



**In This Issue:**

IN A FORTNIGHT  
By Peter Mattis.....1

BEIJING'S POST-BO XILAI LOYALTY DRIVE COULD BLUNT CALLS FOR REFORM  
By Willy Lam.....3

POLITICS AND THE PLA: SECURING SOCIAL STABILITY  
By Dennis J. Blasko.....5

TAIWAN NAVY SAILING AHEAD WITH INDIGENOUS SUBMARINE PROGRAM  
By L.C. Russell Hsiao and Jyh-Perng Wang.....8

EXPLORING UNMANNED DRONES AS AN OPTION FOR CHINA'S FIRST CARRIER  
By Wilson T. VornDick.....11



The People's Armed Police More than the PLA are Key to Stability

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**In a Fortnight**

By Peter Mattis

ZHOU YONGKANG AND THE TARNISHED REPUTATION OF CHINA'S POLICE

The fallout over Politburo member Bo Xilai's removal as Chongqing Party Secretary on March 15 only increased the wave of rumor and speculation sweeping across China after Bo's right-hand man, Wang Lijun, attempted to get political asylum last month at the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu (Xinhua, March 15; "Hu Jintao Draws Blood with the Wang Lijun Scandal," *China Brief*, March 2). As rumors spread about gunshots near Zhongnanhai, speculation began that Zhou Yongkang—the Politburo Standing Committee member with the internal security portfolio—had partnered with Bo in a coup d'état. Zhou appeared to be out of the public eye and reportedly ordered to stay quiet—possibly even under house arrest. He did not disappear from public, however, and there is little reason to link him so strongly to Bo. Even so, this does not mean Zhou's conduct is beyond reproach. The well-chronicled abuses of Bo's anti-organized crime (*dabeiz*) campaigns, the police incident at the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu and the general expansion of an unaccountable security apparatus suggest Zhou's reported troubles may be the result of his failure to control his policy system to some unspoken standard. From Beijing's perspective or at least that of Zhou's factional opponents, this failure to control the internal security apparatus may have damaged China's international reputation, setting back Beijing's plan to present a softer, more sophisticated face to the world.

With Wang safely hidden away in Beijing, Bo removed from his post and order seemingly up in the air, observers turned to Zhou for signs of stability. Zhou's ostensible absence from the public spotlight at a legal propaganda conference only added fuel to the rumors (Central News Agency [Taiwan], March 23; *Want China Times*, March 22; BBC, March 22). The problem with this storyline is that Zhou is so infrequently in the public spotlight. He is so rarely looked for by outside observers, however, that Zhou's absence was only noticed in a time of crisis—and this in a month where he was more publicly active than the preceding three months (December 2011–February 2012) combined based on Xinhua and other official media reports tracking his activities, speeches and appearances. Public appearances already are an inadequate measure of Chinese leaders' political fortunes, but Zhou's troubles seem substantially overstated.

The rumors of such trouble, however, suggest there may be a few sparks smoldering beneath the political haze. As chairman of the Central Politics and Law Committee and key leading groups with internal security responsibility, Zhou is the leading figure in charge of the police, paramilitary and domestic intelligence elements. This apparatus however has not contributed to a positive image of China lately.

The *dabei* campaign in Chongqing has long attracted criticism for its political nature, targeting Bo's political opponents in the city or for raising critical questions about official collaboration with criminal elements ("Chongqing's Mafias Expose Grave Woes in China's Legal Apparatus," *China Brief*, November 4, 2009). While Chinese intellectuals recognize the government's natural responsibility, if not duty, to crack down on organized crime, the problem with Bo's anti-crime campaign was that the targets had more to do with popular or political sentiment than actual crime (Chinaelections.org, March 15; July 12, 2011; *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 2011; *Economic Observer*, January, 12, 2011). The political tenor of the *dabei* campaign violated the norm of keeping the state's police apparatus out of policymaking and politics set after the "Gang of Four" trial and the Cultural Revolution (*People's Daily*, April 5, 1979; Xinhua, June 30, 1979). This is not to say that such abuses have not happened since, but the rumors usually are related to exceptional circumstances, such as Chen Xitong's ouster in 1995 (*Ming Pao*, April 28, 1995).

The police convergence on the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu last month while Wang Lijun was inside drew unwanted foreign attention to what should have been a domestic problem—if not entirely internal to the party itself. Wang reportedly now has been branded a traitor for exposing party secrets, even if what he said to U.S. officials is unknown (*South China Morning Post*, March 7). While Sichuan and Chongqing officials have denied public security elements crossed jurisdictional boundaries—certainly not the reported 70 Chongqing police vehicles—a Chongqing municipality spokesman acknowledge the situation required Mayor Huang Qifan to go to Chengdu (Chongqing News Net, March 5). Sorting out the problem required Beijing, possibly Zhou himself, to dispatch Vice Minister of State Security Qiu Jin to escort Wang to Beijing and sort out what was happening (*Apple Daily* [Hong Kong], February 11; Bloomberg, February 10). Finally, the investigation of Wang exposed a long trail of police corruption from Chongqing to Liaoning (*Ming Pao*, February 11).

Apart from Bo's troublesome activities in Chongqing, well-publicized incidents of China's expanding internal security apparatus—such as actor Christian Bale's run-in with plainclothes police while trying to visit someone under house arrest—have drawn unwelcome attention to the activities ostensibly under Zhou's purview. Domestically, the police are trying to restore public credibility with the "three inquiries, three assessments" campaign and the new leadership of Chongqing's police force has been particularly active since the Wang incident in Chengdu (*China Police Daily*, March 28; "Security Chief's Efforts to Seal Up the Political-Legal Chairmanship," *China Brief*, February 21). Internationally, however, Beijing will have more difficulty trying to rectify the image of a police force unrestricted by law.

