



# Military Capabilities Background

# U.S. Military Overview



- The U.S. Armed Forces remain one the most capable fighting force in the world and maintains a robust presence across the globe through the seven geographic combatant commands. The all-volunteer force is comprised of six services.
- United States Armed forces
  - U.S. Army: 489,000 active duty,
    - 522,000 reserve
  - U.S. Navy: 350,000 active duty,
    - 100,00 reserve
  - U.S. Marine Corps: 180,000 active duty,
    - 36,000 reserve
  - U.S. Air Force: 329,000 active duty,
    - 179,000 reserve
  - U.S. Space Force: 6400 active duty
  - U.S. Coast Guard: 42,000 active duty,
    - 6,300 reserve



# U.S. Army

---



**Role:** The largest of U.S. Armed Services by personnel with a diverse array of infantry, armored, artillery, as well as airborne, air assault, and SOF forces and capabilities. The U.S. Army also manages a significant share of DoD infrastructure and logistics.

- Major assets (the nearest 50)
  - Tanks and assault guns: 2650
  - Infantry vehicles: 15,300
  - Guns/howitzers: 4,500
  - Multiple-rocket launchers: 600
  - Helicopters: 3,750
  - Missile Defense: 42
  - Air Defense: 1,200

# U.S. Navy



- Surface combatants: 87
  - Aircraft carrier (CVN): 12
  - Amphibious warfare ships: 24
  - Cruiser (CG): 19
  - Destroyers (DDG): 69
  - Small surface combatants: 29
- Submarines (all are nuclear):
  - Ballistic missile (SSBN): 14
  - Attack (SSN): 49
  - Cruise missile attack (SSGN): 4
- Naval Aviation
  - Fighter and fighter ground-attack aircraft: 672
  - ASW helicopters: 271
- Background
  - The U.S. Navy is driving a major modernization push, for example, the *Ford* class carrier, *Columbia* class SSBN, and the Next-Generation Destroyer, the DDG(X)
  - The role of unmanned and autonomous systems in the U.S. Navy is an ongoing debate
  - Submarine warfare remains an asymmetric advantage for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific
  - U.S. are deployed across the globe and struggles to balance a high operational tempo with readiness

# U.S. Marine Corps



**Role:** Sister service to the U.S. Navy responsible for a range of specialized mission sets, including expeditionary warfare and military operations in the littoral zones (e.g. ambitious operations)

- Major assets (rounded to the nearest 50)
  - Marine Corps Aviation
    - Fighter and fighter ground-attack aircraft: 350
    - Attack helicopters: 130
  - Infantry vehicles: 700
  - Guns/howitzers: 800
  - Multiple-rocket launchers: 50
- Modernization
  - The U.S. Marine Corps is undergoing significant transformation as the service shifts its focus from counter-insurgency and GWOT towards the Indo-Pacific

# U.S. Air Force



**Role:** Supports all aspects of airpower, including five core missions: air superiority, global strike, rapid global mobility, command and control (C2), and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR)

- Major assets (rounded to the nearest 50)
  - Fighters: 1,400
  - Bombers: 150
  - Transports: 350
  - Tankers: 150
- Modernization
  - The U.S. Air Force continues to modernize parts of its force, most recently with a new bomber, the B-21 Raider, but is assessing the appropriate mix of forces for the future
  - The challenge of defending fixed infrastructure, such as airbases, in a high-intensity conflict persists

# Components of China's Armed Forces



- The People's Liberation Army is the military of the PRC and is controlled by the Chinese Communist Party. The PLA is tasked with safeguarding China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security and maintaining stability and order within the country
- Total PLA personnel: Around 2 million
  - People Liberation Army Ground Force (PLAGF): 975,000
  - People Liberation Army Navy (PLAN): 250,000
  - People Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF): 395,000
- 700,000 conscripts, 850,000 NCOs, 450,000 officers
- People's Army Police (PAP): 660,000
- Internal security forces: 800,000
  - Under the Ministry of Public Security



# PLA Ground Forces (PLAGF)



**Role:** territorial defense, with a strong contingency amphibious capability, retained opposite Taiwan

- Currently has a personnel size of 1,040,000 people
- Major assets (the nearest 50)
  - Tanks and assault guns: 6,850
  - Infantry vehicles: 9,250
  - Guns/howitzers: 3,350
  - Multiple-rocket launchers: 1,550
  - Helicopters: 1,000
- Modernization Features
  - Reduced overall size, disbanded 5 of the previous 18 groups, and reorganized in new combined-arms brigades structure
  - Army lags behind the air force and navy in modern equipment procurement and is still reliant on a substantial proportion of older/obsolete equipment and platforms



# Major PLA Ground Forces



# PLA Air Force (PLAAF) Overview



**Role:** Initially a homeland air defense, the PLAAF has been refocused to broader roles, including joint operations and operating at increasing distances from the mainland

- Formed in 1949 with the creation of the PRC and currently has a personnel size of 395,000 people (end of 2019)
- Major assets
  - Fighters: 1,600-1,800
  - Bombers: 450
  - Transports: 400
  - Tankers: 24+ (Total special mission aircrafts: 150)
- Modernization Features
  - Combat-aircraft improvements are complemented by similar development in more advanced sensors, avionics and weapons
  - Propulsion remains an area of weakness for PLAAF

