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AURA Reflection: Research Internship at Hudson Institute

The AURA grant provided me compensation for an unpaid internship at the Hudson Institute Center for Political-Military Analysis. I was fortunate enough to work under Dr. Richard Weitz who is the director of the Center, but unfortunately does not pay interns as part of the program. As such, the grant was instrumental in filling the gap left by the program's lack of compensation. Thanks to this internship, I fundamentally grew my understanding of arms transfers and military affairs in general terms and allowed me to delve into issues specific to Chinese military activity.

The internship was structured in a manner that rewarded independent approaches to research. Every week, usually on Monday evening, Dr. Weitz would send his interns an email



*The Hudson Institute is a Washington D.C.-based nonpartisan think tank founded in 1961 in Croton-on-Hudson, New York.*

with three to five topic choices as well as the time frame under which a deliverable was expected. These topics would be wide ranging, both in their geographic and topical focus as well as the format of the deliverable. Often, Dr. Weitz would request memos and short reports on certain subjects but at times he would request notes for presentations or even for formal edits to book chapters. The structure being loose by design granted me the freedom to pick and choose projects based on their relevance to my studies as well as according to the skillset required to complete the task.

Accordingly, I chose primarily work that involved Chinese military activity and when possible, issues concerning the Asia-Pacific region. Because the projects I chose frequently involved writing reports, I fine tuned my ability to draft analytical briefs on a short timeline.

With the internship lasting a full semester, I contributed to a comparatively large number of tasks. Some of the more notable projects I completed were a paper on Chinese expansion in the Black Sea region and surrounding countries, a series of memos that detailed flare-ups between the People's Liberation Army and Himalayan claimant states such as India and Bhutan, and a summary report regarding the fall summit of the China-led Shanghai Cooperation

Organization. By default, these did not solely involve national security studies, but also included analyses of economic considerations as well as research into domestic politics of relevant entities. My project regarding Chinese activities in the Black Sea region involved these three spheres as well as theoretical analysis of great power competition given the Russian Federation is predictably quite active in the region as well. I was able to present my findings as part of a student webinar presentation to staff at the Hudson Institute.

My most involved project was a month-long study of the implications of novel hypersonic missile delivery vehicles for U.S. combatant commanders, a paper which contributed to a report from the Department of Defense on the same subject. Hypersonic delivery vehicles are conventional (non-nuclear) missiles with the ability to deliver their payloads at speeds greater than or equal to Mach 5. In this particular realm of emerging military technology, the U.S. is considered behind both China and Russia in operationalizing their versions of hypersonic missile technology. Indeed, the PLA unveiled the DF-17, arguably the world's first operational hypersonic weapon, as part of a military parade in October 2019 while the Russian Avangard hypersonic glide vehicle is thought to be in its final phases of testing before deployment. In comparison, the U.S. is a ways behind the former two in its pursuit of hypersonic capabilities, as it is not yet close to reaching similar levels of readiness as the Chinese. The implications for U.S. combatant commanders are clear given current sensors and missile defense systems would likely pose no match for these weapon systems posting unprecedented speed and maneuverability. Accordingly, my research argued for greater investment to fast-track proposals for a space-based layer of sensors, a prerequisite to elongating response time for ground-based defense systems facing these novel capabilities. In this vein, Russian and Chinese capabilities in the realm of Anti-Satellite weapons, both ground-based and in space, must be assessed and kept in mind as part of design processes to minimize the vulnerabilities of the proposed sensor layer. Altogether, this specific project assignment awakened in me an interest in arms control agreements, especially in the realm of emerging military technology like hypersonic capabilities for delivery vehicles.

In all, I am extremely fortunate to have been selected for this internship program at the Hudson Institute, and even more fortunate of the financial support provided by the AURA scholarship which supplemented my work. It was quite the eye-opening experience as I experienced realms of national security studies previously foreign to me.