Disciplining Zhou may provide a political answer for how to appear to be reining in the police; however, it is unclear how Beijing actually can control the police while executing its favored strategy for preserving stability. Choosing one may involve tradeoffs in the other. China's potential responses to reassert control could undermine its basic strategy for isolating local crises. Pressure to recentralize control over the non-military security forces, including the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the People's Armed Police (PAP), may weaken Beijing's ability to execute its successful "think national, blame

local” strategy to preserve stability (“Wukan Uprising Highlights Dilemmas of Preserving Stability,” *China Brief*, December 20, 2011). Part of what makes this strategy work is how Beijing delegated violence by MPS and PAP forces to local levels, removing the center from direct responsibility in the decision of whether to suppress protestors (“Politics and the PLA: Securing Social Stability,” *China Brief*, March 30). While Beijing may want to reestablish a greater degree of control and some may want to blame Zhou for police abuses, correcting this systemic problem could have unforeseen effects and implications for China’s broader strategy for preserving stability.

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## Beijing’s Post-Bo Xilai Loyalty Drive Could Blunt Calls for Reform

By Willy Lam

The shock downfall of Chongqing Party Secretary Bo Xilai has shattered the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) façade of unity and stability. The past fortnight has witnessed a plethora of rumors about a failed coup d’état supposedly masterminded by Bo in conjunction with Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member Zhou Yongkang, a former party boss of Sichuan who has close links with the charismatic princeling. Other wild stories claimed that Bo had tried to boost his standing within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) by promoting ties with the Chengdu Military Region. Also enjoying massive circulation in China’s cyberspace are unconfirmed reports that Bo had with the help of former Chongqing Police chief Wang Lijun tried to bug the conversations of several PBSC members (*Ming Pao* [Hong Kong], March 22; Bloomberg News, March 21). While the great majority of these tales and innuendo seem to be off the mark, they do confirm serious ills in China’s body politic.

This is despite efforts by the leadership under President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao to shore up stability in the run-up to the 18th CCP Congress, which will witness

a wholesale changing of the guard. First, the apparent unity among the CCP’s disparate cliques is skin-deep and the age-old “anti-corruption card” is still the weapon of choice in factional skullduggery and back-stabbing. Second, military involvements in the party’s internal schisms cannot be ruled out. Despite the sores exposed by Bo’s shenanigans, it is doubtful whether the party elite will heed Premier Wen’s repeated calls for genuine political reform.

An internal party paper, which was circulated among cadres after Bo’s ouster from his Chongqing job, partially has confirmed suggestions that the 62-year-old princeling is being investigated for alleged “economic crimes.” The document said Bo relieved his protégé Wang Lijun—once known as a “national anti-triad hero”—of his police duties after being told that Wang’s underlings were looking into the corruption-related activities of his close kin (Associated Press, March 20; *New York Times*, March 19). Tension between Bo and Wang became so intense that Wang, who was himself under investigation for offenses he allegedly committed when he was a police officer in Liaoning Province, tried to seek political asylum at the U.S. Consulate in Chengdu on February 6 (“Hu Jintao Draws Blood with the Wang Lijun Scandal,” *China Brief*, March 2). Hong Kong papers have reported Bo was in cahoots with the powerful PBSC member Zhou, who oversees the nation’s law enforcement and internal security apparatus. Moreover, one of Zhou’s relatives, who is a millionaire businessman in Chongqing, evidently enjoyed the Bo’s patronage (*Apple Daily* [Hong Kong] March 23). That Bo sought the support of the PLA was attested to by the fact that during an inspection trip to Yunnan Province in early February, he paid a visit to the 14th Army, which was founded by his late father, party elder Bo Yibo. Moreover, in his capacity as Chongqing party chief, Bo has made generous donations to upgrade the equipment and welfare benefits of the Chengdu Military Region, which oversees areas including Chongqing, Sichuan, Yunnan and Tibet (*Apple Daily*, March 20; *Frontline Monthly* [Hong Kong], March 16; *Yunnan Daily*, February 11).

It is little wonder that both in the run-up to and after Bo’s dismissal, President and Central Military Commission (CMC) Chairman Hu and his senior colleagues have made moves to ensure the loyalty of military as well as civilian units. The PLA General Political Department

has since mid-February started a campaign entitled “Put emphasis on politics, pay heed to the national situation, and observe discipline.” The gist of this ideological movement is that officers and soldiers must “maintain the utmost unison in thought, politics and action with the party central authorities, the CMC and Chairman Hu” (People’s Net, March 21; *PLA Daily*, February 17). At the same time, PLA units at the headquarters and regional levels are undergoing a propaganda exercise entitled “We must inherit Lei Feng’s gun.” In the 1950s, Mao Zedong lionized the “proletariat paragon” Lei Feng for his unquestioning loyalty to the party central authorities. According to CMC Vice Chairman General Xu Caihou, CMC Chairman Hu has instructed officers “to push forward the Lei Feng spirit with a strong sense of political responsibility and a high degree of self-consciousness” (*PLA Daily*, March 18; CNTV.com [Beijing], February 29).

In a recent talk to mid-level cadres, Politburo member and CCP Organization Chief Li Yuanhao urged officials to “seriously implement all regulations regarding clean government and discipline.” Li warned “Cadres must under all circumstances be able to uphold their sense of morality, maintain good behavior, and not succumb to corruption” (*Ming Pao*, March 21; China News Service, March 20). Moreover, in a long article in the party’s theoretical journal *Seeking Truth*, Vice President Xi Jinping called upon cadres to “safeguard the purity of the party,” elaborating that “We must resolutely stop and combat any wrong political tendencies that veer from the party’s basic lines” and “Leading cadres must resolutely uphold the party’s principles, charter, goals and policies.” (*Qinshi*, March 16; Xinhua, March 17). The timing suggests these homilies were issued to rein in the centrifugal forces exposed by the Bi Xilai affair.

