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Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with senior members of the People's Liberation Army.

(Credit: Xinhua)

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In a Fortnight

U.S. SUGGESTION FOR JAPANESE PATROLS IN SOUTH CHINA SEA PROMPTS ADIZ THREAT

By Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga

A recent U.S. suggestion for Japanese patrols in the South China Sea has elicited a sharp rebuttal by the Chinese government and reignited Chinese media discussion of a South China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). In a strongly worded editorial the next day, the *Global Times*—the state-run *People's Daily's* more nationalistic and arguably less authoritative subsidiary newspaper—argued that China could respond to this rare open declaration of U.S. balancing against China by declaring a South China Sea ADIZ, quickening or expanding land reclamation efforts in the South China Sea or strengthening military cooperation with Russia in Northeast Asia (*Global Times*, January 30). A Xinhua article said Japanese patrols would raise tensions with China and noted that Japan just commissioned a new surveillance plane, the P-1, with an 8,000 kilometer range, enabling Japan to have the military capability to conduct these patrols in the South China Sea ([Xinhua](#), January 30).

On January 29, Admiral Robert Thomas, commander of the U.S. Seventh Fleet in Asia, said “I think that [Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces] operations in the South China Sea makes sense in the future... In the South China Sea, frankly, the Chinese fishing fleet, the Chinese coastguard and the (navy) overmatch their neighbors” ([Reuters](#), January 29). These comments were supported by the U.S. Department of Defense, though downplayed by the U.S. Department of State ([South China Morning Post](#), February 1). The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) responded that “countries outside the region should respect the endeavor of countries in the region to safeguard peace and stability, and refrain from sowing discord among other countries and creating tensions” ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), January 30). There has been no statement by the Japanese government, but Japan has no announced intention of starting the patrols ([China Daily](#), January 30).

Shen Dingli, a professor at Fudan University, wrote that the U.S. call for Japanese patrols “reflects the Pentagon throwing the South China Sea into disorder by getting even more countries involved in the dispute” ([People’s Daily Overseas](#), February 2). Shen asserted that the “United States hopes to kill several birds with one stone”: increase international pressure on China, increase the threat level to China and signal to other claimants that they can rely on the United States to avoid negotiation with China.

Yet some analysts, including one Taiwanese expert interviewed on Phoenix TV, downplayed the issue. Zheng Jiwen noted that Japan has “security considerations” in the South China Sea because its “critical lifelines” run through the region, and added that Japanese military activity in the Sea is “not news” ([Phoenix TV](#), January 30). He concluded that the patrols are by no means certain to happen and will take time, since there are questions about Japan having the right mechanisms in place in the event of a mid-air crisis, presumably landing rights with the Philippines.

Admiral Thomas’ suggested Japanese patrols come after several years of efforts by Tokyo to build a presence in the South China Sea, which China has consistently opposed ([People’s Daily Online](#), 2011). Beyond revising its constitution to allow more active defense cooperation with the United States, Japan has conducted military exercises with the Philippines and will begin delivering

vessels for the Philippine and Vietnamese coast guards in 2015 ([Philippine Daily Inquirer](#), March 31, 2014; [Tuoitre News](#), July 9, 2014; [Asahi Shimbun](#), October 3, 2014). Furthermore in late January, Japan hosted the Philippine Minister of Defense for bilateral defense meetings and reached an agreement on increased defense cooperation ([Philippine Star](#), February 1; [People’s Daily Overseas](#), January 30). Reflecting Chinese opposition, the *People’s Daily Overseas* said the recent Japan-Philippine bilateral defense meetings demonstrated efforts to “contain China” and “gang up on China” and that Japan wants to link the East China Sea and South China Sea disputes ([People’s Daily Overseas](#), January 30).

The *Global Times*’ threat to establish an ADIZ in retaliation for Japanese patrols appears to fulfill earlier statements by Chinese analysts but counters the Chinese government’s repeated denials of rumors that Beijing seeks to establish a second ADIZ, after its November 2013 unilateral declaration of one over its disputed territory with Japan in the East China Sea (see [China Brief](#), December 5, 2013; [Sina](#), 2014). Most recently in December 2014, the MFA said that “it is within a country’s sovereignty to decide whether to establish an air defense identification zone or not, meanwhile all sort of factors should be taken into account. Currently, peace and stability in the South China Sea is guaranteed,” suggesting there was no need for one ([MFA](#), December 22, 2014). However, Chinese analysts have stated that China may establish an ADIZ if necessary, including in response to more U.S. and Japanese patrols in the South China Sea that threaten China’s national security ([Global Times](#), January 3, 2014). The *Global Times* editorial appears to be a follow-up to that line of thinking.

This justification of a South China Sea ADIZ based on security threats is consistent with China’s narrative for its 2013 East China Sea ADIZ, but the specific targeting of Japan counters the 2013 announcement’s claim that “it is not directed against any specific country or target” ([MFA](#), November 26, 2013). While the *Global Times*’ threat may be a semi-authoritative signal that the Chinese government would not tolerate a Japanese patrol presence in the South China Sea, the fact that *People’s Daily* did not respond and Shen’s *People’s Daily Overseas* article did not mention the ADIZ issue appears to suggest the Chinese government has not yet decided to declare an ADIZ in response to such patrols. Rather, it suggests the Chinese government

has continued interest in eventually establishing an ADIZ and that a similar perceived provocation may serve as the justification when Beijing decides the timing is right down the road.

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A Mandate, Not a Putsch: The Secret of Xi's Success

By David Cohen and Peter Martin

When U.S. President Barack Obama said that Chinese President Xi Jinping “has consolidated power faster and more comprehensively than probably anybody since Deng Xiaoping,” he was voicing a view held in both capitals. Since taking office, Xi has been able to push through ambitious economic reforms, rewire decision-making at the top of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and take down a number of Party heavyweights using the largest anti-graft campaign in decades. How has he amassed the power to impose these changes on a conservative CCP?

The key to Xi's success is likely not a sudden power play, but a decade-long effort to create elite consensus on the most difficult questions facing the Party. In short, Xi was given permission to be a transformative leader. A new review of speeches and writings made during his rise shows that he laid out a platform for his presidency long before being chosen for the job. His selection, therefore, represented a mandate for many of the radical changes he continues to push through. Some elements of this mandate were publicly stated as Xi took office: many key decisions made at the Third Plenum decision were foreshadowed by Hu Jintao's outgoing Work Report in 2012, a document that requires the approval of much of the Party's top echelons (for a comparison, see [China Leadership Monitor](#), No. 42, 2014).

During his years as Party Secretary of Zhejiang Province, from 2002 to 2007, Xi treated the job as an extended audition. In speeches, essays, interviews, a regular column in the *Zhejiang Daily* and two books, Xi laid out a distinctive “Zhejiang model,” containing many of the ideas and slogans he has acted on in the past two years. Xi described his vision for Communist Party rule, and he made sure that the leadership was listening, appearing in

national media to explain his theories. In laying out his vision, Xi entered the most heated debates of the Hu era, finding ways to accommodate both sides. He was pro-market, but not anti-state. He was committed to Mao's socialist legacy, but saw it as a tool for governing rather than revolution.

