



In This Issue:

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

ANTI-SHIP BALLISTIC MISSILE ALTERS REGION'S MILITARY GEOGRAPHY
By Andrew S. Erickson.....3

CHINA AND LAOS: AN UNEASY EMBRACE
By Prashanth Parameswaran.....6

ASSESSING PLA NAVY AND AIR FORCE POLITICAL COMMISSAR CAREER PATHS
By Kenneth W. Allen, Morgan Clemens, Steven Glinert and Daniel Yoon.....9

CHINA'S MILITARY POLITICAL COMMISSAR SYSTEM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE
By Kenneth W. Allen, Brian Chao and Ryan Kinsella.....15



Second Artillery Soldiers Around a Transporter-Erector Launcher (TEL)

China Brief is a bi-weekly journal of information and analysis covering Greater China in Eurasia.

China Brief is a publication of The Jamestown Foundation, a private non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. and is edited by Peter Mattis.

The opinions expressed in China Brief are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Jamestown Foundation.



For comments or questions about *China Brief*, please contact us at mattis@jamestown.org

1111 16th St. NW, Suite #320
Washington, DC 20036
Tel: (202) 483-8888
Fax: (202) 483-8337

Copyright © 2011

In a Fortnight

By Peter Mattis

RIGOROUS TRAINING SCHEDULE HIGHLIGHTS PLA'S FOCUS ON PEOPLE

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) plans to conduct 40 military exercises this year in order to improve its readiness as well as its ability to fight and win wars, according to the Training Department of the PLA's General Staff Department (*PLA Daily*, February 28; Xinhua, February 27). Continuing with the PLA's improving training regimen, the exercises will include a variety of combined arms—what the PLA calls “joint”—and live fire exercises. This announcement adds concreteness to the almost-continuous rhetorical emphasis on the need to improve the PLA's readiness for combat operations. Despite China's progress in modernizing its military with the milestone of major progress in 2020, the international environment is still not favorable for the PLA. As summed up by the Ministry of National Defense (MND) spokesman Geng Yansheng, the PLA “is shouldering the dual responsibilities of mechanizing and informationizing the armed forces...Compared with military capabilities around the world, however, there is still a gap” (Xinhua, March 1).

The injunctions for the PLA to continue the practical work of modernization and implementing the lessons of increasingly realistic exercises comes from the highest

levels. During an inspection tour early last month, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) General Fan Changlong reiterated the call on the PLA to adopt “real combat criteria” in military training so as to meet future wartime needs in the information age (Xinhua, February 7). Later that month, CMC Chairman Xi Jinping “stressed that it is imperative to bear in mind that being able to fight and win battles is essential to building a powerful military...The important instruction has pointed the way for accelerating the modernization construction of the national defense and the military” (*PLA Daily*, February 22). Published excerpts from a PLA forum on implementing the spirit of the 18th Party Congress displayed a similar emphasis on practical learning from exercises. The essays also reflected the order of precedence given to the PLA’s various services, beginning with the PLA Navy and Air Force and followed by the Second Artillery (*PLA Daily*, February 5). This suggests no major changes to the PLA modernization program at least until the widely-anticipated defense white paper, *China’s National Defense in 2012*, is released—presumably sometime this spring after being delayed like the previous iteration.

In the absence of substantive changes, the focus of any new military modernization measures probably will focus on the PLA’s human side as the training emphasis suggests. Additional details may become available at the National People’s Congress (NPC) this month as some proposals are reportedly being tabled. A Shenyang Military Region group army commander and one of the PLA’s delegates for the NPC, Gao Guanghui, has several proposals ready for the upcoming session for “combat power improvement.” The thrust of these proposals focuses on “improving the quality of conscripts as well as perfecting the methods on military officer selection from college-graduates.” Evidently, the PLA’s new equipment and technological innovations have posed “a series of challenges in several aspects including the organization and training mode, support mechanism, and talents cultivation” (*PLA Daily*, March 3). In order to realize the dream of “building a strong military,” according to Second Artillery brigade commander Tan Weihong, “we have to depend on military talents who are capable of fighting and winning battles.” A PLA Navy expert at the submarine academy and another NPC delegate, Li Danni, also said “to win a battle, the key lies in talents.” Professor Li added “not only the soldiers skilled in the operation

of weaponry and equipment are needed, but also the military strategists possessing a deep understanding of modern warfare and the talents in commanding joint operation to win the information-based war in the future are indispensable” (People’s Net, March 3).

The new equipment and new operating procedures as the PLA informatizes appears to be a recognized challenge within the PLA. In a lengthy commentary for the Central Party School magazine, *Seeking Truth*, Nanjing Military Region commander Cai Yingting and counterpart political commissar Zheng Weiping summed up the logic of the PLA’s priorities: “upgrade the core military capabilities to fight and win a war.” The unswerving direction of military development is toward informatization and the PLA must improve its ability to process information to drive operations. The new way of fighting requires more realistic training under the conditions of actual combat to cultivate the “four kinds of talent”—joint operations command personnel, informatization construction personnel, information technology professionals as well as new equipment operations and maintenance personnel (*Qinshi*, March 1; *PLA Daily*, May 6, 2010).

Thus far, the PLA-related coverage, like that discussed above, does not suggest the newly appointed party General Secretary and CMC chair Xi is making any dramatic decisions about military modernization. The only noticeable change is the reframing of some PLA modernization objectives around Xi’s “China Dream.” For example, as an article written for the Central Party School magazine, *Seeking Truth*, by the PLA’s General Staff Department characterized it: “History and practice tell us that, in the final analysis, what decides the pattern of global political and economic affairs is the relative strength of great powers that ultimately must rely on power.” Peaceful development, then, cannot depend on Beijing’s diplomacy or the benign neglect of other great powers. China needs a strong military force to ensure its developmental goals can be met and its dream can be achieved (*Qinshi*, February 1).

The emphasis on talent and training going into 2013 serves as a reminder that the PLA is not just its equipment but also its people (“Assessing the PLA Air Force’s Ten Pillars,” *China Brief*, February 10, 2011). More aggressive focus on training should be useful for the PLA’s three services and one branch; however, observers should look

for whether the additional and more realistic training is done on top of or in place of normal activities. For example, after heavy exercises, PLA Air Force pilots and planes do not take flight for some time to compensate for the exercise tempo, keeping their flight time at its relatively low average of a few hours per week. In addition, the PLA sometimes calls an exercise “joint” when different services exercise against each other rather than when the different services must work together in an exercise.

Peter Mattis is Editor of China Brief at The Jamestown Foundation.

China Channels Billy Mitchell: Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Alters Region’s Military Geography

By Andrew S. Erickson

Editor’s Note: This article is adapted from the occasional report that will be published by The Jamestown Foundation, based on the report’s key findings about the development and implications of China’s Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile program.

China’s DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM) is no longer merely an aspiration. Beijing has successfully developed, partially tested and deployed in small numbers the world’s first weapons system capable of targeting the last relatively uncontested U.S. airfield in the Asia-Pacific from long-range, land-based mobile launchers. This airfield is a moving aircraft carrier strike group (CSG), which the Second Artillery, China’s strategic missile force, now has the capability to at least attempt to disable with the DF-21D in the event of conflict. With the ASBM having progressed this far, and representing the vanguard of a broad range of potent asymmetric systems, Beijing probably expects to achieve a growing degree of deterrence with it.

None of this should be surprising. Numerous data points have been emerging from Chinese sources as well as official statements and reports from Washington and Taipei for years now, available to anyone willing to connect them. They offer an instructive case study not only to

military analysts, but also to anyone conducting analysis under conditions of imperfect information. For instance, relevant Chinese publications multiplied throughout the late 1990s, dipped in a classic “bathtub-shaped” pattern from 2004 to 2006 at a critical point in ASBM development and component testing, and rose sharply thereafter as China headed towards initial deployment beginning in 2010. China is always more transparent in Chinese, and analysts must act accordingly.

