



The CULTURE of the CHINESE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY



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Acronyms

AMS	Chinese Academy of Military Science
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CMC	Central Military Commission
DCT	Defense Consultative Talks
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FAO	Foreign Affairs Office of China's Ministry of National Defense
GAD	General Armament Department
GLD	General Logistics Department
GPD	General Political Department
GSD	General Staff Department
JCS	U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff
KMT	Kuomintang
LSG	Leading Small Group
MND	Ministry of National Defense
MR	Military Region
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NDE	National Defense Education
OSD	Office of the U.S. Secretary of Defense
PACOM	U.S. Pacific Command
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PME	Professional Military Education
PRC	People's Republic of China

Executive Summary

Background

This study examines the military culture of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). It focuses on the following:

- Values and traditions that the PLA regards as important
- Organizational characteristics that shape PLA practices
- Behaviors that result from these values, traditions, and organizational characteristics.

Change is a central feature of present-day Chinese military culture. The PLA has transformed itself from a mass peasant army to a modern military in just a few decades, and now seeks to further transform to meet the needs of 21st century warfare. These shifts require PLA leaders to examine whether traditional values and organizational structures are compatible with modern demands. This study describes both those aspects of PLA culture that are regarded as central to the PLA's identity and those that are currently undergoing rapid transformation.

The research for this study draws upon the following sources:

- PLA publications, including service newspapers, official histories, and leadership manuals
- Chinese- and English-language scholarly studies and policy analyses of the PLA
- Interviews conducted with U.S. military and DoD personnel who have interacted with the PLA.

Key Findings

Origins of PLA Culture

Most PLA leaders believe that ancient Chinese values and war-fighting principles remain relevant for managing a modern military.

PLA and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders express great pride in China's ancient military traditions, which they believe are far richer than those of the West. PLA publications draw extensively on these traditions for principles and lessons relevant to current needs.

- PLA leaders draw on the teachings of ancient military thinkers, especially Sun Tzu (Sunzi), for operational and strategic lessons.
- PLA leaders also draw on classic martial novels such as *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin* as important sources of strategic principles and models of heroism and loyalty.
- PLA texts implicitly draw on the Confucian view of relationships as a framework for how PLA members should interact, although this influence is seldom acknowledged.

The PLA teaches that China's martial traditions are uniquely moral and defensive.

The PLA instructs its personnel that they are the heirs to a martial tradition that:

- Is defined by an emphasis on morality
- Draws its support from the common people
- Is defensive in orientation
- Prefers to avoid direct combat when there are other ways to prevail
- Focuses on strategic and tactical cleverness over physical or material superiority.

The values and organizational structures of the PLA have been deeply influenced by principles of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought.

Many of China's early Communist military leaders were trained in Leninist theoretical and organizational principles at the Whampoa Military Academy in the 1920s. Mao Zedong later modified these ideas to give them a more populist orientation, creating what came to be known as "Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought." This body of thought provided the foundation for many of the PLA's central principles, including the following:

- *The Party-Army principle:* The Party has absolute control over the armed forces.
- *Mass mobilization:* All of society should participate in the revolutionary tasks of the Party and support the undertakings of the armed forces.

- *Broad consultation, limited participation:* Ordinary people's opinions and concerns should be included in Party decisions, but their direct participation in decision-making should be limited.
- *Voluntarism:* Human willpower can overcome great material disadvantage.

The PLA uses a selective interpretation of modern Chinese history to mold the worldview and self-image of its personnel.

The PLA has developed distinctive beliefs about its own history, which give weight to the PLA's present-day tasks. (These beliefs do not always match those of outside observers.) The PLA teaches its members the following lessons about modern Chinese history:

- Foreign nations have long sought to deny China her sovereignty.
- The PLA and the CCP "saved" China from foreign aggression, domestic tyranny, and economic backwardness.
- The PLA has won every war it has fought, even when it has faced much larger and more advanced adversaries.
- The PLA has only waged war when forced to do so, and has always fought in a distinctly moral and defensive fashion.

The PLA's Emphasis on Morality

Throughout its history, the PLA has claimed that its greatest advantage lies in the moral, political, and spiritual excellence of its troops.

Mao and other early Communist military leaders saw war as the supreme test of the human spirit and believed that strength of character, not advanced weaponry or equipment, was the decisive factor in warfare.

This belief grew out of necessity: in its early days, the PLA (then known as the Red Army) was quite weak in material capabilities. Its leaders had to rely instead on the "human factor" – the physical, moral and political superiority of its troops, expressed through their honesty, discipline, and hard work – as its comparative advantage. The Red Army's surprising successes against materially superior enemies in the Chinese civil war and in World War II cemented its leaders' belief that moral and personal qualities of individual servicemembers can indeed shortcoming in other areas.

Despite any developments or acquisitions it has made in the last decade, today's PLA still views itself as materially outmatched by the U.S. and other militaries, and continues to emphasize the importance of building its human capital to compensate for these shortcomings.

The PLA teaches its members that it has a special obligation to treat people humanely and equitably.

The PLA considers itself a “people’s army” that draws its strength from the support of the common people, and it teaches that this support was crucial to its past victories. Its leaders assert that the PLA must both defend the Chinese people in wartime, *and* aid them in their daily lives during peacetime. It considers this focus on the needs of the people to be a central aspect of its identity, setting it apart from foreign militaries and from previous, non-communist, Chinese armies.

This principle manifests itself in two beliefs:

- The PLA believes that treating its own personnel (particularly enlisted personnel) with paternalistic kindness and mercy is an important indicator of its moral and martial strength.
- The PLA believes that it must treat Chinese civilians with the utmost humanity and courtesy.

The PLA sees itself as a beacon of moral values to Chinese society as a whole.

PLA texts stress that members of the Chinese military must be morally better than average people. PLA publications emphasize the need for officers to model good behavior and moral rectitude for the soldiers under their command, and for PLA personnel to secure civilian support for PLA missions by acting as models of socialist ethics.

To ensure that its personnel fulfill their obligations to each other and to society, the PLA has developed a number of moral and disciplinary codes.

These codes include the following:

- The “Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention” (late 1920s) guided soldiers’ interactions with civilians. This code required the Red Army to project the image of a benevolent force working to minimize the impact of military activity on civilian life. PLA personnel still consider these to be fundamental guidelines for military-civilian relations.
- The “Servicemen’s Moral Standards” (2001) were aimed at defining the PLA’s core values and shaping interactions among personnel.

PLA Values

The PLA inculcates its personnel with a well-articulated set of values.

- *Loyalty.* The PLA has a well-defined hierarchy of loyalties to the Party, the nation, the people, and the military.
 - The PLA takes loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party as its highest value, maintained through continuous indoctrination and cultivation of a strong “political consciousness.”
 - The PLA’s concept of patriotism emphasizes its dual mission of ensuring national security and safeguarding domestic stability and development.
 - PLA servicemen are urged to enthusiastically “serve the people.”
 - PLA personnel are expected to exhibit an “ardent love” for the Chinese military.
- *Honor.* “Honor” for the PLA means having a spirit of extreme devotion to one’s tasks.
 - PLA members are instructed that they must elevate their loyalties to the Party, the nation, the people, and the military above all personal considerations.
 - The PLA teaches that honor can be manifested either in feats of heroism or in everyday service to one’s fellow citizens.
 - PLA personnel are taught that *honor belongs to the group, not the individual*. The PLA actively discourages personnel from engaging in “individual heroism” and showing off.
- *Discipline.* The PLA emphasizes unquestioning obedience to superiors and to PLA and CCP regulations. It also expects strict self-control on the part of all personnel, including control over one’s emotions, frugality, and generally responsible behavior.
- *Strength of will.* Members of the PLA are expected to exhibit exemplary toughness and steadfastness of character. This encompasses such qualities as:
 - Unwavering bravery and morale
 - Endurance in the face of extreme hardship and deprivation
 - Psychological resilience to criticism and setbacks.

The PLA uses a number of methods to inculcate its personnel with its “core values.”

- Unit-level training in political values and ethics
- Education campaigns highlighting a specific message or goal
- Leadership and teaching materials that emphasize core values

- Promotion of “model” soldiers whose example others are urged to follow
- Cultural and recreational activities that promote approved behaviors.

PLA Views on Officer-Enlisted Relations

The PLA promotes the belief that cohesion is based on the relationship between officers and enlisted personnel.

- The PLA urges each member of a unit to think of that unit as a caring extended family, where the relationship between officers or NCOs and enlisted personnel mirrors that between parents and children.
- The PLA teaches that unity between officers and enlisted personnel rests on a close relationship of mutual obligation, built in peacetime. Harmony and cohesion within a unit suffers when officers and enlisted personnel fail to carry out their obligations to each other.

The PLA view of superior-subordinate relationships implicitly incorporates both Confucian teachings about authority relationships and Maoist egalitarian ideals.

Confucian society rested upon a series of idealized and *unequal* relationships between superior and subordinate. The superior was expected to display a benevolent and caring attitude toward subordinates, while the subordinate was expected to display an attitude of respect and love toward superiors. This is reflected in the PLA’s view of unit cohesion:

- PLA personnel are taught that officers and enlisted personnel have specific obligations toward one another.
- Officers are taught to “cherish” their subordinates and to care for their physical and psychological needs.
- Enlisted personnel are told to unconditionally obey orders and give their superiors unquestioning respect.

PLA views on cohesion also reflect Maoism’s emphasis on the inherent *equality* of all people in society and in the military.

- PLA officers are instructed that they are politically equal to the enlisted soldiers they command and must not think of themselves as “better” in any way.
- PLA writings assert that the difference between officers and enlisted soldiers rests on the fact that they have different skill sets, but that both skill sets are equally important.

PLA Organizing Principles

The PLA is a “Party-Army” controlled by the CCP at all levels.

Central to the PLA’s organizational culture is its identity as a “Party-Army.” Party control of the military is as fundamental to the PLA as civilian control is to the U.S. military.

Central features of the Party-Army are:

- *Absolute allegiance to the Party above all else.* PLA members swear loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, not to the Chinese State.
- *Centralized Party command.*
 - The PLA’s national command authority (the Central Military Commission, or CMC, of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party) is a Party organization.
 - Party structures exist at all levels of the PLA and play a central role in unit-level decisions.
- *Weak state authority.* State institutions also have little power over the Chinese military.
 - There is a State CMC, but it is a “shell” organization whose membership is usually identical to that of the Party CMC.
 - The Ministry of National Defense (MND) exists mostly for protocol purposes and to organize exchanges with foreign militaries. Its Minister is a powerful individual, but his power comes not from his state position but from his positions in the top echelons of the Party.
- *Dual leadership.* All PLA units are led jointly by a military commander and a political officer. These two officers are considered co-equals and exercise joint leadership over the unit.
- *A comprehensive system of Party organizations and “political work.”* Political officers and Party committees oversee the day-to-day implementation of “military political work” at every level of the PLA. Political work is the primary mode by which the PLA:
 - Carries out the Party’s objectives
 - Manages its human resources
 - Manages its relations with the civilian population
 - Conducts many aspects of training, indoctrination, and wartime activities to co-opt, coerce, or undermine enemy forces.

The PLA operates within a bureaucratic system that is fragmented into vertical and horizontal lines of authority.

- *Vertical lines* are based on functional divisions (e.g., political work, logistics). They stream from higher to lower levels of the PRC bureaucracy: for example, every PLA unit has a logistics department that is in the same vertical line as the logistics department at the next level up.
- *Horizontal lines* exist within a single jurisdiction, such as a Military Region or a province. These lines coordinate issues across multiple functional offices or personnel in that that jurisdiction: for instance, procuring materials for training tasks might require input from several departments in a single unit.

Decision-Making in the PLA

PLA decision-making is based on the principle of collective leadership.

- The Party committee is the central decision-making body in every PLA unit.
- No single individual at any level is authorized to make unilateral decisions or veto decisions made by the Party committee.
- In a military unit's Party committee, all members (including the committee's secretary and deputy secretary) are equal in status. In theory at least, none has a disproportionate vote in committee decisions.
- That said, individual voices may carry more weight based on their Party status and membership in informal networks (described on p. xv).

The PLA promotes a consultative and consensus-based decision making process.

- The PLA encourages decision-making bodies to pursue a wide-ranging debate on major issues involving many individuals before making decisions.
- PLA leaders strive to uphold Maoist principles that allow *all* affected persons – not just members of the Party committee – to have some input into the decision. The PLA has established several institutions that allow all officers and enlisted personnel to provide such input.
- Once a decision is made, further debate is discouraged: everyone is expected to implement the decision even if they disagree with it.

These decision-making practices create a number of bureaucratic inefficiencies.

- Members of the PLA must participate in enormous numbers of meetings.
- The need to reach consensus on all issues means that decision-making can be very slow.
- When Party committees at lower levels cannot reach consensus, they often pass issues up to higher and higher levels of the bureaucracy.

Authority and Influence

The PLA hierarchy includes both ranks and grades.

- The PLA has a system of ten officer ranks that, on the surface, roughly correspond to American military ranks.
- The PLA has a system of 15 “grade levels” that apply to *all* units, organizations, and officers in *all* services and branches.

Officers’ status within the PLA is most reliably indicated by their *grade level*, not their rank.

- Officers’ grade level determines their status within the overall PLA hierarchy.
- Grade determines billet, pay level and retirement age.
- Officers of the same grade level are equal in status even if they have different ranks.

Individuals’ ability to influence decisions comes from three main sources.

The PLA’s organizational norms mean that no individual has the authority to make a decision unilaterally. However, some people are more able to *influence* decisions than others. This influence comes from the following sources:

- *Position in the PLA*. An officer holds a certain amount of authority based on the responsibilities of his billet.
- *Position in the Party*. Because key decisions are made in Party meetings, an officer’s position within the Chinese Communist Party is a source of influence and authority.
- *Informal networks, or guanxi* (“connections” or “relationships”). Individuals can wield a level of influence disproportionate to their formal positions. This can be traced largely to their membership in powerful informal networks based on personal connections. Some common networks on which PLA members draw include those linking:
 - Officers from the same province or region
 - Officers who attended the same institutions of professional military education
 - Officers who served in particular corps or group armies
 - Officers from particular “generations” or age cohorts
 - Commanders and their former subordinates.

Challenges to PLA Culture

The PLA is currently in a period of wide-reaching transformation.

The PLA's current transformation has been prompted by changes in Chinese society and in the nature of warfare.

- *Changes in society.* China's rapid economic growth has created a range of opportunities for young people who might previously have viewed the PLA as their best path to personal advancement. Another key change has been the influx into the PLA of "only child" soldiers (i.e. soldiers born since China introduced strict population control policies in the late 1970s). Individuals from this generation, often called "little emperors," now predominate in the PLA's enlisted forces and junior officer corps.
- *Changes in warfare.* Some PLA leaders believe that the PLA's exemplary human qualities and strategic traditions are no longer sufficient to lead it to victory in wars against better-equipped, more technologically advanced adversaries.

PLA leaders now suggest that traditional PLA values are not *alone* sufficient to win future wars.

- PLA leaders increasingly express concern that winning 21st century wars will require additional qualities that are not captured in the list of traditional PLA values.
- The PLA has identified the following "new-type qualities" as crucial to its future success, and is trying to recruit personnel who possess these qualities:
 - "talent," which includes technological know-how and a broad knowledge base
 - "innovation," or stronger critical thinking skills.
- PLA publications express concern that the urban, educated youth who are most likely to possess these qualities are also those who are hardest to inculcate with traditional PLA values.

There is widespread concern within the PLA that the younger generation of officers and enlisted personnel is morally inferior to its predecessors.

- PLA leaders have expressed concern that the generation of personnel born since China introduced the "one child per family" policy are spoiled, selfish, and undisciplined.
- PLA texts argue that these failings diminish the PLA's traditionally strong "human qualities" and hurt readiness and cohesion.
- PLA publications suggest that leaders remain somewhat stymied about how to inculcate the younger generation with PLA values.

Interacting with the PLA

The CCP sees military diplomacy as an extension of political diplomacy.

- The PLA views interactions with foreigners as one means to advance the Party's strategic and diplomatic agenda.
- Military diplomacy is a particularly fragile aspect of U.S-China relations, and has gone through many periods of volatility.
- When the overall bilateral relationship deteriorates, suspension of the military relationship is usually one of the first consequences.

The PLA holds fundamentally different views from the U.S. military on some key concepts.

- *Transparency.*
 - For the PLA, transparency is not an inherent good.
 - The PLA leadership asserts that transparency is often used as a tool by strong countries against weak ones.
 - PLA leaders argue that “transparency of intentions” is more important than “transparency of capabilities.” If one side is confident that the other's strategic intentions are clear and benign, they claim it is not necessary to know the other's exact capabilities.
- *Mutual Trust.*
 - For the PLA, “mutual trust” must be established before joint activities with a foreign military can be considered.
 - This approach contrasts with that of the U.S., which views joint military activities as a foundation on which mutual trust can be built.
- *Relationship Building.*
 - The PLA seeks to build strong relationships with key individuals on the U.S. side who are viewed as sympathetic to China, through whom they hope to influence U.S. policies.
 - The PLA seeks to build strong ties between *individuals*. Its leaders do not consider the people with whom they deal to be interchangeable, and are often frustrated by the rapid turnover among U.S. personnel.

The PLA tries to plan and coordinate military-to-military (mil-mil) events in ways that ensure that the Chinese side retains the initiative at all times.

- U.S. participants who take part in mil-mil exchanges deal primarily with specialized handlers.
- The PLA often withholds itineraries or changes them at the last minute.

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- Access to PLA units and personnel is tightly controlled.
- Most of the PLA units U.S. visitors see are highly-prepared “showcases.”

Americans who have interacted with Chinese military and political officials have observed consistent patterns in their negotiating behavior.

- Chinese negotiators normally seek agreement on basic principles before allowing discussion on specific issues.
- Chinese negotiators prefer not to engage in the back-and-forth of incremental concessions. They normally hold a “hard position” until they sense that the U.S. has made all the concessions it can. At that point, the Chinese often “cut the knot” and offer what they see as an acceptable compromise, in a single step.
- PLA members have a strong aversion to delivering bad news or saying “no” directly, though they will signal in other ways when they consider something unacceptable.
- The real decision-makers in any negotiation are often not at the table. American offers or requests often have to be “taken back” to Beijing for a decision.

American military and civilian defense personnel who have interacted with the PLA offer a range of advice for those engaging the PLA.

This advice includes the following points:

- Spend time, as the Chinese do, studying the history of the relationship and the other side’s negotiating tactics.
- Be clear with the PLA about U.S. bottom lines.
- Expect frustrations and delays, and avoid setting arbitrary deadlines.
- Take advantage of opportunities for informal discussions.
- Send signals of dissatisfaction that the Chinese will understand, such as canceling or shortening visits or restricting Chinese access to high-ranking U.S. personnel.
- Avoid conceding too much just to reach an agreement, and be prepared to return from China with few or no tangible achievements.
- Cultivate long-term relationships that will be useful during periods of stability, but don’t expect that these ties will be enough to relieve tension in times of crisis.

Introduction

Why does military culture matter?

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the world's largest standing army; it protects the world's fastest-rising economic power. The PLA is increasingly visible on the world stage, yet it is a highly opaque military institution within a highly opaque political system. Many of its inner workings are obscure not only to foreign observers, but to officials of the Chinese government. In recent years much has been written about the PLA's equipment and capabilities. However, *knowing what the PLA can do does not provide us a full picture of how its members act, or why*. This study focuses on an equally important factor in understanding the PLA as an organization: its *military culture*.

The importance of "culture" as an aspect of military organization has received increasing attention in American scholarship since the mid-1990s, and particularly since the 2003 onset of the Iraq War.¹ Military scholars and practitioners agree that many of the crucial decisions militaries make – particularly in reforming themselves to meet new challenges – are shaped by their long-standing values and traditions, or those of the larger societies to which they belong.²

Cultural differences can also have a significant impact on the way national militaries interact. For instance, differing views on the nature of success or failure in military operations, or of the way that officers and enlisted personnel should interact, can affect military personnel's understanding of their foreign interlocutors. In cooperative endeavors – combined exercises, military exchanges, negotiations – divergent expectations can lead to minor frustrations or even diplomatic stalemates.

What is "PLA military culture"?

Academic studies provide a wide range of definitions of "military culture." It is not our purpose here to adjudicate among them on an abstract level, but rather to shed light on aspects of Chinese military behavior not captured by more traditional analyses of the PLA's hardware, training, or capabilities. For our purposes, we consider "PLA military culture" to encompass *persistent and shared values, traditions, and structures that shape the observable attitudes and behaviors of members of the PLA*. We might think of it as the "connective tissue" that links all PLA members, from the top leadership down to the newest conscripts. PLA military culture is expressed through such channels as shared myths, heroic ideals, and rituals that promote group cohesion. It is transmitted among PLA personnel and sustained across generations through formal education, informal acculturation, and daily practice.

¹ See e.g. Stephen Peter Rosen, "Military Effectiveness: Why Society Matters," *International Security* 19:4 (Spring 1995), pp. 5-31; Patrick Porter, "Good Anthropology, Bad History: The Cultural Turn in Studying War," *Parameters* (Summer 2007), pp. 45-58.

² See e.g. Lt. Col. Charles B. Breslin, *Organizational Culture and the Military* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College), 2000.

Military culture in transition

Readers should keep in mind that military culture is not static. In fact, *change is one of the central features of present-day Chinese military culture*. When Mao Zedong died in 1976, he left a military that was demoralized and in a state of technical and institutional disarray. Over the past three decades, PLA leaders have struggled to overcome that legacy, while playing catch-up both with a rapidly changing Chinese society and with modernized militaries around the world. The PLA is currently seeking to meet the needs of 21st century warfare by transforming itself into a smaller, higher quality fighting force; this has required across-the-board reforms in its personnel system, its doctrine, and its training routines and other daily practices.

One important aspect of this transformation has been a reconsideration of those PLA values, beliefs, and organizational structures that its leaders deem incompatible with the demands of modern, high-tech wars. At the same time, PLA leaders face the challenge of not discarding those cultural features they deem central to the PLA's institutional identity. The ongoing tension between these two demands is a major focus of this study.

Purpose of the study

This study highlights *features of PLA culture that are essential to understanding how its members behave*. It seeks to provide an overview of how members of the PLA act toward one another, and how they interact with foreigners. It aims to explain *why* they might behave in these ways: the values they strive to uphold, the structures that constrain their behaviors, and the challenges they believe they are facing.

While it includes some basic facts about the PLA, the purpose of this study is *not* to provide detailed information on the PLA's force structure or capabilities. It is intended to complement, not replace, traditional references on the Chinese military. Appendix 1 contains basic background information on the PLA.

Specifically, this study has the following goals:

- To provide an overview of modern and traditional sources of PLA culture
- To highlight organizational and decision-making structures and practices that shape PLA behaviors
- To outline the challenges that China's larger social and economic changes pose to PLA culture
- To identify those aspects of Chinese military culture that the PLA considers to be unassailable elements of its identity, and those that are undergoing change
- To highlight the channels the PLA uses to convey its values to servicemembers
- To give American military personnel engaging with the PLA an idea of the attitudes and behavioral patterns they will encounter.

Research approach

Our approach to this project was to consider, first and foremost, what the PLA says about itself: what features PLA leaders and personnel consider most central to their military's identity, and how they believe these features should be passed on to new generations. In addition, the authors consulted Chinese- and English-language scholarly works, drew on CNA China Studies' extensive research record, and conducted numerous interviews.

Specific sources included:

A wide variety of book-length texts published by the PLA and intended for PLA servicemembers and policy-makers. These publications included:

- leadership manuals
- teaching materials
- official histories
- academic studies
- military encyclopedias.

PLA journals and newspapers, containing policy statements and announcements by PLA leadership, scholarly analyses of military issues by PLA academics, and articles about the daily lives and concerns of PLA personnel.

Interviews with American military and civilian defense personnel who have worked with the PLA in various capacities, including military attachés and participants in military-to-military exchanges.

English-language scholarly studies of the PLA's organizational and decision-making culture, and that of its parent organization, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Organization

The study is divided into six chapters:

Chapter One, "Origins of PLA Culture," discusses the PLA's roots in traditional Chinese culture and in Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. It also examines how the PLA has reinterpreted modern Chinese history, deriving lessons that form the basis for the way it presents itself to its members and to the world.

Chapter Two, "PLA Values," examines the core values that the PLA strives to instill into its members.

Chapter Three, "PLA Organizing Principles," provides an overview of organizational features unique to the PLA, and explains how these features shape and constrain PLA members' behaviors.

Chapter Four, “Decision-Making in the PLA,” focuses on PLA decision-making culture and its roots in CCP practices. It describes the PLA’s largely Party-derived decision-making principles and processes.

Chapter Five, “Challenges to PLA Culture,” looks at PLA leaders’ concerns that the PLA’s traditional culture is under increasing pressure for change by internal and external forces. It examines recent trends that are altering the environment in which the PLA recruits, trains, and operates, and discusses their implications for the values and organizational norms described in the previous chapters.

Chapter Six, “Interacting with the PLA,” focuses on the behaviors that the PLA displays to its foreign interlocutors and how these are influenced by the values, organizational structures, and decision-making patterns outlined in previous chapters. It draws heavily upon the experiences of American civilian and military personnel and summarizes the lessons they have drawn from their interactions with the PLA.

Chapter 1: Origins of PLA Culture

Introduction: Where does PLA culture come from?

Today's PLA teaches its personnel that they belong to a uniquely Chinese institution. It further instructs them that as heirs to China's ancient legacies and 20th-century revolutionary struggles, they bear the heavy mantle of defending both one of the oldest civilizations in existence and one of the world's few remaining Communist states. The PLA looks to the rich traditions of China and of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) for lessons that will give meaning to this task.

The PLA draws values, self-perceptions, and beliefs about how warfare should be conducted from a few major sources. Its leaders "cherry-pick" principles and lessons from these sources that they deem relevant to current needs, while downplaying facts and events that do not fit comfortably into CCP and PLA narratives about China's history and culture.

This chapter highlights several historical sources from which the PLA draws lessons for today:

Ancient writings on war and social order, including:

- Confucianism
- Martial classics
- Literary classics

Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought

China's modern history, as selectively interpreted by PLA writers.

Ancient sources

Ancient Chinese philosophical texts, military treatises, and literary classics remain central to the PLA's identity. PLA military handbooks still reference battles fought 4,000 years ago as object-lessons, and PLA leaders still seek guidance for modern-day operational practices in writings that are more than 2,500 years old.³ For instance, the author of a recent *China Military Science* article on psychological warfare stated that "the world's earliest explanation of psychological operations" can be found in Sun-tzu's (Sunzi's) *Art of War* and that psychological operations were a central aspect of ancient Chinese warfare.⁴ Numerous PLA leaders justify the PRC's current focus on "peaceful

³ See, e.g., the section on ancient battles in Zhang Huaibi, ed., *Soldiers Handbook* (*junren shouce*; 军人手册) (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2005), pp. 472-500.

⁴ Wu Juncang and Zhang Qiancheng, "The Doctrine of Psychological Operations in Ancient China," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* 2001-5, pp. 88-94, OSC CPP20020114000141; Qian Ruyi, *Command Decision-Making and Strategem* (Beijing: Kunlun Publishing House, 1999), OSC CPP20030424000250.

development” and “a harmonious world” as emanating from “the Chinese nation’s cultural traditions,” particularly the Confucian focus on harmony.⁵

The PLA teaches that longstanding Chinese ethical and military traditions are morally and strategically superior to much newer and, they say, less theoretically sophisticated Western traditions.⁷

Within the Chinese canon of philosophical and warfighting texts, a small number are particularly influential for today’s PLA.

“Ancient Chinese books on the art of war stressed abstraction and generalization and were full of philosophical thinking, while ancient Western strategic theories seemed somewhat disordered and not systematic enough.”⁶

— China Academy of Military Science,
The Science of Military Strategy

Confucianism

Living in a period of near-constant warfare among small states, the scholar-sage Confucius (~551-479 BC) taught that moral behavior (*de*; 德) was the basis of authority and of social order. While the PLA only occasionally references Confucius in its writings, it implicitly draws many of its norms for interpersonal relations from Confucian precepts.⁸ These include the following:

Social morality – and thus social order – is preserved through the creation and maintenance of a small set of foundational relationships between superior and subordinate figures. Confucian society rests upon “five relationships,” most of which are unequal: ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and friend and friend. When these relationships are properly upheld, Confucius and his followers asserted, social harmony can be attained.

These relationships are to be maintained by implementing a few clear principles of interaction, two of which are reflected in the PLA today. First, *each member of a superior-subordinate relationship bears certain obligations to the other*: superiors in

⁵ PLA Air Force General Zheng Shenxia, “China’s Peaceful Development and National Defense Modernization,” *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* 2006-5, OSC CPP20070104478001; see also Lt. Gen. Zhang Qinsheng (Commander, Guangzhou Military Region), “Unswervingly Follow the Path of Peaceful Development,” *Liaowang* No. 49 (3 Dec 2007), pp. 40-42, OSC CPP20080107710002.

⁶ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds. *The Science of Military Strategy* [English translation] (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2005), p. 95.

⁷ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, p. 93; see also Xu Jianjun and He Shaohua, eds., *College Military Course of Study* (*daxue junshi jiaocheng*; 大学军事教程) (Changsha: Zhongnan University Press, 2004), p. 26.

⁸ The principles described here are found scattered throughout a number of Confucian texts over several centuries. For the “Four Books” at the core of Confucian tradition see Confucius, *The Analects*, translated by D.C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1998); Confucius, *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, & The Doctrine of the Mean*, translated by James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, 1971); Mencius, translated by D.C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 2005). For a readable overview of Confucian ideals, see Xinzhong Yao, *An Introduction to Confucianism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

“Respecting officers and loving enlisted personnel is the concrete embodiment of the principle of unity between officers and men. Its basic spirit is that officers should cherish soldiers, and be concerned about their maturation and advancement as well as their food and clothing and daily life; soldiers should respect officers, obey their leadership, and support their work.”⁹

— *How to Be a Good NCO*

a relationship are expected to display a benevolent and caring attitude (*ai*; 爱) toward their subordinates; the subordinates, an attitude of respect and love (*zun* 尊) toward their superiors. Not to act in this way is to shirk one’s social responsibilities.

These terms of “caring” and “respect” are still used by the PLA to describe the ideal relationship between military commanders or leaders and their subordinates, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.¹⁰

Second, *the superior partner in a relationship relies on the subordinate partner for support and advice*. The wise advisor was viewed by Confucian thinkers as a crucial figure in benevolent and effective rule. The willingness to “readily listen to advice” (*congjianruli*;

从谏如流) and to recognize and correct mistaken policies distinguished a successful ruler from a merely well-intentioned one.¹¹ In today’s PLA, commanders are encouraged to be similarly humble about their position, and to accept the advice and suggestions of their troops to correct their mistakes.¹²

Leaders gain moral and political authority through benevolent rule. Confucius

believed that morality had an inherent attractiveness that would impel others to follow. At the top of the Confucian social hierarchy stood the emperor, whose political legitimacy derived from his benevolent behavior. A good Confucian ruler acted as father to his people and cared for their material and moral welfare.

In today’s PLA, *military leaders have taken on the role of the benevolent ruler*. A military leader is expected to act as a father (or, at the

“You should be a kindred spirit with your soldiers, using the heart of a parent and the feelings of an eldest brother to surmount their difficulties and alleviate their suffering, making sure to transfer warmth to the bottom of their hearts.”¹³

— *How to Be a Good NCO*

⁹ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, eds., *How to Be a Good NCO (zenyang dang haoshibing; 怎样当好士官)* (Beijing: Long March Press, 2000), p. 223.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, *How to Be a Good NCO*, pp. 222-224.

¹¹ Zhang Shiping, *Historic Strategies for Reference: Historical Reflections on Contemporary Chinese Strategy (shijian dalüe – dangdai zhongguo zhanlue de lishi kaolü; 史鉴大略 – 当代中国战略的历史思考)* (Beijing: Military Science Press 2005), p. 99.

¹² Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System (zhongguo jiefangjun minzhu zhidu de lilun yu shijian; 中国解放军民主制度的理论与实践)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1993), p. 12.

¹³ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, *How to Be a Good NCO*, p. 94.

grassroots level, as an “elder brother”¹⁴) to his soldiers and to care for their well-being, while exacting discipline, loyalty, and respect from them in exchange.

Moral behavior must be taught by example. Confucianism stresses the importance of *modeling moral behavior as an example to others*. Confucian rulers were expected to behave in an irreproachably moral fashion, in part because doing so inspired their subjects to act with a similar degree of benevolence and morality.

A similar emphasis on modeling moral behavior exists in today's PLA. Countless newspaper articles and political campaigns describe the selfless actions of “model soldiers” and exhort others to follow their example. PLA publications also emphasize the need for grassroots leaders to serve as ethical role models for their troops, and stress the importance of moral behavior for gaining civilian support.¹⁷

SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE

After coming to power in 1949, the CCP conducted numerous campaigns to present PLA personnel as models of moral and political rectitude for Chinese society. The most extensive of these was a 1964 CCP campaign exhorting the Chinese people to “learn from the PLA.”¹⁵ Today, even enlisted personnel who are not Party members are seen as spokespeople for Party values, not just while they serve in the military but also when they leave the PLA for civilian life. A recent handbook for platoon leaders notes that the PLA acts as a “big smelting furnace” and “a big school” that brings the Chinese people together and teaches them how to behave, not just as military personnel but as citizens.¹⁶

Martial classics

The same period that brought forth Confucius also produced a host of military writings on which the PLA still draws. These texts were largely compendia of advice for the leaders of small kingdoms. The PLA teaches its members that the lessons contained in these “classics” (*jing*; 经) prove the superiority of the Chinese military tradition.

¹⁴ “Grassroots” (*jiceng*; 基层) refers to PLA units below the regiment level – i.e., battalions, companies, and platoons.

¹⁵ William W. Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 527; Ralph L. Powell, “Commissars in the Economy: ‘Learn from the PLA’ Movement in China,” *Asian Survey* 5:3 (Mar 1965), pp. 125-138.

¹⁶ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops* (*paizhang daibing jifa*; 排长带兵技法) (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), p. 242.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Huang Shaowen, *Techniques for Squad Leaders Commanding Troops* (*Banzhang daibing jiqiao*; 班长带兵技巧), 2nd Edition (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), p. 29; Chen Anren, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent's Moral Character* (*junshi rencai pinde peiyu lun*; 军事人才品德培育论) (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2001), p. 275.

Seven of these works were gathered together by later Chinese scholars as the “Seven Military Classics” (*wujingqishu*; 武经七书). The most prominent among these is Sun-tzu’s (Sunzi’s) *Art of War*. Zhu De, the first Commander-in-Chief of the PLA’s predecessor Red Army, famously held *The Art of War* in such esteem that he committed the entire book to memory, and used it to guide strategic decisions and plan key battles.¹⁸ Mao Zedong frequently referred to Sun-tzu’s principles in his own copious writings on warfare. PLA textbooks today call *The Art of War* “the most valuable and influential ancient book among all books, ancient and modern, Chinese and foreign,” and in 2006 it was made a required text for all PLA academies, where it is used for “improving the strategy and command proficiency of military officers.”¹⁹

The PLA draws the following lessons from Sun-tzu and other Chinese military classics:

Avoid or minimize war if possible. Sun-tzu advocates minimizing destruction and finding ways other than direct military engagement to win, particularly if one’s physical strength is inferior to that of one’s

adversary. Tactics of “winning without fighting” include diplomatic negotiation, breaking down enemy morale, and luring away enemy troops. When war is unavoidable, the military classics discourage total annihilation of the enemy, preferring to cow him rather than wipe him out.

These concepts are still used in today’s PLA. In one recent article, for instance, two PLA senior colonels define tactics such as restricting access to information, disabling but not physically destroying equipment and communications platforms, and deceiving and demoralizing enemy troops as forms of “winning without fighting.”²⁰

CHINA’S “SEVEN MILITARY CLASSICS”	
Sun-tzu’s <i>Art of War</i> (<i>Sunzi Bingfa</i> ; 孙子兵法)	4 th c BC
<i>Wuzi</i> (<i>Wuzi</i> ; 武子)	4 th c BC
<i>Sima Fa</i> (<i>Simafa</i> ; 司马法)	4 th c BC
<i>Wei Liaozi</i> (<i>Weiliaozi</i> ; 尉缭子)	4 th –3 rd c BC
<i>Tai Gong’s Six Secret Teachings</i> (<i>Tai Gong liutao</i> ; 太公六韬)	4 th –3 rd c BC
<i>Three Strategies of Huang Shigong</i> (<i>Huang Shigong sanlüe</i> ; 黄石公三略)	2 nd –1 st c BC
<i>Questions and Replies between Tang Taizong and Li Weigong</i> (<i>Tang Taizong Li Weigong wendui</i> ; 唐太宗李卫公问对)	7 th c AD

¹⁸ Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), p. 48.

¹⁹ Xu Jianjun and He Shaohua, eds., *College Military Course of Study* (*daxue junshi jiaocheng*; 大学军事教程) (Changsha: Zhongnan University Press, 2004), p. 30; “‘The Art of War by Sunzi’ Becomes Required Course for Chinese Cadets,” *Xinhua*, 5 May 2006, OSC CPP20060505052010. See also Qian Ruyi, *Command Decision-Making and Strategem* (Beijing: Kunlun Publishing House, 1999), OSC CPP20030424000250: “The *Art of War*... is the most profound and influential book of all the Chinese books on war, and a celebrated ‘bible of war’ throughout the world.”

²⁰ Wang Xingsheng and Wu Zhizhong, “Opinion Piece on Military Soft Power,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 7 Jun 2007, p. 6, OSC CPP20070607710013.

Victory depends on careful planning. Chinese martial tradition emphasizes the need to plan a war well before it begins, studying the enemy’s strengths and weaknesses and making an honest assessment of one’s own. This tradition stresses realism over ideals and flexibility over absolute tactical principles. Mao Zedong similarly pointed out that “a careless military man bases his military plans on his own wishful thinking...He does not know or does not want to know that every military plan must be based on the necessary reconnaissance and on careful consideration of the enemy’s situation, his own situation, and their interrelations.”²¹

Stratagem and deception are key elements of military strength. *The Art of War* is famous for its emphasis on “stratagem” – tricks or schemes to outwit the enemy. Sun-tzu writes that wars are won largely on the enemy’s miscalculation of one’s capabilities and plans, so exploiting elements of surprise and disinformation should be a military priority.

Deceiving the enemy about one’s intentions and capabilities remains central to the PLA approach to war, as reflected in Deng Xiaoping’s “24-character strategy” of the early 1990s, which he proclaimed as the basic approach China should take toward its foreign and security policy. U.S. Department of Defense officials today believe that “secrecy and deception” remain a central component of Chinese military strategy.²²

<p>“Although you are capable, display incapability [to your enemy]. When committed to employing your forces, feign inactivity. When your objective is nearby, make it appear as if distant; when far away, create the illusion of being nearby.”</p> <p>— Sun-tzu’s <i>Art of War</i></p>	<p>“Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.”</p> <p>— Deng Xiaoping’s “24-Character Strategy”</p>
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An army cannot win unless its members possess a strong fighting spirit. Ancient martial texts place a premium on the mental and spiritual state, or *qi* (气), of the army. We might think of *qi* as something like “morale,” which impels one to fight even when one’s physical resources are exhausted. Commanders can nourish their troops’ *qi* by keeping them materially well-supplied, treating them benevolently, and providing rewards and punishments that make their will to fight stronger than their fear of death.²³

²¹ Mao Zedong, “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War” (1936), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm.

²² *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008), Chapter 3.

²³ See “The Methods of the Ssu-ma,” translated by Ralph D. Sawyer, in Ralph D. Sawyer, ed., *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 121.

Today's PLA also views "fighting spirit" as the key to martial success. Some PLA writers ascribe near-mystical qualities to this spirit, terming it a "magic weapon for defeating enemies."²⁵ Mao Zedong stressed the importance of "fighting spirit" when discussing the PLA's successes in the Korean war, explaining that the difference between the more-advanced U.S. military and the PLA was that the United States had "more steel [weaponry] than *qi*" while China had "more *qi* than steel."²⁶

"Experience shows that, given equality of weaponry and armaments, fighting spirit decides the result of wars; given inferiority in weapons and armaments, a strong fighting spirit may make up for the inferiority in armaments...."²⁴

— *PLA Daily*

Warfare will be successful only if it is just and has the support of the people. China's ancient strategists believed that only just wars could be successful. Both ancient Chinese texts and modern PLA writings define a just war as one fought on behalf of all the people; they suggest that a war entered into for the personal gain of a ruler or commander (or, PLA texts argue, for the gain of the bourgeois class) is doomed to failure.

"Only by a just war...will the military be able to maintain the morale to achieve victory for a long period of time, pressing forward with indomitable will, and crushing all opposition."²⁷

— "Discussion on Military Soft Power Building," 2006

This principle links the justness of an army's cause with its ability to inspire the "fighting spirit" necessary to win wars. It also notes that, in times of war, national unity rests on the support not just of military personnel but of society as a whole.²⁸

²⁴ "Vigorously Fostering Combat Spirit – Fourth Commentary on Education Activities on the Chinese Military's Loyal Fulfillment of the Historic Missions for the New Stage and the New Century," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 3 Apr 2006, p. 1, OSC CPP20060404515009.

²⁵ "Fostering Combat Spirit with the Focus on Fulfillment of New Missions," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 20 Apr 2005, p. 1, OSC CPP20050420000118.

²⁶ "Fostering Combat Spirit with the Focus on Fulfillment of New Missions."

²⁷ Wang Xingsheng and Wu Zhizhong, "Discussion on Military Soft Power Building," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, 2007-1, pp. 92-98.

²⁸ Sawyer, *Seven Military Classics*, p. 154.

ICTA OF SUN-TZU REFERENCED BY TODAY'S PLA

“The general who makes calculations before battle will win.”

(*weizhan er miaosuan sheng*; 未战而庙算胜)

“If you know yourself and you know your enemy, in a hundred battles you will not lose one.” (*zhiji zhibi, baizhan budai*; 知己知彼，百战不殆)

“All warfare is based on deception.” (*bingzhe guidaoye*; 兵者诡道也)

“Subdue the enemy army without fighting.”

(*buzhan er qu renzhibing*; 不战而屈人之兵)

“The best thing is to attack the enemy's plans, next best to attack his diplomatic relations, next to attack his army, and only last to attack his cities.”

(*gu shangbing famou, qici fajiao, qici fabing, qixia gongcheng*; 故上兵伐谋，其次伐交，其次伐兵，其下攻城)

Literary classics

Members of the PLA also draw lessons from the heroic warriors and clever strategists whose exploits are celebrated in Chinese literature. Many of these semi-legendary tales draw on events from China's wars of antiquity. They remain wildly popular in Chinese society today, where they have been adapted into video games, television series, comic books, and other popular culture products (see Figure 1-1).

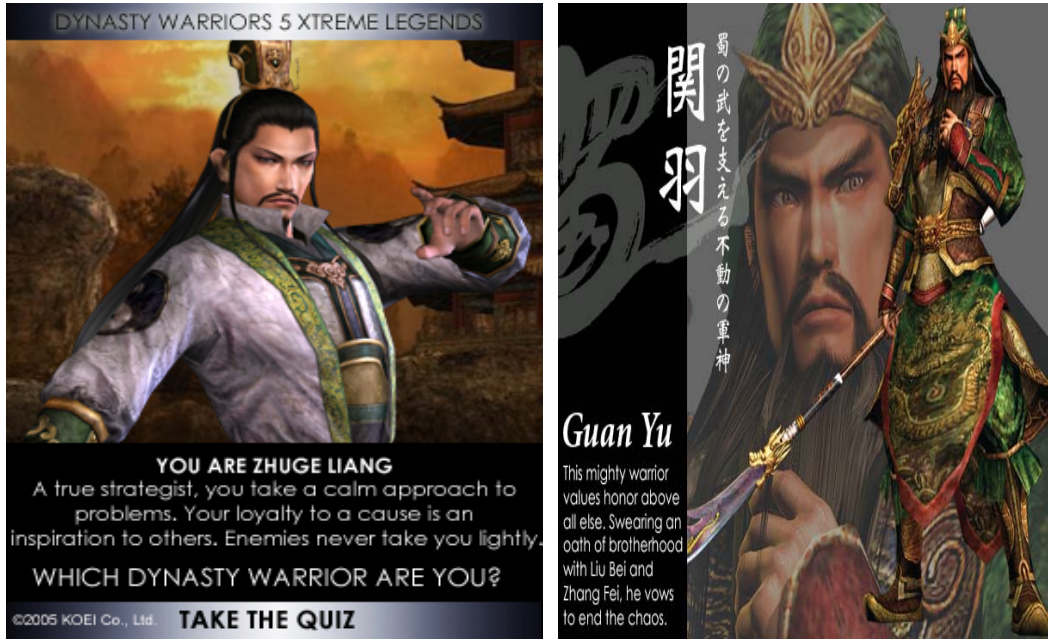
Two 14th-century novels in particular – the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin* (sometimes known as *The Outlaws of the Marsh*) – remain important touchstones for the PLA. The heroes of these novels are depicted as the human embodiments of both Sun-tzu's martial principles and Confucius' social and political mores. In *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the main characters are powerful military and political leaders, while in *Water Margin* they are outlaws and bandits. Their different social positions notwithstanding, all fight cleverly, courageously, and in the name of righteous government and fair treatment of the common people.²⁹

Present-day PLA publications frequently reference these novels, often as object lessons in the efficacy of specific military tactics. Mao Zedong cited both works in his own writings, and was known to be particularly fond of *Water Margin*.³⁰ Most of the tactics and strategies depicted in these novels mirror those described in Sun-tzu.