Of course, Xi's power has many sources. He also used factional ties, political maneuvering and his membership in China's “Red Aristocracy” to reach the top. However, the considerable efforts he went through to publicize his thoughts in a system where cadres are closely tracked for performance and loyalty, suggests that he viewed persuasion as a critical tool, and that those who chose him knew and accepted Xi's plans. This interpretation allows us to explain Xi's effectiveness without assuming he is all-powerful.

Although the leadership selection process is highly secretive, and we do not have direct evidence about exactly who chose Xi or how, we know something about what Xi put into this “black box,” and we know the result—so it is possible to make some deductions about why he succeeded as a candidate.

Pitching His Message in Zhejiang

After working his way up the ranks of the CCP in the provinces of Hebei and Fujian, Xi arrived on the national stage in 2002 as Zhejiang Party Secretary. He governed the province for five years, allowing him to develop a distinctive approach to governance. He waded into national debates with prolific writings and speeches, much of which was collected as two books: *Work on Real Things, Walk at the Forefront* [*Gan Zai Shichu Zou Zai Qianli*] and *New Thoughts from the Yangtze* [*Zhijiang Xinyu*], published in December 2006 and August 2007.

Xi had to pitch himself to a Party caught between conflicting economic traditions. “Red” conservatives, state-sector interests and social reformers all sought a larger state. Economic reformers worried, with increasing intensity, that state power was crowding out the market. Statists and liberals also clashed over political reform. While Western democracy was never on the table, the early Hu years saw intense discussion about “intra-Party democracy” and other ways to legitimize the Party's monopoly on power by tackling corruption and giving people something other than Communism to believe in. Xi used his time in Zhejiang to provide his answers to

these questions.

Using Two Hands to Fix the Economy

Xi seems to have been long interested in Zhejiang and its famous “Zhejiang model” of growth powered by family enterprises. In 1982, as a Hebei official, he led a delegation of provincial officials on a tour of Zhejiang and other coastal provinces. In 1998, as Deputy Party Secretary of Fujian, he led another delegation to Wenzhou, a bastion of Zhejiang private entrepreneurship (*Economic Observer*, December 30, 2002). When he arrived in Zhejiang, one newspaper described him as “a committed proponent of limited government” (*Economic Observer*, December 30, 2002).

Xi explained his view of a mixed economy with the idea of “two hands”: the “visible hand” of the state and the “invisible hand” of the market. He insisted that the two complemented each other. In a March 2006 *Zhejiang Daily* column, Xi described “two hands” as the “key to market-oriented reform” (*Zhejiang Daily*, March 17, 2006). Xi did not coin the “two hands” phrase, but he redefined it—and credited it to Adam Smith: “This concept of marketization is very clearly explained in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*, where he introduces the theory of two hands,” he told CCTV in 2006 (CCTV, March 16, 2006). Xi specified that the hand of the market should “adjust” the economy, promote efficiency and lead urban development, whereas the state should lead social management, public services, fairness and rural development. Xi’s answer to the debate about markets versus the state was that China could simultaneously strengthen both. This is a vision Xi has pursued as General Secretary, even continuing to use the same “two hands” formulation.

In Zhejiang, Xi demonstrated his commitment to the market. He described the private sector as the “life of the Zhejiang economy” and entrepreneurs as its “precious riches” (*China Business Times*, January 2, 2003; Xinhua, December 13, 2003). He argued for raising the political and social status of entrepreneurs (*Zhongguangwang*, March 3, 2004); offering private enterprises greater legal protection (*Legal Daily*, March 10, 2004); providing private capital with a greater role in funding infrastructure (*Zhejiang Daily*, August 11, 2003); and using foreign investment to upgrade industries and technologies (*Zhejiang Daily*, August 12, 2003). He also encouraged price reforms for key inputs (*Zhejiang Daily*, February 9, 2006) and drove

drastic streamlining of government approvals processes, reducing a total of 3,000 to just 800 (Jinshiwang, April 1, 2006).

But Xi also saw a prominent role for the state: He called for a “mixed economy in which public enterprises are the main part” in his “eight-eight strategy” for Zhejiang (*Work on Real Things*, p. 3; *Juece Zazhi*, October 14, 2005). State-owned enterprises would be vital to “guiding economic and social development” and to maintaining Party rule (CCTV.com, June 24, 2004). Private enterprises would require substantial state support to scale and upgrade, and Xi promised this to leading companies, including Zhejiang champion automaker Jili (People’s Daily Online, January 8, 2003; *Zhongxinwang*, December 2, 2003; *Zhejiang Daily*, March 18, 2005).

Finally, Xi made sure that Beijing heard him. Aside from numerous speeches and op-eds, Xi also publicized these ideas in a March 2006 conference on Zhejiang’s “Development Experience” and in national media (*Dajiangwang*, March 31, 2006; *Zhongguangwang*, March 3, 2004). In March 2006, Xi was provided airtime on CCTV to speak on a program entitled “Interpreting the Zhejiang Economy,” where he elaborated his “two hands” approach to markets (CCTV, March 16, 2006). His efforts were also frequently covered by national media, and one of his articles on “two hands” was even reprinted in the national press (*Sina*, March 17, 2006).

As General Secretary, Xi has written this mixed approach into the Party line. The Third Plenum pledged to make markets “decisive” while maintaining the state at the economy’s “core.” Xi, other leaders and the state media have also used “two hands” to applaud their economic policies (for example, *People’s Daily*, November 10, 2013; *People’s Daily*, March 4, 2014; *Renmin Wang*, July 28 2014; *People’s Daily*, August 22, 2014; *People’s Daily Overseas Edition*, January 23, 2015). In May 2014, Xi presided over a collective study session dedicated to state-market relations. He told his colleagues that the “two hands” of the state and market should be used together in a “unified, mutually complementary and coordinated” manner (Xinhua, May 27, 2014). A *People’s Daily* commentary last March referred to “two hands” as the “core proposition of the reform process” (*People’s Daily*, March 10, 2014). Commentators have also spelled out the Zhejiang link. Ding Yuanzhu highlighted the importance of Xi’s writings on “two hands,” especially the March 17, 2006 *Zhejiang*

Daily column, in a detailed exposition of Xi's economics (*Beijing Daily*, March 11, 2014). Shu Guozeng, Director of the Policy Office of Zhejiang's Party Committee, urged *People's Daily* readers to look to Zhejiang's ability to make "two hands clap clearly together" (*People's Daily*, December 17, 2013).