The Ghost of Billy Mitchell

What is perhaps most surprising is the foreign skepticism and denial that has accompanied China’s ASBM. Again, however, this sort of disbelief is nothing new. At the close of World War II, the following editorial appeared: “The ghost of Billy Mitchell should haunt those who crucified him a few years back when he so openly declared that no nation could win the next war without air superiority and advocated that the U.S. move at once to build a strong air force. Billy Mitchell was merely far ahead of his time and it is regrettable that he didn’t live to see his prophecy come true” (*Prescott Evening Courier*, May 7, 1945). Mitchell’s legacy stems from his willingness to push for such revolutionary approaches as the July 21, 1921 test-bombing of captured German battleship *Ostfriesland*, even at the cost of his career.

Consider the reported reaction of then-Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels to Mitchell’s proposal: “Good God! This man should be writing dime novels! ... That idea is so damned nonsensical and impossible that I’m willing to stand on the bridge of a battleship while that nit-wit tries to hit it from the air!” Needless to say, Daniels was nowhere near *Ostfriesland* when army aircraft sunk it with two bombs (*New York Times*, July 22, 1921) [1].

The test’s efficacy was hotly contested by the U.S. Navy and remains debated to this day. Theodore Roosevelt, then-Assistant Secretary of the Navy, was decidedly unimpressed: “I once saw a man kill a lion with a 30-30 caliber rifle under certain conditions, but that doesn’t mean that a 30-30 rifle is a lion gun” [2]. Yet the fact of a hit, however manipulated and revealed, changed the strategic equation. It altered service budgets immediately and helped catalyze development of what later became the U.S. Air Force.

The future is difficult to predict. While it is certainly hubristic to insist that it *will* unfold in a certain way, it is equally hubristic to insist that it *will not*.

No Need for a “Lion Gun”

As with anti-carrier aviation, physics allows for an ASBM, and is the same for China’s burgeoning defense industry as for any of its foreign counterparts. Like the Martin bombers that assaulted *Ostfriesland* with their 2,000 pound bombs, the DF-21D is not a novel idea or technology, but rather an architectural innovation, or ‘Frankenweapon,’ involving a novel assembly of existing systems to yield a new use with unprecedented maneuverability and accuracy. The United States and Russia could have developed an ASBM before China, but are proscribed from doing so by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty they ratified in 1988. Still, military capabilities are determined by effectiveness with respect to objectives, not technological sophistication for its own sake. To paraphrase Secretary Roosevelt, you do not need to invent a “Lion Gun” if a 30-30 rifle can be rigged to do the job. China frequently pursues an “80 percent solution” that may be just good enough to further, or even realize, many of its objectives. In light of sequestration, this approach should inform Pentagon deliberations surrounding prioritization and efficiency.

No Need for a Chinese Mitchell

China may never have had its own Mitchell, but it did not need one. Chinese prioritization of ballistic missile development dates to the 1950s, creating both strengths and institutional interests. Nobody risked court martial for suggesting that carriers could be attacked in a new way. Rather, following the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crises and 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing, China’s top leaders—starting with Jiang Zemin—ordered and funded megaprojects to achieve precisely such effects.

ASBM development fits perfectly into Beijing’s far broader effort to further still-contested island and maritime claims in the Near Seas (Yellow, South China and East China Seas). The DF-21D epitomizes Sun Zi’s universally-relevant injunction: “In war, the way is to avoid what is strong, and strike at what is weak.” Together with China’s other ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, submarines and electromagnetic weapons, it targets specific physics-

based limitations in U.S., allied and friendly military forces to increase the risk to them of intervening in crises on China’s periphery. Even among these other potent systems, however, the ASBM is distinguished by its ability to be fired from mobile, highly-concealable platforms toward moving targets hundreds of kilometers from China’s shores.

No Longer a “Dime Novel”

On March 16, 2011, Taiwan National Security Bureau Director-General Tsai De-sheng restated a previous claim from August 2010 that the PLA already had tested and was deploying the DF-21D (“Taiwan’s Intelligence Chief Warns about the PLA’s Growing Strategic Weapon Systems,” *China Brief*, March 25, 2011). The 2011 ROC National Defense Report confirmed that “a small quantity of” DF-21D ASBMs “were produced and deployed in 2010” [3]. In December 2010, then-Commander of U.S. Pacific Command Admiral Robert Willard asserted “The anti-ship ballistic missile system in China has undergone extensive testing. An analogy using a Western term would be ‘Initial Operational Capability (IOC),’ whereby it has—I think China would perceive that it has—an operational capability now, but they continue to develop it. It will continue to undergo testing, I would imagine, for several more years” (*Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2010).

As for supporting infrastructure, on January 3, 2011, Vice Admiral David Dorsett stated that the PLA “likely has the space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), command and control structure, and ground processing capabilities necessary to support DF-21D employment...[and also] employs an array of non-space based sensors and surveillance assets capable of providing the targeting information” (Bloomberg, January 3, 2011). Two days later, Dorsett added “The Chinese have tested the DF-21D missile system over land a sufficient number of times that the missile system itself is truly competent and capable. ...they have ISR, they have sensors onboard ship that can feed into the targeting aspect of it. So could they start to employ that and field it operationally? Yes, I think so” (*Air Force Magazine*, January 5, 2011).

Willard’s carefully-chosen words reflect the difficulty in equating Chinese and U.S. development benchmarks. The U.S. Defense Acquisition University defines IOC

as “attained when some units and/or organizations in the force structure scheduled to receive a system (1) have received it and (2) have the ability to employ and maintain it” (dap.dau.mil, April 19, 2005). Essentially, China’s ASBM is not fully operational or necessarily fully tested, but is available to be used in some fashion. In a broadly analogous example, the E-8 Joint STARS aircraft did not achieve IOC until June 1996, when the U.S. Air Force received its first aircraft. According to the official history section on the Air Force’s website, however, two developmental E-8 Joint STARS were employed operationally as early as 1991 in Operation Desert Storm even though the aircraft was still in test and evaluation.

Analysts will be hard-pressed to identify a sharp red line between IOC and full operational capability for China’s ASBM. This is part of a larger analytical challenge in which Chinese “hardware” continues to improve dramatically, but the “software” supporting and connecting it remains uncertain and untested in war. Multiple trials have already validated DF-21D components, but Beijing’s ability to employ it against a moving, uncooperative sea-surface target remains unproven. Such confidence almost certainly requires additional testing. Lack of demonstrated progress in this area may be explained by concern that failure might undermine deterrence accrued thus far while alarming China’s neighbors—yielding “the onus without the bonus.” Limitations in jointness, bureaucratic-technological coordination and integration as well as data fusion—pervasive in the PLA more generally—represent larger challenges.

Countermeasures...and a Moving Target

The operational equation is certainly incomplete without considering U.S. countermeasures. In 2011, then-Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Gary Roughead stated, “even though the DF 21 has become a newsworthy weapon, the fact is our aircraft carriers can maneuver, and we have systems that can counter weapons like that” (*Navy Times*, March 16, 2011).

Nonetheless, Chinese capabilities also represent a moving target. Beijing will not slow progress to accommodate U.S. sequestration. Backed by an economy that the U.S. National Intelligence Council predicts will surpass U.S. GDP in any major measure by 2030, China is already pursuing an array of weapons programs only equaled

by the U.S., and utterly unmatched in dynamism and flexibility of resource allocation.