²⁹ Lo Kuan-chung, *Three Kingdoms: China's Epic Drama*, translated and edited by Moss Roberts (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p. 9.

³⁰ See, e.g., Mao Zedong, “Problems of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War.”

Figure 1-1: A personality quiz based on characters from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*



Both novels also highlight essential human qualities that the PLA considers important for its own personnel. (PLA views on these qualities are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.) These include:

Loyalty. In both novels, the heroes’ primary virtue is loyalty – to one another and to principles of righteous imperial rule. Similar demands are made on PLA personnel, who forswear their personal interests to fulfill their “Four Loyalties” to the Party, the Motherland, the Chinese people, and the military profession.

Modesty. Both novels disdain characters driven by ambition for personal power. The PLA also professes to eschew individual glory in favor of collective accomplishment.

Adherence to bonds of obligation. The heroes of both novels place a premium on fulfilling their obligations to others, even at the cost of their own lives. Though not often explicitly discussed in PLA writings, obligations based on a variety of personal ties play an important role in the PLA.

Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought

“Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought” (*makese liening zhuyi mao zedong sixiang*; 马克思列宁主义毛泽东思想) permeates PLA doctrines and organizational structures. Chapter 2 of this report outlines some of the values that derive from this ideology; Chapter 3 discusses its most important organizational legacies for the PLA.

Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought is inextricably linked to the historical development of the CCP. The Party and its ideology developed in China throughout the early part of the 20th century. This development can be broken into three phases, discussed below.

Phase One: Soviet indoctrination and the First United Front (1921–1927)

In its early years, the CCP forged close ties with the Kuomintang (KMT, also called the “Nationalist Party,” or *guomindang*; 国民党) and the Soviet Union. The CCP was founded in July 1921, without a military arm. In its first few years, the CCP had a minimal presence on China’s political scene, numbering only a few hundred members and led by largely unknown figures.³¹ The KMT was much larger – it had 50,000 members by 1923, and was led by the revered politician Sun Yat-sen and the powerful general Chiang Kai-shek.

These two parties joined forces for several years in the “First United Front” (described in the shaded box above). In 1924, under the guidance of the Comintern, they jointly established an institution that would give shape to both parties’ ideologies and institutions for decades to come: the Whampoa Military Academy (*huangpu junxiao*; 黄埔军校). Modeled after Soviet military academies, Whampoa was intended to provide professional military training, as well as ideological guidance, to China’s revolutionary parties.

THE FIRST UNITED FRONT

Although the CCP and the KMT were political rivals, both considered themselves revolutionary parties, fighting to strengthen China against the forces of “imperialism” and “warlordism.” Both sought financial support and organizational guidance from the Soviet Union. Russian advisors from the Communist International (Comintern) persuaded the two parties to set aside their ideological differences and cooperate to overthrow the regional warlords who then controlled much of China. Thus, the KMT and CCP joined forces under the “First United Front” (~1923–1927).

The combined KMT-CCP forces took part in the “Northern Expedition” (1925–26), a military campaign that succeeded in breaking the power of many warlords and reuniting much of China. Nonetheless, the First United Front was an uneasy alliance that ended in bloodshed in early 1927, when KMT leader Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Communists purged from the alliance.

³¹ Figures suggest that the CCP had about 300 members in 1923, two years after its founding, and perhaps 1,500 by 1925. John King Fairbank, *China: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992), p. 282; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1990), p. 336.

At Whampoa, Soviet military advisors trained Chinese officers in modern Russian and German operational practices, in Marxist political theory, and in the theoretical and organizational principles of Leninism.³² Many of the PLA's organizational structures (discussed in Chapter 3) retain a Leninist flavor, most notably the incorporation into the military of a system of political officers who oversee the work of their comrades-in-arms and infuse ideological correctness into their subordinates. Whampoa's influence on the PLA's development is evidenced by the fact that among the first post-1949 generation of PLA leaders, 5 of 10 supreme commanders and 3 of 10 three-star generals had trained at Whampoa.³³

The PLA inherited the following Marxist-Leninist legacies from Whampoa:

The revolutionary principle. Marxism holds that history is a violent process of class struggle that will end in worldwide communism. Marx and his followers believed that in the modern era those who benefit from labor – the capitalist or “bourgeois” class – oppress and enslave those who labor – the “proletariat” or working class. The only way this imbalance can be corrected is through a revolutionary uprising of the working class, leading to the establishment of a new, communist society.³⁴

The PLA teaches its members that the 1949 revolution “liberated” the Chinese peasants from their feudal oppressors. Today's PLA is expected to remain aware of its revolutionary mission and guard against political “backsliding.” The PLA professes to abide by the principle that revolution does not end when the Party gains power – it is a struggle that continues in perpetuity against “counter-revolutionary” forces that seek to sap the ideological purity and fighting spirit of the PLA.

The Party-Army principle. Leninism holds that the Communist Party is the leader both of the revolution and of the armed forces. For revolution to take place, the oppressed classes need to become conscious of their own oppression. Marx thought that this consciousness would arise spontaneously; Lenin, on the other hand, believed that the Communist Party would need to act as the “vanguard” or “advance

³² Cheng Hsiao-shih, *Party-Military Relations in the PRC and Taiwan: Paradoxes of Control* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), p. 20. In addition to the strong Soviet influence, German advisors played a prominent role in the development of the KMT army during this period; see, e.g., William C. Kirby, *Germany and Republican China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984).

³³ Yuan Wei and Zhang Zhuo, eds., *History of the Development of China's Military Schools* (*zhongguo junxiao fazhan shi*; 中国军校发展史) (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2001), p. 291.

³⁴ For a basic explanation of Marxist views of the division of labor, see Frederick Engels, *The Principles of Communism* (1847), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/11/prin-com.htm>; for Marxist theories of political consciousness and revolution, see Karl Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto>.

contingent” to lead the people into revolutionary self-awareness.³⁵ In this sense, the Party was an organization of “professional revolutionaries.”³⁶

“The revolutionary army and the revolutionary government are two sides of the same medal.”³⁷

— Vladimir Ilyich Lenin

Lenin further believed that revolution could take place only through military conflict, writing that “the revolutionary army is needed because great historical issues can be resolved only *by force*.”³⁸ His view is echoed by Mao’s famous statement that “all power comes from the barrel of a gun.”³⁹ The revolutionary army must be

completely controlled by and subordinate to the Party – in fact, in Lenin and Mao’s view, the army has no missions apart from those of the Party. Thus the PLA is a “Party-Army.” The “absolute leadership” of the CCP over the PLA was confirmed in resolutions adopted at one of the CCP’s early policy plenums, the 1929 “Gutian Conference.”⁴⁰

The mass mobilization principle. Lenin – and Mao after him – wrote that the military must mobilize the entire population to participate in revolutionary war. The tasks of mobilization include setting up mass organizations among the people to educate them on revolutionary theory; mobilizing ordinary citizens to join military units, militias, and labor uprisings; and seeking material support from the people for PLA tasks. In this view, there is no clear delineation between Party, people, and army: all are mobilized simultaneously through a network of Party-managed, interwoven organizations.

“Let the people of the whole country mobilize, take up arms and join the War of Resistance. Let those with strength contribute strength, those with money contribute money, those with guns contribute guns, and those with knowledge contribute knowledge.”⁴¹

— Mao Zedong, “Mobilize All the Nation’s Forces For Victory in the War of Resistance”

³⁵ See Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “What is To Be Done? – Burning Questions of Our Revolutionary Movement,” in Henry M. Christman, ed., *The Essential Works of Lenin* (New York: Bantam Books, 1966).

³⁶ Benjamin I. Schwartz, “Themes in Intellectual History: May Fourth and After,” in John K. Fairbank and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 12: Republican China 1912-1949 (Part I)* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 431.

³⁷ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “The Revolutionary Army and the Revolutionary Government” (1905), in Bernard Isaacs and Isador Lasker, eds., *Lenin Collected Works*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), pp. 560-68, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1905/jul/10.htm>.

³⁸ Lenin, “The Revolutionary Army and the Revolutionary Government.” Emphasis in original.

³⁹ Mao Zedong, “Problems of War and Strategy” (1938), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_12.htm.

⁴⁰ Liu Yuan, “The Historic Position of the Gutian Meeting in Our Army Building,” *Qiushi* No. 16, 16 Aug 2007, OSC CPP20070821710010.

⁴¹ Mao Zedong, “For the Mobilization of All the Nation’s Forces for Victory in the War of Resistance” (1937), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_02.htm.

To accomplish these tasks, the Red Army integrated itself into the daily life of rural communities, holding Marxist study sessions and recruiting peasants to the revolutionary cause.⁴²

Phase Two: Breaking with the KMT and forming the Red Army (1927-1930s)

The First United Front broke down in April 1927, after KMT forces, on Chiang Kai-shek's orders, killed thousands of CCP members and wiped out nearly all of the CCP's urban bases. This purge forced the remaining CCP into the countryside. On August 1, 1927 – a date that the PLA considers its founding moment – 20,000 Communist troops, led by Marshal Zhu De, attacked a KMT arsenal at Nanchang, Jiangxi Province. Thus began the Chinese civil war. With Mao at its helm, the CCP would fight against the KMT on and off for the next two decades.

The Communist army, which came to be known as the “Red Army” (*hongjun*; 红军) was made up largely of poor, underequipped peasants. It was faced with materially superior enemies: the KMT and, later on, the Japanese military.

Phase Three: Modifying Marxist-Leninist principles to fit Chinese circumstances (1938 onward)

In October 1938 Mao called for the “Sinification of Marxism.”⁴⁶ Having determined that Lenin's urban, industrial revolution was inappropriate for China's largely rural population, he modified Marxist-Leninist principles to better fit China's circumstances.

CHINESE COMMUNIST ARMIES

The **Red Army** (originally known as the “**Chinese Workers and Peasants Red Army**”) was formed by the CCP after the disintegration of the First United Front in 1927.⁴³

During the “Anti-Japanese War” (i.e., World War II), when the CCP and the KMT suspended their civil war to jointly resist Japanese invasion, the main body of Red Army was absorbed into the joint forces and re-designated the **Eighth Route Army**. A **New Fourth Army** was also formed around a core of fighters who had served as the rear guard during the Long March.⁴⁴

In 1948, after the civil war against the KMT had resumed, these two forces were integrated into the **People's Liberation Army**.⁴⁵

⁴² Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945-1981* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), p. 3.

⁴³ William Wei, “‘Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun’: Mao and the Red Army,” in David A. Graff and Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), p. 233.

⁴⁴ Wei, “Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun,” pp. 243-244.

⁴⁵ Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, p. 46.

⁴⁶ Mao Zedong, *The Collected Works of Mao Zedong (Mao Zedong ji; 毛泽东集)* (Tokyo: Hokubosha, 1970), 6.260-1; see also Stuart Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1969), pp. 172-73.

The many essays Mao produced on this topic are an essential part of what the CCP now calls “Mao Zedong Thought” (*mao zedong sixiang*; 毛泽东思想).

One of the most influential elements of Mao Zedong Thought was Mao’s belief that the CCP’s best chance of winning was to adopt guerrilla tactics, a strategy that he later developed into the concept of “People’s War.”⁴⁷

PEOPLE’S WAR

“People’s War” combines Sun-tzu’s principles of deception and calculation with the mobile, flexible tactics of guerrilla warfare. Mao articulated this concept most clearly in his 1938 essay “On Protracted War.” Mao believed that the poorly equipped CCP army could succeed against technologically superior enemies by arming and training large numbers of peasants.⁴⁸ Some of these soldiers were to be incorporated into the Red Army’s regular forces, while others would form local militias and guerrilla units that could be called upon in times of emergency.

As originally conceived, the components of “People’s War” included:

- “Luring the enemy deep” into one’s territory, then attacking them
- Wearing down the enemy in a protracted war of attrition
- Focusing on the enemy’s weakest points
- Mobilizing the entire population to resist the enemy
- Using speed, surprise, deception, and stratagem
- Using guerrilla tactics when one’s forces are too weak for conventional warfare.

This concept seems far removed from the “local, high-tech wars” the PLA expects to fight today. In 1979 Deng Xiaoping modified the doctrine of “People’s War” to “People’s War Under Modern Conditions,” giving more credence to the use of high-tech weaponry while maintaining an emphasis on striking the enemy’s weak points. Subsequent doctrinal shifts have moved the PLA even further from the original principles of People’s War, but it remains a revered concept and is frequently redefined to fit current operational doctrine.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Mao Zedong, “On Guerilla Warfare” (1937), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/index.htm>.

⁴⁸ William W. Whitson, *The Chinese High Command*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ See Paul H. B. Godwin, “Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine, 1949-1999,” in Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience Since 1949* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 39-40; Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, pp. 110-111; Mark Burles and Abram N. Shulsky, *Patterns in China’s Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000), p. 26.

In addition to “People’s War,” today’s CCP and PLA leaders consider several other Maoist principles to be relevant for the modern Chinese military, including the following:

Ordinary people should participate in decision-making, but only in a limited and controlled fashion. Lenin’s concept of *democratic centralism* (*minzhu jizhong*; 民主集中) continues to guide the CCP’s attitude toward participatory decision-making in Party institutions. Defined as “freedom of discussion, unity of action,” democratic centralism emphasizes the importance of controlled discussion and debate in Party decision-making procedures.⁵⁰ The Party allows all of its members to take part in wide-ranging discussions on matters of policy (the “democratic” aspect), but mandates that once a policy direction has been decided all discussion will end and all members will uphold that decision (the “centralist” aspect).

Mao adapted democratic centralism to more fully incorporate the opinions of ordinary people into Party decisions. The uniquely Maoist concept of the *mass line* (*qunzhong luxian*; 群众路线) posits that the Party needs to understand the masses’ ideas and opinions in order to make informed decisions and design effective policies. However, it holds, the people themselves may not comprehend how best to turn their scattered ideas into coherent policy. Thus, the responsibility for actual policy-making and implementation continues to rest with the Party, which “centralizes” the people’s wisdom and “returns” well-crafted policies back to the citizenry. Succinctly expressed in the slogan “from the masses, to the masses” (*cong qunzhong zhong lai, dao qunzhong zhong qu*; 从群众中来, 到群众中去), the mass line principle remains central to the participatory, “democratic” mechanisms built into the PLA. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 4.)

WHAT IS THE MASS LINE?

The mass line means “taking the ideas of the masses (the scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrating them (through study, changing them into concentrated, systematic ideas), then going into the masses to publicize explanations... causing the masses to persist in them and translate them into action, and through mass action test these ideas to see if they are correct...In this kind of unlimited cycle, every time around will be clearer, livelier, and richer.”⁵¹

— Mao Zedong, “Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership”

Human willpower can overcome great material disadvantage. A distinctive aspect of Mao’s thought was his focus on *voluntarism* – the notion that human will is the determining factor of the success or failure of all endeavors. Mao believed that a sufficiently strong will could overcome not only personal shortcomings, but even

⁵⁰ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “Report of the Unity Congress of the R.S.D.L.P.: A Letter to the St. Petersburg Workers” (1906), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1906/rucong/viii.htm>.

⁵¹ Mao Zedong, “Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership” (1 Jun 1943), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_13.htm.

material reality, to produce desired outcomes.⁵² This sometimes took on absurd dimensions, as when Mao surmised at the beginning of the “Great Leap Forward” (1958–61) that China’s economic backwardness could be solved by turning the energies of the entire population from agricultural to industrial production, even though the Chinese people had little appropriate training or equipment.⁵³ Millions of Chinese citizens starved in the aftermath of this attempt to prove the power of the human will.

While today’s PLA avoids the most extreme formulations of voluntarism, it continues to emphasize the centrality of willpower to success in warfare. PLA texts stress that an army can win a war with inferior material resources, but is doomed to failure without sufficient human resolve and commitment. This topic is explored in detail in Chapter 2.

War follows “scientific” principles that should be studied and followed. Marx and Mao believed that through a systematic analysis of history, one can understand the objective principles that govern human endeavors. China’s military establishment today follows the principles of “scientific Marxism” to determine how best to conduct warfare. Its leaders believe that war is governed by broad, knowable trends or laws (*guilü*; 规律) that, once determined, must be obeyed to ensure success. The field of “military science” (*junshi kexue*; 军事科学) is thus dedicated to the study of the “rules, guidelines, and laws” that govern the conduct of war, and is viewed as not only an academic subject but also the starting point for decisions and policies.⁵⁴

The PLA’s selective interpretation of China’s modern history

The PLA draws a number of lessons and beliefs about itself from recent Chinese history, as filtered through Party-approved texts. On the broadest level, PLA writings retell Chinese post-1840 history as a tale of loss, struggle and redemption. They depict a China torn apart in the 19th century by internal rebellions, foreign invasion, political collapse, and widespread social chaos; today the Chinese call the period between 1840 and 1949 the “Century of Humiliation” (*bainian guochi*; 百年国耻). Official histories today teach that the CCP and the PLA, emerging victorious from the Chinese civil war in 1949, “rescued the nation” (*jiuguo*; 救国) from these depredations and restored it to a position of international prestige.

⁵² For more on Mao’s voluntarism, see Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *History and Will: Philosophical Perspectives of Mao Tse-tung’s Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973).

⁵³ See, e.g., June Grasso, Jay Corrin, and Michael Kort, *Modernization and Revolution in China: From the Opium Wars to World Power, 3rd Edition* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), Chapter 8.

⁵⁴ Maryanne Kivlehan, *Doctrinal Change in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Institutions, Processes, and Influences*, CNA Research Memorandum D0008391.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2003), p. iii.

To give more texture to this narrative, PLA textbooks and official histories divide post-1840 history into three major periods. Below, we summarize these periods, and the lessons the PLA draws from them.

It is important to understand that the PLA's version of China's history is not presented objectively. Historical events that do not resonate with this CCP-approved narrative are barely discussed.

1839–1921: Foreign intrusion and internal disorder

This period of painful national loss is bounded on one end by the Opium War, which the CCP considers the dawn of foreign aggression against China, and on the other by the CCP's own founding. During this period, China was under siege both externally and internally. In addition to its struggles with foreign powers, it was plagued by internal political division and a number of large-scale rebellions.

Figure 1-2 depicts the large territorial losses China suffered during this period.

KEY EVENTS, 1839 - 1921

1840–1842: The United Kingdom, determined to keep Chinese markets open to the opium trade, launches the **First Opium War** (some accounts mark its beginning in 1839) against China's Qing Dynasty. China loses, and is forced to open its seaports to Western countries and Japan. The result is a semi-colonial system of extraterritorial treaty ports, effectively depriving the Chinese imperial government of control over significant parts of its own territory.

1850–1864: China is embroiled in the immense **Taiping Rebellion**, which results in the deaths of millions of Chinese and is put down only with military assistance from foreign powers resident in China.

1899–1900: The **Boxer Uprising** starts as a popular anti-foreign movement but quickly turns against the Qing imperial court for not doing enough to stave off foreign influences. Eventually the Qing court declares war on eight resident foreign powers; it loses, and is plunged into debt by the massive indemnities it is forced to pay.

1894–1895: China loses the **Sino-Japanese War** and is forced to cede Taiwan and other territories to Japan.

1911: The **Qing Dynasty collapses** and the last emperor of China formally abdicates. China is declared a republic, under the leadership of the Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT). Much of the country becomes a fractured collection of fiefdoms controlled by regional **“warlords”** (*junfa*; 军阀).

1921: The **Chinese Communist Party is founded** in Shanghai.

Figure 1-2: Chinese territory lost and regained since 1840



1840
Greatest extent of imperial
China's effective control



1920
Smallest extent of the
Republic of China's effective
control



Present day
Effective territorial control of
the People's Republic of China

1921–1949: The rise of the CCP and the Red Army

In Chinese history texts, this period of struggle is bounded on one end by the founding of the CCP and on the other by its triumph over the KMT. This was a period of nearly perpetual warfare in China. While the KMT and CCP came together twice to fight a common enemy, their ideological and personal antagonisms persisted throughout.

For much of this period, the Red Army was essentially on the run, its ranks filled with poor peasants who were hungry, poorly clothed, and poorly trained. When the Chinese civil war re-ignited after the close of World War II, the Red Army slowly evolved toward more mass-oriented battlefield tactics and eventually consolidated its diverse forces into a single “People’s Liberation Army.” However, it continued to think of itself as an overmatched, essentially guerrilla army.⁵⁵

KEY EVENTS, 1921 - 1949

1921: The **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)** is founded in Shanghai.

1923–1927: The CCP and KMT join forces in the **First United Front**.

1926: United Front forces conduct the **Northern Expedition**, defeating regional warlords and reuniting large portions of China.

April 1927: The KMT purges Communists from the United Front, massacring thousands of CCP members, in the “**White Terror**.”

August 1, 1927: Communist forces under Zhu De attack KMT outposts in the **Nanchang Rebellion**, which the PLA considers its **founding moment**. The **Chinese civil war** begins.

1931–1932: Japan **annexes Chinese Manchuria**.

1934–1935: Communist forces endure the **Long March** (*changzheng*; 长征). After breaking out of KMT encirclement in Jiangxi Province, Mao’s forces march more than 8,000 miles in 10 months, engaging in more than 500 battles and losing nearly 90 percent of their original 85,000 troops.

1937–1945: Japan declares war on China, and sacks and loots Chinese cities, most notably in the 1937 **Rape of Nanking**. The KMT and CCP suspend their civil war to form a **Second United Front** against the Japanese, whose occupation of large parts of Chinese territory lasts until the end of the **Anti-Japanese War** (i.e., World War II).

1948: The **Eighth Route Army** and **New Fourth Army** are integrated to form the **People’s Liberation Army**.

1946–1949: The **Chinese civil war** resumes, culminating in the founding of the **People’s Republic of China** in 1949 and the retreat of KMT forces to Taiwan.

⁵⁵ Larry M. Wortzel, “The Beiping-Tianjin Campaign of 1948-49: The Strategic and Operational Thinking of the People’s Liberation Army,” in Ryan, Finkelstein, and McDevitt, *Chinese Warfighting*, p. 60.

1949–1979: “New China,” post-liberation wars, and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution

Carried to power by the Red Army’s victories, the CCP founded the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Chinese historians depict this as the end of the “Century of Humiliation” and the beginning of China’s redemption, paving the way for China to regain the prestige and power it had lost since 1840.

Much remained to be done, though. “New China” remained poor, heavily rural, and shattered by war. The 30 years that followed saw great strides forward in China’s modernization. It also saw a number of steps backward.

During this period the PLA engaged in a number of conflicts, large and small, outside China’s borders. Though outside observers consider the outcome of many of these conflicts ambiguous, the PLA depicts each of them as a clear military and moral victory for the Chinese forces.

In the late 1960s, the PLA was drawn into the political and social chaos that split China during the “Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution” (*wenhua da geming*; 文化大革命). During this period, Mao encouraged masses of student “Red Guards” to denounce and punish anyone deemed a “rightist,” sometimes including their own parents, teachers, and other authority figures. As the chaos escalated, the PLA was brought in to suppress some of the Red Guard factions, at times using deadly force.

The Cultural Revolution profoundly disrupted the PLA. Its modernization efforts were halted, as members were instructed to focus on ideological concerns rather than on training and preparedness. All educational institutions in China, civilian and military, were shut down. Therefore the generation that came of age during this period – those who are now at the highest echelons of the PLA – were unable to obtain any significant professional military education until this period had ended, when they had already been in the PLA nearly 20 years. As a result, one analyst explains, “the current PLA elite are now responsible for shepherding a military modernization program that, given their personal and professional histories, they are ill-equipped to manage or even understand.”⁵⁶ Today’s PLA acknowledges the great setbacks it experienced as a result of this period of chaos.

When Mao died in 1976, the Cultural Revolution had effectively ended. Mao’s successor, Deng Xiaoping, moved to professionalize and modernize the PLA. He reopened the military academies, began a long-term process of PLA downsizing, updated operational doctrine and training regimens, and began to expose the PLA to foreign ideas and exchanges with foreign military personnel. In 1978 he declared the beginning of a period of “reform and opening up” (*gaige kaifang*; 改革开放), in which China would begin to modernize its economy, society, and military.

⁵⁶ Dean Cheng, Kristen Gunness, and James Bellacqua, *An Exploration of the Evolving PLA Elite*, CNA Research Memorandum D0017346.A1 (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2007), p. iii.

We end our discussion of Chinese history with the beginning of the reform period, since PLA writers consider the decades since then to be part of the current era; much that has happened in that era is covered in other chapters.

KEY EVENTS, 1949 - 1979

1949: The **People's Republic of China** is founded.

1950–1953: The Chinese military engages American forces in the Korean War, which is referred to in China as the “**Aid Korea, Resist America War.**”

1954–1958: The PLA conducts a number of **operations against KMT forces** on Taiwan, but does not invade.

1962: China conducts a brief **border war with India.**

1966–1976: The “**Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution**” profoundly disrupts the PLA's development.

1969: The PLA is involved in a number of **skirmishes with Soviet forces** along its northern border.

1976–1978: After the **death of Mao Zedong**, Deng Xiaoping gradually amasses power, eventually becoming China's paramount leader and introducing a broad set of reforms aimed at modernizing China's economy, government, and military. The period since 1978 has become known as China's “**reform and opening up**” (*gaige kaifang*; 改革开放) period.

1979: China goes to **war with Vietnam** to “teach it a lesson” for invading Cambodia; border skirmishes continue through the early 1980s.

Lessons the PLA takes from its history

The PLA promotes the following beliefs with regard to China's post-1840 history.

The “Century of Humiliation” shows that Western nations are by nature aggressive, forcing China to wage defensive wars.

The PLA takes the events of the 19th and early 20th centuries as evidence that Western powers are fundamentally rapacious, greedy, and aggressive. Some PLA academics today assert that this is a longstanding orientation, writing that Western nations were historically “slave states [that] frequently launched wars of conquest and pillage to expand their territories, plunder wealth, and extend their sphere of influence.”⁵⁷

By contrast, PLA authors assert, China's strategic tradition is distinguished by its constant pursuit of peace.⁵⁸ The PLA depicts China, both historically and in the current era, as a “peace-craving and peace-loving” nation, emphasizing that “peace claims

⁵⁷ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, p. 93.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Gong Yuzhen, *Analysis of China's Strategic Culture (zhongguo zhanlue wenhua jiesi; 中国战略文化界斯)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2002), Chapter 1.

precedence” (*he wei gui*; 和为贵) over war in the Chinese worldview.⁵⁹ China wages war only when all other means of securing peace have failed. PLA texts further declare that China has never harbored territorial ambitions against other nations.⁶⁰ Accordingly, the PLA characterizes all Chinese wars as defensive actions against invaders.⁶¹ Any confrontation between China’s military and that of another nation is depicted as the result of the other nation’s aggressive actions, or “hegemony.”

The Maoist military principle of “active defense” (*jiji fangyu*; 积极防御) draws on the PLA’s depiction of its mission as purely defensive, asserting that China will strike only after the enemy has struck. This is a curious assertion, given that the PRC has launched first strikes in a number of military actions outside its borders. Nevertheless, PLA publications consistently interpret China’s military actions as being driven by an overt threat to China’s national security.

REINTERPRETING “ACTIVE DEFENSE”

The PLA justifies military actions against other nations by distinguishing in its writings between “strategic attack” and “tactical attack.” PLA strategists claim that the principle of “active defense” allows for China to make the first tactical strike when threatened “strategically.” “Strategic attacks” are defined as those not only on the Chinese military but also on China’s sovereignty, the Chinese people, or the CCP’s political control – including the use of “hostile forces such as religious extremists, national separatists, and international terrorists.”⁶² In this way either military attacks on the PRC’s territory *or* political attacks on the CCP may justify a counter-attack by the PLA.

The PLA justifies its current defense modernization in part by recalling China’s legacy of victimization by the West and Japan. It claims that it seeks merely to prevent future invasion, not to expand China’s military footprint.⁶³

⁵⁹ Lin Chengdong and Chen Zhengdong, “The Importance of National Defense Construction and Army Building in the Overall Layout for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 6 Oct 2007, p. 6, OSC CPP20071206710007; David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 21.

⁶⁰ Wu Pin, “Military Scholar on Tactics Views Defense Issues” (interview with Maj. Gen. Cai Yuqiu), *Ta Kung Pao*, 1 Aug 2007, OSC CPP20070806710004.

⁶¹ For example, two PLA scholars at the Academy of Military Science write that “China’s tradition of a unified domain ... [meant that the military] paid more attention to domestic order rather than expansion” starting with the 2nd century BC. See Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, p. 72.

⁶² Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, p. 426; see also Wu Pin, “Military Scholar on Tactics Views Defense Issues.”

⁶³ David M. Finkelstein and John Unangst, *Engaging DoD: Chinese Perspectives on Military Relations with the United States*, CNA Research Memorandum 99-0046.90 (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 1999), p. 2.

DISTRUST OF FOREIGN INTENTIONS: A LEGACY OF THE PAST

As discussed above, the Chinese today view the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a dark period in their history. The year 1840 is considered the dividing line between China's proud imperial past and her subsequent subjugation to foreign whims.

The impact of the "Century of Humiliation" on China's self-image and national aspirations cannot be overemphasized. Chinese citizens still display a deep sense of wounded pride over this period. Due in large part to bitter memories of the sovereignty, power, and human lives that China lost, feelings against foreign interference still run very strong. For instance, one media commentator hailed the 2008 Beijing Olympics as a chance to "dispel the lingering bitterness from the humiliating defeats China suffered at the hands of imperialist aggressors in the past century."⁶⁴

The CCP at times actively encourages PLA members to distrust foreign intentions. For instance, President Hu Jintao, in a 2004 speech on the PLA's main tasks, warned that "Western hostile forces have not given up the wild ambition of trying to subjugate us, intensifying the political strategy of Westernizing and dividing up China."⁶⁵

China's external sovereignty and domestic stability are closely linked; the PLA must strive to protect both.

The Chinese have long believed that "internal strife and external calamities" (*neiluanwaihuan*; 内乱外患) are fundamentally linked.⁶⁶ The PLA points to the unrest and rebellions that characterized pre-1949 China as evidence that for the Chinese nation to survive, it must respond effectively to both external pressures and internal forces of disorder (such as ethnic separatism, local unrest, crime, and corruption). Even after the PRC was founded, the PLA teaches, the security of the new nation was still shaky for many years. PLA leaders proclaim that the PLA played a central role in guaranteeing the PRC's hard-won sovereignty and promoting its subsequent economic development.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Hong Liang, "Time to Drop the Baggage of History," *China Daily*, 2 Sept 2008, OSC CPP20080902968010.

⁶⁵ Hu Jintao, "Understand the New Historic Missions of our Military in the New Period of the New Century" (*renqing xinshiji xinjieduan wojun lishi shiming*; 认清新世纪新阶段我军历史使命), <http://gfjy.jiangxi.gov.cn/yil.asp?idid=11349.htm>.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Christopher P. Twomey, "Chinese Strategic Cultures: Survey and Critique," paper prepared for Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Advanced Systems and Concepts Office, Comparative Strategic Cultures Curriculum (Washington, DC: SAIC, 2006). Twomey argues that a concern with domestic stability is "in no way ... unique to China," though China does "justif[y] these preferences through its own history" (p. 8).

⁶⁷ History Research Institute of the Academy of Military Science, *Eighty Years of the People's Liberation Army* (*zhongguo renmin jiefangjun de bashinian*; 中国人民解放军的八十年) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2007), pp. 265-274.

China's wariness of external interference leads it to adopt what seems, from the outside, to be a rather paranoid attitude toward other nations' intentions. Many Chinese leaders believe that "hegemonic" nations, such as the United States, are bent on undermining weaker countries from within. In the PLA's view, many of the world's domestic disturbances and regional hostilities may be traced to such interference. One influential PLA text asserts, for instance, that "the hot issues in Southern Asia, Central Asia, Northeastern Asia, and Southeastern Asia are all related to the meddling of the dominant countries."⁶⁸

To toughen the nation's defenses against external threats, the PLA believes that it must also maintain domestic stability. This lesson was reinforced during the period of Western intrusion, when the weak ability of the imperial army to resist foreign invaders was further hampered by internal rebellions. As a result, the PLA is tasked with maintaining domestic order *not just for the sake of Party survival but also for the sake of national survival.*

The CCP and the Red Army "saved" China, providing the leadership and political awareness necessary to liberate the country and to resist foreign aggressors and domestic tyrants.

The PLA teaches that the Chinese people chafed under the "humiliations" brought about by foreign imperialists and feudal warlords, but that their attempts to overthrow these oppressors lacked any "firm core leadership" and were doomed to failure.⁷⁰

PLA texts stress that the PRC would never have been founded, or China "liberated," without the victories of the Red Army. They teach that the PLA's victories over the Japanese invaders and the Nationalist Army "saved" China from its downward spiral, marking the beginning of China's "standing up" after a long era of powerlessness, division, and foreign exploitation.⁷¹

"An important reason why the undertakings of the Party and the people could constantly advance from victory to victory and socialist China has been able to gain a firm foothold in the midst of international turbulence...is that we have the PLA: the heroic army that remains loyal to the Party, to socialism, to the Motherland, and to the people."⁶⁹

— PRC President Hu Jintao

⁶⁸ Zheng Shenxia (PLAAF General, director of Academy of Military Science), "Thoroughly Study and Implement the Party's New Achievements in Military Guidance Theory," *Junshi Kexue* 2007-4. Full-text DoD translation at OSC CPP20080223563001.

⁶⁹ Hu Jintao, speech delivered at rally marking the 80th founding anniversary of the PLA at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, 1 Aug 2007, OSC CPP20070801050015.

⁷⁰ History Research Institute of the Academy of Military Science, *Eighty Years of the People's Liberation Army*, pp. 1, 5.

⁷¹ See, e.g., Zou Zhicheng, ed., *College Military Instruction Course of Study (daxue junshike jiaocheng; 大学军事科教成)* (Changsha: Hunan University Press, 2004), pp. 9-11; Xu Jianjun and He Shaohua, *College Military Course of Study*, pp. 7-11. The remaking of the Chinese military is depicted as central to halting a

The victories of the Red Army and the PLA derived largely from their loyalty to the Party and its missions.

The PLA depicts its subordination to the CCP as one of its most distinctive and admirable traits.⁷² It instructs its personnel that the PLA's adherence to the CCP's political missions and moral codes drove its triumph in the Chinese civil war and all subsequent victories.⁷³

The greatest victories of the Red Army and the PLA have been achieved against larger, better-equipped, more technologically advanced adversaries. This is due to the superior morality, just cause, and fighting spirit of Chinese Communist armies.

PLA histories depict the Communist military as a perpetual underdog. The PLA indoctrinates its troops that in wars against the KMT, against Japan's occupying forces, and against the U.S. military in the Korean War, the PLA "miraculously...used a small force to defeat large enemy forces, used poor weapons to defeat enemies armed with advanced weapons and used weak forces to defeat enemies who were strong."⁷⁴

"In Chinese history, there have been various kinds of armies. But only the People's Liberation Army has always managed to keep its advanced nature. It is able to defeat any strong enemy. It never collapses, no matter what hardship it goes through."⁷⁵

— PRC President Hu Jintao

The depiction that "our army has always been brave and has always won" bolsters the PLA's belief in its own just cause and in the power of human will.⁷⁶

The PLA instructs its personnel that with sufficient determination and moral fortitude, they can

overcome all obstacles. By contrast, they say, any foreign military attacking China "must meet failure" because of its immoral purpose. Invading forces are "outwardly fierce but inwardly faint-hearted, while our military is a flourishing and punitive force, defending our sovereignty and repelling hegemony. Morality and justice are on our side."⁷⁷

The grueling experiences of the Chinese civil war period established among Red Army personnel an intense loyalty to the Communist cause and a belief in their own ability to withstand extreme physical hardship. The PLA teaches that the heroic figures of this

decline in power and a rise in corruption that had been building since the mid-Song Dynasty, in the 12th century (see Zou Zhicheng, *College Military Instruction Course of Study*, pp. 8-9).

⁷² See, e.g., Fan Changlong (Jinan MR Commander) and Liu Dongdong (Jinan MR Political Commissar), "Let the Iron Troop Spirit be Passed Down Generation After Generation," *Qiushi* No. 15, 1 Aug 2007, OSC CPP20070807710009; Liu Demou, Yun Shan, and Wu Liang, "The New Mission of the People's Army" (interview with major generals Yao Youzhi and Fu Liqun at Academy of Military Science), *Liaowang*, 8 Jan 2007, pp. 26-28, OSC CPP20070111710012.

⁷³ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders*, p. 244.

⁷⁴ "Fostering Combat Spirit with the Focus on Fulfillment of New Missions."

⁷⁵ Liu Demou, Yun Shan, and Wu Liang, "The New Mission of the People's Army."

⁷⁶ Liu Demou, Yun Shan, and Wu Liang, "The New Mission of the People's Army."

⁷⁷ Wang Xingsheng and Wu Zhizhong, "Discussion on Military Soft Power Building."

period and their participation in arduous exploits such as the Long March illustrate the effectiveness of the PLA's superior fighting spirit.⁷⁸

The PLA has won every war that it has fought.

The PLA depicts its war history as one glorious victory after another. In 2007, PRC President Hu Jintao claimed that the PLA's "revolutionary spirit...stresses beating all enemies and not being beaten by any enemy, and overcoming all difficulties and not being overcome by any difficulty."⁷⁹ Even in instances where outside observers have judged the outcome to be ambiguous at best, PLA histories inevitably depict the Chinese army as triumphant.⁸⁰ For example, the PLA describes the Korean War – which it calls the "Resist America, Aid Korea" war – as a "great victory for the people's armies of China and Korea."⁸¹ China also claims victory in its 1979 war against Vietnam, even though the PLA lost 26,000 men in just 19 days and withdrew before a clear conclusion to the war had been reached.⁸² PLA histories of World War II generally do not mention the U.S. involvement in the war against Japan at all.

⁷⁸ Wei, "'Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun,'" p. 240.

⁷⁹ Hu Jintao, speech delivered at rally marking the 80th founding anniversary of the PLA at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Wortzel, "The Beiping-Tianjin Campaign of 1948-49," p. 274.

⁸¹ Zhang Huaibi, ed., *Soldiers Handbook (junren shouce; 军人手册)* (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2005), p. 522.

⁸² Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*, p. 258.

Chapter 2: PLA Values

Introduction: The “human factor”

As discussed in the previous chapter, the PLA draws many beliefs about itself from its philosophical and historical origins. One crucial belief is that the *moral and personal qualities of individual servicemembers are central to military success*. Mao Zedong believed that “a contest of strength is not only a contest of military and economic power, but also a contest of human power and morale.”⁸³ China’s military leaders attribute the seemingly overmatched Red Army’s surprising victories in the Civil War to the excellent moral, political, and spiritual values (*jiazhi*; 价值) of the Communist troops. The PLA teaches that the immense difficulties faced by the Red Army helped to forge an exceptionally virtuous, strong-willed fighting force; in the PLA’s view, this superior “human factor” (*ren de yinsu*; 人的因素) won these wars.

Today’s PLA teaches that the “human factor” is more important than ever. While the PLA has significantly improved its material capabilities over the last three decades, its leaders recognize that these capabilities still lag far behind those of the U.S. and other advanced militaries, and PLA texts state that “the gap between our military and foreign militaries in weaponry and armaments cannot be fundamentally eradicated within the near future.”⁸⁴ To compensate for this gap, they emphasize, the PLA must spare no effort to maintain its greatest advantage: its personnel’s commitment to and practice of superior moral and personal values.⁸⁵

However, PLA leaders worry that as Chinese society changes, many of its mores are diverging from the PLA’s traditional values, making the latter difficult to sustain. This challenge, and the approaches the PLA is taking to meet it, are discussed in Chapter 5.

How the PLA developed the “human factor”

The PLA’s attention to the “human factor” likely arose partly out of necessity. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Red Army drew the bulk of its recruits from poor peasant communities. It also relied on these communities for material support, including lodging and provisioning. To gain their trust, the Red Army had to be seen as morally upright and deeply invested in the lives and concerns of the common people.

⁸³ Mao Zedong, “On Protracted War” (1938), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm.

⁸⁴ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming (eds.), *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions, Volume 2* (*gaojishu tiaojian xia budui jianshe shiyong zhinan*; 高技术条件下部队建设适用指南) (Hai Chao Publishing House, 2002), p. 755.

⁸⁵ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 755.

Soldiers' poor traditional image

To gain the people's trust, the Red Army needed to overcome the unfavorable public image with which Chinese soldiers had been saddled for many generations. Imperial China displayed an ambivalent attitude toward soldiers: the martial and literary classics discussed earlier revered military prowess, but the Confucian scholar-official elite viewed martial activities with disdain. They saw the use of violence as a "failure of statecraft" and its practitioners as lacking in moral virtue.⁸⁷ Military officer status was conferred not upon the highly educated and capable but rather upon low-level government officials whose work garnered little respect.⁸⁸

"GOOD MEN DON'T BECOME SOLDIERS"

The image of military personnel in imperial China was captured in the popular saying that "just as good iron isn't used for nails, good men don't become soldiers" (*haotie bu da ding haonan bu dangbing*; 好铁不打钉, 好男不当兵).⁸⁶

This image was exacerbated by the behavior of the warlord armies during the early decades of the 20th century. The warlords – regional power-holders who controlled mercenary armies – had little interest in the people's welfare. They levied high taxes and siphoned revenues away from education and social services in order to feed and arm the armies that sustained their power. People who lived in contested territories were subjected to the "requisitions and abuses of passing armies" and often saw their homes destroyed and livelihoods ruined by internecine warfare.⁸⁹ Moral strictures on soldiers' behavior toward ordinary people were weak or nonexistent, so the military was viewed by the public as a "huge preparatory school for banditry" and soldiers gained a reputation for corruption and lawlessness.⁹⁰ Soldiers in these armies scarcely received better treatment than the civilians they abused: commanders were known for inflicting extreme brutality upon their subordinates.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Edward L. Dreyer, "Continuity and Change," in David A. Graff and Robin Higham, eds., *A Military History of China* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2002), pp. 25-26.

⁸⁷ Robin Higham and David A. Graff, "Introduction," in Graff and Higham, *A Military History of China*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ Dreyer, "Continuity and Change," p. 26.

⁸⁹ Edward A. McCord, "Warlordism in Early Republican China," in Graff and Higham, *A Military History of China*, p. 189.

⁹⁰ Robert Slate, "Chinese Role Models and Classical Military Philosophy in Dealing with Soldier Corruption and Moral Degeneration," *Journal of Third World Studies*, Spring 2003, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3821/is_200304/ai_n9173399/print.

⁹¹ Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System* (*zhongguo renmin jiefang jun minzhu zhidu de lilun yu shijian*; 中国人民解放军民主制度的理论与实践) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1993), p. 3.

The KMT was portrayed by the CCP as similarly oppressive. Mao's writings from the 1930s and 1940s are filled with vituperation against the KMT army, portraying its leaders as exhibiting atrocious behavior toward the local populace and their own enlisted personnel alike. The KMT government was widely seen as corrupt and unable to handle social and economic problems.⁹³

A new kind of Chinese army

Many of the bedrock values of today's PLA were formulated to emphasize the distinction between the Red Army and the warlord and KMT armies. To win the hearts and minds of the peasant population, the Red Army sought to define itself as a new type of military, and to present an alternative vision of civil-military interaction and internal command relationships.

Today's PLA teaches that the Red Army won popular support by exhibiting three key characteristics:

First, PLA texts assert, rather than being mercenaries concerned only with personal gain, Red Army personnel possessed a selfless spirit of devotion to the cause of ending the oppressive "feudalist" system, and a willingness to sacrifice material comfort and even their lives to achieve this goal.

Second, the Red Army was made up of soldiers who were the "sons of the people" (*renmin de zidi bing*; 人民的子弟兵). Red Army soldiers were taught to see themselves as "fish" and the people as the "water" that nourished and sustained them.⁹⁴ It was devoted to serving the people's interests, in contrast to previous armies that served the interests of a ruling

MAO'S PORTRAYAL OF THE KMT ARMY

In 1944, Mao wrote of a KMT general: "Tang Enbo is fundamentally opposed to the people of Henan [Province], who say ... 'Henan has four disasters: flood, drought, locusts, and Tang.... Inside Tang Enbo's units, officers and enlisted personnel are isolated from each other. The troops consist of people rounded up by force. On ordinary days they are berated and beaten, exhausted by hunger and fatigue.... In the face of battle they just desert and run, having no will to fight.'"⁹²

⁹² Mao Zedong, "Crisis Arising from the Fall of Changsha" (24 Jun 1944), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/collected-works-pdf/volume9-part1.pdf>.

⁹³ Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), pp. 73-74.

⁹⁴ Mao Zedong, "On Guerrilla Warfare" (1937), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/1937/guerrilla-warfare/ch06.htm>; William Wei, "'Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun': Mao and the Red Army," in Graff and Higham, *A Military History of China*, p. 236.

class.⁹⁵ This concept of “the people’s interests above all” is captured in the name “People’s Liberation Army.”⁹⁶

Third, the Red Army prided itself on its humane and fair treatment of its personnel. As Mao wrote in 1936, “We do not permit any of our Red Army commanders to become a blundering hothead.”⁹⁹ The Red Army aspired to produce commanders who viewed enlisted personnel as equal in human dignity to themselves. Hence, food was distributed equally among all Red Army members, commander and subordinate alike, and officers were forbidden to “beat and insult their soldiers” as officers in the warlord armies had done.¹⁰⁰

THE PLA VIEWS LENIENT TREATMENT OF POWS AS AN EXAMPLE OF ITS HUMANENESS

The PLA considers humane treatment of prisoners of war (*kuandai fulu*; 款待俘虏) to be an indicator of its unique focus on morality.⁹⁷ When the PLA discusses its own history it cites the compassionate treatment it has given to prisoners of war in past conflicts as an example of its moral superiority.

