

China's docks can aid invasion: report

Written by Taipei Times

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The Chinese navy has commissioned three new amphibious transport docks over the past few years that could improve Beijing's ability to seize and hold Taiwan's outlying islands.

According to a report to be unveiled by the US House Armed Services Committee yesterday, each of the docks can carry a mix of air-cushion landing craft, amphibious armored vehicles, helicopters and marines.

Nevertheless, the report says that "at this time" China does not appear to be pursuing the amphibious capabilities necessary to conduct a large-scale invasion of Taiwan.

The docks, described as "large amphibious ships," are part of a general expansion by the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy) detailed in the China Economic and Security Review Commission's recently completed annual report to the US Congress.

A full committee hearing led by representatives Randy Forbes and Colleen Hanabusa is to consider the report, its findings, conclusions and its recommendations.

A draft copy of the report has been the subject of various stories carried by the Taipei Times over the past week.

The report says that the PLA Navy has about 75 major surface combatants, 85 missile patrol boats and 60 conventional and nuclear submarines.

"These units are available for a range of missions — such as enforcing a blockade of Taiwan," the report says.

"As China's naval modernization continues, an increasing percentage of these ships and submarines will feature advanced weaponry," it says.

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"In contrast, the Taiwan Navy has 26 major surface combatants, 45 missile patrol boats and two operational submarines," it adds.

The report says that Taiwan began work on a prototype of a new class of catamaran-style missile corvette in November last year and plans to build up to 11 of them by next year.

"The new ship will carry long-range antiship cruise missiles and feature better sea-keeping ability, range and endurance compared with Taiwan's current patrol fleet," the report says.

"In a potential conflict with China, the corvette will enhance the lethality and survivability of Taiwan's anti-surface force," it says.

In addition, the report says, Taiwan has deployed its long-delayed Ray Ting (RT)-2000 multiple-launch rocket system.

"In a potential Chinese invasion, the RT-2000 will provide Taiwan with quick-fire capability against Chinese amphibious ships as they cross the Taiwan Strait," the report says.

"With a range of up to 25 miles [40.2km] and a wheeled chassis allowing for easy maneuverability, the RT-2000 is a significant improvement over its predecessor, the Kung Feng V1," the report adds.

The Armed Services Committee will hear that Taiwan's defense spending likely "will remain stagnant" through at least the end of President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) term in office in 2016.

"President Ma has little incentive to increase the defense budget, since improved cross-strait relations have reduced public perceptions of the China threat in attempts to recover from the global financial crisis," the report says.

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“US officials and outside observers suggest that if this trend continues, then the Taiwan military may struggle to maintain a credible deterrent capability,” it adds.

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