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In a Fortnight: North Korean Nuclear Test, Satellite Launch Increase Sino-Korean Tensions

On February 7, North Korea televised the launch of a rocket that put an "earth observation satellite" into orbit ([KCTV](#), February 6; [Xinhua](#), February 7). South Korea's spy agency earlier announced that the launch should be viewed as a ballistic missile test, rather than a routine rocket launch ([Yonhap](#), February 7). The launch comes on the heels of a test of a thermonuclear device in the mountains near North Korea's border with China ([Phoenix News](#), January 6). Both actions have received strong condemnations from the international community, putting North Korea's relations with its closest ally, China, in the spotlight ([People's Daily](#), January 7).

China's response has indicated that it is less than pleased with North Korea's recent behavior. Chinese Minister Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying announced that Foreign Ministry Vice-Minister Liu Zhaomin summoned North Korean Ambassador Ji Jae Ryong to propose talks about North Korea's use of guided missile technology to launch a satellite ([Xinhua](#), February 7).

The test of a nuclear device in January was expected to reinforce China's resolve to further pressure North Korea to halt its nuclear weapons program. China has made its call for a "de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula" a regular feature of its statements regarding foreign relations with both Koreas.

Growing friction between the long-time partners has been evidenced by the absence of a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korea's Leader Kim Jong-un. Meanwhile, relations between Xi and Kim's southern counterpart, South Korean President Park have clearly grown stronger ([China Brief](#), September 16, 2015). However, although Chinese high-level diplomacy with North Korea has faltered, the nuclear test and rocket launch have placed

China on the defensive, raising the possibility that China will be less well-placed to play a role in preventing conflict on the peninsula.

For its part, North Korean Ambassador Ji held a news conference in July last year where he specifically laid out North Korea's rationale for its nuclear program, saying "North Korea's nuclear deterrent is in response to the United States' nuclear threat...and is an indispensable means for protecting [North Korea's] sovereignty and existence (Phoenix News, July 28, 2015).

China's response reflects a more complicated reality. The Yellow Sea, which separates most of eastern China from the Korean peninsula, is a vital area for trade. Four of the world's ten busiest ports are Chinese ports on the Yellow Sea: Tangshan, Tianjin, Qingdao and Dalian (Global Times, August 20, 2015). The Shandong and Liaoning peninsulas, stretching to the northeast and southwest, enclose the Bohai Sea, which is home to vital economic centers Tianjin and Dalian on the coast and Beijing nearby.

Geography in turn shapes in the way China views its regional security. China is in the midst of a military reorganization that has resulted in a reconfiguration of its troop deployments, now concentrated in five strategic directions, including, the important Northeast Theater Command that is responsible for crises on the Korean peninsula (see The PLA's New Organizational Structure Part 1 in this issue). The Second Artillery (now reorganized as the Rocket Force) has four launch brigades under Base 51 in the provinces bordering North Korea. Strong Chinese objections to US deployment of Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile batteries in the region, have to be viewed from the perspective of how they degrade China's conventional and nuclear deterrent. The fact that North Korea's actions have now prompted South Korea to begin talks with the United States to acquire a THAAD battery will only exacerbate these fears (Yonhap, February 8).

U.S. military exercises in the region have long been a source of concern for Beijing. Though publically announced and focused on fighting a war with North Korea, the annual joint U.S.-South Korean "Key Re-

solve" and "Foal Eagle" military exercises are uncomfortably close to core Chinese strategic bases and often feature drills that could be used against the Chinese military. In 2010, for example, the U.S. aircraft carrier Washington joined exercises in the Yellow Sea, leading to strong Chinese objections (Global Times, June 9, 2010; People's Daily Online, June 23, 2010). This year, "Key Resolve" is scheduled to begin in March (Yonhap, January 13). If 2015 is any guide, we can expect North Korea to respond with its own series of ballistic missile launches in response to these exercises that may further heighten regional tensions (People's Daily Online, March 3, 2015).

