



Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints

Keith Crane

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To help the U.S. Air Force assess the resources the government of the People's Republic of China is likely to spend on its military over the next two decades, this study projects future growth in Chinese government expenditures as a whole and the military in particular, evaluates the current and likely future capabilities of China's defense industries, and compares likely future Chinese expenditures on defense with recent expenditures by the United States and the U.S. Air Force. Although economic growth in China is destined to slow, output will still triple by 2025. In addition, government reforms hold the promise of improving the weak performance of China's defense industries. Although the researchers' high-end forecast of military expenditures is based on the assumption that the Chinese government would be able to spend 5.0 percent of GDP on defense, they believe that pressures within China to increase social spending on health care, pensions, education, and the environment, coupled with the costs of paying the Chinese government's liabilities, make it more likely that military spending will not rise above 2.3 percent of GDP. Using a combination of projected market and purchasing power parity exchange rates, the authors forecast that Chinese military spending is likely to rise from an estimated \$69 billion in 2003 to \$185 billion by 2025—approximately 61 percent of what the Department of Defense spent in 2003.

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