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China's Military Strategy Under Chairman Xi: More Steel, More Gas, and Harder Bones

by

Dexter Lensing

Under the Direction of Andrew Wedeman, PhD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

ABSTRACT

Under China's leader Xi Jinping, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has continued to rapidly modernize. However, in what ways has China's military strategy changed, and stayed the same, compared to its previous leaders Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao? I use a qualitative comparative case study approach to look for changes and continued similarities between the Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping eras starting from 1997 until the present day. I examined roughly twenty-five Chinese articles from each era on army building. These articles on army building from Chinese scholars and officials are deeply analyzed to track changes in language and descriptions about priorities of army building over time. White papers and CCP Party Congress reports were also utilized. Training was explored by looking at the frequency and type of training under each leader, along with writings on training and changes to training outlines. Additionally, this dissertation asks what Xi's personal influence on the PLA and China's military strategy has been. Previous studies have not examined this topic in depth. I find that there are both continuities and changes in China's strategy. Similarities include the paramount importance of ideology and politics described as the foundation for army building, continued emphasis on talent, leapfrog development, and improving the evaluation system. Meanwhile, changes under Xi revolve around making training more unpredictable and military activity increasingly taking place farther from China, greater importance placed on commanders, and elevating the importance of army building so that it is now on par with development. For Xi's personal influence, I find that there has been greater prioritization on hardware and heartware. Hardware represents weapons and equipment, with platforms such as bombers, missiles, aircraft carriers, and transport aircraft receiving the greatest boost. Heartware, which pertains to morale, or what sometimes is described as the spiritual soul of the army, has also been prioritized. Xi's influence

has also been enforcing and pushing through arguably the largest military reforms and promoting greater civilian-military integration. Overall, Xi has had an outsized effect on the PLA and its strategy.

INDEX WORDS: Army building, PLA, Military training, Xi Jinping, CCP, Military strategy

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2023

China's Military Strategy Under Chairman Xi: More Steel, More Gas, and Harder Bones

by

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December 2023

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents. Working without complaining gave me an example to follow. Additionally, I am thankful for their support of my pursuits and interests throughout my life. I love you and am thankful for you both.

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1 INTRODUCTION

“For our military, whether it is the new situation in the security environment or the new changes in the form of war, there is an urgent need for us to keep a close eye on powerful enemies in military training, aiming at powerful enemies to prepare for war, and defend the country with stronger capabilities and more reliable means.”¹

Because the way warfare is waged never stays the same and the international strategic situation is constantly in flux, states must occasionally change their military strategy. Military institutions must adjust to stay effective in an oft-changing environment. If an actor wishes to win a military conflict in the future, it needs to think about how a war will play out and envision ways of winning future wars. It also must retrain and reorganize its forces to fit the expected form of future military conflict. The faster technology and capabilities change, the faster military planners must revise strategy, and more importantly, force structure—which is a central pillar of army building in Chinese terminology—and training. Training and army building are core components of how militaries execute military doctrine.

Furthermore, doctrine is frequently “written by committee” and backwards looking, meaning that it’s likely to evolve gradually. In this dissertation, I thus contend that a more insightful way to evaluate how Chinese perspectives on warfighting have evolved in the ten years since Xi Jinping assumed the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is to analyze changes in China’s army building and training. For the U.S. military, which has declared “China's military modernization a top priority for US defense planning and budgeting”² such an evaluation is essential.

¹ 桑睿, 王瑞琦 (Sang Rui and Wang Ruiqi) 跑出比对手更快的加速度 (Accelerate faster than your opponent) *PLA Daily*, February 8, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/08/content_333228.htm

² “China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress” Congressional Research Office, January 21, 2021, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33153.pdf>

1.1 Research Question and Contribution of Dissertation

This dissertation examines China's military strategy, and whether there are significant changes in it since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012. Basically, what are the characteristics of military strategy in the Xi era? And how much has it stayed the same—and changed—from the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras? By military strategy, I focus on army building and training. Most scholarship on China's military strategy tends to concentrate on the Military Strategic Guidelines (MSG), which is the doctrine issued by the CCP secretary-general and Central Military Commission (CMC).³ However, real change occurring on the ground and within the PLA as an organization is often missed by taking this approach.

A better indicator and understanding of changes to China's military strategy than the MSGs can be found in observing training, commentary on day-to-day activities in places like the *PLA Daily*, how the PLA itself talks about army building, and guidelines issued by the CMC. The MSGs entail vague themes that are too broad to grasp what the PLA is emphasizing at a micro level. Smaller changes occurring on the ground at the brigade level and below accumulate over time that produces substantial change. By studying training and reading the *PLA Daily* one gets a better understanding of what China's military strategy consists of.

The PLA itself speaks of how “military training is a preview of future wars”⁴ illustrating how training offers an accurate glimpse of strategy. This dissertation contributes to research on China's military strategy by making training and army building the central focus of

³ Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949* (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2019); Joel Wuthnow and Taylor Fravel, “China's military strategy for a ‘new era’: some change, more continuity, and tantalizing hints” *Journal of Security Studies*, (March, 2022), 1-36; Taylor Fravel, “Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy” *International Security* 42, no.3 (Winter 2017/18), 37-83; David Finkelstein, “China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the ‘Military Strategic Guidelines’” *Asia Policy* 4 (2007), 67-72. doi:10.1353/asp.2007.0017.

⁴ 陈乃利, 卫明 (Chen Naili and Wei Ming) 深入推进实战化军事训练 (In-depth promotion of actual combat military training) *PLA Daily*, February 16, 2023, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/16/content_333788.htm

understanding the PRC's military strategy. Training can be thought of as the practice and preview of warfighting, whereas policy documents can be seen as discussing warfighting in the abstract. In the Xi era the PLA has increasingly emphasized that training is practicing for war and vigorously worked on remedying previous issues of training being divorced from combat.⁵ Putting training and army building at the center of studying strategy thus offers an advantage that one does not get from a general reading of the MSGs.

A greater understanding of China's military strategy is important as U.S.-China relations growing increasingly antagonistic—with many likening it to a new Cold War.⁶ And with China's military power starting to close the gap with the U.S. in some areas, trying to decipher China's military strategy, and whether the PLA is capable of effectively succeeding in accomplishing its strategy, is highly important for U.S. policymakers, think tanks, and a broad array of academics that includes PLA scholars and general IR scholars.

Analyzing a state's military strategy can also help understand its wider aims and the situation in which it will realize its political goals through the employment of its armed forces.⁷ Talks on military strategy are not only an academic pursuit, but also offers a lens through which to monitor the progress of PLA fighting capabilities and the probability of its use by Chinese leaders. Finally, this study should be of interest to the general U.S. population. A recent survey reported that a majority (67%) of Americans now view China's military power as a critical threat

⁵ 吴方兵, 栾铖 (Wu Fangbing and Luan Cheng) 没了“眼睛”, 舰炮怎么瞄准 (Without "eyes", how can the naval guns be aimed), *PLA Daily*, September 9 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/09/content_323773.htm

⁶ Gideon Rachman, “A new cold war: Trump, Xi and the escalating US-China confrontation” *Financial Times*, October 5, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/7b809c6a-f733-46f5-a312-9152aed28172>; Alan Dupont, “The US-China Cold War Has Already Started” *The Diplomat*, July 8, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/the-us-china-cold-war-has-already-started/>; Niall Ferguson, “The New Cold War? It's With China, and It Has Already Begun” *New York Times*, December 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/opinion/china-cold-war.html>; Matt Turpin, “Yes, This Is a Cold War” *The Wire China*, November 14, 2021, <https://www.thewirechina.com/2021/11/14/yes-this-is-a-cold-war/>

⁷ Wuthnow and Fravel, *ibid*, 2.

to the U.S., a spike from 41% of those who did in 2016.⁸ But whether China's military strategy justifies these concerns is an important issue worth exploring.

1.2 Developments in the PLA

1.2.1 *Anti-Corruption Campaign*

The PLA has gone through a range of important, major changes in the past several years. These changes are not just in terms of hardware and raw military power, but also critical organizational alterations as well. Immediately after Xi became general-secretary of the CCP and chairman of the CMC, a large-scale anti-corruption campaign was launched.⁹ One analyst described what Xi did in the PLA after taking power as political shock and awe.¹⁰ By 2015, more than four thousand officers at the rank of lieutenant-colonel or above, and eighty-two senior officers had been subject to investigation,¹¹ and currently over 100 generals have been purged.¹² It was an "open secret" that in order to be promoted in the PLA, paying a bribe was necessary.¹³ One former general, Gu Junshan, paid former CMC (Central Military Commission) vice chairman Xu Caihou for a promotion to the tune of \$3.25 million, coming in the form of a wedding gift to Xu's daughter.¹⁴ Later, after Xu was arrested, the amount of gems and cash

⁸ Jeffrey Jones, "Terrorism, Nuclear Weapons, China Viewed as Top U.S. Threats" *Gallup*, March 7, 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/390494/terrorism-nuclear-weapons-china-viewed-top-threats.aspx>

⁹ James Mulvenon, "Comrade, Where's My Military Car? Xi Jinping's Throwback Mass-Line Campaign to Curb PLA Corruption" *China Leadership Monitor*, 42, (2013), 1-5.

¹⁰ Chris Johnson, "Chris Johnson on US-China relations, Xi Jinping and the 6th Plenum" November 5, 2021, in *Sinocism*, <https://sinocism.com/p/sinocism-podcast-1-chris-johnson?s=r>

¹¹ Yin Pumin, "War on Graft" *Beijing Review*, March 9, 2015, <http://www.bjreview.com.cn/nation/txt/2015-03/09/content6754352.htm>

¹² David Lague and Benjamin Kang Lim, "Marshal Xi" *Reuters*, April 23, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-army-xi/>

¹³ Benjamin Kang Lim and Ben Blanchard, "Disgraced China military officer sold 'hundreds' of posts: sources" *Reuters*, April 1, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-military/disgraced-china-military-officer-sold-hundreds-of-posts-sources-idUSBREA300GH20140401>

¹⁴ Wang Heyan, "How a PLA General Built a Web of Corruption to Amass a Fortune" *Caixin*, January 16, 2014, <https://www.caixinglobal.com/2014-01-16/101013597.html> found in Thomas Au, "Combatting Military Corruption in China" *Southern Illinois University Law Journal*, Vol 43, (2019), 303.

discovered at his residence was so enormous that it took one week for investigators to count it all and haul it away.¹⁵

Within his first four years in power, Xi removed General Xu and former vice chairman of the CMC Guo Boxiong, for corruption. From 2002-2012 these two generals essentially ran the PLA and oversaw all important promotions.¹⁶ While both men retired in 2012, in Chinese politics retired leaders still possess considerable influence in promotions and important decisions. Xu and Guo, with their extensive networks, likely would have remained highly influential with promotions in the PLA. Additionally, immediately after the leadership transition from Hu to Xi, new regulations were issued attempting to curb excess and enforce discipline, prohibiting liquor at military receptions, luxurious banquets, and red carpeting.¹⁷ The measures give a glimpse of the Party and Xi trying to reign in the excesses of the PLA during the Hu era.

Ten years into the anti-corruption campaign, however, corruption remains a major problem. Several high-profile officers have been sacked in 2023. The commander of PLARF was removed, and the deputy commander is rumored to have committed suicide right before Xi visited the Eastern Theater Command on July 6—the government claimed he died of a health complication. Former defense minister Wei Fenghe is also rumored to be under investigation.¹⁸ It is hard to judge the veracity of the rumors and what exactly happened, but the removal and replacement of both the commander and political commissar at the same time with officers who

¹⁵ Tom Mitchell and Gabriel Wildau, “Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption purge takes aim at China’s military” *Financial Times*, March 2, 2015, <https://www.ft.com/content/09eae174-c154-11e4-88ca-00144feab7de>

¹⁶ Xiaoting Li, “Cronyism and Military Corruption in the Post-Deng Xiaoping Era: Rethinking the Party-Commands-the-Gun Model” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 26 no.107, (2017), 705.

¹⁷ Carlos Tejada, “China’s New Leaders Ban Lavish Military Banquets” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 22, 2012, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324461604578194641136585674>

¹⁸ “Chinese anti-corruption investigators target top PLA Rocket Force generals, sources say” *South China Morning Post*, July 28, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3229150/chinese-anti-corruption-investigators-target-top-rocket-force-generals-sources-say>; Rahul Kumar, “Is China having a problem with its elite rocket forces?” *India Narrative*, July 20, 2023, <https://www.indianarrative.com/world-news/is-china-having-a-problem-with-its-elite-rocket-forces-148031.html>

come from different backgrounds, the PLAN and PLAAF, suggest the corruption was very serious.¹⁹ Most surprising, Xi's new handpicked defense minister at the 2022 Party Congress, Li Shangfu, was removed after less than one year on the job.²⁰ Despite previous claims that the corrupt influences from Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou have been eliminated, there appears to still be serious corruption problems. Despite this recent surge in high-ranking officers being purged and why now, there is no way for outsiders to know for sure. The reason could be genuine corruption, or it could also be a mixture of corruption and Xi sending some sort of message to the PLA.

1.2.2 Organizational and Training Changes

Aside from efforts to clean up the military and make it more disciplined, major changes were made to the structure of the PLA. China's military has gone through sweeping reforms in the past several years under Xi Jinping that many describe as "unprecedented."²¹ The PLA has cut the size of its ground forces, changed the command structure, introduced new rules and regulations, and strengthened civil-military integration. These wide-ranging restructuring efforts are on a scale not seen since 1949.²² Meanwhile, military training has also increasingly shifted toward joint training farther from China's shores.²³ The extent of the reforms has been felt by nearly every different group within the Army, which in turn, has caused apprehension and

¹⁹ Alastair Gale and Chun Han Wong, "China Replaces Missile Commander Days After Removing Foreign Minister" *Wall Street Journal*, August 1, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-replaces-missile-commander-days-after-removing-foreign-minister-86b0af9b?mod=Searchresults_pos1&page=1

²⁰ Christian Shepherd, "Chinese defense minister removed after just seven months in latest purge" *Washington Post*, October 24, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/24/li-shangfu-china-defense-purge/>

²¹ John Chen, *ibid*, 85.

²² Joel Wuthnow and Philip Saunders, *Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, National Defense University Press, Washington D.C., 2017.

²³ Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Navy holds joint landing exercises far away from mainland" *Global Times*, March 3, 2021, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202103/1217219.shtml>

disruption throughout the entire force.²⁴ The importance and extent of the reforms is also emphasized in Chinese media, with the *People's Daily* describing the reforms as “the most extensive and profound reform of national defense and the military since the founding of the People's Republic of China.”²⁵ These military reforms in the Xi era represent a significant change in the PLA and illustrate concrete changes in strategy. More on these reforms will be discussed in chapter six on the Xi era.

There are indications that Chinese tactics, training, and activity toward Taiwan and the U.S. has changed substantially. PLA confrontations with U.S. military forces in the western Pacific has changed from tracking and following U.S. aircraft and ships and demanding that they leave sensitive areas, to adopting a method where training for future conflict is used through hostile encounters. It is something the PLA describes as “using the enemy to train the troops” with Ryan Martinson and Connor Kennedy suggesting this reflects the concept now being embraced as doctrine.²⁶

Finally, shifts in China's military strategy are evident in the broad changes of China's military capabilities. As Fravel notes, “major change requires that a military develop forces or capabilities that it does not already possess to perform activities that it cannot currently undertake.” Ten years ago, China had no aircraft carriers, today it has two and is finishing a

²⁴ Dennis Blasko, “The PLA army after ‘below the neck’ reforms: contributing to China's joint warfighting, deterrence and MOOTW Posture” *Journal of Strategy Studies*, 42, no.2 (2021), 151.

²⁵ Xu Jun and Li Longyi, 人民军队重整行装再出发 (The People's Army Repacks and sets off again) 人民日报 *People's Daily*, May 30, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-05/30/nw.D110000renmrb_20220530_3-01.htm

²⁶ Ryan Martinson and Conor Kennedy, “Using the Enemy to Train the Troops—Beijing's New Approach to Prepare its Navy for War” *China Brief*, 22 no.6, (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/using-the-enemy-to-train-the-troops-beijings-new-approach-to-prepare-its-navy-for-war/>

third,²⁷ it is on the forefront of developing hypersonic missiles,²⁸ has recently significantly expanded its nuclear arsenal²⁹ that has put China on a trajectory of producing ICBMs that did not exist under Jiang and Hu, and has a space program that has made vast improvements in the past several years.³⁰ These major changes to China's capabilities help allow for changes to strategy.

1.3 Puzzles in Current Research on China's Military Strategy

Despite a massive amount of interest in China's growing raw military power—and rightfully so—there is lagging concentration on China's military strategy. Until Fravel's book in 2019,³¹ there existed little book-length research on China's military strategy. While Fravel's work is the standard for understanding China's military strategy and offers a persuasive and compact argument to explain change, there are some puzzles that arise from it. First, Fravel argues that China's military strategy underwent minor change in 2014, with the Military Strategy Guideline (MSG) producing just small adjustments from the 2004 MSG. If that is true though, how can minor change have produced monumental reforms? As will be discussed later, most PLA scholars agree the reforms introduced at the end of 2015 were unprecedented. China itself also describes the reforms as the most comprehensive since the founding of the PRC.³² It is somewhat strange how minor changes in strategy could have caused sweeping, major military-wide reforms.

²⁷ Teddy Ng, "China could launch its third aircraft carrier 'in next 3 to 6 months'" *South China Morning Post*, November 10, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3155561/china-could-launch-its-third-aircraft-carrier-next-3-6-months>

²⁸ Ryan Beene, "Mach 5 Missiles Spur New Arms Race as U.S. Seeks to Match China" *Bloomberg*, December 28, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-12-28/the-u-s-is-behind-china-on-hypersonic-weapons-and-billions-are-at-stake>

²⁹ Hans Kristensen, Matt Korda, and Eliana Reynolds, "Chinese Nuclear Weapons, 2023" *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79, no. 2 (2023), 108-133.

³⁰ Mandy Mayfield, "China's Ambitious Space Programs Raise Red Flags" *National Defense*, July 2, 2021, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2021/7/2/chinas-ambitious-space-programs-raise-red-flags>

³¹ Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949*, *ibid.*

³² Jun and Longi, *ibid.*

Fravel notes that operational doctrine, force posture, and training are the main components of China's military strategy.³³ Any major change to one of these should represent substantial change to China's military strategy. But rather than following this guidance he puts forth, Fravel mainly adheres to whether there are major changes to the language of the MSGs, changes in warfare, and party unity to determine whether there is major, minor, or no change in China's military strategy. Thus, a more detailed and granular analysis of these components, and the PLA's actual behavior, could reveal alterations to China's military strategy that one cannot find in the MSGs.

Focusing on party unity can also be highly problematic because it is impossible to know for sure whether there is party unity with elite Chinese politics being a black box. It increasingly is, as Winston Churchill once described the Soviet Union, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma".³⁴ There is no public record of who votes for what, and deliberations that occur are unavailable. This mystery of CCP policymaking has only been amplified under Xi, where information is becoming more difficult to come by.³⁵ During Xi's tenure there has been widespread speculation occasionally that Xi was facing pushback from the party elite, only to see those arguments completely squashed shortly thereafter. Fravel's use of party unity to help explain the last time there were major changes to the MSG—in 1993—is also highly questionable.

³³ Fravel, *ibid*, 30-32.

³⁴ Winston Churchill in Alan Cowell, "Churchill's definition of Russia still rings true" *New York Times*, August 1, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/01/world/europe/01iht-letter.1.14939466.html>

³⁵ Odd Arne Westad, "What Does the West Really Know About Xi's China?" *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/what-does-west-really-know-about-xis-china>; Liza Lin and Chun Han Wong, "China Increasingly Obscures True State of its Economy to Outsiders" *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-data-security-law-ships-ports-court-cases-universities-11638803230>; Peter Martin, Jennifer Jacobs, and Nick Wadhams, "China Is Evading U.S. Spies — and the White House Is Worried" *Bloomberg*, November 10, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-11-10/china-under-xi-is-tough-target-for-cia-spies-hurting-biden-s-beijing-policy#xj4y7vzkg>

The 1993 MSG was written in 1992. That year Deng went on his famous southern tour to push through greater economic reforms that faced resistance by some of the Party elite. One scholar describes Deng's southern tour as the most notable example—aside from Mao's Cultural Revolution—of a Party leader expressing disagreement with the Party centre in a public way.³⁶ Thus, if there had been Party unity in 1992, Deng never would have needed to take his famous southern tour to begin with. Fravel's framework of Party unity as one of two core pillars of explaining major change in strategy is also now likely obsolete. With Xi dominating the political system and having placed his closest allies on the most recent Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC),³⁷ it is highly unlikely anyone will voice or express some sort of disagreement in a public way. Or, even in a way that Fravel measures Party unity.

What Fravel describes as minor changes to the 2014 MSG that led to dramatic changes to force posture, organization, and command structure, suggests there is a possible disconnect between strategy and PLA's behavior, and one needs to look beyond the MSGs to accurately capture what is going on. However, it is also possible that Fravel offers too strict of an interpretation. Tai Ming Cheung argues there are several components in the 2014 MSG that offer signs “of major change that cumulatively point to a far more consequential change to China's thinking and approach to future war than the assessment offered by Fravel.”³⁸ Overall, the major void in Fravel's work is what exactly does China's military strategy really explain in terms of

³⁶ Olivia Cheung, “Factional Model-making in China: Party Elites' Open Political Contention in the Policy Process” *The China Quarterly* no. 251, (2022), 705-706.

³⁷ Yew Lun Tian and Tony Munroe, “China's Xi clinches third term, packs leadership with loyalists” *Reuters*, October 24, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-communist-party-politburo-standing-committee-unveiled-2022-10-23/>; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “The 20th Party Congress: Xi Jinping Exerts Overwhelming Control Over Personnel, but Offers No Clues on Reviving the Economy” *China Brief* 22 no.20, (2022), 6-10, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-20th-party-congress-xi-jinping-exerts-overwhelming-control-over-personnel-but-offers-no-clues-on-reviving-the-economy/>

³⁸ Tai Ming Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate: The Rise of the Chinese Techno-Security State* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 150.

PLA behavior.³⁹ This study aims to focus more on PLA behavior rather than concentrating on policy documents.

Moreover, Fravel curiously seems to downplay how extensive and important the military reforms have been. Most PLA scholars describe them as unprecedented, but Fravel in passing just mentions them as organizational reforms without acknowledging how profound they are.⁴⁰ Also, when it comes to the MSGs, they usually only appear once a decade, a deeper analysis of what the PLA and CCP say—and do—could better help understand China's strategy than just focusing on the MSGs. Most of the research on China's military strategy in recent years focuses on the MSGs or the concept of Active Defense. This study adds to the literature by focusing more on the micro-level by looking at things like army building, training, personnel, and force structure.

Second, Fravel gives very little attention to China's military strategy in the Xi era.⁴¹ This is surprising given how much has happened since Xi came to power in 2012 in terms of China's military capabilities and actions in the South China Sea. Xi is much more powerful leader compared to his two predecessors. Major changes to civil-military relations in the Xi era are driven in part by the anti-corruption campaign and greater efforts for the civilian sector to serve the military, and changes to the military command structure. Basically, if there have been major changes to civil-military relations in the Xi era should we not assume this will not have a noticeable effect on strategy? Since 2012, Chinese elite politics has changed from a form of collective leadership where no single individual dominates, to reverting to one-man rule that

³⁹ David Bachman, "Active Defense: China's Military Strategy since 1949 By M. Taylor Fravel. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. 376 pp. \$35.00 (cloth)" *Journal of Chinese History* 中國歷史學刊 4, no. 1 (2020), 215.

⁴⁰ Fravel, *ibid*, 2019.

⁴¹ The amount contains just five pages: 230-235, and briefly again in the conclusion.

defined the Mao era, and to a lesser extent the Deng era. Rather than being a reformer and supporting closer integration to the U.S led order as many in the U.S. predicted and hoped, Xi has become a strongman who has come to control—some would say dominate—China’s political system.⁴² Many compare Xi to Mao,⁴³ however, it is clear Xi is not quite like any previous Chinese leader.⁴⁴ Yet, like Mao, Xi’s ability to consolidate political power has developed in significant part because of the support and control of the PLA.⁴⁵

While there is scholarly work assessing Xi’s influence on China’s media,⁴⁶ political system,⁴⁷ society,⁴⁸ economy,⁴⁹ and foreign policy,⁵⁰ there is no similar research that analyzes Xi’s effect on the PLA, other than a testimony and report by Timothy Heath before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. The testimony, however, is not an in-depth analysis and concludes that Xi’s consolidation of power has strengthened discipline and allowed the CCP greater control over the PLA.⁵¹ A deeper dive into Xi’s effect on the PLA and military

⁴² Jeremy Page, “How the U.S. Misread China’s Xi: Hoping for a Globalist, It Got an Autocrat” December 23, 2020, *The Wall Street Journal*, https://www.wsj.com/articles/xi-jinping-globalist-autocrat-misread-11608735769?mod=article_inline

⁴³ For just a couple examples see Hannah Beech, “China’s Chairman Builds a Cult of Personality” *Time*, March 31, 2016, <https://time.com/4277504/chinas-chairman/>; Doug Bandow, “Xi Jinping Wants to Become the New Mao” *Cato Institute*, March 26, 2020, <https://www.cato.org/commentary/xi-jinping-wants-become-new-mao>

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Why Are There No Biographies of Xi Jinping?” *The Atlantic*, January 30, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/01/xi-jinping-china-biography/617852/>

⁴⁵ Willy Lam, “Xi Jinping Consolidates Power by Promoting Alumni of the Nanjing Military Region” *China Brief* January 9, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/xi-jinping-consolidates-power-by-promoting-alumni-of-the-nanjing-military-region/#.VLZDaivF-3w>

⁴⁶ Ashley Esarey, “Propaganda As a Lens for Assessing Xi Jinping’s Leadership.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 132 (2021), 888-901.

⁴⁷ Timothy Cheek, “Xi Jinping’s Counter-Reformation: the reassertion of ideological governance in historical perspective” *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 132 (2021), 875-887.

⁴⁸ Sarah Lee and Kevin O’Brien, “Adapting in Difficult Circumstances: Protestant Pastors and the Xi Jinping Effect” *Journal of Contemporary China* 30, no. 132 (2021), 902-914.

⁴⁹ Long Piao and Kwangho Jung. “The Effect of the Xi Jinping Administration’s Anticorruption Campaign on the Performance of State-Owned Enterprises.” *Asian Survey* 61, no. 5 (2021), 711-741.

⁵⁰ Dylan Loh, “Diplomatic Control, Foreign Policy, and Change Under Xi Jinping: a field-theoretic account” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 47, no. 3 (2018), 111-145.

⁵¹ Timothy Heath, “The Consolidation of Political Power in China Under Xi Jinping: Implications for the PLA and Domestic Security Forces” Testimony for U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *Rand*, February 7, 2019, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT500/CT503/RAND_CT503.pdf

strategy is still much needed. And considering the evidence finding Xi has had a significant effect on China's media, political system, and society, it is hard to think he has not also had a significant effect on the PLA.

I argue that it is important to study the influence of an individual leader on military strategy—particularly in an authoritarian country—and that doing so can help understand recent changes to China's military strategy. Talmadge argues that military change is more likely to occur—and more swiftly—in regimes that are personalist dictatorships.⁵² China under Xi has become more of a personalist regime. Thus, if changes are more likely in personalist regimes, changes to military strategy are also potentially more likely to occur. Additionally, Xi potentially sees himself as the only capable Chinese leader for the moment who can make China the dominant power in East Asia.⁵³ In sum, this dissertation attempts to fill in the gap of examining Xi's effect on China's military strategy.

Devoting greater attention to the Xi era also contributes to discussions of why the large-scale reforms were finally introduced in late 2015-2016. Some China scholars assert that the drivers behind the military reforms is the PLA, or that China's strategy in the Xi era is a continuation that has been pushed by PLA reformers since the 1990s.⁵⁴ This argument is problematic because scholars seem to believe the PLA is the creator of the reforms, but at the same time is the key reason the reforms were opposed and delayed. For instance, Finkelstein on

⁵² Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictators Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes*. (NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 25.

⁵³ Alice Su, "Dreams of a Red Emperor: The Relentless Rise of Xi Jinping" *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-22/china-xi-jinping-mao-zedong-communist-party>

⁵⁴ Timothy Heath, "An Overview of China's National Military Strategy" *China's Evolving Military Strategy*, Joe McReynolds ed. (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 1-39; David Finkelstein, "Breaking the Paradigm" in Saunders et al eds, *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*. National Defense University Press, Washington D.C., 2019, 72; John Chen, "Choosing the Least Bad Option" in Saunders et al eds, *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*. National Defense University Press, Washington D.C., 2019, 85; An Wang and Ning Fang, *军队条令条例教程* [Course on Regulations and Ordinances of the Armed Forces] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1999), 126-129; found in Dossi, *ibid*, 101.

one hand argues the architect of the reforms could only have come from professionals within the PLA—although adds a caveat it is not clear which officer or group of officers is responsible—but when explaining why it took so long for the reforms to be implemented within the organization of the PLA itself, attributes it to resistance by the PLA.⁵⁵ Why would you oppose the very thing you created? The only reasonable answer would suggest there were two different camps of those who supported the reforms and those who opposed it, with the camp opposing winning out. Following Finkelstein’s analysis, the only possible conclusion is that the group of officers who devised the reforms did not have enough political capacity to enforce them, which would then imply that they were of lower rank, and thus could not pass the reforms without strong backing by a powerful political figure.

Joel Wuthnow has argued Xi was able to pass the reforms by offering carrots to the PLA, largely through granting autonomy and keeping the same promotion pattern in place.⁵⁶ However, this is puzzling because the PLA already enjoyed a large degree of autonomy before Xi took over. In fact, there is strong evidence the PLA has far less autonomy under Xi than it had in the Jiang and Hu eras. Immediately after replacing Hu, Xi introduced new regulations through the CMC that reached so far as to curb celebrations, the arrangement of theatrical performances, and encouraged the use of public transportation.⁵⁷ Moreover, Xi has instituted the Chairman Responsibility System which places more power in Xi’s hands as the civilian leader, launched the anti-corruption campaign, and strengthened the political-commissar system. All these measures indicate the PLA enjoys far less autonomy today than it did before Xi.

⁵⁵ David Finkelstein, “Breaking the Paradigm: Drivers Behind the PLA’s Current Period of Reform” in Saunders et al eds, *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*. (Washington D.C.:National Defense University Press, 2019), 54, 72.

⁵⁶ Joel Wuthnow, “Why Xi Jinping Doesn’t Trust His Own Military” *Foreign Affairs*, September 26, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/why-xi-jinping-doesnt-trust-his-own-military#:~:text=Xi's%20knowledge%20of%20the%20PLA's,in%20a%20crisis%20or%20conflict>.

⁵⁷ Mulvenon, “Comrade, Where’s My Military Car?” *ibid*, 2.

Whoever is largely responsible for devising the reforms is uncertain, but the reason why the reforms finally were passed is clear. As mentioned above, although the PLA acknowledged the need to shift toward joint operations, it took two decades for the command structure to change. James Mulvenon noted that “The P.L.A. has known that they have to go to a joint force structure and get rid of the military regions for 25 years, but they had not been able to generate the political will to be able to do that. He was able to do it.”⁵⁸ ‘He’ in that sentence, referring to Xi. Moreover, Xi’s influence can be seen from those who argue he has given a green light to the PLA to be more aggressive.⁵⁹ Finally, for the Xi era, I examine the content of Xi Jinping thought on strengthening the Army (习近平强军思想) and compare it to the discussion and content of strengthening the Army in the Jiang and Hu eras.

Finally, Fravel notes that there has not been any major change since 1993, when the CMC came out with its first MSG since 1980. This is also surprising considering how far China’s military modernization has come since then. Moreover, China’s power position in the world today is night and day different from 1993. The China that exists today is a different country in terms of power and capabilities compared to China of 1993. Chinese defense spending today is nearly twenty times more than in 1993,⁶⁰ its arsenal contains more than quadruple the number of ICBMs,⁶¹ it has tripled the size of the navy to now possessing the largest naval fleet in the world, is the largest exporter of armed drones,⁶² and is advancing in developing hypersonic

⁵⁸ James Mulvenon, cited in Chris Buckley and Steven Lee Meyers, “Xi Jinping Presses Military Overhaul, and Two Generals Disappear” *New York Times*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/world/asia/xi-jinping-military-china-purge.html>

⁵⁹ Bruce Elleman in Brent Crane, “China’s Sea Change” *The Wire China*, May 29, 2022, <https://www.thewirechina.com/2022/05/29/chinas-sea-change/>

⁶⁰ SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <https://milex.sipri.org/sipri>

⁶¹ Hans Kristensen, “DIA Estimates for Chinese Nuclear Warheads” FAS (Federation of American Scientists), May 31, 2019, <https://fas.org/blogs/security/2019/05/chinese-nuclear-stockpile/>

⁶² Michael Peck, “China Is a Major Exporter of Combat Drones” *The National Interest*, September 8, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/china-major-exporter-combat-drones-193246>

missiles.⁶³ Essentially, in the face of this notable pace in military modernization, and changes to foreign policy, why has there not been more change?

1.4 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation proceeds as follows. The first chapter goes over the research question, literature review and methodology. Discussion and literature on military strategy in general, and research on China's military strategy is assessed, along with research on individual leadership in foreign affairs. The methodology includes a straightforward qualitative comparative case analysis approach that draws out what has changed, and stayed the same, in China's military strategy in the Xi era. Chapter two provides a background on the PLA. Although formed in 1927, the focus will be on the main developments of the PLA from roughly 1949 until 1997, when Jiang Zemin began to establish more authority over the PLA. The third chapter dives into China's military strategy in the Jiang Zemin era, a time-period that covers 1997-2004. While Hu Jintao became president and general secretary of the party in 2002, Jiang remained on as CMC chairman until 2004. Chapter four examines strategy in the Hu Jintao era, from 2005-2012.

Although both the Jiang and Hu eras could have been combined, I chose not to because it still provides an analysis of the Xi era, and pre-Xi era; follows trends in views of strategy from one administration to the next. Also, lumping the two eras together would be a lot for one chapter. Chapter five analyzes Chinese assessments of threats, risks, and assessments of opportunities. These encapsulate views such as developments in Taiwan, changes to military activity or growth of regional neighbors, and the overall security situation of both China's near abroad, and globally. Chapter six looks at military strategy in the Xi era. What—if anything—are

⁶³ Demetri Sevastapulo and Kathrin Hille, "China tests new space capability with hypersonic missile" *Financial Times*, October 16, 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/ba0a3cde-719b-4040-93cb-a486e1f843fb>

the new or defining characteristics of strategy since Xi came to power in late 2012. Chapter seven focuses on whether there has been a 'Xi effect' on military strategy and the PLA, and what that entails. Here, the chapter is partly speculative, with sources offering clear evidence for exactly how Xi has influenced strategy in short supply. A concluding chapter summarizes the findings, arguments, and the focus of army building the CCP might emphasize going forward.

2 LITERATURE AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation examines how China's military strategy has changed—and stayed the same—in the Xi Jinping era compared to the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras. I seek to identify the content of China's military strategy and analyze what is new and different under Xi, and what has stayed the same. Has China's military strategy in the Xi era been characterized more by continuity or change? China's military modernization and capabilities are dramatically improved since the 1990s, thus one would expect its military strategy to change along with it. Additionally, China's power position in the world has risen significantly. If there has been no major change in China's military strategy over the past three decades, it is important to ask why. Any military strategy is partly influenced by capabilities and interests, no major change in China's military strategy would pose a puzzle as to why there has been no major changes despite the big changes in China's capabilities and global power status.

I also examine whether the changes in China's military strategy are evident in the PLA's actions, and if it has changed, how much of this is a result from Xi's personal influence and preference, and how much does the change come from within the PLA or the collective leadership of the CCP. Essentially, which entity—or individual—is largely responsible for driving and shaping China's current military strategy, or how much of it is a combination of the institutions and Xi's personal views? Although trying to disentangle the views of Xi from the PLA and CCP is an extremely difficult task, the implications might suggest if it is Xi driving military strategy, there needs to be more of an emphasis on trying to understand Xi's personal views of military strategy.

Most scholars agree Xi is the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng or Mao. However, scholars of China's military strategy mainly argue that changes in China's strategy and

policy should not be credited to Xi. On the surface these two positions appear to be at odds. If Xi is the most powerful leader since Mao, why would he not want to advance his vision and ideas of military strategy? To reach Mao and Deng's status in the CCP requires ambition, and ambitious individuals like Xi do not sit back and have others or the bureaucracy largely determine the most important matters. Just as importantly, are Xi's intentions congruent with the aims and interests of senior PLA leaders?⁶⁴ Little is known about the current relationship between Xi and the PLA leadership. One official in the Pentagon recently argued Xi does not trust anybody in the PLA.⁶⁵ But it is unclear how accurate that assessment is.

2.1 Literature

Defining military strategy is an inherently difficult task due to numerous different interpretations that have been offered. It is also challenging because scholars speak about national military strategy, others military strategy, and still others military doctrine. Many write about military strategy, national military strategy, and military doctrine without attempting to separately define each concept while using them interchangeably. Additionally, the most notable writers on military strategy like Clausewitz usually speak about military strategy only in terms of how it applies during warfare.⁶⁶ In the early 1990s, the U.S. Army War College defined strategy as essentially involving three key things: ends, ways, and means.⁶⁷ Strategy has similarly been described as "A plan of action designed in order to achieve some end; a purpose together with a system of measures for its accomplishment."⁶⁸ Simply, a goal is being pursued through certain

⁶⁴ Wuthnow and Saunders, "Large and in Charge" *ibid*, 544.

⁶⁵ Eric Schmitt and Zach Montague, "Balloon Crisis Highlighted a Split in China's Leadership, Pentagon Official Says" *New York Times*, February 17, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/17/us/politics/chinese-spy-balloon-debris.html>

⁶⁶ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1873).

⁶⁷ Colonel Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., USA (ret.) (ed.), *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, U.S. Army War College, 1993.

⁶⁸ Joseph Wylie Jr., *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 14.

means to realize that goal. Well-designed strategies are those that tightly connect “threats, objectives, policies, tactics, forces, and other strategies.”⁶⁹

For this study, national military strategy and military strategy is considered as the same thing, scholars often go back and forth in using the terms. Collins explains military strategy as the science of utilizing armed force in all types of conditions, whether in peacetime or in war, to achieve national security objectives.⁷⁰ For this research I use Mark Cozad’s definition of military strategy regarding China as the “Guidance on how to use military power to achieve the political and strategic goals outlined by central leaders”.⁷¹ But, like Collins highlights, the assumption is that the guidance on how to use that power given by central leaders occurs in both war and peacetime.

National military strategy has been described as “the set of ideas that a military organization holds for fighting future wars.”⁷² All countries share common components of national military strategies that include: (1) they are representative of authoritative management, (2) national military strategies often provide guidance for how the military element ought to support national objectives, (3) it is not minuscule details that comprise national military strategies, but usually large and wide-ranging concepts, (4) national military strategies commonly are employed as planning guidelines. The guidelines are usually connected with certain time frames that offer guidance across a range of horizons such as long-term or short-term, (5) although different countries organize the elements of national military strategy in various ways and employ different vocabulary to specify the components, all typically address

⁶⁹ John M. Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (VA: Potomac Books, 2008), 65.

⁷⁰ Collins, *ibid*, 301.

⁷¹ Mark Cozad, “An Overview of China’s National Military Strategy” *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, Joe McReynolds ed. (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 14.

⁷² Fravel, “Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China’s Changes in Military Strategy” *ibid*, 40.

the matters of ends, means, and ways, (6) national military strategies frequently are informed by the analytic judgements that drive rationality for the strategy.⁷³

How does military strategy originate? Collins writes that the preferred military strategy of a country, and how it's originally formed, begins with the national interest (step 1), threats (step 2), domestic policies, political-military objectives—which is directly impacted by the national interests and threats—and foreign policies (step 3).⁷⁴ A different type of view argues the interaction of national power with ideational factors such as strategic culture generate a certain military strategy.⁷⁵ Largely missing in discussions on the factors that affects military strategy is the influence of a national leader. This is somewhat surprising because while a leader can often be the driving force for whether a country goes to war, they also can have an impact on a country's military strategy. One prominent example is the turn of the twentieth century when the U.S. was becoming a global power. During that time, Teddy Roosevelt played a noticeable role in military strategy, by particularly putting emphasis on improving naval power.⁷⁶

How do militaries innovate or change? The literature holds several external explanations for why a state might change its military strategy.⁷⁷ The first is an urgent security threat which happens when a country's existing strategy is discovered to be inadequate following battlefield losses, or a new foe arises.⁷⁸ The second is when a state is forced to change its strategy because there is a change in the military strategy of an opponent.⁷⁹ Third, is the advent of new missions

⁷³ Finkelstien, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'" *ibid*, 79-80.

⁷⁴ Collins, *ibid*, 6.

⁷⁵ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Ideas, Perceptions, and Power: An Examination of China's Military Strategy" in *Strategic Asia 2017-18: Power, Ideas, and Military Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*, Ashley Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills eds (Washington D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017), 21.

⁷⁶ James Reckner, *Teddy Roosevelt's Great White Fleet* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988).

⁷⁷ Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy" *ibid*, 42.

⁷⁸ This idea is from Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), 59-79.

⁷⁹ Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955-1991* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 4.

for the military that are wrought by changes in a country's political goals.⁸⁰ Finally, the arrival of new technologies can lead states to contemplate what it could mean for warfare and alter their military strategies.⁸¹ Zisk argues interaction between domestic and international political factors, civilian political strategy, and foreign military doctrine can also help explain change in military doctrine.⁸²

Scholars are divided as to whether military change occurs through military autonomy or civilian intervention. Zisk, Nielsen, Rosen, and Fravel argue change is driven primarily by the military independent of civilian involvement.⁸³ Civilian intervention is only effective, according to Rosen, when it protects or supports the senior military officers who devise new strategies or changes.⁸⁴ If respected senior officers are the ones creating new changes, why would they need protection from those who the military views as outsiders—namely civilians? One assumption is likely that a group of pro-reform officers are opposed by anti-reform members of a different branch. As evidence for this argument Rosen offers just one case, from the U.S. military in the early 1960s.⁸⁵

Differing arguments highlight strategic change must occasionally be driven by civilian intervention. The military is a massive organization, which, like other massive organizations, is resistant to change. Organizations have their own goals and operating procedures, which affects their behavior and makes it likely that when change happens, according to Allison, it occurs

⁸⁰ Posen, "The Sources of Military Doctrine" *ibid*, 59–79.

⁸¹ Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 67-75.

⁸² Zisk, *ibid*, 5.

⁸³ Zisk, *ibid*, 178-180; Rosen, *ibid*, 7-21; Suzanna Nielsen, *An Army Transformed: The US Army's Post-Vietnam Recovery and the Dynamics of Change in Military Organizations*. (PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010); Fravel, *Active Defense*, *ibid*, 19-20.

⁸⁴ Rosen, *ibid*, 21.

⁸⁵ Rosen, *ibid*, 85-92.

slowly over a long period of time.⁸⁶ Making things more complicated however, is that military organizations themselves are not monolithic entities composed of individuals who are in complete agreement. It is an institution made up of senior officers who disagree amongst themselves on how to fight the next war, and which strategies to incorporate.⁸⁷ Additionally, each branch competes for funding and resources provided by the government.

Thus, Posen argues, change to strategy or fostering adaptation occurs through pressure from civilian leaders. Without it, militaries will emphasize their own institutional interests.⁸⁸ The importance of civilian intervention has been demonstrated in literature by Jack Snyder who noted a lack of civilian oversight contributed to the mismatch between Germany's security goals and military doctrine before WWI.⁸⁹ Burak Kadercan highlighted an absence of civilian intervention for the military degradation of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman civilian leadership was unable to intervene and push for military reform because of the formidable bargaining position of the Janissary corp'.⁹⁰

Allison writes when change is adopted quickly, it usually is a result of either sharp increases or decreases in the military budget, or spectacular performance failures.⁹¹ Explaining why and when innovation occurs despite the inherent nature of militaries to resist change, Kendrick Kuo argues when innovation does take place the reason is largely because the service is in crisis. Kuo describes "a wicked mismatch" where there is a simultaneous phenomenon of

⁸⁶ Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. (Boston MA: Little Brown and Company, 1971), 67-70.

⁸⁷ Rosen, *ibid*, 18-20.

⁸⁸ Posen, *ibid*, 40-60.

⁸⁹ Jack Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914*. (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁹⁰ Burak Kadercan, "Strong Armies, Slow Adaptation. Civil-Military Relations and the Diffusion of Military Power" *International Security* 38 no.3, (2014), 117-152.

⁹¹ Allison, *ibid*, 85.

shrinking resources and growing commitments. This growing gulf between resources and commitments then spurs the military to innovate out of desperation.⁹²

Finally, doctrinal changes could still leave the internal workings of military organizations intact because job reassignments, elimination of units, and creation of new branches are likely to be resisted by some in the military. Reforms creates groups that are losers—who see a loss of influence—which makes some in the military inherently resistant to changes.⁹³ Therefore, a disconnect between doctrinal changes—like the MSGs in the case of China—and actions that are playing out in the military can arise.

Examining why it took so long for the PLA to implement reforms to facilitate a military more capable of joint operations, Simone Dossi explains that it was a lack of civilian intervention. Innovators within the military will only be able to promote reform when they are backed by civilians against those who are opposed to the reforms.⁹⁴ Whether there is civilian intervention is conditioned on the nature of civil-military relations because not all forms of civil-military relations are conducive to civilian intervention. During the Jiang and Hu administrations the military gained much more autonomy. However, shortly after Xi took over he reversed the trend of greater PLA autonomy in the civil-military structure. By rapidly consolidating power Xi's position in relation to the PLA was far greater than Hu and Jiang. And through this process Xi was able to provide the civilian intervention necessary to push through the military reforms and changes.⁹⁵

⁹² Kendrick Kuo, *Military Magic: Military Innovation and Combat Effectiveness in Modern War*, 9-10, book manuscript.

⁹³ Rosen, *ibid*, 44.

⁹⁴ Simone Dossi, "Explaining Military Change in China: Reintroducing Civilian Intervention" *Journal of Contemporary China*, 31 no.133, (2022), 107-108.

⁹⁵ Dossi, *ibid*, 112-113.

2.2 Different Forms of Strategy

In trying to differentiate forms of strategy, Posen explains defensive strategy as denying an adversary the goals that they pursue. Offensive strategy aims to disarm an opponent and wipe out their armed forces. Deterrent strategy attempts to punish an aggressor by raising the enemy's costs of their objective without lowering one's own.⁹⁶ While this approach is compact and easy to use, it often does not capture change within military organizations, or changes to the force posture, concepts of operations, or training. A state also might have several differing military objectives, some of which could require offensive capabilities while the other one's defensive. Also, how defensive strategy is defined can be puzzling because it should already be assumed that every country seeks to deny an adversary the goals the adversary is pursuing. And a country might use military—and non-military—means that are either offensive or deterrent in preventing an adversary from accomplishing the goals they pursue.

Moreover, some national military strategies pursue limited aims by blending defensive and offensive operations.⁹⁷ China's long held active defense strategy is a "blurring of the difference between what are defensive operations and what are offensive."⁹⁸ Even if China were to carry out an offensive strike or operation, Chinese strategists likely will consider it a defensive move, any action by China would be labeled as defensive.⁹⁹ Thus, conceptualizing China's military strategy can be confusing if one were to adopt the offensive, defensive, deterrent approach, even if operations were the sole focus of analysis.

⁹⁶ Posen, *ibid*, 14.

⁹⁷ Fravel, *Active Defense*, 10-11.

⁹⁸ Andrew Scobell, "China's 'Nested' Worldview" in *China's Strategic Arsenal: Worldview, Doctrine, and Systems*, James Smith and Paul Bolt eds. (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021), 38.

⁹⁹ John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 11-12, 40-42; found in Scobell, "China's 'Nested' Worldview" *ibid*, 44.

2.3 PLA Strategy

China's 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* describes military strategy as the “fangzhen and strategems for planning and guiding the overall construction and employment of military power, centered on war” and that “military strategy proceeds from international strategy and the general situation of national development.”¹⁰⁰ China defines its own strategy as “active defense.” The strategy is portrayed as being defensive but also operationally offensive. It is based on the idea that “once Beijing has determined that an adversary has damaged or intends to damage China's interests at the strategic level, Beijing will be justified in responding defensively” at the operational or tactical level, even if the adversary has not yet conducted offensive military operations.¹⁰¹ Another broad description of the active defense strategy summarizes it as forming a group of wide ranging tactical principles along with a set of extremely common operative concepts in order to conduct warfare at the strategic stage of conflict.¹⁰²

PLA scholars assert that China's military strategy is embodied in the Military Strategic Guidelines (MSG) and the National Military Strategy (NMS),¹⁰³ from here on also referred to as the MSGs and NMS. The Military Strategic Guidelines are often given in a speech by the chairman of the CMC to the PLA leadership.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, the infrequent publication of the *Science of Military Strategy* is seen as a key source for studying China's military strategy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Sun Zhaoli et al, *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2013), 3, found in Timothy Heath, “An Overview of China's National Military Strategy” *China's Evolving Military Strategy*, ed Joe McReynolds (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 14.

¹⁰¹ “China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win” *Defense Intelligence Agency*, 2019, <https://www.dia.mil/Military-Power-Publications/>

¹⁰² Finkelstein, “China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the Military Strategic Guidelines” *ibid*, 88.

¹⁰³ Cozad, “Chinese Contingency Planning for Regional Hotspots” *ibid*, 3; Finkelstein, “China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the Military Strategic Guidelines” *ibid*, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Finkelstein, “China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the ‘Military Strategic Guidelines’” *ibid*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor Fravel, “China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy: The Science of Military Strategy from 2001 and 2013” in *China's Evolving Military Strategy*, ed Joe McReynolds (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 41.

However, because the *Science of Military Strategy* is written by top PLA officers, it is not as authoritative as the MSGs and NMS which comes directly from the Party.

China's strategic orientation is primarily driven by the direction and gravity of threats and is "based on the nature and priority of competing interests, the relative strengths of forces, geography, and the overall strategic situation in the region."¹⁰⁶ Most scholars agree that external factors play a significant role when the PLA makes changes to strategy.¹⁰⁷ There is consensus that changes to China's strategic direction occurs infrequently,¹⁰⁸ and when it does, it's usually based on key changes in the structure of the international security environment. Finkelstein argues that the CCP introduces new MSGs when there is at least one major change to the four following areas: China's domestic situation, the international order, China's security situation and the security atmosphere, and the nature of warfare.¹⁰⁹

Views of the external environment encompasses how the CCP perceives the direction of primary threats, geography, relative strength of forces, and the strategic situation of the region.¹¹⁰ If there are major changes in the view of the CCP (expressed through speeches, the state media, or policy documents) with regard to the relative strength of forces in the neighboring region, strategic situation, or direction of primary threats, followed by minor or major change in military strategy, then this is taken as evidence that CCP views of the external environment has caused change in military strategy.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Cozad, "Chinese Contingency Planning for Regional Hotspots" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), p.4 <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT471.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Heath, "An Overview of China's National Military Strategy" *ibid*, 26.

¹⁰⁸ Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China's Military Strategy Since 1949* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the Military Strategic Guidelines" *ibid*, 87.

¹¹⁰ Cozad, "Chinese Contingency Planning for Regional Hotspots" *ibid*, p.4; Burke et al, "People's Liberation Army Operational Concepts" *ibid*.

The domestic situation consists of a two-fold consideration. The first is the internal security of the country. Domestic hotspots such as Xinjiang, Tibet—and now Hong Kong—have required large amounts of resources and manpower to preserve security and challenges to CCP rule. The second consideration is the economic situation which directly affects how much money can be contributed to upgrades in military technology and spending on the armed forces in general. Changes in warfare refers to the changing nature of warfare in the international system and is influenced mostly by great powers or their clients, using the patron's weapons. During and after the war, states assess the most important elements and what aspects they might need to incorporate into their own military.¹¹¹

Fravel asserts that there are two main issues that explain major changes in China's military strategy since 1949: when there occurs substantial changes to the way warfare is waged in the international system, and the leadership of the CCP is united.¹¹² Party unity is when there is consensus among the top party leaders on the most fundamental policy issues. The provision of responsibility for military affairs will be handed over to military officers with minimal oversight when there is party unity, essentially the armed forces largely determine military strategy.¹¹³ The problem with this line of analysis and argument that Fravel offers, however, is that because the CCP elite operate and prioritize secrecy when making the most important decisions, there cannot be certainty, or a strong degree of confidence, about how much unity there is among the top party officials.

There is spirited debate about how influential—if at all—Xi has been in China's large-scale military reforms. Most studies choose not to examine how much or to what extent Xi's

¹¹¹ Fravel, *Active Defense*, 15.

¹¹² Fravel, *ibid*, 39.

¹¹³ Fravel, *ibid*, 45.

influence has been. Changes in strategy usually occur through one of two different mechanisms: civilian intervention, or military autonomy. Fravel asserts that while both can be complementary at times, major changes in China's strategy have largely gone through the mechanism of military autonomy, mainly because when there has been major change to China's military strategy there is Party unity, which then means that during times of Party unity, the CCP grants a large degree of autonomy and delegation of military issues to the PLA.¹¹⁴

Based on recent history, Oriana Skylar Mastro argues China possesses five different strategies from which to choose from to confront both the internal and external challenges it faces, which include: external defense, internal defense, regional hegemony, regional power projection, and development of a globally relevant military.¹¹⁵ However, these are all very broad categories, with internal defense being a strategy that the PRC has always sought and is something every country prioritizes. Heath argues that the following areas are pertinent if one wants to study China's national military strategy: (1) military/strategic threat assessment, (2) designation/assignment of the roles and tasks of military strategy, (3) army-building guidance (4) advice on the engagement/employment of military force.¹¹⁶ PLA scholars have focused on the military/strategic threat assessment which is the main component of the MSGs, this study adds to the field of China's military strategy by examining the PRC's army-building guidance since the latter part of the Jiang Zemin administration, beginning in 1997. The next section examines the literature on the role of individual leaders.

¹¹⁴ Fravel, *Active Defense*, 16-26.

¹¹⁵ Oriana Skylar Mastro, *ibid*, 21.

¹¹⁶ Timothy Heath, "An Overview of China's National Military Strategy" in *China's Evolving Military Strategy*, Joe McReynolds ed (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 16-17.

2.4 Role of Individual Leadership

Much of the more recent literature on individual leadership in international relations focuses on topics such as why leaders initiate conflict, reputational concerns, or leadership and nuclear security.¹¹⁷ Research has found that leaders who have military experience, but no combat experience, are more likely to initiate war. Older leaders—specifically those after the age of seventy—are also more likely to be hawkish due to a desire to leave a legacy in a shortened timeframe.¹¹⁸ Foreign policy experience is also believed to be a significant factor for decision making during war.¹¹⁹ Overall, if one wants to understand risk taking it is important to consider the character of individual leaders.¹²⁰ Most of the research on individual leadership, however, comes from cases of U.S. leaders, or focuses on leaders during war.¹²¹

Leadership style is considered as the approaches in which a leader relates to those surrounding them—whether it be an adviser or other leaders.¹²² A state's foreign policy is determined by one of three types of decision-making units: coalitions, groups, or leaders.¹²³ A predominant leader is an individual who stifles opposition and has the power to make foreign

¹¹⁷ Jessica Weeks, "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict" *American Political Science Review* 106, no.2, (2012), 326-347; Michael Horowitz and Allan Stam, "How Prior Military Experience Influences the Future Militarized Behavior of Leaders" *International Organization*, 68, no.3, (2014): 527-559; Rachel Whitlark, "Nuclear Beliefs: A Leader-Focused Theory of Counter-Proliferation" *Security Studies* 26, no. 4 (2017): 545-574; Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Michael Horowitz, Allan Stam, and Cali Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Saunders, "No Substitute for Experience: Presidents, Advisers, and Information in Group Decision Making" *International Organization* 1 no.1, (2017): 219-247.

¹²⁰ Paul Kowert and Margaret Hermann, "Who Takes Risks? Daring and Caution in Foreign Policy Making" *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 41 no.5, (Oct 1997), 611-637.

¹²¹ For just a few examples see Elizabeth Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011); Robert Jervis, "Do Leaders Matter and How Would We Know?" *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013), 153-179; Yarhi-Milo, *Who Fights for Reputation*, *ibid.*

¹²² Margaret Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis" in *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, ed Jerrold Post (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), 181.

¹²³ Hermann et al, "Who Leads Matters: The Effects of Powerful Individuals" *International Studies Review*, 3 no.2 (2001): 83-131.

policy decisions.¹²⁴ When the decision for how to respond to a foreign policy problem lies in the hand of a single individual, that individual is considered as a predominant leader.¹²⁵ Hermann asserts that several traits are particularly helpful when examining different leadership styles:

(i) the belief that one can influence or control what happens, (2) the need for power and influence, (3) conceptual complexity (the ability to differentiate things and people in one's environment), (4) self-confidence, (5) the tendency to focus on problem solving and accomplishing something versus maintenance of the group and dealing with others' ideas and sensitivities, (6) general distrust or suspiciousness of others, and (7) the intensity with which a person holds an in-group bias.¹²⁶

Leaders are also classified as those who are goal-driven, and those who are situationally responsive.¹²⁷ Goal-driven leaders are ideologues who act on their individual principles,¹²⁸ and since they perceive the world selectively, it is inherently difficult, indeed unlikely, to change their beliefs or attitudes.¹²⁹

However, those who are situationally responsive seek consultation, and are pragmatic and opportunistic.¹³⁰ When planning, these leaders attempt to understand how other individuals and institutions think about situation and will respond.¹³¹ Among the three leaders in this study, Xi

¹²⁴ Hermann and Hermann, "Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How: An Empirical Enquiry" *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989), 363.

¹²⁵ Hermann et al, "Who Leads Matters" *ibid*, 84.

¹²⁶ Hermann, "Assessing Leadership Style: Trait Analysis" *ibid*, 184.

¹²⁷ Mark Snyder, *Public Appearances, Private Realities: The Psychology of Self-Monitoring* (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1987).

¹²⁸ Rufus Browning and Herbert Jacob, "The Interaction Between Politicians' Personalities and Attributes of Their Roles and Political Systems" In *A Source Book for the Study of Personality and Politics*, ed by Fred I. Greenstein and Michael Lerner (Chicago: Markham, 1971); Gordon DiRenzo, "Politicians and Personality: A Cross-Cultural Perspective" in *A Psychological Examination of Political Leaders*, ed by Margaret Hermann (New York: Free Press, 1977).

¹²⁹ Margaret Hermann, "Personality and Foreign Policymaking: A Study of 53 Heads of Government." in *Foreign Policy Decision Making: Perceptions, Cognitions, and Artificial Intelligence*, ed Donald A. Sylvan and Steve Chan. New York: Praeger, 1984).

¹³⁰ Hermann et al, "Who Leads Matters" *ibid*, 87.

¹³¹ Michael Driver, "Individual Differences as Determinants of Aggression in the Inter-Nation Simulation" in *A Psychological Examination of Political Leaders*, ed Margaret Hermann, (New York: Free Press, 1977); Philip Stewart, Margaret Hermann, and Charles Hermann, "Modeling the 1973 Soviet Decision to Support Egypt" *American Political Science Review*, 83 (1989): 35–59.

can be described as a goal-driven leader while Jiang and Hu were situationally responsive leaders. Several articles and books on Xi agree that he believes he is on a personal mission to save the CCP and revive China as a great nation like dynasties of the past.¹³² But he is also pragmatic and opportunistic. Because of the nature of elite Chinese politics though, and the shortage of good biographies on Xi, it remains unknown the extent to which he values or considers the consultation of advisers and elites around him.

Still another characteristic of leaders overlooked in the political science literature until a recent book by Mark Menaldo is personal ambition, specifically leaders who possess transformative ambition. Leaders who have transformative ambition are largely influenced by tenets such as the desire to dramatically heighten the position of one's country in the world or alter the domestic characteristics of domestic society. Transformative leaders are described as those who attempt to make broad and audacious changes to international and domestic politics to achieve specific goals for their country.¹³³ These leaders do not necessarily only chase after power or personal achievements, they also act in tandem with what they believe is best for the common good of the country they lead.¹³⁴ Again, like the description of leaders who are either goal-driven, or situationally responsive, Xi is a highly ambitious leader while Jiang and Hu were less so.

Nan Li argues that two main ideal types illustrate and differentiate leadership styles of Chinese leaders and their interaction with the PLA. Those who impose their will, and those who

¹³² Alice Su, "Dreams of a Red Emperor: The relentless rise of Xi Jinping" *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-22/china-xi-jinping-mao-zedong-communist-party>; Evan Osnos, "Born Red" *The New Yorker*, March 30, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/04/06/born-red>; David Shambaugh, *Following the Leader: Chinese Leaders from Mao to Now* 2nd ed (NY: Polity Press, 2023).

¹³³ Mark Menaldo, *Leadership and Transformative Ambition in International Relations* (Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar, 2013), 4.