The security situation along China's border with North Korea is already problematic. A series of incidents involving North Koreans murdering Chinese citizens has already prompted strong popular resentment of their recalcitrant neighbor, which has been only further exacerbated by North Korea's dismal image in the international community (China Brief, July 2, 2015; China Brief, January 9, 2015).

Between the prospects of a unified, western-aligned Korean Peninsula (and the inevitable refugee crisis along its border resulting from any war of unification) and an increasingly fractious relationship with its neighbor, China will likely choose to preserve the latter at any cost.

Xi's Obsession with "Cultural Renaissance" Raises Fears of Another Cultural Revolution

By Willy Lam

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) (1966–76), a political and cultural watershed for China. Chinese rock star and pop culture icon Cui Jian spoke for many when he said that the Cultural Revolution is still not finished as long as Mao's portrait continues to loom over Tiananmen Square (Hong Kong Economic Journal, February 12, 2015; VOA Chinese, February 9, 2014). Though China has

undergone a massive economic and social transformation since the Cultural Revolution, recent developments are leading intellectuals and even some liberal-minded Chinese officials to reflect on whether it is possible for the Cultural Revolution to return in some form.

Even Chinese Communist Party (CCP) elders are chiming in. Last December, Yu Youjun, a former governor of Shanxi Province and party secretary of the Ministry of Culture argued that “the soil for the Cultural Revolution is still fertile, especially when the people have no reasonable and profound knowledge of it.” He added: “It may partially recur, under certain historical conditions” (South China Morning Post, December 15, 2015; Ming Pao [Hong Kong], December 14, 2015). His comments stem, in part, from the fact that China’s leaders are exerting an ever-greater influence in people’s cultural and spiritual lives. These efforts to close the Chinese mind are also linked to a feverish personality cult that is being erected around President Xi Jinping.

Reviving and Re-Envisioning Culture

Modern Chinese authoritarian figures from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping have seen “culture” as a means to impose the proverbial *yiyan tang* (一言堂) or “one-voice chamber” particularly on the nation’s intelligentsia and civil society. Silencing other voices means ensuring that a “monoculture” holds sway. It was not accidental that during the GPCR, untold quantities of rare and foreign books, as well as objects d’art, were burnt and destroyed. Not only disgraced cadres but world-renowned men of letters, such as the great novelist Lao Shi, committed suicide.

Since taking power three years ago, President and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi has begun a campaign to “revive Chinese culture.” Inherent in Xi’s best-known mantra—the “Chinese dream”—is the concept of “the great renaissance of the Chinese people.” The cultural revival plays a big role in this super-nationalistic goal of a spectacular rebirth of Chinese values and worldviews (People’s Daily, September 25, 2014). Visiting the shrine of Confucius in Qufu, Shandong Province, Xi explicitly linked culture and national power, noting that “The strength of a country and a people is underpinned by

a vigorous culture,” and “the prerequisite of the great renaissance of the Chinese people requires the development and prosperity of Chinese culture” (Xinhua, November 26, 2013).

For Xi and his colleagues working in the Ministry of Culture and the CCP Propaganda Department, culture serves the utilitarian and politically expedient purpose of boosting the people’s faith in “socialism with Chinese characteristics”—and CCP rule. As Xi has reiterated, “the most critical core of a country’s comprehensive strength is cultural soft power.” “We must firm up our self-confidence in the theory, path and institutions [of Chinese-style socialism],” he indicated. “Fundamentally, we also need to have cultural self-confidence” (Xinhua, June 25, 2015; People’s Daily, November 15, 2014). Highlighting “cultural self-confidence,” of course, presupposes that unwholesome, vulgar, and particularly Westernized culture—what Chairman Mao dismissed as “poisonous weeds”—can have no place in socialist China.