Changing East Asia’s Military Geography

Just as U.S. development of long-range precision strike from aircraft carriers enabled it to win the Pacific War by penetrating Japan’s previously impregnable homeland, Chinese development of long-range precision strike, exemplified by the ASBM, threatens the sanctuary of the aircraft carriers that have long served as well-defended platforms from which to launch strikes on sea and land. By threatening U.S. carriers at a greater distance than their aircraft’s range, this alteration of the ways of war could be every bit as momentous as the one that Mitchell identified.

As China’s ASBM becomes more effective operationally, it may reinforce China’s continentalist approach to defense, “using the land to control the sea.” To further its Near Seas interests, Beijing’s focus on developing a partially shore-based, missile-centric “Anti-Navy” to deter foreign navies’ intervention is a far more efficient approach than pursuing a blue water navy of its own. Here, China’s institutional predilections serve it well, and permit it to challenge U.S. forces severely, even as it spends far less on its military than does the United States.

China appears to be already seeking to leverage the DF-21D for strategic communications about deterrence and the reliability of U.S. assistance to regional friends and allies. This is part of a larger trend in which a more capable and confident Beijing is becoming increasingly “translucent,” if still not fully transparent, regarding selected capabilities in order to enhance deterrence.

Don’t Ignore Mitchell Twice

As Washington flirts with sequestration, its leaders will have to decide quickly how important it is to sustain the Asia-Pacific role that their predecessors expended so much blood and treasure to establish. To maintain this powerful legacy, the U.S. must address such emerging challenges as the political-military effects of a working ASBM with respect to reassuring allies and deterring China.

U.S. advantages undersea—which are already proven in contrast to the advanced aerial vehicles that should also

be developed—must be maintained. It would be a grave error to allow numbers or deployments of nuclear attack or guided missile submarines to erode in the Asia-Pacific.

Calibrated transparency about countermeasures is needed to demonstrate that U.S. aircraft carriers can continue to operate successfully in relevant East Asian scenarios. Washington must communicate convincingly with audiences outside the U.S. and Chinese militaries. U.S. taxpayers must be persuaded that investments are needed. Allied citizens must be reassured. Chinese citizens must be disabused of simplistic notions of U.S. weakness. All information should not be hoarded for a conflict that fortunately likely will never come; some should be used to win hearts and minds and prevail in peacetime.

Conversely, failure to maintain and demonstrate adequate countermeasures to asymmetric weapons such as China's ASBM while pursuing Asia-Pacific rebalancing would create the worst of both worlds, in which China's leaders feel targeted by rebalancing, but are emboldened by its hollowness.

Billy Mitchell—to whom U.S. leaders owe so much for their influence in the Asia-Pacific today—would turn in his grave if he found that his prophetic vision had been ignored not once, but twice.

Andrew S. Erickson, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Strategic Research Department at the U.S. Naval War College and a founding member of the department's China Maritime Studies Institute (CMSI). His research websites are <www.andrewerickson.com> and <www.chinasignpost.com>. The views represented in these articles are his alone, and do not reflect the policies or estimates of the U.S. Navy or any other organization of the U.S. government.

Notes:

1. Emile Gauvreau and Lester Cohen, *Billy Mitchell: Founder of Our Air Force and Prophet without Honor*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1942, pp. 41, 48.
2. Ibid.
3. National Defense Report Editing Committee, Ministry of National Defense, *2011 ROC National Defense Report*, Taipei: Ministry of National Defense, August 2011, p. 71.

China and Laos: An Uneasy Embrace

By Prashanth Parameswaran

In January, reports surfaced that Laos would borrow money from China to finance a \$7 billion, 260-mile rail project connecting the Lao capital of Vientiane to the Chinese border (*Ming Pao* [Hong Kong], January 15; *Global Times*, January 10; RFA, December 2, 2012). The project, by far the largest ever carried out in Laos and nearly equal in value to the country's \$8 billion gross domestic product, reveals both Beijing's growing influence in the Southeast Asian country as well as the significant challenges both sides will need to grapple with in the coming years to maintain their close relationship.

China and Laos established diplomatic relations on April 25, 1961, but tensions arose early in the 1970s and early 1980s when the ruling Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) chose to side with Hanoi instead of Beijing during the Sino-Vietnamese War (ASEAN-China Center, 2010). The late 1980s saw ties warm as Laos began forging stronger ties with China and other countries as the Cold War ended. Laotian Prime Minister Kaysone Phomvihane visited Beijing in 1989 and Chinese Premier Li Peng went to Vientiane in 1990, marking a key turning point in the relationship.

Since then, Sino-Lao relations have improved dramatically, with China helping Laos weather the Asian Financial Crisis, Jiang Zemin making the first ever state visit by a Chinese president to Laos in November 2000 and both sides establishing a comprehensive strategic partnership of cooperation in 2009 (*Xinhua*, September 10, 2009). For China, Laos is a critical source of natural resources to power its economic growth, a crucial partner in tackling transnational security issues, and a key ally in Southeast Asia through which it can advance its regional ambitions. For poor, tiny, and landlocked Laos, Beijing offers the technology, money and manpower required to develop its economy and achieve its goal of graduating from the United Nations Development Program's list of least-developed countries by 2020.

Sino-Lao diplomatic relations are fairly advanced. Bilateral visits involving both state and party officials occur frequently, which should come as no surprise given that

Vientiane and Beijing share common communist roots. Likewise, Laotian officials often make trips to China to learn about issues ranging from fighting corruption to economic and social development. The latest high-profile exchange between the two sides was Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's visit in November 2012 before the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which Vientiane hosted. During his visit, Wen spoke highly of Sino-Lao bilateral relations and urged both sides to craft an action plan to realize their comprehensive strategic partnership as soon as possible (*China Daily*, November 6, 2012).

China's influence in Laos is evident most clearly, however, in the economic dimension of the relationship. Although Beijing is involved in an annual three-way tussle with Thailand and Vietnam for the top trade and foreign investment spot in Laos (it ranked third in 2012), official data tend to underestimate the lucrative cross-border trade between China and Laos. Furthermore, as China's ambassador to Laos noted earlier this year, Chinese companies have been Vientiane's choice for executing high-profile projects including the Laos International Convention Center where it hosted the 2012 ASEM meeting, the National Sports Complex for the 2009 SEA Games, and other key infrastructure, mining, hydropower and telecommunications initiatives. (*KPL Lao News Agency*, February 6). With the announcement of recent mega-projects including the high-speed railway project, which China sees as critical to realizing a Trans-Asian Highway integrating it with lucrative Southeast Asian markets, it is not unreasonable to expect that Beijing's contribution for 2012 of \$3.9 billion and 801 projects will only grow in the years to come (*Bangkok Post*, February 12).

Both sides also have boosted security ties in recent years. Most of this has been dedicated to resolving transnational problems like cross-border drug and human trafficking as well as infectious diseases. Since the October 2011 murder of 13 Chinese sailors along the Mekong River, Beijing also has led several rounds of joint patrols with Laos, Myanmar and Thailand along the river to secure transportation routes and target trans-border crimes (*Xinhua*, September 21, 2012). Military-to-military ties are maintained through regular visits and assistance that remains undisclosed [1]. When Ma Xiaotian, deputy chief of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) visited Laos in October of last year, he emphasized that the PLA wanted to strengthen cooperation in various

fields including military academy exchanges (*PLA Daily*, October 20, 2012).