¹³⁴ Menaldo, *ibid*, 5.

curry favor. Leaders who impose their will inhibit the PLA from doing things it wants to do or attempts to force it to do things it does not want to do. Those who curry favor go about building support by doing what the PLA wants. These leaders show reluctance to issue orders that go against what the PLA wants.¹³⁵ Li finds that from 1997-2004, Jiang imposed will, Hu curried favor, and Xi curried favor at the beginning of his term as secretary general and chairman of the CMC, but is increasingly capable of imposing will.¹³⁶

However, this research by Li on different leadership styles and interaction with the PLA was published only shortly after Xi became leader in 2015. Since then, Xi has removed presidential term limits, begun a third term in power, and solidified his hold over the PLA through the Chairman responsibility system—while eliminating the collective leadership structure and strengthening his control of the CCP.¹³⁷ Xi has become what some describe as the “chairman of everything.”¹³⁸ Moreover, Xi’s current position and power vis-a-vis the PLA is the strongest of any leader since Mao. David Shambaugh argues that who is the leader in China matters because of the nature of the political system. In an autocratic system such as China where institutional safeguards are not as strong as they are in democracies, it matters a great deal whether the leader is Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, or Xi Jinping.¹³⁹ Xi’s leadership, beliefs, and governing style is all the more significant because unlike Hu Jintao or Jiang Zemin, Xi was not

¹³⁵ Nan Li, “Top Leaders and the PLA: The Different Styles of Jiang, Hu, and Xi” in *PLA Influence on China’s National Security Policymaking*, Phillip Saunders and Andrew Scobell eds (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 121-122.

¹³⁶ Li, *ibid*, 122.

¹³⁷ Chun Han Wong, *Party of One: Xi Jinping and China’s Superpower Future* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2023).

¹³⁸ Katie Stallard, “How Xi Jinping Views the World” *The New Statesmen*, March 20, 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/asia/china/2023/03/xi-jinping-views-world-autocracy-thought>

¹³⁹ Yasheng Huang, “The Rise and Fall of the EAST: MIT’s Yasheng Huang on his new book” 44:40-45:20, Sinica Podcast, August 21, 2023, <https://thechinaproject.com/podcast/the-rise-and-fall-of-the-east-mits-yasheng-huang-on-his-new-book/>

content with collective-style leadership.¹⁴⁰ Overall, since Xi's time in power it is evident that leaders differ, and are considerably important.¹⁴¹

2.5 Methodology

The question that drives this research is whether and to what degree has China's military strategy changed under Xi Jinping compared to China's previous two leaders, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. I choose to study military strategy by looking at training and army building. Military strategy is chosen as the dependent variable rather than military doctrine for two main reasons. First, some propose that military doctrine is strongly connected with military strategy, it just adds a justificatory factor onto strategy.¹⁴² While studying military doctrine is important, one problem is that often it does not tell the whole story, or even if it will be implemented within a military organization.¹⁴³

Additionally, some believe that a country's military strategy can be considered as a higher form of military doctrine.¹⁴⁴ Thus, according to this version there is not much disconnect between doctrine and strategy. Veteran PLA scholar Paul Godwin once defined strategy as the means in which "military forces are employed to achieve the desired outcome of an actual or potential conflict." Godwin goes on to describe the relationship between strategy and doctrine as "intimately linked, for doctrinal principles have a strong determining effect on a chosen strategy."¹⁴⁵ There cannot be a disconnect between strategy and doctrine.

¹⁴⁰ Shambaugh, *Following the Leader: Chinese Leaders from Mao to Now*, *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ David Lampton, preface to *Following the Leader: from Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping*, 2nd ed (Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2019), xii-xiii.

¹⁴² Harold Hoiback, *Understanding Military Doctrine: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 1.

¹⁴³ Suzanne C. Nielsen, *An Army Transformed: The U.S. Army's Post-Vietnam Recovery and the Dynamics of Change in Military Organizations* (PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010), 18-19.

¹⁴⁴ Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy" *ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ Paul H.B. Godwin, "Compensating for Deficiencies: Doctrinal Evolution in the Chinese People's Liberation Army: 1978-1999" in *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era*, James Mulvenon and Andrew Yang eds (Santa Monica CA: Rand, 2001), 89.

The second reason is that China does not use the term military doctrine in a directly comparative way to how it is used in western countries, although the concept as thought of in the west can be found in documents like operational and combat outlines. But these documents are not openly distributed and kept classified.¹⁴⁶ The term military strategy and science of strategy can be found, particularly when accessing China's MSGs.

This study employs a qualitative case study analysis. The main goal is to define the content of military strategy in the Jiang, Xi, and Hu eras, and compare similarities and differences. As highlighted above, the components that consist of the dependent variable are training and army building. Fravel argues that changes to China's military strategy will be reflected in changes to its operational doctrine, force posture, and training. However, because China has not updated its operational doctrine in more than two decades, I leave it out of the analysis.¹⁴⁷

Force posture is a component of army building; thus, I do not consider it to be its own category. It consists of the armed forces within the different service branches—like the army and navy—and inside a particular service branch, its combat arms. Alterations to the force structure are indicative of changes in military strategy. For China, the main indicators of change in force structure would include military-wide reorganizations and curtailments, along with different types of equipment within the services.¹⁴⁸ Along with force posture, the other component of army building in this research includes weapon development and acquisition.

Military training mainly consists of military exercises. Additionally, training refers to the military education organization and if it offers the necessary skills for soldiers and officers to

¹⁴⁶ Fravel, "China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy" *ibid*, 41.

¹⁴⁷ Elsa Kania, "When Will the PLA Finally Update Its Doctrine?" *The Diplomat*, June 6, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/when-will-the-pla-finally-update-its-doctrine/>

¹⁴⁸ Fravel, "Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy" *ibid*, 49.

implement military strategy.¹⁴⁹ Training is analyzed by how often, and what type of training is conducted. The database *ProQuest* is used for the Jiang Zemin era to collect reports from newspapers such as *China Daily*, *Xinhua*, *South China Morning Post* and other outlets that report on PLA military exercises. For the Hu and Xi era's I searched for training reports with Baidu. I then catalogued the type, number of exercises, and which branch of the military did the training. Training results accounted for each era this way helps search for variation from one leader to the next. Admittedly, there are numerous exercises that go unreported. But capturing training that is reported in the media still offers a useful analysis for apprehending patterns or changes. Additionally, commentary on training in sources such as the *PLA Daily* and journals like *National Defense* are examined to see what the PLA and CCP see as the main focus for training should be, and assessments on the quality of training activities.

The term army building is an important one in PLA jargon. One of the issues that the MSG addresses is the focus for army building.¹⁵⁰ Thus, changes in the language or revisions to the concept of army building is likely to be an indicator for change in strategy. The concept has been defined broadly before by the PLA as “The general term for the various tasks of forming an army and improving the combat effectiveness of the army. Includes military work, political work, and logistical work.”¹⁵¹ Currently though, the PLA describes it as “a general designation of all activities to build armed forces [zujian jundui], maintain and improve the system of military power, and increase combat power.”¹⁵² Andrew Scobell has made it synonymous with the term military modernization by noting it is “modernizing the military or what might be called

¹⁴⁹ Fravel, “Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China’s Changes in Military Strategy” *ibid*, 49.

¹⁵⁰ Finkelstein, *ibid*, 129.

¹⁵¹ 杨庆旺【Yang Qingwang】中国军事知识辞典【Chinese Military Knowledge Dictionary】Ha Hua【哈华】ed. 北京: 华夏出版社 [Beijing: Huaxia Publishing House, 1987], 328.

¹⁵² Junshi kexue yuan, ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefang jun junyu*, p. 8, found in Fravel, *Active Defense*, 67-68.

‘army building.’”¹⁵³ Similarly, Dennis Blasko also describes it as a form of military modernization, but more specifically that which is focused on the long-term, decades long focus on personnel and force structure.¹⁵⁴

The framework below highlights how this study envisions military strategy changing. First, Finkelstein notes that army building is composed of the three key aspects of military modernization: “(1) The development, procurement, acquisition, and fielding of new weapons systems, technologies, and combat capabilities; (2) institutional, structural, systemic, and personnel reforms; and (3) doctrinal adjustments, etc.”¹⁵⁵ Army building can thus be seen as a critical aspect of China’s military strategy because it consists of the basic components such as weapon development and procurement, combat abilities, doctrine, and reforms to force structure. Examining army building is a core tenant of China’s military strategy.

This research focuses on the first two aspects outlined by Finkelstein. Weapon development, acquisition, and technologies, along with institutional, structural and personnel reforms. These are then examined in each case study with changes seen as changes in China’s approach to army building. I also deeply analyzed roughly twenty-five articles from Chinese publications from each era to study how China itself talks about army building. To this author’s knowledge, this is the first research that has deeply examined the way China talks about army building.

Because threats, objectives, and capabilities are also influential on military strategy, they are examined in chapter four. Threats, or the external environment, pertains to external threats

¹⁵³ Andrew Scobell, *Chinese Army Building in the Era of Jiang Zemin* (PA: U.S. Army War College, 2000), loc 77 kindle version.

¹⁵⁴ Dennis Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), 17.

¹⁵⁵ Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the ‘Military Strategic Guidelines’” *ibid*, 94.

from neighbors or western powers such as the U.S. that China perceives endangers its ability to enforce territorial claims or the ability to take Taiwan by force someday if it deems it necessary. It also contains phenomenon such as the formation of potential alliances—such as the Quad—aimed at China, or a rapid buildup in the military capability of a regional neighbor. Capabilities comprise of weapons, weapon development ability, technology, quality of weapon systems, and quality of the troops. Objectives refer to the policies put forth by the CCP through white papers, and key goals described by the PLA itself.

I follow the practice of other PLA scholars when it comes to looking for reliable resources on the PLA.¹⁵⁶ Finding sources on China’s military strategy and policy is growing increasingly challenging,¹⁵⁷ and will likely continue to become more difficult. To help alleviate this, and search for whether there is strategic change and a corresponding change in language, I mainly focus on authoritative sources such as white papers, speeches, directives issued from the CMC and ministry of defense, and plans and policy documents such as the five-year plans produced by the CCP. What might be called semi-authoritative sources include newspapers like the People’s Liberation Army Daily (解放军报), or *PLA Daily*, the *People’s Daily* (人民日报), and the Science of Military Strategy produced by the Academy of Military Sciences. Most of the sources for this study are drawn from the *People’s Daily* and *PLA Daily*. While the number of Chinese sources has greatly proliferated in the post-Mao era, and the *PLA Daily* and *People’s*

¹⁵⁶ Peter Mattis, “So You Want to be a PLA Expert?” *War on the Rocks*, June 2, 2015, <https://warontherocks.com/2015/06/so-you-want-to-be-a-pla-expert/>

¹⁵⁷ Andrea Ghiselli, “Civil–Military Relations and Organisational Preferences Regarding the Use of the Military in Chinese Foreign Policy: Insights from the Debate On MOOTW” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 43, no. 3 (2020), 422.

Daily are considered semi-authoritative, it's value and importance today remains critical for analysis of Chinese politics.¹⁵⁸

Also, Chinese journals such as *National Defense* (国防) and *Political Science Journal* (政工科学), among others, are accessed through the Chinese database CNKI. I give more weight and preference to authors who are either scholars or military officials at China's National Defense University (NDU) or at the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) who are considered reliable sources. I also follow the accounts of the different regional theater commands on the Chinese social media platform Weibo, to search for current PLA guidance, capabilities, and potential changes in force structure and training.

2.5.1 Weaknesses

Although China does have a military strategy,¹⁵⁹ and it gives information about defense policies in speeches and white papers,¹⁶⁰ one reason studying China's military strategy is challenging is because the CCP does not issue a national defense strategy document in the same way the U.S. does. Moreover, there does not exist a single principle or directive that can capture the whole of what China's military strategy is.¹⁶¹ Sources from the PLA publish widely on the topic, but oftentimes they are personal expressions and don't speak for the military or a branch of the service, and most tend to disagree strongly with each other.¹⁶² This is problematic if one wants to examine whether Xi's objectives are compatible with the interests and goals of senior

¹⁵⁸ Alice Miller, "Valedictory: Analyzing the Chinese Leadership in an Era of Sex, Money, and Power" *China Leadership Monitor* 57 (2018): 17.

¹⁵⁹ David Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy," in ed James Mulvenon and Richard H. Yang, *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 100.

¹⁶⁰ Timothy Heath, Kristen Gunness, and Cortez A. Cooper III, *The PLA and China's Rejuvenation: National Security and Military Strategies, Deterrence Concepts, and Combat Capabilities* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016), 9. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1402.html.

¹⁶¹ Heath, "An Overview of China's National Military Strategy" *ibid*, 35.

¹⁶² Taylor Fravel, "China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy" *ibid*, 41.

PLA leaders.¹⁶³ Finally, trying to decipher how much influence someone, or some organization has is filled with immense obstacles. Despite these problems, studying China's military strategy is still important because of the shortage of studies on China's military strategy, and its importance for America's own strategy and interests. And as China's military power grows, the emphasis the U.S. government places on understanding China's military strategies, capabilities with reference to hardware and quality of personnel, along with Chinese intentions should also continue to grow. The following chapter provides a background to the PLA from the founding of the PRC in 1949 up until 1997, when the first case study of the Jiang era begins.

¹⁶³ Wuthnow and Saunders, "Large and in Charge" *ibid*, 544.

3 A HISTORY OF THE PLA FROM 1949-1997

When Mao declared the Chinese people had stood up in 1949, marking the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the PLA was an exhausted force that just concluded two decades of fighting against both internal and external foes. During World War II, or the Second Sino-Japanese War, the PLA suffered 600,000 casualties¹⁶⁴ fighting in a struggle to simply survive from 1937-1945. It was a war one historian described as having “plumbed the depths of human depravity.”¹⁶⁵ The Chinese Civil War—from 1945-1949—against Chiang Chai-shek and the ruling Kuomintang began shortly thereafter, with another 1.06 million PLA soldiers dying, and over one million wounded.¹⁶⁶

Despite the immense cost of victory and unifying the country, Mao's decision to intervene in the Korean War not long after winning the civil war gave no opportunity for the PLA to recover, recuperate, or build the military. Intervening in Korea was a decision the top PLA officers were generally not in support of.¹⁶⁷ General Lin Biao purportedly faked illness to avoid assuming command, and General Peng Dehui accepted command of all Chinese forces for Korea only reluctantly.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, against the U.S., the PLA would be going up against the most powerful military in the world. Lacking adequate supplies including clothing, food, and ammunition, the PLA managed to fight the U.S. to a standstill, allowing Mao to claim victory.

¹⁶⁴ Xiaobing Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*. (University press of Kentucky, 2007), 70.

¹⁶⁵ Frank Dikotter, *The Tragedy of Liberation: A History of the Chinese Revolution* (London: Bloomsburg Publishing, 2015),

¹⁶⁶ Li, *ibid*, 75-76.

¹⁶⁷ Andrew Scobell, "Soldiers, Statesmen, Strategic Culture and China's 1950 Intervention in Korea" *Journal of Contemporary China* 8, no. 22 (1999): 477-497.

¹⁶⁸ Dikotter, *ibid*,

PLA losses were once again heavy, with 115,786 casualties and 221,264 wounded.¹⁶⁹ Others put the figure at between 700,000-900,000 (dead, injured, and missing). However, these are rough estimates, the PRC never gave exact statistics for the conflict.¹⁷⁰

3.1 Overall Background

3.1.1 CCP-PLA Relations, Organizational Aspects, and Political Work

Unlike Western countries, many consider the PLA a party-army rather than a state-army. Western militaries are usually defined by a high degree of professionalism, in that there is a clear line separating politics from the military and an emphasis on military skills. In the Chinese system, the Party issues orders to the PLA rather than the government, which is the characteristic of a state-army. To control the PLA, the Party has often used a variety of measures. Some of these measures include party committees and political commissars throughout the military, and more recently anti-corruption campaigns.¹⁷¹

The nature of political work in the PLA has generally been executed through several different structures, including the General Political Department—under which are included numerous organizations such as the propaganda and cultural departments, among others—the political commissar system, and the discipline inspection system. All three are under the authority of the Central Committee and CMC.¹⁷² Emphasis on the role of the Party in the PLA, and its authority over the PLA has only increased in the Xi era. Two recent essays in the *PLA*

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin Lai, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army since 1949: Ground Forces* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 6.

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Spence, *The Search For Modern China 3rd Edition*. (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013), 475.

¹⁷¹ Philip Saunders and Andrew Scobell, "Introduction: PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking" in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, Phillip Saunders and Andrew Scobell eds, (CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁷² David Shambaugh, "The Soldier and the State in China: The Political Work System in the People's Liberation Army" *The China Quarterly* 127 (1991): 544-549.

Daily highlighted this phenomenon by stressing that Party committees in the PLA are responsible for war preparations and army building, warning to avoid any separation between the party and army,¹⁷³ and emphasizing that it is the Party that created the army.¹⁷⁴

Historically, the CCP has emphasized that the PLA needs to be politically reliable (red) and professionally capable (expert) at the same time, creating tension within the PLA as a result.¹⁷⁵ The PLA is, as Joffe described it, a “Party-army with professional characteristics.”¹⁷⁶ Because of this, Huntington’s framework for studying civil-military relations in socialist countries doesn’t quite fit.¹⁷⁷ Which likely explains why Huntington’s framework has usually not been applied to studies of China’s military.¹⁷⁸ Huntington offered a civil-military relations framework where the relationship is characterized by either subjective or objective control. Subjective control is one where the military does not have autonomy and is subject to a high degree of political control, and they are enmeshed in society to a greater degree. Whereas objective control is one defined by a highly professional army that has more political autonomy.¹⁷⁹

Regarding China though, the PLA is becoming increasingly professionalized while simultaneously is subject to political control. Higher ranking officers are typically party members that also are members of the CCP’s Central Committee. The importance of the PLA in

¹⁷³ 扛起党委备战打仗的政治责任 (Take up the political responsibility of the party committee to prepare for war) *PLA Daily*, July 6, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/06/content_319187.htm

¹⁷⁴ Fan Jing, 永远不能变的军魂 永远不能丢的命根子 (The soul of the army that can never change, the lifeblood that can never be lost) *PLA Daily*, July 7, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/06/content_319188.htm

¹⁷⁵ Philip Saunders and Andrew Scobell, *ibid*, 3.

¹⁷⁶ Ellis Joffe, “Party-Army Relations in China: Retrospect and Prospect” *The China Quarterly*, no.146 (1996), 300.

¹⁷⁷ Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: China’s Military Strategy Since 1949*, *ibid*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ Shambaugh, “The Soldier and the State in China” *ibid*, 529-530.

¹⁷⁹ Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and The State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Control* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1959).

China's political system is reflected in that the PLA helped create the PRC. During the founding of the PRC, it was the army that played an instrumental role for state expansion in the countryside.¹⁸⁰ One scholar has described China's civil-military relations as conditional subjective control for reasons such as a continued transition to objective control while still maintaining the politicization and indoctrination of the PLA.¹⁸¹

To better understand the relationship between the CCP and PLA, Joffe describes three different lenses that PLA scholars have typically used. They include party control, symbiosis, and professionalism. However, Joffe argues all three approaches are complementary of each other.¹⁸² Symbiosis refers to the mutual support of the Party and PLA in holding political power. It is also reflected in the dual role that militaries often play in authoritarian regimes: safeguarding national security from external threats while guarding the Party-state in domestic politics.¹⁸³ For China this was most exemplified in the early years of the PRC when China's paramount leaders like Mao and Deng, and the revolutionary leadership of the Party also had military experience and served during the Second Sino-Japanese War and the civil war. At a deeper level, military commanders and civilian cadres have always worked closely together, not just in the aftermath of the founding of the PRC.

In the Chinese military system, leadership is shared between military and political officials, but the structure was designed for political control. Unit commanders and political cadres are both equally responsible for overseeing daily work and issuing orders to the military. Each unit has a Party committee where a political officer and the unit commander usually take

¹⁸⁰ Li, *ibid*, 77.

¹⁸¹ You Ji, "The party/army state in great transformation" in *The Chinese Communist Party in Action: Consolidating Party Rule*, Zheng Yongnian and Lance Gore eds (NY: Routledge, 2020), 164.

¹⁸² Joffe, *ibid*, 299.

¹⁸³ You Ji, *ibid*, 162.

the top two posts of secretary and deputy secretary.¹⁸⁴ In addition to the party committee at each level, there also exists a Political Department. This Political Department is a much more vital part of the army than the Party committee. It implements policy decisions made by the Party committee and oversees efforts intended to educate the troops.¹⁸⁵ Thus, political officials are deeply intertwined and involved in military affairs in the PLA that is unimaginable in the U.S. and most other countries.

The PLA's military leaders were pulled into the duties of local administration,¹⁸⁶ with military administrations helping provide a management system in every city.¹⁸⁷ Most senior officers simultaneously holding important government posts, serving dual roles in both government and military. General Gao Gang held all four top posts of government chairman, first party secretary, military commander, and army political commissar in the Northeast region. Marshal Peng Dehuai similarly was government chairman and military commander of the Northwest region.¹⁸⁸ In the post-Deng era however, there has been a growing divergence between political and military elites.¹⁸⁹ Civilian elites no longer are likely to have military experience as their predecessors did in the Mao and Deng eras. Although the PLA still plays a role in the Chinese political system, its role has been reduced as there has been a greater shift to it being a professional force. Professionalism in the sense that there is a focus within the PLA on training, education, and tactics without a role or discussion of politics.

¹⁸⁴ Roderick Lee, "Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders" *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 3 no.3, (2020), 136.

¹⁸⁵ John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1967), 106-107.

¹⁸⁶ William Whitson and Chen-Hsia Huang, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-1971* (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 247.

¹⁸⁷ Li, *ibid*, 89.

¹⁸⁸ Spence, *ibid*, 468.

¹⁸⁹ Saunders and Scobell, *ibid*, 4.

While there has been greater emphasis on professionalism, and acknowledgement on the need for it dating back to the 1950s in the wake of the Korean War, the importance of politics in China's military and military strategy is still stressed by PLA officers and instructors. Wang Hongwei, a professor at China's National Defense University, noted that in planning wars the military must obey politics, political strategy guides military strategy, and to think about war issues from a political perspective.¹⁹⁰ This was also echoed in a *PLA Daily* article insisting that political strategy determines military strategy, and the accomplishment of political goals are held as the test standard. The author went to lengths to point out that "tactics must be based on political victory."¹⁹¹ And when describing the differences between China and Western styles of army construction, one PLA official highlighted that the U.S. and other Western countries consist of a command and leadership structure that separated the government and military while the Chinese system combines the military and government, and that there is pros and cons to both approaches.¹⁹² The rest of this chapter covers the developments in the PLA from the 1950s through the 1990s, which will then be followed by an analysis of the PLA's strategy in the Jiang Zemin era.

The PLA is also subject to ideological classes and political work.¹⁹³ Since the establishment of the PRC, the PLA has always played a role in politics. The question is not

¹⁹⁰ Wang Hongwei, "从“军事服从政治”看建党百年来军队建设发展历程" (From the perspective of "military obedience to politics" the development process of military construction in the past hundred years since the founding of the party) *军事历史* (Military History) no.3 (2021), 17-25.

¹⁹¹ Wang Renfei, 善于从政治高度思考和处理军事问题 (Good at thinking and handling military issues from a political perspective) *解放军报* (People's Liberation Army Daily) June 3, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-06/03/content_316961.htm

¹⁹² Wang Min, 中外军队建设理念比较及中国军队的应对策略 (A Comparison of Chinese and Foreign Army Construction Concepts and the Chinese Army's Coping Strategies) *新西部* (New West), no.9 (2011), 115.

¹⁹³ David Shambaugh, "Civil-Military Relations in China: Party-Army or National Military?" *The Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 16 (2002), 12.

whether it is involved in politics, but how much it is involved, which has ebbed and flowed since 1949.

3.2 1950s

The power, influence, and role of the PLA in Chinese society was evident during the creation of the PRC. Mao and the party leadership divided the country into six different military regions, each with its own military command structure.¹⁹⁴ As noted earlier in this chapter, many of the senior military officers assumed dual roles as both military commanders and civilian leaders in their respective regions. After the Korean War however, CCP leaders perhaps sensed that the six different regions gave the PLA a little too much power and further redivided the country into thirteen different regions. Each region was under command of the PLA general headquarters, who in turn was under the guidance of the newly created Military Affairs Commission.¹⁹⁵

3.2.1 Restructuring and Modernization

In the wake of the civil war and founding of the PRC, the CCP also quickly decided to draw up military reforms in efforts to begin rebuilding the Chinese economy, which was devastated from two decades of war and natural disasters. Military expenditure in 1950 accounted for a whopping 41% of the government's budget.¹⁹⁶ The Politburo met in April 1950 to discuss the first reorganization of the PLA with a decision to reduce the number of troops to four million. This amounted to the cutting of 1.5 million troops, in what would be the first large-

¹⁹⁴ Spence, *ibid*, 467.

¹⁹⁵ Spence, *ibid*, 501.

¹⁹⁶ Ji Wenbo, 毛泽东与新中国成立初期人民军队的现代化建设 (Mao Zedong and the Modernization of the People's Army in the Early Stage of the New China) 党史博览 (Party History Expo) 9, (2019), 4-11.

scale demobilization of the PLA.¹⁹⁷ Although the outbreak of the Korean War temporarily put these proposals for demobilization on hold with the plans reversed toward mobilization for war. By 1955 the PLA cut its force to 3.5 million troops, and then 2.5 million in 1957,¹⁹⁸ successfully completing the first significant reduction and reorganization of the military force.¹⁹⁹

Early on it was obvious to senior officers that modernization was desperately needed. The Korean War helped kick-start the path toward military modernization. During the war, the military transitioned toward a more conventional military, with training complementing and catching up to the structure of a more modernized force.²⁰⁰ Growing professionalization developed in the domains of training, command, technology, and organization. However, because most Chinese troops lacked education, training instructions issued by the CMC directed that the entire military—except those who were educated—devote fifty percent of training on cultural education. In 1951, sixty-seven percent of Chinese troops were either illiterate or semi-illiterate. By 1953 that was reduced to thirty percent, allowing the PLA to shift the focus of training from cultural education-based training to more military-based training.²⁰¹ One key aspect of modernization was the establishment of a professional officer corps. Because many commanders had training that was haphazard, the command structure was reorganized. Military academies were established to train new officers. These measures helped institutionalize the officer corps.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Wenbo, *ibid*, 4.

¹⁹⁸ Elleman, *ibid*, 256.

¹⁹⁹ Guo Fenghai, 人民军队改革图强的历史进程和新时代强军要求 (The historical process of the reform of the people's army and the requirement's for a strong army in the new era) *理论视野* (Theoretical Vision), 2019, (10): 78-83.

²⁰⁰ Bruce Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795-1989* (NY: Routledge, 2005), 252.

²⁰¹ Xiao Dewei, 人民解放军军事训练方针的历史演进 (The historical evolution of the People's Liberation Army's military training policy) *军事历史* (Military History), no. 4, (2012), 30-35.

²⁰² Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 7.

3.2.2 *Creation of the PLAN and PLAAF*

When the Korean War began, the CCP was in the early stages of building the air force and navy. The PLA Navy (PLAN) leadership was formed in 1950, with the service starting from an extremely low base. At the end of the Chinese Civil War the PLA basically only consisted of a single army, that of the infantry.²⁰³ At its creation, the PLAN had 183 ships, and of those, 169 were merchant and fishing vessels, along with 6 restored sunken ships. Most of the fleet was woefully outdated. The PLA quickly set out to modernize the fleet. A submarine study team was created in 1951 and sent to Port Lushan to learn from the Soviet Pacific Fleet. One year later, the PLA began constructing its first submarine base in Qingdao.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) was created in 1949,²⁰⁵ and structured into seventeen aviation divisions, including two bomber and twelve fighter divisions.²⁰⁶ When the CMC created the PLAAF, it sent a delegation to the Soviet Union and secured a deal to purchase 434 military aircraft, and the Soviets agreed to send over eight hundred aviation experts to assist the PLA in creating the PLAAF.²⁰⁷

Just as importantly for the modernization of the PLA, Peng Dehuai adopted tactics that allowed China to start learning to conduct joint operations—albeit limited—during the war. While China suffered terrible losses and the economic costs were great, the one positive for the PLA is that Korea provided a sort of test site for China to enhance its combat training against a

²⁰³ Guo Xiuqi, 新中国 70 年国防和军队建设的成就与启示 (Achievements and Enlightenment of National Defense and Military Construction in New China in 70 Years) 高校马克思主义理论研究 (Research on Marxist Theory in Colleges and Universities), 5 no.4, (2019), 31-36.

²⁰⁴ Zhao Xuegong, 抗美援朝与中国军事现代化 (Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea and China's Military Modernization) 理论视野 (Theoretical Vision), no. 6, (2010), 38-41.

²⁰⁵ Shao Yong, 新中国成立 70 年来的人民解放军 (The People's Liberation Army in the 70 years since the founding of New China) 思想政治课研究 (Research on Ideological and Political Courses), no.1, (2020), 20-26.

²⁰⁶ Xuegong, *ibid*, 38-41

²⁰⁷ Li, *ibid*, 109.

major western technological power.²⁰⁸ Overall the war helped to begin the process of modernizing the PLA by organizing the structure and command system, establish the PLAN and PLAAF, and improve military training and tactics that included joint operations. John Gittings noted the war was a “transitional phase in which the old revolutionary methods gradually lost their value”.²⁰⁹ These developments and the importance of the war is emphasized by Xiaobing Li who argued that the Korean War “changed the Chinese forces forever.”²¹⁰

3.2.3 Learning from the Soviets

Emphasis on further increasing military modernization was directed at learning from the Soviet Union. Peng Dehuai, promoted to minister of defense after the Korean War, issued directives in 1954 for the PLA to learn from the Soviet experience and emulate the Soviet military doctrine, pay, rank, and education systems.²¹¹ Some of the first major army regulations the PLA issued were directly copied from the Soviet military. It was not until the late 1950s that the PLA began to formulate their own regulations.²¹² Another benefit of the Korean War, aside from it being a testing site for the PLA against a technologically advanced western power, is that it propelled the Soviets to provide China large amounts of high-grade military weaponry.

After the war, the Soviets continued helping China’s military modernization and providing military arms and supplies.²¹³ Beginning in 1954, military cooperation with the Soviet Union increased exponentially. A comprehensive deal between Moscow and Beijing was agreed

²⁰⁸ Li, *ibid*, 105-106.

²⁰⁹ Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 98.

²¹⁰ Li, *ibid*, 79.

²¹¹ Whitson and Huang, *ibid*, 428.

²¹² Guo Xiuqi, *ibid*, 31-36.

²¹³ David Shambaugh, “China’s Quest for Military Modernization” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 6, no.5, (1979), 296.

on that provided China with the newest Soviet defense arms, such as short-range missiles and MiG-17 fighter jets, along with technical support and material for Chinese scientists to start its own nuclear research programs.²¹⁴ By 1960 there was 10,000 Soviet military advisors in China.²¹⁵ Even with the Sino-Soviet split starting in the late 1950s, the Soviet Union had a deep influence on the PLA's military modernization.

3.2.4 Introduction of the First MSG

In 1956, the first MSG was introduced by the CMC. It represented a major change in China's military strategy, one that shifted from a mobile force that emphasized guerilla warfare toward one of forward defense and positional warfare.²¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the guideline was formulated with mainly the U.S. in mind as China's top external threat. Fravel argues this first MSG was a "watershed" for the PLA, and puzzling at the same time because the strategy was delivered during a time when China's leaders viewed the external environment to be relatively quiet or not as threatening, and there were no expectations to go to war for at least another decade.²¹⁷ However, Yuan Dejin from China's Academy of Military Sciences has written that although the victory of the Korean War bought China a period of peace, the U.S. was even more hostile after the Korean War and was seeking to construct a "'crescent shaped' encirclement against New China" and "in order to ensure national security under the condition of overall peace, the establishment of new China's military strategy has become an important issue that

²¹⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963* (CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 16.

²¹⁵ Wenbo, *ibid.*

²¹⁶ Fravel, *Active Defense*, *ibid.*, 74.

²¹⁷ Fravel, *ibid.*, 72, 73.

must be resolved.²¹⁸ Whatever the true motivations were, the new strategy was also called Active Defense, a concept of strategy that the PLA still references today, with its contents described in more detail in chapter two.

In sum, the major events for the PLA in the 1950s was the establishment of the national military leadership, including the CMC in 1954; the first large-scale demobilization of the PLA; fighting U.S. and UN forces in the Korean War; transitioning to a more conventional, professional military; the introduction of the first Military Strategic Guideline; and the creation of the PLAN and PLAAF. The PLA made tremendous strides in military modernization. At the start of the decade, most troops were illiterate, the navy had inadequate ships ill-prepared for conflict, there was not much of an air force, and the PLA consisted of a peasant-based, guerilla warfare type structure. Additionally, there were smaller but still important developments such as the creation of military schools, construction of military factories, formalizing the military rank system, and providing various disciplinary and training regulations.²¹⁹ Through the efforts of Peng Dehuai, Zhu De and other PLA officers, the military started to resemble a more modern force.

Although the PLA was deeply involved in helping establish the PRC and performing administrative duties, a gap started to emerge—particularly after the Korean War—between the PLA and the CCP and society. While the PLA became more institutionalized, professionalized, and normalized, Chinese society and the CCP were becoming more ideologized and extremist.²²⁰

²¹⁸ Yuan Dejin, 毛泽东与新中国军事战略方针的确立和调整及其启示 (Mao Zedong and the establishment and adjustment of new China's military strategic policy and its enlightenment) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research), no.1, (2010), 22-27.

²¹⁹ Zhang Yabin, Ling Bingmei, and Yu Hongjun, 论聂荣臻军队现代化建设思想 (On Nie Rongzhen's Army Modernization Construction Thought) 军事历史 (Military History) no.1, (2014), 58-62.

²²⁰ Li, *ibid*, 114.

If the PLA was hoping to continue its progress toward becoming a more professionalized force while decreasing its role in society going into the 1960s, these hopes were short-lived with the domestic storm Mao was about to unleash. Signs of trouble already loomed toward the latter part of the 1950s. With the onset of the Great Leap Forward, its economic consequences and growing unease within the general CCP leadership toward the direction of the country, Peng Dehuai confronted Mao and voiced his displeasure at a major Party conference in 1959. The result was Peng removed from office, Lin Biao taking his place as defense minister, and the PLA beginning a new era.²²¹

3.3 1960s

As mentioned above the Soviet Union substantially helped with China's military modernization during the first decade of the PRC. Soviet military experts helped the PLAN train personnel to operate submarines, provided modern weapons and arms, sent thousands of military advisors to China, and gave technical expertise that allowed China begin its nuclear program. By 1960, however, the relationship soured, and the alliance split apart. The split had a major impact on the PLA, particularly the PLAAF which leaned on the USSR for fuel and spare parts.²²²

3.3.1 *War with India*

Prospects for war with India rose after it was found that China built roads to connect Xinjiang with Tibet south of the Kunlan Mountains went across territory claimed by India.²²³ Border tensions between the two countries had already continuously accelerated during the 1950s, largely in the Ladakh and Aksai Chin regions.²²⁴ Amidst growing skirmishing on the

²²¹ Whitson and Huang, *ibid*, 428.

²²² Joffe, *The Chinese Army After Mao*, *ibid*, 17.

²²³ Spence, *ibid*, 527.

²²⁴ Elleman, *ibid*, 260.

border, in 1962 China mobilized 13,000 troops to Tibet, with large-scale attacks by the PLA following soon after and war officially breaking out. The Sino-Indian War took place largely in two separate geographic regions, one in the far east and the other in the west.²²⁵ Indian troops were poorly supplied and unprepared, quickly retreating in the face of Chinese attacks. Not backing down, India regrouped and launched a counteroffensive that proved unsuccessful. The PLA sent additional troops to both the eastern and western sides of the border, repulsing Indian troops and pushing farther into Indian claimed territory.²²⁶ India, reeling in the face of renewed Chinese attacks, asked the U.S. for military assistance. But before it could receive a reply, China declared a unilateral ceasefire ending the war.²²⁷ The duration of the war was brief, lasting from October-November, with PLA troops returning to the original border after December 1st. PLA reforms during the 1950s helped create the positive outcome, and showed the wisdom of the changes that Peng Dehuai, and others, implemented in changing the PLA in the previous decade.²²⁸

3.3.2 Stalling of Modernization Efforts

While the border war with India illustrated the PLA's successful efforts at reforming and modernizing in the 1950s, progress in professionalization continued to reverse after the conclusion of the war. This reversal started around the time that Peng Dehuai was purged. Ironically one of the factors that contributed to the setback was the PLA's military modernization, while helping create a more modern, conventional force, it simultaneously created a new problem. The military reforms led to increasing professionalization which helped

²²⁵ Elleman, *ibid*, 261.

²²⁶ Li, *ibid*, 201-202.

²²⁷ Rudra Chaudhuri, "Why Culture Matters: Revisiting the Sino-Indian Border War of 1962" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 6 (2009), 860.

²²⁸ Li, *ibid*, 202.

created a growing gap between military and civilian elites, and between different generations of officers within the PLA. Those who joined after 1949, or became officers after, coming through the military reforms of the 1950s, what Ellis Joffe calls the “professional generation” and leaned more toward expert, viewed things differently from the pre-1949 veteran leaders, the “guerilla” generation, that leaned red in their outlook. Just as important, the professionalization of the PLA officer corps created tension with the Party.²²⁹

Overall, the growing distance between the Party and senior military leadership prompted Mao to demand a more accommodating relationship between the Party and Army. Mao also resented the criticisms by Peng and others of his domestic policies.²³⁰ The demand for greater support and political reliability from the PLA came to fruition under the guidance of new Defense Minister Lin Biao, the hero of the Chinese Civil War. Lin helped emphasize greater political control of the PLA, illustrated by the slogan “politics in command.” Meanwhile, continued efforts on improving combat effectiveness, seemingly two contradictory strategies. Lin expanded his own personal power in the process.²³¹ During the 1960s there was also an increased blending of the civilian and military realms as more party secretaries became PLA political commissars. The blending of civilian and military spheres was strengthened by Mao’s call for an enormous civilian militia.²³²

3.3.3 Internal Chaos

Starting in 1965, both external and internal events spelled trouble for the PLA. China’s external environment which was relatively peaceful after the Indian border war—aside from

²²⁹ Ellis Joffe, "The Conflict between Old and New in the Chinese Army" *The China Quarterly* no. 18 (1964), 118-119.

²³⁰ Li, *ibid*, 178.

²³¹ Ralph Powell, "The Increasing Power of Lin Piao and the Party-Soldiers 1959–1966" *The China Quarterly* 34 (1968), 44.

²³² Spence, *ibid*, 536.

continued conflict in Vietnam—changed to one of uncertainty and danger with outbreak of the Vietnam War, threatening China's peripheral security. After general agreement on the decision to become involved in a sustained conflict in Vietnam, disagreement over the decision on what kind of war to conduct emerged between the PLA and Party.²³³ The Party proposed a strategy of a peoples' war, the kind of tactics it used against the Japanese in World War II. Disagreeing with this approach, some in the PLA advocated a reliance on positional warfare with a modernized type fighting force—the strategy and changes emphasized by Peng Dehuai and Zhu De during the 1950s. Adding to these complications, in preparation for battle the PLA stressed training a militia devoid of ideological training while the Party emphasized that ideological training must be included.²³⁴

Meanwhile, as the Party moved to increase political control of the PLA, internal chaos pushed the PLA toward an increased involvement in domestic politics. Mao launched the Cultural Revolution in 1965, aiming to radicalize politics while eliminating his political enemies and deepen revolution. The Cultural Revolution was used by Mao as essentially an attack on the Party itself. It lasted a full decade and quickly spiraled out of control, with the country nearly spilling over into complete anarchy and war between rival factions. At times groups of Red Guards directed their attacks at the PLA. By January 1967, PLA regional forces were directed to assist the Red Guards in seizing power from Party committees in all the cities and provinces.²³⁵

Amid the Cultural Revolution and chaos, the PLA shifted to the center of politics and expanded its role in governing. A group of marshals and generals in Beijing tried to prevent this

²³³ Morton Halperin and John Wilson Lewis, "New Tensions in Army-Party Relations in China (1965–1966)" *The China Quarterly* 26 (1966), 60.

²³⁴ Halperin and Lewis, *ibid.*, 61.

²³⁵ Harvey Nelson, "Military Forces In the Cultural Revolution" *The China Quarterly* no. 51, (1972), 450.

shift and deepening involvement in governing but were unsuccessful.²³⁶ the PLA Party committees in the cities and provinces were being replaced by revolutionary committees. These new committees comprised a three-way alliance among cadres who displayed the right type of attitude and behavior, representatives from the masses, and members of the PLA. Violence and clashes also occurred between the PLA and radical groups. The PLA was also given the assignment in 1967 of disbanding all counter-revolutionary groups. This order was construed as a call to break up any militant group that opposed their own organizational interests, and taken too far with the killing of radicals, although it is unknown how many died at the hands of the PLA from this order.²³⁷ From 1966-69, the PLA found itself largely trying to maintain order and stability as Red Guards and different factions disregarded all forms of authority.²³⁸ The internal instability, preoccupation with domestic security and greater involvement in governing meant that there was less time on military training and more time spent on ideological training, leading to the reversal of a more professionalized force. In 1965 the PLA abolished military ranks in one example of this setback in professionalization.²³⁹ Another reversal became apparent in the PLA's performance in Vietnam.

3.3.4 Helping Vietnam

As U.S. bombing of North Vietnam increased in 1964-65, DRV Defense Minister Giap and first secretary general of the North Vietnam Communist Party Le Duan hurried to Beijing appealing for help. In April 1965, China agreed to send support troops. Ho Chi Minh met with Mao a month later asking again for military support and material. Throughout the war China sent

²³⁶ Li, *ibid*, 206, 233.

²³⁷ Spence, *ibid*, 549-551.

²³⁸ Whitson and Huang, *ibid*, 368.

²³⁹ Powell, *ibid*, 38.

military support in the form of rifles, ammunition, artillery shells, anti-aircraft tanks, planes, vessels and radios. Ho and Mao also discussed sending more Chinese troops if the U.S. were to invade the North.²⁴⁰ Chinese leaders grew worried that the U.S. was on a path that would lead to direct confrontation with China, which led to the adoption of a strategy for sending military forces to North Vietnam if the U.S. carried out a ground assault on Hanoi.²⁴¹ The form of Chinese troops sent to North Vietnam largely comprised artillery units. The PLA dispatched sixteen divisions of anti-aircraft artillery by 1969 to North Vietnam, with the regiments serving eight-month rotations. A total of 320,000 PLA troops were sent to the North between 1965-1968, with 170,000 troops present in Vietnam in 1967.

However, Vietnamese officers routinely complained about the rotation system that China used saying that by the time these units arrived and became effective in shooting American aircraft down, it was the fifth month into the rotation, and they only had a little time left before leaving and the process repeated itself with the new unit.²⁴² There were also complaints by North Vietnam soldiers about outdated Chinese artillery pieces, substandard radar technology, and inadequate air defense systems compared to what the Soviets were providing.²⁴³ Divisions between China and North Vietnam appeared early on and festered over issues of tension among PLA and DRV troops, Hanoi's unwillingness to join in Mao's anti-Soviet campaign, and China's ire at the DRV over peace talks with the U.S.²⁴⁴ The growing Sino-Soviet split played a major role in the growing friction between China and North Vietnam. By 1970 all PLA troops

²⁴⁰ Chen Jian, "China's Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964-69" *The China Quarterly* no.142, (1995), 368-369, 380.

²⁴¹ Xiaoming Zhang, "The Vietnam War, 1964-1969: A Chinese Perspective" *Journal of Military History* no.60 (1996), 743.

²⁴² Li, *ibid*, 217, 219, 223.

²⁴³ Xiaobing Li, *Building Ho's Army: Chinese Military Assistance to North Vietnam* (University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 173.

withdrew from Vietnam²⁴⁵ as a more urgent security threat developed in the north, shifting China's attention to its border with the USSR.

3.3.5 *Split with the Soviets*

Amid the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and Vietnam War, the Party leadership also had to manage the growing split and animosity with the Soviets that nearly resulted in war in 1969. It is unknown how close China, and the Soviet Union came to a full-blown war, but toward the end of the decade the situation was serious enough that the PLA considered the possibility of war rapidly rising and increasingly prepared for it.²⁴⁶ The perceived danger for war was great enough that Mao and Party leaders fled from the capital in Beijing.²⁴⁷ Heightened tensions on China's northern border with the USSR grew throughout the Cultural Revolution. But mishaps and conflict began at the border some time before that in 1959.²⁴⁸ Fighting between the two sides broke out on March 2, 1969, at Zhenbao Island, where some believe China was potentially responsible for ambushing the Soviets at the island.²⁴⁹ The official number of casualties is uncertain, but it is estimated that seven Soviet soldiers died, and some were taken prisoner. As Soviet reinforcements arrived the PLA deserted the island.

Two weeks later another skirmish transpired again at the same place. The fighting resulted in eight hundred PLA and sixty Russian casualties. While many believe it was China that initiated the fighting at Zhenbao Island the first time, the second incident was caused by the

²⁴⁵ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 226.

²⁴⁶ Wang Xingwang, 新中国成立以来党和国家领导人论军事战略规划 (Party and state leaders discuss military strategic planning since the founding of New China) *军事历史 (Military History)*, no.1, (2009), 40-43.

²⁴⁷ Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement" *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (2000), 49.

²⁴⁸ Thomas Robinson, "The Sino-Soviet Border Dispute: Background, Development, and the March 1969 Clashes" *American Political Science Review* 66, no. 4 (1972), 1177.

²⁴⁹ Lyle Goldstein, "Return to Zhenbao Island: Who Started Shooting and Why It Matters" *The China Quarterly* no. 168 (2001), 987.

Soviets to bloody China in efforts to persuade them of a border settlement that conformed to the preference of the USSR.²⁵⁰ The fighting between the two sides ended inconclusively, with Soviet Premier Kosygin flying to Beijing in July 1969 to meet with Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to defuse the crisis. However even after Zhou's meeting with Kosygin, the PLA kept preparing for battle and expected a Soviet invasion through the end of the year.²⁵¹ Overall, the skirmishes against the Soviets helped the PLA further burnish its reputation by fighting one of the world's preeminent militaries.²⁵² Indeed, the biggest effect the fighting had on China was in domestic politics, where narratives of the battles caused a deluge of enthusiasm for the PLA's heroics and made it appear Lin's troops were saving the Chinese people, sending Lin's popularity ever higher.²⁵³

The 1960s was highlighted by the Sino-Soviet split, a border war with India, domestic chaos and politics that forced the PLA to become more involved in cultural conflicts and governing that delayed further military modernization. From 1966-1970, the PLA was pulled into domestic politics, becoming the predominant force in the provinces along with a substantial voice in policymaking in Beijing.²⁵⁴ There was also war in Vietnam, tensions within the PLA, and the reversal of professionalization toward an emphasis of politics in command that witnessed more time spent on ideological training than drills and military training. By the end of the decade, China was dangerously close to being involved in war with both superpowers. The U.S. was expanding the war in Vietnam where China was supporting its enemy North Vietnam, while

²⁵⁰ Robinson, *ibid*, 1198-1200.

²⁵¹ Xu Jinzhou, 由林彪“一号命令”开始的全军临战状态何时结束 (When will the whole army's war-prone state started by Lin Biao's "Order No. 1" end?) 党史博览 (Party History Expo) no.11, (2016), 29.

²⁵² Elleman, *ibid*, 279-280.

²⁵³ Spence, *ibid*, 554.

²⁵⁴ Ellis Joffe, "The Chinese Army After the Cultural Revolution: The Effects of Intervention" *The China Quarterly* no. 55, (1973), 450.

a border conflict with the Soviet Union nearly broke out into war. Overall, it was a decade that pushed the PLA toward becoming more red than expert. The poor showing in Vietnam reflected this greater emphasis on political reliability with the reversal of growing professionalization in the PLA and insufficient training stunting the growth of the military.²⁵⁵

3.4 1970s

Defense Minister Lin Biao's personal power throughout the 1960s was strengthened through his political maneuverings and devotion to raising Mao's stature within the PLA. However, Lin and Mao's relationship deteriorated and rapidly descended into a political struggle due in large part to the development of the PLA's domination of politics. For some time, Mao believed that the PLA had acquired too much political power and suspected Lin of being overly ambitious. To rectify this Mao strongly criticized Lin and five of his top aides at a Politburo session in 1970. Seeing the writing on the wall, Lin and his allies purportedly plotted a coup against Mao. Lin even thought about assassinating Premier Zhou Enlai, Jiang Qing (Mao's wife) other central leaders, declare a state of emergency, impose military control of the nation, and seize power.²⁵⁶ These plans were thwarted by Mao and the Party. Then, in one of the most shocking and mysterious events in the PRC's history, Lin died in a plane crash with his family in Mongolia presumably attempting to flee in 1971.²⁵⁷ Shortly after, Mao created a new CMC office with Marshal Ye Jianying in charge. Immediately upon forming the new office Mao convened its first meeting and spoke how numerous problems arose in the PLA under Lin and that the PLA needed to be ready for war.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 204.

²⁵⁶ Di Sheng, 毛泽东突然回京与林彪出逃 (Mao Zedong suddenly returned to Beijing and Lin Biao fled) *世纪桥 Century Bridge*, no.12, (2005), 16-19.

²⁵⁷ Parris Chang, "China's Military" *Current History* 67, no. 397 (1974), 104-105.

²⁵⁸ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 238-239.

3.4.1 *Last Years of the Mao Era*

War with the Soviet Union never materialized and the rest of the Mao era—until 1976—saw the PLA’s role in politics continuously decreasing. In 1973 PLA representation in the top bodies of the Party was reduced. PLA delegates in the Politburo, consisting of 25 members, dropped from thirteen to seven. And in the Central Committee, with 319 members at the time, PLA representatives were cut from 127 to 100. Shortly after there was also an extensive reshuffling and transferring of nearly all the regional PLA leaders.²⁵⁹ While the Party moved to assert greater control over the PLA, it also chastised its performance. At an enlarged CMC meeting in 1975, Deng Xiaoping and Marshal Ye Jianying criticized army construction for being arrogant and swollen, and the PLA leadership as lazy and soft.²⁶⁰ Deng insisted on reforms to reduce the size of the army, introduce new rules and regulations, launching a drive to modernize, while essentially blaming Lin Biao and the Cultural Revolution for contributing to the PLA’s problems.²⁶¹

Deng moved too far in his criticisms and efforts for reform. The changes he proposed were a correction of the mistakes produced by the Cultural Revolution, meaning a repudiation which Mao and Jiang saw as an attack on them. This led to the “Criticize Deng, Countering the Rightist Reversal Style” movement in reaction.²⁶² Reforms were not implemented because shortly after the criticize Deng movement, Mao and Jiang Qing sacked Deng—for a second time. Mao gave command of the PLA to Marshal Ye.²⁶³ In 1976, Mao died, producing a power

²⁵⁹ Chang, *ibid*, 105.

²⁶⁰ Bai Chun, 1975 年军队整顿的主要措施探析 (An analysis of the main measures to rectify the army in 1975) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research) no.1, (2000), 59-70.

²⁶¹ Chun, *ibid*, 59-70.

²⁶² Bai Chun, 简析 1975 年军队整顿被迫中断的原因 (A brief analysis of the reasons for the forced interruption of the military reorganization in 1975) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research) no.4, (2001), 43-49.

²⁶³ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 243.

struggle of who would succeed him in which the PLA played a key role. Marshal Ye in particular, as defense minister and a politburo standing committee member was critical for the outcome in which Deng Xiaoping triumphed over Mao's wife Jiang Qing and the gang of four. The domestic struggle for power and the PLA's key role in helping determine the outcome highlighted how important the military continued to be in politics.

China's relationship with Vietnam grew increasingly strained in the months leading up to its invasion in February 1979.²⁶⁴ Beijing launched a war with Vietnam in order to, as Deng Xiaoping told U.S. President Jimmy Carter in a conversation right before the invasion, "teach Vietnam a lesson" for invading Cambodia, while others think the lesson was to make Vietnam think that promoting closer ties with the USSR rather than China was a mistake.²⁶⁵ A more recent argument asserts that Deng started the war to speed up military modernization while at the same time helping to eliminate his political rival Hua Guofeng.²⁶⁶ Whatever the reason, the war lasted just a few weeks and both sides suffered an enormous amount of casualties. The Correlates of war dataset lists thirteen thousand PLA and eight thousand Vietnamese battlefield deaths.²⁶⁷ But current scholarship has a much higher estimate of at least 25,000 PLA deaths and 37,000 wounded.²⁶⁸ Although China declared victory, Hanoi believed that it was China, not Vietnam that got a lesson.²⁶⁹

PLA troops assigned to partake in the invasion were inadequately trained and unprepared for war against a military force that had extensive combat experience over the previous twenty-five years. And despite much-needed military training and drills, the PLA continued what it did

²⁶⁴ Daniel Trethick, "China's Vietnam War and Its Consequences" *The China Quarterly* no.80, (1979), 740.

²⁶⁵ Elleman, *ibid*, 293.

²⁶⁶ Joshua Eisenman, "China's Vietnam War Revisited: A Domestic Politics Perspective" *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 119 (2019), 729-745.

²⁶⁷ Figure comes from Correlates of war dataset, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets>; first found in Eisenman, *ibid*.

²⁶⁸ King C. Chen, *China's War with Vietnam, 1979* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987), 113-114.

²⁶⁹ Li, *A History of the Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 259.

in the past, employing political indoctrination in efforts to increase morale and combat effectiveness.²⁷⁰ Numerous PLA commanders were shocked at the low morale, ineffectiveness, and discipline during the war.²⁷¹ Beijing did, however, accomplish its geopolitical goal of showing Vietnam that closer relations with the USSR did not mean it could act aggressively with its neighbors or that the USSR would help intervene if invaded.²⁷² From the perspective of operational and tactical performance, the war illustrated that the PLA needed to refocus efforts on professionalization.

For the PLA, the 1970s began with the dramatic fall of Lin Biao and Mao's drive to reduce the PLA's influence while reasserting greater political control. This was evident in the unprecedented—at the time—reshuffling of the PLA leadership in 1973. Reduced involvement in politics briefly subsided with the PLA's key role in helping Deng return to politics and take over the leadership of the CCP in his struggle with Jiang Qing and the group of four. Finally, the short war with Vietnam and the poor performance in it highlighted how urgently the PLA needed to modernize.

3.5 1980s

3.5.1 *Reform and Change*

Following the 1979 Vietnam War, Deng—now firmly in control as paramount leader—moved to reform the PLA. Efforts for reform and greater professionalization of the PLA continued throughout most of the 1980s.²⁷³ These reforms had a major influence in nearly every domain such as organization, size, strategy, technological competencies, and training. And it was

²⁷⁰ Xiaoming Zhang, "China's 1979 War with Vietnam: A Reassessment" *The China Quarterly* no.184, (2005), 862.

²⁷¹ Li, *A History of the Chinese Army*, ibid, 258.

²⁷² Bruce Burton, "Contending Explanations of the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War" *International Journal* 34, no. 4 (1979), 721.

²⁷³ David Shambaugh, "China's Military in Transition: Politics, Professionalism, Procurement and Power Projection" *The China Quarterly* no. 146, (1996), 279.

Deng, with his stature and leadership that was continuously the driving force for greater military modernization, even when there were forms of resistance within the PLA toward reform.²⁷⁴ Deng and the Party leadership emphasized that the PLA was bloated, and cuts were desperately needed. Deng bluntly pointed out that “We must admit that our army is not capable of fighting modern warfare. We must admit that although our army has a large number of people, its quality is relatively poor.”²⁷⁵

At the beginning of China’s opening and reform in 1978 the PLA consisted of six million troops. By 1982 that number was reduced to four million. The size of the PLA went through significant reductions again in 1985 as the CMC revised military strategy, with another million soldiers demobilized.²⁷⁶ In the same year at an enlarged meeting of the CMC that Deng presided over, a series of procedures were adopted to strengthen the regularization of army construction work. These included reforms of the military system, restoring military academies, and major disarmament. Regulations on military training, command work, conscription work, and weapon and equipment management were also issued.²⁷⁷ And in 1988, the rank system was finally reestablished after being abolished during the Cultural Revolution.²⁷⁸

Major organizational changes also were initiated in the early 1980s with major reforms in the high command composition and force structure. The number of higher headquarters was reduced, and military regions were cut from eleven to seven, meaning twelve army corps headquarters and four MR were eliminated.²⁷⁹ Additionally, military spending as a percent of

²⁷⁴ June Teufel Dreyer, "China's Military in the 1980's" *Current History* 83, no. 494, (1984), 269-278.

²⁷⁵ Hongwei, 从“军事服从政治”看建党百年来军队建设发展历程, *ibid*, 18-25.

²⁷⁶ Xiuqi, *ibid*, 32-34.

²⁷⁷ Zhang Guoliang and Wang Wei, 新中国 60 年军事战略方针的转变与军队建设实践 (The transformation of the military strategic policy in the 60 years of new China and the practice of military construction) *军队政工理论研究* (Theoretical Research on Military Political Work) 10 no.4, (2009), 99-101.

²⁷⁸ Yong, 新中国成立 70 年来的人民解放军, *ibid*, 20-26.

²⁷⁹ Nan Li, "Organizational Changes of the PLA, 1985–1997" *The China Quarterly* no.158, (1999), 325-331.

government expenditure decreased to 9% by 1989, down from 17.7% in 1979.²⁸⁰ All these changes were needed after years of delay, and in some cases reversal, of military modernization. Cuts in funding, however, led to some grumbling in the PLA that there was not enough support for military modernization.²⁸¹

3.5.2 Commercialization of the Defense Industry

Another significant development during the 1980s was China's defense industry commercializing. The major rise in arms exports and commercialization of China's defense industry represented a substantial shift from its policies prior to the 1980s. Some attribute this change to Deng's economic initiatives and profit considerations. With steep cuts to defense spending, the PLA was allowed to engage in commercial activities—including making civilian goods—to partially help make up for this.²⁸² Deng personally encouraged the army to adopt a much greater economic role and proposed that the PLAAF, PLAN, and defense industry help expand civilian production. From 1985-1990, profits allegedly grew by 700% as the PLA shifted from mainly agricultural production to consumer goods like washing machines, pianos, TV sets, refrigerators, and hunting rifles among other things.²⁸³ In addition to making consumer goods, the PLA also became a major arms exporter to make up for the cut in funds. Outmoded and excess weapons were sold, along with the production of new weapons. Arms sales to Third World countries from 1986-1989 was more than the total values of arms sales from France, West Germany, and Britain combined.²⁸⁴ Greater commercialization in the PLA however, led to the

²⁸⁰ Bhartendu Kumar Singh, "The Political Economy of China's Defence Modernisation" *Strategic Analysis* 29, no. 4 (2005), 686.

²⁸¹ Thomas J. Bickford, "The Chinese Military and its Business Operations: The PLA as Entrepreneur" *Asian Survey* 34, no. 5 (1994), 462.

²⁸² Eric Hyer, "China's Arms Merchants: Profits in Command" *The China Quarterly* no. 132, (1992), 1106-1107.

²⁸³ James Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Military-Business Complex, 1978-1998* (NY: ME Sharpe, 2001), 57.

²⁸⁴ John Lewis, Hua Di, and Xue Litai, "Beijing's Defense Establishment: Solving the Arms-Export Enigma" *International Security* 15, no. 4 (1991), 101-103.

creation of a new problem: growing corruption. By the early 1990s graft and smuggling started to become a serious problem, with numerous senior officers arrested for corruption with regard to business activities.²⁸⁵

3.5.3 *Strategic Changes*

Changes in organization also were accompanied with changes in military strategy. In 1980 the CMC issued a new MSG, one of three that are considered as an example of major change by Fravel, with the first one in 1956. A significant shift in the conduct of warfare represented by the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, and PLA views of what type of war it might fight with its main adversary, the Soviet Union, changed. As mentioned in chapter two, for Fravel changes in warfare and Party unity explain a major change in the MSG.²⁸⁶ The 1980 MSG stressed a strategy of “Active Defense.” Whereas before the PLA prepared for total war, now it believed limited war more likely. Earlier PLA scholars argue that significant strategic change occurred in 1985, with views of China’s external environment and how a war against the Soviets might be fought considered as a main reason. The PLA shifted from preparing for general war with the USSR to small-scale conflicts around China’s border.²⁸⁷

China’s strategy in the 1960s and 70s is described as people’s war. In the late 1970s it was modified to “people’s war under modern conditions” and beginning in 1985 it changed to local war.²⁸⁸ People’s war is highlighted by drawing the enemy into China’s interior, protracted warfare, and an avoidance of fighting in or near cities. It also was built on a belief that human, not material factors, will decide the outcome of a war. Much of these ideas draw on Mao’s

²⁸⁵ Ellis Joffe, "The PLA and the Chinese economy: The Effect of Involvement" *Survival* 37, no. 2 (1995), 36.

²⁸⁶ Fravel, *Active Defense*, *ibid*, 139.

²⁸⁷ Paul Godwin, "Changing Concepts of Doctrine, Strategy and Operations in the Chinese People's Liberation Army 1978–87." *The China Quarterly* no. 112, (1987), 581-583.

²⁸⁸ Li Nan, "The PLA's Evolving Warfighting Doctrine, Strategy and Tactics, 1985–1995: A Chinese Perspective" *The China Quarterly* no.146 (1996), 443-444.

practices in guerilla and political warfare early on against the Japanese and Kuomintang.²⁸⁹ PLA tactics and war preparation changed from deeply entrenched defense and attritional warfare to operations that prioritized speed and lethal strikes, and wars of shorter duration.²⁹⁰ Li gives different reasons, also from Chinese sources, for why the PLA made this strategic change. In short, they consist of nuclear stalemate between both superpowers, unequal growth of military technologies among countries, modern warfare causing increased destruction and war becoming more costly and evading direct conflict by both superpowers.²⁹¹ The Soviets as the principal adversary did not change, however, expectations for how a future war might transpire did change.

