

# US Should Build a 'Great Wall' to Deter Chinese Aggression



Much of the discussion over the threat from communist [China](#) is about its technology and initiative. But that is too reactive. The United States and its allies can take concrete measures to deter the Chinese regime and actively stop it in case of war by using available resources and geography to create a "[great wall](#)."

## The Problem

The challenge is that the Chinese regime is much closer to Taiwan, Japan, and contested territories than the United States. And the United States often needs a great deal of time to build up forces and logistics

in the region before pursuing military operations. This entices Beijing to pursue a [short, sharp war](#). The current thinking is that the danger is not a long [war](#) but one that is over before America can use its military might.

China may have an overwhelming number of missiles to create an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) bubble to prevent access and deny American entry into the disputed region, possibly beyond the [single carrier strike force](#) on hand. (Though the Russian performance in Ukraine suggests that technological and material superiority might be a mirage.)

With U.S. forces temporarily held at bay, the Chinese regime will seize some disputed territory, probably in the South China Sea, build it up, and present America with a fait accompli. This is like what the Chinese communists (Chicoms) have done with many of their border wars with neighbors, such as the [Ussuri River Skirmish with Russia](#).

With the example of the Russian seizure of Crimea in mind, the Chicoms would essentially dare America to spend the next nine months preparing for war to take it back and assume (with some justification) that American leaders would not have the political will to summon the military strength. American political leaders might face the unenviable choice of doing nothing or escalating to higher levels of violence.

## **The Solution**

But there is a solution to the problem that has not been discussed in much detail. Historically, the Chinese Great Wall as we know it was built

in the late Ming Dynasty, but a system of fortifications and defenses has existed in some form since the Warring States Period. It generally represented the divide between sedentary Chinese society and the nomadic and pastoral steppes, and formed a key [defense](#) against invasion.



A general view shows part of the Jinshanling section of the Great Wall in Chengde, Hebei Province of China, on Aug. 20, 2015. (Photo by VCG/VCG via Getty Images)

But in this case, it might be the West that can use the geography of the Western Pacific to build its own modern "[great wall](#)."

Its basic features will deploy along the first island chain to encumber Chinese military movement from the China seas eastward or southward through the narrow seas that pierce the island chain. The first island chain runs from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines. The central part of that chain and the focus of the new great wall includes Taiwan and the islands immediately to the north and south of them.

The first part of this defense would be integrating the existing defenses of allies. Countries like Japan and Taiwan, being right next to an aggressive regime, already field their own defensive weapon systems. Japan considered adding Aegis offshore batteries and possibly [counter-strike capability](#).

The latter is significant since strategists believe that any invasion of Taiwan will include a missile barrage against Japan to forestall any possible intervention.

Moreover, the Japanese fleet has [trained](#) with the U.S. fleet and can reasonably defend its part of the island chain. The Australian, Philippine, and U.S. forces recently concluded [exercises](#) in the South China Sea and the strait between Taiwan and the Philippines.

This makes a wall of defense consisting of local missile defense and navies that stretches along the central part of the Chinese coast. While not impervious to attack or being broken by massive amounts of Chinese ships and missiles, this is the first part of the defense that can delay and slow down Chinese forces.

But that leads to the important second part of the defense. The islands and territories near China cannot move out of range of Chinese missiles. But the U.S. forces, particularly their heavy surface forces, can ply the open waters beyond the island chain, at the outer range of most Chinese missiles, and act as a mobile reserve force.

As strategists describe, the American destroyers, cruisers, and frigates will surge to points where China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces attempt to break out. The U.S. forces will seal any breaches in the frontier—keeping hostile forces penned within the China seas. For

the Chinese to strike at the U.S. forces, they would have to target and bypass local defenses, presumably the territory they want to seize and hold.



The Arleigh-Burke class guided-missile destroyer USS Barry (DDG 52) conducting underway operations in the South China Sea on April 28, 2020. (Samuel Hardgrove/U.S. Navy/AFP via Getty Images)

Moreover, U.S. forces are well equipped for missile defense. Most of the news is about Chinese carrier killing and hypersonic missiles. They are new and potentially dangerous. But they are also simply the latest version of technology that has been around since World War II. The United States continually upgrades the radar of Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and adopts new technology lasers, such as long-range sensors on F-35s, to counter new missile technology.

The United States is also [reorganizing its forces](#) to quickly augment

local forces in the event of Chinese aggression. The [U.S. Marines](#) are disbanding some units, such as tank battalions, to create small units of about 75 that could be easily inserted into a combat zone. It is important that they pack a punch and be easily deployed and supplied.

Using light and mobile but advanced and long-range technology, the Marine units would [target rival capital ships](#) and relay that information to friendly aircraft and ships, jam or confuse enemy missile swarms, and generally allow the quick reaction carrier group to better respond and operate with China's A2/AD bubble. This will put the shoe on the other foot and make Chinese forces worry about operating within range of U.S. missiles.

This strategy has the benefit of using terrain and mostly existing forces to deter and limit Chinese aggression. The Chinese troops will know they will face a constricted operating environment and strong defenses backed by American power and reinforced with quick reaction Marines.

While China does have potent weapon systems, the bungled Russian invasion suggests that strategy matters just as much, if not more than hardware, and the United States should consider a new great wall.