Using Mao to Govern Markets

Turning to politics, Xi focused on a central problem with the Chinese system: Party leaders and cadres were not connecting with the masses (*Qiu Shi*, 2005, No. 17; *Zhejiang Daily*, June 29, 2005). Where Mao's answer to this problem was to fight the Party bureaucracy, Xi vowed to dig it out of its rut using some of Mao's tools. He labelled the mass line "a fine tradition of our Party" and self-criticism "a sharp weapon in internal Party thought struggles" (*Zhejiang Daily*, April 25, 2005; *Zhejiang Daily*, February 4, 2005). These tools could be used to "rectify" wayward officials and "caution others," as well as to "educate" and "persuade" the masses (*Zhejiang Daily*, August 6, 2004; *Qiu Shi*, 2005, No. 17). Since taking office, Xi has deployed this same reasoning in a major "mass line" campaign and personally led televised self-criticism sessions.

The "mass line" would also be critical to saving the Party from corruption. In 2006, Xi told Zhejiang's Party Discipline Committee that the "mass line" was a means to help the Party "use power correctly" and maintain stability (*Work on Real Things*, pp. 275–279, 440–453). At the same time, he argued for strengthening formal anti-corruption systems (*Zhejiang Daily*, July 16, 2004). Anticipating his current campaign against bad "work styles," Xi also explained that "mass work" could shield the Party from "dogmas" (*jiaotiao*), "bookishness" (*shu daiqi*) and the failure to unite theory with practice (*Zhejiang Daily*, March 25, 2007).

Unlike Mao, Xi's goal was to strengthen Party authority, ushering in "an era of long-term [Party] rule" (*Work on Real Things*, pp. 440–453). The importance of Party authority also informed his approach to the law: "Establishing the rule of law absolutely does not mean weakening the Party's leadership," he wrote (*Zhejiang Daily*, May 22, 2006). This assurance has been clearly borne out by the Fourth Plenum's call to regularize the judicial system while strengthening the Party's ability to guide it (see *China Brief*, November 20, 2014).

Finally, Xi combined his borrowings from Mao with references to other Chinese traditions. Just as Xi has drawn on Mao, Deng and Confucius as General Secretary, in Zhejiang, he quoted Qing historians, Song philosophers, Adam Smith, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, Deng, Jiang, Hu, Chen Yun, Confucius, Han Feizi and Mengzi without a hint of contradiction. He justified this eclecticism with Marxist dialectics. "We are dialectical materialists," he told a 2002 meeting of Zhejiang cadres: "without the past, there would be no present, so we can't completely negate everything in the past" (*Work on Real Things*, p. 421).

Xi's Zhejiang Model

Xi confidently positioned all this as a "model." To do so, he took the "Zhejiang model" and honed it to fit his needs. In an October 2005 Party meeting, Xi insisted that Zhejiang's success rested on its "people-centered" (*minben*) as opposed to private (*minying*) economy, choosing a phrase favored by Hu early in his term (*Work on Real Things*, p. 81). He said explicitly that the model had implications well beyond Zhejiang's borders: "Zhejiang's economic development model will not only contribute to a rich people and strong province, but can also make an important contribution to national and even global development models" (*Zhejiang Daily*, November 1, 2006).

While pushing this model, Xi stated and restated his loyalty to Beijing. In the preface to *Work on Real Things*, he credited Beijing's policies as key to Zhejiang's success; and the name of the book itself was taken from a Xi speech praising Hu Jintao's speeches (*Work on Real Things*, pp. 7, 43). Xi justified his experimentation by arguing that "thoroughly understanding [the center's] message does not mean copying it exactly," but "uniting it with the real situation in Zhejiang" (*Zhejiang Daily*, November 22, 2004). In stark contrast to the "Chongqing model" that Bo Xilai would later use to challenge Beijing, Xi's model was presented as a complement to, or even vindication of, Beijing's policies.

A “Big Tent” Reformer

As Xi’s term in Zhejiang ended in 2007, China’s top leaders were preparing for the 17th National Congress of the CCP. At this Congress, they had to accomplish an unprecedented feat: Selecting a new leader without Deng Xiaoping’s oversight. Where Jiang and Hu had simply been selected by Deng, the post-Deng Party had to learn to choose its own leaders without a destructive power struggle.

Xi’s agenda was tailor-made to solve this problem. While he did not give all the details, he laid out a broad, “big tent” approach to the CCP’s most difficult economic and political dilemmas. Instead of siding with either market reformers or conservative statisticians, his “two hands” theory promised a strong market *and* a strong state. He promised to use ideas from Mao to strengthen rather than weaken China’s governing institutions, while developing the rule of law to strengthen Party rule. These proposals focused on achieving the shared ambitions of China’s leaders: sustaining economic growth, restoring the Party’s image and, most importantly, ensuring its survival.

What University of California San Diego professor Susan Shirk calls the “selectorate” had undoubtedly been listening to Xi’s pitch. He presented a confident, clear and consistent public platform in venues that included national television. In a political system that watches closely for dissent among its own ranks and in which small variations in political language can signify major changes in policy, his program was certainly known to the Party’s kingmakers.

In October 2007, less than a year after leaving Zhejiang for a brief stint as Shanghai Party Secretary, Xi was catapulted to the Politburo Standing Committee without having previously served on the Politburo, marking him as Hu’s heir apparent. China’s elites had managed to reach an agreement about their next leader. Given that they chose Xi knowing his agenda, it is clear that it was acceptable to them—and likely that it played a major role in winning him the job.

Conclusion

Zhejiang tells us a lot about Xi’s rise, the basis of his power and CCP policymaking. It shows that Xi went to great lengths to sell his inclusive vision for his administration and therefore that the 2012 leadership transition was shaped by elite compromises over the CCP’s future as well as factional power plays. Xi has been able to move quickly as president in part because his agenda addressed the concerns of most key players in the leadership. These players already understood the limits and direction of his plans.

There are some things Zhejiang does not tell us. We do not know how important Xi’s mandate remains today—having given him power, can Party elites easily take it back? If so, Xi’s actions will be constrained by the need to hold his coalition together. The status of the anti-corruption campaign is also unclear: While Xi took the problem seriously in Zhejiang (as Hu did nationally), he said nothing that indicated the scale of the campaign or its targets. To look forward, we should ask how much Xi will continue to rely on the support of the people who brought him to power, and whether he will be able to keep them on-side as ideas and plans make way for action.

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Growing CCDI Power Brings Questions of Politically-Motivated Purge

By Willy Lam

“There is no quota for the anti-graft campaign, and there is no upper limit [regarding the rank of cadres to be disciplined].” This is the latest instruction given by Chinese President Xi Jinping on the clean-governance crusade that has shaken up the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the past two years ([CCDI website](#), January 11; [People’s Daily](#), January 11). Undoubtedly, Xi has gone much further than his predecessors, ex-presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, in nabbing high-level miscreants in China’s labyrinthine party-state apparatus—and there is clearly strong public support for Xi’s campaign against the “big tigers.” Nonetheless, doubts have surfaced about the propriety and legality with which the anti-graft movement is being conducted. Specifically, questions are being asked about the status and mechanisms of the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection (CCDI), the Party’s top graft-buster whose power has dramatically expanded since the 18th Party Congress in late 2012.

At the Fourth Central Committee Plenum last October, the CCP leadership vowed to “resolutely uphold the authority of the Constitution and the law” and to “insist upon running the country and administration in accordance with the law” (see [China Brief](#), November 20, 2014). On this and other occasions, Xi reiterated that “all organizations and individuals must operate within the parameters of the Constitution and the law.” The year 2015 has been designated as the beginning of a “new epoch for the comprehensive implementation of rule of law with Chinese characteristics” ([Xinhua](#), October 23, 2014; [Xinhua](#), February 24, 2013). However, the CCDI, which is a secretive Party organ outside the purview of both the National People’s Congress (NPC) and the courts, seems to be an extra-legal institution that derives its authority from just one person: President and Commander-in-Chief Xi.

The CCDI’s Special Status and Unprecedented Power

The CCDI is headed by Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) member Wang Qishan, who is often considered the second most powerful politician in the country. A former vice-premier in charge of finance and foreign trade, Wang is, like Xi, a princeling (a reference to the offspring to top leaders) whose close friendship with the president dates back to the early 1970s, when they were “rusticated” to the same village in Shaanxi Province. The CCDI is the only Party or government organ that has its own Organization and Propaganda offices, which were set up in March 2013. This means, for example, that the CCDI leadership can recruit cadres outside the established channels of the CCP Organization Department, which has since 1949 been responsible for the Party’s human resources-related operations ([People’s Daily](#), March 29, 2013; [Xinhua](#), March 28, 2013).

The CCDI runs twelve Discipline and Inspection Offices (DIO), which are responsible for uncovering graft and related offences in party and government departments, state-owned enterprise (SOE) conglomerates as well as regional administrative units. Four of the 12 DIOs were established in the past two years ([Chongqing Commercial Daily](#), March 20, 2014; [China News Service](#), March 18, 2014). Starting late last year, the CCDI has stationed sub-offices in a number of top Party and government units. These include the CCP Central Committee’s General Office, the Organization Department and the Propaganda Department. Special CCDI units have also been installed within the General Office of the State Council (China’s cabinet), as well as the NPC and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the country’s top advisory organ. The CCDI is set this year to station anti-corruption cells in all regional party and government units as well as in big SOEs ([Xinhua](#), December 12, 2014; [Southern Weekend](#) [Guangzhou] December 12, 2014).

Moreover, the past two years have witnessed an unprecedented number of senior CCDI personnel assigned to post-18th Congress Party organs with responsibilities for economic, political and social reforms. Take, for example, the Central Leading Group on Comprehensively Deepening Reforms (CLGCDR), which has emerged as one of the most powerful policy-setting organs at the CCP’s top echelon. This mammoth

organization is headed by four PBSC members: President Xi, Premier Li Keqiang, PBSC member in charge of ideology and propaganda Liu Yunshan and Executive Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli. Five Deputy CCDI Party Secretaries—Zhao Hongzhu, Huang Shuxian, Li Yufu, Zhang Jun and Chen Wenqing—are among the 39 senior cadres with the rank of ministers or above who sit on the Leading Group. While these five clean-government experts seem to be charged with closing graft-related loopholes in the course of formulating new policies, their presence on this high-level central leading group also means that graft-busters for the first time are deeply involved in the country's overall administration—they are not present on similar Leading Groups for foreign affairs or economics. Never has the CCDI, whose job used to be solely related to clean governance, been involved so deeply in the country's overall administration (*Beijing Youth Daily*, March 13, 2014; *Ta Kung Pao*, January 23, 2014).

Even more remarkable is the fact that CCDI cadres have “parachuted” into regional administrations that are deemed disaster zones of misdemeanor. A case in point is Shanxi Province, where at least a dozen or so senior cadres have been put under investigation in the past year for alleged corruption. Shanxi happens to be the home province—and power base—of two “big tigers,” the disgraced former Politburo member Bo Xilai and the detained Vice-Chairman of the CPPCC, Ling Jihua (*Singtao Daily* [Hong Kong], December 26, 2014; *China Daily*, December 9, 2014; *Shanxi Daily*, September 12, 2014). Last September, two senior CCDI officials were transferred to Shanxi as Standing Committee members of the province's ruling Party committee. Huang Xiaowei, who became the only female Standing Committee member of the CCDI in late 2012, was named Secretary of the Shanxi Disciplinary Inspection Commission. CCDI member Fu Jianhua was promoted to vice-governor of the coal-rich province (*China Daily*, January 19; *People's Daily*, September 30, 2014).

Increased High-Level Corruption Cases Suggest Political Purge, Not Progress

Studies conducted by Ren Jianming, Head of the Clean Governance Research Center at Beijing's Beihang University, have shown that up to one third of cadres with the rank of ministers or above have accepted bribes and commissions or helped their close relatives and cronies profit in commercial deals. This figure is similar to a 2014 report that quoted an internal document as saying that “more than 30 percent of party, government and military officials were found to be involved in some form of corruption” (*Hong Kong Economic Journal*, August 7, 2014; *Reuters*, April 16, 2014; *Procuratorial Daily*, December 25, 2013). Given that it is well-nigh impossible for the CCDI to tackle all of these bad eggs within a short time, the question arises as to what criteria top graft-buster Wang—and President Xi—is using to determine who to go after first.

According to the official media, the CCDI last year detained for investigation 42 officials with the rank of vice-ministers and vice-governors or above. This was substantially more than the 17 officials of similar ranks nabbed in 2013—and the comparable annual figure of six to eight during the Jiang and Hu administrations (*Ming Pao* [Hong Kong], January 12; *People's Daily*, December 30, 2014). Senior cadres incriminated in 2014 included a former Politburo Standing Committee member (Zhou Yongkang), a former Politburo member and vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission (General Xu Caihou) and two former vice-chairmen of the CPPCC (Ling Jihua and Su Rong). Questions have been asked, however, as to whether Xi and Wang have used the anti-corruption campaign as a weapon to bring down political foes. For example, Zhou, Ling, General Xu and former Politburo member Bo Xilai—who are described as “the new Gang of Four” by the Hong Kong and overseas-Chinese media—are rumored to be leaders of an “anti-Xi Jinping cabal” within the Party (*Apple Daily* [Hong Kong] *Radio Free Asia*, December 24, 2014). It is perhaps not surprising that the two previous Politburo members who went to jail for corruption—former Beijing Party secretary Chen Xitong and former Shanghai Party boss Chen Liangyu—were political foes of ex-presidents Jiang and Hu, respectively (*Financial Times Chinese*, August 1, 2014; *Hong Kong Economic Journal*, July 14, 2011).

According to Bao Tong, the secretary of disgraced Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, however, corruption can never be eradicated under China's stern one-party authoritarian rule. "Corruption can only be tackled with political reform and meaningful checks and balances [within the system]," Bao told a Hong Kong TV station. Bao, who is China's highest-ranked dissident, has been under house arrest ever since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989 ([Apple Daily](#), January 17; [Ming Pao](#), January 10). Zhao, the revered liberal leader who passed away ten years ago, was known to advocate the establishment in China of a relatively independent anti-graft agency comparable to the much-admired Independent Commission against Corruption of Hong Kong ([Radio Free Asia](#), January 17).

It is mindful of the potential abuses by the CCDI system that Peking University political scientist Zhang Ming warned that the anti-graft watchdog must not degenerate into something like the "Eastern Factory," which is a reference to the imperial spying agency run by eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) to remove critics of the regime and foes of the emperor and his favorite aides. "It is said in anti-corruption circles that the CCDI observes three big laws—the way of thinking, opinions and instructions of the leadership," said the outspoken academic. "If the police, prosecutors or judges break the law, recourse is still possible. But when the CCDI makes a mistake, nobody is in a position to challenge it." Zhang added that China's anti-graft system amounted to "the Party supervising itself." "Fighting corruption will only be successful if there is popular and media supervision [of the authorities]," he noted ([Zhang Ming's blog](#), May 14, 2014; [IB Times Chinese Edition](#), December 11, 2012).

The CCDI's media appearances have increased at a commensurate pace with the increasingly vital role that it is playing in Chinese politics. For example, the word "CCDI" appeared 81 times last year in the titles of articles in *People's Daily*, compared to a mere 19 times in 2012. The phrase "Party Secretary of the CCDI" showed up 1,327 times on the news section of China's four most popular semi-official Internet portals. This contrasted with the comparable figure of just 433 in 2012 ([Ta Kung Pao](#), January 12; [Ming Pao](#), January 12). Despite the CCDI's enhanced exposure in the media, the operations of the graft-buster remain as non-transparent as ever. While President Xi's commitment to clean governance does not

seem to be in doubt, he and the CCDI's Wang need to do more to convince the public that they have not been using one of China's most powerful organs to consolidate their power and to decimate political foes.

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President Xi Clears the Way for Military Reform: PLA Corruption, Clique Breaking and Making, and Personnel Shuffle

By Kevin N. McCauley

An unprecedented number of personnel moves and promotions within the PLA have occurred under President Xi. The Chinese press suggests that the promotions and shuffling of personnel are due to ongoing anti-corruption campaigns in the Chinese government and the military ([Caixin](#), January 8; [South China Morning Post](#), January 9). Others have noted that a number of officers with backgrounds in the Nanjing Military Region (MR), comprising Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, Jiangxi and Fujian provinces, have been promoted to bolster President Xi's support within the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This MR is noteworthy because President Xi served in Fujian and Zhejiang provinces and in Shanghai (see [China Brief](#), January 9; [The Diplomat](#), December 30, 2014). Meanwhile, the Defense Ministry spokesman, in response to press speculation, portrayed the personnel shuffle as routine ([China Daily](#), January 5). These explanations for the large-scale reshuffling and promotions provide valid, but incomplete, explanations for the large number of PLA personnel moves occurring under President Xi. An important additional reason is to gain support as well as break ground force opposition based in the MRs to President Xi's announced military reforms, which plans to adjust the MRs creating joint commands, thus reducing ground force dominance (see

[China Brief](#), December 5, 2014). Past opposition, mainly from entrenched interests within the ground forces to maintain the current MR structure, derailed earlier plans by former Presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao to adjust the MR structure and form joint commands, which form an important component of President Xi's military reforms.

Tigers and Flies: PLA Anti-Corruption Campaign

Corruption investigations occurred within the PLA before Xi Jinping assumed the presidency, but have greatly expanded in conjunction with a campaign to overhaul military procedures to curb abuse of positions and cliques. Reports indicate a significant increase in the level of PLA corruption over the last decade. Two high-level officers caught in the anti-corruption campaign are former Politburo member and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) General (GEN) Xu Caihou and former deputy director of the General Logistics Department (GLD) Lieutenant General (LTG) Gu Junshan. Xu, who is suffering from terminal bladder cancer, has confessed to taking bribes. Military prosecutors finished their investigation and started the procedure to file the case against Xu last October. Gu, a close associate and whose especially egregious corruption is intertwined with Xu, has been in detention since early 2012. GEN Liu Yuan, political commissar (PC) of the GLD, initiated charges of embezzlement, bribery, misuse of state funds and abuse of power against Gu despite encountering initial opposition ([Want China Times](#), January 4; [South China Morning Post](#), March 17, 2014; [South China Morning Post](#); March 20, 2014; [Xinhua](#), March 31, 2014; [Xinhua](#), October 28, 2014; [Want China Times](#), November 12, 2014).

The PLA recently posted a list of investigations as part of its efforts to institutionalize and align the military's anti-graft campaign with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI). The list includes four officers not previously mentioned in the media as under investigation by the military procuratorate, and additional officers mainly at the LTG and MG level. The list includes officers at military educational institutes, political officers, logistics officers, as well as officers in positions in various MRs and the Second Artillery Force (SAF). Chinese reports have also named additional corruption suspects not mentioned in the recent report of 16 PLA officers

caught up in corruption investigations. In addition, several suicides, including two PLA Navy (PLAN) officers, have been reported in the Chinese press, along with allegations of corruption. Finally there are rumors that GEN Guo Boxiong, a former Politburo member and CMC vice chairman, is implicated in the investigation of Xu Caihou and has been detained by authorities ([MND](#), January 15; [MND](#), January 16; [Global Times](#), January 15; [China.org.cn](#), December 4, 2014; [China.org.cn](#), October 23, 2014; [Want China Times](#), July 10, 2014; [South China Morning Post](#), November 16; [Washington Times](#), November 20, 2014; [Want China Times](#), January 4).

The reports on corruption include mostly MG and above officers. Only recently did the *PLA Daily* announce changes to auditing and management procedures as well as additional information on corruption investigations at the regiment level and above involving 4,024 officers leading to the removal of 21, demotion of 144, reprimand of 77 and poor evaluations of 61 officers. It remains unclear how many corruption cases there might be involving lower ranking officers. The announced PLA corruption cases appear low compared to those involving civilian officials. President Xi is likely using the threat of corruption investigations to ensure support for him and his military reform plan, and does not want to significantly disrupt the PLA or cause morale problems that could lead to lowered combat readiness or even opposition. The PLA corruption cases also demonstrate to the public the civilian and military leaderships' willingness to clean up the armed forces ([PLA Daily](#) 29 January 2015).

Breaking Cliques

The PLA has undergone an unprecedented shuffling of personnel under President Xi affecting the General Departments, all the MRs, PLAN, PLA Air Force (PLAAF), SAF and military educational institutes. A Ministry of National Defense (MND) article in August 2014 discussed the ongoing high level personnel changes. It noted at that time that President Xi had already promoted 11 generals. The article stated that most newly promoted generals are usually members of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, have held the rank of LTG for a full four years and have been an MR-level officer for two full years. In a break with this convention, of four generals promoted in July 2014 only LTG Chu Yimin, political commissar (PC) of Shenyang

MR and previously director of the political department (PD) in the Nanjing MR, had been an MR-level officer for a full two years. The article also noted that the promotions were as much about advancing highly qualified personnel as combating corruption ([MND](#), August 5, 2014).