3.5.4 Changing Civil-Military Relations

In the Deng era, a growing bifurcation between military and political elites began to emerge and continues to the present day, with the PLA's role in politics continuously dissipating. However, in 1989 the military would be called on once more to play a vital role in domestic affairs, and ultimately uphold the CCP's hold on power. Rallies and protests began in April of 1989 to mourn the passing of former general secretary Hu Yaobang, and voice support for greater participation in politics, improve conditions on universities, and curb corruption.²⁹² Not willing to listen or engage in dialogue with protesters by the CCP led to further anger and a spiraling of events. The PLA initially responded listlessly to orders and the response suggested disunity in the ranks.²⁹³

²⁸⁹ Robert Wang, "China's Evolving Strategic Doctrine" *Asian Survey* 24, no. 10 (1984), 1042.

²⁹⁰ Paul Godwin, "Chinese Military Strategy Revised: Local and Limited War" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 519, no. 1 (1992), 191-194.

²⁹¹ Li, *ibid*, 446.

²⁹² Spence, *ibid*, 659.

²⁹³ June Teufel Dreyer, "The Role of the Military" *World Policy Journal* 6, no. 4 (1989), 648.

Martial law was promulgated on May 19. The following day a group of generals sent a letter to the CMC and Deng asserting they did not think martial law ought to be implemented or that soldiers should be sent to the city. This small revolt within the PLA was quickly resolved after Deng sent top PLA leaders to call on those who wrote and signed the letter. By June 2nd, soldiers were sent into Tiananmen Square to put an end to the protests. The PLA being authorized, opened fire on the protesters with casualties ranging from two hundred to nine thousand. Some soldiers refused to fire their weapons though, and afterward up to 3,500 commanders were investigated for misconduct.²⁹⁴ Overall Tiananmen was a calamity for the PLA. It bruised the relationship between the military and the people, interrupted modernization and professionalization, and led the CCP to demand greater indoctrination and loyalty from the military.²⁹⁵

Major organizational reforms and adjustments in strategy were the defining features for the PLA during the 1980s. The PLA's involvement in politics also dramatically shrunk, only to be brought into domestic affairs yet again with its role in the Tiananmen Square protests. Meanwhile, with Deng and the Party focusing on reforming the economy, government expenditures for the PLA were slashed, leading the military engaging in greater commercial activities which then led to a growing problem of corruption. Overall, the end of the Mao era created an opportunity to ramp up efforts to increase professionalization, a theme that would continue in the aftermath of Tiananmen into the 1990s.

²⁹⁴ Harlan Jencks, "Civil-Military Relations in China: Tiananmen and After" *Problems of Communism* no.40 (May-June 1991), 22.

²⁹⁵ Ellis Joffe, "The Chinese Army: Coping with the Consequences of Tiananmen" In *China Briefing, 1991* William Joseph ed (NY: Westview Press, 1992), 39.

3.6 1990-1996

China's external environment dramatically improved by the turn of the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and a growing—particularly economic—relationship with the U.S. In 1996 one scholar concluded that not since the Opium War had China been more secure against external threats.²⁹⁶ From 1990-1997, four major events impacting the PLA was the 1991 Gulf War, growing emphasis on professionalization and modernization, the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, and a reduction in the role of politics. Observing the performance of the U.S. military and its quick outcome in the Gulf War had a jolting influence on China. Rather than getting enmeshed in a quagmire as the Soviets had in Afghanistan, the U.S. used superior technology in the forms of precision bombing, electronic warfare, use of satellites, and combined arms operations to devastating effect. The Gulf War made China aware of how far it had to go and influenced a change in strategy from limited war to limited war under high tech conditions.²⁹⁷

After the Gulf War the PLA made changes not only to its strategy, but also training and efforts to accelerate military modernization and professionalization. From 1993-1997, training and tactics were changed to focus on winning a local war under high tech conditions. Reforms on training methods, tactics and training content were issued, with training particularly aimed at high tech powerful enemies.²⁹⁸ China scholars indicate it was the Gulf War that helped push for vastly greater improvements in military modernization. In 1995 the CMC put forward a strategy of “strengthening the military through science and technology.” And for army construction to put just as much focus on quality as it had on quantity.²⁹⁹ China's robust economic growth also

²⁹⁶ Allen Whiting, "The PLA and China's Threat Perceptions" *The China Quarterly* no.146 (1996), 614.

²⁹⁷ David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (CA: University of California Press, 2002), 69-70.

²⁹⁸ Dewei, *ibid*, 30-35.

²⁹⁹ Hao Shinan, 军事现代化与中国军政关系的形态变迁 (Military Modernization and Changes in China's Military-Government) 复旦政治学评论 (Fudan Political Science Review) no.2, (2016), 204-235.

helped for greater expenditure to be spent on military modernization, as the CCP emphasized China's military modernization needs to be linked with economic growth. Meanwhile, regarding professionalization, while Tiananmen temporarily interrupted growing professionalism the trend in the 1990s was one of an increasingly professionalized force. Officers were better educated, younger, and more specialized in their positions.³⁰⁰

Another event that made it startlingly clear the CCP had far to go in military modernization was the 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Crisis. The purported crisis was triggered by the U.S. giving a visa to Taiwanese leader Lee Teng Hui, and his subsequent visit. In response, China conducted multiple missile tests and military exercises off the coast of Taiwan.³⁰¹ The U.S. sent two aircraft carrier groups in March 1996 to signal its resolve, and while the PLA continued with some exercises and tests after the U.S. sent the carrier groups, the crisis ended shortly after.³⁰² Top CCP officials concluded from the events that the U.S. likely would not sit idly by in the case of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. And thus, the need to strengthen modernization became more imperative.³⁰³

Finally, the role of the PLA in politics continuously diminished. The number of PLA officials in core CCP decision-making bodies decreased significantly, a phenomenon that started with military reforms during the 1980s. Reforms to lower PLA officials in key decision-making bodies was pioneered by Deng to curb the power base of the PLA in politics to form more of a collective style leadership system.³⁰⁴ The Party was seen as sending the military back to the

³⁰⁰ James Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps Trends and Implications* (Santa Monica CA: Rand Corp, 1997), 69.

³⁰¹ Scobell, Andrew. "Show of force: Chinese soldiers, statesmen, and the 1995-1996 Taiwan Strait crisis." *Political Science Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (2000), 231-232.

³⁰² Robert Ross, "The 1995-96 Taiwan Strait Confrontation: Coercion, Credibility, and the Use of Force" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (2000), 111-112.

³⁰³ Li, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, *ibid*, 289-290.

³⁰⁴ Alice Miller, "The PLA in the Party Leadership Decisionmaking System" in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, Phillip Saunders and Andrew Scobell eds, (CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 61-62.

barracks, with Deng wanting to get the PLA out of politics.³⁰⁵ Admiral Liu Huaqing was the last member of the military to serve on the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) in 1997, and only two representatives of the PLA—two CMC vice chairmen—has been on the Politburo since 1992.³⁰⁶

3.7 Summary

The PLA's experience from 1949 until 1996 is one marked with great strides in military modernization and professionalization after starting from essentially a peasant army with no naval or air force branches. These improvements, however, were interspersed with moments when the PLA was pulled deeply into domestic politics that slowed modernization—particularly the 1960s and 1970s. By 1997, additional improvements in professionalization and modernization were still sorely needed. While PLA officers tended to be more educated and younger, corruption and factionalism continued to deeply plague the military.³⁰⁷ PLA capabilities were also still far behind advanced countries. Some analysts argued at the time that the Chinese military was simply not very good.³⁰⁸ The next chapter examines China's military strategy from 1997-2004, setting a baseline for how the Hu and Xi era's will be analyzed and compared with.

³⁰⁵ Ellis Joffe, "The Chinese Army: Coping with the Consequences of Tiananmen" in *China Briefing, 1991*, William Joseph and Deborah Washburn eds. (NY: Routledge, 1992) 39.

³⁰⁶ Saunders and Scobell, *ibid*, 5.

³⁰⁷ June Teufel Dreyer, "The New Officer Corps: Implications for the Future" *The China Quarterly* no.146, (1996), 335.

³⁰⁸ Bates Gill and Michael O'Hanlon, "China's Hollow Military" *The National Interest* no.56, (1999), 61.

4 JIANG ZEMIN ERA: MODERNIZING WHILE NOT DETERIORATING

Deng Xiaoping tapped Jiang Zemin to become general secretary of the CCP in the wake of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989. Jiang rose through the party ranks in part because of his performance as party secretary of Shanghai and a dedication to reform, experience in foreign affairs, and deep familiarity with science and technology.³⁰⁹ A departure from the past, Jiang represented a new type of CCP leader in that he was the first to not possess a revolutionary history or strong personal ties with the military upon ascending to pinnacle of the CCP.³¹⁰ This also illustrated a growing change toward a more technocratic leadership: those who were highly trained in technical sciences and held leadership positions. Before Deng's death in 1997, many China scholars were skeptical of Jiang's authority and power, seeing him as an ineffectual leader whose position and power was mainly dependent on his patron—Deng.³¹¹ This proved to be slightly inaccurate as Jiang went on to strengthened his leadership.

Although Jiang did not have any military experience, he established himself as the most powerful political figure in China by the turn of the century. This came about in no small measure because of his relationship with the PLA.³¹² Over time, as more party elders and senior military officers retired—while others were removed—Jiang strengthened his power and influence within the PLA.³¹³ Skillfully building ties with the strongest factions within the PLA strengthened Jiang's base of support in the military.³¹⁴ However, despite Jiang's power within

³⁰⁹ Ezra Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), 622-623.

³¹⁰ David Shambaugh, "China's Commander-in-Chief: Jiang Zemin and the PLA" in *Chinese Military Modernization*, Dennison Lane, Dimon Liu and Mark Weisenbloom eds. (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 1996).

³¹¹ Li Cheng and Lynn White, "The Fifteenth Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party: full-fledged technocratic leadership with partial control by Jiang Zemin" *Asian Survey* 38, no. 3 (1998), 235-236.

³¹² You Ji, "Jiang Zemin's Command of the Military" *The China Journal* 45 (2001), 131.

³¹³ Alex Chopan, "A Table for Two: Jiang Zemin and the PLA" *Journal of Contemporary China*, 11 no. 31 (2002), 283-284.

³¹⁴ Ji, *ibid*, 135.

the PLA, key decisions and the military policy making process in the CMC still represented a consensus-based approach, rather than one individual dominating the decision-making as had been the case under Mao, and to a large extent Deng too. Jiang also did not have complete authority over promotions in the PLA either, which weakened the ability to strongly influence the military.

Emphasis on modernization and professionalization characterized the main goals of the CCP in the 1990s. The Taiwan Strait Crisis and lack of a strong deterrent threat against the U.S. moving two carrier groups through the South China Sea, along with concerns about the increased business activities of PLA officers magnified the dramatic need for accelerated modernization and professionalization of the military.

This chapter establishes a baseline for defining the contents of China's military strategy during the Jiang era in terms of army building and training. Another purpose it serves is to provide a backdrop for then assessing the Hu and Xi cases, and how much—if any—deviation has transpired since then. The following section provides the main themes of the content of army building in the Jiang era through the analysis of twenty-one articles from Chinese sources that were obtained through the Chinese CNKI database. These sources are supplemented by secondary, scholarly articles on the Jiang era.

4.1 Army Building

The main themes from Chinese sources on army building from 1997-2004 are the “Three Represents” guiding army construction, guarding against deteriorating or weakening, the five sentences, three modernizations of army building, and the continued importance of following Mao and Deng's thought on army building. While there are numerous other issues emphasized as well, such as the absolute authority of the party over the army, education and training,

technology, and cultivating military talents, the one's listed at the start of this section are talked about most frequently.

4.1.1 Three Represents

Guidance to adhere to the Three Represents appeared on a mass scale beginning in 2000. A search on Cnki reveals that prior to 2000, a search for the slogan only appeared once in 1998 and twice in 1999, and then had over three thousand hits in 2000.³¹⁵ The Three Represents was the main CCP slogan during the Jiang era. This section briefly describes the core content and motivation for the concept and is then followed by what the Three Represents meant for the PLA and army building. By introducing the Three Represents, the main purpose was to widen and expand the character of the party while keeping the CCP's class foundation.³¹⁶ Very basically and broadly, the slogan emphasized that the CCP represents (1) the development requirements of the country's economic forces, (2) the planned direction and development of the country's culture, and (3) the essential interests of the people.³¹⁷ The Three Represents Campaign can also, simply, be thought of as attempts by the CCP to advance or encourage established party lines to maintain its legitimacy.³¹⁸

The Three Represents was not just directed toward Chinese society or meant for the party, but also the PLA. Before the CCP began to launch the Three Represents more broadly the PLA already was praising it, and after Jiang introduced the term in a speech, the military put

³¹⁵ <https://kns.cnki.net/kns8/defaultresult/index>

³¹⁶ Bruce Dickson, "Whom Does the Party Represent? From 'three revolutionary classes' to 'three represents'" *American Asian Review* 21, no. 1 (2003), 14.

³¹⁷ <https://baike.baidu.com/item/“三个代表”重要思想/2523227?fromtitle=三个代表&fromid=104156&fr=aladdin>

³¹⁸ Jia Hepeng, "The Three Represents Campaign: Reform the Party or Indoctrinate the Capitalists" *Cato Journal* 24, no.3, (2004), 264.

together its own internal campaign of the slogan.³¹⁹ The widespread use and appearance of the three represents in the PLA is illustrated by the fact that the slogan appeared far more in the *PLA Daily* than any other propaganda outlet such as *People's Daily*, *Xinhua*, and *Guangming Daily*.³²⁰ Han Shenguo, at the time serving in the political department of the Henan Military Region, exclaimed that the PLA should lead the way for the rest of the country when it came to practicing the Three Represents.³²¹ CMC member and Chief of the General Staff of the PLA General Fu Quanyou also emphasized its importance for the PLA by asserting that the building of the armed forces ought to be guided by the Three Represents.³²² However, the PLA expressing support for the Three Represents does not indicate what that meant concretely for modernization or army building.

The military court system applied Jiang's speech on the Three Represents to improve military legal work. And the issuance of new military training regulations in 2002 was fundamentally directed by the three represents,³²³ as was national defense education and the content in classes at military colleges.³²⁴ Finally, and most importantly, discussion of applying the three represents for army building was discussed with the term "scientific outlook on development" as an important concept that flowed from the three represents. Army construction needed to be guided by things such as scientific monitoring mechanisms of defense spending to

³¹⁹ James Mulvenon, "The PLA and the 'Three Represents': Jiang's Bodyguards or Party Army?" *China Leadership Monitor* no. 4 (2002),

³²⁰ <https://kns.cnki.net/kns8/defaultresult/index>

³²¹ Han Shenguo, 军队要走在实践“三个代表”的前列 (the army should be at the forefront of the practice of "Three Represents") 学习论坛 (Learning Forum), no.8, (2001), 7-9.

³²² Fu Quanyou, 学习实践“三个代表”重要思想 有效履行人民军队根本职能 (Study and practice the important thought of "Three Represents" to effectively perform the fundamental functions of the people's army) 求是 (Seeking Truth), no. 15 (2001), 12-15.

³²³ Mulvenon, *ibid.*

³²⁴ Shan Xiuyan and Cui Xiaofeng, 用“三个代表”重要思想指导军事教学改革 (Guide Military Teaching Reform with the Important Thought of "Three Represents") 思想政治教育研究 (Research on Ideological and Political Education) no.4, (2004), 51-52.

address the phenomenon of inefficiency in utilization of resources on one hand, and insufficient military spending on the other. The scientific outlook on development also emphasized informatization for army building as an important requirement. Poor information caused by old thinking in information technology had held the PLA back and needed to be improved if it was to become an effective military capable of keeping up with the advanced military powers.³²⁵

While it is described that Jiang Zemin had his own thought on army building, there was still constant refrain on the importance of Deng Xiaoping thought on army building—along with Mao's thought too. Chinese sources describe Jiang's thought on army building as not being much different from Deng's theory on army construction, or using Mao and Deng's thought to develop army building for the new era.³²⁶ Jiang personally often pointed to Deng's thought on army building when giving guidance to the PLA.³²⁷ Indeed, toward the end of the 1990s, the PLA was instructed that "In the face of this major historical issue and the new situation in the 21st century, our army must hold high the great banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory and firmly establish the guiding position of Deng Xiaoping's army building thought."³²⁸

Deng pushed forward the regularization of the army. One major requirement for this was consistently improving rules and regulations, and not just improving rules but to strictly

³²⁵ Yuan Wei, 以“三个代表”为指针用科学发展观指导部队的改革和建设 (Taking the "Three Represents" as a guideline to guide the reform and construction of the army with the scientific development concept) 军队政工理论研究 (Theoretical Research on Military Political Work), no.5, (2004), 21-22.

³²⁶ Hao Cunxing, 江泽民对毛泽东军事思想和邓小平新时期军队建设思想的创造性发展 (Jiang Zemin's Creative Development of Mao Zedong's Military Thought and Deng Xiaoping's Thought on Army Construction in the New Period 西安政治学院学报 (Journal of Xian Political Science Institute), no.5, (2005), 15-19; Xia Zhengnan, 着力反映邓小平新时期军队建设思想的精华——《邓小平军事哲学思想研究》评价 (Focusing on Reflecting the Essence of Deng Xiaoping's Thought on Military Construction in the New Era - Evaluation of "Research on Deng Xiaoping's Military Philosophical Thought") 求是 (Seeking Truth) no.4, (2002), 62.

³²⁷ Yang Chengping, 江泽民对新时期国防建设的理论贡献 (Jiang Zemin's Theoretical Contribution to National Defense Construction in the New Era) 湖南社会科学 (Hunan Social Sciences) no.4 (2002), 18-21.

³²⁸ Shang Jinsuo, 高举邓小平理论伟大旗帜把建设有中国特色的现代化国防事业全面推向 21 世纪 (Holding high the great banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory and comprehensively promoting the cause of building a modern national defense with Chinese characteristics into the 21st century), 军事历史研究 (Military History Research) no.2 (2001), 1.

implement them. Regularization of the PLA meant greater institutionalization and legalization. Additionally, better discipline was needed. The PLA could not be an effective military without it.³²⁹ Although part of this discipline was emphasized to make sure the PLA was politically loyal to the party and prioritize discipline in implementing rules, it is a core aspect for combat effectiveness. From a broader, more general strategic view, the PLA was guided by Deng to strive by the idea of people's war under modern conditions. It signified a revision of Mao's military thought and strategy.

The strategy under modern conditions proscribed that unlike strategy under Mao, if attacked the PLA would not quickly retreat into the deep interior of the country. Rather, it would try to block the enemy's advance through positional warfare. Future warfare also would not rely overwhelmingly on the infantry but increasingly use combined arms. And, the military could no longer be both a civic force and combat force, the main task is preparing for war.³³⁰ An important factor driving Deng's military thought came from the international situation, which was seen as one that was more peaceful—and would continue that way for some time into the future—than in the past. From this, the PLA should take advantage to acquire better weapons, improve rules and regulations, and reorganize the structure of the forces.³³¹

4.2 Guarding Against Deterioration

While Deng's thought is important for thinking about, or helping explain army building in the Jiang era, the rest of this section and chapter focuses on what the PLA expressed as

³²⁹ Ma Debao, 邓小平军队正规化建设思想及其时代价值 (Deng Xiaoping's Thought on Regularization of the Army and Its Value of the Times) 军队政工理论研究 (Theoretical Research on Military Political Work) 15 no.5, (2014), 33-35.

³³⁰ Ellis Joffe, "People's War under Modern Conditions: A Doctrine for Modern War" *The China Quarterly* 112 (1987), 559-560.

³³¹ Lei Yuanshen and Hu Guangzheng, 论邓小平关于新时期军队建设的思想 (On Deng Xiaoping's Thought on Army Construction in the New Period) 中共党史研究 (Research on the History of the Communist Party of China), no.6, (1994), 24-31.

necessary for army building and training. The term “not deteriorating” (不变质) appears frequently in the Jiang era and is described as one of the two historical issues, along with winning. These two issues were significant because they are noted as the basis and core from which Jiang’s leadership in army construction and national defense revolves,³³² and are highlighted regularly in discussion on army building.³³³

Two reasons are offered for why the PLA needed to guard against deterioration. The first stemmed from what was occurring in the economy. It was not just the global battlefield environment undergoing revolutionary change by the turn of the century, there were also major changes spurred by the explosive growth of the economy. Although this rapid economic growth was good for the country, it posed serious issues for the PLA. Greater wealth and changes to the economy led to changes in lifestyle and values. Li Zenglin from the Nanchang Army College warned that:

However, we must be soberly aware that the market economy has also brought about obvious negative effects. A minority of officers and soldiers have shifted their outlook on life and values to different degrees. The sense of selfless dedication, hard work and the pursuit of progress has been weakened. A small number of officials trade power and money to satisfy their own personal desires, even at the risk of becoming criminals of the people. Our army is a people's army under the leadership of the Party.³³⁴

³³² 解决好打得赢、不变质两个历史性课题 (Solve the two historical issues of winning and not deteriorating) 解放军报 (People’s Liberation Army Daily) October 10, 2004.

³³³ For just a couple examples see Hu Kairui, 践行“三个代表”要求 确保军队打得赢不变质 (Practice the requirements of "Three Represents" to ensure that the army wins and does not deteriorate) 党的建设 (Party Building), no.9 (2003), 10; Feng Shuyun, 党委抓军事斗争准备应处理好三个关系 (Party committees should deal with three relations in preparing for military struggle) 国防 (National Defense) no.11 (2003), 21-22.

³³⁴ Li Zenglin, 两个历史性课题:新时期军队建设与改革的着力点 (Two Historic Issues: The Focus of Military Construction and Reform in the New Era) 南京政治学院学报 (Journal of Nanjing University of Political Science), no. 5 (2000), 71.

Unbridled economic growth not only led to rampant corruption which prompted the CCP to try and ban the PLA from business activities at this time in the late 1990s,³³⁵ but also because it was seen as degrading the attitudes and quality of soldiers. Additionally, these significant domestic changes contributed to growing fears that the PLA was becoming nationalized, or increasingly non-politicized. Warnings against these erroneous ideological tendencies were emphasized—which also could produce further deterioration.³³⁶

Guarding against deterioration was also in response to global military developments. Deng Changyou, political commissar of the Air Force, wrote that not deteriorating was “based on the challenge of the world's new military reform in accordance with the advanced standards to comprehensively improve the level of military construction.”³³⁷ Deng wrote the essay in the wake of the Balkans War and the start of the Afghan and Iraq wars. This emphasis by the PLA on paying careful attention to the trend of military reforms around the world as an important basis for China’s own army building will be expanded on a little more later in this chapter. For now, it was also evident in some discussions of the two deteriorations that the PLA could not afford to fall behind the perceived global military reforms. Thus, the need to fight deterioration was based on both internal and external factors.

4.3 Five sentences

In addition to the language of not deteriorating, dialogue of the “five sentences” was also portrayed as highly important for army building in the Jiang era. Some describe it as the standard

³³⁵ Tai Ming Cheung, *China's Entrepreneurial Army* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174-175.

³³⁶ 解决好打得赢、不变质两个历史性课题 (Solve the two historical issues of winning and not deteriorating), *ibid.*

³³⁷ Deng Changyou, 认真学习贯彻江泽民国防和军队建设思想 (Conscientiously Study and Implement Jiang Zemin's Thoughts on National Defense and Army Construction) 解放军报 (PLA Daily) August 3, 2003.

for army construction for the new period.³³⁸ However, it was not entirely new. The five sentences were characterized as being the focus of the PLA's army construction for at least ten years—it is unclear exactly when it was pushed forward—and continued into the twenty-first century.

Beginning at the grassroots units, the five sentences provided the basis for the PLA at all levels in terms of army building.³³⁹ The five sentences described as general requirements for army building include: “political qualification, military excellence, excellent work style, strict discipline, and strong guarantees.³⁴⁰” It is not clear exactly what strong guarantees entail.

Overall, the five sentences are conveyed as covering the basic elements of politics, military, work style, discipline, and security. Together they represent an inseparable whole, whereby the quality of army building can be elevated.³⁴¹ What is evident is the importance of the political aspect, with political and ideological building being described as the fundamental construction of the army and distinct advantage of the people's army.³⁴²

4.4 Quality over Quantity

Finally, army construction at times must grapple with the issue of whether the military ought to prioritize quantity or quality. In the late 1990s, most China scholars and military officials believed the trend of major countries was toward quality over quantity.³⁴³ Speaking

³³⁸ Yang Jun, 新世纪国防和军队建设的科学指南 (A Scientific Guide to National Defense and Army Construction in the New Century) 南京政治学院学报 (Nanjing Institute of Political Science) no.6, (2002), 11-13.

³³⁹ Xiao Yusheng, 党的十三届四中全会以来国防和军队建设的成就与经验 (Achievements and Experiences in National Defense and Military Construction since the Fourth Plenary Session of the Thirteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China) 军事历史 (Military History) no.5, (2002), 3.

³⁴⁰ Wang Hong, 必须解决好新形势下军队建设的两个历史性课题 (We must solve two historical issues of military construction under the new situation) 军队政工理论研究 (Theoretical Research on Military Political Work) no.2, (2004), 23-25.

³⁴¹ Wang Hong, *ibid.*

³⁴² Jun, *ibid.*, 11.

³⁴³ Chengping, *ibid.*, 20-21.

about quality and quantity often refers to things such as personnel and weaponry.³⁴⁴ In some circumstances increases in quantity can make up for a lack of quality. However, it was believed the PLA needed to focus on quality because when there is a gap pertaining to information technology between it and other militaries, it is difficult to close the gap simply by adding quantity.

Also, when thinking about future warfare and what it might comprise of, most China scholars believed that future wars would be defined as information wars. These wars would be smaller and involve fewer soldiers than in the past. Therefore, it is described that the CMC decided to reform military construction to focus on quality efficiency from a quantitative model.³⁴⁵ Military units will be small or medium sized, and the overall size of armies will be reduced.³⁴⁶ This emphasis on quality over quantity was reflected in 2003 to cut 200,000 troops reducing the size of the PLA to 2.3 million from 2.5 million.³⁴⁷

4.5 Training

The second part of the DV is training. For analysis of this part, the number of training exercises, what type, and what PLA sources discuss as being important for training is examined. Due to the difficulty of collecting information and finding sources from this era, assembling data on the number of training exercises, and what type, proved difficult to gather. For the number of exercises, I used the *ProQuest* database and Baidu searches for military exercises from 1997-

³⁴⁴ Wang Ping 谈我军质量建设的几项原则 (Talking about several principles of our army's quality construction) 现代军事 (Modern Military), no 6. (1999), 31.

³⁴⁵ Wang Yongsheng, 新时期人民解放军质量建设探析 (An Analysis of the Quality Construction of the People's Liberation Army in the New Era) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research) no.2 (1999), 2-4.

³⁴⁶ Sun Lihua and Zhou Jianbo, 21 世纪军队建设发展的主旋律 (The main theme of military construction and development in the 21st century) 国防科技 (Military Science and Technology) 22 no.9, (2001), 24-25.

³⁴⁷ <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/III.htm>

2004. Because *ProQuest* does not possess sources from the *People's Daily* on exercises until 2003, I utilized the *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific* to find the number and types of exercises.

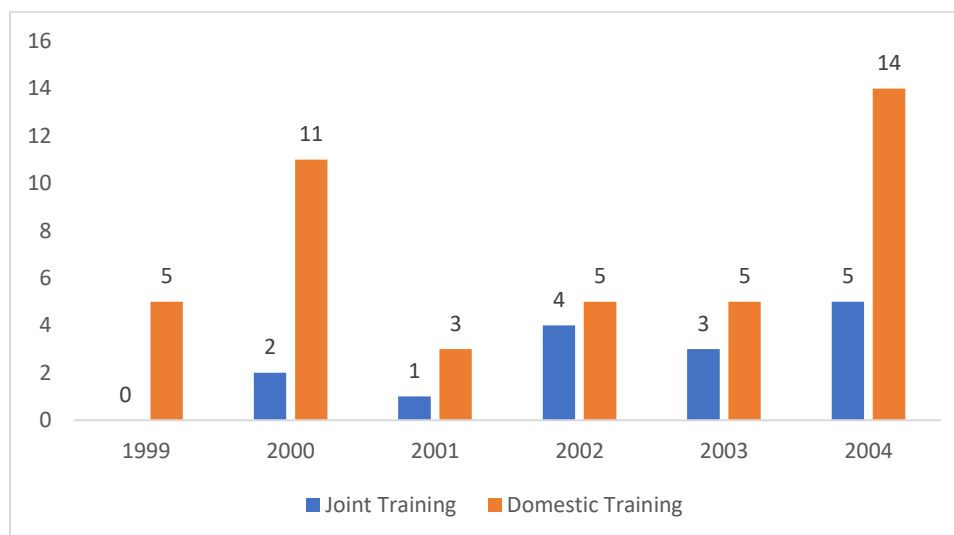


Figure 1: PLA Training in the Jiang Era

However, the data does not begin until 1999, which limits the analysis to 1999-2004. This still provides a long enough timeframe to observe patterns in exercises and the frequency and nature. While the data is sparse, it is still useful in giving a picture of the kind of training the PLA conducted. One final note is that the nature of these exercises is quite large. Big enough that they are observed or reported on by foreign outlets. No doubt, smaller infantry units at the platoon, company, and battalion levels likely carry out field training exercises repeatedly throughout each year. Daily training is essential for combat effectiveness for any military.

4.5.1 Joint Training

Data on PLA exercises in the Jiang era suggests the total number of exercises did not significantly rise until 2004, as the graph above highlights. Another important trend is that joint training exercises significantly increased. There seems to be an intentional shift to conduct joint

exercises with foreign militaries, including a rescue exercise with the U.S. in Honk Kong in 2001,³⁴⁸ and joint naval exercises with the U.K. and France separately in 2004.³⁴⁹ The trend toward increased joint training with foreign militaries was highlighted in China's 2002 defense white paper stressing the PRC's intention to expand multilateral exercises in the future.³⁵⁰

This intention mentioned in the white paper was evident in the number of joint exercises from 2002-2004, compared to the number from 1999-2001. Certainly, joint training with foreign militaries offered the PLA an opportunity to improve their own training and learn from others. Another reason for the increase is also likely due to the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2000. The founding members of the group in addition to China included Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Originally, the organization's top focus was accomplishing a sweeping border agreement and building closer relations among the neighboring countries who made up its composition. But after 9/11, the organization naturally turned progressively more toward security with separatism, extremism, and terrorism as the issues that knit the group closer together.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ "Chinese, US Forces Take Part in Joint Military Rescue Exercise in Hong Kong" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, December 06, 2000. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-us-forces-take-part-joint-military-rescue/docview/450043772/se-2>.

³⁴⁹ "China, France to Hold Joint Naval Exercises" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, March 12, 2004. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/china-france-hold-joint-naval-exercises/docview/461028450/se-2>; "Sino-UK Maritime Exercise Unveils China's New Security Concept - Official" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Jun 20, 2004. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/sino-uk-maritime-exercise-unveils-chinas-new/docview/461080791/se-2>.

³⁵⁰ English version, access through Andrew Erickson's personal website, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/China-Defense-White-Paper_2002_English-Chinese_Annotated.pdf

³⁵¹ Raffaello Pantucci and Alexandros Petersen, *Sinostan: China's Inadvertent Empire* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 152-155.

4.5.2 Domestic Training

Regular training by PLA units domestically also were often concentrated on anti-terrorism or concerns about unrest.³⁵² The highest number of exercises occurred in the border provinces of Tibet,³⁵³ Xinjiang,³⁵⁴ and Guangdong.³⁵⁵ Aside from anti-terrorism drills, joint forces training was the type of training conducted most often in terms of frequency of training reported on. This reinforced the idea the PLA was aware as far back as the Jiang era that improvements in joint force capabilities needed to be a focus and improved. Additionally, large numbers of exercises reported on were either in the East or South China Seas,³⁵⁶ and perceived by some as being directed at Taiwan³⁵⁷—although Taiwanese officials themselves often downplayed this assessment.³⁵⁸ Finally, in 2000, the PLA held its largest exercises since 1965 in an area close to Beijing, with Jiang Zemin in attendance to view the training and speak with officers. The training show was meant to highlight the PLA's advances in modern warfare, with

³⁵² "China's Xinjiang Military District Border Defence Troops Conduct Exercises" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, Oct 25, 2002. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinas-xinjiang-military-district-border-defence/docview/449000228/se-2>.

³⁵³ "China Holds Inter-Services Counterterrorism Drill in Tibet" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Sept 13, 2004. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/china-holds-inter-services-counterterrorism-drill/docview/460988961/se-2>.

³⁵⁴ "China's Xinjiang Military District Border Defence Troops Conduct Exercises" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, Oct 25, 2002. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinas-xinjiang-military-district-border-defence/docview/449000228/se-2>.

³⁵⁵ "China: Guangdong's Zhanjiang Area Stages War Game" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, June 05, 2000. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/china-guangdongs-zhanjiang-area-stages-war-game/docview/449779525/se-2>.

³⁵⁶ "China Reports Exercises on South, East China Sea Coasts" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, Sept 10, 1999. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/china-reports-exercises-on-south-east-sea-coasts/docview/450098897/se-2>.

³⁵⁷ "China's Military Exercise Aims at Taiwan's Penghu Islands - Singapore Paper" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, July 23, 2004. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinas-military-exercise-aims-at-taiwans-penghu/docview/460701043/se-2>.

³⁵⁸ "Taiwan Defence Minister Says Chinese Military Drills 'Routine'" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, May 24, 2000. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/taiwan-defence-minister-says-chinese-military/docview/450074403/se-2>.

exercises showcasing defense against precision attacks, cruise missiles and attack helicopters, and attacking enemy stealth aircraft.³⁵⁹

4.5.3 *Focus of Training*

Military training in the Jiang era focused on technology and efforts for elevating the PLA's combat effectiveness. Some argued three types of training methods should be adopted and were worth learning. The first was multi-level training that could supplement and, in some cases, replace field training. It is a little vague what exactly this is supposed to encompass other than using increased technological training. Confrontational drills are second, these are depicted as incorporating information warfare. Third is expanding the use of simulation training.³⁶⁰ The main benefit of using simulation training was explained as not so much for any special purposes that simulation can help for training, but rather there is no possibility of damaging military equipment, injuries to soldiers, and it saves on fuel and ammunition.³⁶¹

But increased simulation training required more technological sophistication. There was already a growing chorus in Chinese sources for a change from old training styles to new scientific one's. The Jiang era underwent a declared major reform from what was described as traditional training approaches to one of technology training. The CMC declared that revitalization in training that focused on science and technology was needed, and furthermore issuing a report calling for an outburst in technological training.³⁶² The shift and demand for greater technological training echoed the changes to how the PLA saw warfare, in particular the

³⁵⁹ "Chinese President Oversees Largest Military Exercise since 1965" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific - Political*, Oct 16, 2000. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-president-oversees-largest-military/docview/450048716/se-2>.

³⁶⁰ Ping, *ibid*, 30-31.

³⁶¹ Sun Lihua and Zhou Jianbo, *ibid*, 24-27

³⁶² Wang Faan and Zhang Jie, 面向新世纪的突破与跨越——“九五”军队建设与改革回顾 (Breakthroughs and leaps towards the new century—Review of the 'Ninth Five-Year Plan' Army Construction and Reform) *军事历史* (Military History) no.4, (2001), 3-7.

Gulf Coast War and war in the Balkans. Guidance in the MSG emphasized a change in the 1990s from an ideology of emergency preparedness to one of peace building. And indications for training to focus on technology was in the guidelines, arguing a new situation required preparations for military conflict ought to be changed to winning local wars under high-tech conditions, whereas before the PLA should cope with local wars under general conditions.³⁶³

For training to be pushed toward higher levels of science and technology, a more educated military force was imperative. Military talents and high-quality talents were two terms that appear frequently in Chinese sources. Concerns about the cultivation of talents in the military grew and building an environment that was conducive to the growth of high-quality talents became a vital concern.³⁶⁴ The constant emphasis on developing a force with high-quality talents likely was a result that the PLA did not have enough quality, educated troops in the ranks.

While some noted the PLA gradually improved the knowledge base of military cadres, with ten thousand troops who either had a PhD or Masters,³⁶⁵ the overall talent level was seen as not keeping pace with the requirements of modern wars.³⁶⁶ This is perhaps unsurprising since ten thousand cadres with graduate degrees is a drop in the ocean when the PLA consisted of three million people. Some also believed there was a direct link between a military with highly educated soldiers and success on the battlefield. The U.S. victory in the Gulf War was viewed to a large degree because of having highly educated troops, particularly officers. Without this, overwhelming victory would not have been possible.³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Yusheng, *ibid*, 4-5.

³⁶⁴ Changyou, *ibid*.

³⁶⁵ Yusheng, *ibid*, 5-6.

³⁶⁶ Shi Yonggen, 施永根. 试论新时期军队建设的主要矛盾) 空军政治学院学报 (Journal of the Air Force Political Academy), no.6 (1997), 32.

³⁶⁷ Sun Dejun, 军队建设要强化人才 兴军战略 (Strengthening the Strategy of Rejuvenating the Army with Talents in Army Construction) 领导科学 (Leadership Science) no.7 (2003), 42-43.

In efforts to alleviate this problem, the PLA sent soldiers to study abroad. More significantly, new defense universities such as the National University of Defense Technology, the University of Science and Technology, the Naval University of Engineering and Air Force University of Engineering were established.³⁶⁸ While new universities were created, many others were either closed or merged. Furthermore, there were efforts of increasing the role of civilian universities for the advancement of PLA officers, with some officers recruited from civilian universities, a policy approved in regulations issued by the State Council and CMC in 2000.³⁶⁹ In addition to pushing for more college educated military personnel and developing high quality talents, training was strengthened to include long-distance training, night training, joint operations training, and exercises to defeat enemies with superior equipment.³⁷⁰ Efforts of the PLA to make training reflect the emphasis on technology and preparing for informatized local wars, other than simulation, included systems integration training, network training, fuzzy authorization training, and distributed interactive training.³⁷¹

4.5.4 New Training Regulations

From 1999-2002 the PLA issued important new regulations and outlines for training. In 1999 the CMC introduced a new doctrine describing the ways that the PLA would operate future military operations and prepare for military struggle.³⁷² In the summer of 2001, the General Staff Department adjusted and modified the content of PLA training, which was decreed in the

³⁶⁸ Yusheng, *ibid*, 5-6.

³⁶⁹ John Corbett Jr, Edward O' Dowd, and David Chen, "Building the Fighting Strength: PLA Officer Assessment, Education, Training, and Utilization, in *The 'People' In the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*, Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner eds. (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College, 2008), 139-141.

³⁷⁰ Yongsheng, *ibid*, 11-13.

³⁷¹ James Mulvenon, "'True is False, False is True, Virtual is Reality, Reality is Virtue': Technology and Simulation in the Chinese Military Revolution" in *The 'People' In the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*, Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner eds. (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College, 2008), 61.

³⁷² Blasko, *ibid*, 175.

“Outline of Military Training and Evaluation.”³⁷³ The outline emphasized areas such as new equipment, joint operations, operations outside of war such as emergency rescue, and the “‘three attacks and three defenses’ (strike at stealth aircraft, strike at cruise missiles, strike at helicopter gunships; defense against precision attacks, defense against electronic jamming, defense against reconnaissance and surveillance)” among other things.³⁷⁴

Moreover, in 2002 the PLA issued additional new regulations dealing with comprehensively standardizing the leadership, administration, and organization of military training.³⁷⁵ These new regulations, and a new national defense law in 2001, were sorely needed from the view of the PLA because much of the regulations at the time had become outdated. Shortly after the introduction of these new regulations, the General Staff Department organized intensive training courses for cadres at all levels.³⁷⁶ Besides joint training mentioned above that the Outline of Military Training emphasized, other areas included amphibious operations, anti-terrorist, special forces, and airborne operations.³⁷⁷

4.6 Conclusion

Becoming a modernized, regularized, and revolutionary army was a main theme of army building in the Jiang era. Advancing modernization while keeping up with global military trends and guarding against deterioration were key requirements for the PLA. Sweeping domestic changes brought by economic reform and opening caused serious concern among the Party elite, and some top military leaders, that the attitudes and loyalty of rank-and-file soldiers would fade. A major problem for the PLA in the Jiang era was also how to rapidly expand modernization,

³⁷³ <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/V.htm>

³⁷⁴ Blasko, *ibid*, 176.

³⁷⁵ <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/V.htm>

³⁷⁶ Yusheng, *ibid*, 8-9.

³⁷⁷ Blasko, *ibid*, 185-197.

even though military modernization was supposed to follow and obey economic construction. Not only was it to follow economic construction, but the army was instructed to support and participate in the country's economic development.³⁷⁸

All this took place in the broader context of the “two transformations” which called for (1) preparing to win local wars under high tech conditions from an earlier focus on local wars under normal conditions, and (2) an army prioritizing quality over quantity.³⁷⁹ Meanwhile, important new training regulations and a new national defense law were issued between 1999-2002. A new fighting doctrine was promulgated in 1999, and there was emphasis on training that used simulations. This required a more educated force, leading to deep reforms of China's professional military education (PME) structure. The importance of troops—and especially officers—who were knowledgeable in technology was highlighted at the time by some who argued:

The incoming military officer must be highly educated and have abundant knowledge of high science and technology. If you do not know the nature, function and use of high-tech weapons, how to command troops, soldiers are no exception. If soldiers can't use information technology systems, how will they protect themselves and destroy their enemies on the computer battlefield of the future?³⁸⁰

The emphasis on developing talents and the role of science and technology in the PLA was also reflected in the establishment of a commission on science, technology, and industry for national defense.³⁸¹

Meanwhile, the PLA increased the number of joint exercises with foreign armies between 2002-2004 after very few joint exercises were reported from 1999-2001. However, the overall

³⁷⁸ Chengping, *ibid*, 19-21.

³⁷⁹ Thomas Bickford, “Trends in Education and Training, 1924-2007: From Whampoa to Nanjing Polytechnic” in *The ‘People’ In the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military*, in Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner eds. (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College, 2008), 34.

³⁸⁰ Lihua and Jianbo, *ibid*, 25.

³⁸¹ Yusheng, *ibid*, 4.

total number of military exercises that was reported did not significantly change. Efforts to increase joint training with foreign militaries were largely because of the value in learning from foreign militaries while improving the training of PLA troops. Another reason was the creation of the SCO, and its turn toward security after 9/11. The next chapter examines the three factors that are viewed by PLA scholars as influencing China's military strategy: the outlook on the external environment, capabilities, and goals.

5 OUTLOOK, CAPABILITIES, AND GOALS

Before moving to the Xi era, three factors that influence China's military strategy will be further examined. They pertain to how the PLA and CCP view the international environment, PLA capabilities, and goals outlined by the CCP and CMC. The first section will look at views of the external environment, followed by capabilities, and then goals.

5.1 Outlook on the External Environment

When describing factors that influence military strategy, views of the international security environment play a prominent role. The 2001 *Science of Military Strategy* points out that "International political situations are a premise and an objective base on which strategy is worked out. Among them, feature of the times in international politics, international political configuration, international alliances and organizations, major states' strategic intentions and balance of power have significant and balance of power".³⁸² Thus, what is happening outside of China is seen as an important factor in devising military strategy. For CCP and PLA assessments of the external environment, I mainly rely on annual government documents like white papers, Party Congress work reports (every five years), and the yearly work reports from the National People's Congress issued by the State Council. To supplement government reports I continue to use Chinese sources used in the Jiang, Hu, and Xi chapters, with more weight given to scholars and officers at NDU, AMS, along with articles in *Seeking Truth* (求是) and the *PLA Daily*.

Throughout most of the Jiang and Hu era's there was a characterization of the international environment as being simultaneously peaceful and hostile. In government reports the picture of the global security situation often begins in a positive and upbeat tone. At the turn

³⁸² Guangqian and Youzhi, *Science of Military Strategy*, ibid, 49.

of the century, the 2000 white paper used the terms development and peace to describe the two main themes in the world. These themes of peace and development continued to the Xi era, although to a lesser extent. Overall, the international environment is described as having provided more opportunity than challenges.³⁸³ Because of this, some emphasized the PLA ought to take advantage of this “strategic opportunity period”.³⁸⁴ The following sections briefly go into the main events in the international security environment during the Jiang, Hu, and Xi eras, and then several overarching themes that run through each era will be discussed.

5.1.1 Jiang Era

Conditions in China’s immediate neighborhood, or near-abroad, were mostly stable and the outlook overwhelmingly positive. Specifically, the situation in the Asia-Pacific was improving in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis while ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) continued to facilitate cooperation among countries in the region.³⁸⁵ China’s relationship with neighbors like Vietnam, which contains a history of violence and animosity was on a positive trajectory, evidenced by the land border treaty signed between the two countries at the end of 1999. There was optimism that bilateral relations would continue on a peaceful path.³⁸⁶ Relations and security cooperation with Japan and North Korea continued to improve through dialogues in ASEAN regional forums and the Six-Party talks, while tensions with Pakistan and India were lowered through peaceful dialogues.³⁸⁷ The situation in the South

³⁸³ Zhu Rongji “Report on the Work of the Government (2002)” http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Special_11_5/2010-03/03/content_1690621.htm

³⁸⁴ Gang and Gaolian, *ibid*, 10.

³⁸⁵ “White paper ‘China’s National Defense in 2000’ Published” <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2000/Oct/2791.htm>

³⁸⁶ Gu Xiaosong and Brantly Womack “Border Cooperation between China and Vietnam in the 1990s” *Asian Survey* 40, no. 6 (2000), 1057-1058.

³⁸⁷ “China’s National Defense in 2004” <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20041227/>

China Sea was seen as being steady, aided by an agreement of conduct signed on to by relevant parties who possess overlapping claims.³⁸⁸

NATO's war in the former Yugoslavia, 9/11, and the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars were the defining events in international politics during the Jiang era. However, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks there was not overwhelming emphasis on terrorism in government reports. Jiang's work report during the 16th Party Congress in 2002 briefly noted that China fights against all forms of terrorism and seeks to eradicate its root cause.³⁸⁹ Earlier in the year, the government work report from the National People's Congress, delivered by Zhu Rongji also only briefly addressed terrorism.³⁹⁰ Although prominent government and party work reports did not give a significant amount of attention to terrorism in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the Iraq War and global war on terror did influence the PLA's views.

Zhang Youxia, currently the most senior and highest-ranking officer in the PLA, and arguably Xi's most trusted military official, wrote an essay in 2003 describing the effect of the Iraq War on the overall international situation and China's security environment. According to Zhang there were three objectives for the U.S. to achieve through the Iraq War in pursuing its global strategic expansion. The first was to remove Iraq as a thorn and construct a strategic corridor to protect U.S. interests in the Arab world. Second, to fundamentally alter the political landscape in the Middle East by creating a model of democracy. And finally, to help bring about

³⁸⁸ "China's National Defense in 2002" <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/index.htm>

³⁸⁹ Jiang Zemin, "Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at the 16th Party Congress" <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/Nov/49107.htm>

³⁹⁰ Rongji, *ibid.*

the containment of India, Russia, Europe, China, and other major powers by controlling Eurasia. This helped the overarching American strategy of preventing superpowers from rising.³⁹¹

Although the above U.S. objectives were troubling, the Iraq war brought great opportunities. The international strategic pattern was turning more toward balances and multi-power checks, which was signified by Germany, France, and Russia not approving of the Iraq War. Zhang notes there were three strategic opportunities for China to create a more stable and favorable international environment. Specifically, it provided China strategic opportunities to elevate its comprehensive strength, improve its relations with major countries, and expand its international influence.³⁹² Thus overall, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars offered important opportunities for China.

5.1.2 Hu Era

During the Hu administration color revolutions arose and spread in Eastern Europe and Asia. Additionally, there was the Arab Spring and growing tensions with Japan in the East China Sea. The color revolutions—which began in the Jiang era—involved mass protests for fair elections and efforts to bring about the end of the corrupt regimes in power.³⁹³ Many scholars inside China believed that one reason they occurred was because of interventions from western powers for strategic purposes.³⁹⁴ Both the color revolutions and Arab Spring had greater

³⁹¹ Zhang Youxia, 伊拉克战争:对国际战略格局及我国安全环境的影响 (The Iraq War: The Impact on the International Strategic Landscape and my country's Security Environment) 国际展望 (International Outlook) no.14 (2003), 72.

³⁹² Youxia, *ibid*, 71-72.

³⁹³ Katya Kalandadze and Mitchell Orenstein, "Electoral Protests and Democratization: Beyond the Color Revolutions" *Comparative Political Studies*, 42, no.11 (2009), 1403-1404.

³⁹⁴ Titus Chen, "China's Reaction to the Color Revolutions: Adaptive Authoritarianism In Full Swing" *Asian Perspectives*, 34, no.2 (2010), 11-12.

influence on the PRC's domestic politics, and pertain to the dangers of hegemonism and power politics that are referenced in defense white papers and government and party documents.

More pertinent to external security challenges were growing territorial conflict in the Asia-Pacific, most notably with Japan. In 2010, although the Asia-Pacific security situation was still described as generally stable, it was also becoming more volatile.³⁹⁵ A Chinese fishing vessel that year ran into a Japanese patrol boat around the Diaoyu islands, territory that is claimed by both China and Japan. The Chinese captain was detained and given over to prosecutors in Japan.³⁹⁶ Eventually, the captain would be let go two weeks later.³⁹⁷ Two years later, in 2012, tensions further escalated when Japan announced the nationalization, or ownership of the islands.³⁹⁸ Whatever the reasons were for the escalation in tensions over the small, uninhabitable islands, it reflected growing risks of conflict with Japan.

5.1.3 Xi Era

If deteriorating conditions in the outlook of the security environment started to accelerate toward the end of the Hu administration, it only expanded further and faster under Xi. The main issues consisted of major deterioration in U.S.-China relations which included the U.S.-China trade war—or tariffs put on China beginning with the Trump administration, and then further export restrictions placed on businesses interacting with China in the Biden administration—Covid-19, growing tensions over Taiwan, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and growing military cooperation among the U.S. and its allies in Asia, most notably exemplified by attempts to

³⁹⁵ "China's National Defense in 2010" http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm

³⁹⁶ Justin McCurry, "Japan-China row escalates over fishing boat collision" *The Guardian*, September 9, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/sep/09/japan-china-fishing-boat-collision>

³⁹⁷ Martin Fackler and Ian Johnson, "Japan Retreats With Release of Chinese Boat Captain" *New York Times*, September 24, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/25/world/asia/25chinajapan.html>

³⁹⁸ Jane Perlez, "China Accuses Japan of Stealing After Purchase of Group of Disputed Islands" *New York Times*, September 11, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/12/world/asia/china-accuses-japan-of-stealing-disputed-islands.html>

strengthen the Quad and the development of AUKUS. The Quad is a group comprised of the U.S., India, Australia, and Japan, with some defining it as “a loose-knit network of like-minded partners aiming at a broader purpose.”³⁹⁹ It is not a formal alliance and in its first joint statement, China is not mentioned.⁴⁰⁰

However, the goal of the Quad which is stated as ensuring “a free and open Pacific” can easily be seen as countering China. And while its purpose has been described as revolving around general issues like promoting democratic values, combating climate change, counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance,⁴⁰¹ through greater dialogue there has also been increased military coordination, witnessed by the first naval joint exercise in over a decade among the four countries.⁴⁰² Meanwhile, AUKUS which was announced in 2021, is a “trilateral security partnership” between the U.S., U.K, and Australia, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific.⁴⁰³ The main purpose of the security partnership is to provide Australia with nuclear powered submarines at the earliest possible date. Additionally, AUKUS will work on other security issues as well such as:

- undersea capabilities, including autonomous underwater vehicles
- Quantum technologies
- AI and autonomy
- Advanced cyber capabilities
- Hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities
- Defense innovation
- Electronic warfare

³⁹⁹ Sumitha Narayanan Kutty and Rajesh Basrur, “The Quad: What It Is – And What It Is Not” *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-quad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/>

⁴⁰⁰ “Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: ‘The Spirit of the Quad’” March 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Sheila A. Smith, “The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: What to Know” *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 27, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know>

⁴⁰³ “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS” September 21, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aucus/>

White papers and government documents in both the Jiang and Hu administrations mention the U.S. strengthening military alliances in the Asia-Pacific and readjusting its strategy under the description of hegemonism and power politics in the table below. However, unlike the Jiang and Hu periods, there are more striking examples of it taking place, such as increased attention on the Quad and AUKUS. Moreover, strategy papers from the Pentagon emphasize the Indo-Pacific as now being the top regional focus of the U.S. military. Growth of U.S. and Japanese defense spending are also evident. In 2022, Japan announced it would raise its military spending to 2% of GDP by 2027 after traditionally capping it at 1%.⁴⁰⁴ Part of this increase in spending will be focused on acquiring Tomahawk Missiles from the U.S. that has the capability to strike at China.

Another troubling trend for China is increasing attention to the Asia-Pacific region by NATO. Concerns over Japan significantly raising military spending, the U.S. strengthening military cooperation with allies in the Asia-Pacific, and NATO's growing activity in the region is vividly reflected in the pages of the *PLA Daily*—particularly over the past two years. One essay warned the U.S. about the dangers of allowing Japan to increasingly militarize, arguing: “Once Japanese militarism is revived, it will be difficult to control it. At that time, the United States will have to swallow the consequences of breeding tigers, and the people of Japan and Asia may also fall into the abyss of suffering again.”⁴⁰⁵ This is just one illustrative example in Chinese media of trying to push back against the increasingly dark outlook of the security environment. The next

⁴⁰⁴ Xiao Liang and Nan Tian, “The proposed hike in Japan’s military expenditure” *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2023/proposed-hike-japans-military-expenditure>

⁴⁰⁵ Chen Hanghui and Dong Pan, 美日同盟加速嬗变走向何方 (Where is the accelerated evolution of the US-Japan alliance headed?) *PLA Daily*, February 9, 2023, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/09/content_333330.htm

section examines several overarching general topics addressed most often in government reports and White papers.

5.2 General Issues

Table 1: Outlook on the Environment

| Issue Area in International Environment | Jiang | Hu | Xi |
|--|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Main Trend is Peaceful | X | X | X |
| Separatist Forces in Taiwan | X | X | X |
| Hegemonism/Power Politics | X | X | X |
| US Strengthening Military Alliances in EA | X | X | X |
| Increasing Military Competition | | X | X |
| Non-Traditional Threats | X | X | X |
| Asia-Pacific Region Stable Overall | X | X | X |
| Local Wars and Armed Conflict | X | X | X |
| World Undergoing Profound Changes | X | X | X |

The table above contains all the major areas that influenced CCP and PLA views of the environment and appear most prominently in government documents. Each issue is addressed in white papers, party reports, and government work reports under each leader with one exception. The term, or outlook that the environment was experiencing increasing military competition is present under Hu and Xi but not Jiang. That does not mean there were not any concerns about foreign militaries during the Jiang administration. In 2002 there was acknowledgement of how some countries are widening the scope of their armed forces operations.⁴⁰⁶ However, the term

⁴⁰⁶ “China’s National Defense in 2002” *ibid.*

“military competition” and the description of it as intensifying did not first appear in a prominent government or party document until 2006.⁴⁰⁷

Although peace and development were defined as the main trends of the time, the CCP also characterized the international situation as one in which growing threats and security problems were expanding.⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, there was increasingly complex, profound, and rapid changes in the international system.⁴⁰⁹ The PLA now had to protect against both traditional and non-traditional threats.⁴¹⁰ Non-traditional threats consisted of things like energy security and natural disasters, transnational crime, and terrorism. These nontraditional threats were highly mobile, transnational, and occurred suddenly, making international cooperation more important.⁴¹¹ The international anti-terrorist war represented one factor in the growing complexity of the international situation.⁴¹²

Another part of the profound and rapid changes likely refers to the power changes in the international system. The Cold War was defined by a bipolar system (dominated by the U.S. and Soviet Union), shifted to a unipolar system after the fall of the Soviet Union and was seen as changing toward a multipolar system at the turn of the century. Although China believed the U.S. would remain the military superpower for a long time, other great powers like Russia were also seen as building up military power.⁴¹³ In the Hu era, military competition and arms spending were seen as on the rise.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁷ “China’s National Defense in 2006” *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ “China’s National Defense in 2008” *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁹ 开创国防和军队建设新局面的行动指南 (A guide to action to create a new situation in national defense and army building) *People’s Daily*, November 13, 2007.

⁴¹⁰ Sanfei, *ibid.*, 48.

⁴¹¹ Yazhou, *ibid.*, 42.

⁴¹² Rui Zhengyong, and Gang, *ibid.*, 27-28.

⁴¹³ Rui, Zhengyong, and Gang, *ibid.*, 26.

⁴¹⁴ “China’s National Defense in 2008” *ibid.*

There was a variety of different concerns posed by the U.S. and Western countries for PLA assessments of the international environment. One concern that appeared frequently in both the Jiang and Hu era's is Western forces trying to either infiltrate the PLA, or contain China. Some believed hostile Western forces turned their attention to China after the Cold War and employed a strategy of differentiation and Westernization against the PRC.⁴¹⁵ Although this decreased after the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Moreover, decadent ideas and various enemies were seen as eroding and infiltrating the PLA.⁴¹⁶ Another concern came from a rising form of what was described as “new interventionism” or “neo interventionism”. This took place under the concept of humanitarianism. Western powers were increasingly empowering human rights so that it started to supersede sovereignty.

Part of this superseding of sovereignty came from the promotion of human rights around the world, which began erasing borders. The Kosovo crisis was given as one example of this phenomenon and described as posing a threat to China's military and political security construction.⁴¹⁷ Kosovo was important because from it the concept of R2P (responsibility to protect) emerged.⁴¹⁸ R2P was adopted in the UN in 2005 and asserts it is the responsibility of the international community to help a state fulfill its responsibility to prevent crimes against humanity, and intervene if it cannot or will not.⁴¹⁹ This development was troubling for China and its outlook on the environment because the PRC has always stressed the importance of state

⁴¹⁵ Chengping, *ibid*, 18.

⁴¹⁶ Zhang Dongmei, 新时期国防和军队建设的战略思维 (Strategic Thinking of National Defense and Army Construction in the New Era) 军队政工理论研究 (Theoretical Research on Military Political Work) no.6, (2003), 20.

⁴¹⁷ Rui, Zhengyong, and Gang, *ibid*, 28-29.

⁴¹⁸ Michael Doyle, “International Ethics and the Responsibility to Protect” *International Studies Review*, no.13 (2011), 79.

⁴¹⁹ Alex Bellamy, “The Responsibility to Protect—Five Years On” *Ethics and International Affairs*, 24 no.2, (2010), 143.

sovereignty above everything in international politics—even if it does not always adhere to it in practice. Also, hegemonism and power politics still existed.⁴²⁰ Part of western hegemonism was disguised under the promotion of human rights. Meanwhile, another form of hegemonism could be seen as the U.S. strengthening military alliances, increasing military capabilities, and adjusting military deployment in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴²¹ All the trends listed above have only increased as has passed.

While the several preceding paragraphs highlight general concerns present under all three leaders, there are two notable changes in the Xi era. First, is how the CCP describes changes in the world. Changes were always characterized as profound during the Jiang and Hu eras, but the CCP started describing changes as “unprecedented”⁴²² under Xi—also often described as “changes unseen in a century.”⁴²³ This narrative began prior to 2017, when, under the Trump administration, U.S.-China relations started to go off the rails. It is somewhat strange because when Xi replaced Hu in 2012-13, there was not major, significant changes in the international environment. Tai Ming Cheung argues it is Xi that changed the way the CCP viewed threats—external and internal—that led to the shift.⁴²⁴

Second, there is a growing trend in the Xi era to describe China as facing containment and encirclement. At the beginning this narrative was mainly espoused by China scholars.⁴²⁵ But

⁴²⁰ Jiang Zemin, “Full Text of Jiang Zemin’s Report at the 16th Party Congress” *ibid*; Hu Jintao, “17th Party Congress Report” October 15, 2017, <https://china.usc.edu/hu-jintao-17th-party-congress-report-2007>

⁴²¹ “China’s National Defense in 2008” *ibid*.

⁴²² This really started to become more prominent starting with the 2015 White paper: “China’s Military Strategy” May 2015, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2021-06/23/content_4887928.htm

⁴²³ 在党的旗帜下奋力谱写强军事业新篇章 (Strive to compose a new chapter in the strong military industry under the banner of the party) *PLA Daily*, July 31, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-08/01/content_321022.htm

⁴²⁴ Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate*, *ibid*, 54-56.

⁴²⁵ For just one example see 申红心 (Shen Hongxin) 开辟国防和军队现代化建设新路径 (Open up new paths for national defense and military modernization) *中国社会科学报* (Chinese Journal of Social Sciences) November 11, 2021;

during the most recent annual meeting of China's Two Sessions (两会), both Xi and China's foreign minister, Qin Gang, personally attacked the U.S. of seeking to contain and suppress China.⁴²⁶ This represented a major change in the rhetoric of top CCP officials, previously the U.S. did not get mentioned explicitly by name. The *PLA Daily* has also intensified direct criticism of U.S. politicians. A recent article by Dai Xunxun from AMS warned, "Those American politicians who violate fairness and justice and continue to move against the trend of the times will surely burn themselves by playing with fire."⁴²⁷ The increasingly hostile rhetoric and darkening views under Xi will likely accelerate China's drive to be technologically self-sufficient and strive to build deterrence capabilities directed at U.S. forces should conflict occur between the China and Japan or Taiwan. The next section details PLA equipment of all four branches.