People-to-people ties remain an important part of Sino-Lao relations. Although a small ethnic Chinese community in Laos dates back decades, the Chinese population in the country has swelled since the 1990s with the influx of Chinese entrepreneurs and traders across the porous border into northern Laos. Not all Laotians have welcomed this, and some have noted that Chinese businessmen are fairly nationalistic and exclusionary, unlike the older Sino-Lao community [2]. Tourism arrivals from China to Laos also have been increasing recently. For instance, Beijing topped the list of tourism arrivals to Laos in 2012 with 190,000, an increase of 26 percent from 2011 (*Bangkok Post*, January 4). Beijing also has increased significantly the number of annual scholarships for Lao citizens to study in China over the past few years, such that over 1,000 students and officials were studying there by 2012 (*Vientiane Times*, April 9, 2012).

While China and Laos deserve credit for cultivating stronger ties over the past few years, they will need to overcome several obstacles in order to maintain this important relationship. Firstly, both sides remain vulnerable to volatility in the global economy. A protracted Eurozone crisis and an anemic recovery in the United States could slow down growth in Laos' primary trading partners (especially Vietnam, Thailand and China), thereby affecting the demand for Lao exports and foreign direct investment. In a November 2012 report, the World Bank cautioned that while the direct impact on Laos could be modest, the country "does remain vulnerable to secondary impacts through developments in regional economies" in the near to medium-term (Lao PDR Economic Monitor, November 2012). If Laos were to be affected in such a way, it would be hard-pressed to achieve its goal of 56 percent private foreign investment into the private sector by 2015—a goal which government officials acknowledge is already difficult enough (*KPL Lao News Agency*, February 6).

Secondly, while Laos continues to recognize the benefits of its ties to China, it also acknowledges the need to diversify its relationships to avoid excessive dependence on Beijing. This is easier said than done, considering that China, Thailand and Vietnam alone accounted for nearly 80 percent of Laos' imports and 70 percent of

its exports in 2011, and about 60 percent of all foreign direct investment in the country in 2010 (The Diplomat, February 7). For Vientiane, the reality is that Beijing continues to be a dominant force in the region, severely constraining Laos' foreign policy options.

The often fierce competition for contracts between Chinese, Vietnamese and Thai companies to do business in Laos also suggests that breaking this pattern of dependence will not be simple. Moreover, while there has been an uptick of Western business interest, particularly after the country's recent admission to the World Trade Organization (WTO), there remains a lot of work to be done. For all the recent progress, the business environment in Laos remains notorious for its rickety infrastructure, rampant corruption, weak rule of law and frequent government intervention (The Diplomat, February 7). The case of Sanum Investments, which sued the Lao government last year for colluding with well-connected Lao families and companies to expropriate its businesses, remains a cautionary tale for firms considering investing there [3].

Domestic concerns within Laos about the sustainability of the country's growth path and the negative fallout of controversial Chinese projects could present a third potential obstacle to improved Sino-Lao relations. On sustainability, the government has acknowledged that continuing to have natural resources account for around a fifth of overall GDP and half of total exports contributes to rising inflation, an appreciating exchange rate, growing inequality and the decline of the agriculture and manufacturing sectors (Lao Ministry of Industry and Commerce, July 2012). Government economists have warned, however, that shifting private investment from resource to non-resource areas like agribusiness, education and health, will be difficult given the country's largely unskilled workforce and poor infrastructure. They also expressed concern that such a shift could undermine economic growth in the longer term (*Vientiane Times*, June 11, 2012). Beijing may not be happy if Vientiane's economic policy choices restrict its ability to secure vital resources for Chinese development, making Beijing's preferences an important factor for Laotian officials to consider.

Local resentment over controversial Chinese projects is not unique or new to Laos. The last few years, however,

indicate that it is beginning to affect the Lao government's legitimacy. In 2008, a concession granted to Chinese developers to build a large commercial center in central Vientiane near an important national symbol was slammed by locals and even party officials, who accused a government minister of "treason" based on his Chinese heritage (*Myanmar Times*, February 20). The government, which rarely sees the need to explain actions to the public, took the highly unusual step of calling a press conference to dispel rumors that 50,000 families would settle in the area and also addressed specific concerns about the project. While it has since been moved, the project in That Luang continues to be mired in controversy with disputes between families and Chinese companies over relocation compensation (RFA, February 22).

Several other projects also have given rise to thorny bilateral issues. In early 2011, Laos had to shut down a Chinese casino enclave in Golden Boten City in northern Laos after reports that gamblers were taken hostage, tortured and murdered for failing to pay their debts. In June 2012, it froze new investments in mining and further land concessions for rubber plantations until 2015 due to concerns from citizens about land encroachment (AFP, June 27, 2012). After years of delays due to a corruption scandal implicating the Chinese Minister of Railways Liu Zhijun, Vientiane simply decided to borrow money for the high-speed rail project from China instead of granting it land concessions, despite domestic opposition and concerns that this would affect its macroeconomic (RFA, February 2; *South China Morning Post*, July 4, 2011).

In spite of all this, Lao Foreign Minister Thongloun Sisoulith insisted in an exclusive interview with Xinhua before the ASEM meeting last November that it is "more crucial than ever" for China and Laos to foster closer ties in an uncertain world (*Xinhua*, November 4, 2012). What he did not say, but surely senses, is that given the growing concerns in Sino-Lao relations, tightening an already uneasy embrace with Beijing could prove to be a perilous path regardless of its necessity.

Prashanth Parameswaran is a PhD candidate at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and a freelance journalist. He has written widely about international affairs in the Asia-Pacific and blogs about the region at The Asianist [www.asianist.wordpress.com].

Notes:

1. Martin Stuart Fox, “Laos: The Chinese Connection”. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, January 2009, pp. 141–169.
2. Ibid.
3. Murray Hiebert. “CSIS Laos Trip Report,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 1, 2012.

Assessing PLA Navy and Air Force Political Commissar Career Paths

By Kenneth W. Allen, Morgan Clemens, Steven Glinert and Daniel Yoon

This article briefly discusses the history of the political commissars (PCs, *zhengwei*) for the People’s Liberation Army’s Navy (PLAN) and Air Force (PLAAF) since the services were established in 1949, especially during the tumultuous period the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. The article then discusses the career path for the past four PCs and makes some predictions about who will replace the current PLAN PC, Admiral Liu Xiaojiang, and PLAAF PC, General Tian Xiushi, when they reach their mandatory retirement age of 65 based on their grade of military region (MR) leader (*zheng dajunqu zhi*) in 2014 and 2015, respectively [1].

The article will primarily examine the career paths of PCs who entered service after the PLAN and PLAAF were created in 1949. As noted in the companion background piece, political leadership billets include the director (*zhuren*) of the Political Division/Department (DPD), deputy DPD, and the PC and DPCs at every level (“China’s Military Political Commissar System in Comparative Perspective,” *China Brief*, March 4) [2]. The article begins by identifying the grade and rank structure for these key political officer billets.

Key Political Officer Grades and Ranks

Every officer, organization, and billet is assigned one of the PLA’s 15 grades and 10 ranks. In addition, each

officer’s grade is assigned a primary and secondary rank. In the PLA, career advancement is based on grade, not rank, promotions. Table 1 shows the grades and ranks for the PC, DPC, and DPD billets in the PLAN and PLAAF Headquarters and the fleet and MRAF Headquarters. As shown, the PLAN and PLAAF DPC and DPD, as well as the fleet and MRAF PCs all have the same grade but different responsibilities, which accounts for why some DPCs serve concurrently as the DPD and why a DPD can be promoted in grade as a PC without being a DPC.

PLA Navy Political Officers

As shown in Table 2, the PLAN has had 12 PCs since 1949. Although PLAN histories list the PCs as shown in Table 1, it is quite complicated for the period of 1949 until 1979 when Ye Fei became the PC (*China Military Encyclopedia*, 2007). The PLAN did not have a PC until 1957; however, Liu Daosheng, who was the DPC and concurrently the DPD from 1950 to 1957, basically served as the PC [1].