The personnel changes under President Xi have had other anomalies. In the past, officers have often spent much of their careers within a single MR, at least until they reached higher echelons. Personnel changes under President Xi have featured not only movement between MRs, but movement to other services or organizations. This is not unprecedented, as there have been a few officers from the other services at the MR headquarters level which are dominated by ground force officers. Under President Xi's promotions and personnel shuffling, ground force officers from each MR have been reassigned to different MRs. Examples under President Xi of officers exchanging positions with officers in different organizations include the following: LTG Wang Ning, deputy chief of the General Staff and former Nanjing MR alumni, exchanged positions with GEN Wang Jianping, commander of the People's Armed Police Force (PAPF); LTG Zhang Shibo, newly appointed commander of the Beijing MR, exchanged places with Song Puxian, commandant of the National Defense University, both with a Nanjing MR background; GEN Xu Yaoyuan, PC of the PAPF with a Nanjing MR background, changed positions with GEN Sun Sijing, PC of the Academy of Military Science (AMS); LTG Miao Hua, with a Nanjing MR background, moved from deputy PC of the Lanzhou MR to PC of the PLAN; and LTG Wang Zhimin, deputy commander of Guangzhou MR, moved to deputy commander of the SAF ([Caixin](#), December 31, 2014; [Caixin](#), December 26, 2014; [Caixin](#), December 30, 2014; [Caixin](#), December 24, 2014; [Caixin](#), September 23, 2014; [Caixin](#); January 12).

The PLA is also shuffling commanders and political officers down to the battalion level. Exchanges of commanders and political officers at battalion and company levels were tested in a brigade of the 27th Group Army, Beijing MR in 2014. In January 2015, it was announced that the exchange program would be applied to all grass-roots units. According to the PLA, this is designed to improve the quality of officers and end corruption. In addition, the PLA began a program in April 2013 to send officers at and above the regiment level to serve temporarily as privates. Reportedly, 86,000

officers have been through this program to improve work styles ([Global Times](#), January 12; [South China Morning Post](#), January 12; [China Military Online](#), January 12).

Quite a few of the personnel changes involved political officers and to a lesser extent logistics related positions. These are likely designed to break up cliques of officers in positions where corruption is most rampant. Political officers are responsible for personnel selection and logistics officers are responsible for material and construction projects. Both of these areas have been a focus of corruption cases involving payment for billets, embezzlement of funds and bribery for construction contracts. The movement of officers within all of the MRs also breaks ground force cliques in those commands that were likely opposed to adjustments in the military region system and establishment of joint commands that would diminish the power of the ground forces within the defense establishment.

Making Cliques

Analysts have noted that some of President Xi's promotions include building a "Nanjing MR Faction" as a power base for him within the PLA, while also building support for his military reform program (see [China Brief](#), January 9). Reported promotions include LTG Gao Jin, LTG Miao Hua, LTG Yi Xiaoguang, LTG Wang Ning, LTG Song Puxian and MG Jiang Yong, all of whom served in Nanjing MR at some point during their careers (see [China Brief](#), January 9; [The Diplomat](#), December 30, 2014).

In addition to those reported officer promotions with connections to Nanjing MR, examples of additional officers connected to the Nanjing MR also receiving promotions include the following: Qi Jianguo, deputy chief of the General Staff, promoted to GEN, one of the few officers with combat experience and has served in 1st GA and 12th GA Nanjing MR; LTG Qin Weijiang, deputy commander of Nanjing MR, named deputy chief of the General Staff; LTG Zhang Shibo, named Commandant of the National Defense University (NDU), reportedly from Zhejiang; Wei Liang, promoted to GEN, served in Nanjing MR including the 12th GA; Wang Jiaocheng, promoted to GEN, served in Nanjing MR, including the 12th GA; Chu Yimin, promoted to GEN, who served as director of the PD in Nanjing MR; and GEN Xu

Yaoyuan, named PC of the Academy of Military Science (AMS), reportedly from Jiangsu ([MND](#), August 5, 2014).

An MND article in August 2014 stated that 34 incumbent generals once served in the Nanjing MR, including GEN Zhao Keshi, director of the General Logistics Department (GLD) and CMC member; GEN Wu Changde, deputy director of the General Political Department (GPD); LTG Liu Shenyang, deputy commander of Jinan MR; LTG Wang Jian and LTG Cheng Tongyi, both deputy PCs of Beijing MR; and MG Han Weiguo, deputy commander of Beijing MR ([MND](#), August 5, 2014).

Although President Xi appears to be building a Nanjing MR clique to support him and his reform efforts, the MND article from 2014 also correctly notes that Nanjing and Guangzhou MRs have become the most important strategic direction since the fall of the former Soviet Union. These two MRs are responsible for Taiwan and the South China Sea contingencies, respectively, have seen a large number of promotions and personnel shuffling, and are where promotions have focused more on the operational capabilities of the officers, rather than other considerations, especially at the higher echelons within these MRs ([Caixin](#), January 12; [China Military Online](#), January 4; [MND](#), August 5, 2014; [South China Morning Post](#), December 27, 2014).

Shaping the Battlefield for Military Reform

The reform plan was announced in November 2013, and the past year was spent preparing support, breaking opposition, conducting detailed planning for its implementation, and initiating some elements of the reform plan such as improvements in training that have wide support. President Xi's unprecedented number of promotions and reassignments has a number of underlying purposes related to the reform plan. Corruption is cited as the reason in many Chinese press articles, and even the PLA press has provided this as one explanation. Analysts as well as the PLA press have noted the number of Nanjing MR-related promotions, but for different reasons. President Xi is promoting officers with a Nanjing MR background to build a clique within the PLA to support him, although the PLA press is right to note the operational qualifications and the importance of the Nanjing and Guangzhou MRs' strategic direction.

The shuffling of a large number of political and, to a lesser extent, logistics officers from areas where corruption is at its worst is an attempt to break connections and curb corruption. The number of announced corruption cases and the movement of political officers appears to indicate a significant problem in the personnel selection process with serious adverse consequences for the PLA. Corruption involving payments for promotions not only lowers morale within the PLA, but adversely affects PLA combat readiness by not basing promotions on qualifications. The corruption probes involving officers at PLA universities and colleges represent a threat to the PLA's long-range plan to develop military talent. President Xi has expressed concerns over the poor quality of instructors and courses, and fraud in PLA educational institutes which inhibits modernization and no doubt hurts morale. PLA morale and combat readiness are both issues Xi's military reforms seek to address. The apparent limited scale of announced corruption cases in the PLA compared with the civilian sector likely represents a measured approach to use corruption as a potential threat, and to show the public the regime's intent to clean up military abuses, while avoiding incurring poor morale and possible opposition within the military.