5.3 Capabilities

Military strategy can be influenced to a large degree by capabilities. For PLA capabilities, I look at general indicators such as spending, military equipment, and weapons. I acknowledge that possessing a large amount of fighter jets or submarines, and spending a massive amount of money does not automatically help understand how powerful a military is, or what it can achieve—which has become evident yet again by Russia's war in Ukraine. But it does help explain what type of strategy a country might be pursuing. I first address military spending and then move on to equipment for each branch. Analysis of equipment and weapons

⁴²⁶ Chun Han Wong, Keith Zhai, and James T. Arredy, "China's Xi Jinping Takes Rare Direct Aim at U.S. in Speech" *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-xi-jinping-takes-rare-direct-aim-at-u-s-in-speech-5d8fde1a>; 就中国外交政策和对外关系回答中外记者提问 (Answering questions from Chinese and foreign journalists on China's foreign policy and foreign relations) *PLA Daily*, March 8, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/08/content_335095.htm

⁴²⁷ 代勋勋 (Dai Xunxun) 美国“拱火”俄乌冲突凸显霸权面目 (The U.S. "fires up" the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, highlighting the face of hegemony) *PLA Daily*, February 23, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/23/content_334335.htm

for each service branch is done by focusing on the basics, a deep dive into the capabilities of each branch is beyond the scope of this research and on its own would make for a major research project.

Additionally, because the focus is more on weapons and equipment, I do not explore the PLA's cyber capabilities, although that is becoming increasingly important and is one of the major components of information warfare. Analysis on space capabilities is also left out. Great work has been done by a handful of scholars comparing PLA capabilities relative to U.S. capabilities⁴²⁸ while numerous think tanks have conducted war games simulating how China would perform in a war over Taiwan or in the South China Sea.⁴²⁹ This research does not deeply

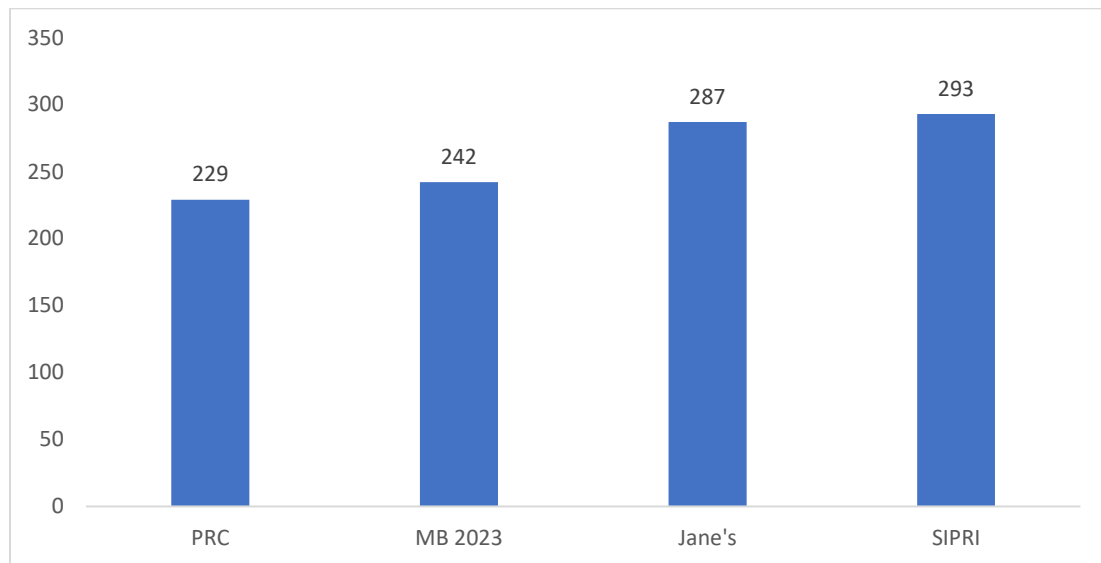


Figure 2: Statistics on China's Military Spending

⁴²⁸ Eric Heginbotham et al, "The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996–2017" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015)

https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR392.html. Also available in print form.

⁴²⁹ For just two examples see Mark Cancian, Matthew Cancian, and Eric Heginbotham, CSIS, January 9, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/first-battle-next-war-wargaming-chinese-invasion-taiwan>; "2020 National Security Conference: The America Competes Summer Series" *Center for a New American Security*, July 22, 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/events/cnas-2020-national-security-conference>

explore how the PLA might perform against the U.S. in a potential conflict. Instead, the focus is on the PLA's core capabilities, looking at military spending from 1997 to the present, and current equipment.

Numerous scholars have pointed out the difficulty of knowing how much China truly spends on defense, and how little transparency there is.⁴³⁰ While China does provide information for how much it spends, many believe it is inaccurate and that China underreports the real number. The graph above illustrates this by comparing the numbers China gave for defense spending in 2022, compared to statistics given by SIPRI, Jane's Intelligence, and Military Balance 2023. Estimates by Jane's and SIPRI were similar but much different than the number produced by the PRC. Below is a look at China's defense spending since 1997 from SIPRI, and where the PRC ranks among other countries. China's defense spending has doubled every five

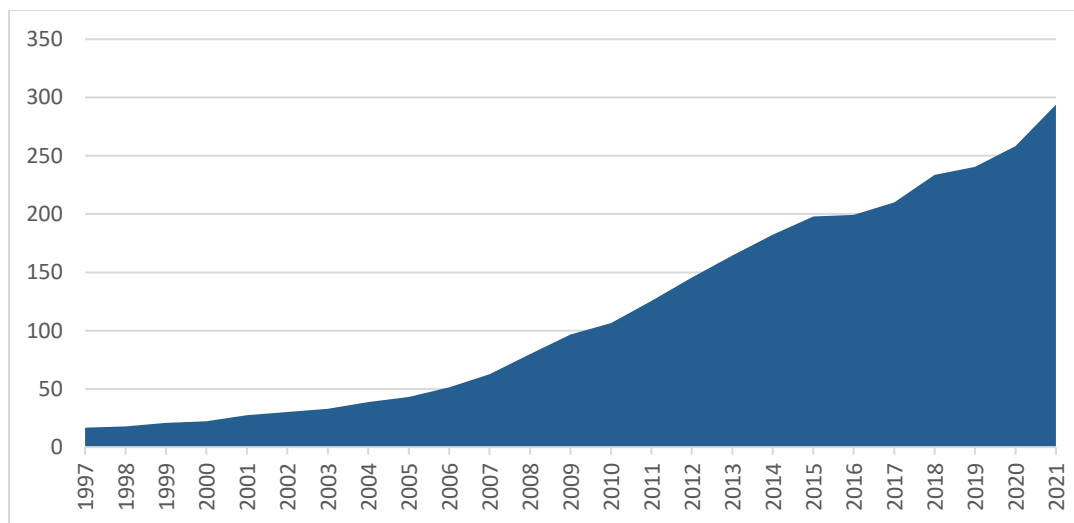


Figure 3: China's Military Spending in Millions \$USD

⁴³⁰ Phillip Saunders and Ross Rustici, "Chinese Military Transparency: Evaluating the 2010 Defense White paper" Institute for National Strategic Studies (INSS) Strategic Forum, National Defense University, July 1, 2011, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1466147/chinese-military-transparency-evaluating-the-2010-defense-white-paper/>; Nan Tian and Fei Su, "A New Estimate of China's Military Expenditure" Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) January 2021, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2021/other-publications/new-estimate-chinas-military-expenditure>

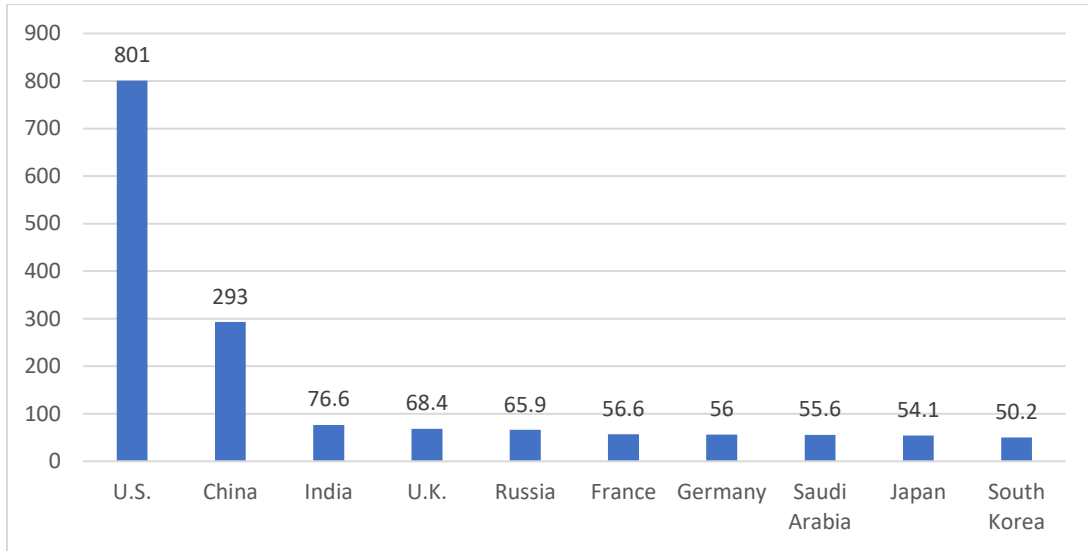


Figure 4: Top Ten Countries in Military Spending \$USD
 Source: Statista

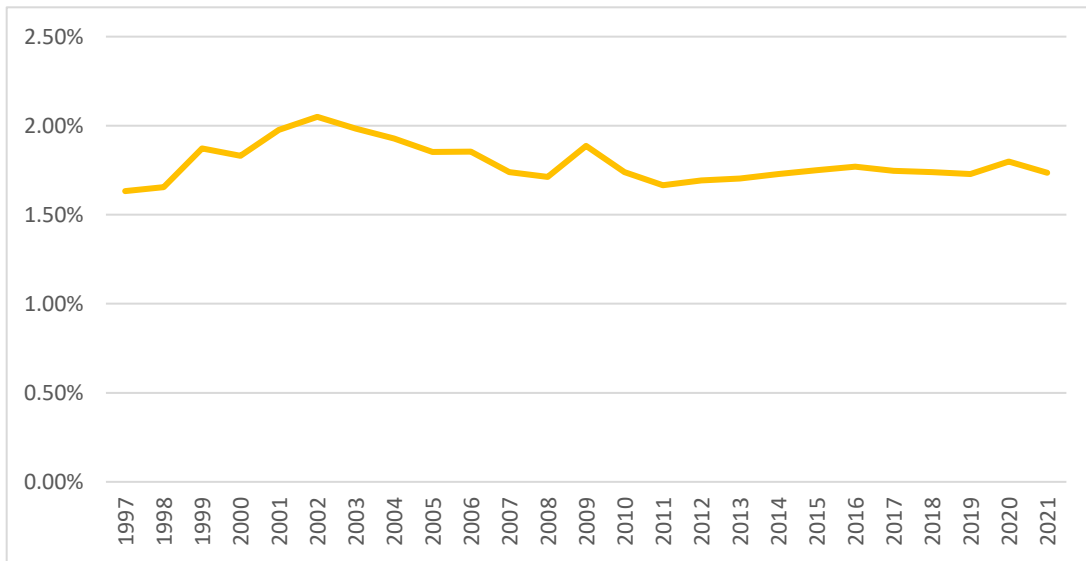


Figure 5: China's Defense Spending as Percentage of GDP
 Source: SIPRI

years since 2000, and now ranks as second largest in the world behind the U.S. at \$293 billion. However, China could spend more on defense than it currently does. In terms of defense spending as a percentage of GDP, it only spends 1.74% on defense, as recently as 2021. That is still considerably behind the U.S. (3.5%), Russia (4.1%), and even South Korea (2.8%).⁴³¹ Even if China is underreporting what it spends, which is likely the case, spending likely still does not exceed 2.3% of GDP. For most of the Jiang era defense spending as a percentage of GDP increased while in the Hu era it decreased. This is probably why there is talk in Chinese sources during the Hu era that there is an insufficient amount of money invested in the PLA and it had to be resourceful and build the army by being thrifty.⁴³² Moreover, and a little surprisingly, spending as a percentage of GDP has stayed relatively flat through most of the Xi era.

Finally, China's defense spending can be broken down further to how much it spends on personnel, training, and equipment. The table below shows what percentage was spent in each category, with 2020 being the most recent year with data available. There is a gap from 2017-2020 because no data is provided for that time. And although there is no data for the Jiang era, the table can be helpful for understanding what the trend has been from the end of the Hu administration through the Xi era. For the most part, defense spending among personnel, training, and equipment has consistently been close to one-third for each. However, there have been noticeable changes over the past decade.

⁴³¹ "What Does China Really Spend on its Military?" *CSIS*, January 28, 2015, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-does-china-really-spend-its-military>

⁴³² General Political Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, "Firmly establish important guidelines for scientific development concept in national defense and military construction" *ibid*, 4-5; Sanfei, *ibid*, 45-46.

During the first five years of the Xi administration, there was a significant increase in spending on equipment and a decrease in training—in terms of percentage. From 2017-2020, that trend started to reverse with a more even distribution among the three categories again. This is an

Table 2: Defense Spending Per Category as a Percentage

| | Personnel | Training | Equipment |
|------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 2010 | 34.9 | 31.9 | 33.2 |
| 2011 | 34.3 | 31.5 | 34.2 |
| 2012 | 29.2 | 34.8 | 36 |
| 2013 | 27 | 36.4 | 36.6 |
| 2014 | 28.6 | 32.3 | 39.1 |
| 2015 | 31 | 28.8 | 40.2 |
| 2016 | 31.3 | 27.4 | 41.3 |
| 2017 | 31.8 | 28.1 | 41.1 |
| 2020 | 29.6 | 33.1 | 37.1 |

Source: China's 2019 White paper; UN data

indication Xi prioritized upgrading the PLA's equipment after taking over for Hu. Emphasis on upgrading equipment—particularly since Xi came to power—and the reasons for which can be attributed to the PLA as still viewing itself behind the world's major military powers was highlighted on *China military network*:

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the whole army has persisted in placing the building of weapons and equipment in a strategic position of priority development, taking combat needs as the traction, closely following the direction of development of military science and technology in the world, planning and layout ahead of time, and accelerating the pace of development. At the same time, we must also realize that compared with the requirements of safeguarding national security and development interests, compared with

the requirements of winning informationized wars, and compared with the world's military powers, the gap is still quite obvious in many aspects.⁴³³

Indications are this has receded somewhat, and hopefully more current data on the past couple years will be released soon. The following briefly examines the equipment of each branch (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force).

5.4 Army (PLAA)

Information collected for capabilities and equipment of each service branch is derived from the DOD's analysis on the PLA, *Global Firepower*—which provides rankings of 145 current military powers in areas ranging from equipment to geography—MilitaryFactory.com, *The Military Balance*, and Chinese media reports. The Army has an estimated 4,950 tanks, 174,000 vehicles,⁴³⁴ and 9,800 artillery pieces.⁴³⁵ While the PLAA has made improvements over the past couple decades, it possesses a mixture of modern, and older, antiquated equipment.⁴³⁶ Approximately one-fourth of the battle tank fleet are either ageing or obsolescent, and three-fourths of the fleet is modern.⁴³⁷ Which means the PLA has around 3,600 tanks at its disposal fit for modern combat.

Among its main battle tanks, the Type 99 and 96 are the most advanced and capable.⁴³⁸ First introduced in 1999, the Type-99 represented a departure from past reliance on Soviet-

⁴³³ 解放军报评论员: 加快推进武器装备现代化 (Commentator of Jiefangjun Daily: Speed up the modernization of weapons and equipment) 中国军网 (China Military Network), October 27, 2021, http://www.81.cn/yw/2021-10/27/content_10102688.htm

⁴³⁴ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=china

⁴³⁵ “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Liberation Army 2022” *U.S. Department of Defense*, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF>, p.47.

⁴³⁶ “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Liberation Army 2022” *ibid*, 47.

⁴³⁷ “Chapter 6: Asia” in *The Military Balance*, 123, no.1 (2023), 209.

⁴³⁸ “China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win” *Defense Intelligence Agency*, 2019, p.59, <https://www.dia.mil/Military-Power-Publications/>

Russian designs as it was created by Chinese engineers that deviated from the Russian model. During the 2015 Victory Day Parade, a newer version, the 99A, was unveiled. This newer type provided upgrades to the Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) support, active protections system and turret and armor. However, because the 99A is costlier to produce and maintain, the Type 96 is still the main fighting tank. There are roughly 600 Type 99A, 600 of the original Type 99, and 2,500 Type 96/96A/96B fielded in the Army's ranks.⁴³⁹

Since 2004 however, the Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Forces have been given priority over the Army, which has somewhat slowed its modernization.⁴⁴⁰ The equipment inventory also suggests this, with the second best tank—the Type 96, which is older than the Type 99—selected as the core of the Army's tank fleet.⁴⁴¹ The Type 96 is considered as not equal to the third generation of Western tanks.⁴⁴² As with other forms of equipment throughout the military, there can be several different variants of the same type or make of equipment. This is the same with tanks, with some currently in use that were produced from 1960s-1980s, which can then complicate maintenance, training, and repair.⁴⁴³ Modernization and replacing older equipment has occurred relatively faster in the Navy and Air Force compared to the Army. But there are still vast improvements overall.

⁴³⁹ https://www.militaryfactory.com/armor/detail.php?armor_id=263

⁴⁴⁰ Cortez A. Cooper, "'Preserving the State': Modernizing and Task-Organizing a 'Hybrid' PLA Ground Force" in *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Army*, Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell eds (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College, 2007), 237; Dennis Blasko, "The Biggest Loser in Chinese Military Reforms: The PLA Army" in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, Phillip Saunders et al eds (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019) 345-346.

⁴⁴¹ Blasko, *ibid*, 362.

⁴⁴² "ZTZ main battle tank" Baidu encyclopedia, <https://baike.baidu.com/item/ZTZ-96%E4%B8%BB%E6%88%98%E5%9D%A6%E5%85%8B/18013374?fr=aladdin>

⁴⁴³ Blasko, *ibid*, 363.

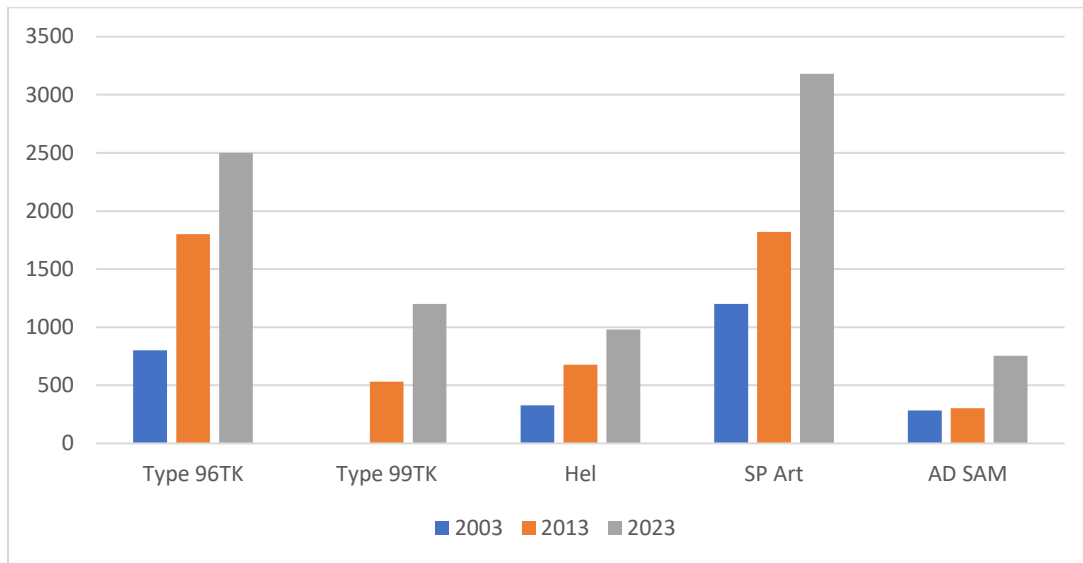


Figure 6: PLAA Equipment Type Over Time

Source: *Military Balance 2023*

The chart above tracks some developments of PLAA capabilities over time. Hel is number of helicopters, SP Art is self-propelled artillery, and AD SAM is air defense surface-to-air missiles. In the Xi era, PLAA SAM missiles have more than doubled from 304 to an estimated 754 or more. The change in the type of helicopters is noticeable too. There were no modern attack helicopters (ATK helicopters) in 2003, currently there are around 320. Another major change in PLAA equipment is artillery. The amount of towed artillery has greatly declined since 2003 while SP (self-propelled) artillery has rapidly increased—a significant improvement in artillery capabilities. Global Firepower ranks the PLAA fourth in tanks, second in vehicles, fourth in self-propelled artillery, and twelfth in towed artillery among modern militaries.⁴⁴⁴ In addition to tanks, the PLAA has a vast, growing array of armored fighting vehicles and personnel carriers, amphibious landing craft, UAVs, and air defense weapons. Overall, it appears the

⁴⁴⁴ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=china

strongest growth in equipment, and emphasis, are attack helicopters, self-propelled artillery, UAVs, air defense systems, and amphibious craft. The trends indicate even within the Army

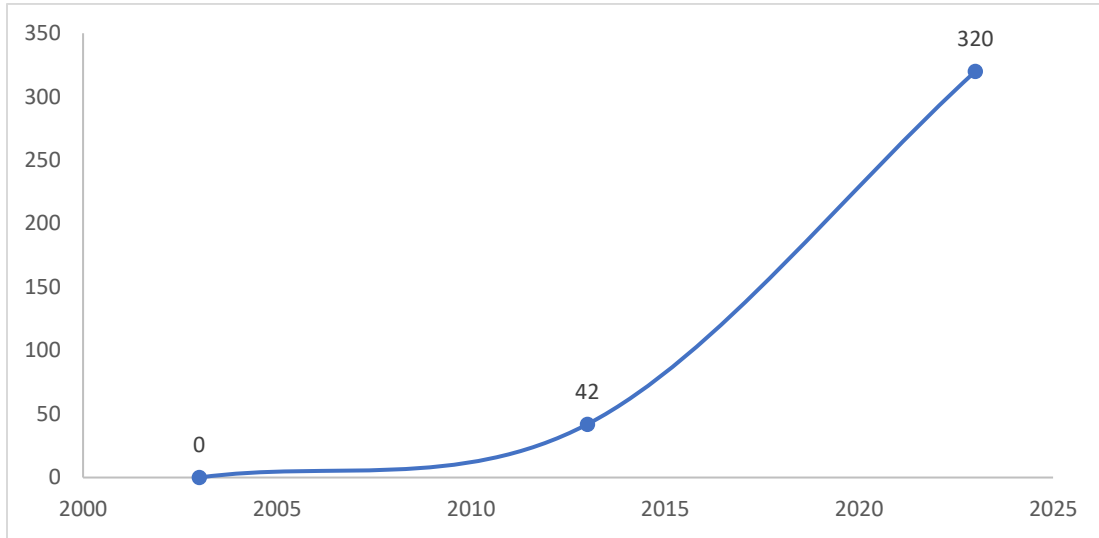


Figure 7: Number of PLAA ATK Helicopters

Source: Military Balance 2023

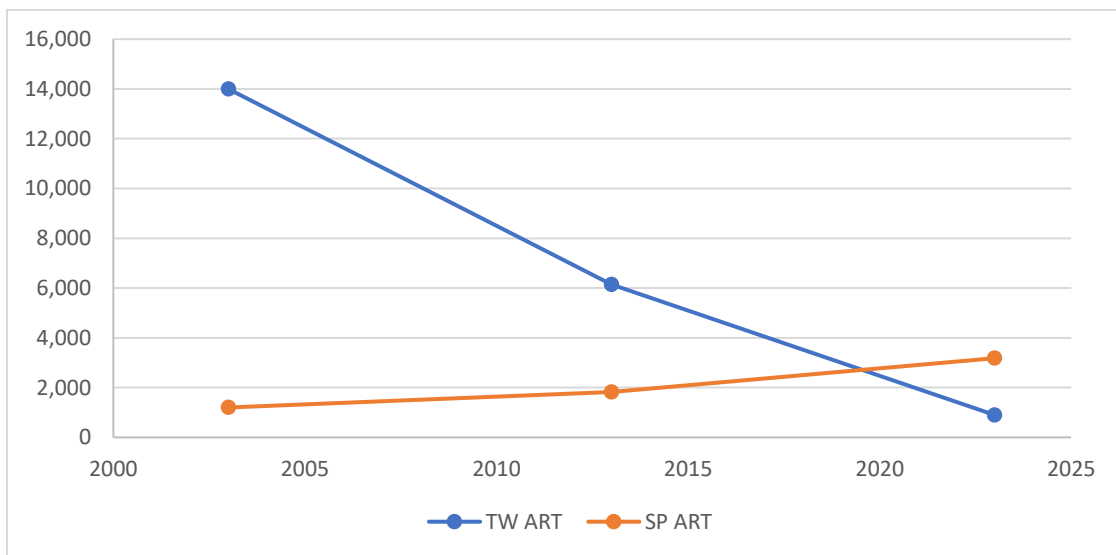


Figure 8: Number of PLAA Artillery by Type Over Time

Source: Military Balance 2023

there is becoming less a focus on land-based fighting abilities in the forms of tanks and towed artillery, and more emphasis on aviation, air defense, and amphibious equipment.

5.5 Navy (PLAN)

Of all the military branches, the Navy has made the most significant strides in modernization since the late 1990s. The PLAN is now the biggest Navy in the world in terms of number of ships, which has caused considerably anxiety and concern among many governments, most notably in Washington. Emphasis on maritime issues and commitment to the Navy has accelerated in the Xi era, reflected in the 2015 White paper which asserted:

The traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests. It is necessary for China to develop a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with its national security and development interests, safeguard its national sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, protect the security of strategic SLOCs and overseas interests, and participate in international maritime cooperation, so as to provide strategic support for building itself into a maritime power.⁴⁴⁵

It is not just that China needs to be a major maritime power to protect its economic interests and trade, but three of its most important sovereignty disputes all involve islands surrounded by large bodies of water—South China Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan.⁴⁴⁶ Additionally, some have argued that China’s eastern seaboard is vulnerable to encirclement and invasion, thus another reason to build up the Navy for defensive purposes.⁴⁴⁷

Instrumental in the modernization of the Navy in recent years is China’s commercial shipbuilding industry, with a majority of PLAN ships built by the China State Shipbuilding

⁴⁴⁵ “China’s Military Strategy” *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew Erickson, “The Impact of Xi Era Reforms on the Chinese Navy” in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, Phillip Saunders et al eds (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019), 127.

⁴⁴⁷ James MacHaffie, “The Geopolitical Roots of China’s Naval Modernization” *Australian Journal of Maritime & Ocean Affairs*, 12 no.1, (2020), 1-15.

Corporation (CSSC).⁴⁴⁸ Overall, Chinese companies have come to dominate the market in shipbuilding, accounting for 47% of total global output while six of the ten biggest shipbuilding corporations in the world are Chinese.⁴⁴⁹ Categories below give current numbers for some of the more important types of warships.

- Aircraft Carriers: 2
Only in recent years has China added aircraft carriers. The first (*Liaoning*) was an older, unfurnished hull purchased from Russia. After extensive work it was commissioned in 2012. The *Liaoning* is much smaller than the typical U.S. aircraft carriers but can travel at a higher speed and perform basic tasks. Aircraft on the *Liaoning*, however, is limited in endurance and range.⁴⁵⁰ China's first domestically built carrier, *Shandong* (similar to the *Liaoning*) was launched in 2017 and commissioned in 2019. A third, *Fujian*, was launched in 2022 and is set to enter sea trials. *Fujian* is much bigger and more advanced than *Shandong* and *Liaoning* and is expected to be commissioned sometime between 2024-25.⁴⁵¹ Despite the introduction of the three aircraft carriers, the pace of the PLAN's development of carrier operations has been incremental, with some even describing it as somewhat cautious.⁴⁵²
- Submarines: 59
 - SSBN: 6
SSBN is a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, which provides limitless operational ranges and presents threats to land-based targets, surface ships and opponent submarines.⁴⁵³
 - SSN: 6
SSN is a nuclear-powered attack submarine, designed to hunt enemy submarine and conduct ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) missions.⁴⁵⁴ The

⁴⁴⁸ Brent Crane, "China's Sea Change" *The Wire China*, May 29, 2022, <https://www.thewirechina.com/2022/05/29/chinas-sea-change/>

⁴⁴⁹ "China Continues to Lead in Global Shipbuilding Market" *China Daily*, January 29, 2023, http://www.enghunan.gov.cn/hneng/News/Text_News/202301/t20230128_29192159.html

⁴⁵⁰ "How Does China's First Aircraft Carrier Stack Up?" *CSIS*, December 9, 2015, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-does-chinas-first-aircraft-carrier-stack>

⁴⁵¹ "China upgrades its naval force with its first indigenous aircraft carrier" *NPR*, June 17, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/17/1105786322/chinas-upgrades-its-naval-force-with-its-first-indigenous-aircraft-carrier>

⁴⁵² *The Military Balance*, *ibid*, 222.

⁴⁵³ https://www.militaryfactory.com/ships/detail.php?ship_id=Type-094-Ballistic-Missile-Submarine

⁴⁵⁴ "Attack Submarines – SSN" U.S. Navy, October 8, 2021, <https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/article/2169558/attack-submarines-ssn/>

PLAN's Type 93 Shang class is also equipped with torpedoes,⁴⁵⁵ unlike the SSBN it does not pose a threat to land-based targets by holding ballistic missiles.

- SSK: 46
SSK refers to the conventional diesel-electric powered submarine, of which China has several different types. They are noisier than nuclear-powered submarines and thus not as stealthy.
- Cruisers: 7
- Destroyers: 42
 - Destroyers are the largest ships below aircraft carriers. Most of the PLAN's Type 052D Destroyers are equipped with towed sonar, anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air (SAM) missiles, and land attack cruise missiles.⁴⁵⁶ Also, a majority of the destroyers are modern and have been built rapidly in the past several years.
- Frigates: 41
 - Frigates can serve similar functions as destroyers but are often smaller, although many of the newer versions are now similar in size to destroyers.
- Corvettes: 50
 - Corvette warships can serve patrolling missions along with providing anti-ship abilities and serving as an airspace deterrent. Newer models are equipped with anti-ship missiles and SAMs, among other capabilities.⁴⁵⁷

In addition, the PLAN also possesses amphibious ships, vessels for mine warfare, landing ships and landing craft, and naval aviation such as bombers and helicopters.⁴⁵⁸ Global fire power ranks China second in aircraft carriers, destroyers, and corvettes, and first in submarines and frigates.⁴⁵⁹

There is considerable variance between global fire power, Military Balance, and the DOD in estimates of PLAN submarines. Global fire power counts seventy-eight, the DOD seventy-

⁴⁵⁵ https://www.militaryfactory.com/ships/detail.php?ship_id=cns-type-093-shang-nuclear-attack-submarine-china

⁴⁵⁶ https://www.militaryfactory.com/ships/detail.php?ship_id=cns-huainan-123-guided-missile-destroyer

⁴⁵⁷ https://www.militaryfactory.com/ships/detail.php?ship_id=cns-xinyang-501-type-056-corvette-warship-china

⁴⁵⁸ The Military Balance 2023, *ibid*, 240-241.

⁴⁵⁹ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=china

one, and Military Balance fifty-nine. Global fire power also estimates eight more destroyers (50) and twenty-two more corvettes (72) than Military Balance. Whatever the true numbers are, the U.S. Navy is still more technologically advanced, and has a more educated force than the PLAN. Considering where the PLAN was at the turn of the 21st century though, its naval modernization has been remarkable. Currently, the PLAN can operate far from its shores for months at a time, and now has a greater ability to project power farther from its home bases. Although its ability to project power past the first island chain is still moderate, it is steadily progressing as it continues to expand operational experience far from home while obtaining more advanced and modern platforms.⁴⁶⁰

5.6 Air Force (PLAAF)

The PLAAF continues to rapidly modernize, with the DOD describing it as quickly catching up to Western countries.⁴⁶¹ In the most recent white paper, it describes the Air Force's tasks as slightly changing, explaining "the PLAAF is accelerating the transition of its tasks from territorial air defense to both offensive and defensive operations, and improving its capabilities for strategic early warning, air strikes, air and missile defense, information countermeasures, airborne operations, strategic projection, and integrated support, so as to build a strong and modernized air force."⁴⁶² Nowhere is this seemingly more apparent than in actions directed at Taiwan over the past three years. Since 2020, PLA aircraft have crossed Taiwan's ADIZ over 3,000 times. Before 2020, it rarely happened—and in 2018 there were no cases.⁴⁶³ Moreover, the

⁴⁶⁰ "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Liberation Army 2022" *ibid*, 51.

⁴⁶¹ "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Liberation Army 2022" *ibid*, 59.

⁴⁶² "China's National Defense in the New Era" *Xinhua*, July 24, 2019, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2019-07/24/content_4846452.htm

⁴⁶³ This is from a database by Gerald C. Brown and Ben Lewis that is updated regularly: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qbfYF0VgDBJoFZN5elpZwNTiKZ4nvCUcs5a7oYwm52g/edit#gid=2015900050>

PLAAF is anticipated to be able to conduct missions such as offensive operations against enemy forces beyond the first island chain.⁴⁶⁴

Moving on to examining equipment, according to *Military Balance 2023*, China currently has 2,566 combat capable aircraft.

- Fighters: 1,628+
 - The PLAAF has continued to modernize by introducing newer types of fighter jets and retiring older versions. The most advanced fighter is the J-20, a fifth-generation stealth fighter that comes in two versions, the J-20 made with Russian engines, and the J-20A made with engines built domestically by China. Currently, there also seems to be plans to roll out another type, the J-20S that comes with two seats.⁴⁶⁵ There are an estimated 140 J-20/A jets in operation, although some believe the number is at least 200.⁴⁶⁶
- Bombers: 176
 - The bomber force is mainly comprised of older types, but the PLA enhances and maintains the operational effectiveness of its current force. All the bombers are made of the H6 type, with the H6K variant capable of striking targets out to the second island chain.⁴⁶⁷ Additionally, the PLA is believed to be developing a new H-20 stealth strategic bomber, with the possibility that it will be introduced around 2025.⁴⁶⁸
- ISR: 48
 - ISR aircraft come in the form of the JZ-8 and JZ-8F Finback, the PLAAF has twenty-four of each type. Most are equipped with radar, internal camera compartment, and twin 23mm cannon.⁴⁶⁹ Not included in the number of ISR aircraft, however, are drones, of which China currently has several different types while also developing newer types.⁴⁷⁰
- Electronic Warfare: 31

⁴⁶⁴ *PLA Aerospace Power*, ibid, 4.

⁴⁶⁵ *PLA Aerospace Power: A Primer on Trends in China's Military Air, Space, and Missile Forces*. (Montgomery AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2022), 24-25.

⁴⁶⁶ Mike Yeo, "Zhuhai Airshow display reveals info on China's J-20, J-16 inventory" *Defense News*, November 8, 2022, <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2022/11/08/display-at-zhuhai-airshow-reveals-info-on-chinas-j-20-j-16-inventory/>

⁴⁶⁷ "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Liberation Army 2022" ibid, 60.

⁴⁶⁸ https://www.militaryfactory.com/aircraft/detail.php?aircraft_id=1752

⁴⁶⁹ "Shenyang J-8 fighter: A history of evolution" *China Defense Today*, November 28, 2016, <https://sinodefence.wordpress.com/2016/11/28/shenyang-j8/>

⁴⁷⁰ https://www.militaryfactory.com/aircraft/detail.php?aircraft_id=2476

- EW aircraft are designed to identify, intercept, and detect electromagnetic signals, and can deploy active measures like inhibit the use of the electromagnetic spectrum to opponents.⁴⁷¹

In addition to the aircraft listed above, the PLAAF has numerous different types of transport aircraft and helicopters. Most alarming to China's neighbors and the U.S., is Beijing's development of advanced air and missile defense capabilities, boasting one of the biggest inventories of long-range SAM systems.⁴⁷² Global firepower ranks China third in total aircraft, second in fighters, third in helicopters and attack helicopters, tenth in tanker fleet, and third in transports.⁴⁷³

Just as impressive is the unmanned systems the PLAAF has produced, including a stealth combat air vehicle introduced just last year (2022), a high-altitude long endurance aircraft, reconnaissance/strike unmanned helicopter system, and a vast array of drones. Moreover, an unmanned cargo drone and two new unmanned helicopter systems are in development, with a possible launch date of 2024 and 2025.⁴⁷⁴ Although progress in developing unmanned equipment appears to have accelerated in recent years, commentary in the *PLA Daily* asserts that PLA unmanned combat capabilities have a long way to go:

unmanned intelligent combat is still in its infancy as a whole, and the continuous development of combat potential is restricted by many bottlenecks. Breaking through the blocking points and meridians of unmanned intelligent combat, and realizing the self-organization, self-adaptation, and systematization of its combat application, is the key to seizing the advantage of the battlefield generation gap in the era of intelligence.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷¹ J. Michael Dam, "Special Mission Aircraft and Unmanned Systems" Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, October 2020, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1128646.pdf>

⁴⁷² "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Liberation Army 2022" *ibid*, 61.

⁴⁷³ https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=china

⁴⁷⁴ <https://www.militaryfactory.com/aircraft/by-country.php?Nation=China>

⁴⁷⁵ Chang Shujie, 如何打通无人智能作战堵点 (How to break through unmanned intelligent combat blocking points) *PLA Daily*, February 21, 2023, https://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-02/21/content_334144.htm

The PLA believes unmanned intelligent combat is important for the battlefield and will likely continue to develop its capabilities. At the 20th CCP party congress, there was emphasis on speeding up the development of unmanned combat forces, indicating unmanned capabilities will be a priority.⁴⁷⁶

5.7 Rocket Force (PLARF)

Among the PLA's growing capabilities, it is China's nuclear arsenal and conventional missiles that has received perhaps the most attention and concern in Washington, besides China's naval fleet. A recent report in the *Wall Street Journal* noted China now has more ICBM launchers than the U.S.⁴⁷⁷ And the Pentagon believes China will have 1,500 nuclear capable missiles by 2035.⁴⁷⁸ The majority of these weapons are under control of China's fourth military branch, the PLA Rocket Force, or PLARF, formerly the Second Artillery Corps before being renamed and elevated in prominence during the 2015-16 military reforms. The creation of PLARF, or its elevation to a service branch on par with the others, is an indication of the growing importance of nuclear and conventional missiles for PLA deterrence and warfighting capabilities.⁴⁷⁹ There are thirty-two brigades in the Rocket Force, with eight more currently being developed.⁴⁸⁰ It is responsible for surface-to-surface conventional missiles, and land-based nuclear one's.⁴⁸¹ PLARF's nuclear forces are thought to be under the CMC and report to it while

⁴⁷⁶ Wang Zulai, Liang Likun, and Wang Xuechao, 科技练兵提升保障效能 (Technological training improves support efficiency) *PLA Daily*, February 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/22/content_334247.htm

⁴⁷⁷ Michael R. Gordon, "China Has More ICBM Launchers Than U.S., American Military Reports" *Wall Street Journal*, February 7, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-has-more-icbm-launchers-than-u-s-american-military-reports-11675779463>

⁴⁷⁸ Idrees Ali and Phil Stewart, "China likely to have 1,500 nuclear warheads by 2035: Pentagon" *Reuters*, November 29, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china-likely-have-1500-nuclear-warheads-by-2035-pentagon-2022-11-29/>

⁴⁷⁹ Adam Ni and Bates Gill, "China's New Missile Force: New Ambitions, New Challenges (Part 1)" *China Brief*, August 10, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-missile-force-new-ambitions-new-challenges-part-1/>

⁴⁸⁰ *The Military Balance 2023*, *ibid*, 237.

⁴⁸¹ *PLA Aerospace Power* *ibid*, 53.

Table 3: Surface-to-Surface Missile Launchers

| Type | Form | Number |
|------|--------------|--------|
| ICBM | Nuclear | 140 |
| IRBM | Dual Capable | 110+ |
| MRBM | Nuclear | 94 |
| MRBM | Conventional | 50 |
| SRBM | Conventional | 225 |
| GLCM | Conventional | 108 |

Source: Department of Defense

while conventional forces could now be under the command of the regional theaters.⁴⁸² For equipment, it is estimated the Rocket Force has 677 surface-to-surface missile launchers, which are further broken down below, along with the number of missiles it possesses.

Additionally, China is developing hypersonic technology for its missiles, with the DF-17—that has a range of 1,000-1,500 miles—as its main hypersonic missile platform. U.S. military

Table 4: Number of Missiles

| Type | Missiles | Range |
|------|----------|---------------|
| ICBM | 300 | >5,500km |
| IRBM | 250+ | 3,000-5,500km |
| MRBM | 500+ | 1,000-3,000km |
| SRBM | 600+ | 300-1,000km |
| GLCM | 300+ | >1,500km |

Source: The Military Balance 2023

⁴⁸² David Logan, “Making Sense of China’s Missile Forces” in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, Phillip Saunders et al eds (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2019),

officers believe China is trying to develop hypersonic missiles with nuclear capability to elude U.S. missile defense systems.⁴⁸³ The DF-41, an intercontinental ballistic missile that has a range five times greater than the DF-17 could also be altered to hold a nuclear or conventional HGV (hypersonic glide vehicle).⁴⁸⁴ China has also recently made progress in advancing its ability to defend against hypersonic missiles.⁴⁸⁵ The reason for the interest in developing hypersonic weapons arises from fears that these capabilities pose a serious threat to China's nuclear weapons, without Washington having to use nuclear weapons if it were to decide to preemptively strike at Beijing's nuclear forces.⁴⁸⁶ Thus, continued interest in developing hypersonic missiles and technology will likely continue.

5.8 Goals

China's military goals are straightforward and vague at the same time. The PLA's most important goals can initially be traced back to 1997 when Jiang Zemin introduced a three-step strategy for PLA modernization at an enlarged CMC meeting. To analyze the correct military strategy established by the CMC, one was instructed to study the contents of the meeting.⁴⁸⁷ The first step sought to create a solid foundation for military modernization and national defense by 2010. Next, the second step aimed to accelerate quality construction by 2020, with the goal of establishing full mechanization being completed. Finally, the last step was to achieve basic

⁴⁸³ General Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy, "Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee," February 13, 2020, at <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/20-02-13-united-states-northern-command-and-united-statesstrategic-command>.

⁴⁸⁴ Kelley M. Saylor, "Hypersonic Weapons: Background and Issues for Congress" *Congressional Research Service*, Updated February 13, 2023, p.18, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45811>

⁴⁸⁵ Stephen Chen, "China just got closer to defeating hypersonic weapons with reusable tech" *South China Morning Post*, January 27, 2023, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/science/article/3207627/china-just-got-closer-defeating-hypersonic-weapons-reusable-tech?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3207627

⁴⁸⁶ Tong Zhao, "Conventional Challenges to Strategic Stability: Chinese Perceptions of Hypersonic Technology and the Security Dilemma" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 23, 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/07/23/conventional-challenges-to-strategic-stability-chinese-perceptions-of-hypersonic-technology-and-security-dilemma-pub-76894>

⁴⁸⁷ Dongmei, *ibid*, 22.

realization of national defense and modernization by the middle of the twenty-first century.⁴⁸⁸

What precisely the realization of national defense and modernization means or entailed is ambiguous and not well defined—as are the goals set forth in the Xi administration and will be examined shortly. Returning to the first step however, additional commentary by Chinese sources suggest that problems of institutional structure and size needed to be resolved and addressed as part of that first step.⁴⁸⁹ In hindsight, that issue and goal was never resolved or accomplished by the time Xi took over at the end of 2012.

Jiang’s original goals for the PLA were altered by Xi in two main areas. First, the end goal of achieving the basic realization of national defense and modernization by the midpoint of the twenty-first century was replaced with the more concrete goal of building a world-class military. Second, an intervening target of basically achieving military modernization by 2035 was set—which essentially became the second step. Additionally, a short-term goal further outlined in 2021 from the Party’s 14th Five-Year Plan was provided, saying to “ensure the realization of the century-old goal of the army in 2027.”⁴⁹⁰ This caused some to suggest China had accelerated its goal of realizing military modernization by seven years, from 2035 to 2027.⁴⁹¹

However, the evidence indicates this is inaccurate. In the *People’s Daily* shortly after the 20th Party Congress, Xu Qiliang—former vice-chairmen of the CMC—wrote that the centennial goal of achieving military modernization was to be realized by 2035, and the one-hundred-year anniversary of the PLA in 2027 would serve as an indication of the great strides being made on

⁴⁸⁸ Jiang Zemin, *The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin vol 2* (Beijing: People’s Press, 2006).

⁴⁸⁹ Yang Yi, “The Strategic Adjustment of China’s National Defense and Military Construction” *ibid*, 54-56.

⁴⁹⁰ 中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划和 2035 年远景目标纲要 (The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the National Economic and Social Development of the People’s Republic of China and Outline of Long-term Goals for 2035) *Xinhua*, March 12, 2021, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2021-03/13/content_5592681.htm

⁴⁹¹ Brian Hart, Bonnie Glaser, and Matthew Funaiolo, “China’s 2027 Goal Marks the PLA’s Centennial, Not an Expedited Military Modernization” *China Brief*, March 26, 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-2027-goal-marks-the-plas-centennial-not-an-expedited-military-modernization/>

the road to building a strong army.⁴⁹² Essentially, the 2027 goal is meant to serve as a pointer to confirm that the mission of achieving modernization will be basically complete by 2035.

Moreover, introducing the 2027 goal serves as a propaganda tool to elevate Xi legacy and the Party's image.⁴⁹³ The goal of achieving mechanization and informatization by 2020 became the first of the new three step strategy outlined under Xi at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. Thus, the first step of achieving mechanization and informatization is now complete. The second step of basically realizing modernization by 2035 is still in place but an interim goal of ensuring progress toward that goal for 2027, the one-hundred-year anniversary of the PLA, has also been created.

Although the current three-step strategy clearly states the PLA's goals, it's also vague and not explicitly defined. What exactly does 'basically realizing military modernization' mean? Xi's work report at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 noted that military modernization goals revolved around four areas: modernizing the organizational structure, theory, weaponry, and service personnel.⁴⁹⁴ A resolution approved by the Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee further described these four issues for the 2035 military modernization goals as:

1. Modernizing the organizational form of the army.
 - i. Modernizing the organizational form includes perfecting the organizational structure with qualities to win informationized wars.

⁴⁹² Xu Qiliang, 如期实现建军一百年奋斗目标（认真学习宣传贯彻党的二十大精神）（Achieve the goal of 100 years since the founding of the army as scheduled (conscientiously study, publicize and implement the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Party) *People's Daily* (人民日报) November 7, 2022; http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-11/07/nw.D110000renmrb_20221107_1-06.htm; see also "Xi Focus: PLA striving to build world-class military under Xi's leadership" *Xinhua*, August 2, 2022, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/2022special/2022-08/02/content_10175336.htm

⁴⁹³ Hart, Glaser, and Funaiolo, *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ Xi Jinping, "Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress" *Xinhua*, November 3, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm

2. The modernization of weapons and equipment

- i. Building weapons and equipment and having it placed as a priority in modernization pertains to the promotion of equipment and weapons. Also, developing weapons that meet the needs of modern warfare and sufficiently improves all-domain combat abilities along with joint combat capabilities based on network information system. Xu Qiliang specifically highlighted heavy weapons like new-type nuclear submarines, domestically built aircraft carriers, the J-20, and the Dongfeng series missiles.⁴⁹⁵

3. The modernization of military personnel

- i. Modernization of personnel refers to constructing world-class personnel who are amenable to achieving tasks and missions of the new era. Producing talent with new type combat abilities, personnel equipped with technological and innovation skills, joint operations command, and personnel that are sophisticated in strategic management.

4. The modernization of military theory

- i. Modernization of military theory seeks new groundbreaking changes in the forms of warfare, constantly expands the understanding of laws governing army building and national defense, prepares for military struggles, and always opens new frontiers in developing contemporary Chinese Marxist military theory.⁴⁹⁶

While still ambiguous, it helps understand what the priorities are in the goal to ‘basically realize military modernization by 2035’ mean.

Finally, what does building a world-class army mean, to have the most powerful military? Is it to be an equal with the U.S., or to be generally viewed as being among the best? The term world class has been around since roughly 2013. While some might view it as a threat

⁴⁹⁵ Qiliang, *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁶ Zhou Junjie and Peng Zhoufei, 全面准确把握党在新时代的强军目标 (Comprehensively and accurately grasp the party's goal of strengthening the military in the new era) *Qilu Evening News* (齐鲁晚报) February 28, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1725973364835225501&wfr=spider&for=pc>

to U.S. military supremacy, Taylor Fravel argues persuasively that upon close analysis of Chinese sources the concept does not highlight China's global ambitions or reveal a global military strategy.⁴⁹⁷ To a large degree, the term has often been used when explaining the PLA's force development, which suggests the PLA seeks to be a military power on par with other great powers by the middle of the twenty-first century.⁴⁹⁸

Being a world class military has been described in the *PLA Daily* as a military that “is commensurate with my country's status as a powerful country, capable of comprehensively and effectively safeguarding national security, and possessing strong international influence”.⁴⁹⁹ What international influence looks like for the PLA is unclear, but it must have the influence that a major, modern military has—although likely not on the scale of the U.S. and the role it has played in being a global policeman. Also, a world-class military has been described in Chinese media as being highly intelligent and highly internationalized. Being internationalized and having international influence is reflected in the PLA's current efforts at conducting more overseas tasks and exerting greater energy of going global.⁵⁰⁰

Additionally, as Ryan Martinson has argued, the term means different things to different branches within the PLA. For the PLAN it means striving to have a global reach—but not meaning hegemony—and command of the sea, meaning the ability to liberally use the ocean

⁴⁹⁷ Taylor Fravel, “China's ‘World Class Military’ Ambitions: Origins and Implications” *Washington Quarterly*, 43 no.1, (2020), 86.

⁴⁹⁸ Fravel, *ibid*, 96.

⁴⁹⁹ Jun Zheng, 在习近平强军思想引领下胜利前进 (Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's thought of strengthening the army, we will advance victoriously) *PLA Daily*, March 2, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/02/content_334758.htm

⁵⁰⁰ 全面准确把握党在新时代的强军目标 (Comprehensively and accurately grasp the party's goal of strengthening the military in the new era) 齐鲁晚报 (Qilu Evening News) February 28, 2022, <https://baijiaohao.baidu.com/s?id=1725973364835225501&wfr=spider&for=pc>

while those who are beaten only do so with great risk.⁵⁰¹ Because it operates at sea, the PLAN's goals are likely the most ambitious of the services. And when the PLAN does operate far from home it does so for training purposes or to safeguard trade. There is no hint of using force far overseas coercively, but if that were to change it could be an indicator of changing military strategy. Finally, a world class military has also been described by the PLA Daily as one that designs wars rather than coping with them.⁵⁰²

Finally, smaller goals have been outlined. The PLA should be able to control crises, shape the situation, contain war, and win the war. Shaping the situation is explained as adapting to the present situation in the security situation and not passively submitting to it. The aim is to grasp the military and strategic initiative and coordinate the use of military forces. Crisis control and management is not letting an event that threatens national security deteriorate and expand but to take the initiative, reduce the danger, and control the extent of the degree of the crisis. Winning the war is the ultimate military capability and required for controlling the crisis, shaping the situation, and containing the war. To contain war is to control the war. This can be achieved according to one scholar "Through the use of armed forces, the display of national will, and the deterrence of military strength, we can defeat the enemy without fighting, and make the enemy dare not use force."⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Ryan Martinson, "Deciphering China's 'World-class' Naval Ambitions" *U.S. Naval Institute*, August 2020, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2020/august/deciphering-chinas-world-class-naval-ambitions>

⁵⁰² 刘显峰, 王永华 (Liu Xianfeng and Wang Yonghua) 从科技视角设计未来战争 (Designing future warfare from a technological perspective) *PLA Daily*, September 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqx/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-09-21&paperNumber=07&articleid=915788

⁵⁰³ 姜铁军, 颜晓峰, 苗润奇 (Jiang Tiejun, Yan Xiaofeng, and Miao Runqi) 强军兴军的时代引领: 习近平强军思想 (The era of strengthening and rejuvenating the army: Xi Jinping's thought on strengthening the army) *军事历史* (Military History) no.6 (2017), 5.

In sum, the PLA's most important, concrete goals involve three main steps. The first is to mark the one-hundred-year anniversary of the PLA in 2027, to indicate the process of realizing modernization by 2035 is on track. The second step is to achieve the completion of modernization by 2035, and the final step is to become a world class military by 2049. Beyond that, the PLA should be able to control crises, shape the situation, control the war, and win the war.

5.9 Conclusion

As should be expected, there has been changes over time to China's outlook on the international environment, equipment/capabilities, and goals. In the late 1990s the environment was mostly stable and peaceful. Intensifying military competition was not yet a major concern described in government reports and white papers—and the term would not first appear in a white paper until 2006. Although 9/11 represented increased threats—especially on China's border with countries like Afghanistan, there was strategic opportunity with the U.S. devoting most of its focus to the war on terrorism in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia rather than giving more attention to East Asia. But as time passed, the outlook grew increasingly threatening, specifically in the Xi era. However, there were no major changes to the international environment when Xi replaced Hu. The change came largely from Xi's differing view of external and internal threats that were much more serious than the outgoing leadership in 2012-13.

During the Hu administration, growing tensions in the South and East China Seas started to build while color revolutions and the Arab Spring spread. Even with the outlook growing more negative, however, relations with the west were still mostly upbeat. The relationship with the U.S. was still characterized as engagement rather than competition. Overall, the assessments

of the security environment were largely mixed shortly before Xi replaced Hu. Some China scholars noted because of increasing uncertainties in the international strategic pattern the PRC encountered unprecedented challenges. But then also argued alterations in the world military pattern offered China a rare opportunity for army building and national defense.⁵⁰⁴

Since the 19th Party Congress in 2017, there began a sharp downturn in the outlook with the initiation of the Trump administrations trade war and implementation of tariffs on China. These actions led to a further downward spiral in the relationship, with tit-for-tat closure of embassies, journalists having visas revoked, and people-to-people initiatives like the Peace Corps and Fulbright Program canceled. President Biden has accelerated the trend with more stringent export controls placed on China.⁵⁰⁵ Meanwhile, the U.S. has sought to strengthen its military presence and ties in East Asia by sending more troops to Taiwan,⁵⁰⁶ seeking to open additional military bases in the Philippines,⁵⁰⁷ and expanding military and security cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India through the Quad. Worse for China, is the trend of NATO giving more attention to the Indo-Pacific region,⁵⁰⁸ with some members like France and Germany sending warships through the South China Sea prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Rui, Zhengyong, and Gang, *ibid*, 26.

⁵⁰⁵ Jon Bateman, "Biden Is Now All-In on Taking Out China" *Foreign Policy*, October 12, 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/12/biden-china-semiconductor-chips-exports-decouple/>

⁵⁰⁶ Nancy A. Youseff and Gordon Lubold, "U.S. to Expand Troop Presence in Taiwan for Training Against China Threat" *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-to-expand-troop-presence-in-taiwan-for-training-against-china-threat-62198a83>

⁵⁰⁷ Sui-Lee Wee, "U.S. to Boost Military Role in the Philippines in Push to Counter China" *New York Times*, February 1, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/01/world/asia/philippines-united-states-military-bases.html>

⁵⁰⁸ Sara Bjerg Moller, "NATO is entering a new phase in the Indo-Pacific" *Atlantic Council*, February 6, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/nato-is-entering-a-new-phase-in-the-indo-pacific/>

⁵⁰⁹ Amber Wang, "France sends warships to South China Sea ahead of exercise with US and Japan" *South China Morning Post*, February 21, 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3122416/france-sends-warships-south-china-sea-ahead-exercise-us-and>; "First German warship in almost two decades enters South China Sea" *Reuters*, December 15, 2021, [https://www.reuters.com/world/first-german-warship-almost-two-decades-enters-south-china-sea-2021-12-15/#:~:text=BERLIN%2C%20Dec%2015%20\(Reuters\),alarm%20over%20China's%20territorial%20ambitions.](https://www.reuters.com/world/first-german-warship-almost-two-decades-enters-south-china-sea-2021-12-15/#:~:text=BERLIN%2C%20Dec%2015%20(Reuters),alarm%20over%20China's%20territorial%20ambitions.)

The view of an increasingly hostile international security environment is vividly evident in the pages of the *PLA Daily*. One commentator recently highlighted, “At present, the instability and uncertainty of my country's national security situation has increased, and the possibility of chaos and war at home has increased.... We must always be vigilant, always prepared, earnestly stock up on army provisions, and polish our shotguns.”⁵¹⁰ Moreover, there is increasing talk that a security deficit in the international environment is widening, along with an increasing government, development, and peace deficit. Simultaneously, “the world has entered a new period of turmoil and change.”⁵¹¹ Overall, the progressively darkening outlook over the past decade could be one factor influencing the goal of building a world-class military. However, it is likely also tied to domestic drivers such as Xi’s signature domestic slogan of the Chinese Dream, and the need for a strong army to realize the dream. Either way, views of the international security environment are the bleakest since possibly the Cold War. Currently, it is unclear how much of the views on the security environment have altered or changed PLA strategy.

In terms of capabilities, the PLAN has had the most significant advances in upgrading equipment and weaponry among the service branches—although the PLAAF and Rocket Force also are rapidly modernizing. As previously mentioned, Xi has emphasized the importance of China to be a maritime power. The PLAN is the largest naval fleet in the world and most of its warships are modern. Recent additions of aircraft carriers extend the PLA’s force projection, with newest carrier, the *Fujian*, only adding to that capability once it is commissioned by 2025. Current trends indicate the PLAN will continue to be of high importance. In 2022, China planned

⁵¹⁰ Zhang Xicheng, 善于应对 “不速之客 (Good at dealing with "uninvited guests") *PLA Daily*, November 7, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-11/07/content_327251.htm

⁵¹¹ Wang Heng, 依靠新的伟大斗争创造新的历史伟业 (Relying on new great struggles to create new historical achievements) *PLA Daily*, February 27, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-02/27/content_334559.htm

on building twenty-two new ships.⁵¹² Many of these ships like the Haikou Type 052C Destroyer are equipped with advanced platforms and capabilities while operating out to Africa, the America's, and Asia.⁵¹³ Meanwhile, the PLAAF is continuing to retire older fighter jets while adding fourth and fifth generation aircraft. A new long-range bomber—the H-20—is also in development, which would strengthen the PLA's nuclear triad.⁵¹⁴

The creation of the Rocket Force and making it a full-service branch signifies the importance placed on missiles and the goal of improving medium and long-range precision strikes. China basically doubled the number of its operational nuclear warheads in just three years, from 2023, and now has at least four hundred currently in its stockpile.⁵¹⁵ Additionally, the Rocket Force has built up such a powerful amount of non-nuclear missiles some argue the PLA might not even need a stealth bomber in the scenario of a conflict over Taiwan.⁵¹⁶ Reports indicate the Rocket Force is increasing training to make its missiles effective, as it test-fired more missiles in 2021 than the rest of the world combined.⁵¹⁷

Finally, although the PLAA has been placed lower in priority as a result of the reforms, it has still made significant progress. Production of its best battle tank, the Type 99, has more than doubled in the Xi era. There is also a robust and growing amount of weaponry in important areas

⁵¹² John M. Donnelly and Andrew Clevenger, “Tensions rise in House over Navy shipbuilding” *Roll Call*, May 11, 2022, <https://rollcall.com/2022/05/11/tensions-rise-in-house-over-navy-shipbuilding/>

⁵¹³ Zhou Yancheng, Peng Tan, and Kang Zizhan, 向深蓝梦想全速前进 (Go full speed towards the deep blue dream) *PLA Daily*, February 27, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/27/content_334529.htm

⁵¹⁴ Minnie Chan, “High hopes of China's H-20 stealth bomber launch as PLA top brass vow weapon system upgrades” *South China Morning Post*, November 11, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3199354/high-hopes-chinas-h-20-stealth-bomber-launch-pla-top-brass-vow-weapon-system-upgrades>

⁵¹⁵ “Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Liberation Army 2022” *ibid*, 97.

⁵¹⁶ David Axe, “China Is Developing A Stealth Bomber—But It May Not Need To” *Forbes*, February 1, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2021/02/01/china-is-developing-a-stealth-bomber-but-it-doesnt-really-need-to/?sh=666ff0311320>

⁵¹⁷ Karoun Demirjian, “Pentagon warns of China's plans for dominance in Taiwan and beyond” *Washington Post*, November 30, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/11/29/pentagon-china-military-report-taiwan/>

such as attack helicopters and self-propelled artillery. Focusing on unmanned systems, amphibious landing craft, and air-defense systems also illustrates efforts to fight and win future wars where manpower and traditional warfare will be less relevant.

