A key issue of discussion is Tel Aviv's opposition to the UAE acquiring the F-35 fighter aircraft from the United States.

After Trump announced that Israel and UAE are normalising relations, some reports had indicated that the UAE had agreed to the measure only after it was promised the F-35s. However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office clarified that he remains opposed to the sale of the F-35 or any other advanced weaponry to countries in the region including those that make peace deals with Israel. Nevertheless, Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's Senior Advisor on the Middle East, told the press that the Israel-UAE agreement 'should increase the probability' of the Emirates get the F-35.



The Emirates has long wished to acquire the F-35 stealth aircraft to buttress the capabilities of its air force, which already operates advanced versions of the F-16. But it has failed to convince the United States to agree to the sale until now. Washington's primary concern is that the F-35 sale would compromise Israel's qualitative military edge. As Israel and UAE prepare to sign a formal agreement establishing diplomatic ties at the White House on September 15, it appears likely that the Emirates may acquire the F-35, albeit perhaps a technologically pared-down version with stringent conditions relating to its deployment and use.