Will Bo’s political demise—and the blow to his much-noted campaign to resuscitate Maoism—spell a bonanza for political reform? After all, news about Bo having been stripped of his Chongqing post came just one day after Premier Wen raised alarm bells about the “reappearance of the Cultural Revolution.” Speaking at the international conference at the close of the National People’s Congress (NPC), Wen underscored the imperative of political reform after asking the Chongqing party leadership to “reflect deeply” on the Wang Lijun affair (Xinhua, March 14). In the ensuing weeks, many signs pointing

to possible ideological liberalization have emerged. For example, immediately after Bo’s disgrace, the Utopia website (<http://www.wyzxsx.com>), which is China’s most popular quasi-Maoist media, was closed down for a few days (*Ming Pao*, March 19; Radio Free Asia, March 16). More significantly, a number of liberal cadres have circulated reports that Wen has again called for a “re-examination of June 4.” This is a reference to the premier’s view that the CCP should overturn its verdict that the pro-democracy movement of 1989 was a “counter-revolutionary turmoil.” Wen also noted full compensation must be paid to the relatives of students killed during the Tiananmen Square incident. Several Western and Hong Kong media outlets reported last week that Baidu.com and a couple of other popular search engines had for a day or two lifted their long-standing restrictions on taboo words such as the “June 4 incident.” Even pictures and short videos showing students and Beijing residents being gunned down near Tiananmen Square were made available to Chinese netizens (CableTV News Hong Kong, March 23; Financial Times, March 23).

Moreover, major Beijing-based state media have continued to publish pieces in support of a “deeper” stage of political reform. For example, the *People’s Daily* ran a commentary on March 22 titled “We should not lose any opportunity to breach the fortress [of reform] and to overcome difficulties.” The article admitted that signs of “a lack of balance, insufficient coordination and unsustainability” had hit different aspects of China’s economic and political life. “Deepening reform is a strategy that will affect all aspects of the body politic,” the commentary noted. This veritable call to arms echoed a much-noticed earlier *People’s Daily* piece which said “while reform carries risks, failure to reform will bring about dangers” to the political system (*People’s Daily*, February 22).

In an interview with Hong Kong media, noted reformer and Beijing University jurist He Weifang expressed faith that political and ideological reforms championed by Premier Wen would run their course. “Premier Wen really meant when he said,” noted Professor He (*Ming Pao*, March 24). Doubts remain, however, as to whether the numerous calls for unreserved loyalty to the party as well as uniformity of thinking made by senior cadres might militate against the spirit of liberalization. For example, the *PLA Daily* breathed new life into Mao Zedong’s famous

1937 article entitled “In Opposition to Liberalism.” The paper noted in a commentary last week that “each party member and cadre should combat liberalism in a clear-cut fashion ... [by] firming up their political beliefs and obeying the party’s political discipline” (*Wen Wei Po* [Hong Kong], March 23; *PLA Daily*, March 22).

Perhaps the best indicator of whether the Hu-Wen leadership is ready to embrace some form of political reform and “universal values” is whether the authorities will handle the Bo investigations according to the rule of law. The high-profile princeling is expected to keep his Politburo status until the Seventh CCP Central Committee plenum, which will likely be convened about one month before the 18th Party Congress. Despite widespread allegations and innuendo regarding the misdemeanors by Bo and his close kin, the Hu leadership has to convince the Chinese public as well as the international community that Bo-related police and judicial proceedings are being conducted in strict accordance to the law. Moreover, alleged victims of Bo’s “anti-triad movement” in 2009 and 2010, who have claimed that they were locked up and imprisoned according to the kind of “rough justice” associated with the country’s *yanda* (“strike hard”) tradition, should be given opportunities to seek legal redress (*South China Morning Post*, March 9). In light of the brief period last week when state censorship was lifted albeit only on a selective basis, the authorities should give Chinese and foreign journalists ample access in covering the intriguing Bo saga. Steps in these directions may help dispel fears that Premier Wen’s calls for liberalization once again will be buried under the age-old imperative of safeguarding unity and stability.

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## Politics and the PLA: Securing Social Stability

By Dennis J. Blasko

Every year, especially around the time of the National People’s Congress, political campaigns are waged to assure the loyalty of all those who carry guns in China and this year is no different (*PLA Daily*, March 19; Xinhua, March 13). This practice is based upon Mao Zedong’s dictum that “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.’ Our principle is that the Party commands the gun and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party” (“Problems of War and Strategy,” November 6, 1938). Today, in China, the prime operating directive is that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) controls the Chinese armed forces and civilian police force. The CCP demands “absolute loyalty” of the armed forces and police.

In contemporary terminology, the first of Hu Jintao’s historic missions for the Chinese armed forces is to consolidate the Party’s ruling position. Likewise, “maintaining stability in the form of government, political system and social order” is foremost among China’s “core interests.” According to Chief of the General Staff Chen Bingde, these priorities precede maintaining “China’s sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national unity” and national economic development (*China Daily*, May 19, 2011).

Chen’s statement to an audience at the U.S. National Defense University is a clear example of transparency in China’s national strategic intentions. First, maintain the preeminence of the CCP and, second, maintain domestic stability. In doing so, the political system of the People’s Republic of China is preserved and national economic development is possible. In the eyes of Beijing’s leaders, chaos is inevitable without the CCP in control. Since all senior military and police officers are Party members, there is little discernable debate about this perception. Nonetheless, China’s political leaders perceive a variety of internal and external threats to maintaining China’s political system and its national security. As a result, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) General Political Department is tasked with maintaining the military’s fealty to the Party.

## Roles and Missions of the Chinese Armed Forces

The 1997 Law on National Defense defined the Chinese armed forces as consisting of the active and reserve units of the PLA, the People's Armed Police (PAP) Force and the people's militia. The PLA is tasked with "the defensive fighting mission," that is to say its primary role is external security. When necessary, however, it may "assist in maintaining public order in accordance with the law." The PAP is charged with "safeguarding security and maintaining public order"—that is, domestic security. The militia provides support to both missions.

According to the 2006 White Paper on National Defense, in performance of its domestic security operations the PAP "is under the leadership and command of the Ministry of Public Security" at the national-level; at the local government level, its forces come under the "command of the public security organs." In other words, the PAP routinely works with the roughly 1.9 million members of the Ministry of Public Security and its local bureaus to maintain internal stability (Xinhua, February 5, 2009). The PLA is not in the chain of command for these operations.