With the rapid expansion of higher quality military equipment and weaponry there is growing dialogue that China has undergone the biggest military buildup since World War II.⁵¹⁸ But is the PLA's rapid modernization and levels of military spending cause for serious concern? While China's military modernization has been remarkable, often lost and forgotten is what type of condition the PLA was in at the start of China's rapid military buildup beginning toward the latter part of the 1990s. The PLA was backward and disregarded, to the extent that for much of the post-Mao era the goal was simply to build a professional, modern military.⁵¹⁹

China's current level of defense spending should also not be alarming, but rather something we should expect to see from the second most powerful country in the world. Scholars who note China is spending more on defense than ever before⁵²⁰ are not saying much when one considers China's economy holds the largest share of global GDP since the 19th century. A key issue is the inability to know exactly how much China spends because of its limited transparency. But with spending at 1.7% of GDP, even if that is underestimated and the accurate figure is somewhere closer between even 1.9-2.5%, that still is not enough to make the PLA an effective global force capable of conducting joint operations far from its own shores.

⁵¹⁸ Darragh Roche, "China's Military Buildup Is 'Most Ambitious' Since WWII, Australia Warns" *Newsweek*, June 22, 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/china-military-buildup-most-ambitious-since-wwii-australia-warns-marles-lloyd-austin-1714923>; Josh Rogin, "China's military expansion is reaching a dangerous tipping point" *Washington Post*, June 16, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/06/16/china-expansion-indopacific-asia-taiwan-xi-aquilino/>;

⁵¹⁹ Adam Liff and Andrew Erickson, "Demystifying China's Defense Spending: Less Mysterious in the Aggregate" *The China Quarterly*, 216 (2013), 807.

⁵²⁰ Lindsay Maizland, "China's Modernizing Military" *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 5, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-modernizing-military>

Something that should be asked is why doesn't Beijing spend more on defense? How the Soviet Union collapsed, and lessons learned from it by China could be one potential reason. One Chinese scholar argued in 2003 that in competing for global hegemony, the Soviets were deceived by the U.S. Star Wars program under Ronald Reagan. This created an overinvestment in defense, estimated to be more than 20% of GNP (gross national product), essentially causing a serious imbalance between economic and military development that helped cause the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁵²¹ Something that is repeatedly found in the Chinese literature on army building since the Jiang era is the need to correctly handle the relationship between national defense and economic construction.

Additionally, China faces economic and social challenges that indicate the ability to support the expansion of the PLA as a global expeditionary force could be limited.⁵²² Thus, lessons taken by the CCP from the Cold War and domestic problems make it unlikely China will raise its level of defense spending to a level that far outpaces its GDP or is considered unhealthy. If it were to do so however, that likely would be an indication there is something major planned—such as an invasion of Taiwan.

Despite the immense progress in modernization and dramatically improving capabilities, there are still three shortcomings the PLA needs to resolve to be confident it can win a high-intensity local war against a major military power. First, despite vast upgrades in equipment and capabilities, in terms of conducting more difficult operations far from home, most scholars believe the PLA has a long way to go. The ability to perform joint operations in the far seas—

⁵²¹ Ma Kun, 战争文化与国防、军队建设观念的塑造 (The culture of war and the shaping of the concept of national defense and army construction) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research), no.4 (2003), 173.

⁵²² Joseph Fewsmith, "Domestic Drivers of China's Future Military Modernization" in *The People's Liberation Army in 2025*. Roy Kamphausen and David Lai eds (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College, 2015), 76.

beyond the second island chain—currently is limited.⁵²³ Adequate strategic delivery capabilities that would be needed to win a short high intensity war in a scenario such as Taiwan is also lacking.⁵²⁴ Additionally, the command and control structure is likely insufficient if the PLA were to conduct overseas operations that lasted for longer periods of time or necessitated joint operations.⁵²⁵ However, even if the command and control structure were to be improved, there are questions if the PLA has enough capable, quality commanders to operate in the system. It is something acknowledged by the PLA in public forums. Zhu Tao—a lieutenant-colonel in the Air Force—recently pointed this out by commenting:

the problem of weak commanding capabilities of some commanders still exists. In the actual training, there are still individual commanders who are either isolated from the joint combat command system, out of the chain of command, or lack the ability to respond well and take adequate measures in the face of various dangerous situations. If you haven't heard drums, you must first raise good generals. We must solve the shortcomings of the commander's ability before the gunshots.⁵²⁶

This highlights the second issue regarding PLA modernization and something that was addressed in both the Jiang and Hu chapters: a shortage of talent, or abilities of commanders and troops. There is concern particularly with operating more modern and technologically advanced weapons. As the PLA continues to upgrade its equipment and weaponry, officers and soldiers are directed that they need to keep up. And some political cadres in the PLA who are supposed to be

⁵²³ Joel Wuthnow, Phillip Saunders, and Ian Burns McCaslin, “PLA Overseas Operations in 2035: Inching Toward a Global Combat Capability” in *Strategic Forum* no. 309 (National Defense University Press, 2021), 2.

⁵²⁴ Chung Chieh and Andrew Yang, “Crossing the Strait: Recent Trends in PLA ‘Strategic Delivery’ Capabilities” in *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operation in Regional and Global Context*. Joel Wuthnow et al eds (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2021), 52.

⁵²⁵ Phillip Saunders, “Command and Control of Overseas Operations in a Reformed PLA” in *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operation in Regional and Global Context*. Joel Wuthnow et al eds (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2021), 108.

⁵²⁶ Zhu Tao, 在指挥链上练指挥 (Practicing command in the chain of command) *PLA Daily*, March 1, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmmap/content/2023-03/01/content_334677.htm

experts in two fields—political and military—have shown no interest in mastering newer military equipment.⁵²⁷ Overall, the technological and scientific literacy of soldiers and officers needs to be bolstered.⁵²⁸ Finally, despite the rapid progress, the PLA believes it still trails the world’s advanced military powers in equipment and weaponry, lacking in the requirements of winning informationized warfare.⁵²⁹ Thus, although some argue China’s military modernization is historic, it remains a regional power.⁵³⁰

Along with views of the international security environment and capabilities, PLA goals have also changed—albeit more moderately than the other two categories. The 1997 enlarged CMC meeting that originally established a three-step strategy under Jiang Zemin, was altered by Xi. Now the PLA seeks to achieve the status of a world-class military by 2049. This does not mean it has aggressive global plans or aims to be capable of taking on the responsibilities similar to the U.S. military, but rather emphasizes being able to safeguard national interests, possess strong international influence, and is proportionate with the PRC’s status as a powerful country. The CCP now envisions and has set the goal of realizing military modernization by 2035, and 2027 for celebrating its one-hundred-year anniversary while checking that the PLA is on the right path for achieving complete modernization in 2035.

⁵²⁷ Bo Xiaojun, 武器装备更新快, 官兵素质要跟上 (Weapons and equipment are updated quickly, and the quality of officers and soldiers must keep up) *PLA Daily*, December 19, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-12/19/content_330162.htm

⁵²⁸ Han Zhiwen and Li Xiwu, 备战当戒“抱瓮灌园”思维 (When preparing for war we should refrain from the thinking of "holding the urn to irrigate the garden") *PLA Daily*, November 22, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/22/content_328367.htm

⁵²⁹ Wang Xin and Li Zhuohan, 加快武器装备现代化 (Accelerate the modernization of weapons and equipment) *PLA Daily*, December 20, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-12/20/content_330213.htm; “Xi Focus: PLA striving to build world-class military under Xi's leadership” *ibid.*

⁵³⁰ Ben Noon and Chris Bassler, “Schrodinger’s Military? Challenges for China’s Military Modernization Ambitions” *War on the Rocks*, October 14, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/schrodingers-military-challenges-for-the-chinas-military-modernization-ambitions/>

6 THE HU ERA 2005-2012: BUILDING AN INFORMATIZED ARMY

Hu Jintao replaced Jiang as party secretary in 2002 but did not become CMC Chairman until 2004. Like Jiang, Hu was appointed by Deng Xiaoping.⁵³¹ Although Hu was tasked with the important and difficult job of managing Tibet as party boss of the region in the late 1980s—during which he oversaw the bloody suppression of large-scale protests in the spring of 1989—he emerged from relative obscurity.⁵³² While some reminisced that Jiang possessed a charisma and outgoing attitude, including in his interactions with the west,⁵³³ Hu was more difficult to read because he possessed a demeanor lacking in personality while intentionally evading attention.⁵³⁴ Meanwhile, Hu also was similar to Jiang in that he had no military experience or powerful connections within the PLA prior to assuming the top leadership role.⁵³⁵

Unlike Jiang however, Hu did not assertively seek to develop close ties with officials in the PLA soon after becoming CMC chairman. Instead, Hu interacted with the military in a much more careful style.⁵³⁶ Part of the reason for this could be by the time Jiang finally relinquished power in 2002, he maintained considerable power because of the officials he helped place in the PLA and security services. Moreover, by waiting two years after becoming general secretary of the party to become CMC chairman, Hu yielded to Jiang who remained in that role even after the transfer of leadership to Hu. Another reason, according to Nan Li, is due to Hu's personality. He

⁵³¹ Mathieu Duchâtel and François Godement, "China's Politics Under Hu Jintao" *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38, no. 3 (2009), 3.

⁵³² Richard Ewing, "Hu Jintao: The Making of a Chinese General Secretary" *The China Quarterly* 173 (2003), 17.

⁵³³ Zhao Yuanyuan, "Five lesser-known facts about Jiang Zemin that Chinese internet users are fondly remembering him for" *The China Project*, November 30, 2022, <https://thechinaproject.com/2022/11/30/five-lesser-known-facts-about-jiang-zemin-that-chinese-internet-users-are-fondly-remembering-him-for/>; Chris Buckley and Michael Wines, "Jiang Zemin, Leader Who Guided China Into Global Market, Dies at 96" *New York Times*, November 30, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/30/world/asia/jiang-zemin-dead.html>

⁵³⁴ Ewing, *ibid*, 17.

⁵³⁵ Li, "Top Leaders and the PLA: The Different Styles of Jiang, Hu, and Xi" *ibid*, 126.

⁵³⁶ Alice Miller, "Hu Jintao and the PLA Brass" *China Leadership Monitor* 21 (2007), 8.

possessed a history of making judgements which rather than encouraging autonomous decision making, demanded prudence.⁵³⁷ Whether it was due to retired party elders who still wielded considerable influence, or Hu's personality and history of caution in the positions he held prior to replacing Jiang, there was a sense the CCPs grasp on the PLA weakened under Hu. The rest of this chapter examines how the PLA talked about army building and the amount of training and type of training exercises in the Hu era.

6.1 Army Building

While there was noticeable improvement in army building during the Jiang era, deep problems persisted, and military modernization still had a long way to go.⁵³⁸ Some characterized army building in the Hu era at a critical stage. An array of deeply rooted problems had accumulated and needed to be resolved while various new problems were consistently popping up.⁵³⁹ Two of the more serious problems was the organizational structure of the PLA was inadequate, and military modernization levels did not meet the requirements to win current wars. Organizational structure of a military is important because it influences the advantages of talents, equipment, and technology.⁵⁴⁰ The PLA's structure of its arms and services during the Hu era did not come close to meeting the needs of joint warfare. Much of this was due to historical reasons in which the structure of the PLA was dominated by the Army and focused on land forces. The

⁵³⁷ Li, *ibid*, 133.

⁵³⁸ Liu Jizhong, 国防和军队建设客观规律的深刻揭示和自觉运用 (Profound Revealing and Conscious Application of Objective Laws of National Defense and Army Construction) 军队政工理论研究 (Theoretical Research on Military Political Work) no.5 (2005), 27-28.

⁵³⁹ Wang Junqi, 紧紧围绕主题主线加强国防和军队现代化建设 (Focusing on the main theme of strengthening national defense and military modernization) 西安政治学院学报 (Xian Institute of Political Science) 24, no.5 (2011), 21-23.

⁵⁴⁰ Xu Sanfei, 改革开放以来我国国防和军事建设的创新发展与启示 (Innovative development and enlightenment of my country's national defense and military construction since the reform and opening up) 学习与实践 (Study and Practice) no.11 (2008), 44-45.

traditional, overwhelming emphasis on the Army left the Air Force and Navy as relatively weak in comparison.⁵⁴¹

Clearly the organizational leadership structure needed to be optimized. Reforms to adjust and optimize the organizational system, improve the compositional proportion and form of the armed services, pushing for the creation of new combat forces, and establishing the joint operation command system were all desperately needed. To improve the joint operation command system, changes needed to be made to cultivate a better joint training system with a joint support system based on the new requirements of information system of systems confrontation.⁵⁴² While this inadequate structure of the PLA was acknowledged, and many officers in the military stressed major reforms were needed correct it, the necessary changes to meaningfully change the structure and elevate its ability to conduct joint operations would not occur in the Hu era.

6.1.1 Scientific Outlook

Addressing issues in army building were often discussed in the defining slogans associated with the CCP general secretary. The Three Represents was the main slogan of the Jiang era. For the Hu era, one slogan that appeared frequently in the literature on army building is the Scientific Outlook on Development. At the 17th Party Congress in 2007, Hu highlighted the Scientific Outlook as a “guiding principle for strengthening national defense and the armed

⁵⁴¹ Jiang Hanbin, 改革开放与我国国防建设 (Reform and opening up and my country's national defense construction) 科学社会主义 (Scientific Socialism) no.1 (2009), 53.

⁵⁴² Wang Xibin, 加快战斗力生成模式转变 推动国防和军队建设科学发展 (Accelerating the transformation of combat power generation mode to promote the scientific development of national defense and military construction) 求是 (Seeking Truth) no.23 (2011), 46.

forces.”⁵⁴³ And Chinese literature on army building repeatedly bring up the Scientific Outlook as instrumental in directing army building.⁵⁴⁴

From an overarching perspective, the Scientific Outlook revolved around the issues of scientific development, harmonious society, and putting people first.⁵⁴⁵ The main purpose of the Scientific Outlook for army building is described as improving combat effectiveness. And combat effectiveness implied the ability of the PLA to win under the new situation of a military built on informatization.⁵⁴⁶ This description of combat effectiveness represented a change from the past. Previously, generating combat effectiveness depended on factors such as number of weapons and equipment, personnel size, and mechanization level. Now it changed to the informatization level of weapons, technological capabilities of personnel, and all parts of the PLA being integrated through information systems.⁵⁴⁷

The concept of an informatized army is the development of system integration, defined broadly as “integrated joint operation carried out by all services and arms on the multi-dimensional battlefield of land, sea, air, space and electricity based on the seamlessly linked network information system.”⁵⁴⁸ The idea that the PLA needed to focus its attention toward

⁵⁴³ Hu Jintao, "Full Text of Hu Jintao's Report at 17th Party Congress" *China Daily*, October 24, 2007, https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-10/24/content_6204564.htm

⁵⁴⁴ For just a couple examples see 坚持在国防和军队建设中贯彻落实科学发展观 (Persist in implementing the Scientific Outlook on Development in national defense and army building) 求是 (Seeking Truth) no.13 (2005), 12; Dai Weimin, 新世纪新阶段党的军事指导理论创新发展的新篇章——学习胡锦涛关于国防和军队建设科学发展的重要论述 (A new chapter in the innovation and development of the Party's military guidance theory in the new century and the new stage: learning from Hu Jintao's important exposition on the scientific development of national defense and army construction) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research) no.1 (2009), 1.

⁵⁴⁵ Guoxin Xing, "Hu Jintao's Political Thinking and Legitimacy Building: A Post-Marxist Perspective" *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 36, no. 4 (2009), 215.

⁵⁴⁶ Yang Rui and Pan Rui, 国防和军队建设贯彻落实科学发展观必须重点关注三个问题 (National defense and military construction must focus on three issues to implement the Scientific Outlook on Development) 国防 (National Defense) no.4 (2009), 14-15.

⁵⁴⁷ Xibin, *ibid*, 45.

⁵⁴⁸ Sun Jingping, 加强军队党的先进性建设 (Strengthening the Construction of the Advanced Nature of the Party in the Army) 政工学刊 (Political Science Journal) no.6 (2006), 12.

building an informatized military took hold in 2004,⁵⁴⁹ around the time when Hu took over as CMC chairman. There are five major types of information operations discussed in *The Science of Military Strategy*. They consist of intelligence warfare, command and control warfare, electronic warfare, cyber warfare, and destructive warfare of information sources. Intelligence warfare pertains to utilizing various methods to acquire the opponent's critical intelligence while preventing the opponent from doing the same. It can also be divided into two categories: intelligent protection and intelligence reconnaissance. The employment of all kinds of reconnaissance satellites, sensors, space shuttles, and reconnaissance planes by the U.S. during the 1991 Gulf War is an example given for this importance of intelligence warfare.

Command and control warfare is the different types of functions employed to attack the enemy's command and control systems, with the goal of destroying his information stream, thus significantly reducing, or destroying the opponent's control and command capabilities.

Electronic warfare pertains to electromagnetic warfare with the purpose of destroying or weakening the efficiency of the enemy's electronic equipment. It is to control and command the electromagnetics on the battlefield. This idea of electronic warfare will be discussed a bit more later in this chapter in the training section. Cyber warfare refers to all types of activities in cyber space, with a goal of damaging, destroying, and disintegrating computers and computer systems.

The US Roosevelt aircraft carrier's command and control system being invaded, which caused temporary communications failure during the 1999 NATO air attacks on the former Yugoslavia by computer experts in the Balkans is provided as one example of the power of cyber warfare. Finally, destructive warfare of information sources is described as a series of operations

⁵⁴⁹ Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, ibid, 16.

that utilize cyber weapons to carry out precision strikes against the enemy's information sources, particularly referring to military information infrastructures like C4ISR.⁵⁵⁰ All five of these operations are somewhat related and rely to a large degree on information technology. They are also described as being a type of system-to-system—or system of system—conflict. This form is the integration of different combat forces and operational units through the use of an information system. Essentially, there are no boundaries between arms and services and conflict is multi-dimensional, operating in both physical and intangible space.⁵⁵¹ Overall, information operations are thought of as combining wartime and peacetime and combining civil with military.⁵⁵²

Moving back to the influence of the Scientific Development on army building, the slogan focused on three key issues in addition to holding combat effectiveness as the standard: better coordination between military and economic construction, putting soldiers first, and capacity building in non-war operations as key factors for the PLA when it comes to army building. Each one of these will be expanded on. Correctly handling economic construction with national defense construction was a major issue and army building component in implementing the Scientific Development Outlook according to the PLA.⁵⁵³

Coordination between the two is to be viewed from the perspective of the PRC's overall development strategy and national security. Furthermore, while it is described as coordination between economic construction and army construction, the PLA is instructed that it must be patient because economic development is the center. The economy must be improved, and then

⁵⁵⁰ Guangqian and Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, ibid, 340-343.

⁵⁵¹ Junqi, ibid, 21.

⁵⁵² Guangqian and Youzhi, ibid, 344-345.

⁵⁵³ 在国防和军队建设中牢固确立科学发展观重要指导方针 (Firmly establish important guidelines for scientific development concept in national defense and military construction) 求是 (Seeking Truth) no.15 (2006), 3.

there can be more resources devoted to improving weapons and equipment.⁵⁵⁴ Overall, for the foreseeable future, the army would be subordinate to economic construction.

Because of this subordination, with limited funds, army building must rely on building through thrift.⁵⁵⁵ Even with limited funds and economic construction prioritized, the PLA was exhorted to still make strides in military modernization. In the past the PLA fought with what it had, in the current era and moving forward it was instructed to develop what it had,⁵⁵⁶ regardless of how much funding came from the government. Additionally, there were calls for a focus on the relationship between what was described as realistic preparation and long-term construction with economic construction. Military construction is a long-term process, and the PLA cannot just think about army building in the present, but also in the future.⁵⁵⁷ Relatedly, additional contradictions that existed and needed to be solved were between long-term interests and immediate interests, and how to correctly handle the relationship between what was called the overall situation and local situation.⁵⁵⁸

Putting people first, or the emphasis on soldiers, is the other core component of what the Scientific Outlook addresses on army building. Some describe the focus on individual troops as the most important principle of the Scientific Outlook.⁵⁵⁹ The president of China's National Defense University characterized giving priority to the creative spirit and dominant position of officers and soldiers with a people-centered approach as the foundation of army building. Three

⁵⁵⁴ Yang Yi, 中国国防与军队建设的战略性调整 (Strategic Adjustment of China's National Defense and Military Construction) 世界经济与政治 (World Economy and Politics) no.11 (2008), 54-55.

⁵⁵⁵ Sanfei, *ibid*, 41-48.

⁵⁵⁶ Shi Gang and Xue Gaolian, 按照新使命的需求深入推进军队建设转型 (According to the needs of the new mission to further promote the transformation of military construction) 军事历史研究 (Military History Research) no.2 (2007), 12-13.

⁵⁵⁷ Gang and Gaolian, *ibid*, 9-15

⁵⁵⁸ Jingping, *ibid*, 13-14.

⁵⁵⁹ Weimin, *ibid*, 1.

consistencies are explained to implement this approach and support the dominant position of soldiers: “adhere to the consistency of being responsible to the superior and responsible to the subordinate, unite and rely on the vast number of officers and soldiers to creatively implement the instructions of superiors; persist in implementing the party's propositions”.⁵⁶⁰ While the jargon here seems confusing, perhaps more importantly is the goal of building constructive conditions that allows soldiers to develop their talent and skills, and protecting the interests of officers and soldiers.⁵⁶¹

Finally, cultivating a fighting spirit, investing in the personal development of soldiers while raising their material conditions, and paying attention to the personal characteristics of soldiers were a major priority. There was talk that the PLA needed to be liberated from an outdated concept of discarding the personality of military cadres and officers indiscriminately, and appropriately handle the connection between the professional needs of the military and the personalized development of officers and soldiers.⁵⁶² Continuing the elevation of professional development was important because although China vastly improved raising the education level of its troops since the Jiang era,⁵⁶³ there still was a wide gap in the number of commanders and troops with the requisite skills “to command information warfare and lead the troops to complete various operational tasks under information conditions and the requirements for winning information warfare.”⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶⁰ Pei Huailiang, 坚持在国防和军队建设中贯彻以人为本思想 (Adhere to the implementation of people-oriented thinking in national defense and military construction 求是 (Seeking Truth) no.24 (2005), 20.

⁵⁶¹ Huailiang, *ibid*, 20.

⁵⁶² Zheng Mingyang and Yang Hongbin, 坚持以人为本 开掘军队建设的动力源泉 (Adhere to People-Oriented and Explore the Power Source of Army Construction) 政工学刊 (Journal of Political Science) no.12 (2007), 23-24.

⁵⁶³ Hanbin, *ibid*, 53-56.

⁵⁶⁴ Jingping, *ibid*, 13.

This shortcoming in skills was also referred to as the three incompatibilities: the abilities of commander teams are discordant with winning an informatized war, the technological quality of soldiers and officers is incompatible with the progress in equipment, and the quality and quantity of personnel training is incompatible with the demands of quickening information construction.⁵⁶⁵ These three incompatibles were considered a hindrance for the PLA's overall army building, and the goal of catching up with foreign militaries.

As mentioned previously, because economic construction was prioritized above army building, the PLA lacked robust funding and resources. This dynamic helped create the issue of what was described as the main contradiction in army building. The modernization level and requirements to win local wars under the condition of information technology were not consistent with the military capabilities of realizing the new historical missions.⁵⁶⁶ This problem is also described as the two incompatibles in army building.⁵⁶⁷ Moreover, the contradiction between insufficient investment and military modernization would continue for quite some time.⁵⁶⁸ To try and solve this problem, the PLA was exhorted to maximize the limited funds available to realize higher levels of combat effectiveness and modernization levels in a more efficient manner.⁵⁶⁹

Because the PLA was far behind for so long that it cannot try to catch up with foreign military powers through the normal process of step-by-step development, it needed to adopt the

⁵⁶⁵ Gang and Gaolian, *ibid*, 12-13.

⁵⁶⁶ Guan Rui, Bai Zhengyong, and Zheng Gang, 适应世界军事格局变化趋势 推进我军建设复合式发展 (Adapting to the changing trend of the world military structure and promoting the compound development of our military construction) 决策与信息 (Decision and Information) no.7 (2008), 28-29.

⁵⁶⁷ Hanbin, *ibid*, 56; Gang and Gaolian, *ibid*, 11-12.

⁵⁶⁸ 在国防和军队建设中牢固确立科学发展观重要指导方针 (Firmly establish important guidelines for scientific development concept in national defense and military construction) *ibid*, 4-5.

⁵⁶⁹ Junqi, *ibid*, 23.

strategy of leapfrog development⁵⁷⁰ regarding equipment construction and weapons.⁵⁷¹ Essentially adopting the techniques and equipment that were already developed by others.⁵⁷² One way that leapfrog development can be achieved, and to begin resolving the contradiction in army building that the level of modernization does not match the requirements to win an informatization, high tech war, is to integrate the military and civilian worlds.⁵⁷³ Leapfrog development in weapons needed the help of civilians expertise, particularly with information technology as the base of weapon production and informatization serving as a force multiplier in combat effectiveness.⁵⁷⁴

6.2 New Historical Missions

As discussed previously, the Scientific Outlook played an important role in providing guidance for army building. Often mentioned along with the Scientific Outlook as important for army building was the New Historical Missions. At its core, the New Historical Missions required the PLA to respond to both non-traditional and traditional threats, efficiently conduct war and non-war operations, elevate its capacity to handle multiple security threats and achieve various military tasks. These tasks were explained as a new requirement and expansion for the PLA's combat effectiveness construction.⁵⁷⁵ Others described the New Historical Missions more expansively by explaining it included not just responding to both traditional and non-traditional

⁵⁷⁰ Ma Ping and Sun Kejia, 中国特色军队建设规律问题初探 (A Preliminary Probe into the Law of Army Construction with Chinese Characteristics) 国防 (National Defense) no.1 (2005), 6-7.

⁵⁷¹ Liu Yazhou, 把握国家安全形势发展新特点新趋势加强国防和军队现代化建设战略筹划 (Grasp the new characteristics and new trends of the development of national security situation and strengthen the strategic planning of national defense and military modernization) 求是 (Seeking Truth), no.12 (2010), 44.

⁵⁷² Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, ibid, 18.

⁵⁷³ Weimin, ibid, 3-4.

⁵⁷⁴ Xibin, ibid, 45-46.

⁵⁷⁵ Xibin, ibid, 44.

security threats, but also safeguarding the security of the sea, the interests of national survival as well as national development, and space and electromagnetic space.

Like the Scientific Outlook, implementing the New Historical Missions was often mentioned with raising combat effectiveness.⁵⁷⁶ What is significant about the New Missions is that it greatly expanded the space and scope of China's national security interests outward. No longer was the focus mainly on the homeland but pushed out toward greater emphasis on the maritime and space domains. Overall, the New Historical Missions focused on strengthening the PLA's support of the Party; improving the ability to protect China's maritime interests; and raising the capabilities in the three critical areas of cyberspace, space, and maritime.⁵⁷⁷

Future plans for the different military branches in army building included a focus on raising the capabilities of firepower suppression, field air defense, armored assault, counterterrorism, special ops to meet the requirements of homeland defense operations and increasing the development of mechanized equipment with better information technology. The Navy should focus on producing new types of special combat aircraft, combat ships, and backing support equipment, cultivate medium (and long-range anti-ship) anti-submarine, and other precision strike weapons while improving its complete combat capability for performing offshore maritime campaigns.

Meanwhile, the Air Force needed to devote its concentration on the development of air defense and antimissile weapon systems, new fighter aircraft, enhance its capabilities in air strikes, information confrontation, air defense operation, and progressively realize the change to

⁵⁷⁶ Rui and Rui, *ibid*, 14.

⁵⁷⁷ Daniel Hartnett, "The 'New Historic Missions': Reflections on Hu Jintao's Military Legacy" in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner eds (Carlisle PA: U.S. Army War College, 2014), 34-35.

an attack defense type from a territorial air defense type. The Second Artillery ought to focus on the improvement of research and development of missiles, establishing a surface to air missile equipment system with regular and nuclear weapons, enhancing the fire assault capability of medium and short-range conventional missiles, and raising the nuclear deterrent and nuclear counterattack capabilities.⁵⁷⁸

6.3 Training

Collecting training data for the Hu era was relatively easier than the Jiang era. Reports of training activities were more widely available with the expansion of the Chinese internet. Like the Jiang era, I gathered reports from the *BBC Monitoring Asia-Pacific* on PLA training through the ProQuest database. There were two changes in obtaining training data that helped produce additional results. First, I also used the Chinese search engine Baidu to look for training reports, which yielded significantly more results than the *ProQuest* database. The keyword in Baidu utilized was 解放军训练活动 (People's Liberation Army training activities). Second, for PLA joint training with foreign militaries I looked at Chinese defense white papers while also

⁵⁷⁸ Sanfei, *ibid*, 46-47.

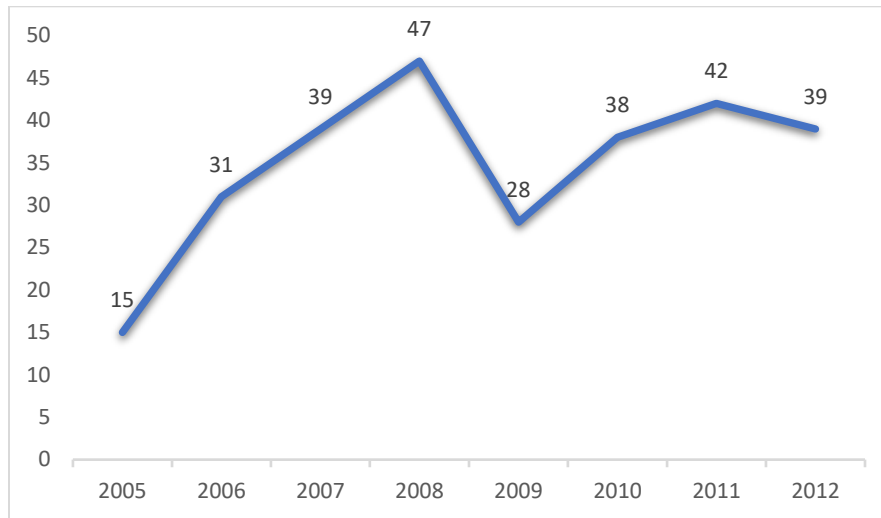


Figure 9: Number of PLA Training Activities in Hu Era

examining the U.S. National Defense University's Military Diplomacy Database, which included number of joint exercises of the PLA with foreign militaries from 2003-2016.⁵⁷⁹

As can be observed from the graph above, the overall number of training activities reported in the Hu era is significantly higher than the Jiang era. The largest number of activities in the Jiang era was thirteen, occurring in 2000. The highest number of training activities reported in the Hu era hit forty-seven in 2008, while the lowest number of fifteen in 2005 was still more than the highest amount in the Jiang era. Driving the increase in training was domestic training activities by the PLA. Joint training had started to grow considerably in the final three years that Jiang was CMC chairman, and the trend would continue under Hu but would fluctuate and never grow to more than fourteen in a single year. The graph below captures this, comparing the number of joint and domestic training each year in the Hu era. After slowing in 2008 and

⁵⁷⁹ <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/1249864/chinese-military-diplomacy-20032016-trends-and-implications/>

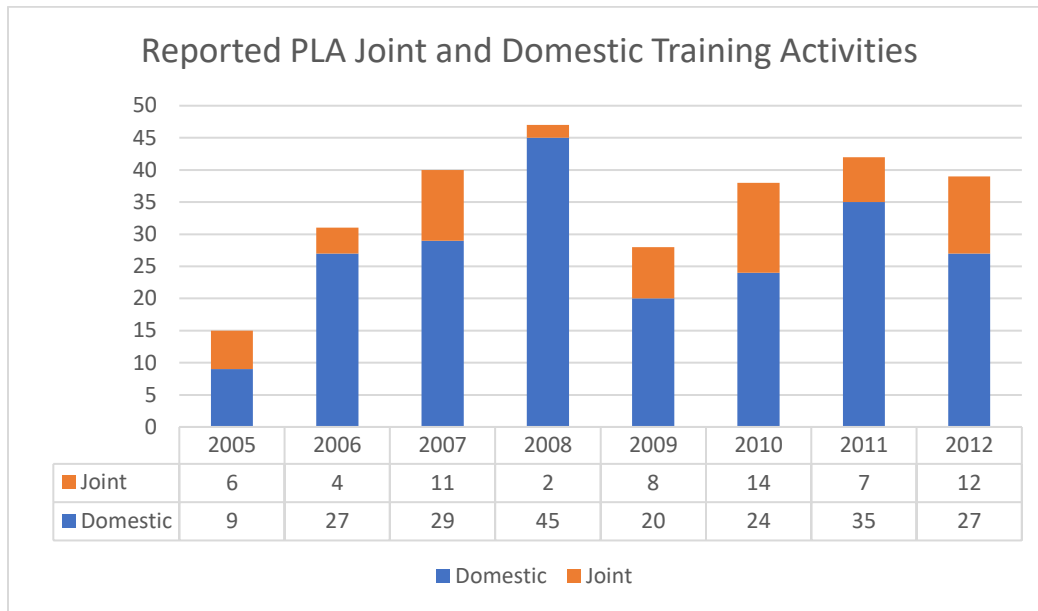


Figure 10: Reported PLA Joint and Domestic Training Activities

2009, joint training expanded again with thirty-three exercises in the final three years of the Hu era.

Not surprisingly, the most joint trainings the PLA did was with Pakistan (11 times) Russia (7 times) and Thailand (7 times). In terms of type of exercise, the highest amount was regular combat, with MOOTW (military operations other than war), second most, and anti-terrorism along with combat support tied for third most. Considering it was the decade following 9/11, it is somewhat surprising that joint anti-terrorism exercises were lower on the list. Meanwhile, the military branch that saw the most joint training exercises was the Navy with twenty-three exercises, followed by the Army with nineteen, and the Air Force with six. Exercises involving multiple branches, also called joint exercises, comprised fifteen exercises. The PLAN leading all branches in number of joint exercises perhaps indicated a recognition for the growing need to protect international trade. Bilateral and multilateral joint maritime exercises

included things like formation movement, firing at air and underwater targets, joint escort, and cross-deck helicopter landing.⁵⁸⁰

Continuing from the Jiang era, exercises organized and taking place with counterparts in the SCO continued to advance. The 2007 Peace Mission exercise with members of the SCO were described by China as the first in which the PLA sent complete organizations involving various armed branches to participate on a large scale in a foreign country.⁵⁸¹ While the highest number of joint trainings were conducted with countries China has good relations with, there were also some exercises conducted with countries China views with suspicion in the national security domain such as India and the U.S.

The joint counter-terrorism training with India in 2007 was the first-time personnel from each country's army held joint training together.⁵⁸² Ever-increasing exercises conducted with countries China has good relations with, and those it does not, reflected the belief that the PLA has a lot it can learn from foreign militaries. Some argued it was not possible to effectively modernize the military without learning from others,⁵⁸³ effectively, "no country's military can modernize itself behind closed doors."⁵⁸⁴ Moreover, it allowed the PLA to shape the security environment and collect intelligence.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁰ "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces" The State Council of the People's Republic of China, August 23, 2014, http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/08/23/content_281474982986506.htm

⁵⁸¹ "Chinese Expert Says Joint Drill Key to Pragmatic Exchange with Other Militaries" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Aug 08, 2007. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-expert-says-joint-drill-key-pragmatic/docview/460894952/se-2>.

⁵⁸² "First Ever India, China Military Exercise from 20 Dec" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Dec 20, 2007, <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/first-ever-india-china-military-exercise-20-dec/docview/460876867/se-2>.

⁵⁸³ Yi, *ibid*, 56-57.

⁵⁸⁴ Ping and Kejjia, *ibid*, 6.

⁵⁸⁵ Kenneth Allen, Phillip Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003-2016: Trends and Implications* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017), 12-13.

After just eighteen domestic training activities in 2005, PLA exercises jumped rapidly to forty-five by 2008, before dropping off somewhat the following year. Still, there would be at least twenty domestic training exercises every year after 2005, with the most occurring in 2006 and 2008. One thing that stands out is that in 2008, domestic training hit its peak while there were only two joint training exercises with foreign militaries. Joint training expanded again, however, with thirty-three exercises in the final three years of the Hu era. Not surprisingly, the Army dominated the number of domestic training activities with 139, followed by the Navy with 54, Air Force with 32, and joint training with 25. While there are plenty of training activities not reported on, this gives a glimpse of how much training was carried out and which branch had the

Table 5: Training by Military Branch

| Branch | # Exercises |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 2nd Artillery | 12 |
| Air Force | 33 |
| Army | 141 |
| Joint | 25 |
| Navy | 54 |

most. Two things stand out. First, the Navy with the second most activities of 54 reflects the intentions to give it more importance while highlighting the expanding interests reaching outward into the maritime domain outlined in *The New Historical Missions*. Second, although increasing and strengthening joint training is a topic the PLA continuously emphasized in the Hu era, the number of joint trainings was still quite low. Also, it is possible that the reason the number of Air Force exercises was much lower than the PLAN or Army could be because

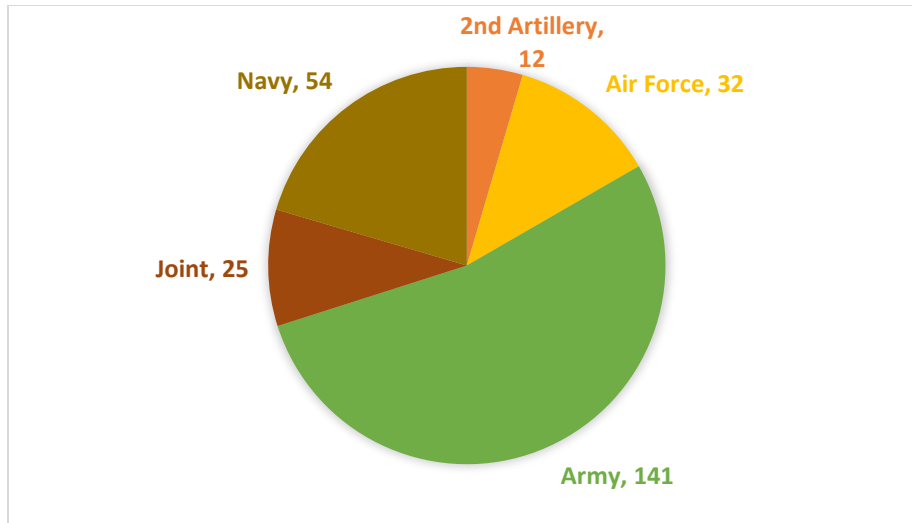


Figure 11: Training by Branch in the Hu Era

exercises like flight training are expensive.

Overall, the number of naval and joint trainings fluctuated considerably. Naval training during the last two years of the Hu era rose significantly, with twenty-one exercises in the final two years after just a total of seventeen in the four previous years before that. Most naval training activities involved combat exercises described as taking place under electromagnetic environments, and included long range naval raids, various ships employing offensive and defensive exercises, missile attacks, amphibious exercises, live fire training, anti-chemical warfare, and bombers flying low altitude operations.⁵⁸⁶ Joint training contained combat techniques conducted through the same command network platform,⁵⁸⁷ and involved different

⁵⁸⁶ 港媒: 解放军三大舰队近期频繁训练强化战力 (Hong Kong media: The three major fleets of the People's Liberation Army have recently conducted frequent training to strengthen their combat strength) *China News Network*, February 20, 2011, <http://military.cntv.cn/20110220/101047.shtml>

⁵⁸⁷ 中国七大战区军兵种联合大演练 (Joint training of services and arms of China's seven major theaters) *International Outlook*, March 21, 2006, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2006-03-21/0815358693.html?domain=mil.news.sina.com.cn&vt=4&from=wap>

services and arms that focused on future combat tasks.⁵⁸⁸ Continuing efforts to strengthen joint training was highlighted by actions like the Jinan military region establishing a three year joint training pilot program in 2009.⁵⁸⁹

Like the Jiang era, greater emphasis on technological training was also called for. Preparing for local wars under information conditions, which began in the Jiang chapter, continued, and expanded under Hu. Some described the focus of PLA training as going through three major changes from the post-Mao era through the Hu era. First, in the 1980s, training changed to campaign tactical training from basic technical training. The second change occurred in the 1990s, with the focus on winning local wars under the situation of modern technology from previously dealing with general wars. And last, in the new century, a major shift to training under information conditions from mechanized conditions.⁵⁹⁰

Even with the description above, and continuous calls for training to change toward informatization, there was frequent criticism and acknowledgement that training was slow to change and needed to break free from the mindset of prioritizing mechanization.⁵⁹¹ One reason for the criticism was because the majority of military cadres were raised, or cultivated under the conditions of mechanization and semi-mechanization, thus the problem was especially

⁵⁸⁸ 解放军部队实施实战条件多兵种高强度联训 (PLA units implement multi-branch high-intensity joint training under actual combat conditions) *PLA Daily*, August 13, 2007, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2007-08-13/0601459373.html>

⁵⁸⁹ 解放军开始新一轮战区联合战役集训 (The People's Liberation Army (PLA) began a new round of joint campaign training in theaters) *China News Network*, June 29, 2012, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/mil/2012/06-29/3997724.shtml>

⁵⁹⁰ Sanfei, *ibid*, 45-46.

⁵⁹¹ For just a couple of examples see 解放军联合训练打破兵种界线 着力提升体系战力 (The joint training of the People's Liberation Army breaks the boundaries of the arms and strives to enhance the combat effectiveness of the system) *Phoenix Information*, November 26, 2009, https://news.ifeng.com/mil/4/200911/1126_342_1451734.shtml

challenging, with deep roots.⁵⁹² While mechanization would remain a component of the PLA's army building and training, the military leadership emphasized that information must be the leading factor, without which military modernization would be inadequate.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the five types of information operations is electronic warfare, also referring to electromagnetic warfare. One theme that appears frequently in the Hu era is training in electromagnetic environments, and that the PLA should increasingly conduct and strengthen training in electromagnetic environments,⁵⁹³ which is based on informatization. Reports indicated that emphasis on electromagnetic training and conducting training in electromagnetic environments began in 2006. Fan Changlong, commander of the Jinan Military Region, explained during a twelve-day drill in 2006 that the purpose of the training "aims to root out any problems that exist among Chinese troops by exposing them to the most difficult electromagnetic environment".⁵⁹⁴ The PLA's Iron Fist training in 2007 was explained as "the first year in which the whole Army has carried out training on electromagnetic combat."⁵⁹⁵

Training reports by 2008 were increasingly described as taking place under electromagnetic environments.⁵⁹⁶ This electromagnetic form of training and warfare pertained to

⁵⁹² Zheng Ganpei, 解放军须着力培养复杂电磁环境作战新型人才 (The People's Liberation Army must focus on cultivating new talents for combat in complex electromagnetic environments) *PLA Daily*, December 18, 2007, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2007-12-18/0619477054.html>

⁵⁹³ 复杂电磁环境下指挥对抗已成我军重点训练科目 (Command and confrontation in a complex electromagnetic environment has become a key training subject for our army) *PLA Daily*, January 13, 2008, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-01-13/1044480951.html>; 2007 年解放军军事训练呈现六大特点 (PLA military training in 2007 presents six characteristics) *Xinhuanet*, December 17, 2007, <https://news.ifeng.com/c/7fYRhqMGzdE>

⁵⁹⁴ "Chinese Army Holds Information Military Drill in Shandong Province" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Nov 20, 2006, <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-army-holds-information-military-drill/docview/460788803/se-2>.

⁵⁹⁵ "China's 'Iron Fist' Military Exercise Concluded" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Nov 02, 2007, <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinas-iron-fist-military-exercise-concluded/docview/460878496/se-2>.

⁵⁹⁶ For just two examples see Qian Yonglin and Zhao Picong, 解放军装甲旅进行强电磁环境下远程机动演练 (The PLA armored brigade conducts long-range maneuvering exercises in a strong electromagnetic environment)

interfering, weakening, or destroying the efficiency of the opponent's electronic equipment while defending your own. Thus, PLA training under electromagnetic environments often involved using jamming equipment, frequency equipment training, electromagnetic reconnaissance, and anti-detection or destruction of the communication command system.⁵⁹⁷ There was two main reasons why electromagnetic training was important to expand at the time. First, it was a form of information warfare, and the goal of army building in the Hu era was creating an informationized army. Second, it was explained as making training closer to actual combat. Increased training under electromagnetic environments however, exposed shortcomings that needed to be corrected. The skills and quality of commanding officers were incompatible with warfare in complicated electromagnetic environments.⁵⁹⁸ Training in electromagnetic warfare was new and would take time to improve. And finally, it also highlighted how unprepared the PLA was to fight modern wars and how far modernization had to go.

Training and evaluation revisions were drafted in 2008,⁵⁹⁹ with a new training program and outline introduced in 2009.⁶⁰⁰ These changes were to be expected given that two years earlier in 2006, training was described as obsolete and not reflective of current conditions. While four

PLA Daily, March 26, 2008, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-03-26/0621491756.html>; 解放军防空旅练复杂电磁环境下防敌空中侦察 (The PLA Air Defense Brigade trains to defend against enemy aerial reconnaissance in a complex electromagnetic environment) *PLA Daily*, March 3, 2008, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-03-03/0724488123.html>

⁵⁹⁷ 沈阳军区设置电磁模拟特遣队进行随时随机训练 (Shenyang Military Region set up electromagnetic simulation task force to conduct random training at any time) *PLA Daily*, September 3, 2008, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-09-03/0617519425.html>

⁵⁹⁸ 解放军推动复杂电磁环境下对抗训练已见实效 (The PLA's promotion of confrontation training in complex electromagnetic environments has achieved practical results) *China Daily*, February 26, 2008, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hqzg/2008-02/26/content_6484845.htm

⁵⁹⁹ 解放军 160 多名军事训练专家集训新训练大纲 (More than 160 military training experts of the People's Liberation Army gather new training syllabus) *PLA Daily*, July 27, 2008, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2008-07-27/0632513377.html>

⁶⁰⁰ 解放军总参解读新大纲:突出军事训练信息化水平 (The General Staff of the People's Liberation Army Interprets the New Outline: Highlighting the Informatization Level of Military Training) January 7, 2009, http://cn.chinagate.cn/tech/2009-01/07/content_17071031_2.htm

core issues were highlighted, there were two main reasons given that training did not accurately mirror reality. First, the key threat in a military's offensive combat had changed to the air, namely, with missiles and armed helicopters representing the number one killer of ground forces and form of engagement with the enemy. However, the main enemy threat in PLA training still came from the front.

Second, non-linear, and non-contact combat had turned into the main form of modern warfare. These two terms pertain to rapid movement, intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities, and precision strikes. Non-linear operations can include things like special operations, airborne units and air assault, dispersion and irregular employment of forces, long range attacks, and rapid armored assaults behind enemy lines.⁶⁰¹ But the emphasis in PLA training was still close, linear, direct combat to crush the enemy. Finally, tactical deception had also become a major strategy to trick the enemy on the modern battlefield, but in the PLA's tactical training, particularly in training below the division level, there were no conditions in training of tactical deception. Thus, revisions were much needed.⁶⁰²

The new outline and regulations emphasized training should be intensified in the following areas:

- Informatized equipment and weaponry
- Operating command information systems
- Maritime, space, and electromagnetic space security
- MOOTW
- Complex electromagnetic environments

⁶⁰¹ Kevin McCauley, *PLA System of Systems Operations: Enabling Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2017), 28.

⁶⁰² Wang Xueping, 解放军部分训练内容陈旧落后与现实不相吻合 (Part of the PLA's training content is outdated and backward and does not coincide with reality) *PLA Daily*, October 3, 2006, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2006-10-03/0612402371.html>

Moreover, it noted there needed to be an acceleration of the construction of integrated training areas and improvements made in the evaluation system.⁶⁰³ Calls to strengthen and innovate joint and integrated training were persistent throughout the Hu era.⁶⁰⁴ Joint training at the time was still quite new for the PLA and would need time and consistent effort to elevate the capabilities necessary to perform joint training.

The amount of domestic joint training in reports from the press indicated that joint training was not regular. And it was not until 2009 that the PLA conducted its first joint operations training with a foreign military (Singapore).⁶⁰⁵ Each year the General Staff Department (GSD) issued annual training tasks for each MR. These annual training tasks were not usually very detailed but did offer areas that were emphasized. Some, like joint operations, usually appear each year. The 2012 instructions included:

- Promote training reform as a whole.
- Do a good job of joint training.
- Strengthen training for all services and arms.
- Improve the teaching quality in colleges.⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰³ “China’s National Defense in 2010” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, March 31, 2011, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm

⁶⁰⁴ 解放军部署新年度军事训练 全面提高部队战斗力 (The People's Liberation Army deploys new annual military training to comprehensively improve the combat effectiveness of troops) *China News*, January 16, 2005, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/news/2005/2005-01-16/26/528829.shtml>;

⁶⁰⁵ 军事专家: 解放军首次战区联合训练有四大关注点 (Military experts: The PLA's first theater joint training has four major concerns) *China Broadcasting Network*, July 2, 2009, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/gn/news/2009/07-02/1758388.shtml>

⁶⁰⁶ 解放军总参谋部向全军发布 2012 年军事训练指示 (The PLA General Staff issued military training instructions for 2012 to the whole army), January 11, 2012, http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2012-01/11/content_2042134.htm

The orders provided general guidance for military training throughout the year. And meetings of party committees at headquarters around the country reviewed the tasks in December and January.⁶⁰⁷

Finally, it should be noted in the current atmosphere of elevated concern over Taiwan, and an increasing narrative from prominent American politicians, military officers, and scholars that China has sped up its plans to potentially invade Taiwan, or that war in the next decade is becoming more likely,⁶⁰⁸ there was a handful of island taking and amphibious assault training activities in the Hu era were they to occur today, would likely be offered as evidence the PLA is about to invade. One training in 2010 called “Jiaolong” was an annual drill that performed island taking maneuvers. Included in the training was 1,800 troops, submarines, landing ships, assault boats, amphibious armored vehicles, minesweepers, and attack helicopters.⁶⁰⁹ Obviously 1,800 troops is a miniscule number compared to how many would take part in an actual invasion of Taiwan, but the exercises are still significant. In 2012, there was also an island taking drill in response to U.S.-Japan military drills.⁶¹⁰ The “Queshan” exercise in 2007 included attacking a

⁶⁰⁷ Blasko, *ibid*, *The Chinese Army Today*, 177.

⁶⁰⁸ Ellen Francis, “China plans to seize Taiwan on ‘much faster timeline,’ Blinken says” *Washington Post*, October 22, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/18/china-seize-taiwan-plan-blinken/>; Adela Suliman, “China could invade Taiwan in the next 6 years, assume global leadership role, U.S. admiral warns” *NBC News*, March 10, 2021, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-could-invade-taiwan-next-6-years-assume-global-leadership-n1260386>; Robert Delaney, “US Navy should prepare for an invasion of Taiwan as soon as this year, fleet chief says” *South China Morning Post*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3196553/us-navy-should-prepare-invasion-taiwan-soon-year-fleet-chief-says>; Keoni Everington, “63% of experts think Chinese invasion of Taiwan possible in 10 years: ChinaPower” *Taiwan News*, September 20, 2022, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/4663136>; Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict With China* (NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2022).

⁶⁰⁹ 解放军 1800 余兵力在南海演习 练攻岛作战 (More than 1,800 PLA troops exercise in the South China Sea to practice island attack operations) November 3, 2010, <http://news.enorth.com.cn/system/2010/11/03/005358543.shtml>

⁶¹⁰ “Chinese Analysts Discuss Navy’s ‘Island Capture’ Drill” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Nov 07, 2012. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-analysts-discuss-navys-island-capture/docview/1139311377/se-2>.

mountainous island,⁶¹¹ and other exercises in the Hu era such as joint landings initiated from sea and amphibious operations that would be part of any invasion.⁶¹²

6.4 Conclusion

Building an informatized army was one main goal of army construction in the Hu era. This was a tall task considering the resources devoted to making that happen remained weak. The PLA acknowledged that army building would continue to be subordinate to economic development. Nevertheless, the military was expected to rapidly modernize despite the limited funding. This can partially explain the promotion and emphasis of leapfrog development, building on breakthroughs by other countries that had already been made. Overall, army building was also guided by directives found in writings on the Scientific Outlook. These focused on combat effectiveness, correctly handling the relationship of economic development with army building, and putting people first, or letting the spirit of officers and soldiers play a more prominent role.

The main contradiction—or problem—described in army building was that the PLA did not meet the modernization level and requirements to win local wars under information conditions. Three other issues plagued army building. First, the quality of officers and soldiers were inadequate for winning modern wars. Especially the technological capabilities of soldiers to operate equipment and commanders to operate and execute the right decisions in high-tech conditions.⁶¹³ Second, equipment and weapons did not meet the requirements for modern war.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹¹ "Chinese Army Launches Seven-Day Drill to Attack Hilly Island" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Sep 22, 2007. <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-army-launches-seven-day-drill-attack/docview/460885897/se-2>.

⁶¹² 南海舰队登陆舰与海军陆战队演练联合登陆作战 (South China Sea Fleet landing ships and marines practice) *PLA Daily*, February 6, 2009, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2009-02-06/0747541049.html>

⁶¹³ "Chinese Army Daily Criticizes Troops' Performance in Live Fire Drill" *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, Jan 27, 2006, <https://www.proquest.com/wire-feeds/chinese-army-daily-criticizes-troops-performance/docview/460660154/se-2>.

⁶¹⁴ Hanbin, *ibid*, 53.

And finally, the organizational structure needed greater adjustments and reform to better conduct and facilitate joint operations. Although the quality and education levels of the military improved throughout the Hu era, all the issues mentioned above would continue to be major problems heading into the Xi era.

Training continued to expand, with the number of domestic exercises varying during the Hu era but overall, significantly increasing—particularly in 2006 and 2008. Not surprisingly, the Army appeared most often in media reports, with three times as many training activities as the PLAN, which had the second most. Although there were continuous directives that joint training needed to be strengthened, there were just twenty-five joint exercises. One main theme of training revolved around taking place under an electromagnetic environment, reflecting the goal to build an informationized army and conduct information operations. Training under electromagnetic environments largely meant information technology playing a bigger role in operations. Cyber, jamming and anti-jamming, space, communication networks and C4ISR are some of the main features of training in an electromagnetic environment.

Meanwhile, joint exercises with foreign militaries continued to expand, especially with Pakistan (a future SCO member) Thailand, and other members of the SCO like Russia, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. However, there were also exercises with countries like India and the U.S. whom China distrusts in the domain of national security. The joint training with foreign powers offered the PLA a lot to learn while improving their own training and collecting intelligence. While progress was made in army building and training during the Hu era, the PLA could look at the state of other military powers and recognize how wide the gap remained. Without major reforms and increased spending, closing the gap would remain a slow process.

7 XI ERA: SHAKING THINGS UP

Xi Jinping had a deep familiarity with the CCP long before joining the Party because of his childhood background. His father, Xi Zhongxun, fought in the revolutionary war, was purged repeatedly during the Cultural Revolution, and was later rehabilitated under Deng Xiaoping. Rather than turning away from the Party and seeking to go into business like many other princelings—children of high-ranking officials—Xi remained committed to joining the Party.⁶¹⁵

Unlike Jiang and Hu, Xi did possess some familiarity with the PLA prior to assuming the leadership. Xi served as an aide for three years to the defense minister, Geng Biao, from 1979-1982, in his first job after graduating from college. It was an important position at the time, China had initiated a war with Vietnam in 1979 that lasted for a few weeks, with conflict continuing sporadically into the 1980s. The work was tedious, but it gave Xi the opportunity to see how things operated and helped form connections.⁶¹⁶

Following the stint as Geng's aide, Xi went down to the grassroots working at the county level beginning in Hubei, before spending seventeen years climbing up the ladder in Fujian province—directly across from Taiwan. Often forgotten is from 1999-2002, Xi served as director for the PLA National Defense Mobilization Committee of Fujian, again, significant due to its proximity to Taiwan. Overall, Xi served three different stints as a first secretary, one as 1st political commissioner, and one as a deputy director in the PLA.⁶¹⁷ That is striking compared to Hu's background, whose only experience in a civilian role in the PLA was serving once as a first secretary.⁶¹⁸ After Fujian, Xi went on to work in Zhejiang province, before serving a short period

⁶¹⁵ Osnos, "Born Red" *ibid.*

⁶¹⁶ Chris Johnson, "Hide and Bide" *The Prince*, episode 2 7:45-8:05.

⁶¹⁷ Xi Jinping, *China Vitae*, https://www.chinavitae.com/biography/Xi_Jinping/career

⁶¹⁸ Hu Jintao, *China Vitae*, https://www.chinavitae.com/biography/hu_jintao/full

as Party secretary of Shanghai. Finally, Xi was elevated to the PBSC where he was tapped as Hu's heir and served as a vice-chairman of the CMC beginning in 2007.

Importantly for Xi, he became chairman of the CMC immediately after assuming leadership of the Party, unlike Hu, who waited for two years. Xi quickly established authority over the military. One way he has done that is through the CMC chairman responsibility system, as mentioned previously in chapter one. Another way is serving as the chair of important military organs, such as the CMC Military Civil Fusion Development Commission, 995 Project Leading Group,⁶¹⁹ and Leading Group for Deepening National Defense and Military Reform. Also, Chinese scholars routinely praise Xi for his military acumen. A group from China's AMS, NDU, and Air Force Command College described Xi as having "a strong military sentiment and rich military experience" while also being deeply acquainted with military construction and national defense.⁶²⁰ The following section discusses literature on the main features of army building in the Xi era.

7.1 Army Building

Analysis of Chinese literature on army building in the Xi era reveals several key themes: reform, military-civilian integration, the four modernizations, innovation, Party authority, and continuing problems of army building efforts. Reforms will first be addressed before moving on to the other issues. The introduction briefly discussed that in 2015-2016 China launched the most extensive military reforms since 1949, the founding year of the PRC. Here, I broadly examine how Chinese scholars and the *PLA Daily* have talked about these reforms. The importance of military reform in the Xi era was reflected in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central

⁶¹⁹ Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate*, *ibid*, 164.

⁶²⁰ Tiejun, Xiaofeng, and Runqi, *ibid*, 3.

Committee, which incorporated military reform into the overall planning and layout of national reform for the first time.⁶²¹ Efforts to formulate the reforms were pushed by Xi. The CMC then organized more than 800 workshops involving nearly 3,000 government officials and high-ranking officers to share ideas and give suggestions. After 150 revisions, the reform plans were approved in July 2015 by top military and Party authorities.⁶²²

7.1.1 Reform

Military reforms were divided into three levels. Starting at the top, “above the neck” reforms produced the management/leadership system of the CMC-service-force, and combat command system of the CMC-theater-force. They have also been referred to as CMC-military-army and CMC-theater-army.⁶²³ Secondly, “below the neck” reforms cut 300,000 personnel, dramatically restructuring non-combat groups and personnel of the Army, and altering the long-term deployment of land defense. Last, were reforms to the military policy system described as reforming the policy system in the four major areas of power utilization, military management and power construction, party building, and enhancing the “military policy system of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”⁶²⁴

The three categories of reform defined as above the neck, below the neck, and military policy system were explained as three major campaigns—some also described them as three

⁶²¹ 高喜平,丁俊萍 (Gao Xiping and Ding Junping) 习近平强军思想的内在结构、主要特点和重大意义 (The internal structure, main characteristics and significance of Xi Jinping's thought on strengthening the army) *学习与实践* (Study and Practice) no.1, (2018), 19.

⁶²² Zhao Lei, “Xi's thought guides reform of armed forces” *China Daily*, September 21, 2022, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202209/21/WS632a4ab9a310fd2b29e78c6d.html>

⁶²³ 欧灿, 刘建伟, 费士廷, 钱宗阳 (Ou Can, Liu Jianwei, Fei Shiting, and Qian Zongyang) 中国特色强军之路越走越宽广 (The road to a strong army with Chinese characteristics is getting wider and wider) *PLA Daily*, March 13, 2023, The road to a strong army with Chinese characteristics is getting wider and wider

⁶²⁴ 何毅亭 (He Yiting) 新时代建设强大人民军队的科学指南 (A Scientific Guide to Building a Strong People's Army in the New Era) *PLA Daily*, April 9, 2021.

major battles.⁶²⁵ By 2018, above the neck reforms were basically achieved and had resolved the problems of the command structure at the top while below the neck reforms and efforts to improve systems and policies were being strongly promoted.⁶²⁶ Shortly before China's annual Two Meetings (两会) in March 2023, commentary simply noted the three major campaigns of military reform since the 18th Party Congress "have been well established" with further instructions asserting:

this round of national defense and military reform tasks has been basically completed. It is necessary to consolidate and expand reform achievements, promote the implementation of established reform tasks, do a good job in follow-up reform planning and demonstration, improve the structure of military forces, optimize the military policy system, and strive to create a new situation of reform and strengthening the military.⁶²⁷

Although reforms are explained as basically achieved, there are still directions urging to build on accomplishments made by the reforms, enhance the structure, expand on reform planning, and improve the military policy system. If the reforms were basically realized, then why are there still calls to improve the structure and elevate the military policy system? The answer lies in the idea that reform is now a continuous process that does not end. Scholars from the Academy of Military Political Work Research Institute note that despite the current round of

⁶²⁵ 赵周贤 (Zhao Zhouxian) 全面推进新时代强军事业的科学指南——深入持久学习贯彻习近平强军思想 (A scientific guide for comprehensively advancing the cause of strengthening the military in the new era - in-depth and lasting study and implementation of Xi Jinping's thought on strengthening the military) 党的文献 (Party Literature) no.2 (2022), 11-12; 周月星 (Zhou Yuexing) 打好军队建设“三大攻坚战”——由全面建成小康社会引发的思考 (Fighting the "Three Tough Battles" for the Construction of the Army: Reflections on Building a Well-off Society in an All-round Way) 国防 (National Defense) no.2 (2018), 35-37.

