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June 3, 2013

The Honorable Charles Hagel
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Hagel:

On 13 May 2013, the Department of Defense confirmed China launched a missile “nearly to geosynchronous orbit,” before falling back and burning up in the earth’s atmosphere. This launch is the world’s highest suborbital launch since 1976 and China’s highest known suborbital launch to date, according to Jonathan McDowell of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. While Beijing claims it was testing a sounding rocket as part of a scientific experiment, *Reuters* and *Washington Free Beacon* press reports cited unnamed U.S. officials as saying that U.S. defense agencies assess that the launch was the first test of a new antisatellite capability. If this was the case, “such a test would signal China’s intent to develop an antisatellite capability to target satellites in an altitude range that includes U.S. Global Positioning System (GPS) and many U.S. military and intelligence satellites,” according to a 22 May 2013 assessment by the bipartisan U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.

To further understand the implications of this launch, I request that your office brief me on the launch and its potential relationship to China’s broader anti-satellite program, as well as China’s counterspace strategy and capabilities. Specifically, we request the brief address the following questions:

- Was the launch part of China’s antisatellite program?
- If so, did the launch test a new or existing antisatellite capability?
- If this is a new antisatellite capability, what type of attack mechanism is it designed to employ (e.g., kinetic kill vehicle, space mine, electronic warfare, or directed energy weapon)?
- If this is a new antisatellite capability, in which orbital regime is it designed to target satellites?

- If the launch was part of China's antisatellite program, why did China attempt to disguise it as a scientific experiment? Has the Department of Defense raised this issue with the Chinese government?
- What are China's current and projected abilities to target U.S. satellites in each orbital regime (e.g., low Earth orbit, high Earth orbit)? To which U.S. satellites do these capabilities pose the greatest risk? How does the Department of Defense plan to mitigate China's counterspace capabilities?

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress