

Pentagon 'Hedge' Strategy Targets China

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The Pentagon is moving strategic bombers to Guam and aircraft carriers and submarines to the Pacific as part of a new "hedge" strategy aimed at preparing for conflict with China, Pentagon officials said yesterday.

Peter Rodman, assistant defense secretary for international security affairs, told a congressional commission that the response to the emerging military threat from China is part of the White House national security strategy made public yesterday.

Although U.S. relations with China are good, "both sides understand very well that there is a potential for a conflict, particularly in the Taiwan Strait," Mr. Rodman said during a hearing of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

China's arms buildup in recent years altered the U.S. "strategic calculus" for defending Taiwan from a mainland attack and shows that "a prudent hedging policy is essential," Mr. Rodman said.

The placement of about 700 Chinese missiles opposite Taiwan has changed the status quo between the non-communist island and the communist mainland, he said.

The Pentagon policy calls for watching China's military and "being ready to deal with it, if the worst case should happen," Mr. Rodman said.

James Thomas, deputy assistant defense secretary for plans, said key elements of the "hedging" policy are aimed at nations with uncertain futures, including China and Russia.

Cooperation is preferred, but the Pentagon must prepare "for the possibility that others could choose a more hostile path," Mr. Thomas said.

"In [the China] part of the hedging strategy, we're looking at the deployments of bomber elements to Guam on a more routine basis," he said. "We're also looking at making adjustments in our naval posture globally, shifting to six carrier battle groups in the Pacific region, given the shift in global transport and trade, as well as over the next several years shifting approximately 60 percent of our attack submarine fleet to the Pacific."

The public term for the strategy is "hedge," but in internal Pentagon discussions the term is "effective preparations to swiftly defeat Chinese aggression," one defense official said.

The comments about a conflict contrast with statements by Pentagon officials that have sought to minimize the emerging threat from China.

The plan calls for frequent rotations of B-2 strategic bombers to Guam, part of what the Air Force calls its global strike mission to reach crisis areas quickly. Special hangars and other deployment and maintenance facilities are being built on Guam, a U.S. territory about 1,800 miles from the Chinese coast.

Three attack submarines are based in Guam, and arms storage there includes long-range air-launched cruise missiles and Joint Direct Attack Munitions.

Adm. William J. Fallon, commander of the Pacific Command, has visited Guam and told reporters that the island will become a pivot point for U.S. forces in the Pacific because of the relatively short distances to the Taiwan Strait, South Korea and Southeast Asia.

Yesterday, Mr. Thomas said the Pentagon is strengthening alliances in Asia as part of the strategy.

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