For example, when allegations of prisoner abuse by U.S. forces at Abu Ghraib surfaced in the international media in 2004, PLA and official PRC media directly contrasted this abuse with the PLA’s historical record. In an interview with a former PLA officer who had been involved in the administration of POW camps during the Korean War, the *People’s Daily* reported that “in sharp contrast to the atrocious behavior of U.S. troops, the Chinese military treated U.S. prisoners of war most humanely.” The former officer observed that “The Chinese troops practiced ‘revolutionary humanitarianism’ toward the POWs throughout.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook Editorial Committee, *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook* (*zhongguo renmin jiefang jun kongjun shibing shouce*; 中国人民解放军空军士兵手册) (Beijing: Blue Sky Publishing House, 2006), p. 159.

⁹⁶ Wang Jingchao and Fang Ning, *The Science of Military Management* (*jundui guanli xue*; 军队管理学) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2001), p. 110; Chen Runsun, “Loving the Military and Making Combat Preparations,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 16 Jan 2002.

⁹⁷ Lian, “Giving Lenient Treatment to POWs,” in Song Shilun and Xiaoke, eds., *The Chinese Military Encyclopedia* (*zhongguo junshi baike quanshu*; 中国军事百科全书), Vol. 4, *Political Work and Military Logistics in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1997), p. 229.

⁹⁸ Xie Rongbin, “Former POW Camp Administrator Recalls that China Practiced ‘Revolutionary Humanitarianism’ Toward American POW’s in the Korean War, in Sharp Contrast to U.S. Treatment of Chinese POW’s Then and Iraqi Prisoners Now,” *Renmin Ribao*, 25 May 2004.

⁹⁹ Mao Zedong, “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War” (1936), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_12.htm.

¹⁰⁰ Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System*, pp. 5, 11.

Moral and disciplinary codes

The CCP's desire to closely tie the military to the common people was the impetus for the Red Army's first code of moral conduct. Devised by Mao Zedong and Red Army Commander-in-Chief Zhu De shortly after the Red Army's founding, this code was known as the "Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention" (*san da jili baxiang zhuyi*; 三大纪律八项注意).¹⁰²

The "Three Rules and Eight Points" acted primarily as a guide for Red Army soldiers in their interactions with civilians. It required them to project the image of a benevolent force genuinely concerned with minimizing the adverse impacts of military activity on civilian life.

THREE MAIN RULES OF DISCIPLINE AND EIGHT POINTS OF ATTENTION

Three Main Rules of Discipline (*san da jili*; 三大纪律):

1. Obey orders.
2. Take not even a needle or thread from the people.
3. Turn in all confiscated goods.

Eight Points of Attention (*baxiang zhuyi*; 八项注意):

1. Replace all doors and return the straw on which you slept before leaving a house.
2. Speak courteously to the people and help them whenever possible.
3. Return all borrowed articles.
4. Pay for everything damaged.
5. Be honest in business transactions.
6. Be sanitary: dig latrines a safe distance from homes and fill them up with earth before leaving.
7. Never molest women.
8. Do not mistreat prisoners.¹⁰¹

Although some of these rules now seem outdated when taken literally, the PLA still considers them its "basic laws of discipline and social order, and the foundation for all

¹⁰¹ Wei, "Political Power Grows Out of the Barrel of a Gun," p. 235.

¹⁰² The "Three Rules and Eight Points" underwent a few incarnations. Chen Zhou, for instance, provides a list of eight "Points of Attention" that are in a slightly different order and, for points 1 and 6, he substitutes "Do not beat or curse at people" and "Do not damage crops." There are other variations as well. It appears that the final content of the "Three Rules and Eight Points" was not finalized until 1947. See PLA General Headquarters, "Instruction on the Re-Issue of the Three Main Rules of Discipline and the Eight Points for Attention," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), 4:155-56.

military discipline.”¹⁰³ The PLA also expects its personnel to treat the “Three Rules and Eight Points” as fundamental guidelines for military-civilian relations. Soldiers participating in the rescue and relief efforts following the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, for instance, were praised in the *PLA Daily* for “strictly obeying the ‘Three Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention,’ and ... [being] highly-disciplined troops.”¹⁰⁴

Moral standards for today’s PLA

The PLA’s significant reforms since the 1990s have been accompanied by new attempts to emphasize the importance of its core values. In October 2001, the General Political Department (GPD) of the PLA, on the orders of then-Chairman of the CCP Central Military Commission Jiang Zemin, issued eight “Servicemen’s Moral Standards” (*junren daode guifan*; 军人道德规范).

Unlike the “Three Main Rules and Eight Points,” which were primarily concerned with servicemen’s behavior toward civilians, the “Moral Standards” focus on ethical conduct *within* the military. In an interview with a reporter from the *PLA Daily* shortly after the new standards were issued, the GPD’s propaganda chief implied that these new standards were formulated in reaction to the corrosive pressures of China’s rapid economic growth and social change on PLA values.¹⁰⁶ These pressures, and the negative impact that the PLA leadership fears they are having on PLA mores, are discussed in Chapter 5.

SERVICEMEN’S MORAL STANDARDS, 2001 (*JUNREN DAODE GUIFAN*; 军人道德规范)

1. Obey the Party’s Command (*ting dang zhihui*; 听党指挥).
2. Be patriotic and devoted (*aiguo fengxian*; 爱国奉献).
3. Love the military and practice for war (*aijun xiwu*; 爱军习武).
4. Respect officers and take care of soldiers (*zungan aibing*; 尊干爱兵).
5. Closely observe discipline (*yanshou jilü*; 严守纪律).
6. Hold fast to integrity (*jiانشou qijie*; 坚守气节).
7. Work diligently in spite of difficulties (*jianku fendou*; 艰苦奋斗).
8. Be civilized and courteous (*wenming limao*; 文明礼貌).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA’s Democratic System*, p. 179.

¹⁰⁴ Jie Zhengxuan, “Engrave Loyalty to the Mission on the Earthquake-Fighting and Disaster Relief Battlefield,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 3 Jul 2008, p. 6, OSC CPP20080703710001.

¹⁰⁵ “Full Text of the ‘Soldiers’ Moral Standards,” *Xinhua*, 26 Oct 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Sai Zhongbao, interview with leader of the PLA General Political Department’s Propaganda Department, *Jiefangjun Bao*, 2 Nov 2001, p. 3.

TWO TASKS FACING TODAY'S PLA

In the late 1990s, President Jiang Zemin announced two “historical tasks” facing the modernizing PLA:

- “**Winning wars,**” or remaining competitive in modern warfare; and
- “**Not degenerating,**” or remaining true to PLA values and traditions.¹⁰⁷

This pronouncement makes clear what the end goals are toward which PLA values are oriented. It also highlights one of the most difficult challenges that the PLA now faces: upgrading its professional capabilities while retaining the traditional values upon which it bases its identity and self-image.

Old and new moral codes, along with a range of PLA publications, underscore the PLA’s belief that certain values are crucial to maintaining the superior “human factor” of Chinese military personnel. The following section presents the most important of these values and explains what they signify in the PLA context.

The PLA’s core values

Loyalty

The PLA’s vision of loyalty links together Party, country, people, and military. One PLA publication lists these as the PLA’s “Four Loyalties,” and Hu Jintao promoted them as “core military values” in 2008.¹⁰⁹

To the Party

The PLA considers absolute, unwavering loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its missions to be its highest value and most important obligation. Accordingly, the first of the 2001 Moral Standards calls upon personnel to “uphold the principle of the Party’s absolute leadership of the military, preserve the power of the Party Central Committee and Central Military Commission, and protect the status of Party organizations at all levels as the core leaders of the unit.”¹¹⁰

THE “FOUR LOYALTIES” OF THE PLA

- Loyalty to the Party
- Loyalty to the Motherland
- Loyalty to the people
- Loyalty to the military profession.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ See e.g. Jun Li, “New Development in the Party’s Military Guidance Theory – A Study of Jiang Zemin’s National Defense and Army Building Theory,” *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue* 2003-1, pp. 42-50; OSC CPP20080815436001; Sai Zhongbao, interview with leader of the PLA General Political Department’s Propaganda Department, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 160.

¹⁰⁹ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 160; “Chinese President Promotes Military Values,” *Xinhua*, 30 Dec 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/30/content_105.

¹¹⁰ “Full Text of the ‘Servicemen’s Moral Standards.’”

From its inception, the basic purpose of the PLA has been to assist the CCP in obtaining and maintaining political power. Mao and all subsequent Party leaders have taken it as an article of faith that firm control over the PLA is indispensable to the CCP's monopoly on power. This firm control requires PLA members to exhibit a strong sense of personal loyalty to the Party, achieved through continuous indoctrination on why obedience to the Party is morally correct. PLA personnel are urged to view the Party's leadership as the ultimate guarantor that "the nature, purpose, and inherent qualities of the people's military will not change, the excellent traditions and work styles of the people's military will not be lost, and military construction will be in the correct direction."¹¹¹

Party control of the military is as fundamental a principle to the PLA as civilian control is to the U.S. military.

Unlike many other militaries, in which personnel are expected to separate themselves from politics, the CCP considers heightening servicemen's "political consciousness" indispensable in ensuring their loyalty to the Party and enabling them to "dedicate their lives to the struggle for the grand objectives of communism."¹¹² This "consciousness" is deemed particularly important for mid- and senior-level officers.¹¹³

To the Motherland

Chinese President Hu Jintao has defined "serving the country" as "closely linking an individual's future and destiny with the country's future and destiny." For the PLA, this means "resolutely defending the country's sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity," upholding Party rule within the nation, and "building a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilized, and harmonious modern socialist country."¹¹⁴ These goals re-emphasize the PLA's dual mission, to both ensure national security and safeguard domestic stability and development.

To the people

PLA servicemen are urged to enthusiastically "serve the people" (*wei renmin fuwu*: 为人民服务). As a "people's army," the PLA is supposed to "share the same destiny and be of

¹¹¹ Qiu Nengyang, "Strengthening 'Five Types of Consciousness' to Ensure the Party's Absolute Leadership of the Military" in Cai Dongchen, ed., *Generals Discuss the Military (jiangjun lun bing; 将军论兵)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2006), p. 543.

¹¹² Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, eds., *Guidebook to Military Life (junlü shenghuo zhinan; 军旅生活指南)*, 2nd Edition (Beijing: People's Armed Police Publishing House, 2007), pp. 2-3.

¹¹³ Chen Anran, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent's Moral Character (junshi rencai pinde peiyu lun; 军事人才品德培育论)* (Beijing: National Defense University Publishing House, 2001), pp. 273, 279.

¹¹⁴ Xu Zhuangzhi and Cao Ruilin, "Hu Jintao Calls for Vigorously Cultivating the Core Values of 'Being Loyal to the Party, Deeply Cherishing the People, Serving the Country, Showing Devotion to Missions, and Upholding Honor' for Contemporary Revolutionary Soldiers," *Xinhua*, 30 Dec 2008, OSC CPP20081230172001.

one heart with the people, and place the interests of the people above everything.”¹¹⁵ PLA writings state that the Chinese military’s strong connection with the common people was crucial to its past victories.¹¹⁶

Personnel are taught that when their own personal interests conflict with the people’s interests, the people’s interests (as determined by the Party) must always come first.¹¹⁷

To the military profession

PLA personnel are also expected to exhibit an “ardent love” for the Chinese military. They are taught to view the PLA as “a firm pillar of the people’s democratic dictatorship, a steel wall defending the socialist Motherland, and an important force in the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Studying the PLA’s “glorious history,” as discussed in Chapter 1, is intended to inspire officers and enlisted men to carry forward the “good traditions of our Party and military.”¹¹⁸

Honor and heroism

“Honor” for the PLA means having a spirit of extreme devotion to one’s tasks. This spirit is believed to manifest itself in feats of heroism, as well as in everyday service to one’s fellow citizens.¹¹⁹ It also means not doing anything to harm the public image of the Chinese military or the Chinese nation.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Wang Jingchao and Fang Ning, *The Science of Military Management*, p. 110.

¹¹⁶ See Wang Jingchao and Fang Ning, *The Science of Military Management*, p. 110

¹¹⁷ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 159.

¹¹⁸ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, eds., *How To Be a Good NCO (zenyang dang hao shiguan; 怎样当好士官)* (Beijing: Long March Press, 2000), p. 221.

¹¹⁹ “Worshipping Honor – Sixth Commentary on Vigorously Fostering Core Values of Contemporary Revolutionary Servicemen,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 10 Jan 2009, p.1, OSC CPP CPP20090112702008.

¹²⁰ In a commentary on the 2008-09 promotion of “military core values,” a *Jiefangjun Bao* editor defined “honor” as follows: “To uphold honor is to consciously cherish and defend the honor of the country, the military, and military members; put honor ahead of one’s life; consciously practice the concept of socialist honor and disgrace; promote the spirit of revolutionary heroism and collectivism; improve quality and develop in an all-around way; strive for first-rate results and render meritorious service; uphold the integrity of the revolution; and strictly observe military discipline.” See Xu Zhuangzhi and Cao Ruilin, “Hu Jintao Calls for Vigorously Cultivating the Core Values of ‘Being Loyal to the Party, Deeply Cherishing the People, Serving the Country, Showing Devotion to Missions, and Upholding Honor’ for Contemporary Revolutionary Soldiers,” *Xinhua*, 30 Dec 2008, OSC CPP20081230172001.

The PLA’s current definition of “honor” incorporates the larger concept of “socialist honor and disgrace,” a campaign initiated by Hu Jintao in April 2006. Hu Jintao promoted “8 honors and 8 disgraces” (*barong bachi; 八荣八耻*) for the Chinese population; these focused on devotion to nation and to one’s fellow citizens, and to being disciplined, honest, and hard-working. For more on the “8 honors and 8 disgraces,” see “New Moral Yardstick: 8 Honors, 8 Disgraces,” PRC Government’s Official Website, 5 Apr 2006, http://www.gov.cn/english/2006-04/05/content_245361.htm.

The PLA's concept of honor and heroism has three essential elements:

Honor and heroism manifest themselves in self-sacrifice. PLA members must be willing to sacrifice their “individual interests, self-respect, or even life” in the service of the Four Loyalties.¹²¹ This includes placing a lower priority on familial responsibilities, something that conflicts with traditional Confucian obligations and which “normal people would not be able to handle.” For instance, “when their parents fall ill, soldiers may not be able to do their filial duty; on New Year’s Day or other festivals, soldiers may not be together with their families.”¹²² PLA personnel are taught that even though dedicating oneself to military service above other obligations can lead to personal ruin, this should be viewed as “success in spite of failure” (*shi de qisuo*; 失得其所).¹²³

Honor and heroism are collective, not individual. The PLA consistently discourages personnel from engaging in “individual heroism” and showing off, and encourages them to refuse personal honors when the other members of their unit have also earned praise.¹²⁴ The PLA has singled out a number of specific “heroic figures” and “honored models,” whose actions it promotes through propaganda activities (a few of these heroes are profiled in Appendix 2). In most cases, though, these individuals are honored after perishing in the line of duty, and thus do not personally benefit from this lionization.

“The value of honor is not in the direct benefits it can provide to those who earn it, but rather in the recognition by organizations and society of the contributions made by a person or a group.”¹²⁵

— *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*

Heroism is manifested not just through extraordinary feats but also through doing one’s ordinary work extraordinarily well. Most of the servicemen whom the PLA propagandizes as heroes are not supermen with extraordinary capabilities who achieve great feats of bravery on the battlefield (an increasingly rare distinction, given that PLA personnel have not been on a battlefield in decades). Rather, PLA heroes tend to be ordinary soldiers who earn praise by “completing their work and carrying out their duties in an excellent fashion.”¹²⁶ The famous model soldier Lei

¹²¹ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 760.

¹²² Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, *Guidebook to Military Life*, pp. 31-32.

¹²³ Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, *Guidebook to Military Life*, p. 24.

¹²⁴ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 160.

¹²⁵ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 160.

¹²⁶ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 160.

Feng, for instance, was martyred not in combat but while helping a comrade to back up a truck.¹²⁷ These are relatable heroes to be closely emulated, not just idolized.

Discipline

PLA “discipline” (*jilü*; 纪律) focuses on adhering to the laws, regulations, and policies of the PLA and the CCP, and to controlling one’s own behavior to avoid besmirching the honor of the PLA. It encompasses the elements discussed below.

Obedience to superiors

Each member of the PLA is expected to unconditionally obey his or her superiors, based on a command hierarchy extending from grassroots units up to the Central Military Commission. As one handbook puts it, “Orders and memos from superiors...all represent the intentions of superior leaders and organizations, and must be followed. Enlisted soldiers obey officers, subordinates obey superiors, and the entire military obeys the unified leadership of the Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.”¹²⁸

Based on the principles of democratic centralism and the mass line, described in Chapter 1, military personnel should feel free to offer their opinions before decisions are made by their unit’s Party committee, but they must obey absolutely these decisions once they are made. A Party committee in a lower-level unit must similarly obey any decisions handed down by a higher-level Party committee.

Existing PLA literature does not provide much guidance as to what personnel should do if they believe that “superiors’ orders and instructions” contradict Party policies or national laws. It is unclear whether there are any circumstances under which PLA personnel could justify disobedience.

¹²⁷ A full profile of Lei Feng was posted on the *Jiefangjun Bao* website in honor of the 80th anniversary of the founding of the PLA in 2007: http://english.chinamil.com/cn/site2/special-reports/80thannofpla/node_12570.htm.

¹²⁸ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, pp. 105-106.

Self-control

PLA personnel are urged to act moderately and soberly in all circumstances. The PLA teaches that a lack of “self-discipline” (*zili*; 自律) or “self-control” (*ziwo kongzhi*; 自我控制) can lead to disobedience, an unwillingness to participate in daily military tasks, and disharmony among the ranks.

Obedience to Party regulations

“Party discipline” (*dangji*; 党纪) refers to the standards of behavior or rules of conduct that all Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members must adhere to.¹³¹ It is limited to Party members in the military, who are subject to punishment by a hierarchy of Party organizations if they are found in violation of Party discipline.

The types of conduct which constitute a violation of Party discipline are many and varied, essentially including anything that violates either Party or State law, or “endangers the interest of the Party, the State, or the people.”¹³² Examples include corruption, abuse of power, dereliction of duty, and immoral behavior, such as rampant alcoholism and sexual promiscuity.¹³³

WHAT IS “SELF-CONTROL?”

A recent PLA publication defines “self-control” as “being good at restraining yourself, and controlling your emotions; not becoming inflamed, not grumbling, not talking irresponsibly, and not eating or drinking excessively; and, consciously observing discipline and various systems of regulation.”¹²⁹

One element of “self-control” about which the PLA seems to be increasingly concerned, is frugality. Personnel are instructed to use their pay wisely, to deposit much of their wages every month, to avoid debt, and in general to repay their debts to their family and to society.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 759.

¹³⁰ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, *How to Be a Good NCO*, p. 88.

¹³¹ “Regulations of Chinese Communist Party on Disciplinary Punishments,” *Renmin Ribao*, 18 Feb 2004, <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/shizheng/1026/2346251.html>.

¹³² “Regulations of Chinese Communist Party on Disciplinary Punishments.”

¹³³ Cheng Baoshan, ed., *The Fundamental Laws and Regulations of Military Political Work in the New Century and New Era—Studying the Newly Revised and Promulgated “Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on Political Work”* (*xin shiji xin jieduan jundui zhengzhi gongzuo de genben fagui—xuexi xin xiuding banbu de “zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo tiaoli”*; 新世纪新阶段军队政治工作的根本法规—学习新修订颁布的《中国人民解放军政治工作条例》) (Beijing: Military Science Publishing House, 2004), p. 215.

SOURCES AND REQUIREMENTS OF DISCIPLINE IN THE PLA

A recent PLA handbook lists the sources and content of PLA discipline as follows:

The five primary sources of PLA discipline (in order of importance):

1. The line, guiding principles, and policies of the Chinese Communist Party
2. The national Constitution, laws, and regulations
3. The military's systems of *tiaoling*, *tiaoli*, and *guizhang* ["regulations"]
4. Superiors' orders and instructions
5. The "Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points of Attention"

The ten basic requirements of PLA discipline:

1. Submit to leadership, and strictly enforce orders and prohibitions.
2. Guard posts closely, and carry out duties.
3. Respect officers and take care of soldiers, and uphold solidarity and friendship.
4. Keep soldiers' discipline in neat formation, and have an upright bearing.
5. Raise the level of vigilance, and guard secrets.
6. Cherish weapons, equipment, and public property.
7. Be honest in your duties, and do not seek personal gain.
8. Support the government and cherish the people, and protect mass interests.
9. Abide by social morals, and pay attention to decorum.
10. Hand confiscated goods over to the public, and do not abuse prisoners.¹³⁴

Strength of will

The PLA expects its personnel to exhibit exemplary toughness and steadfastness of character. This encompasses such qualities as fighting spirit, endurance in the face of hardship, and psychological resilience.

The "fighting spirit" so treasured in ancient martial classics remains an important PLA value today. PLA personnel are expected to be "brave and fearless when faced with the enemy," have strong morale, and be willing to "press ahead and face death unflinchingly."¹³⁵

¹³⁴ PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook, pp. 105-107.

¹³⁵ Li Qiang, Cao Chuanbiao, and Wu Aili, "Fostering Combat Spirit Through Military Training," *Kongjun Bao*, 20 Mar 2007, p. 1, OSC CPP20070516436004; "Vigorously Fostering Combat Spirit – Fourth Commentary on Education Activities on Chinese Military's Loyal Fulfillment of Historic Missions in New Century and New Stage," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 3 Apr 2006, p. 1, OSC CPP20060404515009.

The PLA also expects its personnel to be capable of bearing extreme hardship without complaint, since many will have to live in unpleasant and difficult environments. PLA personnel are taught about the enormous difficulties their Red Army forefathers overcame, reminding them that the hardships they face are mild by comparison.

In addition to physical endurance, enlisted personnel are also expected to be thick-skinned in receiving criticism from superiors. One PLA manual states, “Soldiers must hear and absorb unpleasant words. Doing so is very beneficial in guiding our work and study. As the ancients said, ‘good medicine tastes bitter but is beneficial for illness; the truth often grates on the ear but is beneficial for behavior.’”¹³⁷

“Soldiers’ [need to] endure hardship is embodied by their arduous surroundings. Very few PLA units are garrisoned in well-to-do, bustling areas; in fact, most units are stationed in inland villages with relatively backward economic conditions, remote, bleak, and desolate border or coastal defense areas, vast expanses of frozen snowfields, faraway island outposts, the uninhabited Gobi, windswept deserts, or oxygen-deprived plateaus with little water.”¹³⁶

— *Guidebook to Military Life*

Unity of purpose

The PLA vision of unit cohesion is based on an idealized relationship between officers and enlisted personnel. PLA leaders consider “unity between officers and enlisted personnel” (*guanbing yizhi*; 官兵一致) to be the keystone of cohesion. When the interests of officers and enlisted personnel diverge, as PLA texts claim they did in the warlord and Nationalist armies, cohesion suffers, making it impossible to “realize internal and external harmony and form a strong unit.”¹³⁸ This causes dysfunction in peacetime and impairs combat strength in wartime. In its views on unit cohesion, the PLA differs from the U.S. military, which emphasizes strong, combat-forged bonds between personnel at the same level, or “buddies.”

The PLA teaches that unity between officers and enlisted personnel rests on a close relationship of mutual obligation, built in peacetime. Harmony and cohesion within a unit suffers only when officers and enlisted personnel fail to carry out these obligations.

This relationship mirrors the Confucian bond between parents and children, referenced in Chapter 1. The PLA urges each member of a unit to think of that unit as a caring extended family.¹³⁹ The PLA instructs that – as in a family – officers and enlisted personnel both have clear duties to perform:

¹³⁶ Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, *Guidebook to Military Life*, p. 31.

¹³⁷ Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, *Guidebook to Military Life*, p. 27.

¹³⁸ Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA’s Democratic System*, p. 8; Chen Anren, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent’s Moral Character*, p. 27.

¹³⁹ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops (paizhang daibing jifa; 排长带兵技法)* (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), p. 206.

Officers (and, in some texts, NCOs) must cherish their subordinates and place these subordinates' welfare above their own, in order to "protect common soldiers' human dignity... dispel worries, and overcome difficulties."¹⁴² This is deemed especially important for younger personnel, whose "individual moral and psychological characters are all still in a stage of forming and developing, and are not yet very mature or stable."¹⁴³

AMERICAN VS. CHINESE VIEWS OF UNIT COHESION	
<p><u>U.S. Army</u></p> <p>"The objective measure of cohesion is whether a soldier will choose to stay with his buddies and face discomfort and danger when given the opportunity or temptation to choose comfort and safety. The extreme measure of cohesion is willingness to die with fellow soldiers rather than leave them to die alone."¹⁴⁰</p>	<p><u>PLA</u></p> <p>"If officers can take care of [enlisted personnel] just like their parents did, considerably helping them to solve various difficulties, soldiers will be able to experience the warmth of the big family of the unit ... and the unit will be able to form very strong cohesion."¹⁴¹</p>

In return, **enlisted personnel** are expected to unconditionally obey orders, give leaders the respect they deserve, and "actively assist officers in doing their work."¹⁴⁴ This includes accepting their assignments without question and respecting officers' personal dignity.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ *Field Manual 22-51: Leader's Manual for Combat Stress Control* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2001), Section 3-10 ("Unit Cohesion"), http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/army/fm/22-51/22-51_c.htm#3-10.

¹⁴¹ Li Xuezhong, Xia Xinxin, and Huang Yongjun, eds., *Skills for Political Instructors Leading Troops* (*zhidaoyuan daibing jiyi*; 指导员带兵记忆) (Beijing: PLA Press, 2005), p. 57.

¹⁴² "Full Text of the 'Soldiers' Moral Standards.'"

¹⁴³ Sai Zhongbao, interview with GPD Propaganda Department leader, p. 3.

¹⁴⁴ "Full Text of the 'Soldiers' Moral Standards.'"

¹⁴⁵ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, *How to Be a Good NCO*, p. 222.

Though the PLA's views on cohesion are clearly influenced by the Confucian emphasis on harmony between superiors and subordinates, relationships among personnel must also be squared with the PLA's Maoist principles. These principles, developed during the Red Army period, emphasize "political equality" and the avoidance of class divisions within "revolutionary" institutions like the PLA.¹⁴⁸

PLA leadership manuals emphasize that officers and enlisted personnel are equal in human dignity (*rengē*; 人格), and set apart only by their different duties and divisions of labor (*zhiwu, fengong*; 职务, 分工).¹⁴⁹ Accordingly, officers are instructed that they are not inherently superior to enlisted personnel, and that they hold leadership positions only because they are well-suited to carry out these particular tasks. Officers are expected to be good at managing and commanding troops, just as enlisted soldiers are expected to be adept at the physical and mental skills necessary for success on the battlefield. PLA texts emphasize that both skill sets are equally important.¹⁵⁰

ABOLISHING RANKS

One reflection of the PLA's concern with equality is its ambivalence about ranks, which military leaders at certain points in PLA history have seen as creating class divisions in the PLA.

The Red Army identified its members only by their job title, and the PLA did not introduce ranks until 1955, when it sought to follow the Soviet rank system.¹⁴⁶ This system lasted just ten years before it was abolished in 1965, in a period when foreign influences were considered counter-revolutionary and military ranks were considered *bourgeois*.¹⁴⁷ The PLA divided its forces only into "cadre" (officers) and "fighters" (enlisted personnel). Military ranks were not re-established until 1988.

In accordance with this principle, officers are instructed to avoid the following:

¹⁴⁶ *China's People's Liberation Army: An Introductory Course of Instruction* (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2004), 316.

¹⁴⁷ *Handbook of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, DDB-2680-32-84 (Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 1984), p. 14, http://www.dia.mil/publicaffairs/Foia/PLA_handbook.pdf.

¹⁴⁸ This principle is touted in contemporary media as well as older texts. For a recent statement on PLA "equality," see e.g. Ling Huanxin, "Democracy-Building in the Military Viewed From the Regulations of the Servicemen Committee," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 12 Jun 2008, p. 6, OSC CPP20080612710007. The origins of the concept are discussed in Lai Zhuanzhu, *The Gutian Conference from Beginning to End* (*gutian huiyi qianhou*; 古田会议前后), cited in Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁹ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, *How To Be a Good NCO*, p. 222.

¹⁵⁰ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 202.

Arrogance: Officers are cautioned not to “think exceptionally well” of themselves or to see “officers as precious and soldiers as worthless.”¹⁵²

Favoritism: When their unit earns praise, officers are told to ensure that the honors are evenly distributed and not “enjoyed by only one or several people.”¹⁵³

Hypocrisy: Officers must be willing to do what they order their subordinates to do; they must not “say one thing and do another” (*yanxing buyi*; 言行不一).

THE IDEAL OFFICER

“Each night when [the platoon leader] checked the bunks, he always looked to see if any soldiers had kicked open their mosquito nets; in the winter when the weather was cold, he prepared two kettles of hot water for soldiers on sentry duty, so that they could warm up their feet after returning from duty. Whenever a soldier contracted a hard-to-treat illness, he would find a doctor by hook or by crook to provide medicine. The soldiers felt in their hearts that he had earned the position of beloved eldest brother (*xiongzhang*; 兄长).”¹⁵¹

— *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*

“Professional” qualities

Finally, the PLA has identified several human qualities that it considers crucial for the “new-type” (*xinshi*; 新式) military officers and enlisted personnel it needs to carry out the tasks essential to 21st-century warfare. PLA leaders have now determined that modern, high-tech, information-based wars cannot be won on moral superiority alone. Thus, they say, today’s ideal PLA serviceman is one who has not only the strong set of personal values discussed above but also impeccable “professional” qualities. These qualities, as described in recent PLA publications, can be divided into two categories: “talent” (*rencai*; 人才) and “innovation” (*chuangzao*; 创造).

WHICH QUALITIES ARE MOST IMPORTANT?

At present, the PLA stresses that – while professional qualifications are important – personal qualities must take precedence. Chinese military leaders warn that the PLA must not sacrifice its ethical principles in order to gain more technically proficient personnel. One PLA handbook puts it this way: “In the relationship between morality and [professional] talent, morality must be ‘talent’s commander.’”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 206.

¹⁵² Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 202.

¹⁵³ Huang Shaowen, *Techniques for Squad Leaders Commanding Troops (Banzhang daibing jiqiao; 班长带兵技巧)*, 2nd Edition (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), p. 29.

¹⁵⁴ Chen Anran, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent’s Moral Character*, p. 1.

Talent

A recent PLA book defines “military talent” as “special abilities in areas such as physical strength, technical ability, skills, intelligence, and knowledge.”¹⁵⁵ PLA publications suggest that the PLA is seeking to build two particular kinds of “talent”:

Sophisticated technological know-how. PLA authors write that “in the approaching information age, information will become the foundation for action in warfare.”¹⁵⁶ They note that while the PLA has put a good deal of effort into modernizing PLA hardware, these upgrades are pointless without a corresponding upgrade of the personnel operating this hardware. Hence, they seek personnel with “high-tech knowledge” who can “master this type of equipment.”¹⁵⁷

This emphasis is not limited to junior officers and enlisted personnel. Many top officers rose through the PLA’s ranks in earlier eras, when technical skills were subordinated to political considerations; now, many depend upon staff officers to oversee their communications and information management. Recent PLA publications urge senior officers to master modern technologies and decrease their dependence on subordinates in technical matters.¹⁵⁸

A broad knowledge base. PLA leaders note that a greater integration of weapons, equipment, and information requires the “transition of personnel from having a single skill to being expert in one thing and good at many.”¹⁵⁹ One PLA manual asserts that all military personnel should “study the key points” of a wide range of subjects, and “grasp common knowledge on subjects such as Chinese language, mathematics, basic Marxist theory, history, and logic.”¹⁶⁰ Recent PLA reforms aimed at recruiting more junior officers from civilian colleges point to the perceived importance of this broader knowledge base.

Innovation

A recent leadership manual points out that too many PLA officers and enlisted soldiers rely on outdated skills and stagnant routines, impairing effectiveness:

¹⁵⁵ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 755.

¹⁵⁶ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 755.

¹⁵⁷ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 758.

¹⁵⁸ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, p. 764.

¹⁵⁹ Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, *Guidebook to Military Life*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁰ Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, *Guidebook to Military Life*, pp. 13-14.

Looking around us, we can see some leaders who work very hard, but the results are not distinguished... they always do things in the same way and exert the same effort.... The real problem is with their methods, which are designed without creativity.... Outstanding successes always belong to those leaders of troops who have a creative and path-breaking spirit.¹⁶¹

Instead, officers and enlisted personnel are urged to use critical thinking skills to solve unit-level problems in an “innovative” way. A recent PLA newspaper profile of a model student-soldier, for instance, presents him as “pioneering and innovative” and says that he “always pursues perfection in his work, and has no reservations in speaking his mind.”¹⁶³

While encouraging innovation, PLA leaders believe it is necessary to balance this imperative with the need for discipline and obedience to centralized command and Party leadership. PLA texts emphasize that personnel should not be so bold in trying new methods that they violate policies and principles handed down from above “in order to go their own way.”¹⁶⁴

WHAT IS INNOVATION?

One PLA text defines innovation as the ability to:

- “Break away from convention, and not stick to one pattern in handling and resolving problems”
- “Take actions that the enemy cannot anticipate”
- “Vigorously and quickly master changes in the state of affair.”
- “Invent new operational methods”
- Engage “not just in logical thinking, but also imaginary thinking.”¹⁶²

How does the PLA inculcate the “human factor” into its personnel?

The PLA employs many techniques to train its personnel in the values it deems most important. They include the following:

Frequent unit-level training in political values and ethics. As part of its “political work” system, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, the PLA conducts regular activities at all levels to educate its members about the PLA’s core values and political beliefs. These activities include:

¹⁶¹ Huang Shaowen, *Techniques for Squad Leaders Commanding Troops*, pp.19-20.

¹⁶² Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming, *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, pp. 761-763.

¹⁶³ Jing Zhiyuan and Peng Xiaofeng, “To Unremittingly Cultivate a New Generation with the Innovative Theory of the Party—Reflections on Learning From and Publicizing the Outstanding University Student Soldier Gao Ming,” *Beijing Qiushi*, 16 Oct 2007.

¹⁶⁴ Huang Shaowen, *Techniques for Squad Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 19.

- *Political classes*: These classes are convened regularly for all members of the PLA. Instructors employ simple language to explain difficult concepts and provide explanations that are easy to understand.
- *Reading teams*: Teams of officers are organized to study Marxist theory and Party policies.
- *Central study groups*: Regular meetings of Party committee members are convened to study political theory.
- *Discussion meetings*: Group meetings are held to discuss political education. These meetings are attended by all personnel in a unit. The goal is to guide officers and enlisted personnel in adopting the “correct” positions, viewpoints, and methods of analyzing problems, and to ensure that all personnel share identical ideological beliefs.
- *Watching or listening to approved media*: Each unit organizes its personnel to watch CCP-generated television newscasts, listen to radio news reports, or read the newspaper on a daily basis.¹⁶⁵

PLA media suggest that the requirements for such meetings and training have decreased in the past few years, but it appears that personnel at the battalion level and below still attend meetings on various issues, including values and ethics training, at least a few times a month.¹⁶⁶

Campaigns. The PLA conducts periodic education campaigns aimed at reasserting the importance of its values; these campaigns may use multiple inculcation methods in a coordinated fashion, with an eye towards conveying a specific message or goal. Often education campaigns are initiated by a major speech by or release of a report or document by the Chinese military leadership; comments made by PLA leaders then become the subject of numerous editorials and commentaries. The PLA may then develop discussion materials on the topic for use in unit-level training sessions, such as those discussed above. An uptick in newspaper or other media discussions of a given topic may be evidence that a campaign is underway.

One such campaign appeared to take place in late 2008 and early 2009. In December 2008, Chinese President and CMC Chairman Hu Jintao announced in a meeting with senior PLA leaders that Chinese troops must embrace five “core military values”

¹⁶⁵ Xu Caihou, “Military Ideological and Political Education,” in Song Shilun and Xiaoke, eds., *The Chinese Military Encyclopedia (zhongguo junshi baike quanshu; 中国军事百科全书)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1997), Vol. 4, p. 148; Ou Guozheng, Wang Zongyun, and Li Gang, eds., *A Guide to the Practice of Political Organ Work (zhengzhi jiguan gongzuo shijian zhinan; 政治机关工作实践指南)* (Beijing: Long March Publishing House, 2000), p. 268.

¹⁶⁶ “Regulations on PLA Political Work Amended to Better Reflect Important Thinking of the ‘Three Represents,’” interview with leader of the PLA Political Department, *Jiefangjun Bao*, 26 Dec 2003, p. 1, OSC CPP2003122600051.

(*hexin junshi jiazhi*; 核心军事价值).¹⁶⁷ The topic was quickly picked up by the *Jiefangjun Bao*, which printed several days' worth of commentary focused on each of these values:

- Being loyal to the Party
- Loving the people
- Serving the country
- Dedicating oneself to the [military] mission
- Worshipping honor.¹⁶⁸

Leadership and teaching materials. The PLA publishes countless books on leadership, which frequently include sections instructing officers and NCOs how to pass on PLA values to their troops and how to embody those values in their own work. These books often draw on examples and allegories from the sources discussed in Chapter 1. For example, a recent manual for squad leaders invoked the ancient general Wu Qi as a role model for officers' interaction with enlisted personnel: "He loved his soldiers like his own children, used his mouth to suck the soldiers' blood and pus, was of one heart and mind with them, and was ever victorious."¹⁶⁹

Promoting "model" soldiers. The PLA frequently singles out individual members as "model" soldiers and urges all personnel to emulate them. These "model" soldiers are usually praised for exemplifying specific PLA values, and are made the subjects of hortatory newspaper reports; if their exploits are particularly impressive, they may become the subject of campaigns for widespread study in the PLA. It should be noted that these "model" soldiers are differentiated from the PLA "heroes" discussed earlier, who occupy an even higher echelon in the PLA's pantheon of praise.

Cultural activities. PLA units organize a variety of athletic, artistic, literary, musical, and recreational activities for their personnel. Many of these activities are designed to raise morale, build unity and cooperation among personnel in the unit, and provide

¹⁶⁷ See e.g. "Chinese President Promotes Military Values," *Xinhua*, 30 Dec 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-12/30/content_105.

¹⁶⁸ For the *Jiefangjun Bao*'s staff commentaries on these "core values," see "Important Basic Project of Ideological and Political Building – First Commentary on Vigorously Fostering Military Core Values of Contemporary Revolutionary Servicemen," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 4 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090104702004; "Being Loyal to Party – Second Commentary ...," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 6 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090106710001; "Loving the People – Third Commentary ...," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 7 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090107710001; "Rendering Services to Repay Kindness of Country – Fourth Commentary ...," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 8 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090108710001; "Devoted to Missions – Fifth Commentary ...," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 9 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090109710001; "Worshipping Honor – Sixth Commentary ...," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 10 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090112702008; and "Emphasis on Training, Practice is Crucial – Seventh Commentary ...," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 15 Jan 2009, p. 1, OSC CPP20090115710004.

¹⁶⁹ Huang Shaowen, *Techniques for Squad Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 52.

entertainment that is free of what the PLA considers corrosive to good order and discipline.¹⁷⁰ The PLA also has its own drama, opera, and song and dance troupes, as well as orchestras and acrobatics organizations, all of which produce “artistic works” aimed at promoting PLA values and history.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Li Ying and Liu Xiaojiang, “Military Cultural Work,” in Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 153.

¹⁷¹ Kristen A. Gunness, Julia Rosenfield, and James Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda: An Institutional Overview of the Political Work System in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, CNA Research Memorandum D0014745.A3/1Rev (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), pp. 6-7, 39-40.

Chapter 3: PLA Organizing Principles

The values and ideal human qualities discussed in the previous chapter are end goals toward which the PLA strives. *The PLA's success in achieving these goals is both guided and constrained by its organizational culture.*

The PLA's organizing principles are based on the interaction of three intertwined entities that make up China's political system: Party, State, and army. The President of the People's Republic of China, for example, is also the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chairman of the Central Military Commission. This intertwining of authority results in a number of organizational features unique to the PLA.

The PLA is a "Party-Army."

The PLA's status as a "Party-Army" is central to its identity. In the U.S. military, newly commissioned officers swear to uphold the United States Constitution. Chinese military personnel, on the other hand, do not swear allegiance to the Chinese constitution or even to the Chinese nation. Instead, they swear to follow the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the PLA originated as the armed element of the CCP, and today the CCP's political control is as fundamental to the PLA as "civilian control" is to the American military. The vast majority of PLA officers are Party members. *All* PLA personnel, whether Party members or not, are expected to abide by the principles that CCP leadership is the foundation of national stability and that the PLA must support the CCP's goals.

THE PLA OATH

"I am a member of the People's Liberation Army. I promise that *I will follow the leadership of the Communist Party of China, serve the people wholeheartedly, obey orders, strictly observe discipline, fight heroically, fear no sacrifice, loyally discharge my duties, work hard, practice hard to master combat skills, and resolutely fulfill my missions. Under no circumstances will I betray the motherland or desert the army.*"¹⁷²

— Xinhua, "Internal Service Regulations of the PLA"

The Party controls the PLA's national command authority.

The PLA's national command authority is a Party institution: the Military Commission of the Central Committee of the CCP, usually referred to as the "Central Military Commission" (CMC, *zhongyang junshi weiyuanhui*; 中央军事委员会).¹⁷³ It is normally chaired by the General Secretary of the CCP and made up of top uniformed commanders.

¹⁷² "Internal Service Regulations of the Chinese People's Liberation Army," *Xinhua*, 1 Apr 2002, Chapter 2, Article 12.

¹⁷³ Nan Li, "The Central Military Commission and Military Policy in China," in James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *The People's Liberation Army as Organization: Reference Volume v1.0* (Washington, DC: RAND, 2002), p. 46.

The CMC Chairman is not required by law to be the CCP General Secretary, but this has been the general practice since 1989, with one exception: Jiang Zemin's brief 2003-2004 stint as CMC Chairman after resigning his Party post.

As of early 2009 the CMC consisted of the Chairman, two Vice Chairmen, and eight other members (11 people in total). PRC laws do not specify the size and membership of the CMC, and these have varied over the years. For instance, during the 1970s the CMC included a number of non-military personnel, and its membership expanded considerably, peaking at 64 in 1977. In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping introduced reforms that shrank the CMC and removed most civilian personnel. Since 1987, the Chairman and at most one Vice Chairman have been the only civilians serving on the CMC.¹⁷⁴

**IF THE U.S. MILITARY'S
COMMAND STRUCTURE WERE
LIKE THE PLA'S ...**

- The U.S. President would also serve as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).
- Each member of the JCS would also be a ranking member of the President's political party.

The Party maintains control of the PLA through its “political work” system.

The CCP sustains the Party-army linkage through an elaborate system of political control over the military, which the PLA refers to as the “military political work” (*junshi zhengzhi gongzuo*; 军事政治工作) system.¹⁷⁵ This system encompasses a broad range of missions and tasks that are considered vital to the operation of the PLA.

The PLA political work system grew out of the Soviet-influenced Whampoa Military Academy curriculum, but it extends from the highest to the lowest levels – far deeper than it ever did in the Soviet army. The political work system involves a vast network of people and organizations, and oversees tasks that the CCP considers essential to the PLA's proper functioning, including – but not limited to – its adherence to Party orthodoxy.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ Nan Li, “The Central Military Commission and Military Policy in China,” pp. 66-70.

¹⁷⁵ Ma Leqi, ed., *Political Instructor's Handbook* (*zhidaoyuan shouce*; 指导员手册) (Jinan: Yellow River Press, 2001), p. 9; Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds. *The Chinese Military Encyclopedia* (*zhongguo junshi baikeshu*; 中国军事百科全书) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1997), Vol. 4, pp. 131-32; National Defense University Political Work Research Department, *The Science of PLA Political Work* (*zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo xue*; 中国人民解放军政治工作学) (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2006). For a comprehensive discussion of the PLA's political work system, see Kristen A. Gunness, Julia Rosenfield, and James Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda: An Institutional Overview of the Political Work System in the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, CNA Research Memorandum D0014745.A3/1Rev (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006).

¹⁷⁶ Li Xiaobing, *A History of the Modern Chinese Army* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), p. 53.

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The Party conducts military political work to ensure adherence to Party directives, both ideological and professional.

Political work is more than just Party propaganda. Its purpose is not only to inculcate Party orthodoxy on ideological matters, but to manage many of the administrative and operational tasks necessary for all militaries. Essentially, political work focuses on the “human” dimensions of PLA institutions and of warfare. This includes the following:

- Managing CCP activities among Party members in the PLA
- Managing the people in the PLA (i.e., human resources functions)
- Managing aspects of individual and unit training and indoctrination
- Managing operations directed against enemy forces through cooptation, coercion, and other activities aimed at degrading the enemy’s “will to fight”
- Managing relations between the PLA and civilians.¹⁷⁷

These functions are carried out through a number of tasks that can be grouped into three categories:¹⁷⁸

Party tasks help cement the relationship between the Party and the PLA, ensure the PLA’s loyalty to the Party, and implement CCP political and military priorities in the PLA. These include such activities as: establishing Party organizations throughout the armed forces; recruiting PLA members to join the Party and educating them on Party rules, regulations, and ideology; evaluating Party members’ adherence to these rules; and educating *all* servicemembers on the political values and ethics of the PLA. Political work organs also carry out the cultural and recreational activities discussed in Chapter 2.¹⁷⁹

Operational tasks support warfighters and combat operations. These include, on the one hand, tasks aimed at improving the capabilities and morale of military personnel – including conducting intelligence activities and information operations, carrying out certain types of training, and handling media and public affairs activities to ensure the support of the civilian population. In addition, some operational tasks aim to undermine the morale of the enemy: hence they focus on such activities as conducting and defending against psychological operations, conducting counter-intelligence activities, and handling military prisoners and prisoners of war.