Partly to stoke the flames of nationalism and partly to justify Beijing’s rejection of Western or universal values, Xi has cast himself out as an avid champion of traditional Chinese culture. He said in a 2014 Politburo meeting that “nurturing and developing core socialist values must be anchored upon superior traditional Chinese culture.” “Giving up traditions and losing our foundations are equivalent to cutting off our spiritual lifeblood,” the supreme leader added (Xinhua, February 26, 2014). Xi’s emphasis on purifying culture has a direct impact on the party-state apparatus’s effort to banish so-called Western thoughts and ideology from campuses.

Red Orthodoxy

While it would be an exaggeration to say that the leadership wants to reinstate the Red Guards, Xi has, compared to former presidents Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, paid more attention to saturating the “battle-ground” of higher education with orthodox ideals. Within a year of his ascent to power, Xi approved the notorious Document No. 9, which forbids college teachers from discussing seven taboo areas in class, including Western democratic ideas, freedom of the media, civil society and independence of the judiciary (Apple Daily [Hong Kong], May 9, 2014; BBC

Chinese, August 19, 2013). Ultra-conservative Minister of Culture Yuan Guiren added last year that Party and educational authorities would “definitely not allow views and opinions that attack and libel party leaders or that smear socialism to appear in the classroom” (Xinhua, January 29, 2015; Ming Pao, January 31, 2015). While the Cultural Revolution-era practice of the “rustication” of high-school and college students was abolished in the late 1970s, individual colleges nationwide have in the past few years encouraged students to spend summer and winter vacations in the countryside to get close to the peasants and learn socialist values (Hainan Daily, November 5, 2015; Beijing Youth Daily, March 27, 2015).

Last year, the General Office of the Central Leading Group on Cyberspace Affairs (CLGCA) and the Communist Youth League raised eyebrows when they announced plans to recruit nationwide 10.5 million “Youth Volunteers for Internet Civilization.” Each major university was assigned quotas of several thousand such volunteers whose job is to ensure that politically incorrect and “Westernized” materials are banished from the Internet and the social media (South China Morning Post, April 7, 2015; BBC Chinese, April 7, 2015). CLGCA Secretary-General Lu Wei, who is also a Deputy Director of the Propaganda Department, called upon the volunteers to build up “self-confidence in the theory, path and institutions of socialism.” Lu, who is regarded as one of President Xi’s protégés, specifically instructed the young censors and monitors to “boldly struggle against cacophonous noises as well as evil trends and spirits on the Internet” (Xinhua, March 4, 2015; China Youth Daily, March 3, 2015). As Xi likes to say, the building up of spiritual civilization “must start with children and schools.” “We must ensure that the seeds of our core value systems sprout and grow in the hearts of youths” (Xinhua, February 28, 2015).

Creating a Chinese Spiritual Civilization

Other “foreign” influences are now in the party’s crosshairs. The Xi administration is also trying to render alien creeds such as Christianity more compatible with Chinese values. This seems to be behind the much harsher tactics that Beijing has employed since 2014 against both official and house churches

in Zhejiang and other provinces. The CCP leadership, who sees Christianity as an example of the “collusion” between destabilizing domestic elements and foreign anti-China forces, wants to promote a kind of “counter-infiltration” by injecting Chinese culture into the activities of fast-growing Christian congregations (China Christian Net [Beijing], November 23, 2015). As one Guangdong-based house church activist put it: “President Xi is a keen promoter of Chinese culture.” “He wants to change the nature of the Christian church by introducing elements of Chinese civilization and the Chinese way of doing things.” [1]

It is true that the CCP has, since the 1950s, put pressure on Christian churches to submit themselves to the leadership and control of the state-sponsored Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement and China Christian Council, and the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. [2] Yet the main purpose of the so-called *lianghui* (or “the two official Protestant organizations”) is to ensure that Christian activities will not undermine the authority of the party-state apparatus. Except during the Cultural Revolution, “official” churches—as distinguished by house churches, which refuse to be ruled by the *lianghui*—have not been directly subjected to the party’s ideological or doctrinal intervention. The aggressive Sinicization of Christianity, which started in 2013, is evidenced by the new policy of the so-called *wujin* (五进; literally “five penetrations” or “five introductions”) and *wuhua* (五化; literally “five transformations”), which was initiated in Zhejiang Province. Xi, who was Party Secretary of Zhejiang from 2002 to 2007, apparently wanted to start this experiment in a region which has centuries of interaction with Christian organizations in the West (Initium.com [Hong Kong], September 1, 2015; Christiantoday.com [London], August 14, 2014). *Wujin* consists of the following: “Policies, laws and regulation [of the party-state] must be introduced into churches; health and medical treatment should be introduced into churches; the culture of popular science should go inside churches; [the concept of] supporting people in need should be introduced to churches” and “[the idea of] the construction of harmony must go inside churches.” *Wuhua* includes “the localization of churches: the regularization of the management of churches; the