⁶²⁶ Yuexing, *ibid*, 35.

⁶²⁷ 钧政 (Jun Zheng) 在习近平强军思想引领下胜利前进 (Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's thought of strengthening the army, we will advance victoriously) *PLA Daily*, March 2, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/02/content_334758.htm

reforms being complete, “the need for motivation for reform and innovation is more urgent” because “There is no end to reform, and a strong army will never stop.”⁶²⁸

China scholars point out the main characteristic of military reforms before and during the 1980s pertained to cutting down the scale and size of the forces. Reforms between the 1990s to the start of the 21st century revolved around emphasizing reform of equipment construction and development, and small alterations of structural adjustment which included cutting more personnel. The main feature of Xi era military reforms and national defense is explained as a new shaping of the whole national defense and military system. Additionally, aiming to complete optimization of the structure around the demands of realizing the goal of building a strong military and supporting the Chinese dream.⁶²⁹

One description argues Xi launched the reforms because of long-standing institutional barriers, policy problems, structural contradictions, improving combat effectiveness and elevating the vitality of the military.⁶³⁰ This is likely because the overall command system of the PLA was originally established during the Revolutionary War—after WWII—and altered slightly in the years after. With changes in warfare and expansion of missions, the system could not keep pace with the requirements of winning in the information age for three main reasons. First, the overall planning ability was too feeble. The different military regions, headquarters, and services had numerous different functions within one body and could not focus on grasping the overall situation at their own level.

⁶²⁸ 张明仓, 程达王 (Zhang Mingcang and Cheng Dawang) 凝心聚力实施改革强军战略 (Concentrate on implementing the strategy of reforming and strengthening the military) *PLA Daily*, March 27, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/27/content_336388.htm

⁶²⁹ Xiping and Junping 习近平强军思想的内在结构、主要特点和重大意义 *ibid*, 20.

⁶³⁰ 决定军队未来的关键一招 (A key move to determine the future of the military) *PLA Daily*, September 28, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/28/content_324986.htm

Second, the combat command system was not efficient or prominent. Specifically, the joint operations command system was not sound. Finally, there were too many levels of command and leadership. This led to overlapping functions between departments and leading organs were overstaffed. Basically, the leading innovation of the Xi era reforms were described as the correct division of labor among the operational command system from the construction management system. Critically, the joint operation command chain and management and leadership chain now operate in cooperation with each other.⁶³¹

Two scholars from NDU also argued that aside from realizing the Chinese Dream, and the outdated command system, implementing extensive military reforms were based on realities abroad and at home along with the demands of handling complex challenges. The difficult international and domestic environments were viewed as interwoven, producing urgency to accelerate military reform. Among these external challenges, the U.S. rebalancing strategy to the Asia-Pacific and increasingly dangerous disputes near the Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea posed unparalleled challenges for China's army building.⁶³² This is a more concrete example of how views of the external environment can influence strategy.

7.1.2 Civilian-Military Integration

The importance of civilian-military integration (CMI) for strengthening the army consistently appears in articles by China's PLA scholars, the Chinese media, and Party and government meetings. CMI has a long history in the PRC, going back to the early 1980s at least,

⁶³¹ 任天佑 (Ren Tianyou) 深化国防和军队改革若干机理探析 (Analysis on Several Mechanisms of Deepening National Defense and Military Reform) 中国军事科学 (China Military Science) no. 3, (2016), 38-39.

⁶³² 金桥,王博医 (Jin Qiao and Wang Boyi) 统筹推进国防和军队改革的思考——深入学习贯彻习近平同志国防和军队建设重要论述 (Thoughts on the overall promotion of national defense and military reforms: In-depth study and implementation of Comrade Xi Jinping's important expositions on national defense and military construction) 理论建设 (Theoretical Construction) no.5, (2017), 6-10.

and recent efforts under Xi continue previous attempts to promote greater collaboration between the military and civilian sectors.⁶³³ Xi has often mentioned military-civilian fusion (军民融合)—rather than civilian-military integration (军民一体化). Most western scholars refer to it as MCI.⁶³⁴ I will still call it CMI for two simple reasons. First, CMI and MCI are essentially the same thing, it's just that Xi began to use the term MCI more often around 2017. Second, because China's MCI started receiving an extraordinary amount of attention in the U.S.—mostly negative—Xi and the CCP largely stopped using the term over the past two years.⁶³⁵ It did not even appear in the 2021 14th Five Year Plan, or Xi's 20th Party work report in 2022. Finally, although Xi started to use MCI more often as his second term began, it appears that he still used it interchangeably with CMI at times.⁶³⁶ Overall, the two terms can be used interchangeably.

Bolstering integration not only strengthens the army but is also explained as an act of rejuvenating the country.⁶³⁷ Directions to raise the level and expand the scope of military-civilian integration have consistently emphasized. Changes to integration needed to include the drawing of reasonable boundaries, some type of clear divisions among different roles to be played. Scholars from NDU and AMS argued that when considering division principles “we should adhere to the military priority, give consideration to the economy, focus on national security considerations, and focus on the integration of services for the preparation of military

⁶³³ Richard Bitzinger, “China's Shift from Civil-Military Integration to Military-Civil Fusion” *Asia Policy* 28, no. 1 (2021), 13.

⁶³⁴ Lorand Laskai, “Civil-Military Fusion: The Missing Link Between China's Technological and Military Rise” *Council on Foreign Relations*, January 29, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/civil-military-fusion-missing-link-between-chinas-technological-and-military-rise>

⁶³⁵ Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate*, *ibid*, 138-140.

⁶³⁶ 陈军辉, 陶帅 (Chen Junhui and Tao Shuai) 加速构建军民一体化科技创新体系 (Accelerate the construction of military-civilian integration technology and innovation system) *PLA Daily*, August 10, 2018, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2018-08/10/content_213090.htm?ivk_sa=1024320u

⁶³⁷ Zhouxian, *ibid*, 12.

struggle.”⁶³⁸ For CMI in the Xi era, it appears the military is considered a priority over the economy. Which is a major shift from the Jiang-Hu era’s where it was repeatedly emphasized the military must serve the economy.

A key reason for strengthening CMI is the focus on innovation and elevating science and technology. Technology is seen as central to combat power. It is critical that those who work in science and technology “must keep in mind the mission and responsibility of serving the army, promote the precise connection between the supply side of science and technology and the demand side of war, and accelerate the improvement of the contribution rate of scientific and technological services to combat power.”⁶³⁹ Through CMI strengthening, the PLA can better advance its technological capabilities and enhance its core combat powers. The drive and determination to achieve this is so great that scholars from AMS writing in the top military journal, *China Military Science* (中国军事科学), called for the abolishment of laws implemented in 1998 under Jiang prohibiting private enterprises from the production and operation in military industries.⁶⁴⁰

Many western military scholars would likely argue America has a weak CMI system because there are strong divisions between the civilian and military worlds. But from China’s perspective, the U.S. is a role model. According to the PLA, the reason America has a military that is at the forefront of high technology and innovation is largely through integration with the civilian sector—particularly universities—which helped create DARPA (Defense Advanced

⁶³⁸ 公方彬, 侯昂好 (Gong Fangbin and Hou Angyu) 习近平强军思想论析 (An Analysis of Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Army) 前线 (Frontline) no.8 (2018), 7.

⁶³⁹ 邹菲 (Zhou Fei) 抢占制高点 实现新跨越 (Seize the commanding heights to achieve a new leap forward) *PLA Daily*, March 10, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/10/content_335185.htm

⁶⁴⁰ 姜铁军, 车兴飞 (Jiang Tiejun and Jun Xingfei) 坚定不移走中国特色改革强军之路——深入学习贯彻习近平深化国防和军队改革思想 (Unswervingly follow the road of reforming and strengthening the military with Chinese characteristics - in-depth study and implementation of Xi Jinping's thoughts on deepening national defense and military reform) *中国军事科学* (China Military Science) no 1., (2016), 14.

Research Projects Agency) in 1958. And over time through DARPA, the U.S. has launched innovative breakthroughs like the global positioning system (GPS), the internet, hypersonic weapons, stealth fighters, and laser networks, all of which helped transform the U.S. military and make it the leading military power it is today.⁶⁴¹ These major innovative, technological developments through organizations like DARPA is something China would like to replicate. To strengthen the development of weapons and defense technology through integration, the CCP created the Central Military and Civil Integration Development Committee in 2017. The goal is to elevate the development of weapons and equipment and thus shorten the gap between the PLA and the world's major military powers through the help of civilian sectors.⁶⁴²

More recently, steps to further help solidify integration include the revision of regulations on civilian personnel. The revisions emphasized that civilian personnel are a critical part of military personnel and need to actively participate in combat readiness and military training.⁶⁴³ The role of provincial military regions for coordination of CMI was identified by some as a key area, helping to expand and identify national defense needs, emergency response coordination, and strengthening reserve force construction.⁶⁴⁴ Fan Chengcai, former commander of the Central Theater asserted that the provincial military region system was obligated and tasked with organizing greater integration.⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴¹ Tianyou, "Analysis on Several Mechanisms of Deepening National Defense and Military Reform" *ibid*, 43-44.

⁶⁴² Xiping and Junping, *ibid*, 19-20.

⁶⁴³ 汪学潮 (Wang Xuechao) 不断提升文职人员综合素质 (Continuously improve the overall quality of civilian staff) *PLA Daily*, March 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/09/content_335164.htm

⁶⁴⁴ 张庆伟 (Zhang Qingwei) 深入贯彻落实习近平强军思想 奋力开创国防动员事业新局面 (Thoroughly Implement Xi Jinping's Thought of Strengthening the Army, Strive to Create a New Situation for National Defense Mobilization) *国防 (National Defense)* 408 no.8, (2019), 6.

⁶⁴⁵ 范承才 (Fan Chengcai) 深入学习贯彻习近平强军思想 大力推进谋战思训在部队常态落实 (In-depth study and implementation of Xi Jinping's thought of strengthening the army) *国防 (National Defense)* 381, no.11 (2017), 7-8.

One problem shortly after the reforms, however, was the development of CMI at different levels did not have a clear understanding of how to integrate more deeply. Moreover, some regions and units were unwilling to improve integration. To address some of these issues, the provincial military regional system was instructed to be more active in organizing garrison force symposiums, meetings on national defense needs, focus on elevating the ability to carry out tasks and improve military construction, enthusiastically grasp the new demands of various departments and groups within the authority for military-civilian integration, and overall provide stronger forces of military-civilian integration. Much emphasis was placed on the provincial military regional system because it was described as possessing a unique advantage for securing unity in military-civilian integration.⁶⁴⁶ Yang Chao, from the Political Work Bureau of the National Defense Mobilization Department in the CMC notes the military provinces are “the leader of the integration of the military.”⁶⁴⁷

Importantly, a new military civilian personnel system in 2023 was established. This new system promulgated a three-level military-local joint conference system with the three levels being the CMC, the provincial military regional system, and the military sub-region.⁶⁴⁸ Compared to the previous provincial military regional system which independently sought out, hired, and trained civilians, the new civilian personnel system has clarified the requirements for the military and local joint coordination to do a better job in attracting and hiring civilian personnel. New regulations emphasized the military can use national resources to train civilian personnel, and that appropriate state agencies, central government, and local authorities ought to

⁶⁴⁶ Chengcai, *ibid*, 9.

⁶⁴⁷ 杨超 (Yang Chao) 打通政策落地 “最后一公里” (Get through the policy and implement the "last mile") *PLA Daily*, March 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/15/content_335506.htm

⁶⁴⁸ Chao, *ibid*.

actively support the military in training civilian personnel.⁶⁴⁹ This development is important because military units can now spend more time on preparing for war.⁶⁵⁰

One important factor for this development is so-called military standing committee members (武常委) at city and county levels—considered the military sub-region—who play a central role in influencing the instructions and guidance issued by the provincial military command. They also play an essential role in coordinating national defense and economic construction.⁶⁵¹ Basically, warrior standing committee members connect the local government with the military.⁶⁵² Usually, they are chief officers of a military agency while also serving as a standing committee member of a local Party committee.⁶⁵³ The term 武常委 seems to have appeared sporadically in the Hu era. But over the past several years, 武常委, or military standing committee members, has increased in importance with the term appearing more frequently and their role in army building growing.

Despite emphasis on expanding CMI, some urged there are problems with the concept, mostly in improving and implementing it. Local Party governments and committees are instructed to do a better job of making it a priority and putting it into practice. Also vital for strengthening CMI is the need to promote what is described as a society that vigorously supports the military. A sense of sacrifice is called for. Parents are encouraged to send their children into

⁶⁴⁹ 孙先振 (Sun Xianzhen) 军地协力助 “孔雀蓝” 高飞 (Military and local cooperation help "Peacock Blue" fly high) *PLA Daily*, March 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/15/content_335507.htm

⁶⁵⁰ Xianzhen, *ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ 王晓, 范奇飞, 鲍明建, 赵雷 (Wang Xiao, Fan Qifei, Bao Mingjian, and Zhao Lei) “武常委” 的舞台有多大 (How big is the stage of "Warrior Standing Committee Members") *PLA Daily*, March 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/15/content_335505.htm

⁶⁵² 牟鼎存 (Mou Dingcun) 凝聚军地合力抓好武装工作 (Consolidate Joint Army and Local Forces to Do a Good Job in Armed Work) *PLA Daily*, October 12, 2022, http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2022-10/12/content_325570.htm

⁶⁵³ 李光辉 (Li Guanghui) 立起 “武常委” 的好样子 (Establishing "Military Standing Committee Member" looks good) *PLA Daily*, January 15, 2021, http://www.81.cn/gfbmap/content/2021-01/15/content_280546.htm

the military—with military cadres called on to serve as an example by urging their own children to join. The bottleneck of talents problem that confronts the military is explained as a responsibility of ordinary people and not just military and government leaders.⁶⁵⁴ Recent articles from the *PLA Daily* has expressed intense language about the relationship between civilians and their role in national defense affairs. Zhan Zhengwen (占正文) from the political department of the Strategic Support Force declared “civilians are born for war” and that they need to destroy misconceptions that they do not go to the battlefield or do not need to fight.⁶⁵⁵

Essentially, there is a vigorous push to instill in people a “patriotic awareness of supporting the army.”⁶⁵⁶ In one sense, this reflects the phenomenon of what some describe as China’s whole-of-society approach to issues.⁶⁵⁷ At the 20th Party Congress in 2022, Xi noted that public awareness about the importance of national defense will be elevated.⁶⁵⁸ And a push for greater awareness of national defense was reflected at the recent 14th National People’s Congress (NPC) in March 2023 where Xi asserted “it is necessary to create a strong atmosphere in the whole society that cares about national defense, loves national defense, builds national defense, and defends national defense.”⁶⁵⁹ However, indications suggest some Chinese people—especially young people—are not too enthusiastic about national defense education or giving it greater attention. A school in northern China during September 2022, tried carrying out its

⁶⁵⁴ 高建 (Gao Jian) 自觉强化 “四种意识” 给力国防与军队建设 (“Consciously strengthen the ‘four kinds of consciousness’ to strengthen national defense and military construction”) *Xinhua*, February 25, 2021,

⁶⁵⁵ 占正文 (Zhan Zhengwen) 姓军为战, 一个不用讲的道理 (The surname army is for war, the reason does not need to be said) *PLA Daily* March 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/22/content_336042.htm

⁶⁵⁶ Qingwei, *ibid*, 6.

⁶⁵⁷ Ely Ratner et al, “Rising to the China Challenge: Renewing American Competitiveness in the Indo-Pacific” *Center for a New American Security*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/rising-to-the-china-challenge>

⁶⁵⁸ Xi Jinping, “Full text of the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China” October 25, 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202210/t20221025_10791908.html

⁶⁵⁹ 邹国贤 (Zou Guoxian) 创新推动新时代全民国防教育 (Blaze new trails in promoting national defense education in the new era) *PLA Daily*, March 28, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/28/content_336472.htm

annual two-week military boot camp online because Covid prevented meeting in-person. Students were instructed to report their military régime at home. However, the program was quickly canceled after receiving intense criticism.⁶⁶⁰

Some China scholars noted military-civilian links were simply not strong enough. Worse, a common problem with CMI is that the intersection of the military and civilian arena's "can easily become a weak link in supervision and a blind spot for upright conduct and discipline"⁶⁶¹ mainly referring to corruption. Another issue with deepening CMI in the past was due to things like job-transfer placement, national defense mobilization, social security and other policies were not sound enough. This effects soldiers negatively and is a drag on the enthusiasm of youth to join the military or work as a civilian.⁶⁶² Like many other areas of military change in the Xi era, military-civilian integration has made notable progress on some fronts, while also still grappling with issues in prodding greater integration. It's clear that CMI is important for Xi and has been elevated in the past ten years, with Xi emphasizing that "the promotion of civil-military integration into a national strategy is a major achievement."⁶⁶³ This is illustrated in the following section on four modernizations where elevating each modernization is linked with strengthening CMI.

⁶⁶⁰ Mandy Zuo, "'It's a joke': Chinese vocational school cancels attempt to bring traditional annual 'military training' online after public ridicule" *South China Morning Post*, September 22, 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/people-culture/trending-china/article/3193389/its-joke-chinese-vocational-school-cancels>

⁶⁶¹ 曹俊峰 (Cao Junfeng) 军地交叉地带谨防监管盲区 (Beware of regulatory blind spots in military-civilian intersections) *PLA Daily*, May 9, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-05/09/content_315157.htm

⁶⁶² 刘军 (Liu Jun) 学习贯彻习主席强军思想 努力推进依法治军从严治军深化落实 (Studying and Implementing President Xi's Thought of Strengthening the Army) *国防 (National Defense)* 387, no.5 (2018), 10.

⁶⁶³ Fangbin and Angyu, *ibid*, 7.

7.1.3 *The Four Modernizations*

Xi first outlined the four modernizations in 2017 at the 19th Party Congress. The purpose was for giving new military and national defense implications. These four categories were briefly mentioned in chapter four's section on the PLA's goals, representing what the realization of military modernization by 2035 strives to achieve. At the 20th Party Congress, Xi called for an acceleration of work to achieve the four modernizations.⁶⁶⁴ As a reminder, the four modernizations include military theory, organization, personnel, and weapons and equipment. These areas “clearly define the main signs and realization path of the modernization of national defense and the military, indicate that the Party's understanding of the law of military force construction has reached a new height, and reflect the strategic requirements for a strong military in the new era of the rejuvenation of powerful countries.”⁶⁶⁵ Clearly the four modernizations represent critical goals the PLA is pursuing from now until 2035. Below a little more detail on each modernization is provided.

Modernization of military theory has often developed in tandem with changes to military innovation, the strategic environment, and warfare. It has been defined as using “the outstanding achievements in politics, military affairs, science and technology, education, management and culture created by the contemporary world to improve the country's understanding and knowledge system of national defense and army building through innovation.”⁶⁶⁶ Military theory research is urged to integrate deeply with military science and technology research, combining traditional qualitative methods of research on military theory with modern quantitative methods

⁶⁶⁴ Xi Jinping, “Full text of the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China” *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁵ Tiejun, Xiaofeng, and Runqi, *ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁶⁶ 彭廷华 (Peng Tinghua) 把握军事理论现代化时代内涵 (Grasp the content of the modernization era of military theory) *PLA Daily*, December 5, 2019, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2019-12/05/content_249196.htm

on military science and technology. Chen Dongheng (陈东恒) from AMS notes it should manage:

the relationship between learning and self-reliance, scientifically study and judge the basic trend of the international strategic pattern, accurately grasp the pulse of the world's military development era, learn from the beneficial practices of the world's military powers, and use military theory innovation to lead military practice... Properly handle the relationship between the present and the long-term, closely combine the world's military development and the practice of our military construction, explore and predict the laws of future.⁶⁶⁷

Part of learning from the practices of foreign military powers includes international military exercises, joint peacekeeping operations, international military academic conferences, noting the direction of foreign military theory, and military visits. Also, with most areas of the military in the Xi era, development of military theory requires greater civilian-military exchange and opening to society.⁶⁶⁸

Arguably the most important of the four modernizations is that of organization. One *PLA Daily* article argues “Without the modernization of military organization, there will be no modernization of national defense and military.”⁶⁶⁹ Organizational modernization is the focus of deepening military reforms, and is a systematic, highly complex project. The tasks of modernizing military organization contain a multitude of things, including:

- Building a reasonable, scientific, flat network organizational structure.
- Continuous reform of the military leadership management system and combat command system.
- Create a flat networked command system, and a scientific and rational leadership management system.
- Optimize the proportion of services and arms and reduce the number of non-combatants.

⁶⁶⁷ 陈东恒 (Chen Dongheng) 坚持走具有我军特色的军事理论现代化道路 (Adhere to the Modernization Road of Military Theory with Our Army's Characteristics) 求是 (Seeking Truth) March 31, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-03/31/c_1122594908.htm

⁶⁶⁸ Tinghua, *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁹ 傅宝胜 (Fu Baosheng) 什么是军队组织形态现代化 (What is the modernization of military organization) *PLA Daily*, June 30, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jpdbfy2019/ywyl_206455/9843257.html

- Develop new types of combat forces.
- Cultivate and discover new combat capabilities.
- Focus on information-led and system integration.
- Accelerate standardization construction.
- Realize interconnection among various services and arms.
- Ensure smooth flow of information among various military organizations and elements.
- Issue relevant policies and regulations.
- Refine the list of responsibilities at each level.
- Clarify the operation process of each work.
- Form an organizational function that is flexible, precise, and quick to respond.⁶⁷⁰

Overall, there are six key components that form military organization: the scale, structure, establishment, system, operating mechanism and policy system. But the core of advancing modernization of the organization is realizing efficient command, leadership control, and construction and management benefits from the system. It is leadership—specifically at the top—that matters most and needs to master the situation.⁶⁷¹ Directions last year to speed up organizational modernization included deepening reforms, accelerating the renovation and construction of the armed forces, strengthen combat and strategic forces in new fields and new qualities, establish high-level strategic deterrence and joint combat system, and strengthen joint training of military forces and joint use.⁶⁷²

The shortage of talented officers and troops has been emphasized previously, both in the Jiang and Hu chapters. Here, modernization of personnel is largely echoing similar sentiments. And, like organizational modernization, it is described as critical if the PLA is to become a

⁶⁷⁰ 申红心 (Shen Hongxin) 把握军队组织形态现代化的内涵要义 (Grasping the Connotation and Essentials of Military Organization Modernization) 光明日报 (Guangming Daily) August 4, 2018, <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0804/c1117092-30208720.html>

⁶⁷¹ Baosheng, *ibid.*

⁶⁷² 钧政 (Jun Zheng) 加快国防和军队现代化的全面擘画 (A comprehensive plan to speed up the modernization of national defense and the army) *PLA Daily*, August 29, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-08/29/content_322947.htm

modernized force and achieve the goal of becoming a world-class military by the middle of the century. The key to advancing modernization of personnel lies in education and what the PLA sometimes refer to as the trinity training mode, comprising military professional education, army training practice, and military academy education.⁶⁷³ However, CMI and integration of local and military talents is now also instrumental. There is emphasis on high-end talents in urgent, important fields. One method of accelerating modernization of personnel is calls to integrate national defense into the social and economic development system, further drawing on talents at the local level.⁶⁷⁴ However, the extent of how successful this drawing of talent on the whole country is unclear. The PLA and civilian sectors are instructed to work more closely together, a way for the whole country to serve the army.

Finally, modernization of weapons and equipment are an important symbol of military modernization, and how advanced the military is.⁶⁷⁵ Actual combat requirements should guide the direction of producing weapons and equipment.⁶⁷⁶ Military technology is critical for modernization of weapons and equipment. To realize greater advancements in weaponry, the PLA has to rely on independent innovation. In particular, it should focus on technological breakthroughs in areas such as AI, big data, micro-nano materials, and strengthening source reserves. To achieve modernization of weapons, greater civilian-military collaboration is required.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷³ 徐远兴 (Xu Yuanxing) 全面推进军事人员现代化 (Comprehensively promote the modernization of military personnel) *PLA Daily*, July 10, 2018, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2018-07/10/content_210598.htm

⁶⁷⁴ Yuanxing, *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ 曾华锋 Zeng Huafeng, 夯实武器装备现代化这一重要基础 (Lay a solid foundation for the modernization of weapons and equipment) 求是 (Seeking Truth) March 31, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-03/31/c_1122594908.htm

⁶⁷⁶ 陈东恒 (Chen Dongheng) 把握“四个坚持” 大力推进武器装备现代化 (Grasp the "four persistences" and vigorously promote the modernization of weapons and equipment) 学习时报 (Study Times) April 4, 2018, <http://www.81.cn/jpdbf/jwgzR/jwgz/7993980.html>

⁶⁷⁷ Huafeng, *ibid.*

7.1.4 *Achievements and Continuing Problems*

Giving attention to Chinese sources noting achievements and problems is one of the few means available to try and discern progress made in army building—particularly in the Xi era amidst the vast number of changes and reforms. Chinese scholars and media often mention either achievements and progress, or continuing problems that hinder army building. This section begins by examining depictions of achievements made and follows with new and lingering problems. Major progress lauded under Xi revolved mostly around reforms. One scholar asserts that achievements since the 18th Party Congress in 2012 “has solved some problems that we have been trying to solve for many years but have not been well solved, solved many problems that we thought could not be solved in the past, and achieved a revolutionary reshaping of the whole.”⁶⁷⁸ Some commentary in the Xi era proudly proclaims that the PLA—through reforms—has been “reborn from ashes”⁶⁷⁹ or also described as a rebirth through fire.⁶⁸⁰

In particular, the reforms have “achieved the reconstruction of its political ecology, organizational form, strength system, style and image.”⁶⁸¹ Political ecology mainly refers to political education and governing of the military. In most countries the military is devoid of political speech, but China considers political army building, and political life of the Army as critically important. Stressing political life in the PLA could, once again, be influenced by lessons learned from the Soviet Union to a large degree. The Soviet military’s role in the collapse of the Soviet Union is significant according to China scholars. Gorbachev’s military

⁶⁷⁸ Zhouxian, *ibid*, 11.

⁶⁷⁹ 钱晓虎, 韩成 (Chen Xiaohu and Han Cheng) 书写改革强军的时代答卷 (Write the answer sheet of the era of reforming and strengthening the army) *PLA Daily*, July 26, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/26/content_320648.htm;

⁶⁸⁰ Tiejun, Xiaofeng and Runqi, *ibid*, 10.

⁶⁸¹ 陈红旗 (Chen Hongqi) 必须加快国防和军队现代化 (The modernization of national defense and army must be accelerated) *新湘评* (New Hunan Review) no.15 (2021), 27.

reform efforts produced a nationalization of the military. Eventually, nationalization and further political reforms led to a situation where the Soviet military's ideals and beliefs were shaken, morale and discipline slacked, and factions formed. When the Communist Party called on the military to enforce a state of emergency, the military lacked unified command and loyalty, with soldiers wandering around the city.⁶⁸² This is a situation the CCP desperately seeks to avoid.

Improving the political ecology of the military also refers to a lack of law and discipline before Xi took over. Since then, the PLA has removed the “poisonous influence” of Guo Boxiong, Xu Caihou, Wei Fenghe, and Zhang Yang while “focusing on rectifying thinking, rectifying employment, rectifying organization, and rectifying discipline.”⁶⁸³ Guo and Xu, mentioned in the introduction, and Wei and Zhang were all powerful military officers purged for wrongdoing. Cleaning up the PLA from deteriorating discipline was explained as a significant achievement. Overall, the army's party conduct and clean government construction, along with battling corruption has achieved marked improvement.⁶⁸⁴

Additionally, the emphasis on CMI was explored in the previous section, but here it will be noted that its progress and achievements described by China scholars over the past ten years is also often highlighted.⁶⁸⁵ Simply implementing the promotion of deeper development of CMI was described as a historic achievement.⁶⁸⁶ Other areas of achievement and progress include the

⁶⁸² 卢继元 (Lu Jiyuan) 习近平强军新理念新思想新战略 (Xi Jinping's new ideas, new ideas and new strategies for strengthening the army) 唯实 (Realism) no.3 (2017), 22-23.

⁶⁸³ 龙心刚, 熊杏林, 张铮 (Long Xingang, Xiong Xinlin, and Zhang Zheng) 矢志强军向复兴 (Vow to strengthen the army to revival) *PLA Daily*, August 26, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-08/26/content_322798.htm

⁶⁸⁴ Tiejun, Xiaofeng and Runqi, *ibid*, 10.

⁶⁸⁵ Tianyou, *ibid*, 43-44.

⁶⁸⁶ Tiejun and Xingfei, *ibid*, 12-13.

preparation for war, rejuvenation through science and technology,⁶⁸⁷ and national defense mobilization.⁶⁸⁸

Finally, part of the progress for war preparation was entailed in above the neck reforms which improved the joint operational command organization of the CMC, instituted a joint operational command organization at the theater level, and established the CMC-theater-troop command system. Additionally, information and data that was previously difficult to transmit between different services and arms is now effectively shared. And military exercises like long-range strike, far seas defense, strategic early warning, and information support were successfully integrated into the joint combat system.⁶⁸⁹

The operational command and leadership management system, offensive and defensive capabilities, and global deterrence capabilities have all improved while the Navy has continued to change “from a coastal defensive type to a far-sea defensive type.”⁶⁹⁰ These changes and improvements are critical for elevating modern warfighting capabilities and were needed for a long time. But even with the achievements made to the command structure, sharing of information among the different services, and improvements in capabilities, how well the PLA would perform in a war is a mystery. Continuing problems are still frequently criticized and suggest the CCP is still not confident about the PLA’s ability to fight and win wars.

One of the areas consistently highlighted—and briefly covered in the previous chapter—is the talent level, or abilities of commanders and soldiers. It is a weakness continued from the

⁶⁸⁷ Tiejun, Xiaofeng, and Runqi, *ibid*, 3-4.

⁶⁸⁸ 中国特色现代国防动员体系日趋完善 (The modern national defense mobilization system with Chinese characteristics is improving day by day) *PLA Daily*, August 24, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-08/23/content_322521.htm

⁶⁸⁹ 李典胜 (Li Diansheng) 不改革是打不了仗、打不了胜仗的 (Without reform, we will not be able to fight or win battles) *PLA Daily*, July 11, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/11/content_319541.htm

⁶⁹⁰ Can, Jianwei, Shiting, and Zongyang, *ibid*.

Jiang and Hu eras. Whether commanders can be relied on was highlighted by Xi when he asked “What is the fighting spirit of commanders at all levels? A few comrades have not put their main minds on preparing for war. If these people lead and command the war, can they be trusted?”⁶⁹¹ The problem has only risen in importance because according to the PLA, there are now higher requirements put on the capabilities of commanders “with the profound changes in combat methods”.⁶⁹²

Infusing talent into the PLA is imperative for raising technology standards and capabilities, however there are still laments “that under the new situation, our military personnel work is facing a series of new contradictions and new challenges. The problems of a large talent gap in emerging fields and a shortage of top-notch innovative talents still exist to varying degrees.”⁶⁹³ Scholars complain there is a lack of high-level personnel in key positions, and a brain drain in the military⁶⁹⁴—even though the education level of the PLA has continually risen in the reform era. Although the majority of soldiers recruited into the military are college students, many are not retained after two years because they choose to leave. Most of these college students possess professional expertise but the issue of “not being able to use what is recruited” plagues the military.⁶⁹⁵ Moreover, Liu Guangming, a researcher at NDU bluntly writes that “There are relatively few talents who understand warfare and command, especially

⁶⁹¹ Xi Jinping quoted in Chengcai, “In-depth study and implementation of Xi Jinping's thought of strengthening the army” *ibid*, 5.

⁶⁹² 桂浔 (Gui Xun) 为指挥员 “画像” (“Portrait” of the commander) *PLA Daily*, March 16, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/16/content_335577.htm

⁶⁹³ 徐迪雄, 李钊 (Xu Dixiong and Li Zhao) 着力造就拔尖创新人才 (Efforts to cultivate top-notch innovative talents) *PLA Daily*, November 14, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/14/content_327765.htm

⁶⁹⁴ Tianyou, *ibid*, 46-47.

⁶⁹⁵ 朱永军, 施振, 张景伟, 周远 (Zhu Yongjun, Shi Zhen, Zhang Jingwei, and Zhou Yuan) 为战选才: 特长兵加速奔向战位 (Selecting talents for the battle: Special soldiers speed up to the battle position) *PLA Daily*, June 13, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/13/content_317609.htm

proficient in joint operations command.”⁶⁹⁶ One reason for this lack of adequate talent is because most officers and soldiers have no combat experience. However, there are additional reasons that are outlined.

Commanders do not possess adequate judgement and soldiers lack the ability to operate newer equipment. At the commander level, some officers lack tactical abilities. The reason is because in-depth study of tactical textbooks is done erroneously. Some do not pay enough attention to the study of tactical theory. Learning is disjointed, and comprehension is superficial due to insufficient attention to studying tactical theory, leading to problems when applying tactics in the field.⁶⁹⁷ Also, commanders are not vigilant enough in using data, leading to “sensory failure” on the battlefield, disregarding the perception and reconnaissance of the enemy's situation, and paying insufficient attention to all-inclusive, accurate and timely judgment and analysis of the enemy's situation. The issues are a result from the lack of initiative to utilize advanced equipment to acquire precise data and employ that data to plan operations.⁶⁹⁸

A critical problem is that some commanders are described as having poor judgement and analysis—often core of what is labelled as “five incapables” (五个不会).⁶⁹⁹ The five incapables, are unable to judge the situation, to understand the intention of superiors or higher authority, make operational decisions, deploy soldiers, and handle sudden emergencies.⁷⁰⁰ For these five incapacities, five points are provided offering instruction to help and try resolving the problem: (1)

⁶⁹⁶ 刘光明 (Liu Guangming) 让战争制胜决定因素搭上现代化的快车 (Let the determinants of winning a war take the express train of modernization) 求是 (Seeking Truth) March 31, 2018, http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-03/31/c_1122594908.htm

⁶⁹⁷ 陈双平 (Chen Shuangping) 重视通读战术教材 (Emphasis on reading through tactical textbooks) *PLA Daily*, February 21, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/21/content_334145.htm

⁶⁹⁸ 蒋彬垚, 华瑞, 高骏峰 (Jiang Binyao, Hua Rui, and Gao Junfeng) 时刻做到心中有“数” (Always have “numbers” in mind) *PLA Daily*, February 28, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/28/content_334605.htm

⁶⁹⁹ Zhu Tao, “Practicing command in the chain of command” *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁰ Guangming, *ibid.*

focus on global judgement and analysis, (2) understand the opponents judgement and analysis, (3) build your judgement and analysis on system analysis, (4) view micro-analysis and judgement and (5) utilize human-machine collaboration judgement and analysis.⁷⁰¹ Efforts to improve the capabilities of commanders in tactics and ability to make good analysis and judgement is still an ongoing process the PLA struggles with. Additionally, there are problems farther down the command structure, including at the platoon level. Although platoon leaders are described as possessing a high level of education, their work methods and handling of problems is lacking and needs improvement.⁷⁰²

From an overarching perspective, despite considerable improvement to the command and management structure, lingering problems remain, two of which are the combat system and support force system. The combat system has shortcomings from a lack of attention given to the network chain. Some command systems are not properly linked, and information platforms are not connected. Although sharing of data and information has been enhanced through reforms, data and support links in the combat system still have issues.⁷⁰³ Secondly, there are also problems of resource and information exchange within the support force system. Currently, “The comprehensive support efficiency cannot keep up with the needs of modern combat, which will affect the formation of combat effectiveness at the least and will delay the fighters or even lead

⁷⁰¹ 张翠, 鲁伟鑫 (Zhang Hui and Lu Weixin) 把握分析判断之要 (Grasp the essentials of analysis and judgment) *PLA Daily*, July 21, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-07/21/content_320293.htm

⁷⁰² 紧盯短板夯实根基 (Keep an eye on the shortcomings and lay a solid foundation) *PLA Daily*, December 20, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-12/20/content_330215.htm

⁷⁰³ 杨弘宇 (Yang Hongyu) 着力补齐作战体系短板弱项 (Efforts to make up for the shortcomings of the combat system) *PLA Daily*, February 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-02/22/content_334215.htm

to more serious consequences.”⁷⁰⁴ Problems with both commanders and command systems continue to plague the PLA.

7.1.5 *Five Excesses*

Emphasis on eradicating the five excesses, or five more, (五多) mainly relates to bureaucratic excess. Military units at the grassroots level are burdened with unnecessary rules, slowing the speed of improving training and army building. The five more consists of “too many documents, meetings, inspections, activities, and evaluations.”⁷⁰⁵ This excessive formalism represented what was described as the old system and way of doing things. Efforts to resolve the problem have made major progress. A report on two brigades found that officers were routinely working “false overtime” (伪加班) into the morning hours because of useless classes and inefficient means of completing their work throughout the day. Changes were made and overtime work was only justified during actual military training to prevent “do not fight fatigue” (不打疲劳战) and “useless classes” (不加无用班).⁷⁰⁶

However, there is still a long way to go and the issue of five more has not been effectively fixed. Despite military organs at all levels changing, the renovation of working methods has not kept up.⁷⁰⁷ Wang Zhibin (汪志斌), Army Political Commissar of the Western

⁷⁰⁴ 张建彤 (Zhang Jiantong) 加速综合集成 提升保障效能 (Accelerate comprehensive integration and improve guarantee efficiency) *PLA Daily*, December 20, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-12/20/content_330218.htm

⁷⁰⁵ 申卫红, 韩钟毅, 李建文 (Shen Weihong, Han Zhongyi and Li Jianwen) 减负, 我们可以做更多 (Less burden, we can do more) *PLA Daily*, November 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/25/content_328613.htm

⁷⁰⁶ 赖文湧, 廖晓彬, 牛伟萌 (Lai Wenyong, Liao Xiaobin, and Niu Weiming) 加夜班的同志为啥这么多 (Why are there so many comrades who work night shifts?) *PLA Daily*, May 24, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-05/24/content_316233.htm

⁷⁰⁷ 姜子健 (Jiang Zijian) 坚持推进治军方式实现根本性转变 (Adhere to Advancing the Way of Governing the Army to Achieve a Fundamental Change) *PLA Daily*, October 7, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-10/07/content_325262.htm

Theater Command argued if the five more is not thoroughly eliminated, the consequences would be disastrous if China were to go to war.⁷⁰⁸ One regiment in the Xinjiang Military Region has tried using a mechanism utilizing questionnaires and forums to try and eliminate the five more problems.⁷⁰⁹ The problem of too much bureaucracy—or formalism—while getting cut down recently, is a complicated issue that is not easily removed and continues to linger.

7.1.6 *Peace Disease*

There is still constant emphasis that the peace disease—an issue the PLA has grappled with for a long time—has still not been eradicated from soldiers.⁷¹⁰ The peace disease refers to the problem that because the PLA has been in a peaceful period for a long time, officers and soldiers lose a sense of crisis and are accustomed to the idea of being peace soldiers.⁷¹¹ No war experience means they are not hardened by conflict and become relaxed. As Qian Youwu (钱有武) from AMS has warned, “The enemy is not scary, what is scary is that we have forgotten our mission to fight and win wars.”⁷¹² Xi’s constant demands that the PLA be ready to fight and win wars is one way to try and remedy the peace disease.

⁷⁰⁸ 汪志斌 (Wang Zhibin) 下决心对“五多”挖根除弊 (Determined to root out the “five excesses”) *PLA Daily*, July 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/25/content_320558.htm

⁷⁰⁹ 杨文献, 李佳鹏 (Yang Wenxian and Li Jiapeng) 纠治“五多”助力基层减负 (Correcting the “five excesses” to help reduce the burden on the grassroots) *PLA Daily*, November 22, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/22/content_328339.htm

⁷¹⁰ For just two examples see 丁来富 (Ding Laifu) 全面提高新时代备战打仗能力 (Comprehensively improve the ability to prepare for war in the new era) *PLA Daily*, July 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/25/content_320559.htm; 魏上海 (Wei Shanghai) 坚持全面提高军事训练实战化水平 (Adhere to the comprehensive improvement of the actual combat level of military training) *PLA Daily*, September 14, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/14/content_324056.htm

⁷¹¹ Jiyuan “Xi Jinping's new ideas, new ideas and new strategies for strengthening the army” *ibid*, 22-23.

⁷¹² 钱有武 (Qian Youwu) 军队各项建设都要落实到提高战斗力上 (All aspects of military construction should be implemented to improve combat effectiveness) *PLA Daily*, June 20, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/20/content_318105.htm

7.1.7 *Party Leadership and Party Building*

Perhaps most surprising—in the wake of reforms and the anti-corruption campaign—is reported problems of CCP leadership or authority over the PLA. There are still weaknesses and contradictions in Party building and leadership of the military. Cadres within Party organizations are instructed that to help resolve the problem, political discipline must be deepened, and people should be punished for talking about things that do not include politics.⁷¹³ The Party committees at all levels is described as determining if the goal of strengthening the military can be successfully applied in military building and national defense.⁷¹⁴

7.1.8 *Military Culture – Soldier Quality*

An important concern of the PLA is military culture, and the type of soldier in the force. There are numerous problems described with current soldiers. While a lack of talent has caused troops to lose leadership positions, on the other hand there are some who are talented and eager to learn but do not take rules or discipline seriously enough and do not do their duty. The problem is not that they are not ambitious, but they believe their ability can make them immune to trouble or not need worry about discipline.⁷¹⁵ Another problem is soldiers who are afraid of hardship and avoid it, they have an insufficient mind-set that leads them to avoid conflict.⁷¹⁶ They are not ambitious and do not aspire to make great achievements or pursue a successful

⁷¹³ 永远不变的军魂 (Eternal military soul) *PLA Daily*, September 19, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/19/content_324313.htm

⁷¹⁴ 孔令军 (Kong Lingjun) 坚定强军信念 强化工作统领 (Strengthen the Faith in a Strong Army and Strengthen Work Leadership) *PLA Daily*, March 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/15/content_335485.htm

⁷¹⁵ 于波盛 (Yu Bosheng) 有本事更要守本分 (If you have the ability, you should do your duty even more) *PLA Daily*, June 24, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/24/content_318412.htm

⁷¹⁶ 陈光 李松 (Chen Huang and Li Song) 学学毛竹的“厚积薄发 (Learn the "accumulation of knowledge of bamboo") *PLA Daily* July 25, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/25/content_320569.htm

career.⁷¹⁷ Young soldiers and officers are described as being part of the “net generation” or “net-born generation.” Most are full of energy and vigor but are influenced by diverse cultures and ideas. They go with the flow, can be lazy, and are addicted to entertainment.⁷¹⁸ More worrying for the Party, they are seen as agreeing with Marx in their heart but are “easily taken out of the rhythm and become ‘susceptible groups.’”⁷¹⁹

One part of military culture is the longstanding efforts to eliminate corruption. Great progress in this area has been made under Xi. In 2018, however, talk remained that corruption was still a tumor that needed to be eradicated.⁷²⁰ By 2022, the ongoing endeavors to rid corruption were described as triumphant, with one scholar from NDU’s Xi Jinping Thought Research Center for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era claiming, “The fight against corruption has won an overwhelming victory and has been consolidated in an all-round way.”⁷²¹

However, the strong and relentless drive to clean up corruption has produced a new problem: a fear of being investigated for spending money, even money spent for legitimate purposes. Numerous regulations and discipline for violations have caused stress among soldiers. A recent report quoted one battalion official who complained that “spending money now is like ‘dancing on the tip of a knife.’”⁷²² The result is many do not dare to spend money that should be

⁷¹⁷ 华金良 (Hua Jinliang) 努力追求 “心力茁壮 (Strive to pursue a "strong heart and mind") *PLA Daily*, October 24, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-10/24/content_326349.htm

⁷¹⁸ 杨玉勤, 亢金利 (Yang Yuqin and Kang Jinli) 打赢注意力 “保卫战 (Win and pay attention to the "defense war") *PLA Daily*, November 14, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-11/14/content_327766.htm#

⁷¹⁹ 曹宇, 黄河 (Cao Yu and Huanghe) 原则远比面子更重要 (Principle is far more important than face) *PLA Daily*, August 3, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-08/03/content_321183.htm

⁷²⁰ Jun, *ibid*, 10.

⁷²¹ Zhouxian, *ibid*, 12.

⁷²² 陈飞虎 (Chen Feihu) 透过连队这扇窗, 我看到了什么 (What do I see through the window of the company) *PLA Daily*, March 27, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/27/content_336393.htm

spent, “which in turn restricts and affects the quality and efficiency of grassroots construction.”⁷²³

Another weakness—in training—will be further explored later in the chapter on training activities. Clearly, while much progress has been made over the past decade, deep problems remain. The findings highlighted above on achievements and continued problems reinforce arguments made in a recently published report from *Rand* that suggests U.S. assessments of the PLA should be reconsidered. A big reason why is qualitative analysis of concerns expressed by the PLA and Xi—which this study does—are hardly ever included as key components in quantitative analysis that uses simulations, models, and wargames.⁷²⁴ Qualitative analysis of things like the quality of soldiers and commanders, training, organizational and command issues, and morale, suggest the PLA is not as formidable as many who only focus on what could be described as ‘hardware’ think it is. But that is an issue the next chapter will talk more of.

7.2 Training

Like the Jiang and Hu chapters, training in the Xi era examines the number of domestic trainings that are reported in Chinese media, and the number of joint exercises with foreign militaries. The analysis of domestic training serves as a window to see what is emphasized. Because there is an untold number of training activities that are not reported, the amount of domestic training activities per year should not be over-emphasized but rather is one way to try understanding PLA training better. Also, I focus on training of the army, navy, air force, and rocket force. I do not include training from the joint logistic force, strategic support force, or the People’s Armed Police (PAP).

⁷²³ Feihu, *ibid.*

⁷²⁴ Mark Cozad et al, *Gaining Victory In Systems Warfare: China’s Perspective on the U.S.-China Military Balance* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2023), 232, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1535-1.html

Once again, for domestic training, I searched with Baidu using key phrases such as 人民解放军训练 (People's Liberation Army military training) and 解放军联合训练 (Liberation Army joint exercise) and then input the information into an excel file. I also used the ProQuest database that contains western media outlets, mainly looking at reports from the *BBC Monitoring the Asia-Pacific*. To collect data on joint training with foreign militaries I used the PLA diplomacy database from the U.S. National Defense University that has data through 2016. For 2017-18 I used Baidu, and from 2019-2022 I collected news reports from *China Military Network*. Finally, greater emphasis is given to dialogue on military training from sources such as the *PLA Daily*, *China Military Network*, and China scholars in academic articles.

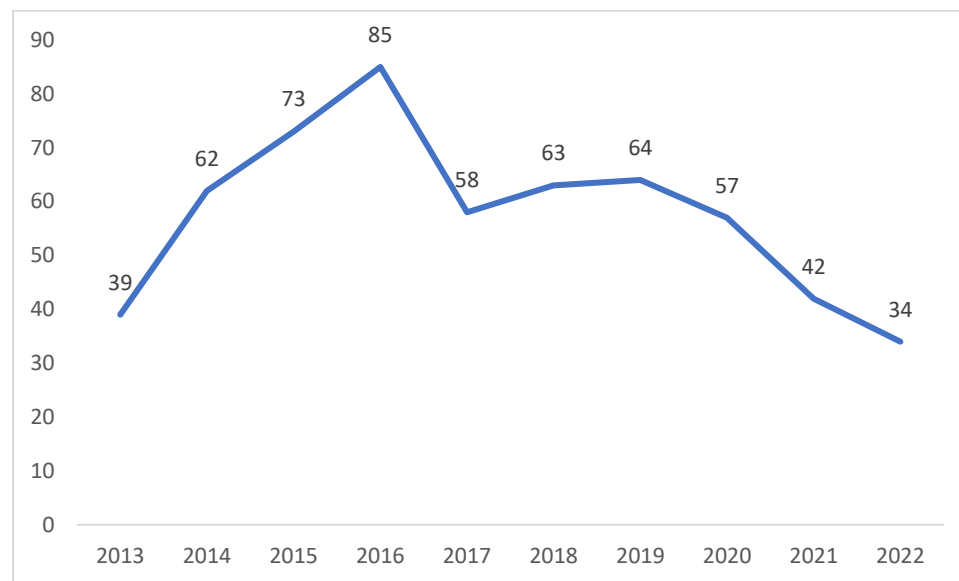


Figure 12: Number of Foreign and Domestic Exercises in Xi Era

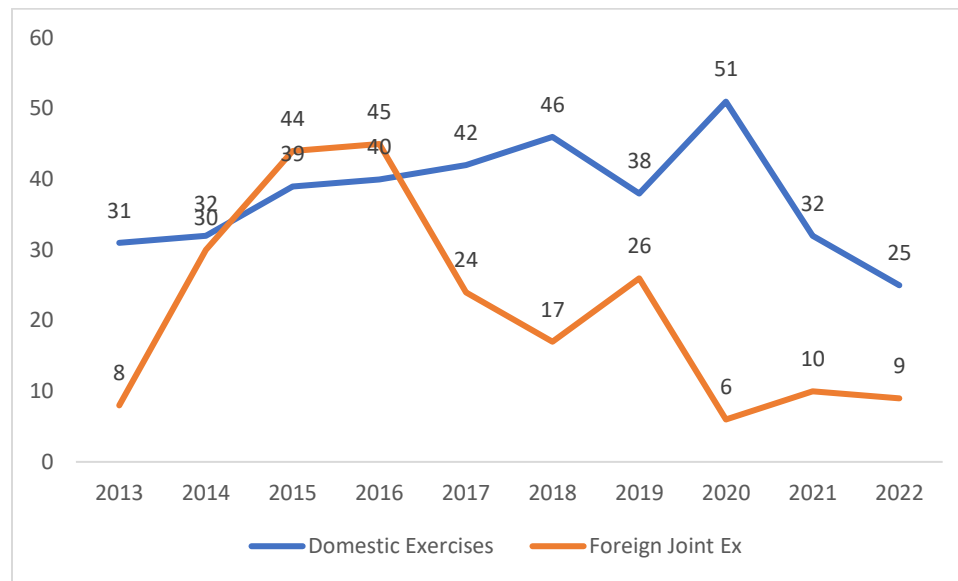


Figure 13: Comparison of Domestic and Foreign Joint Exercises

The total number of exercises—domestic and joint with foreign militaries—increased each of the first three years under Xi. One big reason for this was the massive number of joint exercises with foreign militaries that figure two highlights above. From 2014-2016, joint exercises dramatically expanded before significantly decreasing in 2017, with the downward trend continuing through 2022. The reason for this reduction and shift in 2017, according to some, was a focus toward domestic training amid heightening tensions with the U.S.⁷²⁵ Covid also likely helps explain the continued drop in joint training since 2020. Although with Beijing now completely reversing its zero-Covid policy and President Xi traveling outside of China again extensively, whether joint training expands remains to be seen. Recent commentary in the *PLA Daily* suggests the CCP still values training with foreign militaries. Scholars from NDU assert that:

⁷²⁵ Kristin Huang, “China’s military pulls back from joint war games to focus on training at home” *South China Morning Post*, February 24, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2187439/chinas-military-pulls-back-joint-war-games-focus-training-home>

Carrying out joint exercises and training with foreign militaries is not only an important way to serve the overall political and diplomatic situation of the country, deepen international military cooperation, and expand the "circle of friends", but also a powerful measure to learn from foreign militaries and test and improve the actual combat capabilities of troops.⁷²⁶

Whether there will be an emphasis on reviving joint training will likely be evident this upcoming year—2023.

Naval and counterterrorism exercises are the dominant form of joint training with foreign militaries, especially since 2017. Together, they represent over 50% of joint activities over the past several years. Even with the precipitous drop of joint trainings since Covid, the PLA still values and makes effort to continue training with two partners in specific: Pakistan and Russia. The PLA conducted just six joint exercises in 2020 when Covid broke out. Of those six, two

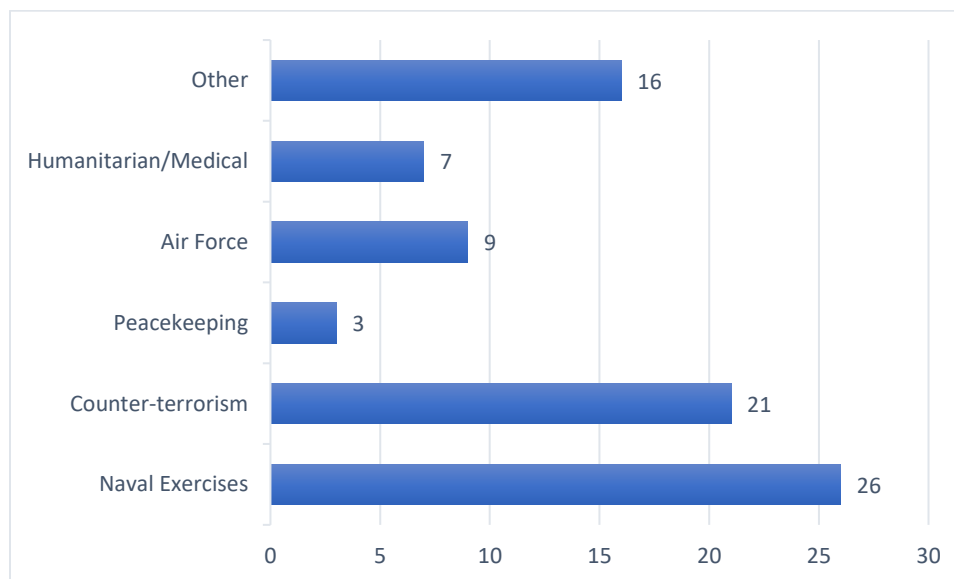


Figure 14: Foreign Joint Exercises Since 2017

⁷²⁶ Naili and Ming “deepen promotion of actual combat military training” *ibid.*

were with Pakistan and two with Russia, constituting over half the joint exercises that year. While Russia and Pakistan constituted most of the joint exercises in recent years, the PLA also carried out joint trainings with countries it has territorial disputes with such as India and Vietnam, along with neighbors like Laos, Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, and SCO members. Through the first three months of 2023, the PLA has taken part in five joint training activities with foreign militaries, three of which are naval exercises, continuing the trend of joint naval drills as the major focus of training.

Although Covid dramatically affected multi-lateral and bilateral training with foreign militaries, it did not have a similar influence on domestic training. This is one area of improvement under Xi: responding effectively to unforeseen challenges. Shortly after the outbreak, Chinese media emphasized military training must not be negatively impacted or reduced.⁷²⁷ During 2020 the number of reported domestic training rose to its highest level in the

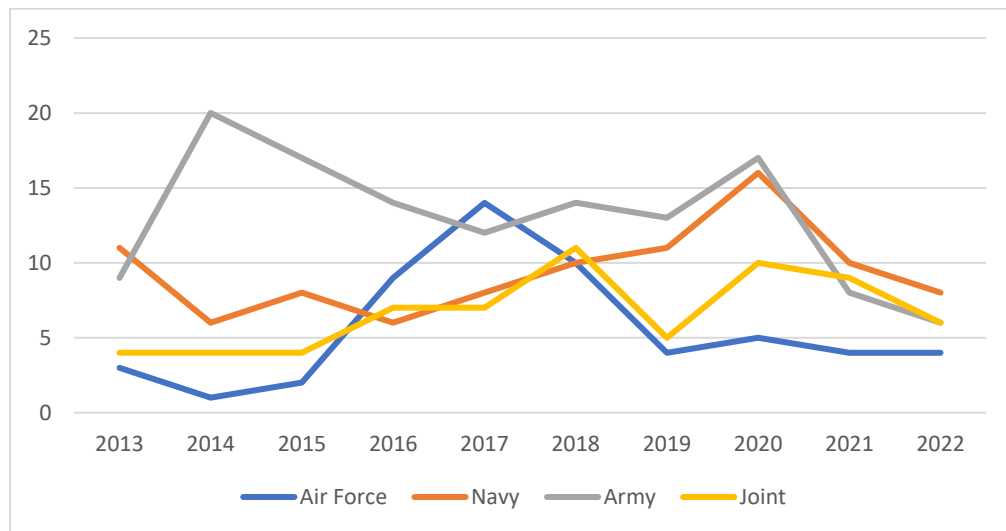


Figure 15: Comparison of Domestic Exercises Among the Different Branches

⁷²⁷ 赵晶晶 (Zhao Jinjing) 战“疫”不忘战备, 练兵备战一刻不松 (We should not forget our war preparedness in the war against the "epidemic," and we will not relax our training and preparation for war) 中国军网 (China Military Network) February 25, 2020, http://www.81.cn/jpdbfy2019/tzjy_207003/tzyw/9751607.html

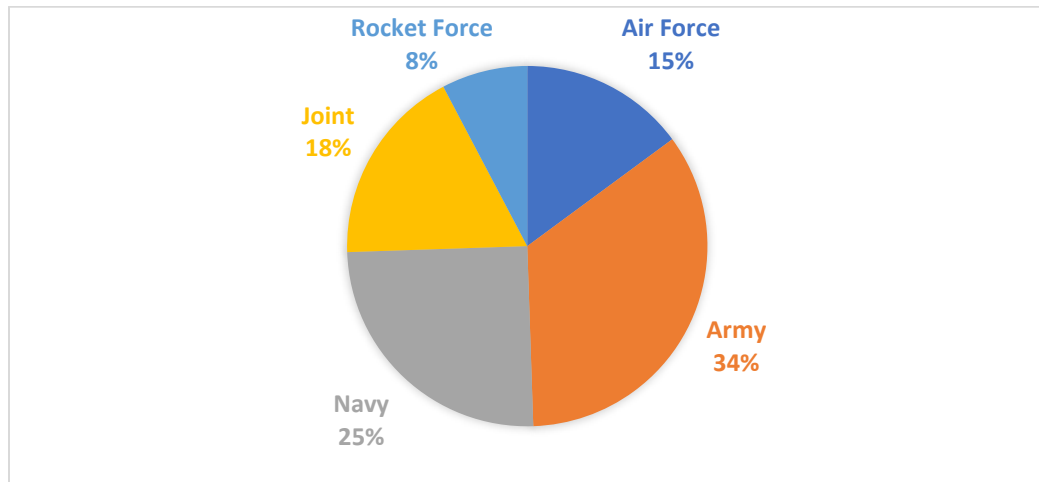


Figure 16: Percentage of Training for Each Branch

Xi era, as figure two illustrates. What explains the downward trend since then to where the numbers are similar to 2013-2014, could be due to the continuing restriction of information by the CCP over the past several years. The PLA and CCP have called for greater emphasis of joint training since the Jiang era, along with greater importance on the Navy and Air Force. In the Xi era, that priority manifested itself in military training. Although most training activities reported were still of the Army, the distribution is more balanced than the Hu era.

Most recently, in 2022, there was a higher number of Navy exercises reported than the Army. And overall, 25% of reported training activities during the Xi administration is naval training, while joint training represents one-sixth of all training activities. The quantity of Rocket Force and Air Force training appears small, but the number for the Rocket Force is likely higher because much of the training it does is done in conjunction with other services. It is also likely much higher for the Air Force because the count of PLA aircraft excursions through Taiwan's airspace—mentioned before—is over three hundred just since 2020. But most of these are not included in the reports, they are reported on by Taiwan.

Exploring the focus of military training for a particular year has become more difficult in the Xi era. The old GSD of the PLA issued annual training tasks for the military regions in the Hu era. Although the tasks were general and broad, they provided instructions for the training focus of a specific year. That has largely disappeared. Now, Chinese media announces a mobilization training order issued by Xi at the start of each year, but it lacks concrete, or detailed information about what is entailed in it or what the focus of that year is. However, there are hints and small pieces of the mobilization order in Chinese media.

The 2022 order noted there needed to be attention to changes in war, opponents, and science and technology. This is vague and does not pertain much to training. The most detailed training instructions just assert that “For five consecutive years, the mobilization order for training has always emphasized ‘the fighting spirit of not fearing hardship and not fearing death.’”⁷²⁸ Again, not too helpful. An interesting comment from the 2021 order talked of building an ability to subdue the enemy in one move.⁷²⁹ This could refer to the goal of winning quickly if China found itself deciding to go to war. Picking up what the PLA is training and directing its focus on is done by sifting through reports of training activities.

Emphasis on joint training—also called combined arms—has improved in the Xi era, specifically in the past several years. Enhancing joint training is not easy however, because it is difficult constructing the conditions for regular joint training.⁷³⁰ One major area of joint training

⁷²⁸ 解放军和武警部队新年度军事训练拉开大幕(The new year of military training of the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Force kicked off) 中国军网 (China Military Network) January 6, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1721207865102426569&wfr=spider&for=pc>

⁷²⁹ 解放军和武警部队官兵新年度军事训练拉开大幕(The new year's military training for officers and men of the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Force kicked off) 中国军网 (China Military Network) January 5, 2021, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1688041953033890612&wfr=spider&for=pc>

⁷³⁰ 张雅东, 陈洁, 梁军 (Zhang Yadong, Chen Jie, and Liang Jun) 中部战区陆军某师按照新大纲要求抓实联合基础训练 (A certain division of the Central Theater Army has grasped joint basic training in accordance with the requirements of the new outline) *PLA Daily*, August 4, 2018, http://www.81.cn/jpdbfy2019/2019zq/zbzq_206510/9509335.html

is land-air coordination. Traditionally, the PLA struggled with land-air coordination because some Army commanders could not employ land aviation and interact with Air Force counterparts effectively. In 2015, efforts to improve land-air combined training progressed with improvements to the helicopter laser engagement system and ability of ground-based air defense forces being able to “shoot down” helicopters during training.

