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## ***U.S. Armed Forces Ready for War? Part One***

Recent statements by senior U.S. commanders show severe deficiencies in their own military might. Disadvantage against China and Russia, aircraft out of action and inability to defend against hypersonic missiles that could sink all of Washington's aircraft carriers in 8 minutes.



During the first months of this year, a series of news stories began to circulate that reported a critical situation within the U.S. armed forces. Likewise, serious difficulties of the military industry to meet the needs of the most powerful war apparatus on the planet were exposed. It was extremely surprising that most of the information comes from military sources who have not spared themselves in publicizing a scenario that, in strategic terms, is extremely complex for Washington.

We will do so in two parts, the first exposes a diagnosis of the U.S. armed forces based on the statements of their own spokesmen. Next week we will present some views from political leaders and institutions, as well as *think tanks* and media linked to the Military Industrial Complex. Everyone will be able to draw their own conclusions about the distance between reality (exposed by the military) and wishes (almost always expressed by politicians). This dichotomy has been particularly visible in the analysis of the events of the past two years in Ukraine and, to some extent, also in Palestine.

On February 21, [U.S. Secretary of the Navy Carlos del Toro](#), speaking at the National Press Club, said that the Chinese Navy had significant advantages over the U.S., including a larger fleet and more capable shipyards.



Carlos del Toro, a native of Cuba, Secretary of the U.S. Navy.

Del Toro believes that the United States should modernize and expand its fleet to confront China, which "*aims to end American dominance in the world's oceans.*" He also revealed that the Asian country has about 340 vessels and is moving towards a fleet of 440 by 2030. Meanwhile, the U.S. Navy has fewer than 300.

That is why he implored for the growth of his country's Navy, that is, to build a more modern fleet in order to be able to face the "Chinese threat". But the key fact is that he said that U.S. naval shipyards "can't compete with the Chinese," adding that the reality was that China had 13 shipyards and that only one of them has more capacity than all the Americans combined.

Trying to explain this situation, del Toro alluded to a series of arguments refuted mostly by analysts in the United States itself. One of them, Blake Herzinger, a researcher and expert on defense policy in the Indo-Pacific at the American Business Institute, said it is customary for U.S. officials to blame China for their frustrations. Herzinger opined, "This seems unfortunately commonplace, [i.e.] the Navy leadership throwing stones at real or

imagined flaws in Chinese shipbuilding rather than taking into account America's failures over two decades in conceptualizing, designing, and building ships for its own Navy."



Blake-Herzinger

Just days later, on Feb. 28, a multi-agency report reported that the U.S. military was facing a staffing shortage, exposing the possibility of abandoning the current voluntary draft system.

The Army, Navy, and Air Force all showed that in 2022 they had the worst recruiting result since 1973, when they switched entirely from traditional recruiting service to that of a contracted or "volunteer" Army. After a notable decline from more than two million recruits in 1990 to 1.4 million in 2001, efforts have been made to keep the total number at a stable level.

The report indicates that the same is happening with reservists. One of the causes of this situation is the population's loss of confidence in the ability of the armed forces to carry out their missions. In this regard, [a 2021 study by the Ronald Reagan Institute](#) indicates that only 45% of the U.S. population trusts the Armed Forces, which is 25% less than in 2018.

But there are other factors, including the failure of U.S. authorities to address the most important issues. It is also argued that recruitment based exclusively on contracts has not provided a solution to the problem. There is no possible way out of the crisis in the short term, which is causing concern among the military high command, since the Pentagon is not ready to reduce the number of troops. For the armed forces, it has been very difficult to see that after 50 years since the abandonment of the conscription system, those in favour of its return have received a very strong argument.

In the same vein, citing a brief that Air Force Lt. Gen. Michael Schmidt prepared for the March 29 hearing in the House Armed Services Committee's air subcommittee, he

reported that [only half of the U.S. fleet of fifth-generation F-35 Lightning II multirole fighters is considered fit for combat missions](#). The situation is dire when we are talking about the most modern fighter of the United States air force introduced into service only in 2015.



[Half of the F-35s are not prepared to go to war. The F-35 has been shown to have a number of problems with its engine cooling](#)

The report reveals that during the month of February of this year "the monthly average combat capacity of the 540 F-35s in service was only 53.1%, well below the goal of 65%", which is a clear manifestation that these aircraft cannot carry out all the combat missions that are proposed to them, limiting themselves in many cases to exhibition flights. Testing and training. Likewise, General Schmidt, without informing the causes of this situation, made it known that only less than 30 per cent of these aircraft were available to carry out the missions.