# PLAAF Air Platforms



- **Fighters:** PLAAF continues to field fourth-generation aircraft, including Chinese J-10B/C, J-11B, and J-16, and it is continuing to develop fifth-generation fighters; it already fields limited numbers of J-20, while development continues on the smaller J-31/FC-31
- **Bombers:** China's bomber force comprises variants of the H-6 Badger bomber (including the new H-6N), and the PLAAF has worked to maintain and enhance the operational effectiveness of these aircraft; also developing new stealth bombers
- **Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACs):** Known in China as Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C), employs aircraft such as the KJ-2000 and KJ-500, can further extend China's radar coverage well past the range of its ground-based radars
- **Air refueling:** Refueling mid-air to increase power projection; has in production Y-20 refueling aircraft, refueling variant of Y-20 debuted near Taiwan November 2021
- **UAVs:** Pilotless aircraft; Most common family in production is the CH family
- **Reconnaissance aircraft:** Primarily used to gather intelligence

# PLA Navy (PLAN) Overview



Role in 2015 defense white paper  
– a combination of “offshore waters defense” and “far seas protection”

Major assets

- Principal surface combatants: 87

- Aircraft carrier: 2
- Destroyers: 32
- Frigates: 48

- Submarines

- Strategic (ballistic missile): 6
- Nuclear-power attack: 9
- Conventional-power attack: 56

- Naval Aviation

- Bombers: 31
- Attack aircraft: 160
- ASW helicopters: 28

- Modernization Features

- Real growth in fleet numbers, accelerated naval-shipyard output, and a more homogeneous fleet with the production of more capable platforms (i.e., Type-052d destroyer and Type-54A frigate)
- Relative weakness in anti-submarine and amphibious warfare
- Blue-water capabilities have improved significantly
- Biggest shipbuilding industry worldwide (48%)

# PLA Navy (PLAN) Overview



Role in 2015 defense white paper – a combination of “offshore waters defense” and “far seas protection”

## Major assets

- Large surface combatants: 87
  - Aircraft carrier: 2
  - Destroyers: 32
  - Frigates: 48
- Submarines
  - Strategic (ballistic missile): 6
  - Nuclear-power attack: 9
  - Conventional-power attack: 56
- Naval Aviation
  - Bombers: 31
  - Attack aircraft: 160
  - ASW helicopters: 28

## • Modernization Features

- Real growth in fleet numbers, accelerated naval-shipyard output, and a more homogeneous fleet with the production of more capable platforms (i.e., Type-052d destroyer and Type-54A frigate)
- Relative weakness in anti-submarine and amphibious warfare
- Blue-water capabilities have improved significantly
- Biggest shipbuilding industry worldwide (48%)



# Major PLAAF and PLAN Forces



# PRC nuclear forces as of 2023



**Table 1.** Chinese nuclear forces, 2023.

Type	NATO designation	Number of launchers <sup>a</sup>	Year deployed	Range (kilometers)	Warheads x yield <sup>b</sup> (kilotons)	Warheads
<b>Land-based ballistic missiles</b>						
<i>Medium-range ballistic missiles</i>						
DF-17	CSS-22	54 <sup>c</sup>	2021	1,800+	1 × HGV	? <sup>d</sup>
DF-21A/E	CSS-5 Mods 2, 6	24	2000, 2016	2,100+ <sup>e</sup>	1 × 200–300	24 <sup>f</sup>
<i>Subtotal</i>		78				24
<i>Intermediate-range ballistic missiles</i>						
DF-26	CSS-18	162 <sup>g</sup>	2016	3,000+	1 × 200–300	54 <sup>h</sup>
<i>Intercontinental ballistic missiles</i>						
DF-4	CSS-3	6 <sup>i</sup>	1980	5,500	1 × 3,300	0
DF-5A	CSS-4 Mod 2	6	1981	12,000	1 × 4,000–5,000	6
DF-5B	CSS-4 Mod 3	12	2015	13,000	Up to 5 × 200–300	60
DF-5C	(CSS-4 Mod 4)	..	(2024)	13,000	(MIRV)	..
DF-27	?	..	(2026)	5,000–8,000	1 × 200–300	..
DF-31	CSS-10 Mod 1	6	2006	7,200	1 × 200–300	6
DF-31A	CSS-10 Mod 2	24	2007	11,200	1 × 200–300	24
DF-31AG	CSS-10 Mod 2 <sup>j</sup>	60	2018	11,200	1 × 200–300	60
DF-41	CSS-20 (mobile)	28 <sup>k</sup>	2020	12,000	Up to 3 × 200–300	84
DF-41	CSS-20 (silo) <sup>l</sup>	.	(2025)	12,000	(3 × 200–300)	.
<i>Subtotal</i>		142				240
<i>Land-based ballistic missile subtotal</i>		382				318
<b>Submarine-launched ballistic missiles</b>						
JL-2	CSS-N-14	0 <sup>m</sup>	2016	7,000+	1 × 200–300	0
JL-3	CSS-N-20	6/72	2022 <sup>n</sup>	9,000+	("Multiple")	72
<b>Aircraft<sup>o</sup></b>						
H-6K	B-6	10	1965/2009	3,100+	1 × bomb	10 <sup>p</sup>
H-6N	B-6	10	2020	3,100+	(1 × ALBM)	10
H-20	?	..	(2028)	?	(bomb/ALCM?)	..
<b>Total</b>		<b>474</b>				<b>410</b>

Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, and Eliana Reynolds, Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2023, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 79:2, 108-133



# Number of PLA Missiles

