



U.S.-CHINA ECONOMIC AND SECURITY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Hearing on China's Emergent Military Aerospace and Commercial Aviation Capabilities

Opening Statement of Commissioner Daniel A. Blumenthal

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Washington, DC**

Good morning and welcome to this year's fifth hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. Today's hearing will address China's emerging aerospace capabilities and future trends, and what these capabilities may mean for U.S. security and commercial interests.

For over two decades, the People's Liberation Army, or PLA, has been attempting to modernize its aerospace capabilities. As China's authoritative defense white paper demonstrated last year, the PLA Air Force seeks to transition from a territorial air defense force to one capable of both offensive and defensive operations. To this end, it continues to develop new combat aircraft, missile defense capabilities, and command systems; improve the training and quality of its personnel; and strengthen its logistics and equipment support capabilities. These are not just future aspirations—in recent years the PLA Air Force has made great strides towards achieving each objective.

In addition to its traditional air capabilities, Beijing is also rapidly improving its missile capabilities. According to the Department of Defense, China is the most active developer of missiles in the world, seeking to simultaneously improve and increase both its ballistic and cruise missile repertoire. In addition to China's 1,200—and growing—short range ballistic missiles across from Taiwan, the PLA also has an increasing number of mobile medium range ballistic missiles, capable of striking targets over 1,700 km from China's borders.

Taken together, these aerospace modernization efforts are eroding the long-established air balance in the region. In the United States, decreased focus on the need to maintain air superiority is allowing Beijing to slowly close the air superiority gap between the U.S. and the PLA air forces. One notable example of this is China's recent announcement that it is on track to have its own fifth generation fighter within the decade. Advances in PLA missile capabilities mean that U.S. forward-deployed bases are no longer the sanctuaries they once were. China's aerospace modernization efforts also threaten allies in the region. Japan, for example, seeks to modernize its Air Self Defense Force and maintain air superiority in the region, primarily as a result of China's emerging aerospace capabilities.

To help us better understand these issues, we will be joined today by a number of experts from the administration, academia, and private organizations. In particular, we are delighted to have Mr. Bruce Lemkin, Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force for International Affairs, and Ms. Mary Saunders, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Manufacturing and Services, to present the administration's perspective.

I now turn the hearing over to Commissioner Videnieks for his opening statement.