¹⁷⁷ James Bellacqua and Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, *Examining the Functions and Missions of Political Work in the PLA*, CNA Information Memorandum D0014286.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ These three categories were developed by American PLA analysts, not by the PLA itself. See Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, pp. 2-15.

¹⁷⁹ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 8.

Administrative tasks support everyday PLA operations. These include managing personnel, including officer assignments and promotions; managing some mobilization, demobilization, and conscription issues; educating and training personnel; and investigating and trying servicemen accused of criminal behavior.¹⁸⁰

MILITARY POLITICAL WORK: NOT AS UNFAMILIAR AS IT SOUNDS

Many of the functions and tasks called “political work” in the PLA play a central role in other militaries as well. Such tasks as managing human resources and personnel issues, training personnel in military history, values and ethics, and conducting intelligence and counter-intelligence operations are as familiar to the U.S. military as they are to the PLA.

Many of the missions that the PLA considers “political work” are performed by the following U.S. Army organizations (or their equivalents in other U.S. services):

- The Office of the Inspector General
- The U.S. Army Personnel Command
- The Military Intelligence Branch
- The Judge Advocate General Corps
- The Military Police Branch
- The Training and Doctrine Command
- The Chaplain Corps
- The Army Public Affairs Program
- The U.S. Army Foreign Area Officer Program
- Psychological Operations Groups
- Civil Affairs battalions
- All institutions conducting Non-Appropriated Fund activities for the benefit of military personnel and their dependents.

Party organizations exist at all levels of the PLA.

The CCP carries out political work tasks through a system of political officers and Party committees, as shown in Table 3-1. These structures exist at nearly every level of the PLA, and play a central role in everyday life.

¹⁸⁰ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 2.

Table 3-1: Political officers and Party committees at various levels of the PLA

ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL	POLITICAL OFFICER	PARTY COMMITTEE
Central Military Commission (<i>zhongyang junshi weiyuanhui</i> ; 中央军事委员会)	Political Commissar (<i>zhengzhi weiyuan</i> ; 政治委员)	Party Committee (<i>dangwei</i> ; 党委)
Military Region (<i>junqu</i> ; 军区)		
Army/Corps ¹⁸¹ (<i>jun</i> ; 军)		
Division (<i>shi</i> ; 师)		
Brigade (<i>li</i> ; 旅)		
Regiment (<i>tuan</i> ; 团)		
Battalion (<i>ying</i> ; 营)	Political Instructor ¹⁸² (<i>zhengzhi jiaodaoyuan</i> ; 政治教导员)	Grassroots Party Committee (<i>jiceng dangwei</i> ; 基层党委)
Company (<i>lian</i> ; 连)	Political Instructor ¹⁸² (<i>zhengzhi zhidaoyuan</i> ; 政治指导员)	Party Branch (<i>dangzhibu</i> ; 党支部)
Platoon (<i>pai</i> ; 排)	No political officer	Party Small Group ¹⁸³ (<i>dang xiaozu</i> ; 党小组)

Political officers. Every unit at the company level and above has a political officer in addition to its military commander. *The political officer and the commander are considered co-equals and share joint leadership over the unit, under what is called the*

¹⁸¹ There is some disagreement among PLA analysts about how to translate the term *jun* (i.e., the organizational level above division and below Military Region). Some have argued that the functions and status of a *jun* in the PLA are significantly different from those of a corps in the U.S. military and hence the term's nearest American equivalent is "army." On the other hand, PLA authors tend to translate the term as "corps" in English translations. We provide both translations in this study.

¹⁸² Some PLA analysts translate the term for political officers at the battalion and company levels as "political instructor," while others use "political director." The functions of the officers at the two levels are the same.

¹⁸³ "Party small groups" are generally established in platoon-level units, which consist mostly of NCOs and conscripts, and where there are few Party members. They are also established on an ad-hoc basis in some other organizations, to perform specific Party tasks under certain circumstances. Chang Yongfu, "Company Party Branch," in Song Shilin and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia (zhongguo junshi baike quanshu; 中国军事百科全书)*, Vol. 4, *Political Work and Military Logistics in the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Beijing: Military Science Press, Jul 1997), pp. 237-38.

“dual-leadership system” (*junzheng shuang shouzhang zhi*; 军政双首长制). They share joint responsibility for issuing orders, giving directions to lower levels, and overseeing all daily unit work.¹⁸⁴ In practice, their responsibilities are usually divided, under a system known as the “senior officer division of labor and responsibilities system” (*shouzhang fengong fuzezhi*; 首长分工负责制): the unit commander oversees the implementation of operational tasks while the political officer carries out political work tasks.¹⁸⁵

According to PLA regulations, even with this division of responsibility the political officer and commander are supposed to consult one other before implementing a decision in the unit.¹⁸⁶ In cases where one or the other senior officer makes a decision on a political or operational matter without doing so, it must be reported to the Party committee (discussed in the next section), where it is subject to review.¹⁸⁷ In some circumstances the political officer can override a commander’s operational and training decisions on the basis of safety or other concerns.¹⁸⁸

Political officers are not simply ideological “babysitters.” PLA political officers (who bear different titles at different levels; see Table 3-1) are not outsiders inserted into the military by the CCP. Rather, they are professional military officers who are specifically trained by the PLA to carry out Party tasks.¹⁸⁹ Political officers must be prepared to assume command if the unit commander is unavailable. Hence, they are expected to have received significant operational training prior to assuming their political posts. Many began their careers with a command billet, such as a platoon or company commander.¹⁹⁰ In their daily work they may be required to perform duties normally associated in the

¹⁸⁴ Cheng Baoshan, ed., *The Fundamental Laws and Regulations of Military Political Work in the New Century and New Era – Studying the Newly Revised and Promulgated ‘Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on Political Work (xin shiji xin jieduan jundui zhengzhi gongzuo de genben fagui – xuexi xin xiuding banbu de ‘zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo tiaoli; 新世纪新阶段军队政治工作的根本法规—学习新修订颁布的“中国人民解放军政治工作条例”)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2004) p. 225.

¹⁸⁵ “Rules and Regulations for Political Work in the People’s Liberation Army,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 31 May 1995, FBIS FTS19950531000166.

¹⁸⁶ “Rules and Regulations for Political Work in the People’s Liberation Army.”

¹⁸⁷ Chang Yongfu, “Company Party Branch,” in Song Shilin and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 237.

¹⁸⁸ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 57.

¹⁸⁹ See Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945-1981* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 15-29.

¹⁹⁰ Julia Rosenfield, Kristen Guinness, James Bellacqua, and Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, *Political Officers in the PLA Political Work System*, CNA Information Memorandum D0014288.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), p. 5.

West with the unit commander, and throughout their careers they are routinely trained in aspects of military command.¹⁹¹

Party committees. The CCP embeds its organizations in every PLA unit down to the company level.¹⁹² Although these organizations have different names at different levels (see Table 3-1), they are identified generically as Party committees.¹⁹³ Personnel in the PLA command and staff chain are also the leaders of the Party committees; thus, all command and staff functions in the PLA, from the national level down to the grassroots level, are inseparable from the oversight of Party committees.¹⁹⁴

The Party committee system extends not just to operational units but also to non-operational entities and individual departments within units. For example, not only does a division have its own Party committee, but each department within the division also has its own Party committee.¹⁹⁵

Although the commander and political officer share leadership over the unit, their peacetime authority is limited. *All major peacetime decisions in PLA units are made by Party committees.* This includes decisions on issues such as:

- Operations and training issues
- Officer evaluation, selection, and staffing
- Expenditure of funds
- Personnel management

¹⁹¹ Liu Zhenzhong, "Political Instructor at the Battalion Level," in Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, pp. 376-77; Wu Shaojing, "Political Instructor at the Company Level," in Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 374.

¹⁹² Liu Yongshou and Wang Yongquan, "Military Party Committee System," in Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, pp. 131-32.

¹⁹³ This system is mirrored in Chinese civilian institutions: every government organ has a Party committee. See e.g. Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 71.

¹⁹⁴ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 71.

¹⁹⁵ At the regiment level and above, the Party committee is relatively large, with members elected at annual Party congresses. This body meets only once or twice a year, and is represented in daily unit life by a "standing committee" (*changwu weiyuanhui*; 常务委员会) that meets much more frequently and is responsible for making key decisions for the unit. For convenience's sake this study refers to *all* those bodies that meet frequently and are responsible for daily decisions as "Party committees," though at the regiment level and above these are technically "standing committees." See Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, pp. 73-75.

- Implementing guidance or regulations passed down by higher-level Party committees¹⁹⁸
- Any other issue it deems important for the effective functioning of the unit.¹⁹⁹

The Party committee is expected to reach decisions through a process of consensus-based discussion and deliberation, detailed in Chapter 4. Although the commander and political officer occupy leadership positions on the Party committee, neither of them has the authority to dictate committee decisions or to make decisions countermanding the committee's will.

Every member of the standing committee is supposed to have an equal say in decision making.²⁰⁰ Once the Party committee reaches a decision, the unit commander and political officer are responsible for implementing it according to the "division of labor and responsibilities system" discussed above.

A unit-level Party committee usually comprises the political officer and commander, who serve as the Party committee's secretary and deputy secretary, respectively; the deputy commanders and deputy political officers of the unit; and the heads of the unit's four functional departments (including the chief of staff, also called the chief of the "headquarters department," the chief of the political department, the chief logistics officer, and the chief armaments officer).²⁰¹ It may also include key officers from sub-units: for example, a regiment-level party committee would include the key officers from associated battalion-level and company-level units.

WOULD THESE COMPLEX SYSTEMS PARALYZE WARTIME DECISION-MAKING?

Not necessarily. PLA regulations state that:

- If the unit commander is incapacitated, on leave, or otherwise unavailable, either the political officer or the deputy commander assumes command.¹⁹⁶
- When an immediate tactical decision is required during combat, commanders may act on their own to carry out existing plans without securing a consensus in the Party Committee or obtaining agreement from the political officer. Afterwards, however, they are required to justify their decisions to the Party committee.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁹⁷ Xie Qingyun and Qiu Guilin, "Political Work in Wartime," in Song Shilun and Xiaoke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 74.

¹⁹⁹ James Bellacqua and Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, *Examining the Functions and Missions of Political Work in the PLA*, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ Shi Fang, "Senior Officer Division of Labor Responsibility System Under the Unified Leadership of the Party Committee," in Song Shilun and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, pp. 28-29.

²⁰¹ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 78. Although it is common practice for the political officer to serve as the secretary of the Party committee, it is not a requirement. In some units, other individuals (most frequently unit commanders) serve as the secretary.

WHAT DO PLA PARTY COMMITTEES DO?

PLA newspapers run frequent stories on the activities of Party committees that shed light on their role. Notable recent examples include the following:

- In 2002, the Party committee for the entire PLA Air Force (PLAAF), concerned about the large number of accidents during the previous year, released PLAAF-wide regulations requiring stricter attention to operational discipline and safety.²⁰²
- In 2004, a PLAAF unit Party committee established job training and placement programs for the family members of unit personnel.²⁰³
- In 2004, a PLA Navy (PLAN) Party committee voted against extending Party membership to a squad leader. Members of the Party committee agreed that although he was technically proficient, he “lacked a sense of urgency about his work and was not a self-starter.” They gave him the opportunity to reapply the following year.²⁰⁴
- In 2006, a Second Artillery base Party committee evaluated the training outcomes of several regiments and brigades and concluded that a number of personnel were “not fit for the demands of combat.” The Party committee demoted or demobilized a number of these “unfit” soldiers.²⁰⁵

State institutions have little authority over the PLA.

In the Party-State-Army triangle discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the Party is the dominant element and main source of authority. As a result, State institutions that appear in name to have military authority in fact have little or no power to influence the PLA. When these institutions do have power, it derives from the Party status of their leaders, rather than from their State positions.

A glance at the PLA’s high-level structures (see Figure 3-1) makes clear why this is so. It is the Central Military Commission of the CCP, not the State Council or the Ministry of National Defense, that has direct authority over the PLA.

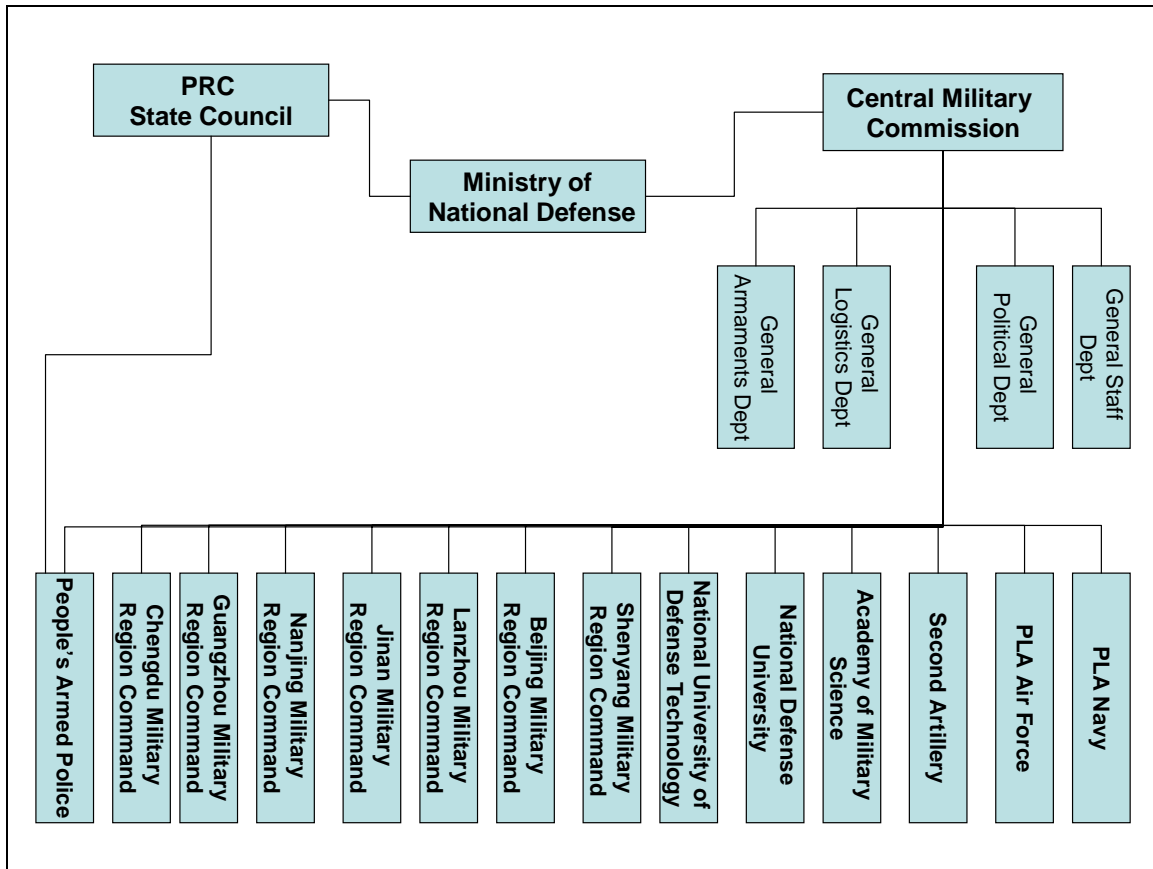
²⁰² *Kongjun Bao*, 27 Aug 2002, p. 1; see also *Kongjun Bao*, 10 Jul 2003, p. 1.

²⁰³ *Kongjun Bao*, 22 Jun 2004, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ *Renmin Haijun*, 15 Jun 2004, p. 2.

²⁰⁵ *Huojianbing Bao*, 14 Feb 2006, p. 1.

Figure 3-1: Structure of the top levels of the PLA²⁰⁶



The State CMC has no independent authority.

On paper, there are officially two Central Military Commissions:

- The “Party CMC,” which is an organ of the Party and answers to the CCP Central Committee and Politburo
- The “State CMC,” which is an organ of the Chinese government and answers to the National People’s Congress and the President.

The Party CMC has been in existence since just a few years after the establishment of the CCP itself.²⁰⁷ The State CMC was established in 1982 as part of a short-lived set of policies, advocated by then-Premier Zhao Ziyang and CCP General Secretary Hu

²⁰⁶ Adapted from “Structure and Organization of the Chinese Armed Forces,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 2003; <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/special/stength/content/index.htm>.

²⁰⁷ The Party CMC was established as a Party post *prior* to the formal founding of the Red Army; in its early days it was called the “Central Military Department” of the CCP.

Yaobang, to “separate the Party from the government” (*dangzheng fenkai*; 党政分开).²⁰⁸ However, the State CMC never attained real authority, and after Hu’s death and Zhao’s purging in 1989, the attempt to separate State from Party authority was abandoned.²⁰⁹

Today the State CMC exists only as what one analyst calls a “hollow shell whose membership totally overlaps with that of its party counterpart.”²¹⁰ The two CMCs currently have the identical roster of members, and the State CMC does not hold separate meetings from the Party CMC.²¹¹ China’s 2006 defense white paper confirmed in writing for the first time that the two CMCs “are completely the same in their composition and in their function of exercising leadership over the armed forces.”²¹² The two CMCs are sometimes referred to within China’s government as “two signs, one organization” (*liangge paizi, tong yige jigou*; 两个牌子, 同一个机构).²¹³

The Ministry of National Defense serves primarily as a foreign liaison office.

Similarly, China’s Ministry of National Defense (MND, *zhongguo guofang bu*; 中国国防部) has almost no power within the PLA’s command structure. It was established by the 1954 PRC Constitution, and is subordinate to the PRC State Council.²¹⁴ At certain times during the Mao era, the MND had some authority over the PLA’s scientific and technological establishments, military academies, and recruiting and conscription systems. However, its power was reduced in the early 1970s after then-Defense Minister Lin Biao’s alleged abortive coup against Mao. After Deng Xiaoping assumed leadership of the PLA in 1978, the MND ceded nearly all its authority to the CMC.

Today, the MND’s largest component is its Foreign Affairs Office (FAO; *waishi bangongshi*; 外事办公室), which acts as a liaison for military-to-military exchanges. According to one analyst, it exists mostly for protocol purposes, to provide organizations and officials with which counterparts in foreign defense establishments may organize

²⁰⁸ Academy of Military Science History Research Department, ed., *70 Years of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army* (*zhongguo renmin jiefangjun de qishi nian*; 中国人民解放军的七十年) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1997), p. 622.

²⁰⁹ David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 115.

²¹⁰ Kenneth G. Lieberthal, *Governing China : From Revolution Through Reform* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995), p. 229.

²¹¹ Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, p. 115.

²¹² *China’s National Defense in 2006* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 29 Dec 2006), III: “China’s Leadership and Administration System for National Defense.”

²¹³ Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s Military*, p. 115.

²¹⁴ *China’s People’s Liberation Army: An Introductory Course of Instruction* (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2004), 128.

contacts.²¹⁵ This means that foreign visitors have a great deal of contact with MND personnel, disproportionate to their actual role in the PLA. The Foreign Affairs Office of the MND is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

Although the MND *as an institution* has only an extremely limited ability to influence the PLA, the individual who sits at its head is one of the most powerful figures in the Chinese defense establishment. However, *he derives his power not from his position in the State but rather from his position in the Party, as a member of the CMC and the Politburo.*²¹⁶

The PLA coordinates with State institutions on certain issues.

Although the Party dominates military affairs, the PLA is not completely isolated from State institutions. It must coordinate with central government agencies and local State organs on multiple issues. At the central government level, the CMC must coordinate with State ministries on such tasks as:

- Formulating the military budget
- Preparing for military-to-military exchanges
- Developing defense white papers.²¹⁷

At the local level, PLA leaders coordinate with civilian officials to fulfill tasks related to mobilization and civil defense, as well as to some of the routine needs of the PLA.²¹⁸ These tasks include (but are not limited to):

- Military recruitment. Local governments contribute both finances and labor to the annual process of registering and screening new PLA conscripts.²¹⁹
- Finding jobs for military spouses and educating military dependents.
- Finding civilian jobs for demobilized personnel.

²¹⁵ Kenneth Allen, "Introduction to the PLA's Administrative and Operational Structure," in James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *The People's Liberation Army as Organization; Reference Volume v1.0* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2002), p. 39.

²¹⁶ Allen, "Introduction to the PLA's Administrative and Operational Structure," p. 39.

²¹⁷ See Dean Cheng, Kristen Gunness, and James Bellacqua, *An Exploration of the Evolving PLA Elite*, CNA Research Memorandum D0017346.A1, 2007 (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2007), pp. 170-173.

²¹⁸ Xie Qingyun and Qiu Guilin, "Political Work in Each Type of Task" in Song Shilin and Xiao Ke, eds., *Chinese Military Encyclopedia*, vol. 4; Dean Cheng, Kristen Gunness, and James Bellacqua, *An Exploration of the Evolving PLA Elite*, pp. 174-77.

²¹⁹ See Kenneth Allen and James Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Enlisted Forces*, CNA Research Memorandum D0014253.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), pp. 51-61.

- Offering PLA assistance to civilian governments. This includes allocating military personnel and equipment to support civilian agricultural production, transportation and energy construction efforts, and environmental protection measures.²²⁰
- Obtaining civilian logistical and economic support for military tasks, and carrying out joint defense measures in times of war or other emergency. In peacetime, this includes joint military-civilian maintenance of military equipment and supplies, and outsourcing PLA logistics to civilian institutions. In times of war or emergency (such as natural disaster or domestic instability), civilians might be required to provide what Americans would term “combat service support,” such as equipment repair, medical and emergency services preparation, communications support, logistics, and transportation.²²¹
- Managing National Defense Education (NDE) in local schools. The NDE system seeks to provide Chinese citizens with a basic understanding of military affairs, and to ensure that civilians can be called upon to assist military efforts if needed. Elements of NDE are incorporated into all levels of schooling, culminating with several weeks of field training that all civilian college students are required to undergo.²²²

Formal authority in the PLA flows simultaneously along vertical and horizontal lines.

The PLA operates within a bureaucratic system characterized by multiple lines of authority. Authority in the PLA flows in two directions simultaneously:

- Vertically, from the Central Military Commission down through military units at every level
- Horizontally, across units or organizations within a single jurisdiction, such as a province or a Military Region.²²³

²²⁰ Ou Guozheng, Wang Zongyun, and Li Gang, eds., *A Guide to the Practice of Political Organ Work* (*zhengzhi jiguan gongzuo shijian zhinan*; 政治机关工作实践指南) (Beijing: Long March Publishing House, 2000), p. 268.

²²¹ On peacetime civilian support for the PLA, see e.g. Xu Kaiwei and Li Qisong, “PLA Guizhou Military District Explores New Mode of Maintaining Militia Arms by Getting Military, Civilian Forces Involved in Commonly Used Equipment Maintenance,” *Zhongguo Guofang Bao*, 30 Oct 2008, OSC CPP20081106711002; Collins Alt, *The PLA Logistics System & Armaments System: Organizations, Roles, and Missions*, CNA Research Memorandum D0018111.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2008), p. 26. On wartime support, see Dean Cheng, *Chinese Approaches to Mobilization: An Open Source Exploitation*, CNA Research Memorandum D0010853.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2004), p. 74.

²²² Law of the Peoples’ Republic of China on National Defense Education, Articles 13-17, http://www.gov.cn/english/laws/2005-10/10/content_75636.htm.

²²³ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, p. 186.

As a result, a single office, at any level of the PLA, must answer to multiple masters, and rarely, if ever, has the authority to single-handedly make or implement decisions. This system results in “fragmented authority”: decisions in the PLA must be coordinated across numerous organizations and individuals, and PLA personnel are embedded in a complicated web of command and authority relationships.

Many aspects of this system remain closed to foreigners (and even to Chinese citizens). American analysts have developed a framework for understanding this system based on years of observation, but much remains unknown. Hence this section should be understood as an *outline* of the principles and practices of PLA organization. These principles mirror those of the Chinese government, within whose bureaucratic structures the PLA is embedded.

Vertical lines

Vertical lines of authority (*tiao*; 条) are based on functional divisions (e.g., education, military, environment) that stream from higher to lower levels of the PRC bureaucracy. For example, the highest body in the military political work system, the General Political Department (GPD), transmits political work tasks from the Party and the CMC down to political work organs at lower levels in the PLA, and supervises their implementation of these tasks. Similarly, each unit’s political officer and Party committee oversee the implementation of political work tasks in subordinate units.²²⁴ Since all authority in these vertical lines ultimately comes from the highest level of the State, Party, or army (depending on the issue), this system is often called “centralized management.”²²⁵

There are vertical lines within vertical lines. For instance, the vertical line for schools might itself be part of a larger vertical line for general educational affairs. The largest and broadest vertical divisions are sometimes referred to as “systems” (*xitong*; 系统). For example, everything to do with the Chinese armed forces falls under the “military affairs system” (*junshi xitong*; 军事系统).²²⁶

²²⁴ See Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 22.

²²⁵ See e.g. Xiong Wenzhao and Cao Xudong, “Getting the Most From Vertical Management,” *China Daily Online*, 21 Dec 2007, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/GS-e/236456.htm>.

²²⁶ Foreign analysts dispute the number of “systems” that exist in the central government. See e.g. Lieberthal, *Governing China*, pp. 218-223; Lu Ning, “The Central Leadership, Supraministry Coordinating Bodies, State Council Ministries, and Party Departments,” in David M. Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978-2000* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). Foreign observers sometimes inaccurately refer to *all* vertical networks as “systems.”

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

PLA vertical lines: the four General Departments

The PLA has four vertical lines of its own, represented by four General Departments (*si zongbu*; 四总部):

- General Staff Department (GSD)
- General Political Department (GPD)
- General Logistics Department (GLD)
- General Armaments Department (GAD).²²⁷

These are *formalized* vertical lines, and their functions are outlined in the biennial PLA White Paper.²²⁸ The heads of the four General Departments currently all sit on the CMC, although this is not required by law.

Table 3-2: The PLA's four General Departments and their functions

DEPARTMENT	FUNCTION ²²⁹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Staff Department (GSD, <i>zong canmou bu</i>; 总参谋部) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To put forward proposals on major issues of military building and operations, organize and exercise strategic command, formulate programs, rules and regulations for military work, and organize and direct war preparations, as well as military training and mobilization.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Political Department (GPD, <i>zong zhengzhi bu</i>; 总政治部) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To ensure the armed forces’ compliance with an implementation of ... the principles and policies of the Party and the Constitution and laws of the State, draw up general and specific policies for political work, formulate rules and regulations for political work, and make arrangements for, supervise and provide guidance to the political work of the armed forces.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Logistics Department (GLD, <i>zong houqin bu</i>; 总后勤部) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To formulate programs, rules and regulations for logistical construction, deploy logistical forces, organize logistical mobilization and provide logistical support, carry out the application, allocation, budgeting, and final accounting of military expenditure, and conduct material procurement.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Armament Department (GAD, <i>zong zhuangbei bu</i>; 总装备部) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “To formulate strategies, programs and plans, policies, and rules and regulations for equipment development, organize equipment R&D, experimentation, procurement, combat service, maintenance and support, and administer the PLA’s funds for equipment buildup.”

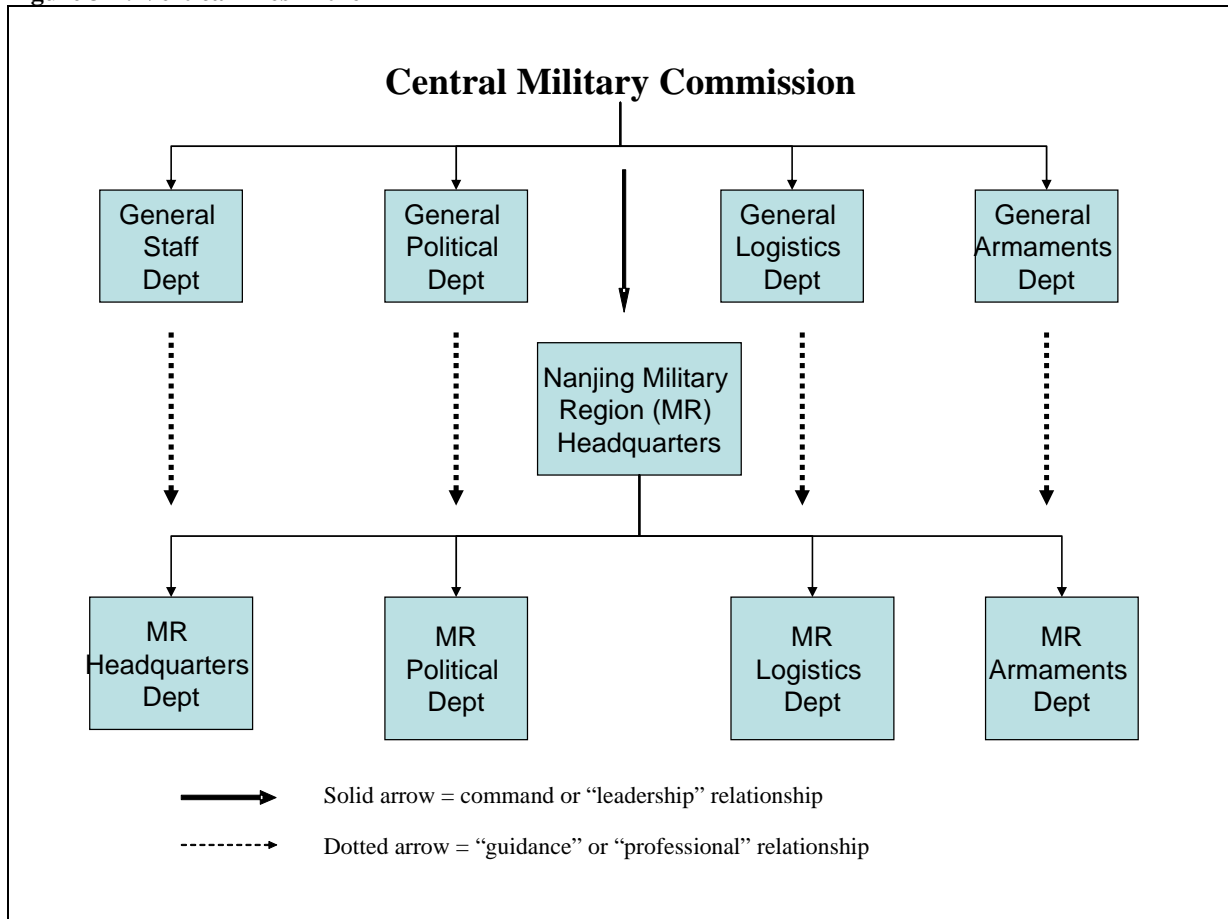
²²⁷ The GAD is sometimes given the English name “General Equipment Department (GED)”; the Chinese name is the same for both translations.

²²⁸ *China’s National Defense in 2006*, III: “China’s Leadership and Administration System for National Defense.”

Through the four General Departments, the CMC exercises administrative control and political leadership over the Military Regions, the PLA Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery, and several military academic institutions. (See Figure 3-1, on p. 62, for a graphic representation.) Vertical lines of authority are structured around functional areas of authority (described in Table 3-2, above), not around the different military services.²³⁰

The four General Departments are mirrored at each level of the PLA bureaucracy by an administrative department: for instance, each Military Region has a Headquarters Department (associated with the GSD), a Political Department, a Logistics Department, and an Armaments Department. These departments exist at the army/corps, division, and regiment levels, and are tasked by the unit commander to carry out any policies sent down by the relevant General Department. Figure 3-2 shows how these vertical lines work.

Figure 3-2: Vertical lines in the PLA



²²⁹ *China's National Defense in 2006*, III: “China’s Leadership and Administration System for National Defense.”

²³⁰ Nan Li, *The Central Military Commission and Military Policy in China*, p. 76.

Horizontal lines

Horizontal lines of authority (literally, “pieces” or *kuai*; 块) exist within a single jurisdiction, such as a province or a Military Region. These lines coordinate issues across that jurisdiction.

- This means coordinating issues across functional areas within a single military unit: for instance, procuring materials for training tasks might require input from the headquarters, logistics, and armaments departments in a single unit.
- It also means coordinating not just within that *military* jurisdiction, but also with the local *civilian* administration. The joint civil-military tasks discussed previously – such as finding civilian jobs for demobilized military personnel or coordinating the maintenance of military equipment and supplies – are examples of tasks requiring horizontal coordination with the local government.

**COORDINATING ISSUES AT THE TOP:
LEADING SMALL GROUPS**

At its very highest levels, the Chinese government must coordinate issues across Party, State, and army, and between policy-setting bodies and policy-implementing bodies. It appears to do so through a series of tightly knit, rather secretive bodies called “leading small groups” (*lingdao xiaozu*; 领导小组), or LSGs. The purpose of these bodies is not to formally set policy, but to serve as a locus of policy coordination, communication, and consultation.

Little information about these groups is available to foreigners or even to the Chinese citizenry, and their exact membership is unknown; however, it appears that high-level PLA personnel sit on several LSGs, including the Foreign Affairs LSG and the National Security Affairs LSG. In this way, the PLA, along with other concerned Party and State organs, can weigh in on issues that stretch across their different bureaucracies.²³¹

Horizontal lines exist all the way up to the central government, where multiple ministries are often required to coordinate policy-making efforts. This system is sometimes called “decentralized management.”²³²

²³¹ For more on LSGs, see e.g. Carol Lee Hamrin, “The Party Leadership System,” in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 95-124; Cheng, Gunness, and Bellacqua, *An Exploration of the Evolving PLA Elite*, pp. 163-69.

²³² There are some indications that the central government is moving to consolidate some of these horizontal functions into single organizations, essentially “re-centralizing” some organizations into vertical networks. Moves in this direction were announced at the Second Plenary Session of the 17th Party Congress in March 2008. See, e.g., “Responsible Official From Central Organization Committee General Office Answers Questions From Renmin Ribao and Xinhua News Agency Reporters on Deepening Reforms of the Administrative System and Organizational Structure,” 11 Mar 2008, OSC CPP20080311074003; and Hua Jianmin, “Explanation on Reforming State Council Organizations,” 11 Mar 2008, OSC CPP20080311074016. Horizontal networks also tend to give a degree of power to local governments. Recent policy decisions suggest that the PRC central government is attempting to reassert some degree of

Which line takes precedence?

Together, vertical and horizontal lines form a “matrix” of authority relationships in which every organization, at every level of the government and military, is embedded.²³³ Every organization in this “matrix” potentially has two masters: the logistics department in a PLA regiment, for instance, has a duty to report both vertically, to the logistics department at the next level up (the division logistics department) and horizontally, to the commander and other affected officers in its own unit.

The greatest potential pitfall of this system is obvious: if there is a disagreement between an organization’s vertical and horizontal relationships, which one should take precedence? The PRC bureaucracy has attempted to solve this problem by designating all relationships, both vertical and horizontal, as either “leadership relationships” (*lingdao guanxi*; 领导关系) or “professional relationships” (*yewu guanxi*; 业务关系). Only in a *leadership relationship* does the superior partner have the authority to issue formal, binding orders. Every organization has only one leadership relationship. Organizations in a *professional relationship* (sometimes called a “guidance relationship”) can offer guidance and coordination, but not binding orders.²³⁴

For example: *the vertical lines of the four General Departments are professional, not leadership relationships.* The four General Departments send guidelines down to military units through their vertical lines, but the officers in a unit receive orders to implement these guidelines from their unit commander and political officer. They are also subject to discipline by the commander, not the four General Departments, if they fail in their task. If a battalion-level logistics officer fails to carry out his assigned tasks, he has to answer to the battalion commander, not to the division-level logistics department. (See Figure 3-2, above, for a schematic depiction of the leadership and guidance relationships in a unit.)

Implications

Formal command relationships notwithstanding, the vertical/horizontal structure sets up potential communication roadblocks among units at all levels of the PLA, and has at least two major implications:

Because officers are trained to carry out functions within a single vertical line, their career paths and skill sets are relatively narrow. There are five PLA career tracks:

- Military (or command) officers (*junshi/zhihui junguan*; 军事/指挥 军官)
- Political officers (*zhengzhi junguan*; 政治军官)

control over localities by strengthening the authority of vertical lines; see Xiong Wenzhao and Cao Xudong, “Getting the Most From Vertical Management”; Andrew C. Mertha, “China’s ‘Soft’ Centralization: Shifting *Tiao/Kuai* Authority Relations,” *China Quarterly* 184 (Dec 2005), pp. 791-810.

²³³ Lieberthal, *Governing China*, p. 187.

²³⁴ Mertha, “China’s ‘Soft’ Centralization,” p. 797; Lieberthal, *Governing China*, pp. 219-220.

- Logistics officers (*houqin junguan*; 后勤军官)
- Armaments officers²³⁵ (*zhuangbei junguan*; 装备军官)
- Specialized technical officers (*zhuanye jishu junguan*; 专业技术军官).

Four of these five categories correspond to the four General Departments. (Specialized technical officers, who are responsible for equipment maintenance, repair, research, development, and testing, may belong to any functional category, though they are most frequently associated with the logistics or armaments tracks.²³⁷) Officers are tracked into one of these systems when they are commissioned, are trained and educated throughout their career in the same system, serve in units and headquarters within that system, and do not routinely transfer from one system to another until they have reached quite a high position (MR deputy leader or above) in the military hierarchy. (The one exception is political officers, who – as discussed earlier in this chapter – often start their careers in a command or other non-political billet.) *As a result, PLA officers are generally more narrowly specialized than their American counterparts.* Appendix 4 of this study depicts the notional career path of a typical “tracked” PLA officer.

Strong vertical lines encourage stove-piping of information. Although vertical lines often lack command authority, the PLA still tends to vertically funnel information. This can lead to inadequate communication among members of a military unit who belong to different vertical lines.

This tendency is theoretically offset by the unit management structure: the commander and political commissar should be well versed in *all* the issues that the unit is dealing with, and the Party committee provides a forum in which information should be shared across vertical

**SOLVING VERTICAL STOVEPIPING
THROUGH HORIZONTAL COORDINATION**

A 2004 newspaper article reported on a PLA Navy officer who was promoted but did not receive the pay raise he was expecting. Upon investigation, the base’s command staff and Party committee discovered that the various departments responsible for pay raises and “cost of living fees” (including the finance, cadre, military affairs, training, and health departments) had not coordinated on this officer’s promotion or on many other cases.

The base Party committee was tasked with coordinating these departments horizontally across the unit. The Party committee ran educational activities for members of the relevant departments, and devised base regulations on the disbursement of cost of living fees, in accordance with regulations set forth by the four General Departments.²³⁶

²³⁵ Sometimes translated as “equipment officers.”

²³⁶ *Renmin Haijun*, 30 Sept 2004, p. 1.

²³⁷ Elizabeth Hague, “PLA Career Progressions and Policies,” p. 264. See also Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 55.

networks and policies coordinated. Anecdotally, however, frequent problems are still reported.²³⁸

Individuals' status within the PLA hierarchy is determined by their grade, not their rank.

Within the structure described above, PLA officers sit in a hierarchy that, superficially, looks similar to that of the U.S. military. In reality, however, a PLA officer's status within the military is determined by his *grade*, a complex hierarchical system unique to the PLA.

What is a grade?

Since 1979 the PLA has had a 15-level grade system that applies to *all* units, organizations, and officers in *all* services and branches. Each grade level has a name (e.g., "division leader" or "MR deputy leader"), and every organization and job position in the PLA is assigned one of these grades. The grades and their names are shown in Table 3-3. *The grade system determines the formal authority relationships among PLA organizations and officers.*

When referring to grade levels, the PLA does not refer to the grade number. For example, a division commander is identified as a "division leader-grade officer," not as a "grade-7 officer."

Institutional grades

Each unit or organization within the PLA is assigned a grade level that determines its authority in relation to other PLA units or organizations.

Specific grades are also applied to each department level within a unit or organization. The PLA's administrative structures are fairly consistent from the CMC down to the regiment level. Within each PLA unit or organization, there are first-level (*yijibu*; 一级部), second-level (*erjibu*; 二级部), and in some cases third-level (*sanjibu*; 三级部) departments. The first-level department is one grade level below the main organization, the second-level department is one grade level below that, and so on. Appendix 5 provides a graphical representation of this system.

²³⁸ Interviews #2 and 7. These and all other interviews were conducted with members of the U.S. defense establishment.

Personnel grades

Every officer in the PLA also has a grade level, sometimes called a “duty grade” (*zhiwu dengji*; 职务等级). It is an officer’s grade that most clearly signals his status in the PLA hierarchy. The importance of the grade system is indicated in several ways:

- Grade level determines a PLA officer’s authority vis-à-vis other officers. For instance, it is because the commander and the political officer in a given unit are always of the same grade that they have equal authority in the unit.
- Officers at the same grade level are equal in status even if they have different ranks.
- An officer’s grade level determines what billets he is eligible to fill.
- Officers’ pay is determined first by their grade level, and only after that by their military rank and years of service.²⁴⁰
- Promotion in grade indicates that one is moving up the career ladder. Moving from one *grade level* to the next is a promotion; moving from one *position* to another in the same grade is a lateral transfer. For example, moving from a position as chief of staff in an MR headquarters to become deputy commander in the same MR headquarters is not a promotion, because both have a grade level of MR Deputy Leader.

Table 3-3: Grade levels and their names

CMC Chairman (<i>junwei zhuxi</i> ; 军委主席)	1
Vice Chairman (<i>junwei fuzhuxi</i> ; 军委副主席)	
CMC Member (<i>junwei weiyuan</i> ; 军委委员)	2
MR Leader ²³⁹ (<i>daqu zhengzhi</i> ; 大区正职)	3
MR Deputy Leader (<i>daqu fuzhi</i> ; 大区副职)	4
Army/Corps Leader (<i>zhengjun</i> ; 正军)	5
Army/Corps Deputy Leader (<i>fujun</i> ; 副军)	6
Division Leader (<i>zhengshi</i> ; 正师)	7
Division Deputy Leader (<i>fushi</i> ; 副师)	8
Regiment Leader (<i>zhengtuan</i> ; 正团)	9
Regiment Deputy Leader (<i>futuan</i> ; 副团)	10
Battalion Leader (<i>zhengying</i> ; 正营)	11
Battalion Deputy Leader (<i>fuying</i> ; 副营)	12
Company Leader (<i>zhenglian</i> ; 正连)	13
Company Deputy Leader (<i>fulian</i> ; 副连)	14
Platoon Leader (<i>zhengpai</i> ; 正排)	15

²³⁹ “Leader” = grade equivalent to the commander and political officer of a unit. “Deputy leader” = grade equivalent to the deputy commander of the unit.

²⁴⁰ “Military Personnel Salary and Benefits,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 14 Jan 2005, OSC CPP20080226436001.

- Each grade level is associated with a mandatory retirement age. Upon reaching that age, an officer must either be promoted or leave the military.

MILITARY AND CIVILIAN GRADES

Grade levels also permit military officers to compare their positions to civilians in the government bureaucracy. Like PLA officers, civilian personnel are divided into 15 grades.

One option for PLA officers leaving active duty is to transfer to a civilian government institution at the same grade as their last military billet. Officers choosing this option will not receive retirement benefits from the PLA, but their time in the PLA will count toward retirement from their new civilian positions.²⁴¹ *In this way, PLA officers' grades are important not just to their status in the military but also to their career prospects after they leave.*

The heads (military commanders and political officers) of units and organizations at each level hold a grade level equal to that of the unit or organization itself. Their subordinates hold lower grades, as do personnel serving in lower-level units and organizations.

What about ranks?

Each PLA officer holds one of 10 military ranks. The ranks use ground force terminology and mostly bear titles similar to U.S. military ranks (as indicated in the shaded box). PLA Navy and Air Force officers simply add “Navy” (*haijun* 海军) or “Air Force” (*kongjun* 空军) before the ground force rank, as in “Navy general” (*haijun shangjiang* 海军上将). However, English translations use American naval ranks, such as “admiral” rather than “Navy general.”

Rank epaulets allow an observer to fix *approximately* where an officer fits into the PLA hierarchy. However, *U.S. military officers of a particular rank should not assume that PLA officers of equal rank are their exact counterpart in terms of authority or responsibilities.*

PLA RANKS: HIERARCHY

Officers are divided into three levels with 10 ranks (*sandeng shiji*; 三等十级).

General officers (*jiangguan*; 将官):

- general (*shangjiang*; 上将)
- lieutenant general (*zhongjiang*; 中将)
- major general (*shaojiang*; 少将)

Field grade officers (*xiaoguan*; 校官):

- senior colonel (*daxiao*; 大校)
- colonel (*shangxiao*; 上校)
- lieutenant colonel (*zhongxiao*; 中校)
- major (*shaoxiao*; 少校)

Company grade officers (*weiguan*; 尉官):

- captain (*shangwei*; 上尉)
- first lieutenant (*zhongwei*; 中尉)
- second lieutenant (*shaowei*; 少尉)

²⁴¹ Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, “Demobilization and Resettlement: The Challenge of Downsizing the People’s Liberation Army” in David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunness, eds., *Civil-Military Relations in Today’s China: Swimming in a New Sea* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), p. 263.