However, it has been known that there is a continued lack of spare parts for the permanent failures in the engines of the F-35s, which forces the aircraft to spend long periods in the workshops, affecting the combat capacity of the armed forces.

Reaffirming the complicated situation of the U.S. military institution, General [Mark Milley](#), who at the time was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, in an interview with journalist Kevin Barón for Defense One, a U.S. portal that offers news and analysis on defense and security issues, revealed that the U.S. refusal to provide tactical ATACMS missiles to Ukraine, in addition to being a consideration in favor of

avoiding the escalation of the conflict, was also due to the fact that "we have relatively few ATACMS and we have to make sure that we also maintain our own ammunition inventories."

In this regard, Milley told Defense One that it will take the U.S. military industry "probably several years" to replenish its stockpiles and meet the Pentagon's needs. And this will be "very expensive" and will not be done "magically overnight."

In another area of the same problem, on November 12 the New York newspaper The Wall Street Journal reported that [the U.S. military is facing a shortage of Patriot air defense and missile defense systems](#). The needs of Ukraine, Israel and the United States itself, which is being attacked at its bases in West Asia, have created a problem with no solution in the short term. At the beginning of November, following the worsening situation in Gaza, Washington sent 6 Patriot anti-aircraft systems to Tel Aviv.

This situation has prevented the United States from consolidating an adequate dislocation of forces and resources in accordance with its plans by conceptualizing the Asia-Pacific theater of operations as the one of greatest strategic importance.



Doug Lamborn

For years, the U.S. military requested the provision of more anti-aircraft systems, however, time and again they were ignored. Now, amid the desperation that overwhelms them, the chairman of the House Armed Services subcommittee, Doug Lamborn, demanded increased funding for Patriot production, stressing that he is concerned about "[the United States'] ability to provide air defense in other areas."

This system, which costs about \$1 billion each, is made by Raytheon Technologies (RTX), which can produce only a dozen a year. It has been reported that there are only 60 Patriots available around the world and that their effectiveness has lost credibility as they have been repeatedly outwitted by Yemeni missiles that struck targets in Saudi Arabia.

But the underlying problem is that neither this nor any air defense system possessed by the West is effective against the action of hypersonic missiles in the hands of Russia, China and recently also Iran.

Hypersonic missiles have come to change the strategic equation in military matters, transforming aircraft carriers (the offensive weapon par excellence in recent decades) into what Brazilian analyst Pepe Escobar has called "very expensive iron bathtubs".



A hypersonic missile flies at least at a speed of Mach 5 (one Mach = 1235 km/hour) and has self-guided technology that makes interception impossible due to its high maneuverability during flight. Although this type of weapon dates back several decades, it was not until the end of 2017 that it began to function effectively.

They can reach a speed of Mach 25 (a little more than 30 thousand km/hour) and a range of 10,000 km. Russia has already exhibited the Kinzhal (Mach 10), Avangard (Mach 25) and Tsirkon (Mach 8) and China the Dongfeng 17 (Mach 5). Recently, Iran has unveiled the Fattah (Mach 5 and a range of 1400 km) which puts it within range to annihilate most of the US bases in West Asia including the 5th Major Naval Base in Western Asia. It floats in Bahrain less than a minute's flight from Iranian territory.

It would only take 11 hypersonic missiles to sink all 11 U.S. aircraft carriers. This would happen in a period of between 3 and 8 minutes depending on where they are on the planet. In that short space of time, U.S. naval power will be gone forever. Likewise, it would only

take between 2 and 5 minutes for the missiles to reach Paris, London, Berlin or New York. Of course, that is not desired by any rational human being, expecting American leaders to be included among those "rational human beings," because Russian and Chinese cities are not unguarded like Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Perhaps this is why, at a conference organized by the American Business Institute in Washington on Feb. 28, [U.S. Army Secretary Christine Wormuth](#) said her country wants to avoid a war in Asia. However, he warned of the urgency of preparing to fight China. Wormuth said, "The best way to avoid a war is to prove to China and the countries in the region that we can really win that war," assuring that fighting China is only a form of "deterrence."



U.S. Armed Forces

As we said before, Wormuth is political, expressing wishes, not realities. A superior disposition and a strategic outlook are needed to understand "war as a continuation of politics." That is why, from another perspective, only a few days later, General Mark Milley himself seemed to respond to Wormuth. In the aforementioned interview for Defense One on April 2, Milley suggested "calming down about the war with China" by warning about the "overheated" rhetoric of an imminent war between the United States and China.

Milley said he believed there was a lot of rhetoric, which could create the perception that war is just around the corner or "that we're on the brink of a war with China."

*Sergio Rodríguez Gelfenstein for La Pluma, December 13, 2023*

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