The 2006 White Paper also states that local PLA commands (at provincial, city and prefecture and county levels) are under the dual-command of their higher military headquarters and "local Party committees and governments at the same level" (*China's National Defense in 2006*). As such, it seems likely that PLA leaders are involved in the decision-making process for internal security operations, but public security officials have the lead.

Thus, the formal, legally established order for maintaining domestic stability in China is first the civilian police (at national and local level), backed up by the PAP and followed by the PLA as the third line of defense. In effect, the PLA's main role in domestic stability is deterrence; however, if deterrence fails, it may become involved after other elements of the government request its help.

## Money Talks

Beijing's preoccupation with maintaining domestic stability has been reflected in reports over the past two years that China's "public security" budget is larger and

growing faster than defense spending. As reported by Reuters, "For 2012, China set combined central and local government spending on "public security" to 701.8 billion yuan (\$111.4 billion), compared with 629.3 billion yuan in 2011, when it grew by nearly 13.8 percent" (Reuters, March 5). Meanwhile the defense budget rose by 11.2 percent to 670.3 billion yuan (\$106.4 billion).

The "public security" budget includes funding for the police, "state security," PAP, courts and prison system at the national and local levels of government throughout China. The number of people involved (1.9 million police, up to 1 million PAP and unknown numbers of "state security," courts and prison system personnel) is greater than the number of active duty PLA (2.3 million) and reserves (over 500,000).

The "public security" budget however complicates part of reasoning behind estimates of "actual" defense spending that conclude it to be significantly higher than the announced figure. Most organizations that attempt to estimate China's "actual" defense spending usually include the PAP budget in whatever larger amount they finally arrive at, despite the 2006 White Paper's statement "The [PAP] has an independent budgetary status in the financial expenditure of the state" (*China's National Defense in 2006*). If the PAP budget is included as part of "public security," then it should not be double-counted as part of "actual" defense spending. These budget classifications also suggest the growing distance between the PLA and its direct support to maintaining internal stability.

## The PLA's Focus

Even without including PAP spending in "actual" defense spending, the PLA's operating budget has grown significantly since 1998. Over these same years, the following reasons for the growth of the announced defense budget have been identified in the series of White Papers: increases in personnel pay and subsidies and improvements in living conditions; new equipment costs; higher training, operations and maintenance costs; compensation for higher prices of food and oil; improvements in the social security system; reimbursement for funds lost as a result of the PLA's divestiture of commercial enterprises; increased expenses for international cooperation; and expenses incurred during disaster relief operations, anti-piracy operations in

the Gulf of Aden and international rescue operations. Though the White Papers do not quantify each of these factors, they are indicative of why the PLA's budget is increasing.

The PLA leadership understands it may be called upon to support police forces in domestic security operations, as it did in March 2008 when a regiment stationed in Lhasa provided transportation support and manned security checkpoints after the police and PAP quelled rioting [1]. The vast majority of the PLA's training effort however is focused on preparing for its external security missions and its ever-increasing non-traditional security tasks.

Most of the new equipment entering the force is not designed for domestic security missions and requires a level of technical sophistication not required in decades past. Likewise, while it is possible to find a few reports of PLA troops conducting anti-riot training, the preponderance of PLA training is focused on experimenting with and improving its joint operational capabilities using a new doctrine issued in the late 1990s and modified in subsequent years. "Force protection" measures to defend PLA installations, units and personnel are implemented routinely and vary as threat conditions change (and may include anti-riot training).

On the other hand, increases in PAP funding have resulted in more armored vehicles and helicopters being assigned to the force. Over the past decade both PAP and civilian police forces have established anti-riot forces, equipped with the most advanced equipment available. These forces practice their tactical techniques quite frequently and openly. Anti-riot training, however, often is associated mistakenly with anti-terrorist training and preparations. There are major differences between anti-riot procedures and anti-terrorist actions; combining of the two in practice could lead to disastrous results and the unwarranted conflation of different types of threats.

### Threats Do Exist... or Do They?

The Chinese government perceives a threat from domestic and international terrorists in its cities and especially in the western regions of the country. This threat is different in type and intensity from the various threats to domestic stability resulting from political, economic and social inequities as well as religious challenges in

all parts of China. The CCP and Chinese government attempt to deter these threats by heavy police and PAP presence in sensitive areas. It is no secret that the Chinese government seeks through a variety of means to prevent any organized opposition to coalesce.

Properly equipped, trained and funded domestic security forces can deter or mitigate many situations that may escalate and endanger stability. Some, not all, PLA units deployed throughout the country provide a third line of deterrence to achieve this goal. Most PLA Navy, Air Force, Second Artillery and many Army units simply are not equipped to conduct anti-riot operations even if some may be useful in anti-terrorist actions.

During the March session of the National People's Congress, President Hu Jintao called for the PLA and PAP "to pay more attention to safeguarding social stability, including that of military personnel." He also stated the PLA and PAP must "focus on national defense and army building," preparation for military struggle (combat readiness), "the development of core military capability and actively engage in military training to increase combat capabilities." All this (and fighting corruption, too) must be done while prioritizing "ideological and political development and unswervingly [upholding] the [CCP's] absolute leadership over the armed forces" (*China Daily*, March 13).

Hu's comments were directed at all the elements of the Chinese armed forces. Each element understands its primary mission and responsibilities and who has the main mission of "social stability." Taken in context with the discussion of army building, training and maintaining loyalty to the Party, there was nothing new in this speech. The way it was presented by the Chinese media may have had a deterrent (psychological) purpose for some parts of the population.

Beijing perceives both internal and external threats that seek to change its form of government. The Chinese government consistently states that China faces "strategic maneuvers and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside" (*China's National Defense in 2008*). As a result, for the past decade, a major theme pounded into the troops by the General Political Department is the persistent threat from outside forces

(non-Party elements) to separate the military from politics, depoliticize the military and “nationalize” the military (*PLA Daily*, March 19).

It is unclear who, if anybody within the PLA, proposes to separate, depoliticize or nationalize the military, but these warnings often reach high peak around the National People’s Congress, shortly after over half a million new recruits have entered the PLA and PAP. These young soldiers have just finished basic training and are entering their units. They are likely targets of this political education campaign as are other sectors of the society where such “deviant” thought may exist. A political campaign based on a non-existent (or minimally existing) straw man would not be unique to China or the CCP.