Promotions, building a base of support within the military, and the threat of corruption investigations all enhance President Xi's control over the military and increase the chances of full implementation of his military reform plan. However, an additional important reason for the PLA personnel shuffle is to break up ground force cliques within the MRs that oppose some of President Xi's military reform proposals, and have also obstructed MR adjustments and the creation of joint commands in the past. The making of cliques to support President Xi and the breaking of cliques opposed to aspects of his military reforms should pave the way forward for real change within the PLA. These moves during the past year are likely the precursor to start implementing these sweeping changes proposed in the military reform plan.

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China-Iran Military Relations at a Crossroads

By Joel Wuthnow

Formal military relations between China and Iran made a series of strides in 2013 and 2014. These included high-level leadership visits and unprecedented port calls involving the two countries' navies. This article seeks to place those developments into context and offers a discussion on their significance. It suggests that China-Iran military ties remain relatively superficial; yet, because both countries pose counter-intervention challenges to U.S. forces, any strengthening of military contacts between them should be a cause for concern.

New Directions in China-Iran Military Relations

Between 1979 and 2013, military contacts between China and Iran rose and then declined. An upsurge of cooperation from the late 1980s through the 1990s included Chinese transfers of anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs) and fast-attack missile boats to Iran. HY-2 "Silkworm" ASCMs used by Iran to strike a U.S.-flagged oil tanker during the "Tanker Wars" of the late 1980s originated in China. The PRC also provided small boats capable of carrying ASCMs and other arms, such as ten *Hondong* fast-attack craft in the mid-1990s. Taken together, Georgia Tech professor John Garver argues that Beijing made a substantial contribution to Iran's anti-littoral warfare capability during these years. [1] In addition to its naval cooperation, China provided technical assistance to Iran's research and development efforts, such as help in Iran's production of the Nasr ASCM, as well as assistance to Iran's nuclear program. [2]

This level of cooperation abated in the late 1990s with the termination of Chinese assistance to Iran's ballistic missile and nuclear programs, due in part to pressure by the United States. Some transfer of defense articles continued, such as the sale of C-14 catamaran missile boats between 2000 and 2002, but the arms relationship essentially ended by 2005. [3] Likewise, high-level officer visits, which had been frequent in the late 1980s and early 1990s, dropped off significantly by the early 2000s. [4] Scholars contend that this decline of military cooperation was due largely to Beijing's decision to prioritize its more strategically significant relations with Washington over

those with Tehran. [5] The passage of UN sanctions on Iran in the 2000s posed another constraint on the prospects for China-Iran military ties, at least in sensitive areas such as nuclear and missile technology.

In this context, stronger China-Iran military relations in 2013 and 2014 have begun to reverse a trend of declining cooperation. Bilateral military contacts in two areas warrant attention.

High-Level Exchanges

The first area concerns high-level military exchanges. For reference, there were only a few publicly reported exchanges between PRC and Iranian military officers between 1996 and 2013. [6] Indeed, according to data contained in China's biannual defense white papers, the most recent such event took place in October 2003, when the commander of the Mobilization Force of the Revolutionary Guards visited Beijing. [7] By contrast, 2014 alone saw two such visits.

First, Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan visited China in May 2014, meeting with Central Military Commission Vice Chairman General Fan Changlong, State Councilor Yang Jiechi, and Defense Minister General Chang Wanquan. During his meeting with Chang, Dehqan stated that the purpose of his visit was to strengthen cooperation in the military and defense fields between the two countries. Likewise, Chang observed that friendly relations between the two militaries would further develop with joint efforts from both sides ([Xinhua](#), May 5, 2014).

Second, Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari visited China in October 2014. According to the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) official newspaper, this was the first-ever visit by an Iranian Navy chief to the PRC ([PLA Daily](#), October 23, 2014). During his visit, Sayyari met with PLA Navy (PLAN) Commander Admiral Wu Shengli, General Chang and paid visits to the North Sea Fleet, East Sea Fleet and PLAN Submarine Academy. Wu told Sayyari that China hoped to strengthen high-level visits and port calls, as well as technological cooperation and collaboration in personnel training. Sayyari remarked during his visit that Iran aimed to achieve greater cooperation with China in the areas of anti-piracy and humanitarian assistance/

Key Events in China-Iran Military Relations, 2013-2014

Date	Type	Description
March 2013	Port Visit	Two Iranian Navy ships visit Zhangjiagang port
May 2014	High-Level Exchange	Iranian Defense Minister visits China
September 2014	Port Visit	Two PLAN ships visit Bandar Abbas port
October 2014	High-Level Exchange	Iranian Navy Commander visits China

disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, as well as in the area of protecting sea lines of communication ([PLA Daily](#), October 23, 2014).

Naval Diplomacy

A second feature of renewed military cooperation between China and Iran has been in the area of naval diplomacy and, in particular, mutual port visits between the two navies. In fact, the two such visits that took place in 2013 and 2014 represented the first time that naval vessels from each state visited the other. First, in March 2013, the Iranian destroyer *Sabalan* and the helicopter carrier *Kharg* paid a visit to Zhangjiagang port, Jiangsu Province. Iranian press stated that the purpose of the visit was to convey Iran's "message of peace and friendship" to China and other East Asian countries ([PressTV](#), March 4, 2013).

Second, in September 2014, two PLAN vessels conducted a five-day port visit at Bandar Abbas, a key Iranian port located along the Strait of Hormuz. The PRC ships were the destroyer *Changchun* and the frigate *Changzhou*, both of which were returning to China after conducting anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden ([PLA Daily](#), September 22, 2014). The visit involved meetings between PLAN officers and the commanders of the Iranian navy's First Coastal Defense Area and its Southern Fleet, as well as social events involving Iranian and Chinese sailors. During the visit, the PLAN rear admiral in command of the two ships remarked that mutual learning would lead to stronger cooperative relations between the two navies. [8] Following the visit, naval ships from both sides held joint drills focused on formation and communications ([China Radio International](#), September 25, 2014).

Discussion

On one level, these developments represent normal activities of the sort that occur between many armed

services. China holds high-level exchanges with officers from numerous countries each year, and it has routinely carried out overseas port visits since the mid-1980s. [9] Moreover, since the mid-2000s, China has expanded its naval diplomacy in regions far from its borders. This has been part of the "new historic missions" articulated by then-President Hu Jintao in 2004, which require the PLA to be prepared to safeguard China's expanding national interests, such as in the Middle East. [10] Likewise, Iran has developed its naval diplomacy in recent years in order to "show the flag" and demonstrate its abilities to conduct out-of-area operations. [11]

However, the timing of these developments raises some interesting questions. As part of its involvement in international anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, the PLAN has conducted multiple port visits in the Middle East since 2008. [12] Why, then, did its ships not visit Iran until 2014? Similarly, the PLA has had many opportunities since 2003 to hold public, high-level meetings with its Iranian counterparts. Why did it not do so until 2014?