Meanwhile, strikes on land-based targets by fighters were also improved with a screen immediately afterwards showing whether the targets were destroyed.⁷³¹ Following the military reforms, land-air joint training continued to improve and grow, along with joint air defense training, air-ground confrontations, and combined training between airborne units and army ground units. And previous gaps in the air-defense system have been improved through a “joint air situation sharing network” between the Air Force and Army.⁷³²

Another important type of joint training, especially for an invasion of Taiwan scenario, are amphibious land assault exercises. These are done with combined forces of the Army, Air Force, and Navy. One such exercise in 2019 began with Navy minesweepers and obstacle breaking ships, clearing the way for amphibious assault vehicles to land Army combat forces. As troops neared the coast, artillery, tanks, and warplanes made joint strikes from numerous different locations. The Army also called in air strikes to provide support.⁷³³ Large-scale amphibious exercises like the one mentioned above happens infrequently. More common are joint training in the far seas among the Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force that include

⁷³¹ 解放军演练陆空协同 目标引导员指示空对地突击 (The PLA exercises land and air coordination target guides instruct air-to-ground assaults) *Sohu*, August 7, 2015, https://www.sohu.com/a/26225884_115428

⁷³² 陈典宏, 陈晓鹏, 张永岳, 李建文 (Chen Dianhong, Chen Xiaopeng, Zhang Yongyue, and Li Jianwen) 陆空联训, 空地较量, 跨兵种对抗演练砥砺实战能力 (Joint training by land and air, competition between air and ground, and cross-arms confrontation exercises have sharpened actual combat capabilities) 中国军网 (China Military Network) November 14, 2020, http://www.81.cn/yw_208727/9936411.html?big=fan

⁷³³ “PLA conducts joint land assault exercises off China's southeast coast” *Global Times*, September 9, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/Exercises/News_209184/16003271.html

operations pertaining to counterterrorism and anti-piracy, general combat training—which often can involve live fire drills—and search and rescue.⁷³⁴

Air Force training has continued to improve combat readiness over the past decade as the PLAAF performs exercises like long-distance flight training covering thousands of miles through the day and night to “break through physical and mental limits.”⁷³⁵ Routine training has started to prioritize electromagnetic warfare, long range offensive strikes, joint air defense, and maritime strike operations. Additionally, over the past several years PLAAF has expanded maritime strike missions and longer-range bomber flights deeper into the Western Pacific.⁷³⁶ One of the largest annual PLAAF exercises is called “Red Sword” and often takes place in the northwest part of the country around the Gobi Desert. Numerous different aircraft are involved in the exercises including bombers, reconnaissance aircraft, early warning aircraft, and fighters along with combat forces involving surface-to-air missiles and radar.⁷³⁷ Additionally, operations around Taiwan has rapidly grown, especially since 2020, But it began in late 2016 with reports of training that circled the island.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁴ 周启青, 周演成 (Zhou Qiqing and Zhou Yancheng 南部战区海军远海联合训练编队起航 (The Southern Theater Naval Joint Training Group in the Far Seas set sail) *PLA Daily*, January 18, 2019, <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0118/c1011-30576142.html>

⁷³⁵ 张爽, 彭博, 黄春霖 (Zhang Shuang, Peng Bo, and Huang Chunlin) 空军某部开展跨昼夜联训, 锤炼全天候制胜打赢能力 (A certain air force unit carried out joint training across day and night to temper its ability to win and win all-weather battles) 中国军网 (China Military Network) April 7, 2022, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1729425760184951854&wfr=spider&for=pc>

⁷³⁶ *PLA Aerospace Power: A Primer on Trends in China's Military Air, Space, and Missile Forces*, *ibid*, 29.

⁷³⁷ 空军“红剑-2018”演习致力提升体系制胜能力(The Air Force's "Red Sword-2018" exercise is committed to improving the system's ability to win) 新华网 (Xinhuanet) May 24, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-05/24/c_129879430.htm

⁷³⁸ 解放军军机再次绕台远海训练 (PLA military planes once again circled Taiwan and the far sea for training) *CCTV*, December 11, 2016, <http://tv.cctv.com/2016/12/11/VIDEWbmyOBqG1EAqipqYaBbw161211.shtml>; 解放军军机远海长航再绕台湾 台有关人士: 展示突破第一岛链能力对台施压 (People's Liberation Army military aircraft sail around Taiwan again for a long time: show the ability to break through the First island chain and put pressure on Taiwan) *CCTV*, December 11, 2016, <https://tv.cctv.com/2016/12/11/VIDENcOVe69yrmGhr7KW8ehF161211.shtml?spm=C52507945305.P1Tyk9aHorGZ.0.0>

The capabilities section of chapter five illustrated that the PLAA is making efforts to become a more mobile force by focusing on things like aviation and air defense, this also appears in training. Army training in the Xi era has increasingly entailed air defense, aviation drills, and reconnaissance in addition to regular combat drills.⁷³⁹ One reason for this could be that the Army's air defense units has shortcomings that need to be improved through extensive training.⁷⁴⁰ There has also been a small number of amphibious trainings conducted, although these amphibious training activities are sometimes rumored to be in response of U.S. actions toward Taiwan.⁷⁴¹

With newer equipment quickly entering the Army, training has also focused on operating and integrating it into the force. This newer equipment is described as bringing a high level of difficulty in learning and slows the progress of training. One Army brigade recently held a training exercise and invited special forces and Army aviation units to join. During the training a new type of reconnaissance drone was used but the special warfare and Army aviation units had trouble keeping up with the training because of issues receiving information sent back from the drone.⁷⁴² Army training has elevated with a shift in becoming more mobile and incorporating new equipment, but issues remain with interaction and training between different units.

⁷³⁹ 魏兵, 宋子洵 (Wei Bing and Song Zixun) 解放军和武警部队官兵新年度军事训练拉开大幕 (The new year's military training for officers and men of the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Force kicked off) 中国军网 (China Military Network) January 3, 2020, http://www.81.cn/2020zt/2020-01/03/content_9710827.htm; 解放军和武警部队新年度军事训练拉开大幕 (The new year of military training of the People's Liberation Army and the Armed Police Force kicked off) 中国军网 (China Military Network) January 6, 2022,

<https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1721207865102426569&wfr=spider&for=pc>

⁷⁴⁰ 陆军防空旅“以箭代弹”加强训练 (The army's air defense brigade "replaced ammunition with arrows" to strengthen training) 观察者 (Observer) May 6, 2017, https://www.guancha.cn/military-affairs/2017_05_06_406974.shtml

⁷⁴¹ 解放军开展多海域军事训练 专家: 防止美台进一步勾结 (PLA Conducts Military Training in Multiple Seas Expert: Prevent further collusion between the United States and Taiwan) 新华网 (Xinhuanet) July 20, 2021, <https://view.inews.qq.com/a/20210720A02GF900>

⁷⁴² 赖文涌 廖晓彬 喻润东 (Lai Wenyong, Liao Xiaobin, and Yu Rundong) 第 73 集团军某旅: 新装备陆续列装, 战士们加速奔向新战场 (A Brigade of the 73rd Group Army: New equipment has been installed one after another,

Naval training has also expanded and gone through changes over the past several years. Like the Air Force, naval training is increasingly conducted farther away from China. One example in June 2021, was a destroyer, frigate, and supply ship transiting east of Taiwan before joining aircraft for joint training.⁷⁴³ Additionally, the PLAN has continued to expand ASW (anti-submarine warfare), amphibious training, and far seas patrols and resupply training. The biggest improvements in PLAN training, however, might be upgrades in simulations for college students, or also described as interns at the Naval Submarine Academy. Before, students trained onshore before joining PLAN submarine units.

In 2018, changes were made so that training was conducted at sea on surface ships by installing square cabins or “blind boxes” with submarine navigation equipment to imitate the work of submarine forces. Students also take turns in different roles outside of their grades and majors during training to understand and be able to perform different tasks in a submarine unit.⁷⁴⁴ In order to make up for gaps in talent construction and accelerate training, some naval officers are trained quickly on multiple different warships. The story of one deputy captain explained how he went to sea for more than two hundred days. After serving for less than nine months as deputy captain and going through training like equipment use, fire strikes, ship control, and tactical coordination, he passed operational and post assessments.⁷⁴⁵

and the soldiers are speeding up to the new battlefield) *PLA Daily*, March 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/bz_208549/16211731.html

⁷⁴³ 不再口头警告，解放军海空联合演练，两大罕见动作让对岸紧张过头(No longer verbal warnings, the PLA's joint naval and air exercises, two rare moves that make the opposite shore too nervous) 海纳新闻 (Haina News) June 22, 2021, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1703228448374827577&wfr=spider&for=pc>

⁷⁴⁴ 高密, 韩江雪, 张一飞 (Gao Mi, Han Jiangxue, and Zhang Yifei) 海上“盲盒”的打开方式 (The method of opening the "blind box" at sea) *PLA Daily*, March 14, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/14/content_335443.htm

⁷⁴⁵ 一舰出海 多舰指挥员共享训练资源 (One ship goes to sea, numerous ship commanders share training resources) *PLA Daily*, February 16, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/16/content_333842.htm

Training has improved throughout the PLA during the Xi administration, but various problems remain. In some units, simulations of real battlefield environments are not adequate, causing officers and soldiers to not grasp “the feeling of fighting” and the conditions during training “of the enemy situation is too simple.”⁷⁴⁶ In a similar vein, confrontation training has improved, but there are still problems where officers and soldiers are unwilling to set up dangerous situations. The enemy capability during training is too modest. This is a problem considering confrontation training is described as “the first test of future wars”.⁷⁴⁷

Another unruly habit is emphasis on training orders while neglecting training quality, and problems are criticized but then problem rectification is neglected.⁷⁴⁸ That is a small problem compared to the issue of shortcomings among some officers and soldiers operating new equipment and weapons. Zhang Xicheng (张西成) from the Army Research Institute delivered a sharp criticism, arguing:

In recent years, our army has continuously increased its actual combat training, and attached great importance to the exploration of the performance and power of weapons and equipment, but there are still some unsatisfactory points. As far as the understanding and mastery of the existing weapons and equipment are concerned, there are those who have just tasted it and do not seek deep understanding; those who are full of small progress and know how to use it have it.⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁶ 宋强 (Song Qiang) 多创设沉浸式练兵条件 (Create more immersive training conditions) *PLA Daily*, February 8, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-02/08/content_333229.htm

⁷⁴⁷ 满孝轩, 周咏霖 (Man Xiaoxuan and Zhou Yonglin) 真打实抗砥砺胜战之能 (The ability to fight hard and win battles) *PLA Daily*, March 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/09/content_335121.htm

⁷⁴⁸ 王奇锋 (Wang Qifeng) 保持以监促训的力度韧劲 (Maintain resilience in promoting training through supervision) *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2021, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2021-04/24/content_287877.htm

⁷⁴⁹ 张西成 (Zhang Xicheng) 提升人与武器结合的境界 (Enhance the realm of combining people with weapons) *PLA Daily*, May 11, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-05/11/content_315319.htm

Perhaps most importantly, is the role of commanders for training. Recently the PLA has regularly emphasized that training generals first is the key to training troops. Good commanders are those who can then fight and train troops.

However, there are commanders who are not familiar with changes in the form of warfare, weapons and equipment, command methods, and combat style. Worse, some individual commanders do not do a good job of organizing training or grasp it, leading to training that just goes through the motions.⁷⁵⁰ Commanders also fail to properly handle the relationship between key points and the overall situation when organizing training.⁷⁵¹ Finally, there are still reports of a disconnect between college education and army practice,⁷⁵² unbalanced training resources and insufficient training venues,⁷⁵³ inaccurate content training,⁷⁵⁴ utilization of information equipment is not fully considered,⁷⁵⁵ and system training needs to be strengthened.⁷⁵⁶

7.3 Conclusion

Under Xi, China is now focused on striving to become a military built on what it calls intelligentization, in addition to mechanization and information. The difference between

⁷⁵⁰ 贾长城 (Jia Changcheng) 真训善训带动官兵“跟我练” (True training and good training drive officers and soldiers to "practice with me") *PLA Daily*, May 31, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-05/31/content_316714.htm

⁷⁵¹ 满孝轩, 周咏霖 (Man Xiaoxuan and Zhou Yonglin) 真打实抗砥砺胜战之能 (The ability to fight hard and win battles) *PLA Daily*, March 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/09/content_335121.htm

⁷⁵² 冯奕 (Feng Yi) 构建战教耦合育人新格局 (Constructing teaching of war with a new education pattern) *PLA Daily*, September 1, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-09/01/content_323229.htm

⁷⁵³ 牛伟萌, 张凌辉, 李跃文 (Niu Weimeng, Zhang Linghui, and Li Yuewen) 陆军无人机进驻空军场站训练 (Army drones stationed in the air force station for training) *PLA Daily*, December 7, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-12/07/content_329355.htm

⁷⁵⁴ 付博, 刘念, 王畅, (Fu Bo, Liu Nian, and Wang Chang) 按纲施训 实战实训 (Conduct practical training according to the outline) *PLA Daily*, October 12, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-10/12/content_325604.htm

⁷⁵⁵ 何雍 (He Yong) 紧盯战争之变练打仗 (Keep an Eye on the Changes of War and Practice Fighting) *PLA Daily*, July 11, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-07/11/content_319542.htm

⁷⁵⁶ 江游 (Jiang You) 在体系中练就制胜“铁拳” (Practice the winning "iron fist" in the system) *PLA Daily*, March 21, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/21/content_335972.htm

informatized and intelligentization is the latter is thought of the utilization of AI and its associated technologies such as cloud computing, autonomous systems, and quantum computing whereas informatized is more focused on traditional 4CISR like reconnaissance, surveillance, and command and control. Important for both concepts though is the ability to conduct joint operations and waging war in new domains. Toward this end, the most extensive military reforms since the founding of the PRC were implemented to increasingly conduct operations farther from China. Building a force more capable of joint operations has been a theme in writings on army building since the Jiang era but not a possibility without the needed reforms to restructure the organization and command system of the PLA. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the PLA's current capabilities of performing joint activities far from China are still quite weak. But the structure is now more conducive to joint operations.

Army building has also focused on the four modernizations and deepening CMI. Concentrating on improving personnel, weaponry and equipment, theory, and organization is fundamental for the PLA to realize modernization by 2035. Cultivating better commanders and soldiers who are talented, disciplined, and loyal is key to modernization of personnel. Part of the modernization of personnel is included in the deepening of CMI. Civilians are described as a “new composition of the people's army, the new force to ensure victory, the new engine to strengthen the army with science and technology, and the new support to build a dream of national defense”.⁷⁵⁷ The revised regulations of the civilian personnel system issued in January 2023 is an effort to raise the talent level and help make the military more technologically advanced. Raising spending on weaponry and equipment during the first five years of Xi's

⁷⁵⁷ 筱静 (Xiao Jing) 增加认同感 增强归属感 (Increase the sense of identity and enhance the sense of belonging) *PLA Daily*, April 5, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/05/content_336979.htm

leadership illustrates the importance placed on modernization of equipment and the reforms highlight advanced modernization of the organization.

Military training regulations were revised and issued by the CMC in 2018. The new regulations emphasized innovation and scientific and technological training.⁷⁵⁸ Overall, military training under Xi reflected plans of striving to be a more mobile force. The Army increasingly focused on air defense and aviation training. There are also now certification training and assessments for UAV operators, further indications the Army is stressing greater devotion to new forms of combat.⁷⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the amount of reported training activities by the Navy was nearly on par with the Army. Priority is now given as much to sea power as land power. Together, the Air Force and Navy have increasingly conducted training over the past decade that is taking place farther from China. Additionally, integrated training among the service branches is becoming common, with one brigade in a recent *PLA Daily* article given as an example of soldiers and officers who spend time studying and observing in different branches.⁷⁶⁰

During much of the Xi era the PLA has significantly elevated its training quality and army building to better prepare for future wars. Most notable is the PLA's achievements of restructuring the organization and command system. But there are still problems that appear frequently in the pages of the *PLA Daily* and academic articles by China scholars. They largely pertain to personnel and weaponry/equipment. Chief among these are concerns about the quality of commanders who still struggle with judging the situation, deploying soldiers, formulating

⁷⁵⁸ 朱玉明, 刘一伟 (Zhu Yuming and Liu Yiwei) 中国人民解放军军事训练条例 (试行) 宣讲全面展开 (The "Regulations on Military Training of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (Trial)" is fully launched) *PLA Daily*, February 6, 2018, <http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/qwfb/4804251.html>

⁷⁵⁹ 陆军首次开展无人机专业士兵职业资格培训考核认证 (For the first time, the Army has conducted professional qualification training and certification for drones) *PLA Daily*, March 30, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/30/content_336587.htm

⁷⁶⁰ 陈典宏, 通讯员, 李珏宏 (Chen Dianhong Xu Haojie, and Li Juehong) 跨兵种淬火蓄积胜战底气 (Quenching across different branches and accumulating the confidence to win battles) *PLA Daily*, April 3, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-04/03/content_336822.htm

combat plans, and directing training. Secondly, despite rapid progress in weapons and equipment, there is still a gap between China and the most advanced militaries with the PLA noting the need to accelerate the modernization of weapons.⁷⁶¹ Third, strenuous efforts to infuse the PLA with high-quality, educated talents have improved.

However, efforts to incorporate civilians and deepen CMI appear to be making uneven progress. The new civilian personnel system regulations issued in January 2023 were designed to help recruit individuals talented in science and technology—among other fields—to bolster PLA progress in innovation. But recent instructions for officers and soldiers to make civilians feel comfortable and view them as fearless soldiers even though they do not hold a steel gun and wear a military uniform suggest that progress has not been as good as the CCP may have hoped for.⁷⁶² The next chapter examines Xi’s personal influence on China’s military strategy and the PLA in general.

⁷⁶¹ 刘杨钺, 徐能武 (Liu Yangyue and Xu Nengwu) 大国重器 “中国造” (Major weapon of a great power is “Chinese made”) *PLA Daily*, November 11, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/11/content_327579.htm

⁷⁶² Xiao Jing, “Increase the sense of identity and enhance the sense of belonging” *ibid.*

8 THE XI EFFECT: HEARTWARE AND HARDWARE

To what extent has Xi personally influenced the PRC's military strategy since he assumed power at the 18th Party Congress? That question is the focus of this chapter with the attention on Xi's personal impact. Additionally, I broadly include and look at Xi's effect on the PLA in general. I argue Xi has influenced the PLA's strategy in three main ways:

1. Pushing through major reforms
2. Controlling personnel
3. Prioritizing hardware and heartware

Of those, pushing through the reforms and prioritizing hardware and heartware are the most important. One caveat to note is the difficulty sometimes of concretely separating Xi's influence from that of the PLA as an autonomous institution. However, with Xi's status as the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao, that alone is justification to explore how much or to what extent he has influenced military strategy and the PLA in general. In addition to the three areas highlighted above, I argue Xi has influenced the PLA in general by using his personal political power and efforts to strengthen military-civilian integration—MCI. For a long time now the CCP has tried elevating MCI, but with no success. Efforts to strengthen MCI under Xi have made notable progress because of Xi's personal role. However, attempts at enforcing a stronger MCI system are still encountering significant hurdles. Before going into the three major ways Xi has influenced strategy and the PLA in general, I briefly provide background of Xi's personal involvement in China's military affairs. That is followed by sections covering the passing of the major military reforms, controlling personnel, and prioritization of hardware and heartware.

8.1 Xi's Personal Role

Like chapter six discussed, Xi is often portrayed as possessing deep military acumen. Chinese media and scholars regularly praise Xi for his grasp of military affairs. Zhang Youxia declared the PLA can be confident because of President Xi's experience of "piloting a powerful country and a strong military."⁷⁶³ What Zhang is implying is that the PLA now has a leader that can inspire troops that it has not had before—or not had in a long time. Despite the immense number of domestic issues China is grappling with, Xi purportedly devotes a lot of attention to army building and national defense; giving it great importance.⁷⁶⁴ The prominence of Xi's influence on all the major changes that have occurred in the PLA over the past decade is also regularly emphasized. He has elevated the PLA's deterrence and combat capability, adjusted the core responsibilities of preparing for war, innovated the military strategic guidance,⁷⁶⁵ optimized the military strategic layout, and stressed the strategy of strengthening the military should be put first.⁷⁶⁶

Importantly, it's Xi who is described as formulating changes to revisions of the strategic guidelines, with members of the Air Force Command Academy noting:

President Xi Jinping formulated a new era of military strategic guidelines, emphasizing on keeping a close eye on the powerful enemy, balancing the powerful enemy, focusing on winning the information-based war with intelligent characteristics, focusing on the unity of strategic defense and offensive in battle, strengthening joint operations, focusing on multi-regional operations, and providing scientific guidance for further advancing the preparation of military struggle in the new era.⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶³ 张又侠 (Zhang Youxia) 在党的旗帜引领下建设强大人民军队 (Building a strong people's army under the leadership of the party's banner) 智慧中国 (Wisdom China) no.8, (2021), 10-11.

⁷⁶⁴ 侯占宇, 王宇宁 (Hou Zhanyu and Wang Yuning) 牢固确立习近平军事战略思想的指导地位 (Firmly Establish the Guiding Position of Xi Jinping's Military Strategic Thought) 政工学刊 (Journal of Politics and Engineering) no. 9 (2021), 16.

⁷⁶⁵ Youxia, *ibid*, 11-12.

⁷⁶⁶ Tieefang, Xiaofeng, and Runqi, *ibid*, 2-3.

⁷⁶⁷ Zhanyu and Yuning, *ibid*, 16.

The quote above helps reveal what Xi has prioritized in military affairs, namely, balancing the powerful enemy (likely referring to the U.S.), fusing strategic defense and offense, winning informatized wars with intelligent characteristics, solidifying joint operations, and focusing on multi-regional operations.

Whether Xi has deep insight or understanding of military strategy and affairs is debatable, but it's clear he spends far more time on military affairs than either Jiang or Hu did. To oversee what he wants prioritized, Xi is described as personally and regularly making decisions on major military operations and planning major training activities.⁷⁶⁸ He goes far and wide to visit the military and provide guidance, from northern outposts to the Gobi Desert, from the southern coast to boarding warships and fighter planes. Within his first one hundred days as leader, Xi made numerous high profile visits to military command facilities, something that neither Jiang nor Hu did.⁷⁶⁹

Furthermore, in the first three years as CMC chairman, Xi made 53 visits to military events while Hu made only 36 similar appearances in roughly the same time span.⁷⁷⁰ Additionally, Xi attended approximately 120 defense science and technology and military meetings, visits, and conferences from 2012-2020. Most visibly, within his first ten years as leader Xi presided over five large-scale military parades whereas Deng, Jiang, and Hu only did so once.⁷⁷¹ One nonauthoritative Chinese media report claimed Xi spends a half-day every week

⁷⁶⁸ “建设一支听党指挥能打胜仗作风优良的人民军队”——“十个明确”彰显马克思主义中国化新飞跃述评之八("Build a people's army that obeys the command of the party, can win battles, and has a good work style") *People's Daily*, February 21, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-02/21/nw.D110000renmrb_20220221_1-02.htm

⁷⁶⁹ Jeremy Page, “For Xi, a 'China Dream' of Military Power” *Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2013, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324128504578348774040546346>

⁷⁷⁰ Joel Wuthnow and Phillip Saunders, “Large and in Charge” in Saunders et al eds, *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2019), 538.

⁷⁷¹ Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate*, *ibid*, 144.

at his CMC office, in contrast to Hu, who rarely used his office. Xi's molding of his public profile in the PLA is also noticeable.⁷⁷²

This crafting of Xi's image and status in the PLA—and how far it is above that of Jiang or Hu—was reflected in Xi gaining the title of commander-in-chief in 2016.⁷⁷³ Another visible example is Chinese state media reporting that Xi was the first Chinese president to don a military uniform while inspecting a top military body.⁷⁷⁴ Moreover, he is depicted as a leader who loves the soldiers and takes time to handwrite letters in reply to the troops.⁷⁷⁵ Addressing the peace disease, Xi harkens on the PLA needing to develop a fighting spirit that enables an attitude of not fearing death or hardship.⁷⁷⁶ All of the above actions are given as evidence by China scholars that Xi is an example for the military to follow.⁷⁷⁷

Tai Ming-Cheung has argued “No other Chinese Communist Party leader, not even Mao Zedong, has controlled the military to the same extent as Xi does today.”⁷⁷⁸ Xi's role in military affairs leading up to the 20th Party Congress in 2022 was described by Chinese media as essentially a savior, with the *PLA Daily* declaring, “President Xi Jinping has historically rescued, reshaped and rebuilt the people's army, vigorously promoted the modernization of national defense and the army, led the way to strengthening the army with Chinese characteristics, and opened up a new system, structure, pattern and appearance of the people's army.”⁷⁷⁹ Those are

⁷⁷² Chien-wen Kou, “Xi Jinping in Command: Solving the Principal Agent Problems in CCP-PLA Relations” *The China Quarterly* 232, (2017), 873.

⁷⁷³ Austin Ramzy, “China's President, Xi Jinping, Gains a New Title: Commander in Chief” *New York Times*, April 21, 2016, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/world/asia/china-xi-jinping-military-commander.html>

⁷⁷⁴ “President Xi urges stronger military” *China Daily*, April 21, 2016, found in James Mulvenon, “Xi Jinping has a cool new nickname: ‘Commander in Chief’” *China Leadership Monitor*, 51, (2017).

⁷⁷⁵ 曹海峰 (Cao Haifeng) 追寻坚实足迹 凝聚奋进力量 (Pursue a solid footprint and unite the strength to forge ahead) *PLA Daily*, June 6, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/08/content_317254.htm

⁷⁷⁶ Zhanyu and Yuning, *ibid*, 16-17.

⁷⁷⁷ Chengcai, *ibid*, 33.

⁷⁷⁸ Tai Ming Cheung, “Xi Jinping and the Remaking of Chinese Military Politics” in *Xi Takes Charge: Implications of the 19th Party Congress for China's Future*, vol 21, (2017), 12.

⁷⁷⁹ 为如期实现建军一百年奋斗目标、加快把人民军队建成世界一流军队团结奋斗 (In order to realize the goal of the 100-year struggle for the establishment of the army as scheduled, and accelerate the transformation of the

unusually strong words for the role of the CMC chairman and general secretary of the CCP in military work. Some of this can likely be attributed to the cult of personality Xi has developed. But it is also important to note the description of the PLA now having a new form and appearance. The PLA is described as having undergone a complete transformation since the 18th Party Congress in late 2012, largely through Xi's personal involvement. Many of the accomplishments in the PLA over the past decade are all things the CCP wanted to do in the past but failed to do. These overdue accomplishments are largely credited to Xi.⁷⁸⁰

Xi's influence on military affairs—and his personal authority over the PLA—is reflected in the establishment and deepening of the CMC Chairman Responsibility System. What are the core features of the CMC Chairman Responsibility System? Most significantly, it is described as “the buck stops at the chairman's desk, as ultimately ‘all significant issues in national defense and Army building [are] planned and decided by the CMC chairman.’”⁷⁸¹ The importance of the Chairman Responsibility System is captured in its description as the fundamental system of the CCP's absolute authority over the PLA.⁷⁸² Two professors at China's National Defense University (国防大学) in addition to acknowledging the main characteristic of the CMC Chairman Responsibility System is the absolute decision making of the chairman, argued the CCP Central Committee with Xi at the core, greatly improved and advanced the practice and

people's army into a world-class army, we will work together) *PLA Daily*, October 10, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-10/22/content_326219.htm

⁷⁸⁰ 邓一非 (Deng Yifei) 凝心聚力攻坚克难 (Concentrate on overcoming difficulties) *PLA Daily*, April 18, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-04/18/content_337846.htm

⁷⁸¹ James Mulvenon, “The Yuan Stops Here: Xi Jinping and the ‘CMC Chairman Responsibility System’” *China Leadership Monitor*, 47 (2015), 2.

⁷⁸² 强党性, 永葆政治本色 (Strengthening party spirit and preserving political nature forever) *PLA Daily*, April 12, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-04/12/content_337462.htm

theory of the CMC Chairman Responsibility System, particularly at the 19th Party Congress in 2017.⁷⁸³

Through the CMC Chairman Responsibility System, Xi has rectified what is explained as an irregular phenomenon that used to plague the CMC.⁷⁸⁴ It is also notable because in the Jiang and Hu era's this term was not used, but rather the CMC Vice-Chairman Responsibility system appeared instead.⁷⁸⁵ Emphasis on the Chairman Responsibility System has not abated since the 19th Party Congress. In November 2022, the CMC issued "Several Opinions on Deepening the Implementation of the Chairman's Responsibility System of the Military Commission" to further implement arrangements and decisions of Chairman Xi and promote greater political consciousness of the CMC chairman's responsibility system.⁷⁸⁶

8.1.1 Pushing through Reforms

The CCP and CMC made necessary adjustments to shift strategy toward one of preparing for informatized warfare—which included greater emphasis on joint operations—during the Hu administration. However, successfully implementing that strategy was essentially hopeless without reforming the organizational structure and command system. Hu's failed efforts to pass major reforms, and descriptions by high-ranking PLA officers and Chinese media about difficulties the Xi leadership faced in passing the major reforms is revealing. Because of this, I argue the PLA was in much worse condition when Xi replaced Hu than many realize. The

⁷⁸³ Liu Shiping and Zhang Cong, 军委主席负责制是实现党对军队绝对领导的根本制度 [The CMC Chairman Responsibility System is the Fundamental System for Realizing the Party's Absolute Leadership over the Army] 中国领导科学 [China Leadership Science], no.5, (2021), 37-39. Actual pages 36-42.

⁷⁸⁴ 刘颜鸣, 张泽栋 (Liu Yanming and Zhang Zedong) 坚持巩固党指挥枪的根本优势 (Adhere to the fundamental advantage of strengthening the party's command of the gun) *PLA Daily*, September 5, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/05/content_323488.htm

⁷⁸⁵ Mulvenon, *ibid*, 1.

⁷⁸⁶ 中央军委印发《关于深化军委主席负责制贯彻落实的若干意见》(The Central Military Commission issued "Several Opinions on Deepening the Implementation of the Chairman's Responsibility System of the Military Commission") *PLA Daily*, November 3, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/03/content_326987.htm

problem was not only reforms were overdue and encountered resistance, but political conditions were also an issue.

One recent article explained how leading up to the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the military faced severe political risks with Xi working forcefully to govern the military with stern discipline.⁷⁸⁷ What these risks entailed is not elaborated on, but they likely refer to Guo Boxiong, Xu Caihou, and Zhou Yongkang. Zhang Youxia highlighted these dangers that were dealt with by writing:

In view of the serious political risks faced by our army in the period before the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, President Xi made every effort to turn the tide of the storm and fix the crisis, led the convening of the Gutian Military Political Work Conference, established the strategy of building the military in a new era, and led the whole army to reorganize and start again.⁷⁸⁸

The sentiments expressed by Zhang have also been mentioned in the *PLA Daily*. Prior to the 18th Party Congress there were problems such as ineffective governance of the Party in the PLA, a weakening of the Party's leadership, and lack of Party building.⁷⁸⁹ During the Xi era, structural contradictions, institutional obstacles, and policy issues are frequently highlighted as problems that have hindered army building and deepening national defense.⁷⁹⁰ The reforms which are characterized as being launched by Xi were done with the goal of overcoming these institutional obstacles, contradictions and reversing problems while enhancing and liberating the

⁷⁸⁷ 林从义 (Lin Congyi) 习近平聚焦: 解放军在习近平领导下努力建设世界一流军队 (Xi Focus: PLA striving to build world-class military under Xi's leadership) 新华网 (Xinhuanet) August 2, 2022, http://www.81.cn/ChinaMilitary/rdxw_208665/10175532.html

⁷⁸⁸ 张又侠 (Zhang Youxia) 坚持走中国特色强军之路 (Adhere to the Road to a Strong Army with Chinese Characteristics) *People's Daily*, November 30, 2021.

⁷⁸⁹ Can, Jianwei, Shiting, and Zongyang, *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁰ 贾珍珍, 卢潇, 刘杨钺 (Jia Zhenzhen, Lu Xiao, and Liu Yangyue) 在改革创新康庄大道上阔步前行 (Stride forward on the broad avenue of reform and innovation) *PLA Daily*, September 26, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/26/content_324849.htm

vitality of the army and combat effectiveness.⁷⁹¹ These deep-seated problems have been largely resolved, but there are still warnings to “say goodbye to the old rules, and break with the accumulated evils.”⁷⁹² Over time under Jiang and Hu, significant problems amassed, leading to degradation in combat readiness, and as mentioned previously, rampant corruption.

The much-needed reforms that began in late 2015 and have improved the PLA’s ability to conduct joint operations, and modernize the military overall, are often painted as the result of Xi’s actions. One report explained:

Chairman Xi has focused on designing and shaping the future of our military, proposed a strategy of reforming and strengthening the military, led the most extensive and profound national defense and military reforms since the founding of new China, and restructured the leadership and command system and the modern military force system”.⁷⁹³

Other articles similarly talk about Xi initiating the revolutionary and unprecedented changes in the army, and personally leading the reform.⁷⁹⁴

Additionally, Xi is praised as being the first general secretary of the Party to serve as the leader of the leading group for deepening national defense and military reform.⁷⁹⁵ How much of the reforms Xi personally designed is questionable. Again, this could partially be the result of Xi’s cult of personality. The upper brass of the PLA likely worked on the fine details in the workshops that produced the reforms. But it is likely Xi had a large degree of influence on the

⁷⁹¹ 决定军队未来的关键一招 (A key move to determine the future of the military) *PLA Daily*, September 28, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/28/content_324986.htm

⁷⁹² 傅达林, 谭正义, 郑琦 (Fu Dalin, Tan Zhengyi, and Zheng Qi) 筑就坚如磐石的强军之基 (Build a rock-solid foundation for a strong army) *PLA Daily*, October 12, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-10/12/content_325602.htm

⁷⁹³ 孙兴维 (Sun Xingfei) 向开拓创新要战斗力 (To pioneer and innovate to fight) *PLA Daily*, March 8, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/08/content_335089.htm

⁷⁹⁴ Yiting, “A Scientific Guide to Building a Strong People’s Army in the New Era” *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁵ 钱晓虎, 韩成 (Qian Xiaohu and Han Cheng) 书写改革强军的时代答卷 (Writing the answer sheet of the era of reform and strengthening the army) *PLA Daily*, July 26, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/26/content_320648.htm

direction of the main points and topics. During the writing process of the reforms, from the first to the final draft, Xi reportedly “reviewed each draft word by word, made important instructions, and put forward specific revisions.”⁷⁹⁶ Xi’s influence and time invested in the reforms were substantial. Moreover, the reforms would not have been implemented and passed without Xi’s personal political power and efforts. The next section goes deeper in exploring Xi’s personal influence. One scholar, when describing PLA influence on China’s national security, defined influence as the power to produce a policy outcome through a blend of coercing, persuading, or inducing others to behave in a way that otherwise would not have happened.⁷⁹⁷ That describes Xi’s role and actions in implementing the military reforms.

8.1.2 Control Over Personnel

Xi also influences China’s military strategy through his control over personnel and promotions in the PLA. Moving quickly, Xi was able to grasp control over the PLA by unexpectedly becoming CMC chairmen immediately—most thought Hu would stay on as CMC chairmen for the first two years after the leadership transition, just like what happened during the transition from Deng to Jiang, and then Jiang to Hu.⁷⁹⁸ Becoming chairmen immediately allowed Xi to take control over the PLA appointment power.⁷⁹⁹ Additionally, the reforms and restructuring of the CMC has greatly elevated Xi’s personal authority over the PLA.⁸⁰⁰ As CMC

⁷⁹⁶ 闫嘉琪 (Yan Jiaqi) “实现强军目标, 建设世界一流军队” (“Achieve the goal of strengthening the army and building a world-class army”) *People’s Daily*, October 14, 2017, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1014/c1001-29587281.html>

⁷⁹⁷ Yali Chen, “The PLA in China’s Foreign and Security Policy-Making: Drivers, Mechanisms, and Interactions” (PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2015), 21.

⁷⁹⁸ James Mulvenon, “The New Central Military Commission” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 40 (2013), 1.

⁷⁹⁹ Joel Wuthnow, “Xi’s New Central Military Commission: A War Council for Taiwan?” *China Leadership Monitor* no. 74, (2022), 1.

⁸⁰⁰ Jaehwan Lim, “Explaining military reforms under Xi Jinping: military effectiveness, power consolidation, and party-military relations in China” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022), 265.

Chairmen and through the enforcement of the Chairmen Responsibility System, Xi dictates and possesses authority over promotions and personnel.

Since 2012, there has been large-scale restructuring and reshuffling of the senior leadership in the PLA. This is most clearly illustrated with the shakeup in the leadership within the first three years of Xi's leadership. By 2015, "Among the 91 highest ranking military leaders in the PLA, 57 (62.6 percent) are newcomers who emerged after the 18th Party Congress in November 2012."⁸⁰¹ This shuffling of the senior leadership exceeded that of 1973, the last time there was drastic change at the top of the PLA leadership.⁸⁰² The large-scale rearranging of the top military brass provides Xi opportunity to influence strategy. Some PLA scholars also point out that frequent rotations moving personnel around make it more difficult for officers to devise a plot against Xi.⁸⁰³ Overall, Xi's control over who sits at the top of the PLA leadership means that changes at the top—particularly to the CMC—give rise to questions about whether there is a change in Xi's intentions, with the most recent changeup to the CMC reflecting continuity.⁸⁰⁴ Also significant with the most recent CMC is the continued absence of a civilian vice chairmen, reflecting Xi's grasp on power in the PLA has intensified, with no replacement in sight.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰¹ You Ji, "Promoting 'Young Guards': The Recent High Turnover in the PLA Leadership (Part I: Purges and Reshuffles)" *China Leadership Monitor*, 48 (2015), 3, <https://www.hoover.org/research/promoting-young-guards-recent-high-turnover-pla-leadership-part-i-purges-and-reshuffles>

⁸⁰² Ji Beiqun "军队换将直追毛泽东 习近平“深谋远虑” [To reshuffle military generals as fast as Mao: Xi Jinping's 'foresight'] Duowei Newsnet, January 10, 2015, <http://china.dwnews.com/news/2015-01-10/59629032.html> first found in You Ji, *ibid*.

⁸⁰³ Tom Kou, Xi Jinping in Command: Solving the principal-agent problem in CCP-PLA relations? *The China Quarterly* no. 232 (2017), 878.

⁸⁰⁴ Wuthnow, "Xi's New Central Military Commission: A War Council for Taiwan?" *ibid*, 2.

⁸⁰⁵ Lyle J. Morris, "What China's New Central Military Commission Tells Us About Xi's Military Strategy" *Asia Society Policy Institute*, October 27, 2022, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/what-chinas-new-central-military-commission-tells-us-about-xis-military-strategy>

8.1.3 *Prioritizing Hardware and Heartware*

The combination of man and machine has long been considered important for winning modern warfare according to the PLA. Xi has elevated its importance and prioritized weapons, along with the quality of troops—specifically commanders. Analysis of the PLA often focuses on what can be described as hardware—weaponry and equipment. But often ignored in studies and commentary on China’s military is heartware. However, heartware is not as simple to gauge and unlike hardware it cannot be easily measured. Broadly, I consider heartware to consist of issues such as loyalty or political reliability, morale, discipline, and corruption. Similarly, other scholars have used the word software to describe quality of personnel, doctrine, and training.⁸⁰⁶ But that is an odd choice to describe human qualities when the word software makes one think of and denotes computer programming. Thus, I go with heartware. Still other scholars have mentioned the term heartware before for the PLA but use it vaguely without specifying what it exactly entails.⁸⁰⁷ This chapter makes more of an effort to explain what heartware consists of.

Assessments of heartware were done through close reading of the *PLA Daily*. But before examining heartware, I first look at hardware through the examination of basic trends in weaponry over the past two decades, derived from the *Military Balance 2023*. Chapter five examined the capabilities of each branch. Here I expand on the growth of PLA capabilities in the Xi era by looking at basic trends not covered in chapter five to illustrate the prioritization on hardware. I also explore commentary in the *PLA Daily* on the importance of upgrading

⁸⁰⁶ Lee, “Building the Next Generation of Chinese Military Leaders” *ibid*, 135.

⁸⁰⁷ For example, see James Char and Richard Bitzinger, “Reshaping the People’s Liberation Army Since the 18th Party Congress: Politics, Policymaking, and Professionalism” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 39 no. 5-6, (2016), 599-607; the authors briefly talk about it in terms of civil-military relations and softer aspects of the PLA revolution resulting from the reforms, but there is no effort to define it or explain it in more detail.

weaponry, and how its deployment to each service branch has been so rapid it periodically has caused issues with troops keeping up with newer equipment.

Xi has personally given priority to the development of weapons. Ma Dongbing (马栋兵) from the Shanghai Armed Police Corps argued since he came to power “President Xi has insisted on the strategy of giving priority to the development of weapons and equipment position, accelerate the construction of a weapon and equipment system that meets the requirements of information-based warfare and fulfilling missions”.⁸⁰⁸ Commentary in Chinese media recently also emphasizes the importance of hardware for national defense by arguing that through building equipment and weapons faster and better can the PRC ensure national security and rejuvenation have critical support.⁸⁰⁹

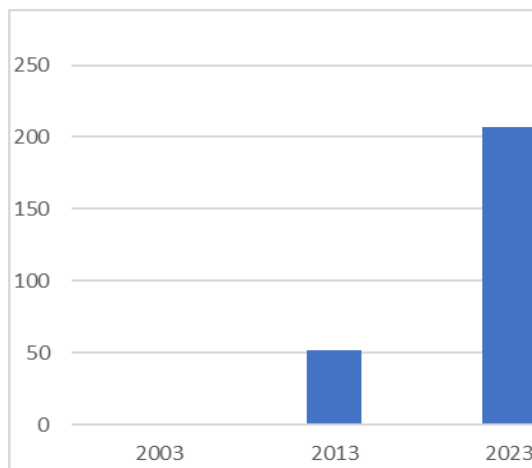


Figure 17: Number of Satellites

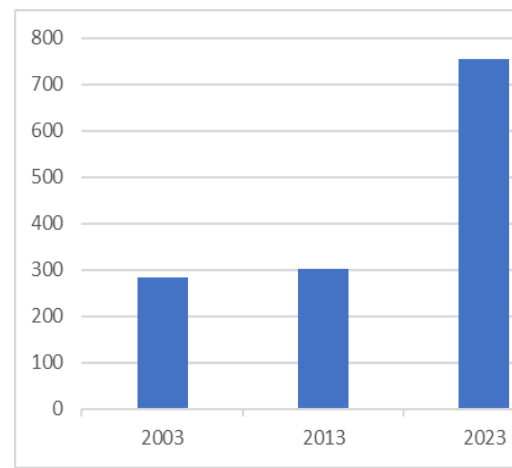


Figure 18: PLAA AD SAM

⁸⁰⁸ 马栋兵 (Ma Dongbing) 人是决定因素, 这一条永远不会变 (People are the deciding factor, this one will never change) *PLA Daily*, June 8, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/08/content_317253.htm

⁸⁰⁹ 刘杨钺, 徐能武 (Liu Yangyue and Xu Nengwu) 大国重器 “中国造” (“Made in China” great power weapon) *PLA Daily*, November 11, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/11/content_327579.htm

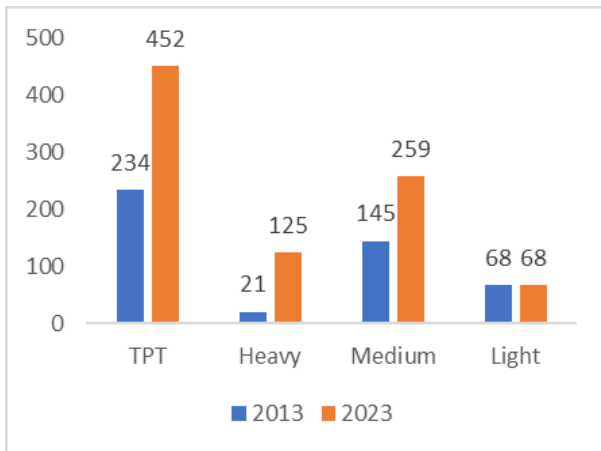


Figure 19: PLAA Number of Helicopters

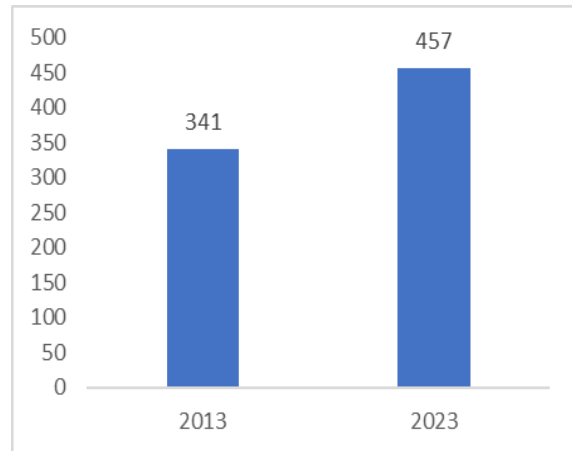


Figure 20: PLAN Aircraft

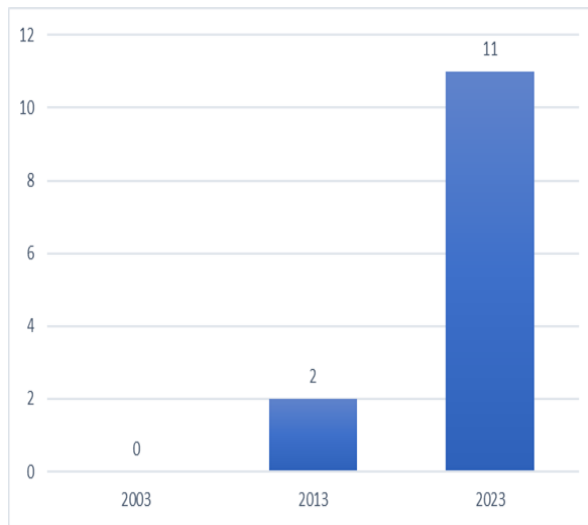


Figure 21: PLAN Main Amphibious Vessels

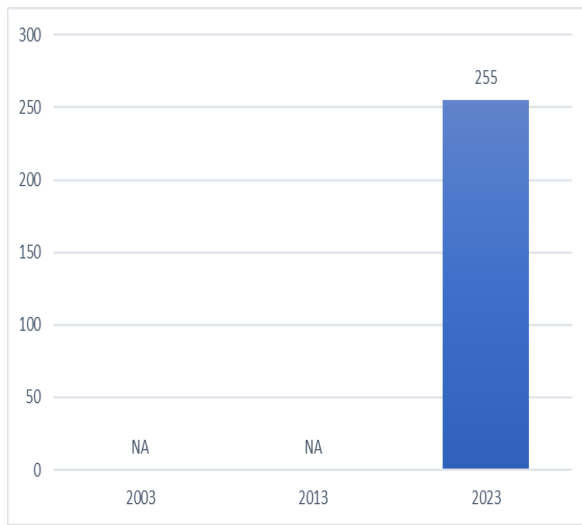


Figure 22: PLAA Landing Craft

The graphs above illustrate the transformation in PLA capabilities over the past decade. The number of satellites is included because it highlights the focus on the need for weapons that are important for winning informationized warfare. Additionally, reports indicate one of the biggest takeaways China has learned from Russia’s war in Ukraine is the use of satellites,

particularly Ukraine's use of and help from the SpaceX starlink satellites.⁸¹⁰ Satellites became a priority under Xi before the war in Ukraine, and now lessons learned from the war has only further highlighted how important they are. Other graphs above illustrate emphasis on air defense, aviation, and amphibious capabilities, reflecting the prominence on high mobility and defense of equipment and territory. Chapter five included brief discussion on the development of hypersonic weapons, in addition to that but harder to measure are smaller things like laser weapons and electromagnetic guns which are being prioritized along with highly mobile artillery and hypersonic weapons.

These weapons are described as leading to a new era of quick-response offensive and defensive confrontation.⁸¹¹ Prioritization of upgrading weapons and equipment is also evident in commentary on training. New equipment and weapons are continuously being installed, causing a large concentration of training devoted to operating the new weapons and equipment.⁸¹² Recently, reports note the stream of new equipment has led to testing the combat capability of new equipment as the focus of military training.⁸¹³ And because “the upgrading of weapons and equipment has been accelerated” the allocation of military work has become increasingly

⁸¹⁰ Chris Buckley, “China Draws Lessons From Russia’s Losses in Ukraine, and Its Gains” *New York Times*, April 1, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/01/world/asia/china-russia-ukraine-war.html>; Eduardo Batista and Greg Tarode, “Studying Ukraine war, China’s military minds fret over US missiles, Starlink” *Reuters*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/studying-ukraine-war-chinas-military-minds-fret-over-us-missiles-starlink-2023-03-08/>

⁸¹¹ 薛闫兴 (Xue Yanxing) 透视智能化新质作战能力 (Perspective of intelligent new combat capability) *PLA Daily*, June 16, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/16/content_317873.htm

⁸¹² 常军, 蒋彬垚 (Chang Jun and Jiang Binyao) 军地携手提升新装保障能力 (Military and civilian cooperate to enhance new equipment support capabilities) *PLA Daily*, June 13 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/13/content_317601.htm; 图片(Picture) *PLA Daily*, April 19 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/19/content_337943.htm

⁸¹³ 宋美洋, 谈文昊 (Song Meiyang and Tan Wenhao) 沙场砺剑织密防空天网 (Sharpen swords on the battlefield and weave dense air defense skynet) *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqx/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-24&paperNumber=01&articleid=904037

detailed with ever growing demand for high-quality, professional recruits with a high degree of specialization in important areas.⁸¹⁴

The significant amount of new weaponry introduced into the military is also evident in reports that the rapid influx of new weapons and equipment has exposed problems. Despite the newer weapons becoming increasingly sophisticated and diverse, there are complaints some units are not maximizing the potential of new weaponry and equipment. Methods for using newer equipment could be more creative, enhancing tactics and combat effectiveness, but units have not capitalized on it.⁸¹⁵ Other units “emphasize proficiency rather than innovative applications, some units emphasize technology rather than tactics, some units emphasize practical operations rather than theoretical learning, and some units emphasize hardware maintenance rather than software maintenance” while commanders are exhorted to take the lead in using the new equipment.⁸¹⁶

Additionally, the constant stream of new equipment and weapons is also evident in one report that acknowledges it has caused issues for families. Many officers and soldiers get relocated because of the need to train or work on new weaponry, forcing separation from family and problems with relocation and changing schools for their children.⁸¹⁷ Prioritization of weapons and equipment is not just quantity as the graphs above showed, but also better

⁸¹⁴ 朱永军, 施振, 张景伟, 周远 (Zhu Yongjun, Shi Zhen, Zhang Jingwei, and Zhou Yuan) 为战选才: 特长兵加速奔向战位 (Selecting talents for the battle: Special soldiers speed up to the battle position) *PLA Daily*, June 13, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/13/content_317609.htm

⁸¹⁵ 张西成 (Zhang Xicheng) “一样的武器”也能打“不一样的仗” (“The same weapon” can also fight “different battles”) *PLA Daily*, March 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/22/content_336041.htm

⁸¹⁶ 徐畅 (Xu Chang) 装备智能化呼唤“智慧的脑” (Intelligent equipment calls for “intelligent brain”) *PLA Daily*, May 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-15&paperNumber=06&articleid=905827

⁸¹⁷ 吴龙, 伍双林, 李建文 (Wu Long Wu Shuanglin, and Li Jianwen) 跨区域解难帮困暖兵心添动力 (Cross regional problem-solving and assistance, warming the hearts of soldiers and adding motivation) *PLA Daily*, May 4, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-04&paperNumber=03&articleid=904728

technology and higher quality. Since the Jiang administration there has been consistent refrain about the PLA needing to shift quantity to quality. Under Xi quality has dramatically improved.

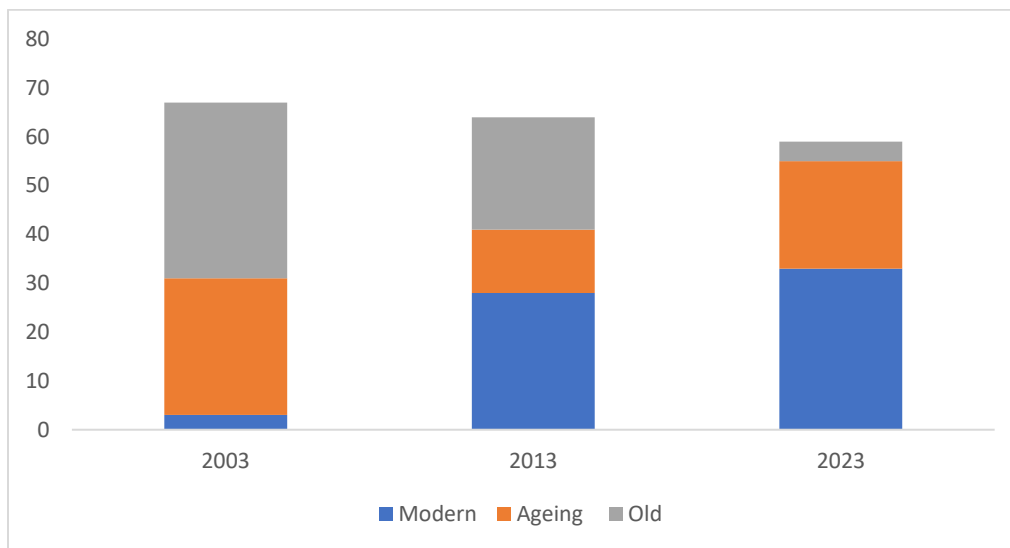


Figure 23: PLAN Submarines

Source: Military Balance 2023

Graphs 7-9 highlight some of these changes. Among some platforms the quantity has not changed much over time, but the quality has significantly improved. One notable area is submarines. In 2003 over half of China’s submarines were old (what is characterized as anything over 35 years old). Currently, all of China’s submarines are either modern or ageing (modern as anything less than 20 years old and ageing between 20-35 years old). The PLA has achieved a qualitative leap in weaponry after focusing on a quantitative leap in the past.⁸¹⁸ For China both quality and quantity are important. With warfare accelerating toward an intellegentized form, “the rapid and large-scale growth of new weapons and equipment and new combat forces has

⁸¹⁸ 周明顺, 陈晓瞳 (Zhou Mingshun and Chen Xiaotong) 试训融合, 海战场上当先锋 (Trial training fusion, be a pioneer on the sea battlefield) *PLA Daily*, May 16, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-16&paperNumber=02&articleid=905928

become the commanding height of strategic competition between major powers and the key force to win the future.”⁸¹⁹ Weaponry and equipment is now at the forefront, essentially, of China’s competition with the U.S.

8.1.4 Heartware

In addition to hardware, Xi has prioritized heartware. Inspecting the nature of heartware entails things not easily identified or measured but are nonetheless crucial for a military. Its importance is captured in the idea that warfare is not just a contest of equipment and weapons, “but also a contest of spiritual will.”⁸²⁰ In order to fortify the army “one must first strengthen the soul.”⁸²¹ Along these lines, one trend Xi has consistently harkened on is the PLA needing to energetically develop a fighting spirit of “not afraid of hardship and not afraid of death”.⁸²² Strengthening the PLA’s fighting spirit was highlighted at the most recent Party Congress, stressing its importance for the military.⁸²³ Following the Party Congress in late 2022, there is constant refrain in the pages of the *PLA Daily* calling for officers and soldiers to seek, or ask for hardship (自找吃苦). Asking for hardship is important for solidifying strength, character, will,

⁸¹⁹ 胡有才(Hu Youcai) 厘清加强实战化训练着力点 (Clarify the focus of strengthening practical training) *PLA Daily*, May 18, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-18&paperNumber=07&articleid=906129

⁸²⁰ 岳小林, 任增荣 (Yue Xiaolin and Ren Zengrong) “生命线” 彰显生命力 ("Lifeline" showcases vitality) *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-24&paperNumber=02&articleid=904019

⁸²¹ 苏新波 (Su Xinbo) 始终从政治高度思考和处理军事问题 (Always consider and handle military issues from a political perspective) *PLA Daily*, May 17, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-17&paperNumber=06&articleid=906041

⁸²² Zhanyu and Yuning, “Firmly Establish the Guiding Position of Xi Jinping’s Military Strategic Thought” *ibid*, 16.

⁸²³ 吴林先, 李亮亮 (Wu Linxian and Li Liangliang) 与时代同行为强军阅读 (Read with the same age as a strong army) *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-24&paperNumber=01&articleid=904033

and strengthening muscles and bones. However, some soldiers have no desire to ask for hardship and would rather lie down.⁸²⁴

The prominence on strengthening the PLA's fighting spirit and seeking hardship by Xi comes from worries that soldiers—especially younger ones—possess insufficient fighting spirit. Xi's concerns about the PLA's fighting spirit were evident immediately after taking over for Hu. In a reported speech not long after becoming CMC chairman, Xi complained that “What is even more worrying is that some officers and soldiers have a weak sense of crisis, slack in thought and spirit, and even have a mentality that they cannot fight a war, and it is not my turn to fight a war. This kind of thinking and mentality is unacceptable!”⁸²⁵

Worse, PLA soldiers not only do not have fighting experience, but they also have a phobia of fighting. This is especially problematic because the CCP believes the road ahead likely will be one that is increasingly stormy.⁸²⁶ Soldiers must be capable of doing what soldiers are supposed to do: fight. Xi appears to be attempting to try and have soldiers brace for a future where conflict is more likely. Instilling a fighting spirit and focusing on war is a requirement for any military, but it is something the CCP has not been able to count on with the continued problem of the peace disease. Recent reports, however, indicate troops are working on attitudes toward fighting. One brigade has adopted the battle cry: “Don't wear military uniforms if you

⁸²⁴ 李宝亭 (Li Baoting) 青年官兵要学会 “自找苦吃” (Young officers and soldiers must learn to "ask for hardship") *PLA Daily*, May 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-18&paperNumber=06&articleid=906093

⁸²⁵ Xi Jinping in “英明治军背后: 习总回忆曾有老领导叮嘱注意三件事” (Behind the wise rule of the army: President Xi recalled that an old leader once told him to pay attention to three things) *Sina*, August 3, 2015, <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/2015-08-03/1009836301.html>

⁸²⁶ 贾乾 (Jia Gan) 努力成为本职工作的行家里手 (Strive to become an expert in your job) *PLA Daily*, March 23, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/23/content_336135.htm

don't want to fight, and don't come to the army if you are afraid of suffering or death’”.⁸²⁷

Fighting spirit is one form of heartware, the other aspects continue below.

8.1.5 *Loyalty and Reliability*

The next aspect of heartware this section covers is political loyalty, or reliability.

Stressing the absolute authority of the CCP over the PLA has always been emphasized, starting with Mao’s famous dictum that “our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party.”⁸²⁸ However, under Xi it has been vigorously renewed and elevated. From close reading of the *PLA Daily* it appears there is still a large degree of suspicion held by Xi and the Party that some leading military cadres are not loyal or reliable.

One article bluntly pointed out that:

However, in real life, there are still a small number of leading cadres who pretend to be loyal to the party and discount it. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the leading cadres investigated and dealt with by the whole army, in the final analysis, have had problems with their loyalty to the party. Some of them have duplicity and inconsistency in their words and deeds; Such practices not only affect the image of the army, but also harm themselves and their families.⁸²⁹

Fan Jing from AMS lamented that leading cadres purportedly lack personal experience—and do not understand—the paramount importance of the party’s command of the gun. Fan also went on to warn that there “must be no wavering, no hesitation, or any ambiguity.”⁸³⁰

⁸²⁷ 王振江, 董朝武 凡春龙 (Wang Zhenjiang, Dong Chaowu, and Fan Chunlong) “三信一书” 共育战斗精神 (“Three Beliefs and One Book” to cultivate fighting spirit) *PLA Daily*, May 10, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-10&paperNumber=02&articleid=905353

⁸²⁸ Mao Zedong, "Problems of War and Strategy" *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* 2 (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1967), 224.

