

Commanders Corner, August 2020

There were no August 2020 Executive Board and Post meetings due to restrictions on social gatherings related to the COVID-19 outbreak; Post and Executive Committee meetings are suspended until further notice. The South Montgomery County Community Center has advised that they will remain closed through December 31, 2020. We will advise if there are any updates.

The COVID-19 pandemic has curtailed our activities. I encourage you to continue to use good judgment in your upcoming activities. Please follow the guidelines for mask use and social distancing.

Sadly we are losing one of our key Executive Committee members. Victoria Glover, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Commander and Past Commander is moving to a location outside of our Post area. She was instrumental in helping me transition into the Commander's role. Victoria was the director of our Boys State program and did an exemplary job for this, one of our favorite activities. Her diligence resulted in signing up many schools in our area and we had some of the highest number of boys participating in the state. For example, our Post sponsored 38 boys in 2019 and 25 boys in 2020. The 2020 participation was reduced since the pandemic limited the program to a virtual event. Prior to the constraints earlier in the year we were on target to exceed the 2019 level.

Victoria, on behalf of the Executive Committee and Post membership, a heartfelt thank you for your service to Post 305.

One of the topics I am interested in is news about our MIAs. Below is a link to a website (Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency) that documents recovery of MIAs:

<https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/Recent-News-Stories/>

This is an impressive website that showcases the diligence this agency pursues in accounting for our MIAs.

Some interesting military news:

## Decommissioned Navy Warship Blasted and Sunk in Pacific Exercise



Live fire from ships and aircraft participating in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise sink the decommissioned amphibious cargo ship ex-USS Durham (LKA 114) August 30, 2020. (U.S. Navy)

31 Aug 2020

Military.com | By Bing Xiao

USS Durham, we hardly knew you.

Ships and aircraft from ten nations participating in the Rim of the Pacific exercise sank the former amphibious cargo ship in a dramatic live-fire exercise Aug. 30, according to Navy releases.

Durham, a Charleston-class amphibious cargo ship, entered service in 1969 and was decommissioned after 24 years in 1994. The 575-foot, 10,000-ton ship, which deployed in support of the Vietnam and Gulf War conflicts, was stricken from the Naval Vessel Register in

2015, and has since awaited disposal at the Pearl Harbor, Hawaii Naval Inactive Ship Maintenance Facility.

The sinking exercises, or SINKEX, with former U.S. Navy warships are a regular part of RIMPAC, the world's largest biennial international maritime warfare exercise. This year, the exercise involved ten nations, 22 ships, one submarine, and approximately 5,300 personnel. It was held Aug.17-31 near the Hawaiian Islands.

SINKEXs aim to develop proficiency and confidence in various weapons and systems for participating units through realistic training that could not be duplicated in simulators, a Navy release states.

"Simulation is a critical part of our training but there is nothing better than to conduct live fire training," Royal Australian Navy Capt. Phillipa Hay, commander, RIMPAC 2020 Task Force One, said in a statement. "Sinking exercises are an important way to test our weapons and weapons systems in the most realistic way possible. It demonstrates as a joint force we are capable of high-end warfare."

Former Navy warships designated for sinking, known as hulks, are prepared strictly under Environmental Protection Agency regulations and in line with the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, officials said.

Each hulk is sunk in at least 1,000 fathoms, or 6,000 feet, of water and at least 50 nautical miles from land, with surveys that ensure people and marine mammals are out of the dangerous area during the exercise, according to the Navy.

The Navy said each vessel also undergoes a rigorous cleaning process to remove any harmful chemicals, particularly liquid polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from transformers, large capacitors and small capacitors; and to get rid of all trash, floatable materials, mercury or fluorocarbon-containing materials and readily detachable solid PCB items. Petroleum is also cleaned from tanks, piping, and reservoirs.

Additionally, a Navy environmental, safety and health manager and a quality assurance supervisor take responsibility for environmental remediation following a SINKEX. Upon completion of the environmental remediation, the manager and supervisor provide signed certification of the work under EPA requirements.

\*\*\*\*\*

## China's Military Has Surpassed US in Ships, Missiles and Air Defense, DoD Report Finds



Chinese military vehicles carrying DF-17 ballistic missiles roll during a parade to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the founding of Communist China in Beijing, Tuesday, Oct. 1, 2019. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

1 Sep 2020

Military.com | By Richard Sisk

China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has already surpassed the U.S. in missile development and its number of warships and air defense systems under the Chinese Communist Party's plan to achieve dominance by 2049, the Defense Department said in a sobering report Tuesday.