From 1957 to 1979, the PLAN’s PCs were identified as the PC, the first PC (*diyì zhengwei*), or the second PC (*di’èr zhengwei*), but there were overlaps and their exact relationships and responsibilities are not clear. Online biographic information and the *Dictionary of China’s Communist Party Central Committee Members for 1921–2003* reveal some discrepancies from an orderly succession process in these posts:

- Su Zhenhua served as the PC from 1957 to 1973 and as the first PC from 1973 to 1979, but he was ineffective for most of this period;
- Wang Hongkun served as the second PC from 1966 to 1977, but basically served as the PC from 1966–1967;
- Li Zuopeng served as a PLAN deputy commander starting in 1962 and as the first PC from 1967 to 1971, but functioned as the PC.

Table 1: Key Political Officer Grades and Ranks

Grade	PLAN/PLAAF HQ	Fleet/MRAF HQ	Primary Rank	Secondary Rank
MR Leader	PC		GEN/ADM	LTG/VADM
MR Deputy Leader	DPC, DPD	PC	LTG/VADM	MG/RADM
Corps Leader	Deputy DPD	DPC, DPD	MG/RADM	LTG/VADM
Corps Deputy Leader		Deputy DPD	MG/RADM	SCOL/SCPT

Table 2: PLAN Political Commissars

PC	Year Started (age)	Commander	DPC	Fleet PC	CMC Member
None	1949 – 1957				
Su Zhenhua	1957 (45); 1971 (59)		X		X
Wang Hongkun	1966 (58)		X		
Li Zuopeng	1967 (53)				X
Du Yide	1977 (65)		X		X
Ye Fei	1979 (65)	X			
Li Yaowen	1980 (62)				X
Wei Jinshan	1990 (63)		X		
Zhou Kunren	1993 (56)		X	X	
Yang Huaiqing	1995(56)		X		
Hu YanlinHu Yanlin	2003 (60)		X		
Liu Xiaojiang	2008 (59)		X		

Li Zuopeng's Impact on the PLAN

Until the late 1970s, Li Zuopeng probably had the most significant, negative impact on PLAN development, because, for all practical purposes, he ran the Navy from 1962 until 1971. He was born in 1914 in Jiangxi Province

and joined the Red Army in 1930. In 1935, he began working in the General Staff Department (GSD) and participated in the Long March. From 1939 to the early 1950s, he served in various Army staff, training, school, and command positions, including the commander of the 4th Field Army's 43rd Army. In 1962, he was assigned to his first PLAN position as a deputy commander. In 1967,

he became the PLAN PC and was later assigned as a concurrent deputy chief of the General Staff (DCOGS) and Central Military Commission (CMC) member (*China's Navy 2007*).

Under Defense Minister Lin Biao's tutelage, Li essentially took over command of the PLAN, which negatively affected the PLAN's direction of development. After the Cultural Revolution was launched, this battle became worse, especially during the period from 1967 to 1971. During this time, Li advocated politics above all else, and he brutally persecuted officers who disagreed with him, thus destroying unit development. When Lin Biao's plane crashed in September 1971, Li was immediately arrested. Ten years later, the PRC's highest court tried and sentenced him to 17 years. Although he was arrested in 1971, his policies continued to negatively affect PLAN development through the end of the decade (*China's Navy 2007*).

Su Zhenhua, who served twice as the PLAN commander was dominated by Li Zuopeng and was virtually ineffective. Deng Xiaoping finally appointed Ye Fei, who had never served in the PLAN and was at that time the Minister of Transportation, as the PLAN PC in February 1979 and then as the commander a year later to help put the PLAN back on track.

PLAN Political Commissar Career Paths

The following bullets provide background information on the four PCs who joined the PLA after the PLAN was created in 1949:

- Zhou Kunren joined the PLAN in 1956 as a medical technician and served in medical billets onboard various vessels until he shifted to the political officer track onboard vessels in 1967. He later served in political officer leadership positions (Political Department, DPC, and PC) in a vessel *zhidui* (flotilla) and the East Sea Fleet (ESF) and South Sea Fleet (SSF) Headquarters. He also served as a deputy director in the PLAN Political Department and as a DPC. Following his tour as the PLAN PC (1993–1995) and concurrent Party Committee deputy secretary, he became the PC for the General Logistics Department (GLD) but wore an Army uniform. Zhou first received medical training as a student. He attended the

PLA Military College basic course for eight months in 1980 and the provincial-level cadre course at the Central Party School for seven months in 1985–1986.

- Yang Huaqing joined the PLAN in 1958 as an enlisted member and then became a culture staff officer and served primarily in second-level political organization and cadre department billets until he assumed leadership positions as a Political Department director and PC at a naval base starting in 1985. From 1990 on, he served in PLAN Headquarters as a DPD, DPC, and PC, as well as a concurrent Party Committee deputy secretary. He received his initial education and training as a student at a naval training unit. In 1987, he studied at the Central Party School for four months. In 1994 he took a four-month graduate course at the National Defense University (NDU). From 1997 to 2007, he took a graduate course by correspondence from the Central Party School.
- Hu Yanlin joined the PLAAF in 1959 as a pilot cadet and shifted from being a pilot to political officer leadership billets early in his career. In 1990, he transferred to PLA Naval Aviation as a political officer, where he served as an air division DPC and PC before moving to leadership billets in Naval Aviation Headquarters. He then became the director of the PLAN's Political Department, followed by serving as a DPC and PC. Besides his pilot cadet training, he attended the NDU basic course for two years from 1986 to 1988, and a short course at the Central Party School in 1991.
- Liu Xiaojiang began his career in 1970 as an enlisted member in the PLA's railway corps. He then served in the GSD as a secretary (*mishu*), including working under Admiral Liu Huaqing while he was a deputy chief of the General Staff and PLAN commander. From 1984 to 1998, he served in various General Political Department (GPD) Cadre Department and Culture Department billets. From 1998 to 2008, he served as a deputy director of the PLAN's Political Department and then as a PLAN DPC and concurrent director of the Discipline Inspection Committee before becoming the PC in 2008. As an MR leader-grade officer, Liu will have to retire at the age of 65 in 2014.

Table 3: PLAAF Political Commissars

<i>PC</i>	<i>Year Started (age)</i>	<i>Commander</i>	<i>DPC</i>	<i>MRAF PC</i>	<i>CMC Member</i>
Xiao Hua	1950 (34)				X
None	1950–1957				
Wu Faxian	1957 (42)	X	X		X
Yu Lijin	1965 (52)		X	X	
Wang Huiqiu	1968 (57)		X		
Fu Chuanzuo	1973 (59)				
Zhang Tingfa	1975 (57)	X			
Gao Houliang	1977 (62)		X		
Zhu Guang	1985 (63)				
Ding Wenchang	1992 (59)				
Qiao Qingchen	1999 (60)	X			
Deng Changyou	2002 (55)				
Tian Xiusi	2012 (62)				

A review of the above four PLAN PCs found the following similarities and differences:

- Only Zhou and Yang spent their entire career in the PLAN;
- Yang and Hu first served as the director of the PLAN Headquarters Political Department and concurrently as a Party Standing Committee member before becoming a deputy PC and then the PC;
- All four served as a deputy PC;
- Only Zhou served as a fleet PC;
- The starting age for as the PC was 56 for Zhou and Yang, 59 for Liu, and 60 for Hu, and only Zhou moved on to another position (GLD PC at age 58) before retiring at age 65.