A likely explanation is that expansion of China-Iran military relations since 2013 has followed improvements in the overall bilateral relationship. The election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran's president in August 2013, a burgeoning energy relationship in 2014 and recent advances by Islamic State militants may all have prompted Beijing to upgrade its emphasis on closer relations with Tehran ([USNI](#), October 27, 2014). The tone for the bilateral relationship was set in a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Rouhani on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in September 2013, in which Xi stated that mutual trust had deepened and cooperation had strengthened ([China Daily](#), September 12, 2013). During a second meeting between the two heads of state in May 2014, Xi stated that the two countries would cooperate in all fields, citing oil and gas ventures, high-level exchanges and counter-terrorism as

examples ([Xinhua](#), May 22, 2014). By contrast, meetings between Hu Jintao and Rouhani's predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, often focused on PRC concerns over Iran's nuclear program. [13] Through this lens, fostering positive military ties appears to reflect broader diplomatic priorities under Xi.

For the United States, recent developments in China-Iran military relations may not pose an immediate challenge. Currently, those relations appear relatively superficial, even if they do seem to be growing. Further cooperation in non-traditional security areas, such as anti-piracy and counter-terrorism, may even bring positive benefits to regional security.

The key issue is whether military cooperation between Beijing and Tehran expands in a way that jeopardizes U.S. interests. The U.S. Department of Defense's 2012 *Defense Strategic Guidance* singled out both China and Iran as posing an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) challenge to U.S. forces. [14] To date, there has been only anecdotal evidence that the two countries are cooperating in sensitive areas that may exacerbate the A2/AD challenge. For instance, a PRC firm may have attempted to illicitly transfer man-portable air defense technology to Iran in March 2013. [15] However, the recent uptick in formal military ties could presage more robust cooperation in fields such as technical assistance, personnel training or sharing of views in counter-intervention doctrine. The likelihood of such an outcome is uncertain and may be contingent on a variety of factors, such as the continuation of UN sanctions. Nevertheless, any evidence of enhanced cooperation between the U.S. military's two most prominent A2/AD challengers should raise concerns.

Issues to Watch

Given the potential stakes of evolving China-Iran military relations, it would be advisable to further explore the strategic and political dynamics that may be giving rise to those developments. Specific areas of inquiry should include:

- *Strategic views toward the United States.* First, strategic perspectives in Beijing and Tehran toward the United States could provide insight into the prospects for deepening military relations between the two sides. It is

especially important to consider how officials and strategic thinkers from both sides perceive the dangers posed by the U.S. presence in their respective regions, and the extent to which bilateral military cooperation is seen as a viable way to mitigate those risks. Evidence that any of those views are shifting in light of the U.S. rebalance to Asia, or U.S. military operations in the Middle East, could have particularly salient implications for progress in their military relationship.

- *Evolving China-Iran political relations.* Second, China-Iran military relations may be following the broader achievements in the overall bilateral relationship. If this is the case, it would be useful to understand the general direction in which those relations seem to be moving, as well as the perspectives in Beijing and Tehran regarding the opportunities and constraints on cooperation with the other. Evidence of optimism on either side that there may be room to significantly upgrade relations, especially with the advent of new leadership on both sides, could signify more opportunities for enhanced military relations between the two countries.
- *Regional strategic goals.* Third, it is important to understand how military interactions between China and Iran facilitate the two country's strategic goals in the Middle East. China's broader approach to the Middle East could shape the nature or extent of its military contacts with Iran, while Iran's goals in its own neighborhood may impact the nature of its interactions with the PLA. The two countries' perspectives on the challenge posed by Islamic State, as well as regional piracy and trafficking issues, would be helpful in ascertaining the possible direction of cooperation.

Final Thoughts

China-Iran military cooperation made a number of advances in 2013 and 2014, though the level of that cooperation continues to pale in comparison to that of the late 1980s and 1990s. There is nothing inherently disconcerting about leadership visits and port calls, but given that the PRC and IRI have been singled out as posing counter-intervention challenges for U.S. forces, any level of military contact between the two countries should be a reason for continued attention. Therefore, it is of the essence to scrutinize their military relationship, and to gain insight into the strategic and political dynamics leading to closer cooperation between the two countries.

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Notes

1. John Garver, *China and Iran: Ancient Partners in a Post-Imperial World* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2006), pp. 166–200.
2. Scott Harold and Alireza Nader, “China and Iran: Economic, Political, and Military Relations,” RAND Occasional Paper, 2012, p. 6.
3. For instance, the SIPRI Arms Transfer Database contains no record of PRC arms sales to Iran after 2005. See data at: <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.
4. According to John Garver, there were 14 high-level exchanges between China and Iran between 1989 and 2006, but only 2 between 1997 and 2003 (John Garver, *China and Iran*, p. 172).
5. John Garver, *China and Iran*, p. 196; Scott Harold and Alireza Nader, “China and Iran,” p. 6.
6. Garver counts only four high-level military exchanges between China and Iran from 1996 to 2003 (John Garver, *China and Iran*, p. 172).
7. *China’s National Defense in 2004*, PRC State Council Information Office, December 2004, Appendix III.
8. *China’s National Defense in 2004*, Appendix III.
9. For more information, see: Christopher D. Yung and Ross Rustici, “China’s Out of Area Naval Operations: Case Studies, Trajectories, Obstacles, and Potential Solutions,” *China Strategic Perspectives* 3 (Washington, D.C.: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, 2010), pp. 12–13.
10. For a discussion, see: Daniel M. Hartnett, “The PLA’s Domestic and Foreign Activities and Orientation,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 4 March 2009, <http://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.4.09Hartnett.pdf> and Cortez A. Cooper, “The PLA Navy’s ‘New Historic Missions’: Expanding Capabilities for a Re-emergent Maritime Power,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 11 June 2009.
11. Michael Eisenstadt and Alon Paz, “Iran’s Evolving Maritime Presence,” *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 13 March 2014, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-evolving-maritime-presence>.
12. See: Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, “No Substitute for Experience: Chinese Antipiracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden,” U.S. Naval War College, China Maritime Studies, No. 1, 2013, table preceding p. 1.
13. For instance, during a June 2012 meeting, Hu reportedly admonished Ahmadinejad to “weigh the situation” and take a “flexible and pragmatic approach” toward the nuclear negotiations ([Associated Press](#), June 8, 2012).
14. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2012), p. 4.

15. In March 2013, an Iranian vessel near Yemen was found to be transporting PRC-made QW-1M man-portable air defense systems. James Brandon Gentry, “China’s Role in Iran’s Anti-Access/Area Denial Weapons Capability Development,” Middle East Institute paper, 16 April 2013, <http://www.mei.edu/content/china's-role-iran's-anti-access-area-denial-weapons-capability-development>.

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