Officers rise in both grade and rank as they are promoted; however, *officers' grades do not dictate their exact rank, or vice versa.*

- With the exception of CMC Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, who are always generals, each grade level is associated with two ranks: for example, a deputy Military Region leader could be a lieutenant general or a major general.
- Each rank is associated with as many as four grade levels. Hence, one might see an officer deferring to another of the same rank, if the former is of a lower grade.

For a graphical representation of how PLA ranks and grades relate to one another, see Appendix 6.

Determining an officer's grade: looking for clues

PLA officers may not readily discuss their grade level with outsiders, so when meeting PLA officers it can be difficult to gauge their place in the PLA hierarchy. However, officers' grades can be determined, either approximately or exactly, if one or more of the following things are known:

- Their rank
- Their job title
- Their uniform insignia.

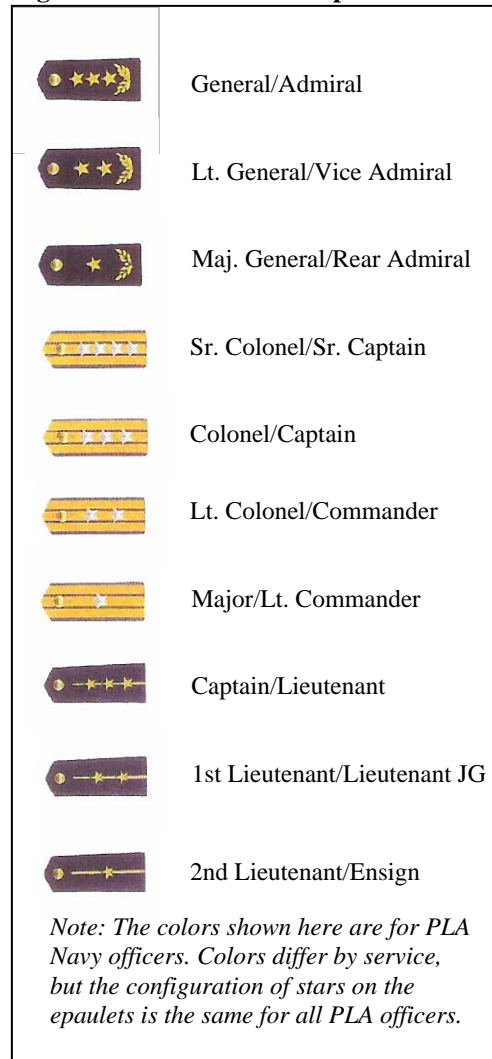
Rank

Knowing officers' ranks – identified by their shoulder epaulets, as shown in Figure 3-3 – allows an observer to infer their approximate grade. The reason is that a limited number of grades can be attained by officers of a particular rank. For instance, a lieutenant colonel may hold the grade level of regiment leader, regiment deputy leader, or battalion leader. Appendix 6 illustrates how the ranks and grades correspond.

Job title

Officers' job titles indicate their current billet (commander, political officer, department director, etc.). *Since each position within a particular institution corresponds to a specific grade, an officer's job title indicates the exact grade level he has attained.* For instance, if one learns that a PLA officer is the Director of the Political Department for the Nanjing Military Region (i.e., the head of a first-level department of a Military-Region grade

Figure 3-3: Rank shoulder epaulets





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organization), it can be deduced that he is at the MR Deputy Leader grade level. Of course, not all job titles make clear exactly what grade level that billet occupies.

Uniform insignia

In the summer of 2007, the PLA introduced a new style of uniforms for officers on which, for the first time, *an officer's grade can be directly determined from the color and number of stars on the center ribbon in the top row of ribbons worn on the left chest of dress uniforms.* (The other ribbons worn on the left chest signify years of service.) Table 3-4 shows dress uniform grade insignia.

Table 3-4: Uniform grade insignia

PLA Grades, Ranks, Insignia, and Ribbons					
Grade #	Ret. Age	Grade	Primary Rank/Secondary	Insignia	Rows of Ribbons
1	N/A	CMC Vice Chairman	N/A or Gen		7
2	70	CMC Member	Gen		
3	65	MR Leader	Gen/Lt Gen		6
4	63	MR Deputy Leader	Lt Gen/Maj Gen		
5	55	Army Leader	Maj Gen/Lt Gen		5
6		Army Deputy Leader	Maj Gen/Sr Col		
7	50	Division Leader	Sr Col/Maj Gen		4
8		Division Deputy Leader	Col/Sr Col		
9	45	Regiment Leader	Col/Lt Col		3
10		Regiment Deputy Leader	Lt Col/Maj		
11	40	Battalion Leader	Maj/Lt Col		2
12		Battalion Deputy Leader	Capt/Maj		
13	35	Company Leader	Capt/1 st Lt		1
14		Company Deputy Leader	1 st Lt/Capt		
15	30	Platoon Leader	2 nd Lt/1 st Lt		

Addressing a member of the PLA

PLA personnel are given formal guidance on how to address one another. The PLA's Routine Service Regulations provide the following guidelines:

Service members address one another *by their position, or position plus surname, or position plus the word "comrade."* Senior officers and superiors *may* address their subordinates or their equals by surname, or by surname plus the word "comrade." Those at the lower levels *may* address their superiors as "senior officer" or "senior officer" plus the word "comrade." On public occasions and *when the position of the other person is not known*, one may address the other person by his *military rank plus the word "comrade" or simply as "comrade."*²⁴²

In other words, Staff Officer Zhang is likely to address his superior as "Commander Zhou" or "Chief of Staff Zhou," not "Colonel Zhou." This mode of addressing officers contrasts with that of most modern militaries, in which officers address each other by military rank and surname, or just by rank.

An exception is when PLA delegations visit abroad or meet foreign military visitors in China. In such situations, the Chinese media usually refer to the PLA officers' rank and sometimes to their positions.

There are three sources of authority and influence in the PLA.

The actual authority that PLA members can wield is a function of several factors beyond their formal status within the PLA. These factors are essential to an individual's ability to influence decision-making, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

Status within the PLA

As discussed above, officers' grade levels are the best indicator of how much authority their position holds in the PLA bureaucracy. If an outside observer can determine a PLA officer's grade level, he can ascertain roughly how much authority that officer's position has relative to that of other officers in the room.

Party position

An individual's influence within the PLA is also a factor of her status within the CCP, for several reasons:

- Positions of authority in the PLA usually come with positions of authority in the Party, since positions on a unit's Party committee are normally reserved for officers in leadership roles: commanders, political commissars, and heads of functional departments. In this sense they wear "two hats." Someone who is not

²⁴² "Routine Service Regulations for the PLA," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 1 Apr 2002, pp. 4-8; emphasis added.

considered politically reliable will not rise to a leadership position, in the military or the Party.

- The Party committee system (along with other elements of the political work system) plays a key role in officer evaluations. Hence, regardless of professional qualifications, an officer cannot have a successful career in the PLA without receiving the imprimatur of the CCP via the Party committee system.²⁴³
- Unless one sits on the unit Party committee, one has little to no direct role in unit decision-making. This excludes all non-Party members (particularly enlisted personnel, many of whom are not Party members), as well as unit personnel who are Party members but who were not selected to be on the unit Party committee by the next higher level Party committee.

The length of time an officer has been a Party member and her role in the Party committee system are thus strong determinants of her status vis-à-vis her fellow personnel. This may help explain some professional and social interaction among PLA officers of various grades and ranks, which, from a Western military perspective, might be considered instances of “undue familiarity” or disregard for rank and authority.²⁴⁵

SEPARATING PLA POSITION AND PARTY AUTHORITY

The PLA promotes the principle that personnel’s different positions in a unit should not affect their authority within the Party committee, where all members are theoretically equal (see Chapter 4). However, the PLA may be struggling to square this egalitarian ideal with the realities of command relationships.

For example, a July 2002 PLA newspaper article reported that NCOs – who had only recently been allowed to sit on the Party committees of tactical units – were beginning to withdraw from these committees in significant numbers. The NCOs complained that officers serving on the committees acted as if their superior positions also gave them greater authority in Party organs, so they did not pay attention to NCOs’ opinions. The article reported that one unit’s Party committee admonished officers to “separate the relationship between their administrative and Party committee duties.”²⁴⁴

Informal networks

In the CCP and the PLA, certain individuals wield a level of influence disproportionate to their formal positions. This can be traced largely to their membership in powerful informal networks based on personal connections, or *guanxi*.

²⁴³ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 71.

²⁴⁵ Guinness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. xii.

GUANXI: THE ART OF RELATIONSHIPS

The concept of *guanxi* (关系) – literally, “connections” or “relationships” – is a well-documented element of Chinese social, business, and political practices.²⁴⁶ In general, *guanxi* relationships are long-term ties based on a sense of mutual obligation. These relationships tend to be reinforced by such practices as giving gifts and hosting banquets, and reflect a traditional emphasis on reciprocal relations as the basis of social order.²⁴⁷

Guanxi may rest on any of a variety of affiliations, including familial and geographical ties. In modern China, *guanxi* may be formed among people who fought together in the Civil War, were sent to work in the same rural units during the Cultural Revolution, or went to school together.²⁴⁸ *Guanxi* may provide a way for people to attain positions of status, by relying on the influence of senior members of their *guanxi* network.

Guanxi played a significant role in the rise of the CCP. The first generation of CCP leaders fought together in a protracted civil war, an experience which cemented long-term loyalties. Once the CCP came to power, one analyst notes, the subsequent “volatility of Chinese politics” further encouraged leaders to “rely on personal relationships to get things done.”²⁴⁹ Some were able to use their *guanxi* networks to avoid the purges that characterized Chinese factional politics during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁵⁰

Members of the PLA draw both on connections they formed before entering military service and on a number of shared military experiences to establish *guanxi* networks. PLA-specific networks include:

- Officers who attended the same institutions of professional military education²⁵¹

²⁴⁶ For an overview of the many ways that *guanxi* affects daily interactions in China, see Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank, eds., *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²⁴⁷ For a discussion of these practices in urban settings, see Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); on rural settings, see Andrew Kipness, *Producing Guanxi: Sentiment, Self, and Subculture in a North China Village* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997). One author notes that people attempting to cement a *guanxi* relationship may offer favors now in order to create a sense of obligation for the future; see Xuezhi Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics,” *The China Journal*, No. 46 (Jul 2001), p. 74.

²⁴⁸ Pre-existing networks among overseas Chinese are sometimes touted as the reason for their economic success in many countries. For just one example of the many published works on this topic, see Yadong Luo, *Guanxi and Business* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2000).

²⁴⁹ Xuezhi Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics,” p. 70.

²⁵⁰ Lowell Dittmer, “Chinese Informal Politics,” *The China Journal*, 34 (Jul 1995), p. 13.

²⁵¹ Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps*, pp. 59-61.

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- Officers whose early service was in particular corps or group armies²⁵²
- Officers who entered the PLA in the same province or region²⁵³
- Officers from particular “generations” or age cohorts²⁵⁴
- Commanders and their former subordinates²⁵⁵
- Officers from prominent military families.²⁵⁶

One analyst notes that the dual-leadership system further encourages the development of “personal bonds mingled with personal emotions and moral obligations” between commanders and political officers.²⁵⁷ Another source of long-term ties is the fact that most PLA officers spend their entire military career in a single region and even in a single unit: this means that they work with the same people for many years, and develop relationships with local governments and Party committees.

INFLUENCE WITHOUT TITLES

The most influential leaders in the CCP and the PLA are those who have been able to cultivate extensive ties and place “loyal friends” within multiple organizations at multiple levels.²⁵⁸

Deng Xiaoping famously remained China’s “paramount leader” for years after resigning his last formal leadership post in 1989. Under Deng, the PLA’s Central Military Commission was dominated by an informal network of “elders” who had fought together in China’s Revolutionary War. When these leaders retired, they maintained personal influence through family members, protégés, and personal friends who remained in the system.²⁵⁹

Under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, the influence of this “elder network” declined considerably and power became more formalized. However, informal networks are said to still play a crucial role within the highest levels of China’s defense establishment.

²⁵² Michael Swaine, *The Military & Political Succession in China* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1992), pp. 23-25.

²⁵³ James C. Mulvenon, *Professionalization of the Senior Chinese Officer Corps: Trends and Implications* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997), p. 51; Li Cheng and Scott W. Harold, “China’s New Military Elite,” *China Security*, Autumn 2007, p. 70-71. Mulvenon points out that more than half of the PLA officer corps from 1989-1994 was born in one of four coastal provinces (Shandong, Hebei, Jiangsu, and Liaoning), with 24 percent from Shandong alone. Ten years later, Cheng and Harold reported that officers from Shandong continued to make up a disproportionate share of the “military elite.”

²⁵⁴ See William Whitson, “The Concept of Military Generation: The Chinese Communist Case,” *Asian Survey*, Nov 1968, pp. 921-947; Cheng and Harold, “China’s New Military Elite,” pp. 71-72.

²⁵⁵ Xuezhong Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics,” p. 70.

²⁵⁶ Cheng and Harold, “China’s New Military Elite,” p. 77. According to the authors, in 2007 three “princelings,” or sons of prominent military leaders, held posts on the Central Military Commission.

²⁵⁷ Xuezhong Guo, “Dimensions of Guanxi in Chinese Elite Politics,” p. 70.

Recent publications indicate concern among the PLA leadership that *guanxi* networks at lower levels have the potential to undermine discipline and cohesion. They express particular concern about two types of networks: “soldiers with connections” (*guanxi bing*; 关系兵) and “hometown ties” (*laoxiang*; 老乡).

“**Soldiers with connections**” are enlisted soldiers with close ties to officers above their immediate superiors. Recent PLA publications report that because of such ties, these soldiers can be difficult to command. A 2004 newspaper article, for instance, reports that the commander of a certain company was unable to punish a soldier for poor discipline because this soldier “had strong connections to leaders above the company commander.”

²⁶¹ A manual for NCOs notes that those commanding “soldiers with connections” may be subject to entreaties from superiors to “look after” these soldiers when decisions are to be made about accession to the Party or NCO selection.²⁶²

The importance of “**hometown ties**” in Chinese society has been well-documented for many centuries, and PLA publications indicate that they remain an important source of informal affiliation among officers and enlisted personnel.²⁶³

TAKING CARE OF OLD FRIENDS

A 2006 newspaper article reported on a regiment that had sent a group to conduct surprise safety and health inspections of its grassroots units.²⁶⁰ The group found one company in such perfect order that they concluded it must have been warned about the inspection. The company commander admitted that a headquarters staff officer had once been the deputy commander of the regiment. In order to protect his “old unit,” this officer had leaked news of the upcoming inspection. The offending officer was reprimanded, and the regiment’s Party committee launched a campaign to rectify similar disciplinary problems.

²⁵⁸ See David M. Lampton, “A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic Politics in China,” in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 56.

²⁵⁹ Jonathan D. Pollack, “Structure and Process in the Chinese Military System,” in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 160-161 and 163.

²⁶⁰ *Huojianbing Bao*, 16 Feb 2006, p. 2.

²⁶¹ *Renmin Haijun*, 17 Jul 2004.

²⁶² Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, (eds.), *How to Be a Good NCO (zenyang dang haoshibing; 怎样当好士官)* (Beijing: Long March Press, 2000), p. 103; for an example, see *Kongjun Bao*, 9 Jul 2005.

²⁶³ For instance, home-town connections became the basis for the powerful political organizations that provided social support and governed social and political relations among San Francisco’s Chinese population in the late 19th century; see, e.g., Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850-1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), Chapter 3.

Hometown ties are viewed by many PLA leaders as a largely benign phenomenon. As a manual for platoon leaders explains, “Loving one’s native place and emphasizing affection for one’s homeland are emotions that all people share.”²⁶⁴ However, PLA publications also warn against allowing hometown ties to give enlisted personnel an unfair advantage with their superiors.²⁶⁵ Some assert that these ties may also become the basis for gangs or “brotherhoods” that engage in violent or criminal activity and retaliate against perceived slights by members of other groups.²⁶⁶

The PLA has begun to introduce policies aimed at limiting the influence of hometown ties. For instance, the 2000 “Active Duty Officers Law” forbids officers to command the Military Sub-District or People’s Armed Forces Department in their places of origin.²⁶⁷ One PLA newspaper reported that PLA units are also paying closer attention to conscripts’ files and trying to make it more difficult for soldiers to self-segregate by home region or ethnicity.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁴ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops (paizhang daibing jifa; 排长带兵技法)* (Beijing: PLA Press, 2005), p. 19.

²⁶⁵ *Renmin Haijun*, 22 May 2004; Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, eds., *How to Be a Good NCO*, p. 71.

²⁶⁶ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*, pp. 20-21; Ou, Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, *How to Be A Good NCO*, p. 122.

²⁶⁷ “Law of the People’s Republic of China for Active Duty Military Officers,” *Xinhua*, 28 Dec 2000, Article 31, OSC CPP20001228000194. The law excludes officers in non-command positions or in operational group army, division, and brigade units.

²⁶⁸ *Renmin Haijun*, 11 Feb 2006.

Chapter 4: Decision-Making in the PLA

Introduction: An opaque process

Decision-making in the PLA is shaped by the organizational structures outlined in the previous chapter, and by the traditions and values discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

Since PLA sources seldom discuss the inner dynamics of PLA decision-making, these remain murky to outside observers. Indeed, a signature characteristic of PLA decision-making is its lack of transparency. PLA texts are more forthcoming about the *ideal* principles and procedures that decision-makers are expected to uphold. It is also possible to draw some inferences about PLA decision-making from our understanding of CCP decision-making processes.

Although understanding these ideals is key to grasping the context in which PLA decision-making takes place, readers should keep in mind that it is impossible to know for certain how closely the PLA abides by these ideals in actual situations.

PLA decision-making principles

All members of the PLA are politically equal.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the PLA espouses the political equality of all personnel. It seeks to create within its ranks a mirror of the Communist Party's relationship with the Chinese citizenry, whereby Party members and leading officials are instructed not to see themselves as inherently better or of higher status than the common people. Similarly, PLA publications insist that officers and enlisted personnel are "politically equal," with no difference in their rights or social status. As a result, the interests and concerns of *all* personnel are held to be of equal merit.

The Party takes the lead in decision-making.

"Political equality" does not mean that all members of a unit have an equal say in unit decision-making. The "vanguard" principle of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, detailed in Chapter 1, means that Party members are considered more "advanced" in their ability to understand the needs and concerns of the "masses." Hence, Party committees are the locus of decision-making within a military unit.

Party committees make decisions “democratically,” in consultation with all affected parties.

Although final decisions on major issues are made by unit Party committees, the PLA professes a commitment to a form of “democracy within the military” (*jundui nei de minzhu*; 军队内的民主) that gives all members of a unit some input.²⁷⁰ The PLA’s “democracy” rests on ideals that diverge significantly from Western democratic traditions, although both are aimed at incorporating the knowledge and opinions of the broader public into decision-making.

In the CCP and the PLA, “democracy” means:

- “Consulting” with the masses to ensure that their needs are met by Party decisions
- Giving the masses the right to “criticize” and to “supervise” their leaders, thus ensuring the leaders’ adherence to laws and Party regulations.²⁶⁹

In his 1948 essay “The Democratic Movement in the Army,” Mao Zedong described the three forms of “democracy” he deemed appropriate for the PLA.²⁷¹ These “Three Democracies” are meant to provide a role for ordinary servicemen in decision-making, and to employ a modified version of the Leninist principle of “democratic centralism,” discussed in Chapter 1. Whereas Lenin’s “democratic centralism” was limited to intra-Party discussions, Mao at times broadened this principle to include *all* affected persons.

Mao’s “Three Democracies” have undergone a number of refinements, but the PLA leadership still considers them to be the cornerstone of enlisted personnel’s participation in unit decision-making.²⁷² The “Three Democracies” are as follows:

²⁶⁹ On “democracy” within the military, see, e.g., Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, eds., *How to Be a Good NCO (zenyang dang hao shiguan; 怎样当好士官)* (Beijing: Long March Press, 2000), p. 154; Zhou Guangde and Zhu Jinhai, *Skills for Company Leaders Commanding Troops (lian zhang daibing jingeng; 连长带兵技能)* (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), pp. 96-97. On supervision as a central element of “military democracy,” see Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System*, pp. 96-97.

²⁷⁰ For a more in-depth discussion of the PLA’s principle of “military democracy” and the PLA’s “democratic” institutions, see Peter W. Mackenzie, *From the Masses, to the Masses: Servicemen’s Committees and PLA ‘Democracy,’* CNA Information Memorandum D0019043.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2008), OSC CPP20081110325005.

²⁷¹ Mao Zedong, “The Democratic Movement in the Army” (1948), *Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), Vol. IV, pp. 191-92, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_27.htm. See also Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System*, pp. 36, 37.

²⁷² See e.g. Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, eds., *Guidebook to Military Life (junli shenghuo zhinan; 军旅生活指南)*, 2nd Edition (Beijing: People’s Armed Police Publishing House, 2007), p. 265; Sai Zhongbao, Interview with PLA Official, “Important Measures to Strengthen the Army’s Internal Democracy Building,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 7 Aug 2007, p. 3, OSC CPP20070807710003.

Political democracy. Officers and enlisted personnel are politically equal. All have the right to criticize leaders, offer suggestions, and report abuses of power and violations of discipline. Leaders solicit the ideas and opinions of the “masses” of enlisted personnel before making decisions.

Economic democracy. Enlisted personnel have the right to supervise and take part in their unit’s economic management, including such issues as mess expenses and provisioning.

Military democracy. Enlisted personnel have the opportunity to provide ideas and suggestions before military operations are conducted. Training is to be conducted on the basis of “mutual learning” between officers and enlisted personnel.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the two components of Maoist “democratic centralism” dictate, first, that all affected individuals engage in debate before a decision is made, and, second, that once a decision is made by the Party leadership, everyone must conscientiously implement the decision even if they do not agree with it.²⁷⁴

MILITARY DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

“Before our assault on Shijiazhuang [in November 1947], we called for giving precedence to studying how to attack the city, with senior and junior cadres holding a meeting together. When we were fighting we also held meetings, and also when we were unable to advance. On the firing line, three to five people would still hold meetings, especially branch personnel, to bring up leadership functions....The result was that soldiers worked as a team, with each man doing his part, to obtain victory.”²⁷³

— Zhu De, “Letter to the CCP Central Committee and Comrade Mao Zedong” (Dec 1947)

Accordingly, PLA decision-makers are supposed to conduct broad consultations with members of both the Party committee *and* the unit as a whole, and to allow energetic debates to take place before a decision is made.²⁷⁵ The processes by which these consultations are conducted are discussed later in this chapter.

Decisions are made collectively.

Party leaders in PLA units are supposed to abide by the principle of “collective leadership” (*jiti lingdao*; 集体领导). This principle holds that no single individual has the

²⁷³ *Selected Works of Zhu De (Zhu De xuanji; 朱德选集)* (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1983), pp. 225-26.

²⁷⁴ Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 193.

²⁷⁵ Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System*, p. 71.

power to dictate policy. Rather, all major decisions should be based on agreement within multi-member decision-making bodies.²⁷⁶

PLA regulations state that in a military unit's Party committee, the secretary, deputy secretary, standing committee members, and members of the full committee are equal in status—none has a disproportionate vote in committee decisions.²⁷⁷

At the highest level of the Chinese government and military, “collective leadership” coalesces around a central figure, designated the “core” in Chinese terminology. This figure – Hu Jintao in the current era – is considered to be “first among equals”: he wields great influence over the PLA by merit of his military and Party positions and personal connections. Still, not even he can unilaterally make or implement decisions.²⁷⁸

Decisions should be made by consensus.

According to CCP and PLA norms, decisions should be reached by consensus, not by a majority imposing its will on a minority.²⁷⁹ The norms of collective decision-making also emphasize that a large number of individuals should be involved in decision-making, to ensure that decisions represent as wide a variety of opinions and concerns as possible. Accordingly, CCP and PLA decision-making bodies spend a great deal of time and effort discussing policy options, deciding on courses of action, and ensuring that there is broad consensus.

²⁷⁶ The term “collective responsibility” as used here should not be confused with the “collective responsibility” system introduced in the 1980s as part of China’s economic reforms.

²⁷⁷ Cheng Baoshan, ed., *The Fundamental Laws and Regulations of Military Political Work in the New Century and New Era—Studying the Newly Revised and Promulgated “Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on Political Work”* (xin shiji xin jieduan jundui zhengzhi gongzuo de genben fagui—xuexi xin xiuding banbu de “zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo tiaoli”; 新世纪新阶段军队政治工作的根本法规—学习新修订颁布的《中国人民解放军政治工作条例》) (Beijing: Military Science Press 2004), pp. 194-201.

²⁷⁸ Bo Zhiyue, *China’s Elite Politics: Political Transition and Power Balancing* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2007), pp. 48-49. This does not mean that in practice, all Party committee members’ opinions are treated equally in all circumstances. As detailed in Chapter 3, a number of factors can increase the weight of individuals’ opinions, including their position in the PLA, their position in the Party, and the extent of their informal networks.

²⁷⁹ PLA writings do not entirely reject the possibility of decision by majority, but indicate a strong preference for consensus. See, e.g., Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System*, p. 70.

PLA decision-making practices

Consensus-based decision-making within PLA units tends to follow certain steps.

1. Discussion and debate

PLA publications suggest that vigorous debate and discussion is indispensable to developing new policies, especially at higher levels. In practice, this ideal has received varying degrees of adherence over the years. Chairman Mao, for instance, often consulted with a group of high-level civilian and military leaders about policy decisions; in most cases, however, the “consensus” that resulted from these meetings reflected Mao’s personal preferences.²⁸¹ At times, most infamously in the “Hundred Flowers” movement (*baihua yundong*; 百花运动) of 1956 and 1957, Mao encouraged a broad public debate on policy issues, only to use this debate to identify and punish critics.²⁸²

INSUFFICIENT DISCUSSION?

Recent PLA newspaper articles suggest a concern that there may be too *little* debate in PLA Party committees. These articles suggest that PLA leaders are particularly troubled that NCOs, who have recently been allowed to sit on company-level Party committees, do not participate enough in committee discussions. One article points out, for instance, that although PLA Navy companies have set aside company-level Party branch posts for NCOs, these NCOs “are reticent to speak up during Committee meetings and worry that their suggestions will not be viewed favorably.” Thus, they are “usually very quiet during times of discussion and decision making.”²⁸⁰

In recent years, the Party has again encouraged open discussions on policy issues within decision-making bodies, especially with regard to doctrinal issues.

²⁸⁰ *Renmin Haijun*, 29 May 2003 and 24 Apr 2004.

²⁸¹ Michael Swaine, “Chinese Crisis Management: Framework for Analysis, Tentative Observations, and Questions for the Future,” in Andrew Scobell and Larry M. Wortzel, eds., *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), p. 25.

²⁸² See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search For Modern China, 2nd Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), pp. 539–43.

DEBATING DOCTRINE

The PLA encourages open discussion on issues relating to military doctrine within its professional newspapers and journals. Much can be gleaned about recent doctrinal debates from these publications. For readers of PLA periodicals, a series of articles expressing a variety of views on a similar topic usually indicates several things:

- The PLA is considering a doctrinal adjustment in this area.
- PLA institutions are probably engaged in formal research efforts on this topic.
- The course of adjustment has not yet been decided. These articles indicate the range of views being explored.²⁸³

However, once a doctrinal concept has been settled upon and codified by the CMC, public debate appears to cease completely. Just as they are used to announce the beginning of a doctrinal debate, PLA newspapers and journals also signal that debate has ended, consensus has been reached, and a decision has been made. This type of message is normally sent by way of articles announcing the issuance of new regulations.²⁸⁴ From that point forward, the expression of contending views stops and all voices rally around the new guidance.²⁸⁵

2. Bargaining

After allowing sufficient time for debate, Party committees build consensus through a process of bargaining. CCP and PLA leaders at all levels must wait to act until the complex trade-offs involved in this process have been concluded and a consensus has emerged.²⁸⁶

One recent analysis of CCP decision-making notes that this process occurs largely behind the scenes; the particulars of discussions and the various bargaining positions are not discussed outside the Party committee “until decisions have been reached and the unified line is ready for public viewing.”²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Maryanne Kivlehan, *Doctrinal Change in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Institutions, Processes, and Influences*, CNA Research Memorandum D0008391.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2003), p. 65.

²⁸⁴ Kivlehan, *Doctrinal Change in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, p. 103.

²⁸⁵ Kivlehan, *Doctrinal Change in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, p. 81.

²⁸⁶ David M. Lampton, “A Plum for a Peach: Bargaining, Interest, and Bureaucratic Politics in China,” in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 35.

²⁸⁷ Susan Puska, “SARS 2002-2003: A Case Study in Crisis Management,” in Scobell and Wortzel, *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress*, p. 94.

3. *Deferring decisions to higher levels*

If a Party committee cannot reach consensus or committee members have significant differences of opinion on a key policy issue, the issue may be “kicked up” to a higher-level Party committee – which may choose to defer to an even higher level.²⁸⁸ In certain cases, one analyst reports, the Central Military Commission (CMC) has been called upon as a “court of last resort” to resolve lower-level disputes, such as those on key decisions involving weapons acquisition.²⁸⁹ This “kicking up” appears to be fairly common within CCP decision-making as a whole.²⁹⁰

4. *Ending the debate*

According to the principle of “democratic centralism,” once decisions are made, everyone must conscientiously implement them; debate is no longer welcomed.

All members of a unit may provide input to the Party committee through “democratic” mechanisms.

The PLA has established a range of institutions and practices aimed at gathering ideas and opinions during the decision-making process. These institutions and practices carry out the principles of the “mass line,” discussed in Chapter 1, and include the following:

Servicemen’s committees (*junren weiyuanhui*; 军人委员会). All company-level units and organizations within the PLA are required to establish servicemen’s committees. These sitting committees are elected on an annual basis by a caucus of the entire unit, also known as the servicemen’s assembly (*junren dahui*; 军人大会). They provide opinions and suggestions to the Party committee, and carry out some political work tasks at the committee’s request. They act as a key liaison between the Party and enlisted personnel, very few of whom are Party members.²⁹¹

Servicemen’s congresses (*junren daibiao huiyi*; 军人代表会议) are the main “democratic” institutions at the brigade and regiment levels. They are made up of representatives selected by company-level servicemen’s assemblies, but are not sitting organizations like servicemen’s committees; they are convened once a year by the Party committee.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Gunness, Rosenfield, and Bellacqua, *Not Just Party Propaganda*, p. 87.

²⁸⁹ Jonathan D. Pollack, “Structure and Process in the Chinese Military System,” in Lieberthal and Lampton, *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, p. 167.

²⁹⁰ Lampton, “A Plum for a Peach,” p. 39.

²⁹¹ “Notification Regarding Distribution of ‘Regulations on Political Work in the People’s Liberation Army’ by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” *Jundui Zhengzhi Gongzuo*, 5 Dec 2003, Article 100, OSC CPP20070122325003.

²⁹² “Notification Regarding Distribution of ‘Regulations on Political Work in the People’s Liberation Army’ by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” Articles 95 and 97.

Democratic evaluation. The PLA employs a system of “democratic evaluation” by which Party committees solicit the opinions and criticisms of unit members before deciding who among enlisted personnel will be promoted, selected to take military academy entrance exams, or awarded for exemplary service. New regulations publicized in August 2008 state that servicemen’s committees will take a leading role in conducting democratic evaluation.²⁹³

According to PLA newspapers, certain units have even introduced “open elections” to choose squad leaders.²⁹⁴ These activities extend Mao’s original conception of “political democracy,” which allowed for enlisted personnel to “nominate those whom they trust from their own ranks for lower-level cadre posts” in certain circumstances.²⁹⁵

Implications of PLA decision-making principles and practices

No individual is clearly accountable for any decision.

One practical consequence of the system of collective decision-making is that few PLA individuals hold personal accountability for a given decision. This can make things difficult for foreign visitors: Americans interacting with the PLA often seek, understandably, to identify key decision-makers who are potentially sympathetic to the U.S. position. As one American defense official who has had extensive contact with the PLA explained, “The U.S. approach is often to find the ‘right’ person to talk to, or to separate the white hats from the black hats.” However, the official noted, when talking with the PLA, “you are negotiating with an institution, not an individual.”²⁹⁶ Any individual negotiator must receive the agreement of many other people before a decision can go forward.

There are too many meetings.

Fulfilling the PLA’s ideal of collective, consensus-based decision-making requires an extraordinary number of meetings.²⁹⁷ PLA publications indicate that when an ongoing problem or disagreement on nearly any topic emerges at the unit level, the most common solution is to introduce regular “discussion meetings” (*yantao hui*; 研讨会) on the issue.²⁹⁸

²⁹³ “Regulations on the Work of Servicemen’s Committees,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 19 Aug 2008, p. 3.

²⁹⁴ *Huojian Bingbao*, 4 Apr 2006.

²⁹⁵ Mao Zedong, “The Democratic Movement in the Army” (1948), http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_27.htm

²⁹⁶ Interview #6.

²⁹⁷ See Lieberthal, *Governing China*, p. 194.

²⁹⁸ Various articles from *Huojian Bing Bao*, *Kongjun Bao*, and *Renmin Haijun*, 2003-2006.

PLA newspapers from the past several years indicate that although holding meetings is still considered an appropriate way to gather “democratic” input, PLA leaders are seeking to moderate what they view as an excessive proliferation of meetings. The articles suggest that the meetings often take attention away from important operational tasks.

THE TROUBLE WITH MEETINGS

Recent PLA media articles have cited the burden of frequent meetings. For example:

On 15 January 2004, *Renmin Haijun* reported that the PLA Navy Political Department had set forward guidance for naval headquarters on the “three do nots (*san bu*; 三不),” the first of which was “do not hold useless meetings.” The article noted that because of the overabundance of meetings, “grassroots level work units were overwhelmed.”

On 25 May 2004, a *Kongjun Bao* article quoted an Air Force company commanding officer who reported having to attend five to six meetings *per day*: “There are too many meetings, so many in fact that he cannot get his work done.”

In January 2006, *Renmin Haijun* reported that a field navigation station had not had running water for over a month. Faulty pipes had not been fixed because “the period at the end of a year and beginning of the new one is filled with meetings...command staff is often taken away from taking care of important problems like this one.”

The bureaucratic process is slow.

The PLA’s emphasis on consensus-building can make decision-making an extremely slow process, and can limit flexibility during times of crisis. Western analysts of the CCP and the PLA have made the following observations:

The need to solicit and balance a wide range of views, and then build consensus among a number of different actors, can slow down the process of policy formulation.²⁹⁹ Though this process gives decision-makers access to useful information, opinions, and ideas, it also requires a significant amount of time to process and discuss all this information. Since CCP decision-making is largely closed, this delay can convey to outsiders the impression that decision-makers are afflicted by “policy paralysis.”³⁰⁰

Too many people have a veto in the bargaining process, which can be a recipe for infighting and inertia.³⁰¹ If a significant minority holds out for greater concessions, it can hamstring the process.³⁰²

²⁹⁹ See David Lampton, “China’s Foreign and National Security Policy-Making Process: Is It Changing, and Does It Matter?” in David Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 13.

³⁰⁰ Frank Miller and Andrew Scobell, “‘Decisionmaking under Stress’ or ‘Crisis Management’?: In Lieu of a Conclusion” in Scobell and Wortzel, *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress*, p. 235.

This mode of decision-making does not work well in a crisis, when there is a great demand for rapid action, information is scarce, and the stakes are high. Engaging in time-consuming processes of consensus-building can cause leaders to miss crucial opportunities to act during a crisis, or even to exacerbate the situation.³⁰³ Foreign observers surmise that this was the case in several recent crises, including the Tiananmen Square demonstrations, the Falun Gong crackdown, and the SARS crisis.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ See, e.g., Bates Gill, “Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The Dynamics of Chinese Nonproliferation and Arms Control Policy-Making in an Era of Reform” in Lampton, *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy*, p. 258.

³⁰² Lampton, “A Plum for a Peach,” p. 35; Susan L. Shirk, “The Chinese Political System and the Political Strategy of Economic Reform” in Lieberthal and Lampton, *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China*, p. 73.

³⁰³ Nan Li, “Organizational Changes of the PLA, 1985-1997,” *China Quarterly* 158 (Jun 1999), p. 323; Puska, “SARS 2002-2003,” p. 95.

³⁰⁴ See Scobell and Wortzel, *Chinese National Security Decisionmaking Under Stress*.

Chapter 5: Challenges to PLA Culture

Recent PLA writings depict a military whose traditional culture is under bombardment by internal and external forces. PLA leaders are concerned that changes in society and in the PLA itself are making it harder to sustain a critical balance between its twin goals, discussed in Chapter 2, of “winning wars” and “not degenerating.” They worry that if the PLA does not rise to meet the challenges currently facing it, it will be unable to accomplish either goal.

Changing world, changing China

PLA publications discuss several trends that are altering the environment in which the PLA recruits, trains, and operates.

The changing nature of warfare

PLA leaders have long been aware that the PLA lags behind the militaries of other powerful countries in terms of advanced weaponry, technology, and doctrine. PLA propaganda has consistently promoted the belief that the PLA’s superior human qualities allow it to overcome these shortcomings. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Chinese armies historically drew upon the country’s large peasant class for the majority of their personnel. Beyond the simple availability of large numbers of able young peasant men, Chinese peasants were believed to be “possessed of many military virtues, such as simplicity, sincerity, bravery, obedience, tenacity, and the ability to stoically endure great hardship.”³⁰⁶

“Our army’s modernization in recent years has resulted in significant developments. Nonetheless, China still lags behind neighboring countries, not to mention its gap with developed countries. Our army’s modernization level is no match for winning informatized wars. Its military capacity does not fit in well with the army’s historical mission in the new stage of the new century.”³⁰⁵

— Two PLA major generals, in an interview with a Chinese journal

However, in recent decades – and especially since observing the U.S. forces’ use of high-tech weapons and joint operations in the First Persian Gulf War – many PLA strategists have become convinced that the nature of modern warfare has changed so fundamentally that Chinese soldiers’ excellent human qualities alone can no longer guarantee victory.

PLA texts warn that unless the PLA upgrades its capabilities to become competitive with the world’s most advanced militaries, China will not play its rightful role in the world and will again be vulnerable to the whims of foreign powers.

³⁰⁵ Liu Demou, Yun Shan, and Wu Liang, “The New Mission of the People’s Army” (interview with Major Generals Yao Youzhi and Fu Liqun at the Academy of Military Science), *Liaowang*, 8 Jan 2007, pp. 26-28, OSC CPP20070111710012.

³⁰⁶ Chang Jui-te, “The National Army from Whampoa to 1949,” in David A. Graff and Robin Higham, *A Military History of China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002), p. 203.

Rapid growth of the market economy

Since the beginning of China's "reform and opening" policy in 1978, China's gross domestic product (GDP) has grown at an average annual rate of nearly 10 percent.³⁰⁷ According to the Chinese government, per capita disposable income in 2007 was more than 30 times what it was in 1978 for urban Chinese and more than 25 times what it was for rural Chinese.³⁰⁸

This has had an enormous impact on Chinese society. Since the late 1980s, China has created 120 million new jobs and lifted 400 million people out of poverty, a feat unprecedented in human history.³⁰⁹ For the PLA, this has meant that younger generations of officers and enlisted soldiers have been brought up with a much higher standard of living, and vastly different expectations from life, than their predecessors. It also means that people in many sectors of Chinese society who once saw military service as an economic lifeline now have a vastly expanded range of career opportunities.

Increasing access to foreign culture and information

China's post-Mao leaders have acknowledged that economic opening could lead to infiltration by foreign cultures and ideas. Deng Xiaoping famously noted that "when you open the window, flies and mosquitoes come in."³¹⁰ Thirty years later, China has many windows open. Young Chinese have become avid consumers of foreign information, cultural products, clothing, food, and designer goods.

The largest window is the internet, which now has over 220 million Chinese users – more than in any other country.³¹¹ Increasingly, Chinese internet users are becoming active creators and distributors of information rather than simply consumers of government propaganda. In 2007, the *People's Daily* reported that China had 20.8 million bloggers.³¹²

This access means that many more Chinese are conversant with viewpoints beyond the relatively narrow ones provided by the CCP. Many PLA publications report that young officers and enlisted soldiers exhibit greater independence of thought than older

³⁰⁷ Figures reported by the National Bureau of Statistics of China, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2007/indexeh.htm>.

³⁰⁸ "GDP Grows At an Annual Average of 9.67% from 1978 to 2006," *Xinhua*, 7 May 2007.

³⁰⁹ Jahangir Aziz and Steven Dunaway, "China's Rebalancing Act," *Finance and Development: A Quarterly Magazine of the IMF*, 44:3 (Sept 2007), <http://www.imf.org/EXTERNAL/PUBS/FT/FANDD/2007/09/aziz.htm>.

³¹⁰ Phillip C. Saunders, "Supping with a Long Spoon: Dependence and Interdependence in Sino-American Relations," *The China Journal* 43 (Jan 2000), p. 55.

³¹¹ "China's Internet Users Hit 221m, Rank World's First," *Xinhua*, 24 Apr 2008.

³¹² "China Has 20.8 Million Bloggers," *Renmin Ribao*, 11 Jan 2007.

servicemen, and worldviews that incorporate not just traditional Chinese or Communist Party values but also foreign ones.

Rippling effects of the “one child policy”

To curb population growth, China introduced a policy in 1979 requiring most Chinese women to have no more than one child.³¹³ The Chinese government claims that this policy has prevented 400 million births.³¹⁴

PLA publications express concerns about the social and psychological effects of this policy on the generation of Chinese born since the one child policy began, often referred to as the “little emperors” (*xiao huangdi*; 小皇帝). Members of this generation, especially males, are characterized as having received the exclusive attention and doting protection of their parents and grandparents. They are often described as pampered, demanding, and intolerant of setbacks.

A long era of relative peace and stability

China has not engaged in a full-scale war since its brief border conflict with Vietnam in 1979. This has been the longest period of peace and stability that China has experienced in more than 150 years.

While this peaceful era has contributed immensely to China’s economic and social development, it presents unique challenges to the PLA. Most importantly, PLA leaders fear that most of the younger PLA members do not think they face any imminent threat of war; this has made it difficult to impress upon them a sense of the urgency about their tasks.

Challenges and responses

The changes outlined in the previous section have serious implications for the PLA’s ability to meet warfighting needs and organizational objectives. This section highlights the challenges and problems PLA leaders have identified, and the measures they have taken to address these challenges.

Challenge: The PLA does not have the force it wants.

Today’s PLA faces immense difficulties in attracting the people it needs in order to build the high-quality fighting force it wants. PLA leaders have expressed considerable concern that today’s force is not ready to meet the demands of 21st century warfare. At the beginning of the reform period the PLA was large and unwieldy, with a huge, bloated

³¹³ Wang Feng, “Can China Afford to Continue its One Child Policy?” *Asia Pacific Issues*, Analysis From the East-West Center, No. 77 (Mar 2005), p. 3.

³¹⁴ “Family Planning Policy Prevents 400 Million Births,” *Xinhua*, 9 Nov 2006.

officer corps that had limited technological skills and a narrow knowledge base, and an enlisted force composed largely of unskilled, poorly educated rural conscripts.³¹⁵

LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MEN

Due to the changing demands of 21st-century warfare, the PLA now seeks:

- Conscripts from urban, educated backgrounds
- Officers who are better educated and more technically capable
- Personnel who are capable of incorporating new technologies
- Personnel who are innovative and willing to take risks.

However, despite reforms to the personnel system, PLA leaders remain concerned that the PLA has too many:

- Conscripts who are rural, uneducated, and poor
- Officers who stay too long in their positions and are too slow to adapt to new techniques and technologies
- Personnel (particularly officers) who are conservative and risk averse.³¹⁶

The PLA now wants to fill its ranks with technically proficient personnel who have sophisticated critical thinking skills and broad educational backgrounds. However, it faces two difficulties in meeting this goal:

The rural, uneducated youths from whom the PLA traditionally drew its personnel still make up the bulk of the PLA's enlisted force. Traditionally peasants were thought to be honest and hardworking, but they do not have the broad education or the technological know-how to meet the PLA's current needs.

The urban, educated youth whom the PLA now seeks to recruit increasingly do not want to join the PLA. In the past, the career opportunities and compensation level provided by the PLA were comparable to – or better than – those of the agricultural and state sectors that employed the vast majority of young Chinese. However, today's rapidly growing private sector generally offers better pay and more flexibility to the urban, well-off, educated youths whom the PLA most needs.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ See, e.g., Shang Chunming, "A Review of New-Era Military Academy Training and a Preview of Coming Reform and Development," *Junshi Kexue*, 1999-4; Cheng Sijin, "The Challenge of Conscription in an Era of Social Change," in David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunness, eds., *Civil-Military Relations in Today's China: Swimming in a New Sea* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), pp. 237-39.

³¹⁶ *Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008), p. 46; Kenneth Allen and James Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Enlisted Forces*, CNA Research Memorandum D0014253.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), pp. 6-7.

³¹⁷ See, e.g., *Renmin Haijun*, 21 Jun 2005, p. 1, which notes that "the disparity between military and civilian incomes is a constant challenge for political education," and that "the challenges of recruiting and retaining these young talented individuals" are difficult.

Furthermore, China's rising living standards have made the adjustment to military life and its hardships much more dramatic than it was in the past. It is increasingly difficult to convince capable young people to choose a life that is often stark, lonely, boring, and physically demanding. PLA newspapers are filled with stories of NCOs who have been separated from spouses and children for years, and of young enlisted personnel who worry that they will not be able to find spouses while stationed at a remote military base.³¹⁸ While historically PLA troops were expected to sacrifice these personal considerations out of loyalty to the Party and the nation, today's PLA worries that fewer and fewer young Chinese are willing to make such sacrifices. Indeed, the urban, educated youth whom the PLA most wants are those least likely to accept these hardships.