Although there are no clear patterns for determining who the next PLAN PC will be, the field can most likely be narrowed down to officers who are serving as a deputy PC and previously served as a deputy director

and/or the director of the PLAN's Political Department. Furthermore, they most likely did not serve as a fleet PC. Based on the information available, one of the top contenders is most likely Vice Admiral Ma Faxiang, who has been the director of the PLAN Political Department since June 2011 (club.xilu.com/xinguancha, January 16, 2010). Ma previously served as the PC for the PLAN Equipment Research Academy (2004–2008) and as the PC for the PLAN Test and Training Base (2008–2011). It is not clear what his date of birth is, but it is probably around 1954, which would make him eligible to replace Liu Xiaojiang in 2014. The two current deputy PCs, Wang Yaohai and Wang Sentai, were born in 1950 and 1951, respectively, which makes them too old to replace Liu in 2014. As a result, Ma will most likely replace Wang Yaohai as a deputy PC and then could become the PC in 2014.

PLA Air Force Political Officers

As shown in the Table 3, the PLAAF has had 12 PCs since 1949, three of whom became the commander.

In May 1950, Wu Faxian became a PLAAF DPC and concurrently DPD. For all practical purposes, he served as the PC when Xiao Hua, who was the PC for less than six months, was transferred to the General Political Department (GPD). Like the PLAN, the PLAAF's development suffered during the Cultural Revolution because of PLAAF commander Wu Faxian's involvement with Defense Minister Lin Biao. Wu, who had been the PLAAF political commissar from 1957 to 1965, was appointed PLAAF commander in May 1965 but still served as the party secretary and *de facto* PC. He was assigned concurrently as a DCOGS and a deputy director of the CMC's General Office. When Lin's aircraft crashed in Mongolia in September 1971 after an alleged abortive coup against Mao Zedong, Wu Faxian was immediately arrested. He was tried 10 years later and sentenced to 17 years in prison (*People's Liberation Army Air Force 2010*). After Wu's arrest, the PLAAF subsequently went without a commander until May 1973.

When Deng Xiaoping gained control of the Communist Party in 1978, he sought to keep a much tighter rein over the PLAAF than the other service arms. He sought to upgrade China's airpower capabilities, but one of his unstated purposes was to assert his authority over what he and other senior officials regarded as a "potentially dangerous service" partly because of its ability to move troops around China rapidly in times of crisis [4]. After Deng took control, Zhang Tingfa, who had previously served as the PLAAF PC was appointed the PLAAF commander and party secretary until 1985, which provided additional political control.

PLAAF Political Commissar Career Paths

The following bullets provide background information on the four PCs who joined the PLA after the PLAAF was created in 1949:

- Ding Wenchang joined the PLA in 1951 as an Army cadet and then served as a PLAAF aircraft mechanic before switching to the political officer career track, where he held various staff officer and leadership billets. He served as the PLAAF

Political Department director and then the PC. He attended the Central Party School for five months in late 1983 and NDU for three months in 1989.

- Qiao Qingchen joined a PLAAF Aviation Prep School in 1956 and then attended an Aviation School before serving as a pilot. Throughout his career, he shifted back and forth between aviation commander and political officer billets. He served as the Beijing MRAF commander, then the PLAAF PC and finally the PLAAF commander, where he was the party secretary in all three billets. In 2004, he became a CMC member. In 1990, he attended a four-month course at the Central Party School.
- Deng Changyou joined the PLAAF in March 1968 as an enlisted force engineer and was then commissioned as a platoon leader. He spent his early career as a political officer in engineering units before moving into command post, air corps, and MRAF political officer leadership billets. He then served as the PLAAF DPD before becoming the PC. He attended the PLA Political College for two years (1981–1983) and took a correspondence course from the Central Party School for over two years (1993–1996).
- Tian Xiushi joined the PLA in 1968 as an enlisted member. After becoming an officer and company commander, he shifted to the political track. Spent his career in the Xinjiang Military District and then the Lanzhou MR Headquarters until becoming the Chengdu MR PC in 2009. He transferred to the PLAAF as the PC in 2012. He attended the NDU Basic Course for a year (1994–1995) and a Political Work Course at the Xi'an Political College for almost two years (2002–2004). Tian assumed his position in October 2012 and will have to retire at age 65 in 2015.

A review of the above PLAAF PCs found the following similarities and differences for the three career PLAAF officers:

- They each spent their entire career in the PLAAF without any billets in the GPD or an MR Headquarters;
- They each worked their way up the career ladder in unit, air corps/command post, and MRAF

- Headquarters billets;
- None of them served as an MRAF PC, and only Deng served as an MRAF deputy PC;
- Ding and Deng served as a deputy director of the PLAAF Political Department and then concurrently as the director of the Political Department, where they were also a member of the Party Standing Committee;
- None of them served as a PLAAF deputy PC;
- All three took an in-residence or correspondence course from the Central Party School while serving in deputy corps leader or corps leader billets;
- The starting age as PC was 55 for Deng, 59 for Ding, and 60 for Qiao, and only Qiao moved on to another position (PLAAF commander at age 63) before retiring at age 65;
- Only Qiao moved back and forth between PC and commander billets throughout his career;
- Only Deng served as the head of a Discipline Inspection Committee, which was in an MRAF Headquarters.

Assuming the another outside officer is not chosen, the most likely person to become the next PC is Lieutenant General Fang Jianguo, even though his profile contradicts most of the patterns above. The key factor is that Fang, who will be 60 years old in 2015, became the director of the Political Department in December 2012, while moving up as the senior deputy PC in protocol order.

Although no complete profile is available, Fang was born in 1955 and apparently spent most of his career in Army political officer billets, including serving as the secretary to General Chi Haotian from 1985 until 2000 when Chi was the Jinan MR PC and then the Chief of the General Staff. In 2006, Fang transferred to the PLAAF as a deputy director in the PLAAF Headquarters Political Department. In 2007, he became the Lanzhou MRAF PC. In June 2012, he became one of the PLAAF's deputy PCs and in December 2012 became first in protocol order and was appointed as the concurrent director of the Political Department.

Conclusions

The PLAN and PLAAF have each had 12 PCs since

the services were created in 1949. Although there is no clear career path for predicting who the next PCs will be, this article surmises that the most likely candidates are Vice Admiral Ma Faxiang and Lieutenant General Fang Jianguo, respectively, based on their age and having served in the headquarters' Political Department as a deputy director and the director. Fang is currently the senior deputy PC, and Ma will most likely become a deputy PC in the next year.

Aside from these tentative predictions, the information provided both here and the comparative companion to this article allows for a broader and more generalized assessment of the higher echelons of the PLA's political officer system. It is quite evident that the PLA's senior political officers have widely varied operational backgrounds, educational experiences and long-term career paths, cutting across institutions, positions and even services. As was also seen with the Soviet and KMT systems described in the comparative background, a technical/operational background (or at least experience) is generally considered necessary for political officers to be effective; yet, at the highest levels, such backgrounds are not necessarily as vital, and certainly no specific background can be considered mandatory in any of the three systems.

Thus, there can be little in the way of absolute and specific requisites in terms of background and career path for the senior political leadership, and, ultimately, it may well be a truism that, in an armed force attached to a political party, interpersonal connections and bureaucratic wrangling may well carry the greatest weight in determining the leaders of its system of political control.

Kenneth W. Allen is a Senior China Analyst at Defense Group Inc. (DGI). He is a retired U.S. Air Force officer, whose extensive service abroad includes a tour in China as the Assistant Air Attaché. He has written numerous articles on Chinese military affairs. A Chinese linguist, he holds an M.A. in international relations from Boston University.

Morgan Clemens is a Research Associate at DGI, where his work focuses on the Chinese armed forces and defense industry. He has studied in China and holds an M.A. in Asian Studies from George Washington University and a B.A. in History and Government from the College of William and Mary.