### Conclusion

With all senior PLA and PAP officers as Party members, it seems likely that most share the Party’s collective worldview and belief in the CCP’s and armed forces’ essential role in protecting China from domestic chaos and external threats. There may be ideological and policy differences of varying degrees among senior Party members and such differences may also be found among senior military leaders. It is unlikely, however, that a senior PLA leader would lead the call publicly for major political reform outside the parameters of the limited discussion allowed. Maintaining social stability is a core interest shared by all of China’s leaders for both public and private reasons. Others disagree.

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Notes:

1. For a complete description of the PLA’s activities in Lhasa in 2008, see Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*, second edition, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 217–18.

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## Taiwan Navy Sailing Ahead with Indigenous Submarine Program

By L.C. Russell Hsiao and Jyh-Perng Wang

The Republic of China (ROC) Navy appears to be moving forward with a long awaited program to build diesel submarines in Taiwan. A domestic submarine program—which was aborted under former President Chen Shui-bian’s administration—reportedly has been resuscitated in President Ma Ying-jeou’s second term. While talk of an indigenous submarine program is nothing new, interest in the program resurfaced after local reports revealed that officials from Taiwan’s Navy had briefed a group of legislators in the Legislative Yuan’s (LY) Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee about the program during a classified meeting in late January (*Taipei Times*, February 21). Legislators from both the ruling-Kuomintang (KMT) and opposition-Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) reportedly attended the meeting. Moreover, unconfirmed reports suggest the program may be farther along than Western observers expect and presumably has the support of Taiwan’s political leadership. The latest move by the Ma administration to move forward with the indigenous submarine development program after his re-election may represent a realignment in the domestic political environment and growing concerns about China’s military deployments.

In the past decade, the fate of Taiwan’s elusive quest for submarines had been the subject of many conspiracy theories. Indeed, the program had been in a state of paralysis practically from the moment former President George W. Bush announced in 2001 that the United States would provide eight diesel-electric submarines to Taiwan. There were many reasons for the delay in the agreement’s implementation. In part, the program fell victim to partisan political gridlock and prevailing bureaucratic interests in Taiwan and the United States, and miscommunication about whether the platform should be acquired via the Foreign Military Sale (FMS) or the Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) channel (Taiwan Link, October 30, 2008). The 2001 submarine purchase plan—presumably the most important of the three major arms procurement targets—was dead in the political water ever since the U.S. Navy’s “independent cost estimate” of \$9.8 billion sparked a boycott by the then opposition-KMT and People First Party (PFP) (*Taipei*

*Times*, February 26). The combination of these factors, in no sequential order, contributed to why there has been little progress on Taiwan's quest for submarines over the past ten years...perhaps until now.

During the classified briefing at the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, a senior official from the ROC Navy apparently asked for the major political parties' support for the Fiscal Year 2013 budget, which included the indigenous submarine program (*Straits Times*, February 20). Ostensibly, the plan is to initially develop a 1,000 or 1,500 ton series with a deliverable prototype within three to four years (*Taipei Times*, February 21). Ever since the submarine program, codenamed the "Sea Star Project," reportedly was aborted under the former DPP administration, there have been constant rumors about high-level meetings in Taipei concerning the program's resurrection and of foreign participation in a feasibility study ("Is Russia Helping Taiwan Build Submarines?" *China Brief*, March 10, 2011; "Taiwan's Submarine Program: Pipe-Dream or Next Big Thing?" *China Brief*, April 16, 2009). So the latest move could be interpreted as a signal that the program has finally reached an important milestone in terms of attaining a consensus among Taiwan's political leaders. On February 21, when asked about the leak regarding the Ma administration's policy on the indigenous submarine program, Ministry of National Defense (MND) Spokesperson Luo Shao-he stated the MND supports an indigenous submarine program. Luo added the MND would welcome such a decision if the relevant technological limitations are resolved (Central News Agency [Taiwan], February 21). The stars finally may be aligning for Taiwan's domestic submarine program.

The Ma administration's apparent decision to pursue the indigenous submarine program, however, did not occur over night. In 2009, several reports citing sources close to the National Security Council (NSC) claimed a study had been commissioned under the directive of the President. According to the Taiwan-based *Liberty Times*, the NSC reportedly issued an order to the Navy to undertake a feasibility study on Taiwan's capability to indigenously build submarines ("Taiwan's Submarine Program: Pipe-Dream or Next Big Thing?" *China Brief*, April 16, 2009). It also was reported "[a]t least five top-level defense meetings have been held to evaluate the possibility that the eight underwater warships can be locally

assembled." The meetings apparently recommended local construction of the submarines and a final report had been prepared for President Ma's approval. Experts at the time believed "Ma is likely to give the green light for the local construction to stimulate the economy and help reduce unemployment" (*China Post*, April 7, 2009).

At around the same time, China Shipbuilding Corporation (CSBC), which is based in the southern-port city of Kaohsiung, revealed "[a] research plan is under way to build submarine hulls up to international standard" (*China Post*, April 7, 2009). In January 2011, the popular Taiwanese weekly *Next Magazine* reported there were plans to introduce Russian Kilo-class technology into its submarine design. According to the report, a task force was organized by the NSC and the Navy, which contacted Russian government authorities back in October 2010 and reached an agreement on technical cooperation to construct pressure hulls for the submarines (*Next Magazine* [Taiwan], January 27).

The CSBC Corporation also had established a "Preparatory Working Group for the Submarine Project," the working group was later codenamed "Project Diving Dragon." The plan involved the collection of information on submarine construction imitating the German 209 model submarines' ship structure, conceptual designs, experimental computer modeling, and established a 46-member research team that invested 20,000,000 NTD (roughly \$678,000) (*Jianchuan zhiishi* [Ship Knowledge], August 2003). The aforementioned CSBC working group was also reportedly sent to France, Spain and Italy to different shipbuilding companies to acquire expertise and seek assistance. These shipbuilding companies were said to have sent specialists to assess Taiwan's defense industries capacity to undertake domestic construction of the submarine. An assessment report is due for official release sometime in 2012 [1].

