crazy future technology China Missile Test Has Ominous Implications

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China Missile Test Has Ominous Implications * By WENDELL MINNICK* * TAIPEI* — Confusion over the nature of China's Jan. 11 missile test is slowly clearing up, although experts still dispute whether it was designed to test missile interception technol ogy, as reported by Xinhua, China's state news agency, or to expand anti-satellite capabilities. Sources believe the test involved an upgraded HQ-9 surface-to-air missile (SAM) equipped with a new exoatmospheric kill vehicle for use as a ballistic missile de fense or anti-satellite (ASAT) sys tem. China's land-based and ship based HQ-9 is a variant of the Russian S-300V SAM. However, the HQ-9 variant launched Jan. 11 is believed to have been "co-developed or stolen from the Russian S-400 Triumf," said Ian Easton, a research fellow at the Washington-based Project 2049 Institute. Pentagon sources have said "that it was an exoatmospheric test, which may fit with an unofficial Chinese interview where an un named colonel suggested that the test occurred above 20,000 me ters," said Dean Cheng, a research fellow at the Heritage Foundation, a Washington think tank. The timing of the test also came as a surprise, Dean said, since it was three years to the day that China conducted its first ASAT missile test in 2007. "The Chinese are too crazy about the significance of dates and an niversaries for that to be a coinci dence," Easton said. The fact that the launch oc curred on the anniversary of Chi na's first ASAT missile test sug gests it was hardly just a ballistic missile defense (BMD) effort alone, but part of a larger effort to expand ASAT capabilities. The 2007 ASAT test involved a modified KT-1/2 or DF-21 missile derivative dubbed the SC-19. The SC-19 is difficult to use and re quires 12 hours of preparation, so it would not be "useful as a ballis tic missile interceptor," Easton said. "That's why the HQ-9 system is interesting as an intercept op tion, but still not much is known about it. "The implications of this test are potentially huge," he said. It "defi nitely represents a big leap in mil itary technology for China." Only the United States and Japan, with U.S. assistance, have "ever tested this kind of thing, and it's consid ered cutting edge even by us. "Being able to do a kinetic kill that high up outside the atmos phere shows that they've also made some great leaps in sensing, cueing and guidance technology, not to mention the extreme chal lenge of programming software and the advanced algorithms be hind it. Incredible," he said. However, there are still fears the missile test was an attempt to ex pand China's ASAT capabilities. A mobile ASAT missile deployed on a truck or ship could be potential ly devastating for the U.S. military. While the Chinese media have been portraying the Jan. 11 launch as a focus on missile defense, it could have been a next-generation test for an upgraded ASAT missile. "After all, a missile is harder to hit than a satellite, and if they did have the sensor network to track and go after ballistic missiles, they could certainly hit satellites," Eas ton said. "This is interesting because our birds would presumably change orbits to avoid attack in times of tension, and in the future, we will be launching smaller satel lites and manned or unmanned space planes, as well as global strike unmanned combat aerial ve hicles to deal with China," he said. "From the Chinese perspective, this 'interceptor' technology could be a means for dealing with all of these threats as well as an ASAT weapon in its own right." According to Mark Stokes, au thor of the book, "China's Strategic Modernization," "Beijing's goal os tensibly is both to develop missile defense countermeasures to en sure the viability of its nuclear de terrent and to develop an indige nous missile defense capability. "A missile defense capability, es pecially one that is able to inter cept missiles in the midcourse phase of flight, has applications for intercepting satellites overflying China as well," he said. Stokes also pointed to concerns over China's development of an anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) based on the DF-21 missile. A com bined ASAT, ASBM and BMD ca pability would place China in a re spectable position to counter U.S. military operations during a war. However, despite U.S. fears, it appears the only true ballistic mis sile threat to China is from India. The United States, Japan and Tai wan do not rely on ballistic mis siles for their main defensive op erations, save U.S. intercontinen tal ballistic missiles that entail a different kind of threat, Cheng said. "But it would apply to the Indian short-range, medium-range and in termediate-range ballistic missile forces, as well as the Russians, who still retain a variety of mis siles as well," he said. Also of concern is the fact that a vertical-launched HQ-9 SAM vari ant is fielded on two Chinese Type 052C destroyers. An upgraded model that has ASAT or BMD ca pabilities similar to the U.S. Navy's Standard Missile-3 would be prob lematic for both India and the United States. E-mail: wminn...@defensenews.com.* "Beijing's goal ostensibly is both to develop missile defense countermeasures ... and to develop an indigenous missile defense capability. has applications for intercepting satellites overflying China as well."* * Mark Stokes* Author of the book, "China's Strategic Modernization"

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