Steven Glinert is a China analyst at DGI. He graduated from George Washington University with a degree in International Relations in 2010 and has written papers for the Minerva Project.

Daniel Yoon is a Chinese linguist–analyst at DGI. He is a graduate of Tufts University and formerly a visiting student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Notes:

1. The PLA did not institute a mandatory retirement age of 65 for military region leader–grade officers until 1995.
2. The commander, PC, and deputies are called *zhuguan*, and the directors of the Headquarters, Political, Logistics, and Equipment Departments are called *shouzhang*. Collectively, they are called *lingdao* (leaders).
3. Unless otherwise noted, biographical information comes from online Chinese wikis with entries on individual PLA officers, including <<http://baike.baidu.com>>.
4. John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, “China’s Search for a Modern Air Force,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1, Summer 1999, pp. 64–94; William W. Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927–71*, New York, Washington, London: Praeger, 1973, p. 550; Stanley Karnow, *Mao and China: A Legacy of Turmoil*, Penguin Books, New York, 1972, p. 429. *Dangdai Zhongguo Kongjun*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1989, p. 481.

China’s Military Political Commissar System in Comparative Perspective

By Kenneth W. Allen, Brian Chao and Ryan Kinsella

In October 2012, most Western analysts of China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) were surprised when the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) Central Military Commission (CMC) appointed General Tian Xiusi—who

had served since 1968 as an Army enlisted member and political officer—as the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) political commissar (PC). Furthermore, in February 2008, the CMC had appointed Vice Admiral Liu Xiaojiang, who had served from 1970 until 1998 as an Army enlisted member and political officer, as the PLA Navy’s (PLAN) PC. Given their grade of military region leader, they will be replaced when they are required to retire at age 65 in 2015 and 2014, respectively.

Although it is not possible to predict exactly who will replace them, there are certain positions that the past four PLAAF and PLAN PCs (who joined the PLA after 1949) have held, and have not held, that will help narrow down the possible candidates. When providing these assessments, however, it is important to first understand how the PLA’s PC system has evolved and how it roughly compares to the Soviet/Russian and Taiwan/Republic of China (ROC) political officer system since their beginnings in the 1920s.

Therefore, this article provides a brief overview of all three PC systems to include where the PCs receive their political officer education.

PLA Political Officer Overview

The PLA’s predecessor, the Red Army, assigned its first PCs to units in 1929 (*China Military Encyclopedia* 1997, Vol. 4, p. 377), which was a year before it created the General Political Department (GPD, *zong zhengzhi bu*) (*China Military Encyclopedia* 2007: *China PLA Military History*, Vol. 1, p. 63).

The PLA’s political work system consists of three component systems: party committee (*dangwei*), political commissar (*zhengwei*), and administrative and functional (*jiguan*) (*China Military Encyclopedia* 2007: *China PLA Military Political Work Overview*, Vol. 2, p. 497).

Since the 1930s, the PLA’s political work system has consisted of political officers at every level in the chain of command, from the company level up to the four General Departments—General Staff (GSD), GPD, General Logistics (GLD) and General Armament (GAD). Squads, which consist of enlisted personnel, and platoons do not have political officers. The three levels

of political officers who serve as unit leaders (*zhuguan*) and deputy leaders are as follows (*People's Liberation Army Air Force 2010*, Chapter 6, NASIC; *China's National Defense 2002*):

- Political commissars (*zhengwei*) are assigned to all organizations at the regiment level and above;
- Political directors (*jiaodaoyuan*) are assigned to all battalion-level organizations;
- Political instructors (*zhidaoyuan*) are assigned to all company-level organizations.

The three levels of political officers above have basically the same key responsibilities:

- Implementing decisions made by the party committee;
- Instilling party discipline among party members;
- Providing political education to the troops within their organization;
- Working with other components of the political work system.

A high percentage of political officers who serve as unit leaders and deputies, as well as some of the directors in first-level Political Divisions (*zhengzhi chu*) at the regiment level and Political Departments (*zhengzhi bu*) above the regiment level, are selected from company-grade officers who have been Communist Party members since they were cadets and are already serving in the military/command track; however, some political officers also come from the logistics, equipment, and special technical track. As a result, the new political officers already have some operational experience at the grassroots level (e.g., battalion and below). They continue to build on this experience as members of the unit's party committee and standing committee throughout the rest of their career.

As a general rule, the unit's political officer serves as the secretary for the party committee (regiment and above), grassroots party committee (battalion), or party branch (company), while the unit's military track leader (e.g., commander, director, or commandant/president), serve as the deputy secretary. In addition, the GLD and GAD, as well as their counterpart organizations in the Military Regions, Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery down to the regiment level have both a director and PC, where the PC usually serves as the party secretary. The exception is when the commander, such as former PLAAF commander

Qiao Qingchen and former PLAN commander Ye Fei, or the GLD/GAD director previously served as a political officer. Under those circumstances, the commander/director then serves as the party secretary.

Besides the political officers who serve as unit political leaders and directors of the first-level Political Division/Department, other political officers include the directors of the various second-level administrative and functional political departments, bureaus, divisions, offices and branches down to the regiment level, including the organization, cadre (officer personnel), propaganda, security, cultural activities, mass work and party discipline departments. There are also political staff officers (*ganshi*) and secretaries (*mishu*), who support the leaders and first- and second-level department directors (*PLAAF 2010*).

Finally, every PLA organization has more than one deputy PC. In some cases, one of the deputies also serves concurrently as the director of the Political Department. This is possible because both billets are the same grade at every level. As a result, some PCs have been selected from either a deputy PC or the director of the Political Department.

PLA Political Officer Education

Prior to 1985, the PLA Political College in Beijing was the primary academic institution for mid-level and senior political officers. In 1985, it merged with the PLA Military College and PLA Logistics College to form the National Defense University (NDU). Since then, the PLA's two primary political academic institutions have been the PLA Xi'an Political College and the PLA Nanjing Political College. In 1999, the PLAAF's Political College in Shanghai was subordinated to the Nanjing Political College as a branch college, and the PLAN's Political College was merged into the Dalian Naval Ship Academy (*China Military Encyclopedia 2007: Military Organizational Structure*, Vol. 1, pp. 138-140 and *China PLA Military History*, Vol. 3, pp. 661–668, 702–704).

As a general rule, political officers who become unit political leaders or deputies at the company level have not received any formal education or training to become a political officer. Based on a review of biographic information for the PLAN and PLAAF PCs who joined

the PLA after 1949, the only formal political officer professional military education (PME) they receive occurs through either an in-residence course at one of the political colleges or an in-residence or correspondence course from the Central Party School for regiment-level and above officers. They also attend a short or long in-residence course at NDU for division and above officers, but the focus is not on political work. Meanwhile, second-level political department directors and deputy directors, as well as political staff officers, begin as cadets at the Xi'an or Nanjing political colleges and then receive their intermediate-level PME there as well. The Air Force Command College and Naval Command College also have undergraduate cadet programs for political staff officers (*China Military Encyclopedia 2007: China PLA Military History*, Vol. 3, pp. 734, 748).

Soviet and Russian Military Political Officer Overview

The organization of the Soviet military underwent a series of transformations since its inception in 1917, including introductions of at least two specialized political officer positions—the *politruk*, also called political director, and the *pompolit*, also called deputy commander for political affairs. In historic and cultural contexts, these positions collectively are referred to as commissars, though this phrase often refers only to the *politruk*. These positions existed at various times during the Soviet Union's existence and were granted varying levels of authority over their corresponding units. *Politruks* slowly were phased out under the “single-command” doctrine of the late 1920s and 1930s, after which a commander could opt to join the Communist Party, or be assigned a *pompolit* as a commissioned representative of the party to serve as his assistant (www.apn.ru, November 2007).