The change in attitude by the President's closest advisors (NSC, MND and Taiwan Navy) also provides hints of this apparent shift in policy. For instance, when President Ma was elected to his first term in office back in May 2008, the NSC reportedly began holding meetings starting that July to address the submarine issue. Yet, because of the price tag shock of the submarine purchase through the FMS channel, moving forward on the program would have come at a heavy political cost. The government's

approach was to collect as many different inputs from defense experts, planners and industrial specialists. In spite of having more than 10 meetings, the experts, scholars, military leaders and shipbuilding representatives reportedly could not arrive at a consensus (*United Daily* [Taiwan], July 28, 2008). The push toward indigenous development of submarines, however, suggests the political calculations may have changed.

For example, a founding member of the quasi-governmental Straits Exchange Foundation and long time advisor to Ma, Chen Chang-wen (C.V. Chen), who was a strong vocal opponent of U.S. arms sale since 2002, shifted his position to support the indigenous submarine program in a widely-noted editorial in spring 2009. In the article, Chen explained that, in the past, nearly 60 percent of Taiwan's defense budget was being spent on purchasing equipments from abroad, which did not improve Taiwan's technological standards and military capabilities, nor did they help Taiwan's economy or expand business opportunities. On the other hand, if the eight submarines are produced domestically, then about 30 percent of the human labor cost would create business opportunities in Taiwan, and Taiwanese businesses could supply approximately 40 percent of the items for 60 percent of the equipment material cost. Additionally, other associated maintenance costs and investments would be able to help the economy (*China Times*, March 23, 2009).

In the absence of new weapon systems from the United States, Taiwan has taken steps to shore up its indigenous military capabilities—submarine technologies are no exception (Taiwan's Military Shores Up Indigenous Defense Capabilities," *China Brief*, September 10, 2010). Taiwan, however, still will need to acquire special combat and communications systems from abroad. Nearly five years after the 2001 package was announced, and in light of the lack in progress of the submarine purchase plan from the U.S. Navy, in July 2006, the Taiwan Science & Technology Policy Research and Information Center, National Applied Research Laboratories reportedly hatched the "Strategic Proposal to Ingeniously Build Small Submarines" (*Apple Daily* [Taiwan], April 16, 2009). The plan, however, needed the Chen administration's approval to fund a blueprint to develop a 500-ton, near-shore submarine. Because of the MND's and Navy's insistence on purchasing submarines through the FMS

channel from the United States, there was no final decision.

According to former Defense Minister Michael Tsai, Taiwan does not need to buy large submarines from the United States; instead, Tsai recommended MND, NSC, CSBC and other private companies should cooperate to develop a 300-ton small submarine domestically. Tsai claims Taiwan already has the capability, the financial resources, and the expertise to construct small submarines. Moreover, a 300-ton submarine is more suited for operating in the Taiwan Strait. According to Tsai's assessment, it will only require three to five years to successfully develop a prototype [2].

It should be noted that despite all the signals to the contrary, the Taiwan Navy thus far has denied such plans and actions (Central News Agency, March 20). According to the latest U.S.-Taiwan Business Council annual defense review released last October, a Taiwan delegation apparently visited at least three western European countries in search of potential technology/design suppliers, technical partners, and/or technical personnel that could assist Taiwan with an indigenous submarine development/construction program. The final report for the feasibility study was completed at the end of 2011. Taiwan Navy and CSBC are expected to brief the MND, MOEA, and the LY on the status of the indigenous submarine program during the spring 2012 session. This is presumably in anticipation of having to submit a significant funding request starting in the FY2013-2014 time frame, to support the start of the program [3].

In the final analysis, the MND may propose a plan during the current legislative session to produce submarines domestically. As highlighted at the outset of this article, the plan aims to either develop a 1,000 to 1,500-ton prototype (*Taipei Times*, February 26). In light of the recent steps taken by the Ma administration to signal its determination to acquire submarines, the question remains whether or not the Obama administration will assist Taipei—if it is not through direct foreign military sales (*Taipei Times*, February 21). At the same time, the Ma administration's decision to move toward indigenously-built submarines is also reflective of a growing unease in Taiwan toward China's military deployments. In the latest news about China's military modernization, People's Liberation Army Navy Deputy Commander Xu

Hongmeng recently confirmed that its first aircraft carrier will be commissioned on August 1 (*People's Daily*, March 8). After more than a decade, the questions clouding Taiwan's submarine program appears to be slowly dissipating. The question is no longer "if" nor "how" but "when"? The ROC Navy appears to be sailing ahead with the indigenous submarine program.

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Notes:

1. Kai Shan, "Bu lu panshan de qianjian zhi lu: taiwan gaicai qianjian guozao? [The Faltering Road to Submarines: Is Taiwan Shifting to Domestically-Made Submarines?]," *Yatai fangwu zazhi* [Asia-Pacific Defense Magazine], No. 46, February 2012, p. 46. For a thorough description of what took place, see the following account from former submarine captain Guan Zhenqing, *Xia qian! Xia qian! Zhonghua minguo haijun qiangjian budui zhi chuangjian* [Dive! Dive! The Creation of the ROC Navy Submarine Force], Taipei: Lao zhanyou gongzuoshi jjunshi wencuibu, 2011, pp. 58, 60–61, 68–69, 132–133, 134–137, 143–144, 192, 219.
2. "Guofang yusuan yu taimai zhanlue guanxi [National Defense Budgeting and Taiwanese-U.S. Strategic Relations]," *Xin taiwan guoce zhiku* [Taiwan Braintrust], June 21, 2011 <[http://www.braintrust.tw/article1.php?article\\_id=928](http://www.braintrust.tw/article1.php?article_id=928)>.
3. "Defense and Security Report Annual Review, 2011," US-Taiwan Business Council, pp. 17–18.

