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U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

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The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission was created by Congress to report on the national security implications of the bilateral trade and economic relationship between the United States and the People's Republic of China. For more information, visit www.uscc.gov.

REPORT: CHINA'S EVOLVING SPACE CAPABILITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS

Today the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission released a report entitled ***CHINA'S EVOLVING SPACE CAPABILITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS.*** The report details significant advances in China's space program. This report was prepared for the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission by the Project 2049 Institute.

Among other things, the report concludes that:

- Given asymmetries in reliance on space systems, even relative increases in Chinese space capabilities could present challenges for the United States.
- The Chinese military manages China's space program and there is significant overlap between civilian and military space operations, which mutually reinforce one another.
- Over the next 10-15 years, China is likely to develop more advanced precision strike assets, integrated with persistent space-based surveillance, a single integrated air and space picture, and a more survivable communications architecture, which could enhance China's confidence in enforcing a broader range of territorial claims around China's periphery.
- China is pressing forward with an ambitious counterspace program, including ground- and space-based surveillance systems, electronic warfare capabilities, and kinetic kill vehicles.
- The possibility of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait remains the principal strategic concern of Chinese national security policy makers, defense planners, and acquisition authorities.

The following is the Commission's summary of the report:

REPORT SUMMARY

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has made significant advances in its space program and is emerging as a space power. With preservation of its monopoly on power as an overriding goal, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) bolsters its legitimacy through achievements in space.

The Chinese military manages China's space program and there is significant overlap between civilian and military space operations, which mutually reinforce one another. An increasingly sophisticated R&D and industrial establishment supplies the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with military space systems. The PLA General Armaments Department (GAD) appears to oversee space systems acquisitions and operations. Other important organizations in the space program include the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) and China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC). As a rough NASA counterpart, the China National Space Administration (CNSA) facilitates international exchanges and cooperative programs with other space-faring nations.

The PLA is rapidly improving its space and counterspace capabilities in order to advance CCP interests and defend against perceived challenges to sovereignty and territorial integrity. Because Taiwan's democratic system of government – an alternative to mainland China's authoritarian model -- presents an existential challenge to the CCP, the PLA relies on military coercion to compel concessions on sovereignty. The possibility of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait remains the principal strategic concern of Chinese national security policy makers, defense planners, and acquisition authorities.

China has made considerable progress in advancing its space capabilities. A survivable, growing space-based sensor architecture, able to transmit reconnaissance data to ground sites in China in near real time, could be used to facilitate the PLA's ability to carry out long-range precision strikes with growing lethality and speed. Its space-based sensor development is focused on surveillance and targeting. The PLA may augment existing space-based assets with microsatellites launched on solid-fueled launch vehicles. Chinese R&D investments include dedicated military communications satellites able to transmit high volumes of data to a wide variety of users and to support operations at increasingly extended ranges from China's coast, a constellation of navigation satellites that further enhances China's operational scope, foreign satellite communications monitoring systems, electronic countermeasure systems to disrupt an opponent's use of space-based systems, and the capability for physical destruction of satellites in orbit. Chinese space system development is intimately connected with R&D

investment into next generation extended range precision strike systems.

Over the next 10-15 years, China is likely to develop more advanced precision strike assets, integrated with persistent space-based surveillance, a single integrated air and space picture, and survivable communications architecture, which could enable greater confidence in contesting a broader range of sovereignty and territorial claims around China's periphery. China's interest in space also is driven by a requirement to field countermeasures against advanced U.S. long-range precision strike capabilities, which are expected to come more fully online over the next 10-15 years. Such capabilities enable the PLA to conduct military operations at increasingly greater distances from Chinese shores, which may complicate U.S. freedom of action in the Asia-Pacific region.