Response #1: Restructuring the enlisted force and officer corps to improve quality

Since the 1990s, the PLA has taken significant steps to transform itself “from a military focused on quantity to one focused on quality.”³¹⁹ The most dramatic result of this re-orientation is the PLA's downsizing of its forces by almost half, from 4.5 million in 1981 to 2.3 million in 2005.³²⁰ The most recent round of downsizing, which took place from 2003 to 2005, demobilized 200,000 PLA personnel, 85 percent of whom were officers.³²¹

The PLA is also endeavoring to broaden the knowledge and capabilities base of its officers by drawing many more candidates directly from civilian colleges and universities, through on-campus recruitment offices and National Defense Scholarships (similar to the U.S. ROTC program). New PLA officers are now required to have a four-year bachelor's degree or three-year “senior technical” degree. The vast majority of PLA officers still come from military academies, of which there were 63 in 2005, but in the past decade PLA leaders have pushed to change this.³²²

³¹⁸ See, e.g., *Renmin Haijun*, 4 Apr 2004, p. 3; *Kongjun Bao*, 15 Apr 2006, p. 1; *Kongjun Bao*, 19 Aug 2004, p. 3.

³¹⁹ The wording comes from former PRC President Jiang Zemin's 1995 “Two Transformations” policy, which aimed improving the PLA's capabilities; see Appendix 1 for more details. See also David M. Finkelstein, “Thinking about the PLA's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs,” in James Mulvenon and David Finkelstein, eds., *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs* (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2002), p. 3.

³²⁰ Harlan Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Military, 1945-1981* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982), p. 146; Guo Nei, “PLA Downsizes Its Forces by 200,000,” *China Daily*, 10 Jan 2006.

³²¹ Guo Nei, “PLA Downsizes Its Forces by 200,000.”

³²² Prior to 1982, many PLA officers had no higher education at all, due partly to the fact that all China's educational institutions – military and civilian – had been shut down for nearly a decade during the Cultural Revolution. For the number of PLA academies, see Chen Liangyu, Sun Wei, and Lu Li, *Education and Management of Cadets at Military Schools (junxiao xueyuan jiaoyu yu guanli; 军校学员教育与管理)* (Beijing: National Defense University Press, Dec 2003), p. 20. For a detailed study of China's professional military education (PME) system, see James Bellacqua, Malia K. DuMont, Kristen Gunness, David M. Finkelstein, and Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, *Professional Military Education in the Chinese People's Liberation Army: An Institutional Overview, Volume 1*, CNA Research Memorandum D0012462.A1/Final

Finally, the PLA established a formal NCO corps in 1998 to introduce more technically and professionally competent enlisted personnel.³²³ PLA enlisted personnel may apply to become NCOs after completing their conscription period; a few NCOs are also recruited directly from the civilian sphere, if they have useful professional or technical skills.³²⁴

NCOs hold many key technical billets in the PLA, and their responsibilities are increasing; however, their authority is still quite limited compared to that of their counterparts in the U.S. military, and many tasks that Americans would expect to be performed by NCOs are done in the PLA by junior officers.³²⁵

Response #2: Improved living conditions on military bases

The PLA has also attempted to make daily life in the military more appealing. It has publicized a number of improvements at many PLA bases, including:

- Upgraded health facilities
- Higher-quality food
- Computing facilities
- On-base internet access
- Courses providing specialized skills
- Fitness equipment and athletic fields
- Entertainment and cultural centers
- Legal services stations.³²⁶

Notable improvements are also underway in soldiers' family lives. In recent years PLA leaders have recognized that long separations from family and financial worries "can cause many military households to go through difficulties and contradictions" and that these difficulties can contribute to poor performance by distracted PLA personnel.³²⁷ The PLA has employed several methods to lessen family hardships, including:

(Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2005). See also "PLA Rank Regulations" (*zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junguan jun xian tiaoli*; 中国人民解放军军官军衔条例), http://www.gov.cn/banshi/gm/content_63642.htm.

³²³ "Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China," *Xinhua*, 30 Dec 1998.

³²⁴ *Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008*, p. 46; Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 52.

³²⁵ Jiang Heping and Su Ruozhou, "Training and Recruitment for Officer Billets to be Converted to NCO Duties Next Year," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 23 Dec 2004, p. 1; interviews # 1, 9, 10, 12, 15.

³²⁶ Various articles from *Huojianbing Bao*, 2006.

³²⁷ *Kongjun Bao*, 22 Jun 2004, p. 2.

- Building or improving temporary housing units for NCOs' visiting family members
- Helping to find jobs or provide job training for military spouses and find schools for servicemen's children
- Providing assistance to alleviate the difficulties of families of servicemen on long deployments, sometimes through "Help Those in Hardship Detachments" (*bangkun fendui*; 帮困分队) or "family service providers" (*jiating fuwu xiaojie*; 家庭服务小姐).³²⁸

Challenge: Some servicemembers are demanding greater input in unit decision-making, conflicting with traditional PLA emphasis on loyalty and obedience.

Unlike 1960s' soldier-hero Lei Feng, who famously aspired only to be a "small cog in the machine" of Communism, many younger servicemen want to be "masters of their destinies."³²⁹ There is a widespread sense that younger Chinese are more open to participatory ways of thinking than their elders, and that if they are to be persuaded to join the military they may demand greater input in unit decision-making. As early as 1983, Yu Qiuli, the head of the PLA's General Political Department, observed, "Today's soldiers are very young, their self-confidence is very strong, and they demand equal treatment."³³⁰ A recent manual for company leaders concurs that these personnel "have an intense consciousness for democracy and participation; they all want to be able to stand out conspicuously in their work, to find a suitable place to use their skills, and to achieve something."³³¹

PLA writings indicate that this sentiment extends to servicemen's views on authority: younger personnel are less likely to accept it unquestioningly. For instance, from 2000 to 2002 *Kongjun Bao* published a series of articles tracking the progress of a "typical" PLA Air Force conscript, meant to represent a new generation of PLA personnel. One article portrayed this conscript as having a different attitude toward leadership than earlier generations:

When he talked about his squad leader, he often used the words "appreciate" and "admire" but never "worship"...While standing in formation to receive training he would think of how he would organize exercises if he were the squad

³²⁸ Various articles from *Huojianbing Bao*, *Renmin Haijun*, and *Kongjun Bao*, 2002–2006.

³²⁹ See, e.g., Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops (paizhang daibing jifa*; 排长带兵技法) (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), pp. 196, 205, 244.

³³⁰ Chen Zhou, *Theory and Practice of the PLA Democratic System (zhongguo jiefangjun minzhu zhidu de lilun yu shijian*; 中国解放军民主制度的理论与实践) (Beijing: Military Science Press, 1993), p. 64.

³³¹ Zhou Guangde and Zhu Jinhai, *Skills for Company Leaders Commanding Troops (lianhang daibing jineng*; 连长带兵技能) (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2005), p. 96.

leader...When work groups from superior levels came to inspect the unit, he faced them and bravely put forward criticisms like “I feel that this kind of inspection is basically unnecessary.”³³²

This symbolic figure thus showed himself to be an independent thinker, not afraid to question his superiors and suggest alternative methods when he believed them to be taking the wrong approach. Given the PLA’s desire for its servicemembers to improve their critical thinking skills, discussed in Chapter 2, this is a potentially welcome development. The articles indeed have a tone of admiration for these conscripts, but they also point to potential difficulties should large numbers of them begin to voice their opinions about training regimens and other matters.

Response: Increased (but controlled) “democracy”

To respond to these issues, the PLA is seeking to reinvigorate the “democratic” institutions discussed in Chapter 3. Recent developments include:

- New regulations, passed in April 2008, to increase the amount of input given to the unit by **servicemen’s committees**. These company-level organizations are directly elected by the entire unit to represent servicemen’s interests, protect their rights, supervise company financial and administrative management, and provide input into company decision-making.³³³
- Increased use of “**democratic evaluation**,” the practice by which enlisted personnel provide input on the promotions of their peers or even their superiors.³³⁴
- “**Democratic life meetings**,” convened by Party committees or branches at all levels at least twice a year, at which all of the unit’s Party members are encouraged to “speak their minds, criticize, and self-criticize.”³³⁵ This is not a new requirement, but recent PLA media indicate that in the last several years the PLA has sought to reinvigorate these meetings and transform them into more

³³² Chen Zhiming and Liu Pengyue, “Two Years Spent with One Ordinary Soldier,” *Kongjun Bao*, 28 Dec 2002, p. 2.

³³³ Ling Huanxin, “A New Starting Point for the Military’s Grassroots Democratic Construction,” *PLA Daily*, 24 Jun 2008; Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, *China’s Defense in 2008* (Beijing, Jan 2009), III: “Reform and Development of the PLA.”

³³⁴ “Regulations on the Work of Servicemen’s Committees,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 19 Aug 2008, p. 3; *Huojian bingbao*, 4 Apr 2006.

³³⁵ Cheng Baoshan, ed., *The Fundamental Laws and Regulations of Military Political Work in the New Century and New Era – Studying the Newly Revised and Promulgated ‘Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on Political Work (xin shiji xin jieduan jundui zhengzhi gongzuo de genben fagui – xuexi xin xiuding banbu de ‘zhongguo renmin jiefangjun zhengzhi gongzuo tiaoli; 新世纪新阶段军队政治工作的根本法规—学习新修订颁布的“中国人民解放军政治工作条例”)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2004), Article 45.

useful forums for exchanging opinions and pinpointing problems within the unit.³³⁶

- **Informal debates and discussions**, usually convened by a unit’s Party committee, for the purpose of settling disputes by “airing out the opinion of the two sides”³³⁷ or of exploring all sides of an operational or ideological issue.³³⁸

Challenge: Younger personnel are seen as weak, immature, and morally deficient.

PLA publications indicate serious concern among the PLA leadership about the rise of the “little emperors” (*xiao huangdi*; 小皇帝), those born in the years since the one child policy was implemented. Within the PLA, this generation is viewed as spoiled and soft. Two factors contribute to this perception:

- As only children, or “single-child soldiers” (*dusheng zibing*; 独生子兵), they have received the total attention – and collective aspirations – of their parents, and often of their grandparents as well.
- Having grown up entirely in the reform period, they have little experience with the political chaos and economic hardship that characterized and “toughened” the generation of citizens who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s and are now in positions of senior PLA leadership.

THE PLA’S DEPICTION OF ONLY CHILDREN

“In 2006, 65% of the [Second Artillery] conscripts were only children and 60% were from cities and towns. During new conscript training, these conscripts frequently stayed in bed, goofed around, or cried. During meals, they wasted food that they did not find appetizing. The new conscript company held arduous education sessions to try and correct their behavior, but met with little success.”³³⁹

— *Huojianbing Bao*, 2006

On one hand, the little emperors are believed to exhibit “talent” and “innovation.”

PLA publications suggest that these young people, having grown up with greater personal freedoms and opportunities than their parents, add “new vigor and vitality to the undertaking of socialism with Chinese characteristics.”³⁴⁰ A 2007 *Jiefangjun Bao* survey of only-child soldiers concluded that most of them “possess a special literary aptitude, [and] stress the ... use of personal competences; their thinking is open and lively, their

³³⁶ Zou Weirong, Yang Jiqing, and Guo Jianyao, “PRC Article Compares Quality of Two ‘Democratic Life’ Meetings Held by Military,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 22 Oct 2003, p. 6, OSCCPP20031022000066.

³³⁷ *Huojianbing Bao*, 27 May 2006, p. 2

³³⁸ See, e.g., *Huojianbing Bao*, 20 Jun 2006, p. 2; *Kongjun Bao*, 16 Dec 2004, p. 2.

³³⁹ *Huojianbing Bao*, 21 Feb 2006.

³⁴⁰ Jing Zhiyuan and Peng Xiaofeng, “To Unremittingly Cultivate a New Generation with the Innovative Theory of the Party—Reflections on Learning From and Publicizing the Outstanding University Student Soldier Gao Ming,” *Beijing Qiushi*, 16 Oct 2007.

democratic and competitive consciousness is relatively strong, they are good at independent thought, and they are relatively self-sufficient.”³⁴¹

On the other hand, they are perceived as having weak moral and psychological fiber. The ways in which the PLA describes its new generation of enlisted soldiers could apply to young recruits in any military: they are viewed as immature, undisciplined, and overly concerned with their peers’ opinions.³⁴⁶ However, the PLA attributes these traits less to recruits’ youth than to their status as only children or as members of a post-reform generation.

PLA service newspapers run frequent stories about “single-child soldiers.” One cites unit-level surveys that indicate that these soldiers are “relatively selfish and are unaccustomed to obeying orders or caring for others” and are “accustomed to getting whatever they want.”³⁴⁷ Training errors and discipline problems are often blamed on soldiers’ only-child status.

A SAMPLING OF PERSPECTIVES ON “ONLY-CHILD SOLDIERS” IN PLA PUBLICATIONS

- They are “delicate and fragile,” and “cannot handle setbacks.”³⁴²
- They are “soft and materialistic (*gonglixing*; 功利性).”³⁴³
- They are “lacking in willpower.”
- They “easily get into clashes with their comrades-in-arms.”
- They have “unsociable and eccentric personalities.”
- They “lack a sense of collective identity and a sense of honor.”³⁴⁴
- Their “demands and expectations are excessively high, and when they cannot do as they wish, their feelings of disappointment are strong.”
- They “rely excessively on their affection for their families and hometowns.”
- Their “moods fluctuate greatly, and they easily get excited in reaction to events.”³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Zhou Weimin, “One Child Families’ Influence on the Thinking of Officers and Enlisted Personnel and Countermeasures,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 7 Nov 2007.

³⁴² Maureen Fan, “China Scouts Colleges to Fill Ranks of Modern Army,” *The Washington Post*, 17 Dec 2007, p. A01; Zhou Weimin, “One Child Families’ Influence on the Thinking of Officers and Enlisted Personnel.”

³⁴³ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, “Hu’s New Goal: Inspiring the PLA for Victory,” *China Brief* 7:5 (5 Apr 2007).

³⁴⁴ Zhou Weimin, “One Child Families’ Influence on the Thinking of Officers and Enlisted Personnel.”

³⁴⁵ Zhang Wei and Chen Jianzhou, “Harmony and the ‘Soft Power’ of Leaders” (*hexie, lingdao zhe de ‘ruan shili’*; 和谐, 领导者的“软实力”), *Jiefangjun Bao*, 14 Sept 2007, p. 6.

³⁴⁶ See, e.g., Sun Shiquan and Liu Zhihong, *Dispelling Doubt on Soldier’s Psychological Problems (junren xinli wenti shiyi*; 军人心理问题释疑) (Jinan: Yellow River Press, 2006), p. 161.

³⁴⁷ *Huojianbing Bao*, 23 Feb 2006, p. 3.

According to PLA publications, the major faults of only children include:

Fearfulness. A number of PLA newspaper articles recount training problems where young enlisted soldiers were terrified by live ammunition training, night-time flying, and other exercises.³⁴⁸ PLA publications contrast the fearfulness of this generation with the bravery of their predecessors.³⁴⁹

Poor self-control. PLA publications report that the little emperors lack the self-discipline to curb such behaviors as excessive internet use, drunkenness, fighting, gambling, and financial irresponsibility.³⁵¹ The latter behavior is of particular concern both because it undermines the PLA's public image as a frugal, self-sacrificing institution, and because it may drive young soldiers into debt from which they have a hard time recovering. Tendencies toward conspicuous consumption can also encourage a culture of gift-giving and bribery, which the PLA is eager to avoid.

Lack of discipline. The PLA attributes many disciplinary problems to the "psychological" weaknesses of young recruits and to the temptations of the outside world. Examples include soldiers going AWOL or taking excessive leave; urban soldiers or college graduates showing disdain for working in "grassroots units" in rural areas; and enlisted soldiers refusing to obey commanders whom they find "overly repetitive" or "untrustworthy."³⁵²

"What [today's enlisted personnel] are not eager to do themselves, they pay others to do; they spend a good deal of money when they go on holiday or leave, and are not willing to take public buses; when they wear civilian clothes they pay attention to famous brands, and the "class" of their cigarettes gets higher and higher;...The squads and platoons of some companies now frequently hold dinner parties....Some soldiers, when they have any sort of good news or happy occasion, everyone yells out 'treat us,' so they buy some dishes, go out to restaurants, and order some good food and wine to eat and drink together."³⁵⁰

— *Platoon Leaders' Handbook*

Aversion to hardship. Today's young recruits are believed to be either unprepared or unwilling to "suffer hardship" (*chiku*; 吃苦), either because as only children they

³⁴⁸ See, e.g., *Renmin Haijun*, 1 Apr 2004, p. 1, and 31 Aug 2004, p. 1.

³⁴⁹ *Kongjun Bao*, 4 Sept 2003, p. 4.

³⁵⁰ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 395.

³⁵¹ See, e.g., *Kongjun Bao*, 14 Sept 2004, p. 3.

³⁵² *Kongjun Bao*, 14 Oct 2004, p. 3; Sun Shiquan and Liu Zhihong, *Dispelling Doubt on Soldier's Psychological Problems*, p. 161.

have been spoiled by their parents, or because as urbanites they have simply never experienced true hardship.³⁵³

PLA leaders worry that as younger generations become accustomed to mental stimulation, information, and entertainment from the outside world, the relatively sparse barracks lifestyle will become ever more difficult for young troops to endure. PLA publications on managing enlisted personnel recount dozens of problems, including the troops' "growing sense of anxiety" about being cut off from the internet, their complaints about life on base being boring, resentment among remotely stationed troops that they did not get urban postings, and so on.³⁵⁴

In recent years, the PLA has attempted to address some of these complaints by providing soldiers with more amenities, including better recreational facilities and higher-quality food, as described earlier in this chapter. However, some PLA officials are concerned that soldiers' more comfortable surroundings may soften their resolve, such that "the affluent living conditions of the peace era may become the root of misfortune for the corrosion of fighting spirit."³⁵⁵

Weak devotion to the people. PLA publications suggest that the individualistic nature of a market economy undermines the Party's and the PLA's goal of "serving the people." A *Jiefangjun Bao* commentary on the 2001 "Servicemen's Moral Standards" complained that some personnel "consider it incompatible with the basic principle and inherent law of market economic operations to emphasize serving the people They regard serving the people as 'mere formality,' and regard satisfying personal needs as the most tangible benefit."³⁵⁷

"The negative influences of the market economy have increased the difficulty of ideological and political construction.... The corrosion of the unit by the diversification of social life and the ideologies of money worship, hedonism, and excessive individualism is becoming more and more widespread.... Officers' and enlisted men's ideals and convictions, ideologies, outlooks on life, and outlooks on morals are facing an unprecedented assault."³⁵⁶

— PLA General, writing about the current state of the PLA

Other reports indicate that former PLA servicemen often expect to receive some "preferential treatment" in looking for

³⁵³ *Renmin Haijun*, 23 Aug 2005, p. 1; *Huojianbing Bao*, 23 Feb 2006, p. 1.

³⁵⁴ Lu Jiamo and Heng Xiaochen, eds., *100 Cases in Psychological Counseling for Officers and Enlisted Soldiers (guanbing xinli shudao yibai li; 官兵心理疏导一百例)* (Beijing: PLA Press, 2003), pp. 29, 276.

³⁵⁵ Liu Shihao, *Techniques and Methods for Platoon Leaders Commanding Troops*, p. 395.

³⁵⁶ Qiu Nengyang, "Strengthening 'Five Types of Consciousness' to Ensure the Party's Absolute Leadership of the Military," in Cai Dongchen, ed., *Generals Discuss the Military (jiangjun lun bing; 将军论兵)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2006), p. 543.

³⁵⁷ Qiao Jinping and Zhou Shanying, "Ethics for Chinese Servicemen," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 22 Nov 2001.

future government work, gaining entrance to local schools, and reducing tuition costs, and that recruits may join the PLA based on these expectations rather than on a desire to “serve the people.” In interviews about their reasons for joining the PLA, the newspapers report, “very few of these recruits talk about supporting national development.”³⁵⁸

Response #1: Targeted “political work”

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the PLA conducts a number of activities, usually through its political work system, to inculcate and maintain correct political values and ethics among all personnel. Political officers provide PLA servicemen with periodic ideological education and training to guide them in “continuously raising and broadening their ideological and political consciousness.”³⁵⁹ Such activities as political classes, reading groups, and discussion meetings are aimed at solving the “practical ideological problems” that are deemed to be at the root of some of the problems discussed above.³⁶⁰

PLA newspapers give numerous examples of grassroots units holding such activities to address disciplinary problems arising from these ideological failures, ranging from excessive use of the internet, to inability to adjust to a rigorous training schedule, to personnel leaving the base to go into the local town.³⁶¹ Though PLA press reports indicate that requirements for soldiers to participate in political meetings and training activities have decreased in recent years, the ubiquity of the political work system within PLA units makes these a commonly employed channel through which the PLA seeks to address and reduce problems with its personnel’s outlook and behavior.³⁶²

Response #2: Psychological counseling

Recent PLA publications indicate that the Chinese military now believes that political work alone is insufficient to tackle these challenges. Some argue that the younger generation’s difficulties in meeting PLA expectations can be traced to “the influence of emotions and other psychological elements” rather than to poor political training.³⁶³ Indeed, one PLA scholar argues, “of the major incidents that have occurred in the armed

³⁵⁸ *Kongjun Bao*, 29 Jan 2004, p. 4.

³⁵⁹ Zhang Shusen and Cao Xueyi, eds., *Guidebook to Military Life (junli shenghuo zhinan; 军旅生活指南)*, 2nd Edition (Beijing: People’s Armed Police Publishing House, 2007), p. 8.

³⁶⁰ James Bellacqua and Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, *Examining the Functions and Missions of Political Work in the PLA*, CNA Information Memorandum D0014286.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), pp. 4-5.

³⁶¹ Various articles in *Renmin Haijun* and *Kongjun Bao*, 2002–2006; articles in *Huojianbing Bao*, 2006.

³⁶² Bellacqua and Kivlehan-Wise, *Examining the Functions and Missions of Political Work in the PLA*, p. 5.

³⁶³ Chen Anren, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent’s Moral Character (junshi rencai pinde peiyu lun; 军事人才品德培育论)* (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2001), p. 71. One PLA senior officer suggested in an interview that this focus on psychology has developed since the early 2000s.

forces in recent years, relatively few were triggered by political viewpoints, while the vast majority were caused by bad moral character and by psychological shortcomings.”³⁶⁴

Consequently, in the past several years the PLA has devoted more and more attention to providing psychological resources at the unit level. These include:

- **Psychological counseling offices** (*xinli zixun bangongshi*; 心理咨询办公室) or “psychology counseling stations” (*xinli zixun zhan*; 心理咨询站) staffed by trained personnel
- **Regular visits to units by psychologists** to give lectures and meet with troubled soldiers
- **Education courses** in psychology for unit personnel
- Psychological counseling **hotlines and websites**
- **“Psychological training”** (*xinli xunlian*; 心理训练) activities aimed at preparing soldiers to handle the intense pressures of actual combat
- Opening **psychological health files** for new conscripts (*xinbing xinli jiankang dangan*; 新兵心理健康档案)
- Incorporating **psychological evaluations** into the enlisted recruitment and officer selection process.³⁶⁵

Despite the increased emphasis on psychological counseling, the number of qualified psychological workers remains small. For instance, as of 2005 the PLA Navy reported that it had fewer than 100 psychologists, most of whom were not nationally certified.³⁶⁶

Response #3: “Heart-to-heart talks”

As discussed in Chapter 2, the relationship between officers and enlisted personnel is seen as the basis of cohesion in the PLA. As a result, many PLA publications recognize that the ways in which officers and NCOs deal with troops under their command is essential to resolving problems. One tool employed by these officers is the “heart-to-heart talk” (*tanxin*; 谈心).

“Heart-to-heart talks” are simply one-on-one sessions between an enlistee and his superior officer, in which they “admire each other, bare their hearts to each other, share jokes and feel happy, and allow soldiers’ ideological problems and contradictions to be

³⁶⁴ Chen Anren, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent’s Moral Character*, p. 71.

³⁶⁵ Various articles from *Renmin Haijun*, *Kongjun Bao*, and *Huojianbing Bao*, 2002–2006.

³⁶⁶ *Renmin Haijun*, 12 Jul 2005, p. 1.

resolved.”³⁶⁷ Such talks are employed in a wide range of situations, from correcting soldiers’ training errors to dealing with personnel who have gone AWOL.³⁶⁸

Officers are instructed to hold these talks as soon as problems become evident, to maintain a warm rather than reprimanding tone, and to focus on guiding soldiers to willingly improve their performance rather than on pressuring or threatening them. Since lower-level figures of authority, such as squad leaders, traditionally assume the role of a sympathetic “elder brother” to enlisted soldiers, it is thought by many in the PLA that soldiers will be most receptive to their persuasion and guidance. “Heart-to-heart talks” also allow unit leaders to criticize their troops without exposing them to a public loss of face.

Challenge: Three decades of peace have weakened personnel’s sense of urgency about the PLA’s missions.

Because the PLA has not engaged in significant conflict since its 1979 war and subsequent skirmishes with Vietnam nearly thirty years ago, the vast majority of PLA soldiers have never seen actual combat.³⁷⁰

PLA publications express concern that China’s long peace has led many personnel to develop the “muddled idea” that they are “peacetime soldiers.” This phenomenon is described in a leadership manual for squad leaders:

When a line forms, they are the last to come out of the dormitory; when the troops assemble on the drilling ground, they are the last to take their place in the ranks; during exercises, they always have a few small problems....When you look for reasons, they say, “It’s peacetime now, we’ll never fight a war,” “These are exercises, not war-fighting or being on duty,” or “These are not real guns and bullets, so there’s no need to be so serious.”³⁷¹

“Although great wars are not being fought right now, that does not mean that they will not be fought; we should see that behind ‘peace’ there is still the scent of gunpowder; we should not have the mindset of being ‘peacetime’ soldiers.”³⁶⁹

— *Guidebook to Military Life*

The “peacetime soldier” phenomenon has potentially harmful effects on PLA values and on its operational capabilities, including the following:

³⁶⁷ Ou Guozheng, Liu Changjian, and Sha Gongping, eds., *How To Be a Good NCO (zenyang dang hao shiguan; 怎样当好士官)* (Beijing: Long March Press, 2000), p. 233.

³⁶⁸ Huang Shaowen, *Squad Leaders’ Techniques for Commanding Troops (banzhang daibing jiqiao; 班长带兵技巧)* (Beijing: PLA Publishing House, 2001), p. 130.

³⁶⁹ Zhang and Cao, *Guidebook to Military Life*, p. 32.

³⁷⁰ Cheng Li and Scott W. Harold, “China’s New Military Elite,” *China Security* 3:4 (Autumn 2007), p. 72.

³⁷¹ Huang Shaowen, *Squad Leaders’ Techniques for Commanding Troops*, p. 115.

Diminished “fighting spirit.” PLA publications note that young soldiers often do not enter the military with the appropriate sense of devotion and urgency to create a unified, strong-willed fighting force. Young conscripts are more likely to join the PLA out of personal motivations – to gain income and technical skills – than out of a sense of patriotism and self-sacrifice.³⁷²

PLA newspapers also report that some units underestimate the importance of mental training and overemphasize technical skills, because they believe that “modern warfare involves little bodily contact, and that knowing how to use modern equipment is the most important knowledge set.”³⁷³ This kind of training downplays the “fighting spirit” and other “human qualities” that the PLA has long considered its greatest asset.

Lax combat training. PLA leaders also worry that these “peacetime soldiers” have been subject to a training culture that focuses on the perfection of rote tasks, and thus have been inadequately trained to respond to the contingencies of combat.

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion in PLA newspapers about the shortcomings of the PLA’s combat training practices. These newspapers report that in many of these exercises, units are provided with meticulous training plans that detail every step and leave little to chance, leaving soldiers unable to respond to the inevitable contingencies and uncertainties of warfare.³⁷⁵

Additionally, since many units are rewarded according to the “success” of their training exercises, there is little sense that training can be used to uncover and rectify weaknesses. This provides incentives for even tighter scripting and, in some units, outright cheating.

**AIMING FOR PERFECTION OVER
REALISM**

In 2005, one PLA Marine Corps brigade suddenly gave up an award it had won after live-fire training and demanded that the brigade political commissar cancel its first-place ranking. During a private conversation with some of his soldiers, a squad leader within the brigade had inadvertently revealed that the night before the contest he had secretly sneaked onto the tank combat assault field and measured the distance from the point his tank would stop to the target. The following day when he took the field he fired four rounds and struck four targets. Unfortunately for this squad leader, news of his trickery reached the platoon leader who then made a report to the company leader.³⁷⁴

— *Renmin Haijun*

³⁷² Chen Anren, *On the Cultivation of Military Talent’s Moral Character*, p. 277; see also *Kongjun Bao*, 13 Jul 2004, p. 3.

³⁷³ *Kongjun Bao*, 11 May 2004, p. 3.

³⁷⁴ *Renmin Haijun*, 23 Apr 2005.

³⁷⁵ *Renmin Haijun*, 16 Mar 2004, p. 1.

PLA publications point out that this mode of training has failed to provide personnel with a sense of the complicated and unpredictable nature of battlefield conditions. Many PLA units are able to “fight on paper” but have little understanding of actual combat or psychological preparation to deal with its pressures and rapidly changing conditions.³⁷⁶

Response #1: Increased “real war” training

Significant initiatives have been underway for the past several years in the PLA to address concerns about personnel’s lax attitudes and training. Chief among these is the push for more “real war” (*shizhan*; 实战) training.

Rather than relying on familiar locations and closely scripted procedures, “real war” seeks to replicate the uncertain conditions of actual combat. PLA units have sought to introduce such training methods as the following:

- Deploying over unfamiliar geographic areas
- Wearing full battle dress
- Involving all unit personnel rather than smaller groups
- Training in all types of weather³⁷⁷
- Using live ammunition and real equipment rather than substitute materials (*tidaipin*; 替代品)³⁷⁸
- Making sudden, unannounced changes to training plans and conditions, and observing how quickly units are able to adapt³⁷⁹
- In the PLA Navy, conducting training further from shore, requiring more days at sea and a larger combat radius (*banjing*; 半径).³⁸⁰

These initiatives have in turn created new challenges for the PLA. Most importantly, they have led to debate within some units about how to balance the need for “real war” preparation with the imperative of soldiers’ safety. Some officers and enlisted soldiers are concerned that higher-intensity forms of training may cause more frequent accidents and injuries.³⁸¹ Others have expressed concern that higher accident rates will damage units’ reputations. However, some commanders, including a regiment leader quoted in

³⁷⁶ *Kongjun Bao*, 15 Oct 2002, p. 1; *Renmin Haijun*, 5 Feb 2005, p. 1.

³⁷⁷ *Kongjun Bao*, 19 Aug 2004, p. 2.

³⁷⁸ *Huojianbing Bao*, 4 Apr 2006, p. 2.

³⁷⁹ *Huojianbing Bao*, 18 May 2006, p. 2.

³⁸⁰ *Renmin Haijun*, 28 Feb 2004, p. 1.

³⁸¹ *Huojianbing Bao*, 4 Jul 2006, p. 2.

Huojianbing Bao, believe that “fighting spirit cannot be sacrificed for the sake of safety,” and are calling for more time to be spent on dangerous training subjects (*kemu*, 课目).³⁸²

Response #2: Increased engagement in non-combat operations such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance

Since the late 1990s, the PLA has been deployed to conduct major disaster relief efforts, in response to catastrophes, such as:

- Several instances of Yangtze River flooding, most notably in 1998
- Severe snowstorms during the Chinese New Year holiday in January 2008
- The May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province.³⁸³

Beyond their basic function of relieving human suffering, these operations serve several additional purposes for the PLA:

- They give personnel a sense of purpose, and instill an understanding that even in times of peace, PLA officers and enlisted soldiers must be prepared to respond to the call of duty in tense and often dangerous circumstances.
- They allow PLA leaders to put mobilization, command, and communications systems to the test in real-world situations.
- They serve an important public relations purpose in displaying to the Chinese people – and to the world – the PLA’s acts of bravery and sacrifice. In each of these cases, the Chinese government and State-run media have transmitted countless images of PLA members heroically “serving the people” and bearing enormous burdens to save civilian lives.³⁸⁴

³⁸² *Huojianbing Bao*, 4 Apr 2006, p. 2. It is worth noting that outside observers do not generally regard PLA units as having very good safety records. E.g., interview #20.

³⁸³ Gao Jianguo, “Transformation of the PLA and Building the Army’s Image,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 24 Jul 2008, p. 6, OSC CPP20080724710004.

³⁸⁴ See, e.g., Xiong Qunfeng, “‘Battlefield’ is the Best Classroom,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 22 Feb 2008, OSC CPP20080222702014.

Chapter 6: Interacting With the PLA

Introduction: Overcoming frustration

American personnel who interact with the PLA often return from China frustrated by Chinese behaviors and attitudes that seem unusual or even counter-productive. One interviewee compared working with the PLA to “slamming your head against a brick wall, all day, every day,” and another stated that “in dealing with the PLA, everything is much harder than it needs to be.”³⁸⁵

The values, organizational structures, and decision-making norms outlined in previous chapters all provide motivations and constraints for PLA interactions with foreigners. Understanding the reasons behind the behaviors may not entirely eliminate the frustrations of working with the PLA, but it can at least give U.S. personnel an idea of what to expect and how to prepare.

This chapter addresses the following four questions:

- **What goals does the PLA have for its military-to-military (mil-mil) relationship with the United States?**
- **What distinctive viewpoints does the PLA bring to its interactions with the U.S. military?**
- **What behaviors are Americans likely to encounter in their interactions with the PLA?**
- **How can U.S. personnel make the most of exchanges with the PLA?**

For this chapter, the authors conducted interviews with numerous U.S. military and defense personnel who have worked with the PLA, including officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, U.S. military foreign area officers and defense attachés, and participants in mil-mil exchanges. The authors also drew upon published works by American military and civilian analysts, and by PLA officers and academics.

³⁸⁵ Interviews #1 and 2.

What goals does the PLA have for its military-to-military relationship with the United States?

Goal # 1: Advance the overall bilateral relationship

The PLA is not an independent actor in mil-mil relations. The PLA's interactions with the U.S. military are guided by the missions it receives from the CCP, and are carried out in the context of the CCP's goals for the larger bilateral relationship.

The PLA views military-to-military relations as a means of advancing the CCP's political and national security objectives.

As the military arm of the CCP, the PLA has always played a significant role in the Party's external relations and in the PRC's state-to-state diplomacy.³⁸⁶ *The CCP instructs the PLA to view "political diplomacy" and "military diplomacy" as merely different means to the same ends.*³⁸⁷ Therefore, in bilateral discussions, PLA officers often make assertions about China's broad strategic objectives, and ask questions about America's political and strategic goals, in ways that may startle American visitors.³⁸⁸

Most PLA officers (especially at more senior levels) are Party members, which further ties together military and political considerations. It does not make sense, in the Chinese context, to view military issues as being distinct from political concerns. One American observer noted that U.S. military personnel "often make the mistake [in mil-mil exchanges] of thinking, 'we're all military folks here, so we can set politics aside.' This just isn't possible with the PLA."³⁸⁹ As a result, the PLA's conduct of military diplomacy may be subject to Party agendas and calendars not obvious to American interlocutors.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ David M. Finkelstein and John Unangst, *Engaging DoD: Chinese Perspectives on Military Relations with the United States*, CNA Research Memorandum 99-0046.90 (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 1999), p. 4.

³⁸⁷ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, pp. vii, 26.

³⁸⁸ Interviews #7 and 8.

³⁸⁹ Interview #6.

³⁹⁰ Interview #4.

Military-to-military relations with China are captive to the larger bilateral relationship.

Since U.S.-PRC bilateral relations were normalized in 1979, *their least stable element has been the military dimension*.³⁹² When the political relationship has soured, mil-mil relations have usually been the first to be cut off and the last to be reestablished. They are also the only element in the relationship that has undergone periods of complete suspension. These suspensions follow a familiar cycle: they begin with an instigating event, and are followed by a period in which the two sides “court” one another to resume or deepen relations. See Table 6-1, on the following page, for an overview of major swings in the relationship since the 1980s.

“U.S. military ties with China often have served as the proverbial canary in the coalmine, acutely vulnerable to harmful changes in their environment.”³⁹¹

— Two American analysts of the PLA

When the CCP deems mil-mil exchanges to be necessary, the PLA must execute this directive whether or not its leaders want to.

The decision to enhance mil-mil interaction with the United States rests with the Party, not the PLA. *How* dialogue with the U.S. military is executed, however, is largely left to the PLA.³⁹³ As a result, when PLA leaders find specific tasks unpalatable, the PLA can drag its feet and make execution difficult. *Even when the Party is clearly willing to improve the military relationship, agreements in principle do not necessarily translate—or they may translate only very slowly—into action on the ground.*³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Kurt Campbell and Richard Weitz, “The Limits of U.S.-China Military Cooperation: Lessons from 1995-1999,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29:1 (Winter 2005-06), p. 180.

³⁹² For a history and analysis of the U.S.-China military-to-military relationship since 1980, see Kevin Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2004), Chapter 2; Shirley A. Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts: Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), pp. 1-4; Kurt Campbell and Richard Weitz, “The Limits of U.S.-China Military Cooperation,” pp. 169-186; David Finkelstein and John Unangst, *Engaging DoD*; and Kristen Gunness, “China’s Military Diplomacy in an Era of Change,” paper presented at the National Defense University symposium on China’s Global Activism: Implications for U.S. Security Interests, National Defense University, Fort Lesley J. McNair, 20 Jun 2006.

³⁹³ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. vii.

³⁹⁴ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 32.

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Table 6-1: Swings in the U.S.-China mil-mil relationship between 1980 and 2008 – selected incidents³⁹⁵

DATES	INSTIGATING INCIDENT	RESULT	HOW WAS THE ISSUE RESOLVED?
1981-1983	U.S. arms sales to Taiwan	China halts technology transfers and arms purchases from the U.S.	Two countries sign the U.S.-PRC Joint Communiqué in August 1982, in which U.S. promises to “gradually ... reduce its sale of arms to Taiwan.” In 1983, the two sides agree in principle to resume military ties. U.S. agrees to four arms sale programs between 1985 and 1987.
1987-1988	Chinese arms sales to Iran and Saudi Arabia	U.S. suspends additional liberalization of high-tech transfers to China.	Suspension lifted March 1988, but many in U.S. government remain skeptical of whether such transfers are in U.S. interest.
June 1989 - fall 1994	Tiananmen Square massacre	U.S. side suspends mil-mil contacts and arms sales to China. Both sides cancel completion of previously-agreed arms sale programs.	Some restrictions on equipment sales lifted in December 1992; President Clinton and Secretary of Defense William Perry reestablish bilateral military contacts in 1994 as part of overall “comprehensive engagement” with China. Reflecting lingering suspicion of Chinese intentions, U.S. Congress passes a law in 1995 barring U.S. assistance in Chinese defense conversion.
1996	PLA launches missiles across the Taiwan Strait for the second time in six months.	U.S. briefly cancels high-level mil-mil visits.	Some in U.S. advocate increased military ties with China to improve communication. The two countries hold first Defense Consultative Talks (DCT) in December 1997.
May 1999	US errantly bombs Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the war in Kosovo.	China suspends military contacts in 1999.	U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia, Kurt Campbell, meets with Chinese officials in November 1999 to discuss restarting the mil-mil relationship. High-level contacts resume by 2000. Reflecting years of concern on the part of U.S. lawmakers, in 2000 the U.S. Congress passes the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and DeLay Amendment limiting mil-mil contacts to a few areas.
April 2001	American surveillance plane and Chinese fighter plane collide near China, killing the Chinese pilot.	U.S. briefly suspends all mil-mil contacts.	U.S. reestablishes limited mil-mil contacts in May 2001, subject to case-by-case review. DCT resume in late 2002. Cabinet-level mil-mil contacts held 2005-2006.
Oct 2008	U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.	China suspends mil-mil contacts.	Not resolved as of January 2009.

³⁹⁵ For more on the impact of these incidents on U.S.-China relations, see e.g. Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, Chapter 1; Kan, *U.S.-China Military Contacts*, pp. 1-4; Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, Chapter 1.

Goal #2: Improve China's image within the U.S. political and military establishments

The PLA sees mil-mil interaction as an opportunity to show that it has become a modern military worthy of the United States' respect.

In mil-mil interactions, the PLA appears eager to show foreign visitors that the values and the nation it represents are worthy of respect. The following themes often emerge in discussions with U.S. personnel:

Insistence on equality. PLA members appear anxious to show that the PLA can deal with the U.S. military on “equal terms” – referring not to equivalence of military might, but to an *equal status on the world stage*. One interviewee noted that senior PLA officers are “slipping the word ‘equality’ more and more into their wording” and demanding mil-mil arrangements that reflect this sentiment.³⁹⁶ In a 2007 newspaper interview, a PLA academic explained that only when two countries believe themselves to be “on an equal footing” will a deep, sustained military-to-military relationship be possible.³⁹⁷

National pride. Chinese military personnel display great pride in their nation and in the PLA's role as its defender. Americans who have worked with Chinese military personnel in overseas settings, such as UN peacekeeping missions, note the fervor with which many PLA officers discuss their nation's historical and ideological uniqueness.³⁹⁸

Competitiveness. Operational interactions between the PLA and the U.S. military have been limited, but U.S. participants in such interactions report being surprised by the degree of competitiveness displayed by their Chinese counterparts. In part, this competitiveness seems geared toward proving that Chinese military personnel are as good as, or even better at some tasks, than their U.S. counterparts, despite the technological advantages of the U.S. military.³⁹⁹ One instructive example is the military skills competition between U.S. and Chinese Marines that took place in 2006, described on the next page.

³⁹⁶ Interview #5.

³⁹⁷ “Pride and Prejudice: An Interpretation of Keating's Visit to China,” *Bingqi Zhishi*, 4 Mar 2008, OSC CPP20080411563001. See also Tao Shelan, “Military Specialist: Chinese, US Military Forces Building a New Type of Constructive Military Relationship,” *Zhongguo Xinwen She*, 6 Nov 2007, OSC CPP 20071106138004.

³⁹⁸ Interviews #8 and 13.

³⁹⁹ Interviews #11 and 12.

PLA COMPETITIVENESS

In 2006, an unusual military competition took place in Zhanjiang, China, between a U.S. Marine Corps detachment and a unit of Chinese Marines. Organized at the PRC's suggestion, this was the first such competition held between the two militaries. It consisted of a tug-of-war, a basketball game, an obstacle course, and a target-shooting competition.

American Marines who participated in the event reported being surprised by the degree of competitiveness that their Chinese counterparts displayed on several levels.

- First, the PLA participants in this “casual” competition had clearly been handpicked for their extraordinary physical strength and skill. As one U.S. participant later said, “These guys obviously played basketball all day – this was their job.... The tug-of-war guys were *big* guys, with thick legs, and they all had these specialized shoes.” The U.S. Marines were outmatched in every event except the rifle competition.
- Second, although the Chinese agreed to the Americans’ suggestion that U.S. and Chinese Marines form two mixed teams, each with members from both militaries, “the Chinese changed it up once we got started – they ran every race as one of them vs. one of us.” A Chinese television report of the event highlights individual U.S. Marines losing badly on the course, and makes no mention of the combined teams.
- Third, PLA officers and Chinese media repeatedly touted the superiority of the Chinese Marines over the Americans. U.S. participants said that the PLA Marines were gracious, but that their commanding officers were determined to make clear to the media and other bystanders that the Chinese military had proved its superiority. For instance, the Chinese and U.S. participants got into a mild disagreement over who had won a target-shooting competition: the U.S. Marines had a higher average score, but a Chinese Marine had the highest single score. U.S. participants report that the Chinese media and officers were adamant that the Chinese had “won” this competition. As one U.S. participant said, “There was definitely a purpose to all this – to show that they [the Chinese] were superior.”⁴⁰⁰

PLA leaders see mil-mil interaction as a chance to correct what they consider unfairly negative U.S. perceptions of China’s strategic intentions.

PLA leaders believe that the United States wrongly sees China as a threat. When U.S. government or military leaders express concern about the purpose of China’s current military buildup, they are pilloried in the Chinese press as having a “Cold War mentality”

⁴⁰⁰ Interviews #4, 11, and 12; a video of the event is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFoWCbQjwXw>.

that displays the U.S. desire to seek “absolute military supremacy” by suppressing China’s natural desire to safeguard national security and protect its territorial integrity.⁴⁰¹

PLA leaders see mil-mil interaction as an opportunity to dispel this “China threat theory” and to defend the PLA’s actions. The PLA’s main lines of counter-argument are that:

- China’s military intentions do not threaten any nation
- The PLA’s capabilities are weak, and pose no threat to the United States.⁴⁰²

The PLA seeks to give these arguments credence by:

Maintaining a high-level dialogue through which the PLA can present CCP concerns and priorities to the U.S. military and political establishment. Members of the PLA, particularly at the higher levels, take any opportunity available to state China’s case on crucial topics, such as Taiwan.⁴⁰³ Dialogue at senior levels, in particular, is sought as a “welcome antidote to the perceived ‘anti-China forces’ in the United States.”⁴⁰⁴

Showing China’s willingness to engage in the international arena. In recent years China has been eager to show in mil-mil interactions that it is meeting its responsibilities as a “world power” (*shijie daguo*; 世界大国) and a reliable member of the international community. Americans who have interacted with the PLA in recent years view this as a positive development. One interviewee said that although “gains will always be incremental...things are improving – the Chinese have a growing recognition that there’s a need to engage, and that there are certain things expected that they’ll have to do.”⁴⁰⁵ Others noted that the PLA’s growing involvement in international issues, such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and military environmental protection, show that it is growing more comfortable taking a constructive role on the world stage.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰¹ Lin Chuan, “The United States Is Playing Up ‘China Military Threat Theory’; Chinese and US Military Leaders Engage in ‘War of Words’ in Singapore,” *Zhongguo Tongxun She*, 3 Jun 2008, OSC CPP20080603172001.