The ultimate goal of the People's Republic of China, or PRC, is to "develop a military by mid-Century that is equal to -- or in some cases superior to -- the U.S. military, or that of any other great power that the PRC views as a threat," the DoD's annual report to Congress said.

To that end, the PRC has "marshaled the resources, technology, and political will over the past two decades to strengthen and modernize the PLA in nearly every respect," the report said.

Under the national strategy pressed by Chinese President Xi Jinping, the result has been that "China is already ahead of the United States in certain areas" essential to its overall aim of progressing from homeland and periphery defense to global power projection, the report said.

"The PRC has the largest navy in the world, with an overall battle force of approximately 350 ships and submarines, including over 130 major surface combatants," the report said.

That's compared to the U.S. Navy's current battle force of 295 ships.

In addition, "the PRC has more than 1,250 ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers," while the U.S. currently fields one type of conventional GLBM with a range of 70 to 300 kilometers and no GLCMs, the report said.

In some respects, China is also ahead on integrated air defense systems with a mix of Russian-built and homegrown systems, the report said.

"The PRC has one of the world's largest forces of advanced long-range surface-to-air systems" -- including Russian-built S-400, [S-300](#), and domestically-produced anti-air systems -- making up "part of its robust and redundant integrated air defense system," the report said.

Despite the advances, the PLA "remains in a position of inferiority" to the U.S. in overall military strength, said Chad Sbragia, the deputy assistant secretary of Defense for China.

The 173-page DoD report "does not claim that China's military is 10 feet tall," but the Chinese Communist Party wants it to be, and has the plan and resources to reach that goal, Sbragia, a retired Marine officer, said at an American Enterprise Institute forum on China's military.

At an earlier Pentagon briefing on the report, Sbragia said Beijing's military strategy was driven by the view that the U.S. has decided upon a long period of confrontation to counter the global spread of China's influence.

He said that China "increasingly views the United States as more willing to confront Beijing on matters where the U.S. and PRC interests are inimical."

"The CCP leaders view the United States' security alliances and partnerships -- especially those in the Indo-Pacific region -- as destabilizing and irreconcilable with China's interests," Sbragia said.

The DoD report, titled "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China" comes about two weeks before Congress is set to return from recess to convene a Senate-House Conference Committee on the National Defense Authorization Act and the defense budget for Fiscal Year 2021.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper has acknowledged downward pressures on the defense budget to offset the enormous costs of the COVID-19 response while arguing for sustained increases of 3-5% in defense spending in future years to maintain U.S. superiority and readiness.

The 20th annual report on China by DoD noted the "staggering" improvements in China's ability to build, coordinate and project power since the first report was issued.

"DoD's first annual report to Congress in 2000 assessed the PRC's armed forces at that time to be a sizable but mostly archaic military that was poorly suited to the CCP's long-term ambitions," the report said.

In 2000, "the PLA lacked the capabilities, organization, and readiness for modern warfare," the report said. But the CCP, it added, recognized the shortcomings and set about with determination to "strengthen and transform its armed forces in a manner commensurate with its aspirations to strengthen and transform China."

"More striking than the PLA's staggering amounts of new military hardware are the recent sweeping efforts taken by CCP leaders that include completely restructuring the PLA into a force better suited for joint operations" and for "expanding the PRC's overseas military footprint."

The PLA has already established its first overseas military base in Djibouti, about a mile from U.S. Africa Command's main base on the Horn of Africa.

In its commentary on the DoD assessment, the American Enterprise Institute noted that the report also stressed that "The PRC has likely considered locations for PLA military logistics facilities in Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan."

Despite the progress made by China's military over the past two decades, "major gaps and shortcomings remain" in readiness and operational capability, the report said, but China's leaders are acutely aware of the problems and have detailed plans to overcome them.

"Of course, the CCP does not intend for the PLA to be merely a showpiece of China's modernity or to keep it focused solely on regional threats," the report said.

