China’s system for the development of military capabilities is far more opaque than that of the United States. Nonetheless, based on official publications of China’s military, known as the People’s Liberation Army, assembling a picture of the broad contours of this process is possible. The process is as follows.

At irregular intervals of five to 10 years, the Central Military Commission of the People’s Liberation Army issues a set of “military strategic guidelines.” Meanwhile, at regular intervals of every five years, based on the prevailing military strategic guidelines, each of the People’s Liberation Army’s services formulates a service development strategy that addresses the service’s expected capability and force structure requirements for the next 20 years. Based on this overall service development strategy, an equipment development strategy addressing the service’s expected equipment needs over the next 20 years is developed. Next, based on the equipment development strategy, an overall, 10-year equipment development plan; a more detailed, five-year equipment development program; and a mid- to long-term “special equipment” development program are formulated.

None of the documents described in the preceding paragraph appear to be publicly available. But China’s periodic defense white papers, textbooks used at the People’s Liberation Army’s military educational institutions, and other sources describe the broad directions of development the organization is pursuing. Countering these capabilities will require the United States and its allies to pursue a systematic and comprehensive program. This program should include developing the capability of ground forces to evade and survive attack by highly mobile and lethal armor, infantry, artillery, and helicopter forces as well as the capability to find, fix, and destroy such forces. The program should also include the capability to degrade the People’s Liberation Army’s naval reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities; defend US Navy ships against attack by long-range, precision strike weapons; and find and sink the Chinese military’s ships and submarines from standoff ranges.

In addition, the United States and its allies will need the capability to defend their air bases and other key targets from attacks by large numbers of long-range, precision strike weapons, including ballistic and cruise missiles and aircraft armed with precision-guided munitions, as well as the capability to penetrate a Chinese air defense system that includes advanced fighter aircraft and long-range, surface-to-air missiles. Countering such attacks will require active and passive missile defenses; the ability to operate from dispersed, austere locations far from Chinese territory; and the ability to recover from the effects of the attacks rapidly. Furthermore, the militaries of the United States and its allies will need to be capable of operating with some or all of their space systems degraded or destroyed. These countries should acquire counterspace capabilities that are at least as effective as those the People’s Liberation Army is acquiring. Finally, in the cyber arena, the US military must increase its capabilities to prevent the People’s Liberation Army cyber forces from infiltrating US military systems and to detect intrusions and purge and repair or reconstitute the affected systems if intrusions do occur.