⁴⁰² Interview #6; Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 28.

⁴⁰³ Interviews #2, 5, 7, and 8.

⁴⁰⁴ James Mulvenon, “Make Talk Not War: Strategic U.S.-China Military-to-Military Exchanges in the First Half of 2007,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 21 (Summer 2007), p. 2, <http://media.hoover.org/documents/CLM21JM.pdf>.

⁴⁰⁵ Interview #5.

⁴⁰⁶ Interview #3.

Goal #3: Learn about the U.S. military

All PLA interactions with developed foreign militaries are seen as opportunities to assess the state of modern warfare. The PLA leadership uses military exchanges to learn about aspects of U.S. military technology, doctrine, and organization that may be worth emulating. As one interviewee said, “For the PLA, the U.S. is the gold standard.”⁴⁰⁷

U.S. analysts suggest that members of the PLA show “great interest in U.S. defense doctrines and manuals,” and in learning from U.S. military practices.⁴⁰⁸ Interviewees noted that during mil-mil exchanges the PLA tends to show fairly high levels of interest in:

- U.S. military technology
- How the U.S. military manages its personnel.

INTEREST IN U.S. NCOs

American visitors to China note that their PLA counterparts are clearly interested in how the U.S. military organizes and manages people. Several remarked that the PLA seems particularly interested in the authority and autonomy given to noncommissioned officers.⁴⁰⁹ One interviewee reported, “The Chinese were really intrigued by the fact that the U.S. NCOs were making things happen. This was something their leadership had a lot of questions about – how do your NCOs do that, how do they make their decisions?”⁴¹⁰ The PLA’s interest in foreign militaries’ use of NCOs, and in military management more generally, is echoed in many of its publications.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Interview #3.

⁴⁰⁸ Campbell and Weitz, “The Limits of U.S.-China Military Cooperation,” p. 173.

⁴⁰⁹ Interviews # 9, 10, 12, 14, and 15.

⁴¹⁰ Interview #12.

⁴¹¹ See, e.g., Deng Zhongdang, *A Comparison of Chinese and Foreign NCO Education (zhongwai shiguan jiaoyu bijiao; 中外使馆教育比较)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2005).

What distinctive viewpoints does the PLA bring to its interactions with the U.S. military?

Chinese and American military leaders have significantly different understandings of the demands that militaries may reasonably make on one another. Specifically, they display divergent views on:

- How to build “mutual trust”
- How to cultivate relationships among members of the two militaries
- How to define “transparency.”

Mutual trust

The PLA assesses the outlook for bilateral military relations in terms of the level of “mutual trust” (*huxin*; 互信) that has already been established between the two sides.⁴¹³ They argue that only when deep “mutual trust” exists can two nations conduct a successful military-to-military relationship.

“Mutual trust is the basis of all bilateral relations.”⁴¹²

— PLA military academic

For the PLA, “mutual trust” means an absence of significant suspicion about the intentions of the other party.

A perusal of Chinese sources suggests that when the PLA leadership says that a high degree of “mutual trust” exists between two nations, it means that neither country harbors significant concerns about the intentions or actions of the other. PLA writers complain that the U.S. government and military display a lack of “trust” when they make statements indicating that China is not transparent enough and may pose a military threat to the United States. In the view of the PLA leadership, these “groundless suspicions,” and the continued U.S. attempts to “pressure” China into changing some of its military practices, pose major obstacles to the two countries’ ability to build the “mutual trust” that is necessary for cooperative military relations.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹² PLA Colonel Teng Jianqun (ret.), Director, Research Department, China Arms Control and Disarmament Association, quoted in Ding Ying, “Ring Up the Generals,” *Beijing Review*, 17 Apr 2008, OSC CPP20080428715036.

⁴¹³ Interview # 2.

⁴¹⁴ Ding Ying, “Ring Up the Generals”; see also Liu Jun, “China-Russian Military Hotline is Set Up as a Natural Result of the Ripe Conditions,” *Guoji Xianqu Daobao*, 18 Mar 2008, p. 4, OSC CPP20080408624002.

“Mutual trust” is built on “mutual understanding,” which is achieved through dialogue.

Long-time observers of China’s military note that in PLA parlance, achieving “mutual trust” requires that nations first reach a “mutual understanding” of one another’s viewpoints. This “mutual understanding” is attained through dialogue and personnel exchanges, particularly at higher levels – for instance, the U.S.-China bilateral Defense Consultative Talks, or exchanges between the two countries’ National Defense Universities.⁴¹⁶

“Security is mutual, and security dialogues and cooperation should be aimed at promoting trust, *not at creating confrontations.*”⁴¹⁵

— Information Office of the PRC State Council

Theoretically such dialogue should allow the two sides to frankly confront strategic differences and take one another’s concerns seriously. However, observers report that in practice “dialogue” usually means persuading the United States of the correctness of China’s position.⁴¹⁷

Once “mutual understanding” has been attained through dialogue – or once the United States has been brought around to the Chinese point of view – the two countries can then prove their commitment to establishing “mutual trust” by displaying, through public statements, that they harbor no concerns about each other’s intentions.⁴¹⁸

Mil-mil interaction is a symbol of “mutual trust” that *already* exists, not a path toward building trust.

PLA writings argue that nations cannot engage in combined military activities unless a high degree of political and military “mutual trust” has been established. One recent *Jiefangjun Bao* commentary states that “If a joint exercise is held between the countries that have serious conflicts... [it] can only be a symbolic military exercise with no concrete content.”⁴¹⁹ PLA-U.S. military joint activities or contacts are usually tied to Chinese assessments of an increase in “mutual trust” and positive movement in the bilateral strategic agenda.⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁵ *China’s National Defense* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, Jul 1998), I: “The International Security Situation”; emphasis added.

⁴¹⁶ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 18.

⁴¹⁷ E.g., interview #6; also Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. v.

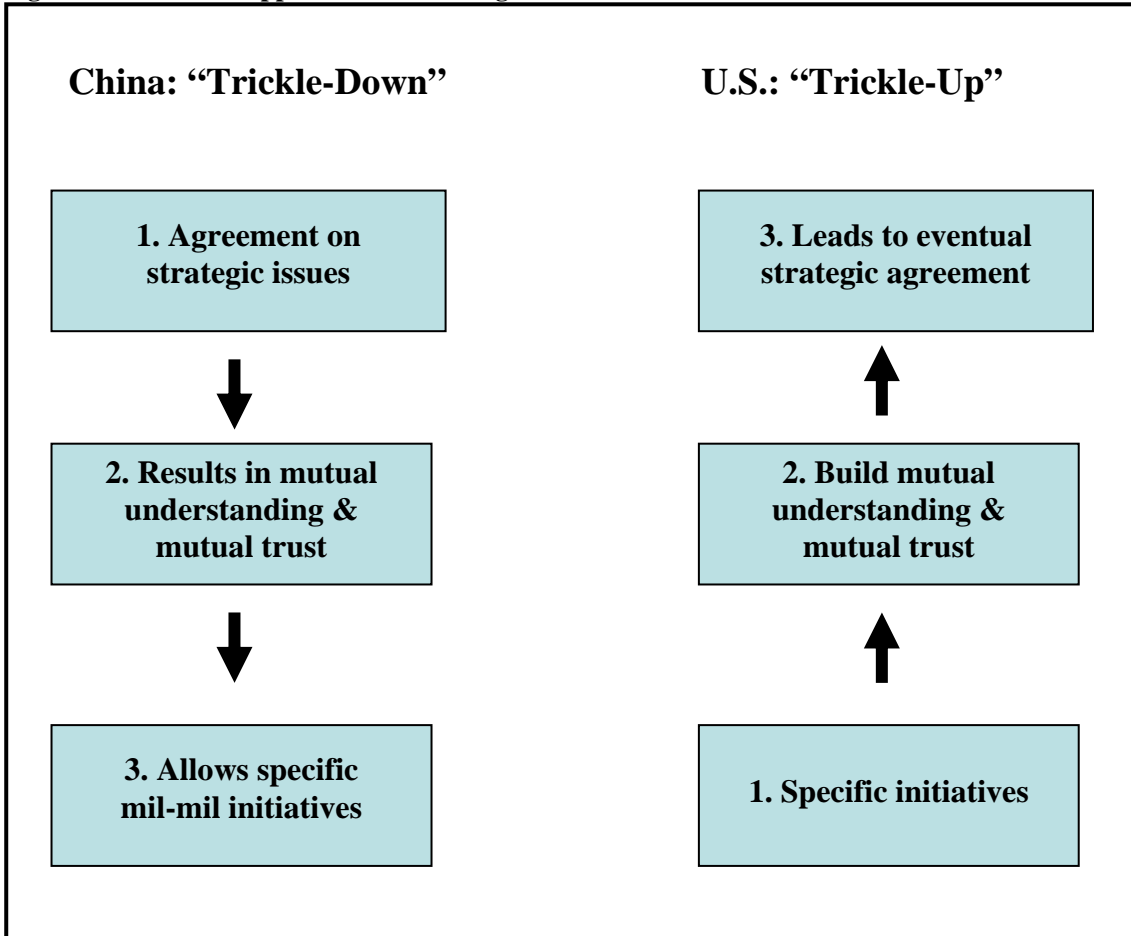
⁴¹⁸ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 17.

⁴¹⁹ Wang Xinjun, “What To Look For in Joint Exercises,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 7 Aug 2007, p. 5, OSC CPP20070807710002.

⁴²⁰ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 19.

The difference between the U.S. and Chinese perspectives on mil-mil interaction may be characterized as a “trickle-up” approach versus a “trickle-down” approach. In the American view, specific joint initiatives build mutual understanding and trust, which eventually lead to strategic agreement. For the PLA, conversely, agreement on strategic issues results in mutual understanding and trust, which allows for specific initiatives to take place.⁴²¹ These approaches are shown below, in Figure 6-1.

Figure 6-1: Different approaches to building mutual trust



Relationship building

PLA members view personal relationships as carrying a degree of obligation.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, traditional Chinese thought holds that all relationships carry clear mutual obligations, including that between “friends.” Observers note that Chinese officials seek to form strong friendships with key individuals on the U.S. side who are viewed as sympathetic to China. They hope that when necessary they will be

⁴²¹ Yuan Peng, “Strategic Mutual Trust and Strategic Stability: Principal Tasks Facing Sino-US Relations,” *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, 20 Jan 2008, OSC CPP20080403587001; Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 45.

able to call upon these “old friends” to advocate for conciliatory policies and negotiation stances toward China.⁴²² In doing so, they may seek to manipulate their American friends’ “feelings of good will, obligation, guilt, or dependence.”⁴²³

PLA officials do not consider individuals to be interchangeable, and are frustrated by the many “new faces” in U.S. delegations.

One implication of the PLA’s preference for building long-term relationships is that new arrivals to the conversation cannot expect to pick up a discussion where their predecessor left off. As a U.S. military attaché said, “You can’t just plug in a new person.”⁴²⁴ Members of the PLA endeavor to build relationships with their American counterparts over many years and multiple visits. Because “mutual understanding” is achieved through a long process of dialogue between members of both militaries, replacing members of that conversation sets this process back.

Because PLA personnel tend to stay in a single unit – and hence a single geographic location – for a long time, they expect their interpersonal networks to remain fairly stable. This does not mesh well with the U.S. standard of moving officers from one position to another after just two or three years.

“[A recent visit] confirmed one of Beijing’s greatest frustrations with Sino-U.S. senior military dialogue ... [namely that] many of its visiting U.S. interlocutors are soon-to-retire officers on their final, “swan song” visit, which undermines the goal of developing long-term ties between professionals.”⁴²⁵

— American analyst of the PLA

Senior PLA members have been known to complain that each American delegation seems to consist of an entirely new set of faces, making it difficult to establish the solid relationships that are conducive to “mutual trust.”⁴²⁶

Friendliness and cordiality are not indicators of a strong relationship.

American personnel sometimes misread the cordial tone of interactions with the PLA. PLA officers – and the Chinese more generally – are known as extremely gracious hosts, but this does not reflect an underlying sense of obligation or trust.⁴²⁷ One interviewee commented that U.S. visitors often wrongly assume that “after having a meeting, sharing a meal, and engaging in some sidebar conversations, they will get a sense of their

⁴²² Alfred D. Wilhelm, Jr., *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1994), p. 58; Richard H. Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior: Pursuing Interests Through “Old Friends”* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1999), p. 61.

⁴²³ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 4.

⁴²⁴ Interview #4.

⁴²⁵ Mulvenon, “Make Talk Not War,” p. 4.

⁴²⁶ Interviews #3 and 6.

⁴²⁷ Interviews #4, 6, and 7.

Chinese counterparts and build a rapport so they can achieve some things off-script.”⁴²⁸ In fact, this kind of rapport can take a long time and multiple visits to develop.

Once a relationship has been established, there may be a drop in formality and reserve.

Several interviewees commented that, at all levels of interaction, members of the PLA drop their initial reserve once the parties have spent more time together.⁴²⁹ This allows members of the two militaries to have more personal conversations – for example, about family or life plans, or other topics that Americans consider fairly casual. Longer-term relationships also smooth some logistical aspects of the bilateral relationship. One U.S. official, for instance, noted that PLA officers may display “more flexibility” in setting meeting agendas and other arrangements with Americans with whom they have worked for several years.⁴³⁰

Transparency and reciprocity

“Transparency” and “reciprocity” are major sticking points in U.S.-China mil-mil contacts. U.S. personnel complain that the PLA is reluctant to provide even the most basic information about its structures and capabilities. On visits, Americans are given access only to a limited number of “show units” putting on scripted displays, and requests to learn more about training procedures or about units’ capabilities are politely but firmly turned down.⁴³¹ The U.S. report, *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2008*, produced by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, characterizes China’s lack of transparency in military and security affairs as posing “risks to stability by increasing the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation.”⁴³²

Conversely, the PLA leadership complains that the American view of “military transparency” (*junshi touming*; 军事透明) and its related demands for “reciprocity” are one-sided and inapplicable to China.

The PLA does not view transparency as an inherent good.

One American commentator has noted that the U.S. push for transparency reflects not just a desire for more information about the PLA, but a “uniquely Western...disposition” towards information—one that “perceive[s] transparency as an intrinsic good and regard[s] access to information, especially regarding the actions of public institutions and

⁴²⁸ Interview # 6.

⁴²⁹ Interviews # 9 and 14.

⁴³⁰ Interview # 6.

⁴³¹ Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, pp. xiv, 55; interviews #1, 2, 7, 9; Campbell and Weitz, “The Limits of U.S.-China Military Cooperation,” p. 175.

⁴³² *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 2008* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008), p. 1.

organizations, as an individual right.”⁴³³ There is little evidence that a similar disposition exists in China. Even information that Americans might see as innocuous may be considered off-limits for their Chinese interlocutors.⁴³⁴ One American analyst recalls a PLA delegation visit to the United States in 1997, when “delegation members refused to answer simple questions of unit designation, type of aircraft flown, or even what province they were from.”⁴³⁵

The PLA believes that transparency is a tool used by the strong against the weak. A number of PLA writers put forth the idea that military transparency is a Western concern, aimed at arrogantly displaying the military might of strong nations while revealing the vulnerabilities of weak ones.⁴³⁷ Many PLA officials believe that the “transparent” display of U.S. strengths is aimed at dissuading China from risking a conflict with the United States. One PLA official has been paraphrased as saying that the Chinese military is “insulted by the suggestion, made all too clear, that China needs to be deterred and is being shown things for that purpose....Why should China be transparent if the United States is talking, acting, and treating China as an adversary to be deterred?”⁴³⁸ The PLA sees this type of deterrence as an affront to the “mutual trust” that must be the basis for transparency.⁴³⁹

“The differences between individual countries mean that it is impossible to have a universal standard for military transparency....To rich countries military transparency is an effective way to brandish military power and deter others, whereas to poor nations low military transparency is a way to protect themselves, by being ambiguous rather than specific.”⁴³⁶

— PLA senior official, Academy of Military Science

⁴³³ Gregory Kulacki, “Chinese Perspectives on Transparency and Security,” *Global Security*, 13 Jan 2003, pp. 1-2, http://www.ucsusa.org/global_security/china/chinese-perspectives-on-transparency-and-security.html.

⁴³⁴ See, e.g., *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008*. For details on the PRC’s extensive secrecy laws, see “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Guarding State Secrets” and “Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on the Guarding of Secrets,” selected portions available at <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/newLaws/protectSecretsENG.php>.

⁴³⁵ Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, p. 68.

⁴³⁶ Luo Yuan, “China to Increase Military Transparency,” *China Daily*, 25 Oct 2007, OSC CPP20071025968108.

⁴³⁷ See, e.g., interview with senior PLA official, quoted in Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, p. 84; also, Xu Jia, “Issues of Military Transparency,” *China Daily Online*, 1 Aug 2008, OSC CPP20080801968029.

⁴³⁸ Cited in Mark T. Nakagawa, *United States Military-to-Military Contacts with the People’s Liberation Army: Can it further U.S. policies and aims in the Asia-Pacific region?*, thesis, Master of Military Art and Science, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (Fort Leavenworth, KS: 2003), pp. 56-57.

⁴³⁹ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. xi.; see also Xu Jia, “Issues of Military Transparency.”

*Some U.S. military leaders expect that if the United States is transparent about its operational capabilities, China will feel obligated to reciprocate. For the most part, this idea has proved to be mistaken, mainly because PLA leaders believe that revealing China's military assets to the United States would compound the PLA's already substantial material disadvantages.*⁴⁴⁰

The PLA believes that transparency of strategic intentions is more important than transparency of operational or tactical capabilities

The term “strategic intentions” refers to a broad articulation of state principles. An example is China’s “no first use” policy on nuclear weapons. “Transparency of capabilities” refers to specific knowledge of a military’s organization, personnel, or assets.⁴⁴²

In the view of the PLA leadership, if a nation is clear about its strategic intentions there is no need to be concerned about its operational capabilities.⁴⁴³

**THE PLA’S DEFINITION OF
“STRATEGIC TRANSPARENCY”**

“We do not conceal our intention to build a strong and modern national defense. We also tell the world candidly that the Chinese defense policy is always defensive in nature. The modernization of the Chinese armed forces aims to achieve the ability to defend national sovereignty, security and reunification of the country.”⁴⁴¹

— PLA senior official

PLA leaders believe both that their concerns are reasonable, and that the U.S. does not give the PLA enough credit.⁴⁴⁴

The PLA asserts that its concerns about providing too much transparency are reasonable, and that it has not gotten enough credit from the United States for the many improvements in transparency it has made in recent years. The PLA leadership’s views on transparency include the following:

⁴⁴⁰ Interviews # 1, 7, and 8; Arthur Ding, *U.S.-China Ties: Seeking Common Ground Amid Mutual Suspicion*, RSIS Commentaries, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University (Singapore: 27 Nov 2007), p. 2

⁴⁴¹ Sun Shangwu’s interview with Lt. General Zhang Qinsheng, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the PLA, “PLA Making Great Efforts to Be More Open,” *China Daily*, 2 Feb 2007, p. 12.

⁴⁴² Interviews #1 and 7. See also Ding, *U.S.-China Ties*, p. 2.

⁴⁴³ This point is repeated in numerous PLA writings; see, e.g., Luo Yuan, “China To Increase Military Transparency” and Xu Jia, “Issues of Military Transparency.”

⁴⁴⁴ For more on the topic of the PLA’s military transparency, see Heidi Holz with Alison Kaufman, *A Means to an End: The Chinese Military’s Use of Transparency*, CNA Information Memorandum D0019044.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2008), OSC CPP20081110325003001.

The PLA believes that it is transparent. PLA leaders argue that the PLA is entirely upfront about its strategic intentions, and that in recent years it has made significant concessions to U.S. standards of operational transparency, including the following:

- China now issues a biennial White Paper on national defense
- the PLA has opened several military exercises to foreign observers
- the PLA now conducts more joint exercises and exchanges with foreign militaries
- the PLA sends more of its own personnel overseas to observe foreign militaries
- China has joined the UN Military Transparency System and participates in the UN Conventional Weapons Registration System.⁴⁴⁶

“China’s current military strategy is clear. The objective is building informatized troops and winning an informatized war. China’s strategic intentions are transparent, the most transparent in the world: we follow the military strategy of active defense. In contrast, the U.S.’s and Japan’s strategic intentions are not transparent.”⁴⁴⁵

— PLA Navy Rear Admiral

The PLA complains that the U.S. is not transparent with the PLA. The PLA argues that the United States is opaque about its strategic intentions toward China, particularly in maintaining a military relationship with Taiwan. Moreover, PLA officials say, U.S. legal restrictions on what the Chinese may see on visits to U.S. military facilities mean that the United States is not truly interested in operational transparency.⁴⁴⁷ The PLA also suggests that the fact that the United States is more open with some other countries than it is with China indicates that the U.S. does not trust China enough to be truly transparent.⁴⁴⁸

“When we complain about transparency, they [the Chinese] shift the blame to us. They point to the [2000] National Defense Authorization Act and DeLay Amendment, which limits the extent of military exchanges with China. ‘You poke us about transparency, but the NDAA won’t let you do exchanges with us. This is non-transparent.’”

— Former U.S. defense attaché

PLA leaders argue that when the U.S. perceives China to have a deliberate lack of operational transparency, it simply misunderstands how the PLA works. PLA officials assert that the U.S. military sometimes misreads the PLA’s institutional processes and its internal standards on the handling of information, mistaking these standards for a deliberate eschewal of

⁴⁴⁵ PLA Navy Rear Admiral Yang Yi, quoted in Liu Haijian et al., “Our Troops March Toward the Sun,” *Guangzhou Ribao*, 1 Aug 2007, OSC CPP20070801050012.

⁴⁴⁶ Xu Jia, “Issues of Military Transparency”; see also Sun Shangwu’s interview with Lieutenant-General Zhang Qinsheng, p. 12. Interviewee #1 reiterated that PLA officials often make these points in discussions with their American counterparts.

⁴⁴⁷ Interview #3.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview # 15.

transparency. PLA officials are quick to point out that the PLA is closed not only to foreigners but also to the average Chinese citizen.⁴⁴⁹ One senior PLA officer notes that military personnel may at times choose not to discuss budgetary and management issues simply because the systems involved are too complicated to explain easily to foreigners, and will engender awkward or frustrating conversations.⁴⁵⁰ Table 6-2, below, highlights the main differences between the U.S. and PLA views on military transparency.

Table 6-2: Overview of U.S. and PLA views on military transparency

U.S. VIEWS	PRC VIEWS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military transparency is an international standard that applies equally to all countries. • Operational transparency allows countries to assess each other’s strategic intentions. • High levels of transparency and reciprocity can engender trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Military transparency is a standard imposed by strong nations on weak ones. • Strategic transparency is more important than operational transparency. • Transparency relies on having already high levels of “mutual trust.”

⁴⁴⁹ Finkelstein and Unangst. *Engaging DoD*, p. 15.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview # 15.

What behaviors are Americans likely to encounter in their interactions with the PLA?

Planning and coordinating U.S.-China military-to-military events

The PLA plans and coordinates mil-mil events in ways that *seek to ensure that the Chinese side retains the initiative at all times.*

The PLA personnel with whom U.S. visitors have the most direct contact are specialized handlers.

In organizing exchanges with the PLA, the U.S. military does not deal directly with Chinese operational units, but rather with the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) of the Ministry of National Defense. This office is the PLA's "frontline organization for handling contacts and programs with foreign militaries."⁴⁵¹

The FAO generally serves as a gate-keeper, preventing the leakage of sensitive information to foreigners. Some frustrated members of the U.S. military have described the FAO's primary purpose as erecting bureaucratic barriers to ensure that a proper distance is maintained between PLA operational personnel and their U.S. counterparts.⁴⁵³

Interviewees noted that many FAO staff members are posted at the Ministry in Beijing for their entire careers after only one or two tours in operational units, and have little knowledge of the PLA outside their areas of responsibility.⁴⁵⁴

WHO IS THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS OFFICE?

Because the nature of their work is considered "sensitive," the staff of the Foreign Affairs Office is small and carefully selected through political and security vetting. According to one scholar, Foreign Affairs Office staff members:

- Are considered by the Party and the PLA to be politically "highly reliable"
- Have significant foreign experience, as students or attachés
- Have requisite language skills for the countries with which they work.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 49.

⁴⁵² Interviews #1, 6, and 7.

⁴⁵³ Interview #5; Col. Jer Donald Get, US Army (ret.), *What's With the Relationship Between America's Army and China's PLA?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1996), p. 12-13.

⁴⁵⁴ Interviews #1 and 3.

The PLA frequently withholds or changes itineraries, perhaps to keep U.S. personnel off balance or to send messages of dissatisfaction.

Reaching agreement with the PLA on itineraries takes more effort and is freighted with greater significance than U.S. personnel may be accustomed to. Several interviewees pointed out that when U.S. personnel agree to an itinerary drafted by the PLA, they are perceived to have acquiesced to PLA priorities for the visit – *even if* they express some reservations or concerns about the particulars.⁴⁵⁵

One major frustration of dealing with the PLA, U.S. personnel report, is that it is often difficult to get a solid itinerary until the last minute.

- In some cases, U.S. delegations do not know which cities and bases they will visit until after they arrive in Beijing. They also may not know exactly with whom they will be meeting.⁴⁵⁶
- The Foreign Affairs Office routinely makes major changes to itineraries with no advance notice or explanation. Some American analysts argue that this “deliberate uncertainty” is calculated to keep U.S. personnel off balance.⁴⁵⁷

If PLA hosts are dissatisfied with the U.S. side, this can manifest in canceled or delayed meetings with key officials.⁴⁵⁸ However, U.S. personnel are often unprepared to pick up these signals. As one interviewee said, “[Because] the U.S. understands success differently, we may choose to ignore snubs, or just not know that they’re happening.”⁴⁵⁹

“There was a [U.S.] delegation to China...The American guy didn’t live up to some of the expectations, but he focused on the fact that they were all polite to him and didn’t say anything – he didn’t see that they weren’t happy....When they say that someone is busy, or they change the person you’re supposed to be meeting with, that’s a snub.”

— U.S. Army foreign area officer

⁴⁵⁵ Interviews #1, 3, and 5.

⁴⁵⁶ Interview #9; Get, *What’s With the Relationship Between America’s Army and China’s PLA?*, p. 13.

⁴⁵⁷ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 9; Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁵⁸ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 108.

⁴⁵⁹ Interview #3.

Access to PLA units and personnel is tightly controlled.

U.S. military visitors to China report that the FAO often provides only a small window into PLA operational units. Quotes from interviewees highlight several specific areas in which access for U.S. visitors was limited:

Access to weapons and equipment. An American involved in a recent visit to China said, “The Chinese had a static display....They showed us only stuff you would have within a company – no rockets, no larger mortar systems, howitzers, grenade launchers, large systems.... I noticed that they did not want us to handle the weapons – when I grabbed one, I was immediately told to put it down.”⁴⁶⁰

Access to enlisted personnel. One former U.S. Army foreign area officer said of a visit to PLA units, “The few enlisted soldiers we met were even afraid to talk to us, or if we wanted to give them something small, like a US-China pin or something...I’d have to get their commanding officer to tell them it was okay to take it.”⁴⁶¹

Access to lower-level officers. A U.S. military official responsible for arranging mil-mil exchanges reported, “The U.S. wanted to do exchanges at the O-4 and O-5 level, but the Chinese refused. They said that officers at those levels might get ‘confused’ about ‘where their future may lie’ and that they were concerned about their ‘ideological purity.’ They were concerned that these officers were not yet vested enough in the system.”⁴⁶²

Many of the facilities U.S. visitors see are PLA “showcases.”

A number of interviewees pointed out that rather than presenting an unvarnished, authentic picture of the PLA, the Foreign Affairs Office tends to bring visiting U.S. delegations to the PLA’s “showcase units,” which are extensively prepared for the visit.⁴⁶³ Every two years, the CMC provides the FAO with a list of bases that are approved for visits. One interviewee estimated that this list excludes roughly 80 percent of all PLA bases.⁴⁶⁴ Another interviewee complained that U.S. delegations are sometimes taken to the same units repeatedly.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁰ Interview #12.

⁴⁶¹ Interview #3.

⁴⁶² Interview #7.

⁴⁶³ Interviews #3, 9, and 10.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview #3.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview #10. An American analyst reports similar claims; see Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, p. 57.

PLA units are usually upfront about being “showcased”: many such units put up signs in English, give tours, and present as “training exercises” well-rehearsed performances that are, as one U.S. delegation member put it, “a little *too* organized, too hokey.”⁴⁶⁶

“One U.S. leader saw a PLA armored division performing a live ammunition exercise. These guys ran out with a mortar, slapped it down on the ground, leveled it and fired a round, which hit exactly in the center of the target. This is almost impossible to do – you knew that they had gone out beforehand and set it all up, figured out exactly the right place to put the base, probably dug holes so they could pop it into the slots, figured out exactly what the charge needed to be for that wind speed, etc. The U.S. guys saw right through it; they know that any tiny deviation throws off the known distance and range. *This sort of thing isn’t unique to the PLA, but we wouldn’t call it “training,” we call it a demonstration.*”

— U.S. Army foreign area officer

The PLA places great importance on securing meetings with high-level officials.

Whereas Americans tend to see meetings as a means to achieving tangible outcomes, for the Chinese *meetings are successful outcomes in and of themselves*, regardless of what is discussed or achieved. Chinese military delegations visiting the United States often seem primarily focused on securing meetings with high-ranking U.S. government and military officials: two American observers assert that PLA officers are sent to the United States with orders to convey to the highest levels an understanding of China’s strategic intentions and its concerns about U.S. actions. It is less clear that they are tasked with ensuring that the message is received in a certain way. Therefore, whom they see often takes precedence over what they see or what is achieved, and they seem oddly – from an American perspective – uninterested in the actual content of the meeting.⁴⁶⁷ One interviewee gave the following hypothetical example: if the Defense Secretary meets with a visiting Chinese delegation to express U.S. discontent about Chinese actions, the delegation is likely to be more impressed by the fact that they were allowed to meet with the Secretary than with the message he was trying to deliver.⁴⁶⁸

“Every time a delegation arrives in Beijing, they are first taken into a little room at the airport, where they sit and chat with their hosts, who assure them ‘the visit will be a success.’ To them, it’s a *fait accompli* that the visit will be a success because you’re there, which means you’ve accepted the itinerary. Once you’ve done everything on the itinerary, to them the visit has been a success regardless of the content of the discussions and of whether the Americans have gotten the itinerary they wanted. It’s form over function.”

— Former U.S. defense attaché

⁴⁶⁶ Interviews #3 and 9.

⁴⁶⁷ Interview #5; Finkelstein and Unangst, *Engaging DoD*, p. 60.

⁴⁶⁸ Interview #3.

Interacting with PLA hosts

The Chinese take their delegation-hosting duties very seriously, and seek to convey a sense of hospitality and national pride.

Interviewees noted that the Chinese are gracious and extravagant hosts. U.S. military delegations are given police escorts that can stop traffic to allow quicker passage to their destinations; they are given tours of spectacular historical sites, such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, and the Shaolin Temple; and they are treated to lavish multi-course meals at four-star restaurants. At these meals, Chinese officers give eloquent, well-rehearsed toasts and speeches about bilateral friendship and cooperation.⁴⁶⁹

This treatment can make for an enjoyable trip, but it can also give the visitor a false sense that the exchange has been successful and that substantial things have been achieved. As one U.S. military attaché puts it, mil-mil exchanges can be “like Chinese food: it looks great, it tastes great, but an hour later you’re hungry again. People feel good about their visit, and only later say ‘Hey, we didn’t really get anything there!’”⁴⁷⁰

In a study of Chinese negotiating behavior, one American scholar argues that this hospitality sets a tone for negotiations by impressing upon U.S. visitors the grandiosity of China’s “great tradition and future potential” while downplaying its current weaknesses.⁴⁷¹

The Chinese strive to learn about the U.S. military while providing as little information as possible about the PLA.

U.S. visitors often find themselves giving lengthy, detailed briefings to their PLA counterparts regarding U.S. personnel and equipment while Chinese officers take copious notes, only to receive abbreviated, non-specific information in return.⁴⁷²

“My overall impression of them was – ‘guarded.’ For example, I asked them how they coordinated a particular sort of joint operation in the PLA. Their answer was extremely general: ‘We coordinate closely with the Air Force.’...They seemed to be tolerating us, but weren’t willing to have open discussions.”

— U.S. NCO

The PLA almost always speaks with one voice.

U.S. personnel note that PLA members almost always present a united front, hew closely to a single message, and employ uniform rhetoric. One analyst notes, “The consistency

⁴⁶⁹ Interviews #7 and 8.

⁴⁷⁰ Interview #4.

⁴⁷¹ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 1.

⁴⁷² Interviews #4 and 7; Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, p. 68.

with which different officials invoke the same phrasing...reflects what must be written instructions or briefs that they follow closely.”⁴⁷³

This can be a source of consternation for Americans, who find it difficult to have a frank exchange of views with Chinese officials who give “canned” presentations, “stick to their talking points,” and are “very well locked in step.”⁴⁷⁴ As a result, formal meetings can seem like a pointless exercise in which “we talk at them and they talk at us.”⁴⁷⁵

THE PLA’S TWO AUDIENCES

PLA officers’ tendency to speak with one voice is aimed not just at the *external* audience (U.S. military interlocutors), but also at an *internal* one (peers and superiors). One interviewee explained that officers “need to be viewed a certain way by the other Chinese, perhaps to survive in their system. This is a very insular group.”⁴⁷⁶ Thus, a former U.S. military attaché asserted, they are “less likely to express strong opinions in front of their leaders and peers.”⁴⁷⁷ As one U.S. defense official reported:

One guy we dealt with at the Defense Consultative Talks was [in a high position in the PLA]. His predecessor was a master “barbarian handler” and never went off script. But the new guy had an operations background, and when he started to go off message the Foreign Affairs Office people actually interrupted him, or cut him off. He didn’t stay in the job very long. His successor was much more on message.⁴⁷⁸

However, Chinese interlocutors may be more candid in certain settings.

Several interviewees reported that during tea breaks, meals, and other intervals between scheduled events, individual PLA personnel were willing to answer questions or discuss topics that had been too sensitive for larger sessions.⁴⁷⁹ Unfortunately, military exchanges are often so overscheduled that free time is limited and opportunities for informal discussions are rare.

Other interviewees reported that some younger PLA officers are more open and less afraid of talking to foreigners.⁴⁸⁰ One interviewee speculated that older officers are fully invested in their military careers and deeply concerned about impairing their chances for

⁴⁷³ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 49.

⁴⁷⁴ Interviews #1, 8, and 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview #8.

⁴⁷⁶ Interview #18.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview #2.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview #6.

⁴⁷⁹ Interviews #8, 9, and 10.

⁴⁸⁰ Interviews #3 and 8.

promotion. Younger officers, by contrast, often have other attractive career options outside the military, and thus they “have less to lose if they get in trouble for talking.”⁴⁸¹ By the same token, another interviewee noted, PLA officers who are close to retirement are also comparatively open, for similar reasons: they are no longer concerned with safeguarding their career prospects.⁴⁸²

“You often see younger officers talking to foreigners while their commanding officers are totally shaking over in the corner and trying to get them to stop, but they ignore them.”

— U.S. Army foreign area officer

Interviewees also noted that it was easier to have frank discussions with officers at lower-ranking institutions far from Beijing or Military Region headquarters, and with “uniformed academics” at PLA academies or think-tanks.⁴⁸³

Members of the PLA display a strong aversion to delivering “bad news.”

Foreign observers note that members of the PLA seem reluctant to deliver bad news or directly say “no.” This can be traced to the Chinese concern with “face,” the desire of individual PLA members to avoid being held accountable for problems or errors, and the PLA’s desire to keep American military personnel happy on their visits to China.

THE IMPORTANCE OF “FACE”

To have “face” (*mianzi*; 面子) means to have standing within one’s community and to be recognized as someone worthy of respect. To cause someone to “lose face” is to publicly deny him that respect and to treat him as an inferior. “Losing face” is a shameful experience for the loser, and usually a person who causes someone else to lose face will also come off looking bad.⁴⁸⁴ When interacting with the PLA, a foreign visitor must be cautious not to “do things that are set up to embarrass them.”⁴⁸⁵ For example, one U.S. delegation was cautioned to allow the Chinese to supply their own interpreters rather than to insist on using American translators, to avoid making the Chinese look unsophisticated.⁴⁸⁶

The desire to maintain face may make it difficult for a member of the PLA to back down or be seen as compromising. This can result in unwillingness to accept criticism or correction, even if the PLA member has clearly made a mistake.⁴⁸⁷ In negotiations, this may cause a PLA member to dig in his heels on a seemingly small issue, particularly in front of other PLA members. One former U.S. Ambassador to China recently said that successful diplomacy with China often requires that the United States “build ladders for the Chinese to climb down.”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸¹ Interview #3.

⁴⁸² Interview #5.

⁴⁸³ Interviews #1 and 2.

This aversion to conflict applies to the PLA's interactions not just with foreigners but also among its own members. Disagreeing publicly with a superior or a peer can cause a person to lose face, and delivering bad news can be seen as criticism.⁴⁸⁹ The result is that bad news is often toned down or simply not delivered at all.⁴⁹⁰

This means that in interactions with foreigners, PLA personnel tend to put a good face on all situations in order to avoid or smooth over conflict. As one former U.S. military attaché said, "They'll tell you what you want to hear in order to get past a stalemate."⁴⁹¹ It also means that when they must say "no," they will tend to do so indirectly.

HOW THE CHINESE SAY "NO"

PLA members often employ indirect means of refusing requests or turning down proposals, such as:

- **"It is not convenient"** (*bu fangbian*; 不方便). Example: "It is not convenient for you to meet with the Minister today."
- **"It is not clear"** (*bu qingqu*; 不清楚) or **"I cannot say for certain"** (*shuo buding*; 说不定). Example: "I cannot say for certain whether we will be able to visit that facility."
- **"We are embarrassed"** (*bu hao yisi*; 不好意思). Example: "We cannot show you that base because we are embarrassed about its poor condition."

In most cases these statements indicate that the Chinese side has already made up its mind, and the answer is "no."

⁴⁸⁴ For more on "face," see e.g. H.C. Hu, "The Chinese Concept of 'Face,'" *American Anthropologist* 46 (1944), pp. 45-64; David Yau-fai Ho, "On the Concept of Face," *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 81, No. 4 (Jan., 1976), pp. 867-884; Joo Yup Kim and Sang Hoon Nam, "The Concept and Dynamics of Face: Implications for Organizational Behavior in Asia," *Organization Science* 9, 4 (Jul.-Aug. 1998), pp. 522-534. For "face" as it relates to Chinese foreign policy and relations with the United States, see the many writings of Peter Hays Gries, particularly *Face Nationalism: Power and Passion in Chinese Anti-Foreignism*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview #4.

⁴⁸⁶ Interview #12.

⁴⁸⁷ Interviews #13 and 14; *Kongjun Bao*, 26 Sept 2002, p. 3, 24 Oct 2002, p. 2, and 20 Jul 2004, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁸ Former U.S. Ambassador to China, Admiral Joseph W. Prueher, USN (ret.), Ambassador's Panel, "China and the Next Administration: Insights for Managing a Critical Relationship," conference held in Washington, DC, 5 Dec 2008.

⁴⁸⁹ Interview #3.

⁴⁹⁰ Interview #3.

⁴⁹¹ Interview #2.

Negotiating with the PLA

Chinese negotiators seek agreement on basic principles before they will discuss specific issues to be resolved.

According to American studies of Chinese negotiating behavior, Chinese negotiators often insist that discussion of specific issues can proceed only after both sides have committed to a set of basic principles. These principles will serve as guidelines and constraints for negotiation on individual issues.

The Chinese emphasis on basic principles means that they do not share what one American scholar calls “the American fascination with agreements of excruciating detail and execution to the letter of the law.” For the Chinese, it is most important to achieve a “spirit of agreement.”⁴⁹²

The Chinese side often seeks to avoid making incremental concessions.

Chinese and American negotiators hold different views of how to set an opening position. Americans are most likely to employ what Henry Kissinger has called the “salami-slicing method”: they normally begin negotiating from a position that is far more favorable to their interests than they expect the final agreement to be. They expect that the other side will do the same, and that a compromise will be reached through a process of incremental concessions, or “slices.”⁴⁹³

According to a former U.S. military attaché, while “Americans expect to bend a little during discussion,” the Chinese “come to the table with a hard position.”⁴⁹⁴ They expect that the final point of convergence will be very close to this opening position. The main purpose of negotiations for the Chinese is not to exchange incremental concessions, but rather to minimize opposition to their point of view by persuading the other side that the Chinese position is correct.⁴⁹⁵

PLA negotiators understand that Americans are prepared to move away gradually from their opening position as negotiations proceed. Therefore, they may seek to test how much ground the Americans will concede before the Chinese side has to move at all.⁴⁹⁶

The Chinese normally make concessions only when they believe they know for certain the Americans’ true bottom-line position. When they judge that all the “give” in the

⁴⁹² Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table*, p. 14.

⁴⁹³ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 753.

⁴⁹⁴ Interview #1.

⁴⁹⁵ Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table*, p. 16.

⁴⁹⁶ Interview #1; Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 75

American position has been exhausted, they may put forth a compromise position.⁴⁹⁷ As Kissinger noted, the Chinese prefer to determine a reasonable solution and “get there in one jump” rather than engage in the back-and-forth of incremental concessions.⁴⁹⁸

PLA negotiators place great importance on the history of a negotiation.

Interviewees were impressed with the level of preparedness PLA negotiators bring to the table. The Chinese possess a strong sense of the history of a negotiation and an ability to call up minute details of previous meetings. As one Pentagon official emphasized, “These guys keep book.”⁴⁹⁹

PLA personnel keep meticulous notes of everything that is said by their American counterparts, and, after talks conclude, they draft detailed reports that are dutifully filed for use in later negotiations. *These records allow Chinese negotiators to point out when U.S. positions contradict statements or commitments American officials made in earlier exchanges.*⁵⁰⁰

The Chinese convey the image that they are prepared to wait out their foreign counterparts.

The Chinese take pride in their tendency to think in the long term, and their ability to patiently delay action until the ideal moment arrives. Chinese negotiators seek to reinforce this image among their American interlocutors.⁵⁰¹

We’re looking at our clocks when we’re trying to get things done, and they’re looking at the calendar.

— Former U.S. military attaché

The Chinese deliberately use their image of infinite patience as part of their “hard bargaining” strategy. They purposefully convey the impression that they are willing and able to “wait us out.” According to one American study of Chinese negotiating behavior, Chinese leaders believe that Americans “have little sensitivity to the lengthy rhythms of history; they are future-oriented and driven by a sense of urgency derived from notions of efficiency and progress, as well as political institutions that create the rhythm of four-year cycles of leadership authority and policy initiative.”⁵⁰²

To properly respond to China’s tactic of “waiting us out,” it is important to recognize that perception is not always reality. Chinese negotiators are often subject to significant time

⁴⁹⁷ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 50.

⁴⁹⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 753

⁴⁹⁹ Interview #6.

⁵⁰⁰ Interview #3; Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 172.

⁵⁰¹ Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table*, p. 46.

⁵⁰² Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 165.

pressures of their own. One American scholar notes that last-minute concessions by the Chinese often occur just before or even after American negotiators' self-imposed deadlines have passed, and are often signaled by the intervention of senior leaders to "cut the knot" of a deadlocked negotiation.⁵⁰³

The real decision-makers are often not at the negotiating table.

In many negotiations, the Chinese officers at the table have little personal authority to make decisions. Due to the centralized nature of PLA decision-making, offers made by the American side often have to be "taken back" to leaders in Beijing before agreement is reached.⁵⁰⁴

Pentagon officials note that this is also true with regard to U.S. requests for scheduling changes or access to specific individuals or facilities. These can only be "agreed to in principle" by the Chinese officials with whom the United States directly interacts, who must wait for higher officials in Beijing to sign off on the changes.⁵⁰⁵

Negotiations continue even after an agreement is reached.

Interviewees pointed out that even when the arduous negotiation process detailed above concludes and an agreement is in place, the Chinese side often continues to push for a better deal.⁵⁰⁶ The Chinese see negotiation not as a finite event with a clear end point, but as an open-ended process: *each agreement is only a benchmark in a longer struggle to maximize Chinese interests and an acknowledgement that nothing better can be achieved at that moment.*⁵⁰⁷

In addition, when implementing agreements with the United States, the Chinese will often push for an interpretation of the agreements' terms and intentions that is most favorable to the Chinese side. They may selectively cite the records they have carefully kept of statements (formal and informal) made by the U.S. side during the negotiation process.⁵⁰⁸

"Let's say you're in a shop in China and you agree on a price with the clerk...if they don't go into the back room to talk to their boss, there's no deal. You don't always know how far up the decision is going to go; they may decide not to have it go anywhere, or it could go all the way up to the top....When they say 'we agree,' what they mean is 'I agree that I will take this to my bosses for a decision.'...You have to let them take a break, smoke a cigarette and make some phone calls."

—U.S. Army foreign area officer

⁵⁰³ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁴ Interview #5.

⁵⁰⁵ Interviews #2 and 5.

⁵⁰⁶ Interviews #3 and 6.

⁵⁰⁷ Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table*, pp. 62-63.

How can U.S. personnel make the most of exchanges with the PLA?