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## Exploring Unmanned Drones as an Option for China's First Carrier

By Wilson T. VornDick

The deputy commander of the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLAN), Xu Hongmeng, stated on March 13 that after four sea trials he "has a plan" to enter the Chinese aircraft carrier, formerly the Soviet-made *Kuznetsov*-class aircraft carrier *Varyag*, into active service by the end of this year (*China Daily*, March 13). Simultaneously, China actively has been pursuing the formation and training of a PLAN air wing capable of operating off an aircraft carrier. On the other side of the world, the U.S. Navy landed an F/A-18 Hornet itself on the deck of the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower last summer using flight control software designed for the X-47B without any input from the pilot, demonstrating the Navy's progression toward aircraft carrier-capable unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). This begs the following question: what if China is on par with or exceeding current U.S. UAV developments?

These three separate, but possibly converging developments, in the Chinese maritime domain have progressed significantly over the last year: the sea-trials of the ex-*Varyag*, the operability and formation of PLAN aviation wings and advances of Chinese UAV technologies. Combined, these operational capabilities and technological advancements could create the potential for a potent Chinese drone carrier. It is important to note moving forward that the case for a Chinese drone carrier is strictly speculative. Yet, the convergence of these separate assets, techniques and technologies could lead to a plausible and feasible application of carrier-capable UAVs in the not too distant future.

### Carrier Operability

China's carrier aspirations have been documented and researched for some time. The functionality of an aircraft carrier is both within and an integral part of Chinese long-term strategic ambitions. In August, these ambitions reached a significant milestone with the successful sea trials of the Chinese aircraft carrier ex-*Varyag*. It is smaller than American Nimitz but larger than the French *Charles De Gaulle*. The *Kuznetsov*-class can support multiple configurations of both fixed-wing and helicopter assets

(up to 41 aircraft). Regardless, China's carrier is toothless without the lethal projection of an air wing.

### PLAN Air wing

Despite recent photographs of J-15s on the deck, some contend that an operable PLAN air wing is still some time off. Some China watchers estimate this could take a few months, while others contend that it will take years. Recently, Daniel Kosteka contended that the "PLAN's requirements for ship-based aviation are increasing dramatically" ("Problems and Prospects for China's Ship-Based Aviation Program," *China Brief*, January 6). Yet, the Achilles' heel of sea power for China continues to be its naval aviation component. In retrospect, it took U.S. naval aviation much of the last century to become as proficient as it is today. This was a product of not only technological advancements and innovations, but also of tremendous human losses (pilots, aircrews and seamen). Rather than focus its naval aspirations using the human element, the PLAN may choose to substitute it with a bloodless and cheaper mechanical alternative. Until PLAN air wing capabilities catch up with the carrier, what does China do with an otherwise operational, but empty aircraft carrier? UAV-based carrier or carrier-based drone (CBD) strike experimentation could be a viable and revolutionary option for China to pursue.

### UAV Advances and Potential

The biannual Zhuhai Air Show in 2010 highlighted twenty five various Chinese UAV prototypes [1]. If one was to peer into a comparable air show in Russia, India or Iran, would they see so many prototypes? Besides actual proto-types, Chinese military periodicals are full of UAV related articles. Last July, *Modern Ships* magazine, a ten-page, special section discussed carrier-based UAVs in detail. This included in-depth discussions and schematics concerning the dimensions and the footprint of current U.S. naval prototype UAVs (X-47 A/B and X-45 A/B/C) alongside F-18s and F-35s, possible placement and footprint on a U.S. carrier, ranges of current U.S. UAVs, navigational advances and launch/return capabilities for UAVs [2]. The CVN-78 design also was shown incorporating multiple UAVs on the flight deck. In November's *Modern Weaponry*, a full-page profile picture displayed a new and unidentified UAV (prototype?) with a tail hook assembly (*Modern Weaponry*, November 2011,

p. 2). It should be noted that it is entirely plausible that a UAV tail hook assembly does not directly indicate naval utilization. Tail hooks can also be used in short, land-based runway scenarios as well. On January 11, CCTV's "Military Report" (junshi baodao) program reported on the X-47B's carrier application and included pictures of it with its wings bent for storage. These publications manifest a growing and progressing Chinese awareness of UAV capabilities and their relevant naval applications.

UAVs also are beginning to fill scientific discussions in Chinese military technical journals. A glance at October's *Fire Control & Command Control* reveals two articles' titles that display Chinese technological prowess with respect to communications and guidance for UAVs: "The Effectiveness Evaluation of C4ISR System Based on RBF Networks" and "Research on UAV Communication System Performance Based on Two Dimension Turbo Coding" (*Fire Control and Command Control* [FC&CC], October 2011, pp. 11, 28). In December, an article appeared, describing in great detail the complex algorithms required for "multi-UAV cooperative air combat" scenarios (*FC&CC*, December 2011, p. 60).

On September 23, an interesting competition took place at the China Aviation Museum in Beijing. The Aviation Industry of China (AVIC), one of China's leading aeronautical consortiums, in conjunction with UVS International of Paris hosted a three-day "International UAV Innovation Grand Prix." This event was open to teams from any country with a grand prize of 2,650,000 yuan (approximately \$378,000). AVIC specifically was looking for "innovative" and "radical" UAV entries with a mandatory tail-hook. Entries also were to be "a small, conventional/fixed-wing UAV that can automatically take off, cruise and land" on a simulated aircraft carrier deck. It may not be coincidental that the carrier parameters required were basically the parameters for a *Kuznetsov*-class flight deck. This competition becomes more interesting in light of AVIC's push into the UAV market and its 18.8 percent growth last year ("Civilian UAV Production as a Window to the PLA's Unmanned Fleet," *China Brief*, February 21).