⁸²⁹ 盧俊 (Lu Jun) 铸牢忠诚, 要害在“绝对”两个字 (The key to forging loyalty lies in the word "absolute") *PLA Daily*, April 26, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-26&paperNumber=06&articleid=904340

⁸³⁰ 范晶 (Fan Jing) 永远不能变的军魂 永远不能丢的命根子 (The soul of the army that can never change, the lifeblood that can never be lost) *PLA Daily*, July 6, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/06/content_319188.htm

Shoring up a perceived lack of political loyalty in the PLA is a key component of strengthening heartware. After ten years of investing an immense amount of energy into cleaning up the PLA's political ecology, it's revealing that there is still this much concern about the loyalty of leading cadres. Emphasis on political loyalty—aside from protecting any challenges to the CCP's rule—also stems from a belief that when an army possesses noble ideals it takes on a political soul that will not be afraid of obstacles or hardships.⁸³¹ The emphasis on loyalty in the Xi era also appears in renewed pushes to ensure political loyalty in the PLA through deepening inspections. Over the past two years, authorities have consistently issued new regulations where political and ideological inspections must now be tested with actual results. Rather than just checking notes and registrations there is now also a description of “examining the unity of knowledge and action.”⁸³² It is not clear what the unity of knowledge and action exactly consists of, but inspections to enforce greater loyalty through expanding inspections is evident. Loyalty to the party is paramount for the PLA's army building, with soldiers instructed to talk about politics.⁸³³ Those who refuse to talk about politics should even be punished.⁸³⁴

8.1.6 *Discipline*

The third aspect of heartware is discipline, with its importance highlighted in the belief that “Discipline is to a political party and an army what water and air are to life” and guidance

⁸³¹ 杨四为 (Yang Siwei) 交出“以学铸魂”优秀答卷 (Hand over the excellent answer sheet of "forging the soul through learning") *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-24&paperNumber=01&articleid=904036

⁸³² 陈岩 (Chen Yan) 我要求战士这样记教育笔记 (I ask soldiers to take educational notes like this) *PLA Daily*, April 4, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/04/content_336952.htm

⁸³³ 杨超 (Yang Chao) 铸牢党对军队绝对领导这个强军之魂 (Solidify the Party's absolute leadership over the military, the soul of a strong military) *People's Daily*, April 26, 2022, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-04/26/nw.D110000renmrb_20220426_3-09.htm

⁸³⁴ 永远不变的军魂 (The eternal military spirit), *ibid.*

for discipline construction to be placed in a more prominent position.⁸³⁵ Discipline is described as important for combat effectiveness⁸³⁶ and helps fight guard against corruption. Xi made it evident early in his tenure that he thought discipline was lacking in the PLA and needed strengthening. In 2014, Xi convened a two-day PLA political work conference attended by four-hundred and twenty generals. In his speech at the conference, Xi pointed out numerous problems in the PLA, with organizational discipline seen as one of the root causes for the problems that had festered.⁸³⁷

Prior to Xi's speech at Gutian however, the CMC with Xi's guidance issued "the spirit of the eight central regulations, the ten regulations of the Military Commission and their implementation rules".⁸³⁸ Most of these regulations were aimed at problems with corruption and political work. In 2016 Xi also added a strong disciplinary governance mechanism to oversee the political work system within the PLA.⁸³⁹ Emphasis on discipline, particularly early in the Xi administration, is also reflected in the number of times the word discipline (纪律) appears in the *PLA Daily*. From 2004-2011 it averaged less than 200 times per year before starting to spike in 2012. During 2014 and 2015, at the time of the Gutian conference and start of the drafting of military reforms it again dramatically expanded, appearing 752 times in 2015. Overall, the term discipline has appeared with much greater regularity than the Hu era. But despite the consistent effort by Xi to enforce greater discipline in the PLA, there are hints that the progress made to

⁸³⁵ 马腾, 杨慧莘 (Ma Tengfei and Yang Yixin) 让铁的纪律成为官兵自觉遵循 (Let the iron discipline become self-consciously followed by officers and soldiers) *PLA Daily*, April 14, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/14/content_337599.htm

⁸³⁶ 李家华 (Li Jiahua) 注重培养和强化 “自觉的纪律” (Focus on cultivating and strengthening "conscious discipline") *PLA Daily*, April 26, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-26&paperNumber=07&articleid=904303

⁸³⁷ James Mulvenon, "Hotel Gutian: We Haven't Had That Spirit Here Since 1929" *China Leadership Monitor* no.46, (2015), 4.

⁸³⁸ 姜健 (Jiang Jian) 正风肃纪没有休止符 (There is no rest for positive wind and discipline) *PLA Daily*, December 14, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-12/14/content_329833.htm

⁸³⁹ Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate*, *ibid*, 45.

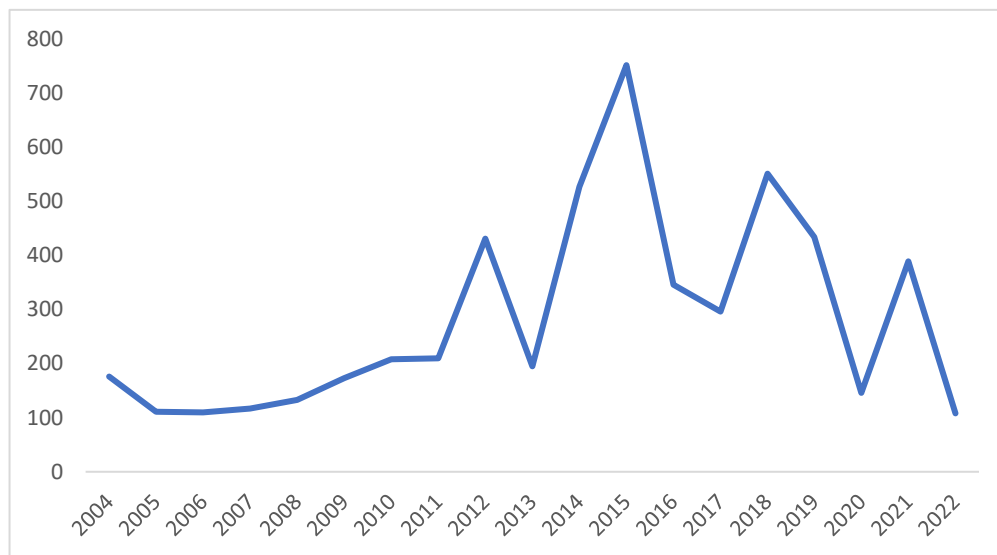


Figure 24: Number of appearances in the PLA Daily of the word discipline

Source: CNKI

forge a more disciplined military is still unsatisfactory. Themed education on solving “outstanding problems in integrity and self-discipline, focusing on rectifying the lack of awe of party rules and discipline” were just recently rolled out with complaints that “the phenomenon of violating discipline still exists.”⁸⁴⁰ And in 2022, the CMC issued “Measures on Strengthening the Construction of the Military Integrity Culture in the New Era” which also highlighted the need to improve discipline.⁸⁴¹

8.1.7 *Morale*

Concerns about morale is a continuation of the Hu era, during which there was a high degree of emphasis in articles on army building about the need to improve morale and raise the

⁸⁴⁰ 李纪元 (Li Jiyuan) 廉洁奉公树立新风 (Clean and honest in serving the public, establishing a new atmosphere) *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-24&paperNumber=06&articleid=903991

⁸⁴¹ 印发《关于加强新时代军队廉洁文化建设的措施》 (Printing and distributing "Measures on Strengthening the Construction of the Military Integrity Culture in the New Era") *PLA Daily*, September 28, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/28/content_324984.htm

life-quality of soldiers. Under Xi that has continued and expanded. But morale has also taken on a more wide-ranging meaning. Schools are instructed to consider cultivating morality as one part of the so-called fundamental tasks, alongside educating people to prepare for war.⁸⁴²

Assessments of soldiers' morality needs are now called on to be more concrete. Perhaps unsurprisingly under Xi, the content of assessment of morality is not what one would immediately think. These assessments of morality indicate investigating troops politically and giving attention to identification of loyalty.⁸⁴³ Military academies are called on to cultivate morality of cadets "to ensure that they will always be a strong position for upholding the leadership of the party, and to cultivate staunch flag bearers and reliable successors."⁸⁴⁴

Morale in the Xi era also takes on more traditional aspects as well, such as quality of life and making soldiers feel they are being cared for. Something that periodically comes up is cultivating love and the idea of making education "heart-warming". Officers and educators ought to use affection and passion while caring, helping, and trying to understand people.⁸⁴⁵ There is also an acknowledgement that one phenomenon that affects morale among the troops is the idea if one soldier makes a mistake everybody else also suffers from it. However, soldiers are repulsed and annoyed by this approach, thus, some call for standards that should vary for everyone.⁸⁴⁶ Overall, like discipline, the word morale (德) has appeared in the *PLA Daily* at a

⁸⁴² 探索人才培养新模式助力战斗力提升 (Exploring new modes of talent cultivation to enhance combat effectiveness) *PLA Daily*, April 18, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/18/content_337874.htm

⁸⁴³ 程柏华, 刘代坤 (Cheng Bohua and Liu Daikun) 坚持德才兼备以德为先的用人标准 (Adhere to the standard of employing people with both ability and integrity and putting morality first) *PLA Daily*, March 20, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/20/content_335893.htm

⁸⁴⁴ 黎湘 (Li Xiang) 把立德树人贯穿军事教育全过程 (Integrating Morality and Cultivating Talents throughout the Whole Process of Military Education) *PLA Daily*, June 27, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/27/content_318569.htm

⁸⁴⁵ 李善禄, 郭龙佼 (Li Shanlu and Guo Longjiao) 把教育做到官兵心坎上 (Putting education at the heart of officers and soldiers) *PLA Daily*, September 8, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-09/08/content_323697.htm

⁸⁴⁶ 王健康 (Wang Jian Kang) 带兵“金标准”和“今标准” (Leading troops "gold standard" and "today standard") *PLA Daily*, November 3, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-11/03/content_327022.htm

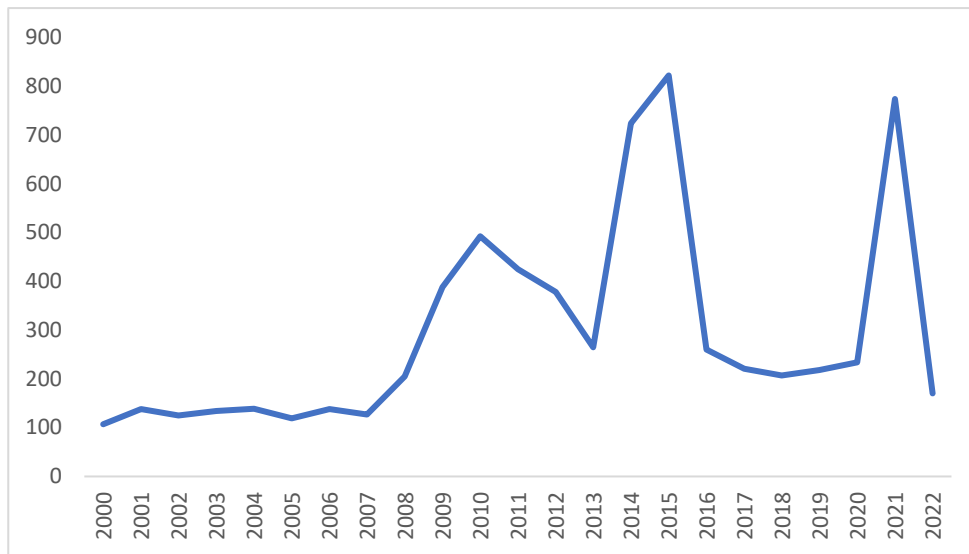


Figure 25: Number of times the word morality has appeared in the PLA Daily

Source: CNKI

higher frequency than before. There is extreme variation in the Xi era but the three highest amounts of 822 (2015), 774 (2021), and 721 (2014), all vastly exceed the highest number in either the Hu or Jiang era of 492 (2010). Xi believes boosting morale is viewed as an important part of building a strong army. An army without good morale is less likely able to fight and win wars, a key theme Xi has called on the PLA to focus on.

8.1.8 Corruption

Xi's signature campaign since taking power has been anti-corruption, which has also reached deep into the PLA. A clean military devoid of corruption was highlighted by Xi when he emphasized ““The army is armed with guns, and there must be no place for corrupt elements to

hide in the army.”⁸⁴⁷ By 2016, over sixty officers were arrested,⁸⁴⁸ forty-six of whom were tigers⁸⁴⁹ (those with the rank of major general and above). After the arrests in 2014 and 2015 of retired officers Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong, the top two military advisors to Hu Jintao,⁸⁵⁰ purges of senior officers continued. In 2017, Fang Fenghui, chief of the joint staff department, and Zhang Yang, director of the military’s political department—both had been members of the CMC—were abruptly removed.⁸⁵¹ Shortly after, Zhang committed suicide while under house arrest,⁸⁵² and Fang was eventually charged and removed from the military.⁸⁵³ Fang and Zhang’s removal signaled the corruption campaign was still taking aim at high-ranking officers going into Xi’s second five year term in office.

Fang and Zhang’s removal also enabled Xi to further consolidate his control over the PLA and insert allies into the key positions that they had occupied.⁸⁵⁴ Overall, more than one

⁸⁴⁷ 柴国梁, 费宏迅 (Chai Guoliang and Fei Hongxun) 军中绝不能有腐败分子藏身之地 (There must be no hiding place for corrupt elements to hide in the military) *PLA Daily*, August 3, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-08/03/content_321182.htm

⁸⁴⁸ Derek Grossman and Michael S. Chase, “Xi’s Purge of the Military Prepares the Chinese Army for Confrontation” *Rand*, April 21, 2016, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/04/xis-purge-of-the-military-prepares-the-chinese-army.html>

⁸⁴⁹ “Visualizing China’s Anti-Corruption Campaign” *China File*, August 15, 2018, <https://www.chinafile.com/infographics/visualizing-chinas-anti-corruption-campaign>

⁸⁵⁰ Joel MCIadden, Kim Fassler, and Justin Godby, “The New PLA Leadership: Xi Molds the PLA to His Vision” in Saunders et al eds, *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, (Washington D.C: National Defense University Press, 2019), 559.

⁸⁵¹ Chris Buckley and Steven Lee Meyers, “Xi Jinping Presses Military Overhaul, and Two Generals Disappear” *New York Times*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/world/asia/xi-jinping-military-china-purge.html>

⁸⁵² 张阳自杀身亡 [Zhang Yang committed suicide] *Xinhua*, November 28, 2017, http://www.xinhua.net.com/politics/2017-11/28/c_1122023059.htm

⁸⁵³ 中共中央决定给予房峰辉开除党籍处分 将房峰辉涉嫌严重违法犯罪案移送审查起诉 [The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided to give Fang Fenghui the punishment of expulsion from the party and transfer Fang Fenghui’s suspected serious crimes for review and prosecution] *Xinhua*, October 16, 2018, <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1614476017573780262&wfr=spider&for=pc>

⁸⁵⁴ “China expels two top former generals from Communist Party for corruption” *Reuters*, October 16, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-corruption-military/china-expels-two-top-former-generals-from-communist-party-for-corruption-idUSKCN1MQ1HC>

hundred generals were imprisoned and numerous lower-level officers were sacked.⁸⁵⁵ Since the 18th Party Congress in 2012, the PLA has praised the work done to eliminate the poisonous influence of Guo, Xu, Fang, and Zhang from the military.⁸⁵⁶ However, despite immense efforts to rectify corruption, it still exists and remains a concern.⁸⁵⁷ Evidence of this is reflected in recent warnings against corruption that takes place online, telling cadres not to take online gifts.⁸⁵⁸ Even if corruption were to be completely resolved, institutional prevention can never relax.⁸⁵⁹

The continuous calls to guard against corruption will likely continue for the foreseeable future because it is a core aspect of Xi's efforts to improve the PLA's heartware, which is seen as having a deleterious effect on officers and soldiers.⁸⁶⁰ Additionally, the recent purge of tigers in the PLARF—covered more later—suggests ten years into Xi's anti-corruption campaign there remains major problems with corruption. By prioritizing heartware, Xi has aimed to fundamentally rewire the attitude of the military so that it has “a new mental outlook, and a new army atmosphere.”⁸⁶¹

⁸⁵⁵ Jun Mai, “Xi Jinping’s anti-corruption drive brings down more generals than 20th century warfare” *South China Morning Post*, November 17, 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2120430/xi-jinpings-anti-corruption-drive-brings-down-more>

⁸⁵⁶ 矢志强军向复兴 (Determined to strengthen the army towards revival) *PLA Daily*, August 26, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-08/26/content_322798.htm

⁸⁵⁷ Jiyuan, “Integrity and honesty set up a new style” *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁸ 李晓辉, 张凡 (Li Xiaohui and Zhang Fan) 坚决向线上礼物说“不” (Say no to online gifts) *PLA Daily*, November 14, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-11/14/content_327767.htm

⁸⁵⁹ 郭亮, 张震 (Guo Liang and Zhang Zhen) 习近平“强军梦”思想指引下军队反腐工作的提升 (The improvement of military anti-corruption work under the guidance of Xi Jinping's "dream of strengthening the military") *人民论坛* (People's Forum) no.29, (2014), 60.

⁸⁶⁰ Tiejun, Xiaofeng, and Runqi, *ibid.*, 10.

⁸⁶¹ 刘正斌, 胡守佳 (Liu Zhengbin and Hu Shoujia) 书写政治建军的时代华章 (Writing the Era of Political and Military Construction) *PLA Daily*, March 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/22/content_336046.htm

8.1.9 Pushing for Greater MCI

Under Xi, MCI's importance has grown exponentially.⁸⁶² And just like the reforms, Xi is portrayed as the one who worked hard to push for greater development of military-civilian integration.⁸⁶³ Efforts by the CCP to promote greater integration—or Xi's preferred use of the term fusion—dates back to the 1980s when Deng Xiaoping declared there was a need to “accelerate the establishment of the military-civilian integration innovation system” through making “greater efforts to promote the development of the military through science and technology, adhere to the need for combat effectiveness in scientific and technological

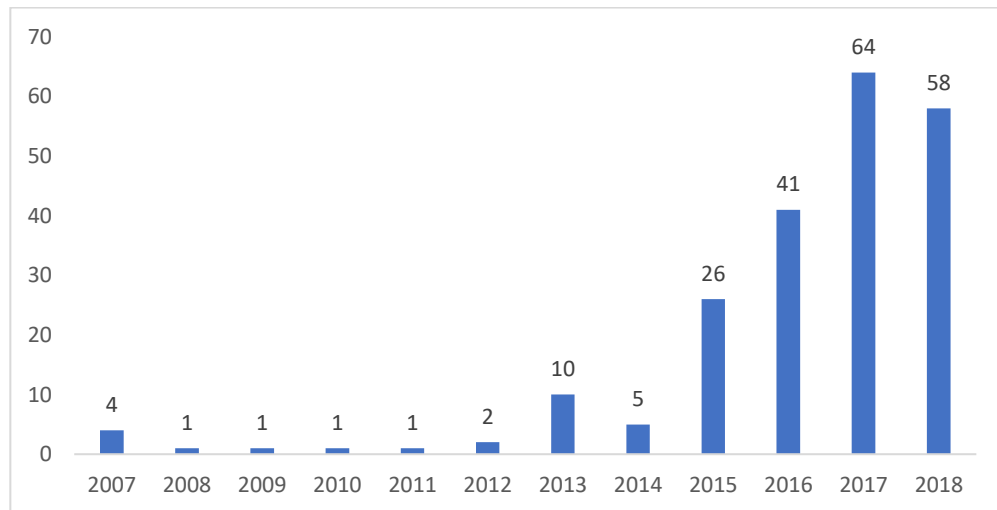


Figure 26: Number of MCI Policy Documents Issued

Source: Data taken from *Innovate to Dominate* p.107

innovation, and provide strong scientific and technological support for the construction of our military.”⁸⁶⁴ However, this never transpired to the extent that Deng called for, and efforts for greater integration prior to Xi largely failed. One example of the push for stronger integration in

⁸⁶² Brendan Mulvaney, “Introduction” in Alex Stone and Peter Wood, *China's Military-Civil Fusion Strategy: A View from Chinese Strategists* (Montgomery AL: Aerospace Studies Institute, 2020), 2.

⁸⁶³ Xiping and Junping, *ibid*, 18.

⁸⁶⁴ Xiping and Junping, *ibid*, 23.

the Xi era is the number of military-civil fusion policy documents that have been promulgated, as figure two illustrates above. The amount of MCI documents has tremendously multiplied under the Xi administration. Another example is the amount of money raised for MCI funds, as figure three shows below. The number of documents issued, and funds raised for strengthening MCI is evidence of Xi's desire to elevate MCI's importance and succeed where previous efforts have

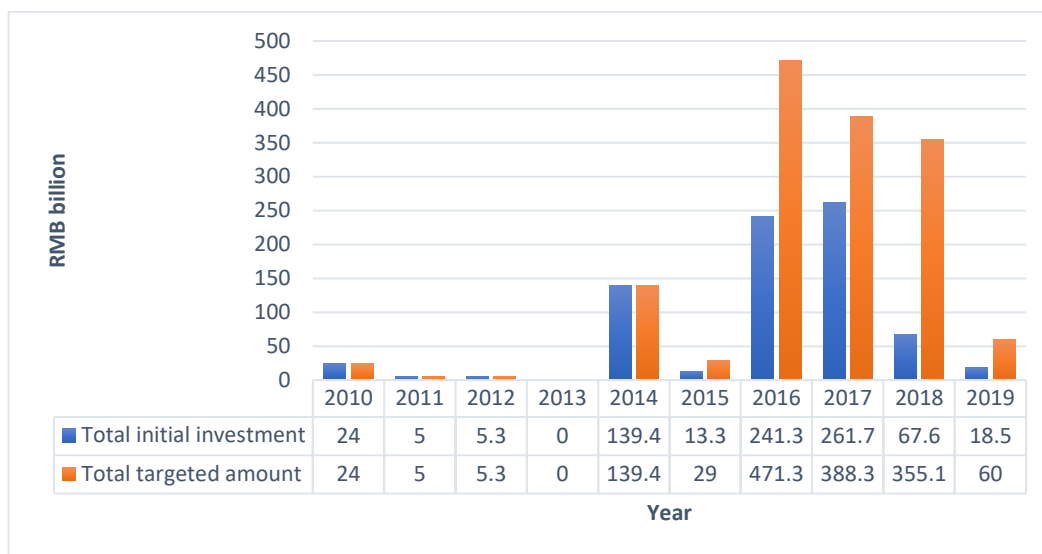


Figure 27: MCI Funds Raised Annually

Source: Data taken from *Innovate to Dominate* p.129

failed. Further evidence of the push to strengthen MCI and integration is increased discussion of an integrated national strategic system (一体化国家战略体系). At the 19th Party Congress, Xi mentioned greater achievements will be made in building integrated national strategies.⁸⁶⁵ Hints that MCI would be strengthened came in the months prior to the 19th CPC National Congress when Xi chaired the first meeting of the Central Military-Civilian Fusion Development Committee. Li Keqiang (former premier), Liu Yunshan, and Zhang Gaoli (both Politburo

⁸⁶⁵ Xi Jinping, "Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress" *ibid.*

Standing Committee members and deputies of the new committee) also attended. At the meeting Xi proclaimed that MCI was transitioning from initial to deep integration, and the integration of civilians and military needed to be better and faster.⁸⁶⁶ Greater emphasis on developing INSS is a result of Xi pushing for better and faster integration of the military and civilian sectors. As figure

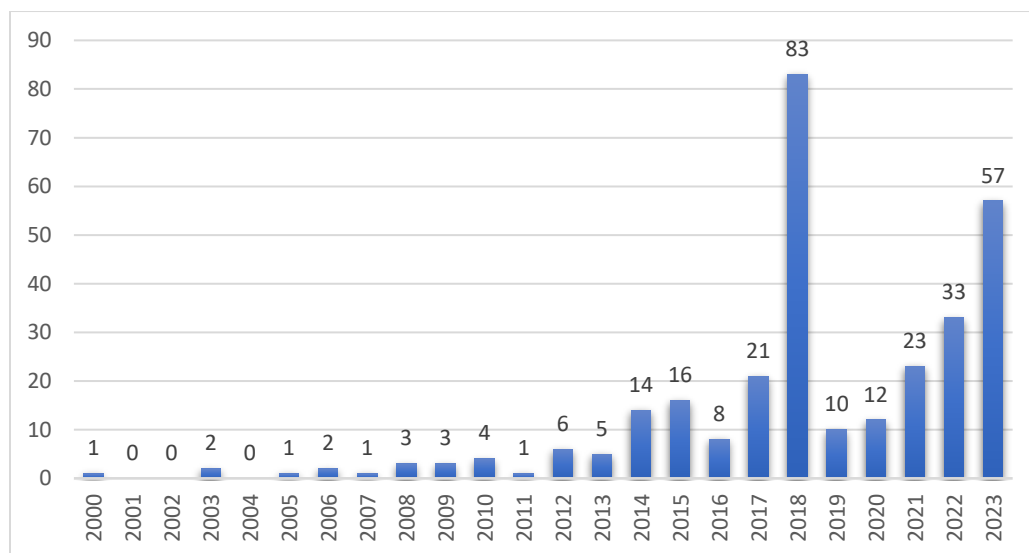


Figure 28: Appearance of Integrated National Strategic System in PLA Daily

Source: CNKI

eleven shows above, INSS has appeared with much more frequency in the *PLA Daily* during the Xi era. It jumped drastically in 2018 following the 19th Party Congress, and then declined afterward. Recently however, it is rising once again, with it mentioned fifty-seven times through the first four months of 2023, more than 2021 and 2022 combined.

During the 14th National People's Congress in March 2023, numerous articles ran in the *PLA Daily* on the importance of deepening INSS. At the NPC Xi also gave a speech in a meeting

⁸⁶⁶ 习近平主持召开中央军民融合发展委员会第一次全体会议 (Xi Jinping presided over the first plenary meeting of the Central Military-Civilian Fusion Development Committee) *Xinuanet*, June, 21, 2017, https://www.cma.gov.cn/2011xwzx/2011xqxxw/2011xqxyw/201706/t20170621_426081.html?from=groupmessage

with delegates from the PLA and Armed Police Force arguing the INSS needed to be improved and consolidated.⁸⁶⁷ Exact details of what INSS entails however, remains a little vague. It's described as involving a wide range of fields and is a systematic, complex project. Most broadly, it "is a strategic deployment aimed at better coordinating development and security, and better coordinating economic construction and national defense construction."⁸⁶⁸ Military modernization requires the support of science and technology, the national economy, and human resources.⁸⁶⁹ INSS aims to deepen integration of the economy, science and technology, and strength of all sectors of the country in support of military modernization and national defense. Some specific areas pointed to for greater integration development are ocean power, aerospace power, network power, manufacturing power, and calls to make use of the whole society.⁸⁷⁰ INSS is now considered as a strategic issue that must be solved and studied in army building and national defense.⁸⁷¹

In sum, INSS could be explained as a deeper form of MCI. Strengthening INSS is becoming more important because any country that can maximize the integration of its overall strength will possess a military advantage.⁸⁷² Complete mobilization of political, cultural,

⁸⁶⁷ 李建文, 张笑语 (Li Jianwen and Zhang Xiaoyu) 坚持集中统一领导, 开创“一体化”新局面 (Adhere to centralized and unified leadership, and create a new situation of "integration") *PLA Daily*, March 10, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/10/content_335179.htm

⁸⁶⁸ 李秦卫 (Li Qinwei) 以“一体化”实现“最大化” (Maximize through 'integration') *PLA Daily*, March 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/09/content_335159.htm

⁸⁶⁹ 钱晓虎 (Qian Xiaohu) 实现富国与强军相统一 (Realizing the unity of a wealthy country and a strong military) *PLA Daily*, March 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/09/content_335160.htm

⁸⁷⁰ 许梦清, 刘维阳 (Xu Mengqing and Lu Weiyang) 构建一体化的国家战略体系和能力 (Build an integrated national strategic system and capabilities) *PLA Daily*, May 16, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-05/16/content_315662.htm

⁸⁷¹ 周碧松, 杨钧 (Zhou Bisong and Yang Jun) 巩固提高一体化国家战略体系和能力 (Consolidate and improve the integrated national strategic system and capabilities) *PLA Daily*, December 27, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-12/27/content_330732.htm

⁸⁷² 李晓阳 (Li Xiaoyang) 巩固提高一体化国家战略体系和能力 (Consolidate and improve the integrated national strategic system and capabilities) *PLA Daily*, March 20, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/20/content_335894.htm

economic, military, and diplomatic forces is required to overcome the “formidable opponent”⁸⁷³ (likely referring to the U.S.). Warfare is viewed as a battle between the overall strength of each country’s system, or that is a lesson China has taken from Rome versus Carthage. Rome adopted a citizen militia system that produced a patriotic citizen spirit, whereas Carthage hired mercenaries. Thus, combat effectiveness of a military “should not only depend on individual outstanding commanders but should depend on outstanding talent groups and a complete war system.”⁸⁷⁴

The war system alone is not enough, but also the resources devoted to the war system is important, because conflict “on the battlefield is not only a contest between military systems, but also a systemic confrontation based on the overall strength of the country. In future wars, whoever can maximize the system integration of the country's overall strength will win the military competitive advantage.”⁸⁷⁵ Xi believes that China needs to marshal all the country’s talent and resources to accelerate and enhance military modernization and solidify China’s war system in a potential showdown with the U.S. Strengthening MCI and pushing INSS is one way to help improve that goal. Without Xi’s personal involvement MCI would have continued to languish.⁸⁷⁶

⁸⁷³ 夏成效, 张红梅 (Xia Chengxiao and Zhang Hongmei) 准确把握人民战争战略战术内在要求 (Accurately Grasp the Inherent Requirements of People's War Strategy and Tactics) *PLA Daily*, March 30, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/30/content_336623.htm

⁸⁷⁴ 毛炜豪 (Mao Weihao) 从足球战术 “tiki-taka” 说起 (From football tactics "tiki-taka") *PLA Daily*, March 23, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/23/content_336144.htm

⁸⁷⁵ 夏杰 (Xian Jie) 用全新观念抓好练兵备战 (Use new concepts to do a good job in training and preparing for war) *PLA Daily*, May 11, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-11&paperNumber=07&articleid=905579

⁸⁷⁶ Cheung, *Innovate to Dominate*, *ibid*, 140.

8.2 Conclusion

Xi Jinping set out to change and mold the PLA into a force better equipped with increasingly modernized weapons while also trying to make it more resemble a force that is better disciplined. Prior to Xi, the PLA increasingly became undisciplined, corrupt, and lacked so-called fighting spirit. It did not have the appearance of a modern army. After quickly establishing authority over the PLA, Xi implemented what has been described as shock-and-reform, or shock-and-awe, changes in the military. The reforms reoriented the military so that it now has “a new system, a new structure, a new pattern, and a new look, and its modernization level and actual combat capabilities have been significantly improved.”⁸⁷⁷ While deep issues persist, the changes improved the PLA’s command structure, with the goal of conducting joint operations in a potential war also have been improved. Because the PLA has not fought in a war in four decades, however, it is uncertain how much its joint operations capabilities have improved. By making the structure more amenable to joint operations, however, the foundation is in place to carry out more complex military operations with greater ability than in the past with its outdated command structure.

Overall, Xi’s influence on China’s military strategy has included overseeing and implementing the most extensive reforms since the PRC’s founding, controlling personnel, and prioritizing hardware and heartware. Rapid acceleration of producing heavy weaponry such as ICBMs, aircraft carriers, Y-20 Transport planes, J-20 fighter jets, and satellites reflect where the main emphasis on prioritization of weapons has been directed. But indications from the *PLA Daily* suggest introduction of new equipment has been rapid and widespread across all the

⁸⁷⁷ 王耀靖 (Wang Yaojing) 坚持党员干部带头 (Adhere to party members and cadres taking the lead) *PLA Daily*, May 30, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-30&paperNumber=06&articleid=906965

different branches and units within each branch.⁸⁷⁸ This stress on the modernization of equipment has been a signature accomplishment with Xi described as the one who has pushed for the rapid advances in weapons.

With this rapid production of new weaponry that is also higher quality, Xi has declared the PLA now has newfound capabilities it traditionally has not had, stating: “in the past, there was less steel and more gas, but now there is more steel, more gas, and stronger bones.”⁸⁷⁹ More steel refers to weapons and equipment, gas is energy or the PLA’s fighting spirit, while stronger bones seems to be something similar to gas, a form of courage and attitude, or people who have experienced hardship. To illustrate how some talk about strong and weak bones, Duan Siqi wrote that “The Chinese people do not believe in evil, are not afraid of ghosts, and are not “soft bones””.⁸⁸⁰ There is a courage and mental strength involved in the phrase.

Xi’s focus on these issues is largely done with the aim of forming a military that can fight and win wars. Possessing more weapons with modernized technology is not enough, the individuals operating the equipment is just as important. Finally, Xi’s influence on the PLA in general is a consistent effort at strengthening MCI. Comprehensive national strength is one of four main areas identified by Xi for the PLA to be capable of fighting and winning wars—along with strategy and tactics, systems and mechanisms, and weapons and equipment.⁸⁸¹ Utilizing all

⁸⁷⁸ 陈典宏, 汪涛, 倪子纯 (Chen Dianhong, Wang Tao, and Ni Zichun) 党委委员领研战法谋创新 (Members of the party committee lead research on tactics and seek innovation) *PLA Daily*, May 29, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-29&paperNumber=10&articleid=906883

⁸⁷⁹ 刘光明, 王强, 刘珂 (Liu Guangming, Wang Qiang, and Liu Ke) 全面提高新时代备战打仗能 (Comprehensively improve the ability to prepare for war in the new era) *PLA Daily*, March 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/15/content_335490.htm

⁸⁸⁰ 段思齐 (Duan Siqi) 必须用敌人听得懂的语言同他们对话 (We must speak to the enemy in a language that they understand) *PLA Daily*, May 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-22&paperNumber=06&articleid=906355

⁸⁸¹ 龚耘, 黄庆丰, 叶念 (Gong Yun, Huang Qingfeng, and Ye Nian) 坚持敢打必胜 (Persist in fighting and winning) *PLA Daily*, June 12, 2023,

of China's talents are resources is necessary for both preparing for, and winning war. It is likely Xi will continue to emphasize this prioritization on hardware and heartware for the foreseeable future.

9 CONCLUSION

This dissertation examined army building and military training under Jiang, Hu, and Xi. The benefit of employing a comparative study of army building and training under China's past three leaders is that it highlights trends and changes over time. Also, by focusing on army building, this study adds to the lackluster amount of literature that currently exists on China's military strategy. Existing literature mainly looks at China's military strategy from a more macro view, such as focusing on the MSGs.⁸⁸² Other literature has examined particular components such as People's War,⁸⁸³ and still other work has focused on a branch or specific topic. This dissertation adopted a more micro approach to discover how the PLA talks about army building as a whole, while following changes and continuities from one leader to the next. To understand China's military strategy, one needs to look beyond the MSGs and focus on what the PLA is actually doing on the ground in real time. Regular reading of the *PLA Daily* and activity by the PLA whether it be domestic training or activity around Japan and Taiwan provides a much better understanding of China's military strategy and capabilities than a deep investigation of the MSGs.

Army building can encompass a variety of different things, and I cast the net wide by examining how China scholars and the CCP talked about army building in academic articles, the media, and government or party documents. This produced a broad array of results and main threads from each era, as the table below illustrates. Army building in the Jiang era largely focused on guarding against deterioration. The PLA in the late 1990s and going into the 20th Century was deeply corrupt. This largely was a result from the military venturing into business

⁸⁸² Fravel, *Active Defense*, *ibid.*

⁸⁸³ Amrita Jash, *The Concept of Active Defence in China's Military Strategy* (New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2021).

starting in the 1980s as a concession made by Deng Xiaoping cutting the size of the PLA and directing the country to focus on economic growth which left a limited amount of resources for the military.

Guarding against deterioration also dealt with transformational changes to Chinese society brought from China's economic reforms and the embracing of markets. CCP leaders worried materialism, and its influence on soldiers, would become a hindrance to PLA modernization and cultivating a well-trained force. The other trends of army building included the three modernizations, Three Represents, and five sentences. Domestic training focused on anti-terrorism and dealing with unrest. Meanwhile, the PLA expanded joint training with foreign militaries, particularly towards the end of the Jiang era.

Although the shift toward informatization started at the end of the Jiang era, it was the

Table 6: Focus of Each Era

| Leader | Army Building | Training |
|---------------|--|--|
| Jiang | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Three Represents guiding army building. ▪ Guarding against deterioration. ▪ Five sentences. ▪ Three modernizations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expanding foreign joint training. ▪ Domestic training focused on anti-terrorism/dealing with unrest. ▪ Multi-level, confrontational, and simulation |
| Hu | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informatization ▪ New Historical Missions ▪ Raising capabilities of firepower suppression, field air defense, counterterrorism, and special ops. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in domestic basic training. ▪ Training resources were dominated by the Army. ▪ Emphasis on training in electromagnetic environments. |
| Xi | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reform ▪ MCI ▪ Greater focus on upgrading weapons and equipment. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Substantial increase in foreign joint training prior to Covid. ▪ Increased importance of naval training. ▪ Emphasis on weapons and equipment training. |

main theme of army building under Hu. Basic training increased during the Hu era, with the army dominating the trainings that were reported. The focus of domestic training focused on taking place in electromagnetic environments—which is a component of informatization highlighted in army building. Over the past decade with Xi at the helm, army building has concentrated on reform with the largest military reforms since the founding on the PRC beginning toward the end of 2015. Also, the Xi era has been defined by greater efforts at MCI and devoting more resources on upgrading weapons and equipment.

From Jiang through the Xi era there have been both continued similarities and notable changes. Both similarities and changes are highlighted in the table below, and the next two

Table 7: Continued Similarities and Changes

| Continued Similarities | Changes |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ideology and political education in army building stressed as paramount. ▪ Emphasis on talent. ▪ Leapfrog development ▪ Need to improve cadre evaluation mechanism. ▪ Accelerating Army Building. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making training more unpredictable. ▪ Greater importance is placed on commanders. ▪ Army construction is no longer described as subservient to economic construction, of equal importance. ▪ More emphasis on upgrading weaponry and equipment. |

sections briefly summarizes both categories.

9.1 Continued Similarities

Themes that run through all three eras are the stressing of ideology as paramount for army building, key role of talent, leapfrog development, and need to improve the cadre evaluation system. To begin with ideology, the main requirements for army building during the

Jiang era was for cadres to be "politically qualified, militarily competent, with a fine style of work, strict discipline and strong support.... Stressing that ideological and political construction should be given the first place in all military construction".⁸⁸⁴ This directive continued through the Hu and Xi eras. The goals of ideological and political education were described by one scholar in the Hu era as strengthening soldiers' beliefs in fighting for the Party and country (emphasis on how Party comes before country), create people-oriented thought, and innovate educational methods.⁸⁸⁵ Under Xi, political and ideological education is consistently emphasized as the top criterion for army building and recruiting soldiers into the military, and "political army building is the foundation of the army."⁸⁸⁶ However, although ideology and political education has always been described as the top criterion for army building, it is unclear how many officers and soldiers adhere or care for ideology.

Both emphasis on talent and leapfrog development have been key areas for army building. The reasons for striving to improve the talent-level and leapfrog development is that the PLA has consistently been behind the most advanced and modernized military powers in these categories. Both areas are seen as critical for helping catch up with the U.S. Zhang Youxia recently asserted that human talent is "more important than at any other time in history."⁸⁸⁷ The idea that talent is more important than ever was reflected in a recent PLA Daily article that argued "At present, the transformation of the form of warfare to informatization and intelligence is accelerating, and the decisive role of talents in equipment research and development, weapon

⁸⁸⁴ Changyou, "Conscientiously Study and Implement Jiang Zemin's Thoughts on National Defense and Army Construction" *ibid.*

⁸⁸⁵ Min, *ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁸⁶ 孙先振 (Sun Xianzhen) 从政治高度思考军事问题 (Thinking about military issues from a political perspective) *PLA Daily*, March 1, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/01/content_334675.htm

⁸⁸⁷ Zhang Youxia, "Adhere to the road of strengthening the army with Chinese characteristics (study and implement the spirit of the Sixth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee of the Party)" *People's Daily*, November 30, 2021, <https://archive.ph/WTXpp>

operation, and command and decision-making is more prominent.”⁸⁸⁸ Since early in the Jiang era, talent was viewed as a key method for building a military with both quality and quantity.⁸⁸⁹ Shi Yonggen, deputy commander under Jiang of the Nanjing military region Air Force, argued in the late 1990s that the PLA’s “human quality is not suitable for modern wars.”⁸⁹⁰

While the education level of soldiers has dramatically improved since the late 1990s, there is still a shortcoming in talent. Some of the same problems that plagues the U.S. military also exists in the PLA,⁸⁹¹ with one of the main problems being that talented individuals can usually make much more in the civilian world. This is one reason Xi has made CMI such a key emphasis. Ironically, one potential silver lining of China’s current high youth un-employment is discussion that the PLA can take advantage of it and draw in more people.⁸⁹² And while the PLA has made great strides in upgrading weapons and equipment, there has still been calls for leapfrog development during the Xi era,⁸⁹³ indicating China still has a long way to go to reach U.S. military modernization levels.

Throughout all three eras there have also been calls to improve the cadre evaluation system. During the Jiang era it was referred to as cadre assessment, with three grades of

⁸⁸⁸ 曾京峰 (Zeng Jingfeng) 坚持以用为本, 用好用活人才 (Adhere to the use-oriented, make good use of live talents) *PLA Daily*, May 22, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-05/27/content_316476.htm

⁸⁸⁹ 刘嘉平 (Liu Jiaping) 新世纪建军新趋势 (The new trend of army building in the new century) *现代军事* (Modern Military) no.4, (2001), 54.

⁸⁹⁰ Yonggen, “On the main contradictions of military construction in the new era” *ibid*, 32.

⁸⁹¹ Larry Wortzel, “A Comparison of Recruitment and Training Problems in the U.S. Army and China’s People’s Liberation Army” *U.S. Army*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.usa.org/publications/comparison-recruitment-and-training-problems-us-army-and-chinas-peoples-liberation>

⁸⁹² Minnie Chan, “Can China fix youth unemployment woes with military recruitment drive?” *South China Morning Post*, June 24, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3225127/can-china-fix-youth-unemployment-woes-military-recruitment-drive>

⁸⁹³ 钧政 (Jun Zheng) 在习近平强军思想引领下胜利前进 (Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's thought of strengthening the army, we will advance victoriously) *PLA Daily*, March 2, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/02/content_334758.htm

excellent, competent, and incompetent.⁸⁹⁴ Improving the evaluation mechanism is related to talent, finding those who are most capable of leading and contributing to military modernization. Despite claims that the cadre assessment process had been improved under Jiang, there were still calls to improve the evaluation system in the Hu era.⁸⁹⁵ Evaluations over the past several years have focused on assessments on training camp exercises.⁸⁹⁶ Overall, the evaluation system under Xi seems to have improved for high-ranking officers.⁸⁹⁷ But with corruption and discipline issues still prevalent, improving evaluation mechanisms and assessments will likely continue.

9.2 Changes

Under Xi, there appears to be a greater sense of urgency in army building. The term ‘accelerate’ when describing some form of military modernization or army building in either a white paper or Party Congress work report did appear shortly before Xi, explicitly in the 2010 white paper.⁸⁹⁸ But it spoke of acceleration in specific aspects of modernization such as retrofitting main battlefield weaponry, mechanization of motorized units, a new model of a multifunctional, integrated support force, modernization of the PLAN’s combat forces and deterrence, and modernization of the PLAN’s building of surface logistical platforms. Under Xi, acceleration is now often used to describe all of military modernization and army building⁸⁹⁹, although certain areas are still highlighted. The CCP’s most recent Five-Year plan—the 14th Five

⁸⁹⁴ 王法安, 张杰 (Wang Faan and Zhang Jie) 面向新世纪的突破与跨越——“九五”军队建设与改革回顾 (A Breakthrough and Leap Forward in the New Century——A Review of Military Construction and Reform during the Ninth Five-Year Pla) 军事历史 (Military History) no.4, (2001), 5-6.

⁸⁹⁵ Rui and Rui, *ibid*, 15.

⁸⁹⁶ 童祖静, 通讯员, 冯华华 (Tong Zujing, Liu Yu, and Feng Huahua) 集训归来, 对口岗位展身手 (After returning from the training camp, show off your skills in the corresponding position) *PLA Daily*, April 1, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/01/content_336717.htm

⁸⁹⁷ 李建文, 戚勇强, (Li Jianwen and Qi Yongqiang) 为战砺才以战选才 (Choose talents for battle) *PLA Daily*, April 24, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-24&paperNumber=02&articleid=904018

⁸⁹⁸ “The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces” *ibid*.

⁸⁹⁹ “China’s Military Strategy” *ibid*.

Year Plan—which began in 2021, army building overall was described as “being accelerated.”⁹⁰⁰ All this does not mean Beijing’s plans, or goals, for army building have changed. Injecting urgency in army building could be a way to ensure the PLA stays on track for the tasks it has been given and prevent top officers from relaxing.

Secondly, the importance of commanders has been a frequent refrain in the Xi era, especially in the past year. Scholars from NDU recently argued that “War practice tells us that in the final analysis, war confrontation is a game of commanders' thinking and cognition.”⁹⁰¹ Command is seen as a critical factor in whether the PLA can fight and win wars.⁹⁰² Effective command is also explained as the extent to which weapons and equipment can be effective in combat. How commanders use tactics is argued as a big factor in the role of weapons and equipment in warfare.⁹⁰³ One reason given for why commanders—and commanding—is so important is because with warfare shifting toward intelligentization, commanding has become more complex and difficult. Intelligent warfare is increasingly concentrated on things like information flow capabilities, situational awareness, and enemy analysis proficiencies. Essentially, the PLA sees the fog of war as becoming more complex.⁹⁰⁴ Thus, the emphasis on commanders will likely continue.

⁹⁰⁰ 韩炜 (Han Wei) 精耕细作砺前行 (Intensive cultivation and meticulous work to forge ahead) *PLA Daily*, March 13, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/13/content_335382.htm

⁹⁰¹ 徐玉忠, 张壹, 杨宁 (Xu Yuzhong, Zhang Yi, and Yang Ning) 作战决策应融入复杂性思维 (Combat decision-making should incorporate complex thinking) *PLA Daily*, April 6, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-04/06/content_337049.htm

⁹⁰² 孙焯, 栗勇兵 (Sun Wei and Li Yongbing) 重视开展智能化指挥训练 (Emphasis on carrying out intelligent command training) *PLA Daily*, April 27, 2023, https://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-04-27&paperNumber=07&articleid=904431

⁹⁰³ 王奇锋 (Wang Jifeng) 提升指挥员的战术素养 (Improve the tactical quality of commanders) *PLA Daily*, June 17, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-06-17&paperNumber=02&articleid=908326

⁹⁰⁴ 况冬, 许炎 (Kuang Dong and Xu Yan) 作战指挥应有“感” (Combat command should have a "sense") *PLA Daily*, May 9, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-05-09&paperNumber=07&articleid=905207

Finally, while not necessarily pertaining to the nature of army building itself, something significant that has occurred under Xi is how the importance of army building has been elevated. Under Jiang and Hu, army construction was always described as being secondary to, and serving economic construction.⁹⁰⁵ In the Xi era however, army building has been put on the same level as economic construction. In one *PLA Daily* article on building the integrated national strategic system, the authors mentioned that “it is necessary to balance development interests and security interests and strive to achieve mutual consideration of rapid development and security and stability.”⁹⁰⁶ Which illustrates the change to security given as much prominence as development. A final change is the emphasis on weaponry and equipment, but that will be reviewed again briefly later in the section on Xi’s influence.

The PLA in the Xi era has attempted to adjust conditions so that training is unpredictable, and the opponent much stronger. In the past, soldiers knew what was going to happen during training and what they were facing. However, modern warfare is viewed by the PLA as increasingly “sudden” and training needs to incorporate what has been described as “encounter battles”.⁹⁰⁷ In the 2022 mobilization order, Xi stated the military had to strengthen confrontational training. As an officer from the PLAA wrote, “War is cruel, and the enemy is cruel. If the usual confrontation drills are easy and comfortable, and everyone is happy, the result seems to be a win-win situation, but it is actually a double-lose.”⁹⁰⁸ In one recent brigade

⁹⁰⁵ Yusheng, *ibid*, 7-8; ““Persist in implementing the Scientific Outlook on Development in national defense and army building” *ibid*, 12.

⁹⁰⁶ 周碧松, 杨钧 (Zhou Bisong and Yang Jun) 巩固提高一体化国家战略体系和能力 (Consolidate and improve the integrated national strategic system and capabilities) *PLA Daily*, December 27, 2022, https://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-12/27/content_330732.htm

⁹⁰⁷ 闫野 (Yan Ye) 用 “遭遇战” 给打赢能力淬火 (Use "Encounter" to temper your ability to win) *PLA Daily*, June 3, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-06/03/content_316962.htm

⁹⁰⁸ 杨卫 (Yang Wei) 多一些硬碰硬的高强度对抗 (More head-to-head high-intensity confrontation) *PLA Daily*, July 6, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-07/06/content_319189.htm

exercise, a soldier complained about shooting at and missing a target because smoke unexpectedly rose up and blurred his vision. The battalion commander in charge of the assessment overheard the conversation between him and his comrades and scolded the soldier by reportedly saying “On the battlefield, will the enemy stand there waiting for you to shoot? Will your comrades prepare equipment waiting for you to rescue?”⁹⁰⁹

Additionally, there is more concentration of training against a more difficult, powerful enemy. This has also required more dangerous training situations. Dangerous training environments and going against stronger opponents is seen as an effective method for elevating combat power and the ability to win wars.⁹¹⁰ Or, as Yang Wei noted, “‘playing with powerful enemies.’”⁹¹¹ Although the PLA has improved training so that it is more difficult and has introduced greater uncertainty, some units still are described of creating situations where they “can't get out of the ‘red must win, blue must lose’ mindset, deliberately reduce the intensity and difficulty of confrontation, and dare not set up dangerous and dangerous situations”.⁹¹² Correcting these training issues is critical for the PLA because “Military training is a rehearsal for future wars, and there must be no floating and falsehood, otherwise you will have to pay the price in blood.”⁹¹³ Seeing Russia’s failures in Ukraine has likely only reinforced these views.

⁹⁰⁹ 钱浩, 肖士金 (Qian Hao and Xu Shijin) 突发特情打破“应考套路” (Sudden special situation to break the "test routine") *PLA Daily*, February 20, 2023, https://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-02/20/content_334062.htm

⁹¹⁰ 陈典宏, 许浩杰 (Chen Dianhong and Xu Haojie) “强大的对手”是最好磨刀石 (“Strong opponents” are the best sharpening stones) http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-06/13/content_317597.htm

⁹¹¹ Wei, *ibid.*

⁹¹² 满孝轩, 周咏霖 (Man Xiaoxuan and Zhou Yonglin) 真打实抗砥砺胜战之能 (The ability to fight hard and win battles) *PLA Daily*, March 3, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/09/content_335121.htm

⁹¹³ 谢磊 (Xie Lei) 牢固树立战斗力标准 (Firmly establish the standard of combat effectiveness) *PLA Daily*, March 21, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2023-03/21/content_335981.htm

9.3 Continuing Problems

Reading the *PLA Daily* on a regular basis portrays a military that is blunt and forthcoming about its shortcomings. Studying army building and training in the Xi era for this research has revealed continuing problems, even with the improvements in training and army building. One phenomenon discovered in this study, in which other PLA scholars have pointed out, is that the PLA has deep issues with the quality of soldiers that make up the military. Most studies on the PLA usually focuses on China's weaponry or conducts war games that excludes quality of personnel, the human factor.⁹¹⁴ A lot of research on the PLA is funded by the Pentagon, which tends to focus on capabilities rather than flaws.⁹¹⁵ Even amid concerns about AI's influence on warfare however, the PLA remains adamant that the "main factor that determines the outcome of a war is people, not things."⁹¹⁶

Among the lingering problems in the PLA, training issues and continued corruption remain high on the list. Recent complaints in a *PLA Daily* article center on three main problems. First, training content is not carefully linked with combat missions. Some examples include less support operations training, but more combat operations, more planning coordination training, and more training of single units but a lack of training in system linkage. Second, the training atmosphere is somewhat unconnected with the combat scene. Third, training requirements are not closely linked with ability requirements, example for this include "there are many standards for the main combat arms and few standards for new qualitative forces, and there are many

⁹¹⁴ Taylor Lee and Peter Singer, "The PLA's People Problem" *Defense One*, January 11, 2023, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2023/01/plas-people-problem/381728/>

⁹¹⁵ "The People's Liberation Army is not yet as formidable as the West fears" *The Economist*, November 6, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/11/06/the-peoples-liberation-army-is-not-yet-as-formidable-as-the-west-fears>

⁹¹⁶ 夏成效 张红梅 (Xia Zhicheng and Zhang Hongmei) 准确把握人民战争战略战术内在要求 (Accurately Grasping the Inherent Requirements of People's War Strategy and Tactics) *PLA Daily*, March 30, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-03/30/content_336623.htm

standards for combat elements and few standards for support elements.”⁹¹⁷ Additionally, there remains contradiction in basic training such as outdated methods and concepts, high costs and low efficiency, standardizing settings across units, and coordinating training.⁹¹⁸

9.4 Xi’s Influence

This dissertation also examined Xi’s personal influence on the PLA’s military strategy. Very little research previously has explored the topic. However, because Xi has accumulated so much power and now dominates the CCP to an extent not since Mao, and because he has influenced China’s economy, media, and society it would be surprising if he has not had a large influence on the military as well. Although it is difficult to separate or try and distinguish whether an action was produced by Xi or the PLA as an institution, with Xi’s status it still is important to explore. I found that Xi has influenced the PLA in three main ways: (1) successfully pushing through the largest reforms since the early years of the establishment of the PRC; (2) controlling personnel; and (3) prioritizing hardware and heartware.

Xi’s influence pushing through the most extensive reforms since 1949 may seem easy to think of as being overstated. However, it is difficult to adequately emphasize and describe what a herculean task it was to force through the reforms. First, when we talk about organizational change to the PLA it is made more difficult by the size. The general literature states that military and organizational change in general is difficult because large organizations with different branches competing for money are inherently resistant to change. But that is amplified and

⁹¹⁷ 杨欢 (Yang Huan) 打通战训耦合的链路 (Open up the link of combat training coupling) *PLA Daily*, July 15, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-07-10&paperNumber=02&articleid=909932

⁹¹⁸ 胡旬 (Hu Xun) 深化探索新时代基础训练方式 (Deepen the exploration of basic training methods in the new era) *PLA Daily*, July 5, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-07-05&paperNumber=06&articleid=909620

infinitely more difficult with the PLA. With two million troops, it dwarfs most other militaries. Saying there is military reform in a country like France or Spain is not remotely the same as that of China.

Although improving the PLA's weaponry was on the agenda under Jiang and Hu too,⁹¹⁹ it has been elevated under Xi. Two indicators give evidence for this: data of what the PLA spent money on—specifically from 2010-2020. Spending increased as a percentage of the budget relative to spending on training and personnel under Xi. Second, there is continuous reporting in the *PLA Daily* about new equipment constantly entering the services, and personnel having to devote training to master the new equipment. In addition to elevating hardware is improving heartware, which I described as encompassing a fighting spirit, loyalty and reliability, discipline, morale, and guarding against corruption.

The PLA was likely in far worse condition when Xi replaced Hu than most scholars acknowledge or know. Xi prioritized and accelerated elevating weaponry to ensure the PLA is on the path of becoming a world-class military, and to try and close the gap with the U.S. Heartware was singled out because without a disciplined force with morale, the PLA will be incapable of fighting effectively if ordered to. Xi's immediate calls after taking power—and continuation throughout his administration—for the PLA to be able to fight and win wars is likely an implicit criticism that the current state of the military was not capable of fighting and winning wars. Improving heartware is a critical aspect for the PLA to rectify that problem.

⁹¹⁹ Changyou, *ibid*; Yonggen, *ibid*, 32-33; Ping and Kejia, *ibid*, 8-9.

9.5 Results and Literature

What I find is that China's military strategy during the Xi era doesn't fit quite the mold of competing hypothesis in the general literature on why a country changes strategy. The forceful arguments made in Chinese media that it was Xi who spearheaded the changes suggest that civilian intervention on the part of Xi was needed for the reforms to pass and be enforced. Although Xi likely did not draw up the changes personally, he probably spent a considerable amount of time reviewing them and making suggestions, along with rejecting some changes while accepting others. However, because of the institutional dynamics of the party-state, Xi cannot be viewed as an outsider either. Both Jiang and Hu were civilians too, and there was change in the dependent variable (army building and training) while not much change in the independent variable (nature of the leader) for the Jiang and Hu cases. Finally, there does not exist a "wicked mismatch" in China's case of growing commitments and shrinking resources. While the security environment has degraded far more in the Xi era than the Jiang or Hu era, there are not shrinking resources. If anything, Xi has, according to some, demonstrated he prefers guns over butter.⁹²⁰

9.6 Focus of Army Building for the Future?

Having covered army building and training under China's past three leaders, this section briefly probes and suggests where army building, or its main threads, could be headed in the future. This is largely a brief exploratory exercise based to a large degree on recent trends in the PLA and articles in the *PLA Daily*. Aside from continuing focusing on improving the decision-making of commanders, training against difficult enemies, and further improving hardware and

⁹²⁰ Jacqueline Deal and Michael Mort, "China Prefers Guns to Butter" *Foreign Policy*, September 7, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/07/china-economic-slowdown-pla-buildup-taiwan/>

heartware, future army building will likely also focus on unmanned platforms and the intelligent command system. The 20th National People's Congress report called for the acceleration of developing unmanned capabilities."⁹²¹ The form of warfare is developing such that "It can be said that the old war is dead, the unmanned war is gradually emerging, the intelligent war is coming to us".⁹²² Currently, unmanned platforms are still quite new, and the development of their combat capabilities is curtailed in China by numerous bottlenecks. However, breaking through the bottlenecks is critical for grasping the advantage on the battlefield in the era of intelligence.⁹²³

Intelligent warfare has the characteristics of employing an algorithmic combat command that assists decision-making. It is increasingly a form that seeks to dominate virtual space, and centers on the competition for intelligence superiority in all fields. The importance of this form is described as "Whoever can win the intelligence advantage in the virtual space will win the victory in the intelligent war."⁹²⁴ Overall, when the PLA talks of an intelligent combat command system, it often is the general idea of sharing information. Every command-and-control node on the battlefield shares information in real time, which then accelerates combat operations and command decision-making and combat operations.⁹²⁵ Finally, because precise, long-range strike capabilities are seen by the PLA as an area of emphasis many countries focus on, bombers,

⁹²¹ 孙兴维, 李浩然, 林铎 (Sun Xingwei, Li Haoran, Lin Duo) 向战而行, 锻造投送尖兵 (Go towards the battle, forging and sending sharp soldiers) *PLA Daily*, February 20, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-02/20/content_334105.htm

⁹²² 薛程, 费宏迅 (Xue Cheng and Fei Hongxun) "深悟现代战争的“一次性效应” (A deep understanding of the "one-time effect" of modern warfare) *PLA Daily*, October 31, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-10/31/content_326784.htm

⁹²³ 常书杰 (Chang Shujie) 如何打通无人智能作战堵点 (How to break through unmanned intelligent combat blocking points) *PLA Daily*, February 21, 2023, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2023-02/21/content_334144.htm

⁹²⁴ 智韬 (Zhi Tao) 从多维视角看智能化战争 (Looking at Intelligent Warfare from a Multidimensional Perspective) *PLA Daily*, July 7, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-07/07/content_319277.htm

⁹²⁵ 宋晓冬, 杜沛 (Song Xiaodong and Du Pei) 探求智能化战场指挥机构生存之道 (Seeking the Way of Survival of Intelligent Battlefield Command Organization) *PLA Daily*, December 22, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjmap/content/2022-12/22/content_330390.htm

aircraft carriers, and missiles will likely continue to be among the key weapon platforms. Long-range weapons are important with the view expressed in one *PLA Daily* article as “Offense is the best defense, and having enough long-range attack capability is a deterrent.”⁹²⁶ Capabilities likely will focus on counter-intervention against any potential U.S. response to a war over Taiwan. Over the past five years China is prioritizing the ability to strike U.S. and allied forces far beyond Taiwan. Essentially, rapidly building its arsenal of ICBMs, and underground facilities located in the northern, eastern, and southern military theaters are indications of this strategy of emphasizing the ability to attack forces far east of Taiwan.

Based on the direction of the PLA’s army building, emphasis on long-range offensive capabilities, and writings in outlets like the *PLA daily*, the type of war China is planning on and envisions winning is one of surprise, high-intensity, short duration, while annihilating the enemy and demoralizing any response. The goal is to avoid a war of attrition. Because as the war drags on, “the defender’s response can steer the war in directions that the attacker cannot predict.”⁹²⁷ First strikes should deprive the opponent of its combat capability. This approach is captured in the saying that “it is better to cut off one finger than to hurt ten fingers” (伤其十指, 不如断其一指).⁹²⁸ However, in the event of a war over Taiwan, or on the southwest border with India, winning will require a force that is disciplined, well-trained, uncorrupt, and has a solid fighting spirit. Essentially, one that has strong heartware to go with China’s rapidly modernizing

⁹²⁶ 胡鹏, 张媛, 周利军 (Hu Peng, Zhang Yuan, and Zhou Lijun) 精确制导武器面面观 (Aspects of Precision Guided Weapons) *PLA Daily*, June 2, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-06-02&paperNumber=09&articleid=907217

⁹²⁷ 刘鹏, 余国强, 张含笑 (Liu Peng, Yu Guoqiang, and Zhang Hanxiao) “战争突然性”的三个悖论 (“Three Paradoxes of “Suddenness of War”) *PLA Daily*, July 13, 2023, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2023-07-13&paperNumber=07&articleid=910303

⁹²⁸ 吴思亮 (Wu Siliang) 现代战争视阈下的“歼灭战” (“War of Annihilation” from the Perspective of Modern Warfare) *PLA Daily*, July 7, 2022, http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2022-07/07/content_319275.htm

hardware. That is the mission Xi Jinping has set for the PLA and demands from it. Whether the PLA can continue to progress in those areas will go a long way in determining its combat effectiveness and ability to win wars when called on in the future.

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