Interviewees provided a range of suggestions for U.S. personnel interacting with the PLA.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR U.S. MILITARY DELEGATES AND NEGOTIATORS

- Prepare well.
- Be clear with the PLA about U.S. bottom lines.
- Be patient and persistent.
- Coordinate questions and presentations.
- Send signals of dissatisfaction that the Chinese will understand.
- Be prepared, and cleared, to say “no” and walk away without an agreement.
- Cultivate relationships, but don’t expect too much.
- Develop long-term expertise.

Prepare well.

Several interviewees pointed out that many U.S. military delegations are not sufficiently prepared in advance of their visits to China. This puts them at a considerable disadvantage compared to the Chinese, who evidently spend a great amount of time studying the history of the relationship and American negotiating tactics, and developing a unified view of what is to be achieved through each exchange.

Effective preparation for engaging the PLA greatly depends on the quality of records produced from past exchanges. Interviewees agreed that the U.S. military should emphasize the importance of having personnel maintain and file detailed notes on how events transpired and what their thoughts and impressions were of Chinese behavior and statements.

Be clear with the PLA about U.S. bottom lines.

Interviewees argued that U.S. negotiators’ tendency to remain vague about bottom lines in advance of a negotiation is not as effective a technique in China as it may be elsewhere. The most effective strategy for negotiating with the PLA is for the United States to be upfront about the concrete outcomes it feels must be achieved for the exchange or negotiation to be considered successful. All members of the U.S. delegation should be familiar with these bottom-line objectives, and should be able to speak from the same page about them.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Interview #6; Wilhelm, *The Chinese at the Negotiating Table*, pp. 20-21, 48.

⁵⁰⁹ Interviews #4 and 7; Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 173; Get, *What’s With the Relationship Between America’s Army and China’s PLA?*, p. 20.

Be patient and persistent.

Some interviewees asserted that one of the greatest impediments to progress in the Sino-U.S. military relationship is the pressure placed on U.S. military personnel to achieve concrete outcomes by certain deadlines. The Chinese, while not without time pressures of their own, know that U.S. interlocutors will be under more stress as deadlines approach, and so they give up very little until deadlines are imminent or have already passed.⁵¹⁰

“We must have realistic expectations. We should expect to be stalled, slow-rolled, and milked for whatever we’ve got. We are going to get incremental benefits, over the course of years and years. We have to be persistent, and keep trying alternate approaches.”

— Former military attaché

Henry Kissinger once advised that in negotiations with China “the best means of pressure available to each side was to pretend that there was no deadline.”⁵¹¹ To achieve its objectives, one interviewee suggested, the U.S. side needs to “slow down, expect no results, and wait it out.”⁵¹²

Coordinate questions and presentations.

Several interviewees noted that many U.S. delegations, even those that are well briefed in advance, travel to China with no coordinated strategy for learning about the PLA and conveying information about the U.S. military to the Chinese.

Because U.S. visits to China are highly stage-managed by the PLA, with little time for questions or discussion, interviewees urged that U.S. delegations coordinate their information-gathering in advance to make the most efficient use of scant opportunities. This may involve prepping particular delegation members to ask specific questions.⁵¹³ One interviewee recommended sending questions in advance to Chinese contacts; they may be able to get advance permission from their superiors to discuss certain issues, but cannot take the initiative on the spot to answer unexpected questions.⁵¹⁴

Interviewees also recommended that American military delegations actively seek out opportunities for informal discussion with Chinese personnel. These may include breaks between presentations, shared meals, travel time, or any other occasion during which Chinese and American personnel mingle informally. Too often, one interviewee pointed out, during meals the Americans choose to sit at their own table, wasting opportunities for unstructured conversation with their Chinese counterparts.⁵¹⁵ U.S. personnel should

⁵¹⁰ Interview #2; Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 7.

⁵¹¹ Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 145.

⁵¹² Interview #2.

⁵¹³ Interview #9; Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, p. 70.

⁵¹⁴ Interview #17.

avoid doing this, and should also seek out Chinese personnel most likely to be candid with them, including junior officers and those about to retire. The language barrier between U.S. and Chinese personnel may limit the opportunities to hold such conversations, but so far as possible these opportunities should be pursued.

Another interviewee noted that U.S. personnel often make presentations that are not well tailored to their Chinese audience, containing too much American military jargon and acronym-speak. Presentations should be broad, concise, and well-prepared.⁵¹⁶

Send signals of dissatisfaction that the Chinese will understand.

As noted before, the PLA uses meetings and agendas as a way of expressing discontent with certain aspects of the bilateral relationship. Several interviewees argued that *the U.S. side should not only learn to interpret the signals that the Chinese are sending, but also learn how to send similar signals to the Chinese.*

Interviewees pointed out that the U.S. military can convey messages of discontent to the Chinese through its handling of mil-mil events, either deliberately or inadvertently:

Deliberately, by canceling or shortening visits. Prior experience suggests that canceling or shortening planned visits of U.S. military officials to China may send a stronger message to the PLA than going along with existing itineraries and trying to verbally convey dissatisfaction during those visits.

Inadvertently, by curtailing access to high-level officials. When the Chinese are not able to get the meetings they want, they may take it as a snub even when it is not intended as such. As one U.S. Army foreign area officer said, “Sometimes our people just really aren’t available – a guy has to go have a meeting about Iraq. But what they hear is, China isn’t important, or the U.S.-China relationship is less important to us than the U.S.-Iraq relationship, and they take it as a snub.”⁵¹⁷

Be prepared, and cleared, to say “no” and walk away without an agreement.

Negotiators from the U.S. military naturally go to China hoping that they will bring tangible agreements home with them. However, interviewees emphasized, U.S. personnel

⁵¹⁵ Interview #2; Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, p. 71.

⁵¹⁶ Interview #8.

⁵¹⁷ Interview #3.

must be prepared to walk away from a negotiation if the only other option is “giving away too much.”⁵¹⁸ Interviewees noted that PLA negotiators are not hesitant to leave proposals on the table, but Americans too often accept unfavorable agreements in order to obtain concrete outcomes before self-imposed deadlines.⁵¹⁹

Similarly, one interviewee suggested, U.S. delegations should not accept itineraries that do not satisfy U.S. needs, out of a desire not to rock the boat or offend the sensitivities of Chinese hosts. American acceptance of PLA itineraries sends the signal, often incorrect, that a delegation fully approves of how the visit has been handled by the PLA.

“The U.S. always wants to make it work – we always care, and the Chinese know it...we want to feel like we’ve accomplished something, no matter what the cost. It’s like taking a piece of land in a campaign – we don’t want to turn around and go home and say, ‘I didn’t take the hill.’ But in the end we need to be able to say, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t want that, I’d rather just get nothing.’”

— U.S. military attaché

Cultivate long-term relationships, but don’t expect too much.

It clearly serves U.S. interests to identify and form friendly ties with promising young PLA officers who appear likely to rise to important positions. One analyst argues that U.S. personnel can make good use of these connections during times of stability in the bilateral relationship. They can serve to facilitate communication to “dissuade the PLA and its civilian leadership from taking courses of action inimical to U.S. interests and disabuse them of misperceptions.”⁵²⁰

However, the same analyst noted, the United States should have realistic expectations. Most notably, the United States has seldom been able to count on its network of relationships with PLA officers to relieve tensions in times of crisis.⁵²¹ One interviewee noted that even though the PLA expects its “old friends” to support policies and solutions sympathetic to China’s interests, they do not appear to see this as a reciprocal obligation.⁵²²

Develop long-term expertise.

Finally, interviewees argued that in the long term the U.S. military should devote more attention to cultivating knowledge about China and using China experts in the Sino-U.S. military relationship. Sending a core group of well-informed personnel on multiple trips

⁵¹⁸ Interview #2.

⁵¹⁹ Interview #4; Solomon, *Chinese Negotiating Behavior*, p. 170.

⁵²⁰ Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, pp. 94-95.

⁵²¹ Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management*, pp. 94-95. The EP-3 incident of 2001 is an excellent example of this.

⁵²² Interview #6.

would help improve the continuity of negotiations, convey that the United States is serious about building the relationship, and develop institutional capacities for dealing effectively with the PLA. According to one interviewee, the United States must understand that it needs to “take the long view, create regional experts, and build career-long relationships.”⁵²³

⁵²³ Interview #2.

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Appendix 1: Basic Facts About the PLA

This appendix provides a basic overview of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) force structure and recent reforms, as of early 2009.

China's armed forces

China's armed forces are made up of three components, of which the PLA is only one.⁵²⁴

The **People's Liberation Army (PLA)** refers to China's army, navy, air force, and strategic missile corps. It is under the command of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).⁵²⁵ At about 2.3 million members, it is the largest standing army in the world.⁵²⁶ The PLA consists of active and reserve forces. Reservists, who are estimated to number about 800,000, are not counted in the 2.3 million figure.⁵²⁷

The term "People's Liberation Army" refers to all of the services, not just the army; the name reflects the ground-force orientation of the PLA in its early days as the "Red Army."

In addition to fighting wars, the PLA can be called upon to help maintain public order when civilian authorities determine that such help is needed.⁵²⁸

The **People's Armed Police (PAP)** is a paramilitary force tasked with maintaining security and public order. Estimated at between 660,000 and 900,000 members, it falls under the joint leadership of the CMC and of the central government's State Council, and is the only active-duty security force in China that is part of both the military and civilian administrative systems.⁵²⁹

The **militia** is a reserve force expected to provide the PLA with combat support and manpower replenishment during wartime. It has recently taken part in peacetime security operations, such as disaster relief. Militia units are organized in rural counties, urban districts, and state-owned and private enterprises. They are overseen by local

⁵²⁴ "National Defense Law of the People's Republic of China" (Beijing: Legal Publishing House, 14 Mar 1997), Article 22.

⁵²⁵ Full name: Military Commission of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

⁵²⁶ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008* (Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge, 2008), p. 376; *China's National Defense in 2006* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 29 Dec 2006), IV: "The People's Liberation Army."

⁵²⁷ *The Military Balance 2008*.

⁵²⁸ "National Defense Law of the People's Republic of China"; Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 19.

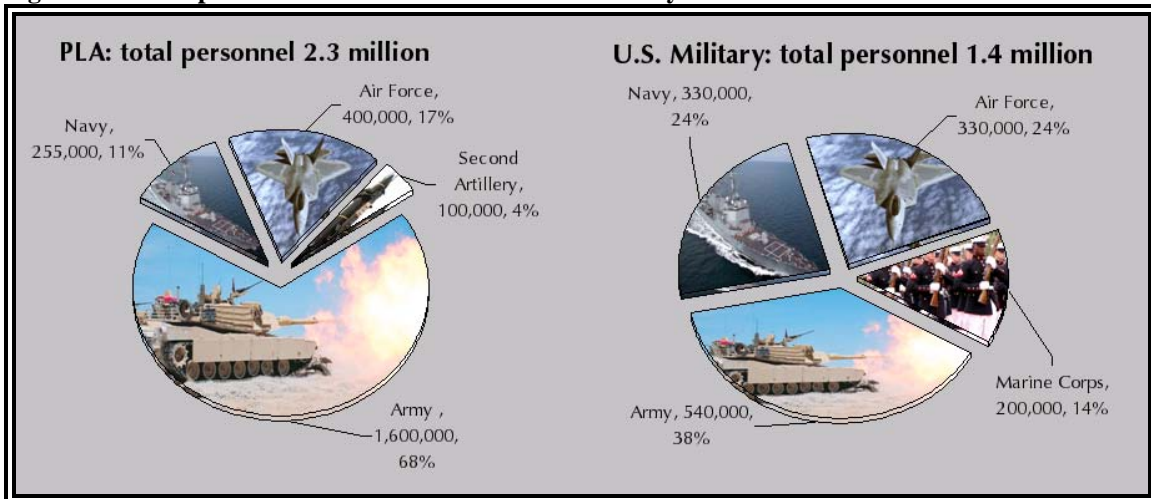
⁵²⁹ Thomas J. Bickford and Frederic Vellucci, *The Chinese People's Armed Police: Organization, Roles, and Missions*, CNA Research Memorandum D0018781.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2008), pp. viii, 5.

governments and Party committees as well as by local military units.⁵³⁰ Many militia members are former soldiers who were demobilized after two years of conscription.⁵³¹ China's 2008 National Defense White Paper asserts that between 2006 and 2010 China plans to reduce total militia forces from 10 million to 8 million.⁵³²

PLA services

The PLA is divided into three services – the army (PLA Army), navy (PLA Navy, or PLAN), and air force (PLA Air Force, or PLAAF) – and one independent branch that functions as a service, the strategic missile force (Second Artillery). The PLA is dominated by ground forces, though in recent years it has put more resources into building up its maritime and air power capabilities.⁵³³ The Chinese government does not release official figures on the size of each of its services, but outside sources estimate the breakdown of services roughly as follows.

Figure A-1: Comparison of Chinese and American Military Personnel⁵³⁴



Personnel

The PLA divides its active-duty personnel into three categories: conscripts, NCOs, and officers. While the PLA does not publicize its force proportions, estimates for the different categories as of 2008 are as follows:

⁵³⁰ *China's National Defense in 2006; China's National Defense in 2004* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2004).

⁵³¹ "Military Service Law of the People's Republic of China," *Xinhua*, 30 Dec 1998.

⁵³² *China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2009), IX: "National Defense Reserve Buildup."

⁵³³ See, e.g., *China's National Defense in 2006*, II: "National Defense Policy."

⁵³⁴ PLA numbers from *The Military Balance 2008*; Blasko, p. 20. U.S. numbers as of September 30, 2008; updated monthly, at <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd/mil/personnel/MILITARY/ms0.pdf>.

- Conscripts: 800,000
- NCOs: 800,000
- Officers: 700,000⁵³⁵

Conscripts

All young Chinese men are required to register with their county or municipal military service office when they turn 18, and they remain eligible for conscription until the age of 22. Young women may also volunteer for active duty or be called up “depending on the needs of the military,” but they are not normally required to register.⁵³⁶ The PLA requires that one-third of conscripts come from urban areas and two-thirds from rural areas.⁵³⁷

Although millions of young men become eligible for conscription every year, the PLA requires only a few hundred thousand new conscripts; in fact *only a very small proportion of the eligible population – probably less than five percent – ever joins the military.*⁵³⁸ There are many ways of avoiding conscription, and in the end few people join the military who don’t want to.

In 1999, the mandatory conscription period was reduced from three or four years to just two years. At the end of the conscription period, conscripts may follow one of three paths: they may be demobilized and return to civilian life; they may apply to become non-commissioned officers (NCOs); or they may take military academy entrance exams and eventually become officers.⁵³⁹

One-half of the conscripted force turns over at the same time each year

Conscription and basic training are carried out as part of an annual cycle:

- On November 1, potential conscripts report for screening.
- By around February 1, new conscripts have completed their initial processing and basic training.
- Between late October and mid December, conscripts who have completed their two-year obligation are demobilized.

⁵³⁵ *The Military Balance 2008*; Zhang Yunpeng and Xia Hongping, “PLA NCOs Grow to Vital Force in Modernization Drive,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 12 Nov 2008.

⁵³⁶ “Conscription Work Regulations,” *Xinhua*, 5 Sept 2001.

⁵³⁷ Qin Lichun and Deng Zhiqiang, “This Life has a Reason to Make Us All March Together,” *Kongjun Bao*, 14 Feb 2006, p. 3.

⁵³⁸ Kenneth Allen and James Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Enlisted Forces*, CNA Research Memorandum D0014253.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), p. 53.

⁵³⁹ Allen and Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Enlisted Forces*, p. 34.

Very few conscripts are Party members, largely because the two-year conscription period is shorter than the length of time it often takes to apply for Party membership.

NCOs

The PLA decided to establish a formal NCO corps in 1998 and implemented this decision the following year.⁵⁴⁰ PLA enlisted personnel who become NCOs after completing their conscription period may remain on active duty for up to 30 years. NCOs may also be recruited directly from the civilian sphere, if they have useful professional or technical skills; the percentage of NCOs recruited this way is rising, though most NCOs still come from the enlisted force.⁵⁴¹ A diagram on career paths for PLA enlisted personnel can be found in Appendix 3.

PLA personnel terminology		
“Cadre” (<i>ganbu</i> ; 干部)	=	Officer
“Soldier” (<i>shibing</i> ; 士兵)	=	Enlisted personnel
“Officers and men” (<i>guanbing</i> ; 官兵)	=	Officers and enlisted personnel

NCOs hold many key technical billets in the PLA, and their responsibilities are increasing. Some receive professional military education (PME), either through training organizations or correspondence courses, or (less commonly) through a special NCO program at a military academy or an NCO school.⁵⁴²

Many tasks performed by NCOs in the U.S. military are done in the PLA by junior officers. U.S. visitors report being surprised at the relatively limited authority that PLA NCOs seem to have.⁵⁴³ For instance, as one USAF officer observes, in the U.S. military senior NCOs can sign off on the air-worthiness of an aircraft, while in the PLA that task would fall to a junior officer.⁵⁴⁴ These visitors note that the PLA is interested in understanding foreign militaries’ use of NCOs.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁰ Su Ruozhou, “Major Reform in Our Army’s Service System – Yang Zhiqi, director of the Military Affairs Department of General Staff Headquarters, Answers Reporters’ Questions on Military Service Regulations,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 13 Jul 1999, p. 2.

⁵⁴¹ *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008*, p. 46; Blasko, p. 52.

⁵⁴² “NCOs Dream of a ‘A University Without Walls,’” *Zhongguo Jiaoyu Bao*, 26 Jul 2005; Yang Yangshen, Duan Yueshan, and Su Ruozhu, “Reform of Chinese Army’s NCO System Brings Historic Change to Military Personnel Structure,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 13 Oct 2004; PLA General Staff Department Military Affairs Department, “Opinions on Strengthening the Development of a Talented NCO Contingent” (*guanyu jiaqiang shiguan rencai duiwu jianshe de yijian*; 关于加强士官人才队伍建设的意见), 2005.

⁵⁴³ Interviews # 1, 9, 10, 12, and 15.

⁵⁴⁴ Interview #9.

⁵⁴⁵ Interviews #1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, and 15.

Table A-1: Three major differences between the U.S. and PLA NCO systems

U.S. Military	PLA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCOs have rotational assignments • NCOs take on increasing leadership responsibilities as they progress in their careers • There is an enlisted advisor system through which NCOs advise officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCOs usually stay in the same unit for their entire career • NCO’s highest leadership responsibility is as a squad leader • NCOs have little influence on decision-making and few formal channels for communicating with officers

Officers

There is a far higher proportion of officers in the PLA than in the U.S. military – they make up perhaps as many as a third of total PLA personnel, compared with just 16 percent in the U.S.⁵⁴⁶ PLA “officers” (also identified as “cadres”) also include “civilian cadres,” who are comparable to U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) civilians.⁵⁴⁷

New PLA officers are required to have a four-year bachelor’s degree or three-year “senior technical” degree. Officers may take one of two paths to a commission:

- **Graduating from a military academy.** The vast majority of PLA officers still come from military academies, of which there were 63 in 2005.⁵⁴⁸
- **Being commissioned from a civilian college.** Since 1999, the PLA has pushed for a majority of officers to come from this path, though the change has been slow to take root.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁶ 2006 *Uniformed Services Almanac* (Falls Church, VA: Uniformed Services Almanac, Inc, 2006), p. 251.

⁵⁴⁷ Allen and Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Enlisted Forces*, p. 35; Lei Yuanshen, “Formal Presentation at CISS-IDA-CNA Workshop at CISS,” Beijing, 27 Mar 2006.

⁵⁴⁸ Chen Liangyu, Sun Wei, Lu Li, *Education and Management of Cadets at Military Schools (junxiao xueyuan jiaoyu yu guanli; 军校学员教育与管理)* (Beijing: National Defense University Press, Dec 2003), p. 20.

⁵⁴⁹ “PLA Rank Regulations” (*zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junguan jun xian tiaoli; 中国人民解放军军官军衔条例*), at http://www.gov.cn/banshi/gm/content_63642.htm.

PLA officers follow one of five career tracks:

- Command (sometimes called the “military” track)
- Political
- Logistics
- Equipment
- “Special technical officers,” who are responsible for equipment maintenance, repair, research, development, and testing⁵⁵⁰

Officers generally spend their entire careers in a single track; the major exception is political officers, who often start in a command track and are expected to continue to receive command training throughout their career. PLA officers also usually spend most of their career in a single geographic location, until they reach a position at the level of a deputy Military Region leader. Command and political officers are nearly always Party members. The higher officers rise, the more likely it is that they will join the Party.

A diagram on career paths for PLA officers is in Appendix 4.

Women in the PLA

Women comprise about 12 percent of the PLA’s active-duty forces. They tend to be restricted to a small number of technical professions, including communications and nursing; there are also some female political officers. Some PLA units comprise both men and women, but the vast majority are single-sex.

Female enlisted personnel may, like males, apply for admission to officer academies; however, they may apply for only a limited number of specialties (including nursing, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications, journalism, and finance); they are required to score higher than males on the admissions exam; and a far smaller proportion are admitted.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁵⁰ “Technical officers” may not be able to progress past the two-star level; traditionally these positions have also been less desirable, but they may become higher-status with the growing PLA emphasis on military modernization. Elizabeth Hague, “PLA Career Progressions and Policies,” in Roy Kamphausen, Andres Scobell, and Travis Tanner, eds., *The ‘People’ in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), p. 264.

⁵⁵¹ Zheng Shaobo, *Practical Dictionary for Enlisted Personnel (shibing shiyong cidian; 士兵实用辞典)* (Beijing: Academy of Military Science Publishing House, 2005), p. 370.

Doctrinal change and force restructuring

Since Deng Xiaoping came to power in the late 1970s, the PLA has made major changes in its doctrine and its force structure. These have been well-documented elsewhere; we provide a list of recommended readings on the topic in Appendix 7. Here we provide a brief summary of the most significant shifts since 1985.

1985: In his “**Strategic Decision**,” Deng Xiaoping announced that “peace and development” had replaced “war and revolution” as the keynote of the times. With this decision, the PLA was told that it no longer needed to plan for “total war, major war, [or] nuclear war” and could instead shift focus to reforming and modernizing its forces to meet the challenges of more limited, local wars. The PLA began a process of massive force restructuring, consolidating its Military Regions from 11 to 7 and reducing its manpower by one million people. Further personnel reductions followed in 1997 and 2003.

1993: Jiang Zemin issued the *National Military Strategic Guidelines for the New Period*. These stated that future wars would be limited in scope, short in duration, joint-focused, and dependent on improved logistics and information capabilities. The *Guidelines* were amended in 2002 and 2004, but the 1993 policy remains foundational for today’s PLA.

1995: Jiang Zemin announced the “**Two Transformations**” policy of reform and modernization for the PLA. These included:

- A shift from “fighting local wars” to “fighting and winning local wars under modern, high-tech conditions.”
- A shift from a military focused on quantity to one focused on quality.

1999: The “**New Generation Operations Regulations**” shifted operational focus from long campaigns of attrition to short “campaigns of paralysis,” particularly focusing on joint operations. Over the next few years each of the PLA services issued new doctrine and training regulations in accordance with this new guidance.

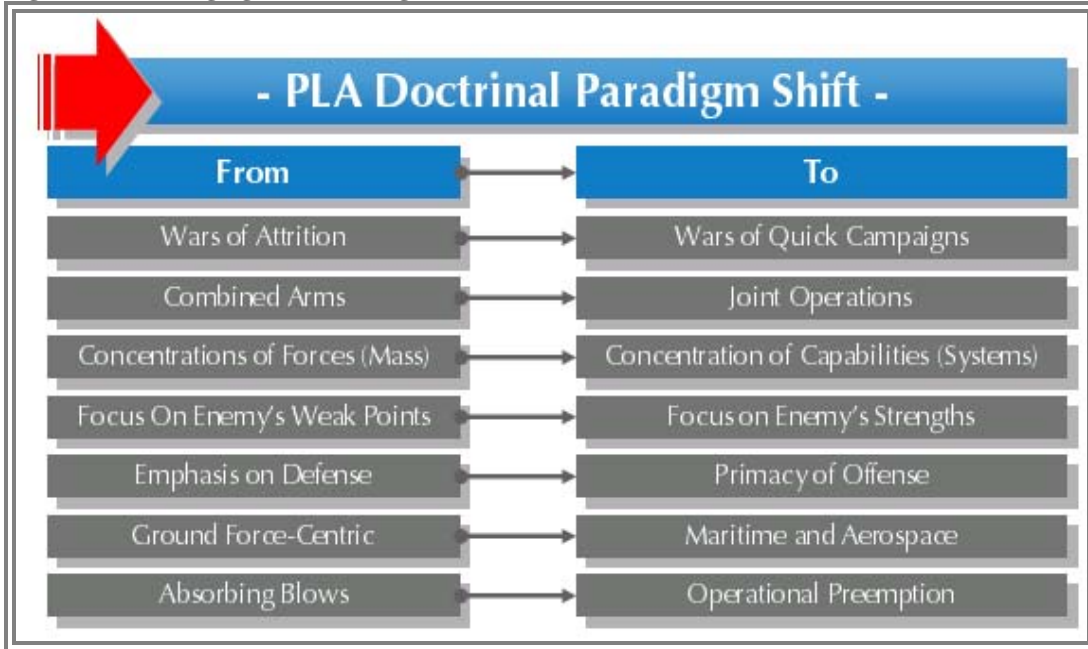
2002: Jiang Zemin **adjusted the “Strategic Guidelines” to encompass a new focus on “informatized warfare,”** i.e. warfare whose success rests on the use of information technology, communications, and high-tech weaponry.

2004: Hu Jintao announced the “**New Historic Missions in the New Period of the New Century**” which laid out the Party’s missions for the PLA. These included:





- Reinforcing the armed forces’ loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party
- Ensuring China’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and domestic security
- Safeguarding China’s expanding national interests
- Ensuring world peace.

The overall orientation of these changes is summed up in the following chart:

Figure A-2: Changing PLA Paradigms

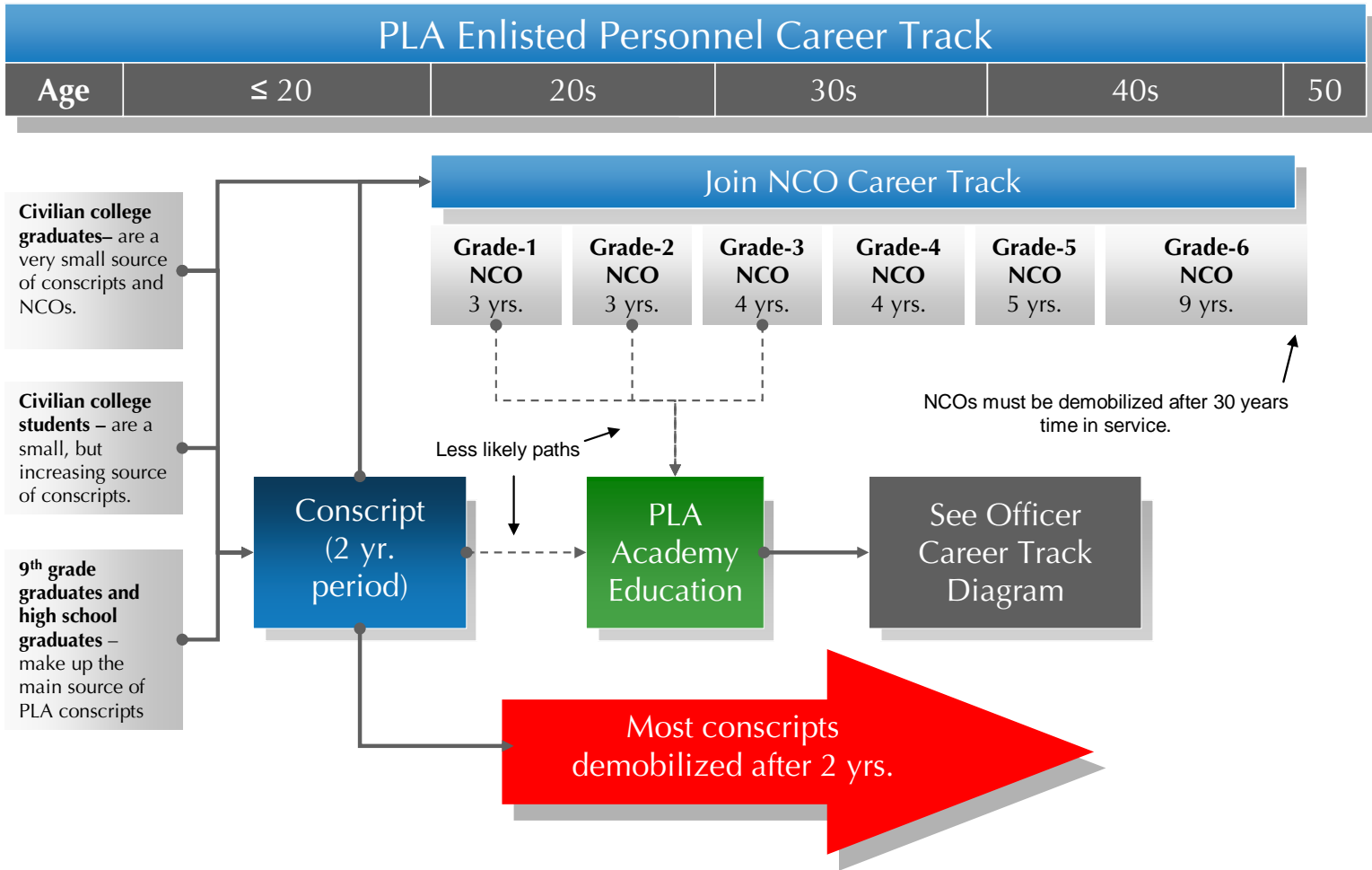


Appendix 2: A Sampling of PLA Heroes⁵⁵²

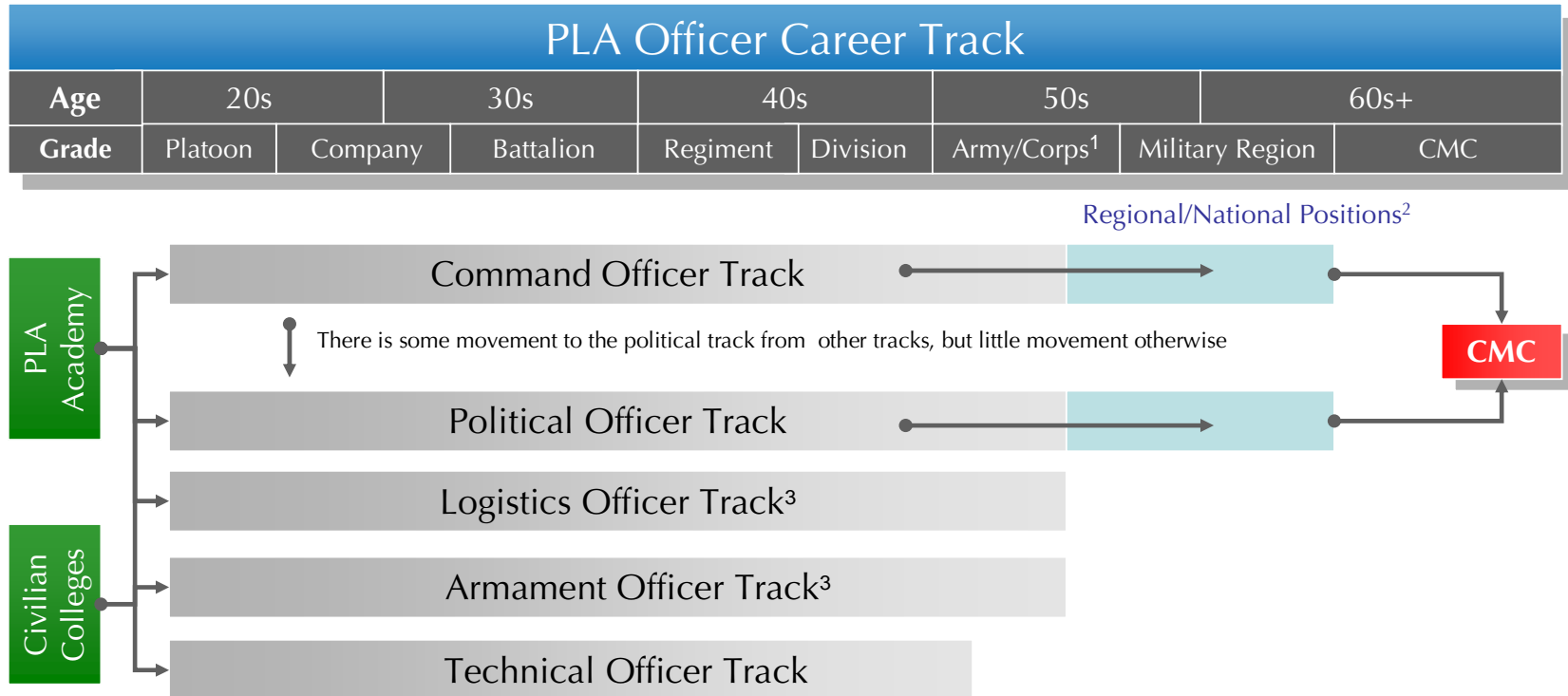
Name	Who was he?	How did he die?	Why is he a hero?
Zhang Side (1915-1944) 	Born into a poor peasant family, Zhang joined the Red Army and later the CCP. He participated in the Long March and fought against Japan in World War II.	A kiln collapsed on him in while he was burning charcoal, a task to which the Party had assigned him.	After his valiant service in one unit, he was transferred to another unit where he was assigned an inferior position. However, Zhang “subjected to the needs of the revolution without any complaint and thought of individual success and failure.” He “sacrificed his young life” to the revolution, “worked hard and perfectly fulfilled his duties.”
Dong Cunrui (1929-1948) 	Dong joined the Communist army at a young age, and soon became a Party member. He fought in the Chinese civil war.	He blew up an explosive package he was holding, in order to destroy a KMT bunker that could not otherwise be breached.	He had “mastery of military skills and intelligence and bravery on the battlefield,” and “without hesitation ... sacrificed his 19-year-old life” for the revolution.
Lei Feng (1940-1962) 	Born into a peasant family, Lei Feng was orphaned at a young age. He joined various Communist youth organizations and later joined the PLA, where he was assigned to be a driver in a transportation unit.	Died of a “transport accident” when a telephone pole, knocked over by a truck he was directing, fell on him.	He was extremely devoted to his work, and “made extraordinary achievements in ordinary positions.” He was “modest and prudent” and “not self-satisfied.” In addition, Lei was “loyal to the Party, the people, the country, and socialism” and “studied hard Mao Zedong’s work.”
Li Xiangqun (1978-1998) 	Li joined the PLA at 18 and joined the Party two years later. He participated in relief efforts following massive floods in the Yangtze River valley in 1998.	He “was exhausted and fell in a faint on the dam” that he was working to repair.	“In every emergency task, Li was always the first.” He sacrificed his life for the good of his countrymen.

⁵⁵² These soldiers have been identified by the PLA as “honored models” and “heroic figures.” They were all promoted on the *Jiefangjun Bao* website in honor of the 80th anniversary of the founding of the PLA in 2007. The information given here comes from that site: http://english.chinamil.com/cn/site2/special-reports/80thannofpla/node_12570.htm

Appendix 3: Enlisted Personnel Career Paths



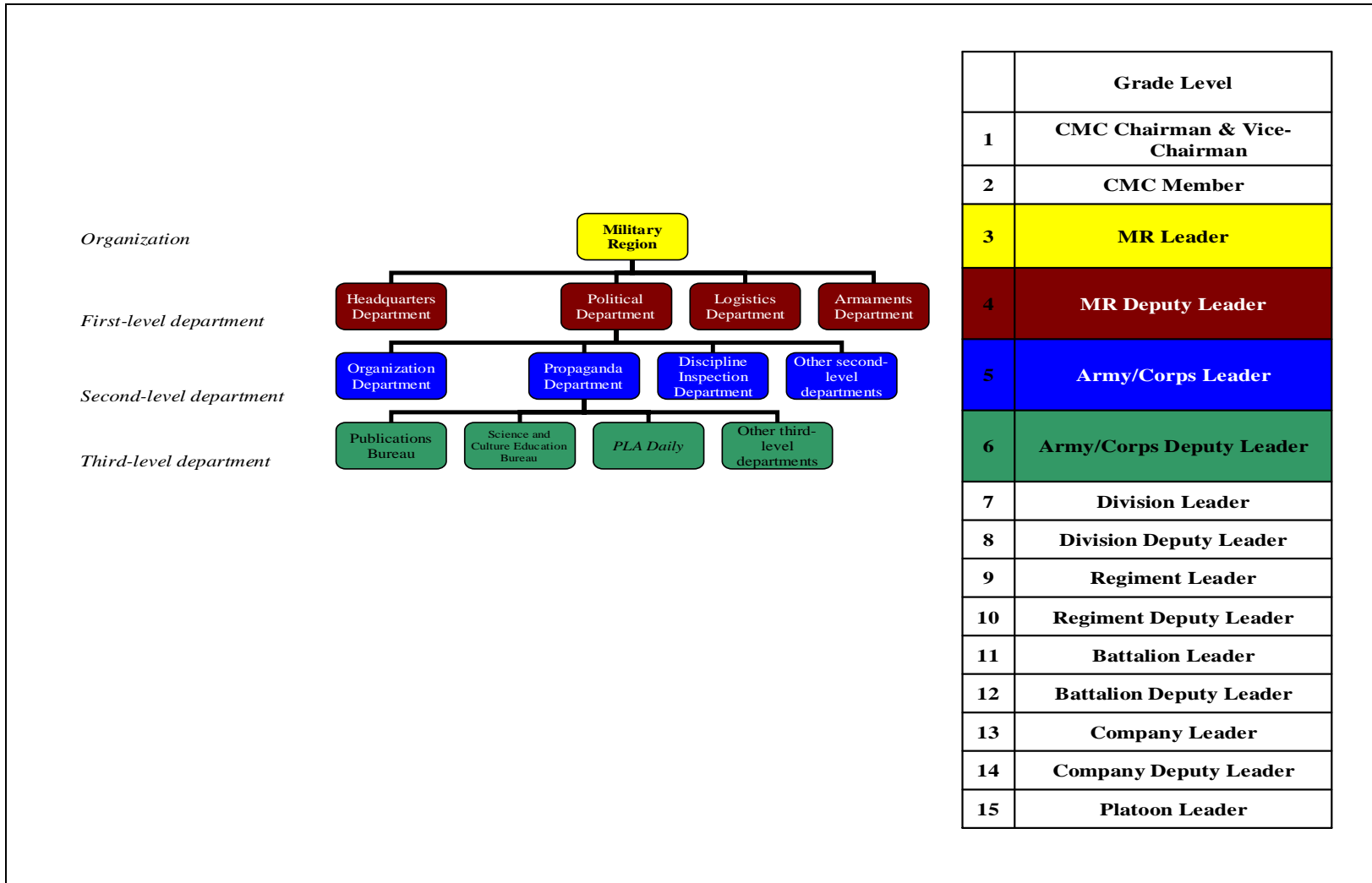
Appendix 4: Officer Career Paths



Notes:

1. The PLA term *jun* can be translated as either “army” or “corps.”
2. When a PLA officer reaches a position at the grade level of MR deputy leader or above, he may begin to move geographically, away from the unit in which he has served his entire career.
3. Logistics and armaments officers tend not to go above a grade of “army/corps leader.”

Appendix 5: Institutional Grades



Appendix 6: PLA Grades and Ranks

RANKS GRADES	GEN / ADM	LTG / VADM	MG / RADM	SCOL / SCAPT	COL / CAPT	LTC / CDR	MAJ / LCDR	CPT / LT	1LT / LTJG	2LT / ENS
CMC Vice Chairman	X									
CMC Member	X									
Military Region Leader	X	X								
Military Region Deputy Leader		X	X							
Army Leader		X	X							
Army Deputy Leader			X	X						
Division Leader			X	X						
Division Deputy Leader / Brigade Leader				X	X					
Regiment Leader / Brigade Deputy Leader					X	X				
Regiment Deputy Leader						X	X			
Battalion Leader						X	X			
Battalion Deputy Leader							X	X		
Company Leader								X	X	
Company Deputy Leader								X	X	
Platoon Leader									X	X

Appendix 7: Suggested Further Readings

PLA personnel systems, organizational structures, and recent reforms

- Blasko, Dennis J. *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*. New York: Routledge, 2006
- Burkitt, Laurie, Andrew Scobell, and Larry M. Wortzel, eds. *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army at 75*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2003.
- Flanagan, Stephen J. and Michael E. Marti, eds. *The People's Liberation Army and China in Transition*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2003.
- Kamphausen, Roy, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner, eds. *The 'People' in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008.
- Mulvenon, James C., and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds. *The People's Liberation Army as Organization: Reference Volume 1.0*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002.
- China's Navy 2007*. Washington, DC: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2007.
- Puska, Col. Susan M., ed. *People's Liberation Army After Next*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2000.
- Shambaugh, David. *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.
- Wortzel, Larry M., ed. *The Chinese Armed Forces in the 21st Century*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1999.

PLA doctrinal change

- Finkelstein, David M. *Evolving Operational Concepts of the Chinese People's Liberation Army and Navy: A Preliminary Exploration*, CRM D0007031.A1/Final. Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2002.
- Hartnett, Daniel M. "Toward a Globally Focused Chinese Military: The *Historic Missions* of the Chinese Armed Forces," CME D0018304.A1. Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2008.
- Mulvenon, James and David M. Finkelstein, eds. *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*. Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2005.
- Yao Yunzhu, "The Evolution of Military Doctrine of the Chinese PLA from 1985 to 1995," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 2 (Winter 1995), pp. 57-80.

Chinese military history and traditions

Graff, David A. and Robin Higham, eds. *A Military History of China*. Boulder: Westview Press, 2002.

Li Xiaobing. *A History of the Modern Chinese Army*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

Mao Zedong. “Pay Attention to Economic Work” (1933); “Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War” (1936); “On Guerrilla Warfare” (1937); “On Protracted War” (1938); “The Concept of Operations for the Northwest War Theater” (1947); “The Present Situation and Our Tasks” (1947). All available online at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/date-index.htm>.

Ryan, Mark A., David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt, eds. *Chinese Warfighting: the PLA Experience Since 1949*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003.

Sawyer, Ralph D., ed. *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

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About the Authors

Alison Kaufman is a Research Analyst with CNA China Studies. She has authored or co-authored recent CNA reports on U.S.-China economic relations, Chinese military soft power, and the PLA's views on military transparency. She has also participated in several bilateral conferences on political and military issues. Her research interests include Chinese nationalism, U.S.-China relations, and changing Chinese political ideologies.

Dr. Kaufman holds a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, with a focus on Chinese political philosophy, and B.A. in East Asian Studies from Harvard University. Prior to joining CNA, she worked for the World Bank's China program, at China Radio International in Beijing, and as a subject matter expert on Chinese affairs for the Monitor Group. She has studied and worked extensively in mainland China and in Taiwan.

Peter Mackenzie is an Associate Research Analyst with CNA China Studies. He has authored or co-authored recent CNA reports on the PLA's "democratic" principles and institutions and on trends in Taiwan's civil-military relations. His research interests include PLA modernization, Chinese political reform and social change, PRC elite leadership dynamics, U.S.-China Track II diplomacy, and China-Africa relations.

Mr. Mackenzie holds a Master's Degree in Public Policy and Administration from Columbia University and a Bachelor's Degree in Asian Studies from Williams College. Prior to joining CNA, he worked for the National Committee on United States-China Relations, the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the Atlantic Council. He has lived and worked extensively in Africa and in China.

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1. PLA Air Force soldiers shout slogans during a welcoming ceremony for Laos' Prime Minister Bouphavanh in Beijing, 2007. Reuters: Jason Lee
2. PLA Marine competes in an obstacle course in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
3. PLA recruits stand still as they balance books on their heads during training session at military base in Hefei, 2008. Reuters: Jianan Yu
4. PLA Marines in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
5. PLA Marine Honor Guard, Zhanjiang, 2006. Lt. Col. Marcus Annibale, USMC
6. Chinese and American Marines participate in a rifle competition in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
7. Chinese and American Marines compete in an obstacle course in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
8. Officers from the PLA Navy, ground forces, and Air Force salute in the latest upgrade uniform, Beijing, 2007. Reuters/China Daily
9. PLA Marine competes in an obstacle course in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
10. PLA Marines in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
11. Soldiers carry an injured woman after rescuing her from the ruins of a collapsed building in Miaoxian, Sichuan Province, 2008. Reuters/China Daily
12. PLA Marine competes in an obstacle course in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
13. PLA Marine competes in an obstacle course in Zhanjiang, 2006. United States Marine Corps
14. Soldiers carry an injured woman after rescuing her from the ruins of a collapsed building in Miaoxian, Sichuan Province, 2008. Reuters/China Daily
15. Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, ADM Timothy Keating, meets Chinese Air Force Lt. General Liu Chengjun in Beijing, 2008. Reuters: Andy Wong
16. Tanks from motorized division of the PLA drive into the "war zone" during a military exercise in Henan Province, 2006. Reuters/China Daily
17. PLA Marine Honor Guard, Zhanjiang, 2006. Lt. Col. Marcus Annibale, USMC
18. Chinese troops march in Tiananmen Square, 1997. Reuters: Will Burgess
19. Zhang Mengyun, 82, bids farewell to PLA Air Force personnel in quake-hit Pengzhou, 2008. Reuters/China Daily

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Marine Corps Intelligence Activity
2033 Barnett Avenue
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5011
COM: (703) 784-6167; DSN: 278-6167

Please direct feedback to:
feedback@mcia.osis.gov

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