The Soviet Revolutionary Military Council—in conjunction with the Eighth Congress of the Republic of Poland—established the organ of leadership for political-party work in the Red Army and Navy in April 1919. In May 1919, the department was named the Political Directorate of the Revolutionary Military Council (*PUR*). In September 1920, this was imbued with the authority to oversee all “political-propaganda” works in the military establishment. Its constituent departments governed administration, news, agitprop, education,

literature publication and procurement. In 1924, the *PUR* was renamed the Political Department of the People's Commissariat of the Red Army, and it oversaw Army and Navy affairs [1].

During efforts to modernize the Soviet military during the 1930s, a new generation of political officers began to be assigned to more technical roles in the Army and Navy, including mobilization training, personnel management as well as overseeing the spread and accessibility of technical writing. It was during this time that political officers were introduced into the Air Force of the Red Army.

Specifically, *Politruks* were re-instituted preceding World War II as arms of decentralized “military councils,” and they were required to be represented in all units at the regiment level and above starting in May 1937. According to some military historians, it was during this period that political officers within the Soviet Army and Navy gained a negative reputation among officers and enlisted men due to a perceived lack of valor or an overemphasis on protocol over pragmatism (“Gold Stars of Political Workers,” avia.lib.ru/bibl/1023/title.html, 1984).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and abolition of political officers in 1991, the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation began training Assistant Commanders for Education Work, or *Zampolit*, primarily constituting chaplains and counselors. They are not considered political officers, as their functions are limited in comparison to their predecessors and they do not undergo specialized officer training (nvo.ng.ru, May 22, 2009; www.apn.ru, November 2007).

Soviet Military Political Officer Education

The V. I. Lenin Military-Political Academy was founded in 1919 to prepare political leaders of the Red Army and Navy with higher military education. Its graduates were expected to excel technically and provide policy guidance and political organizing in their units. However, the Academy was not exclusive to political officers, as it included in its classes members of labor forces, internal and border troops and future teaching staff of other military schools. The school also conducted humanities

research, and constituted the central authority for all other higher military-political education, including for political officers and non-PCs alike.

By 1934, the school had established four separate areas of focus to reflect the modernizing military of the Soviet Union: combined arms, air, naval, and military-pedagogical. While the areas of training remained constant, the organization of the institution and the terms of study remained in flux throughout its history. During World War II, for example, training was significantly accelerated for political officers, requiring only one year of study.

A number of early leaders of the Red Army graduated from the V. I. Lenin Military-Political Academy during its first years. These first graduating classes comprised both political officers and pure military officers in high levels of command.

In 1994, following the abolition of Russia's military-political establishment, the Academy was renamed the Military Institute of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, and it is primarily a military and pedagogical institute.

Taiwan/ROC Military Political Officer Overview [2]

Taiwan's Armed Forces has a political commissar system known organizationally as the Political Warfare Bureau (*zhengzhi zuozhan ju*), which is an agency within the Ministry of National Defense (MND) [3]. It traces its legacy back to the Whampoa Military Academy in the early years of both the Republic of China (ROC) and the Nationalist Party of China (Kuomintang/KMT), though it did not live through the Sino-Japanese War and World War II. The system was reestablished in April 1950 as the Political Department (*zhengzhi bu*) by Chiang Ching-kuo, son of and future successor to President Chiang Kai-shek. The impetus for this was the ROC Government's defeat and evacuation to Taiwan in 1949, as a lack of military discipline and loyalty to the KMT were "two factors blamed in part for the loss to the communists on the mainland" [4]. For much of the next thirty years and through two further name changes, the political commissar system exercised tremendous influence in

Taiwan's Armed Forces, maintaining service members' loyalty to not only the country, but to the president, as well as to Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People. Indeed, the Three Principles and the Presidents Chiang were placed above the Republic in order of importance.

Through this system, the KMT ensured that only service members reliably loyal to the party-state could advance in their military careers. Its importance did not begin to decline again until the lifting of martial law in 1987 by Chiang Ching-kuo, who had created and overseen the system in the first place. Thus began the slow depoliticization of the military and of the KMT's hold on the armed forces through the political commissar system.

Since then, members of opposition parties have been allowed into the military; the Political Warfare Bureau has lost formal power and influence in the military, as has the KMT; the bureau itself was demoted from a department level in the early years of the Chen Shui-bian administration (2000–2008); and the National Defense Law of 2000 inserted the Minister of National Defense into the military's chain of command, fitting in between the Commander-in-Chief (the president) and the Chief of the General Staff. Today, the Political Warfare Bureau's mission is to ensure loyalty to the state and not to any political party and to address any personal issues that service members may have [5].

The three services (Army, Navy and Air Force) each has its own Political Warfare Department (*zhengzhan shi*) and each unit within each service undergoes political education on a weekly basis, which takes the form of two hours' audio-visual instruction on national, as opposed to political party, issues known as Juguang Day (a reference to "*wuwang zaiju*"). Otherwise, political commissars' powers today are greatly limited, such that they only attend meetings that pertain to their area of responsibility and, unlike their counterparts in the PLA, are not allowed to interfere with operational matters.

Taiwan Military Political Officer Education

The Army and Navy political commissars enter their field as cadets in the National Defense University (NDU)'s Department of Political Science and remain political commissars for the duration of their military service. The

Air Force, however, selects its political commissars from its pilots, who attend the NDU's specialized political warfare college, Fu Hsing Kang College. Unlike in the Army and Navy, Air Force political commissar selectees are expected to move between political warfare officer and operations officer billets in their careers—indeed, political officer experience is a key factor in a pilot's promotion. Whereas the other services' political warfare officers are full-time political warfare officers, the Air Force's political warfare officers must shoulder both operational and political warfare responsibilities. In the past, women political commissars were restricted to cultural billets (song-and-dance troupes, media presenters, etc.); today, women fill all billets in political warfare.

Kenneth W. Allen is a Senior China Analyst at Defense Group Inc. (DGI). He is a retired U.S. Air Force officer, whose extensive service abroad includes a tour in China as the Assistant Air Attaché. He has written numerous articles on Chinese military affairs. A Chinese linguist, he holds an M.A. in international relations from Boston University.

Brian C. Chao is Research Associate for East Asia in DGI and Researcher at the Asia-Pacific Desk for Wikistrat. Mr. Chao took his A.B. in Government from Dartmouth College, during which he served an internship with APSA/East Asia in OSD Policy. Mr. Chao is fluent in Mandarin Chinese and is a member of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the U.S. Naval Institute, and Young Professionals in Foreign Policy.

Ryan Kinsella is a Research Associate for Russia at DGI. He has studied in Moscow and holds an M.A. in International Politics with a focus on Russia and Eastern Europe from the American University. He also holds a B.A. in Political Science and Russian from Dickinson College.

Notes:

1. This paragraph is based on an analysis of a series of Soviet military orders, namely Order RVSR No. 674, Order RVSR No. 912, Order RVSR No. 1912 and Order RVS USSR No. 446/96 as well as the Central State Archive of the Soviet Army.
2. Unless otherwise cited, information from this section on Taiwan's political warfare system was gained from correspondence and interviews with knowledgeable personnel.

3. As of January 1, 2013, the word “general” (*zong*) was dropped from the bureau's name, per an amendment to the Ministry of National Defense Organization Act on November 23, 2012, see <<http://www.mnd.gov.tw/Publish.aspx?cnid=127&p=55860>>.
4. M. Taylor Fravel, “Towards Civilian Supremacy: Civil-Military Relations in Taiwan's Democratization,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1, Fall 2002, p. 62.
5. Fravel, “Towards Civilian Supremacy,” pp. 68, 70; Authors' correspondence.