"As this report shows, the CCP desires the PLA to become a practical instrument of its statecraft with an active role in advancing the PRC's foreign policy, particularly with respect to the PRC's increasingly global interests and its aims to revise aspects of the international order," it added.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Two Epidemics Are Creating a National Security Crisis: COVID-19 and Obesity



An airman checks his status with a scale and a tape measure. (U.S. Air Force/Senior Airman Michael J. Veloz)

31 Aug 2020

Military.com | By Michael S. Hall

***Retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Michael S. Hall is the former adjutant general of New York and a member of Mission: Readiness.***

In a challenging time for our nation, I'm worried about the long-term national security implications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The connection between national security and the pandemic may not be readily apparent. We all see and experience the immediate impacts of this terrible health emergency in our everyday lives. But there are even more far-reaching effects that could threaten our nation's military preparedness for years to come.

The root cause of that threat? Food insecurity among our country's young people.

Food insecurity can lead to malnutrition created when people lack reliable access to nutritious foods. Malnutrition can take many forms, one of which is obesity -- currently a top medical disqualifier for military recruits.

In all, a jaw-dropping 71 percent of young Americans can't qualify for military service, even if they wish to serve. The national security nonprofit Mission: Readiness, of which I am a member, has been sounding the alarm about this serious problem for more than a decade.

The bad news doesn't end there, unfortunately. Even many recruits who can meet enough basic benchmarks to enlist struggle after doing so. A few weeks of boot camp aren't enough to overcome years of unhealthy eating and lack of exercise. That's why more than five percent of our military is still unfit for deployment even after completing basic training. That shortfall ultimately leads to our armed forces being understaffed and not achieving an optimal level of preparedness.

And the pandemic is about to make these problems even worse.

A forthcoming Mission: Readiness research report illustrates the pandemic's devastating effect on food insecurity. Evidence suggests that, due to significant, pandemic-fueled increases to the unemployment and child poverty rates, up to an additional 18 million children will experience food insecurity as a result of the pandemic.

That's 25 percent of all kids in this country, and that figure represents a massive increase from 2018, when food insecurity already impacted a significant 11 million children in the United States. Food insecurity rates from April 2020 are also significantly higher than any other point with comparable data; in households with children under 18, rates have increased by an incredible 130 percent from 2018 to April 2020.

These increasing rates could have a catastrophic impact. Projected rates of food insecurity in the South are especially high, with 24 percent of Mississippi adults and 35 percent of Louisiana children expected to experience food insecurity. In Texas, estimates suggest that more than two million children could become food insecure -- the highest number in the country.

However, another recent Mission: Readiness report, entitled "Bridging the Summer Meals Gap," offers solutions to reduce food insecurity by modernizing and adapting the school and summer meal programs. In response to the pandemic, Congress temporarily allowed some school and summer meal program flexibilities to allow for food delivery, mobile food sites, packaging for pick-up, and meal availability at multiple sites to address lack of transportation when schools are closed. Coupled with incentives to purchase and use local food supplies from local farmers and producers, and increased technical assistance and training to school and summer meal program preparers to prepare fresh vegetables and fruits that appeal to kids, these innovations will help reduce food insecurity during the pandemic and well into the future.

Solutions like these are especially critical for children who live in "food deserts," where affordable, nutritious food is difficult to find, or "food swamps," where nutrition-poor food is readily available and irresistibly inexpensive. In many cases, communities find themselves struggling with food deserts and food swamps simultaneously, particularly in disadvantaged and underserved areas.

That lack of healthy food can lead directly to food insecurity and, thereby, to malnutrition manifesting as obesity. Parents and children in these areas frequently can't access the nutritious foods their families need.

That's why school and summer meals programs are so vital to our country's children -- and to our national security. By adapting and innovating these programs, we can fight food insecurity and the obesity epidemic by helping children consistently access nutritious, balanced meals year-round.

This is a distinctly pressing concern, with many school systems no longer meeting in person for the foreseeable future. We cannot allow the pandemic to rob these young people of their futures, including military service if they choose that path.

To achieve that goal, I urge Congress to take action to strengthen our efforts in the battle against food insecurity. Lawmakers should continue school and summer meal program flexibilities now, and work to pass innovative school and summer meal solutions to ensure our nation's kids have consistent access to balanced, nutritious meals throughout the year. These important steps will mitigate the food insecurity crisis and, in doing so, help preserve the health of our youth and the security of our nation.