The combination of size, space and economics of UAVs suggest an extremely tantalizing possibility for naval combat situations. For example, the Northrop Grumman X-47B (Unmanned Combat Air System Demonstrator or

UCAS-D) footprint is at least one third smaller than the F-18E. If the wings are collapsed, the X-47B footprint is further reduced. Not only is the X-47B's horizontal cross section smaller but also the vertical cross section. If UAV weight reductions match the footprint reductions, it could even be possible to stack helicopter or fixed-wing UAVs in multiple columns in the hangar bay or on the flight deck of the ex-*Varyag*. This could dramatically increase the overall number of UAVs that could be flown, increasing strike potential. The typical compliment of the Kuznetsov-class carrier is 41 mixed rotary- or fixed-wing assets. Taking into account the savings in size and weight, it could be possible that as many as 60-plus UAVs could be mission capable at any one time. Flying times and range also are significantly greater for UAVs depending on the variation. Cost considerations should be a decisive factor when assessing the viability of the UAV. At the 2011 Aviation Expo in Beijing, Sunward Tech initiated a sale of two helicopter UAVs with a ground control station for less than 10 million yuan (less than \$1.6 million) (*FlightGlobal*, September 23, 2011). An F-18 costs roughly \$55 million. The potential costs savings are monumental.

An all-drone carrier would incorporate these advantages. A 2008 report by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a Washington think tank that studies military technology, said long-range pilotless aircraft had potential to transform carriers “from a power-projection system with outstanding global mobility but relatively limited tactical reach and persistence into a key component of a global surveillance-strike network” [3]. Moving toward its own UAV carrier goals, the U.S. Navy has made major advances with its trials of the X-47Bs.

### **Advent of a Drone Carrier?**

If Chinese developments are on par or outpace current U.S. UAV developments, it is possible the Chinese could produce a fully-capable CBD air wing well before a PLAN human-piloted air wing is ready. Even if China staged its UAV progression with its human air wing alternative, it would still allow the PLAN multiple options between an all-drone carrier, all-human or mixed drone-human carrier air wing. This author has not found any direct evidence indicating any of these courses of action. The advent of strike-capable CBDs, however, would be a strategically revolutionary event in carrier aviation and PLAN capability. UAV technologies could empower

Chinese weapon developers to “leap-frog” over current technologies directly into future ones. If the Chinese will not have a proficient human PLAN air wing for some time, why not explore the possibility of a revolutionary change in carrier aviation?

There are still significant developmental gaps that have to be overcome before the international community witnesses the ex-*Varyag* steaming over the horizon with a sky full of weapon-laden CBDs. First, the PLA needs to make additional advances in its command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR). Recent pictures of Chinese UAV control consoles reveal a striking similarity between them and video arcade-style gaming kiosks from the 1980s in both size and design with a central screen and joystick. In regards to communications, Chinese capabilities appear to be relatively limited to either SATCOM or direct data linkages (radio) that do not extend beyond the UAVs primary ground station. Because of this limitation, it is relatively uncertain where the UAV's “joystick” would actually be. Whether the joystick and others would be located in a command center onboard the carrier or at a more remote locale, such as a facility at the Ningbo naval base, is not entirely clear at this time. A second hurdle is that a CBD, its armaments, spare parts and logistics train would need to go into full production—and no such UAV production appears to be underway. Finally, the various pilots, deck crews and support elements of the ex-*Varyag* need to be created and trained. Many of these problems parallel issues that a manned air wing would require solutions for. Nonetheless, UAV generational development has been measured as a function of single-digit years vice double-digit decades for more traditional weapons programs because the applications, technologies and techniques for UAVs are developing at such a breakneck pace.

### **Part of a New Strategy?**

Strategically, a Chinese drone carrier could offer a new approach to traditional naval warfare. What if the Chinese fundamentally view the aircraft carrier in an entirely different fashion from the more traditional, U.S. model? What if the Chinese were to believe that the carrier is not necessarily the capital ship of the fleet to be protected at all costs, but rather one more asset in a battle space close to China? If the PLAN was neither cost sensitive

nor risk adverse, while focusing on quantity over quality, a drone carrier could be a viable asymmetric asset. It is not hard to imagine a “swarm scenario” with dozens or hundreds of CBDs pouncing on multiple targets at once. Non-conventional weapons use and techniques are not a new concept to the PLA and is in line with their military culture. They have invested heavily in other emerging asymmetric weaponry, such as mines, cyber-based electronic warfare and anti-carrier (DF-21D) missiles.

In various scenarios, a PLAN drone carrier offers some interesting possibilities. In the Taiwan Strait, the importance of a PLAN drone carrier would likely be minimal, precisely because of the preponderance of other Chinese naval, air, maritime and artillery assets. Whether for missions in the South China Sea, the Strait of Malacca, monitoring the Indian Ocean for Somali pirates, or elsewhere abroad, a drone carrier would prove to be a valuable asset. Given China’s political and economic interests in each of those areas, a heavily-armed and -outfitted drone carrier could easily overwhelm most of the neighboring militaries’ capabilities. If the drone carrier was utilized in a non-combatant role, it could provide valuable reconnaissance and support.

In conclusion, none of the evidence so far conclusively points to the utilization of the ex-*Varyag* as a drone carrier. The convergence of CBD air wing technologies and techniques with an operational carrier however suggests a very plausible naval capability within the near future. If the concept becomes a possible leap-frog technology and platform for the PLAN, observers should expect to see publication drop-offs in UAV manufacture and testing reports, ex-*Varyag* sea-trial reports, and PLAN air wing informatics very soon. Known as the “bath tub” effect, approaching deployment of a drone carrier would be signaled by a renewed spurt of publications dealing with operational/doctrinal problems rather than more technical concerns. While the ex-*Varyag* currently deployed by the PLAN is not regarded by the U.S. Navy as a major threat, a conversion of the ex-*Varyag* to a drone carrier or set of follow-on carriers might very well be.

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Notes:

1. Richard Fisher, “Maritime Employment of PLA Unmanned Aerial Vehicles,” in Andrew Erickson and Lyle Goldstein, eds., *Chinese Aerospace Power: Evolving Maritime Roles*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011, p. 108.
2. Staff, *Xiandai Jianchuan [Modern Ships]*, July 15, 2011, pp. 12–21. Most of this article was directly translated from Norman Friedman’s *Unmanned Combat Air Systems: A New Kind of Carrier Aviation*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010.
3. Tom Ehrhard and Robert Work, “Range, Persistence, Stealth and Networking: The Case for a Carrier-Based Unmanned Combat Air System,” Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, June 18, 2008.

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