bendihua [本地化; indigenization] of theology; rendering transparent the finances of churches and rendering church doctrines *shiying* [‘compatible’]” (VOA Chinese, November 27, 2015; Radio Free Asia, July 31, 2015).

The wording of the new regulations seems loaded. For example, the promotion of “popular science” presupposes that churches are spreading “unscientific” creeds or even cults. The concept of “harmony” has since the days of the ex-president Hu been interpreted as values that are in sync with CCP doctrines and the party’s ideals about social stability. The *wuhua* has even more far-reaching consequences for the development of Christianity in China. “Localizing and indigenizing” church doctrines and activities means they should be rendered compatible with the values—including both traditional Chinese norms and socialism with Chinese characteristics—that the Xi leadership is ferociously spreading in Chinese society.

During the Cultural Revolution, churches, temples, monasteries and religious monuments all over China suffered various degrees of damage. Since Xi took over three years ago, restrictions on the religious activities of Muslims and Tibetan Buddhists in Xinjiang and Tibet have been tightened. Even the more populous eastern provinces have seen crackdowns. In Zhejiang alone, some 1,200 crosses have been removed from both officially recognized and unsanctioned churches, even as thousands of Christian protesters have been beaten up by police or put under 24-hour surveillance (Radio Free Asia, January 7; Hongkongfp.com, July 27, 2015).

The drastic diminution of the public space of intellectuals, NGOs and religious organizations in China lends credence to the views of the recently deceased Du Runsheng about the Cultural Revolution. An acclaimed reformer whose disciples once included Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Qishan, Du had this to say about the GPCR and similar ideological campaigns waged by Mao: “Without independent thinking, one billion brains are equivalent to just one brain. Mistakes made [by one person] are duplicated by everybody. We must take heed from these

horrendous lessons of history” (Financial Times Chinese, November 5, 2015; Finance.sina, November 4, 2015).

Xi’s Cult of Personality

A personality cult around Xi is being feverishly constructed as the ultra-ambitious leader arrogates more and more power to himself (*China Brief*, May 5, 2015). Since late 2015, state media has given Xi the title of “core of the CCP leadership.” [3] In a ritual reminiscent of the Maoist era, senior cadres repeatedly declared their fealty to the 62-year-old princeling. Since last December, the party bosses of Tianjin, Sichuan, Anhui, Hubei, Guangxi, and Inner Mongolia have pledged unquestioned loyalty to “General Secretary Xi Jinping as the core” of the CCP leadership (Apple Daily, February 1; Phoenix TV, January 31).

Conclusion

Accompanying Xi’s consolidation of power, his influence over the cultural, spiritual and personal lives of his countrymen has greatly expanded. Unlike his predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who were products of compromise—technocrats with limited power—Xi has the political capital to take center stage in way no leader has in a generation. Given these developments, the possibility cannot be ruled out that Xi might, in the footsteps of Mao, unleash an ideological movement somewhat akin to the Cultural Revolution so as to impose uniformity of thinking and further consolidate his power.

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Note

1. Author’s interview with house church activist, January 5, 2016.

2. For a discussion of the role of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council, see, for example, the official website of the *lianghui*, <http://www.ccctspm.org/>.
3. While ex-president Jiang was widely recognized as the “core of the Third-Generation Leadership,” former president Hu never gained a similar status.

The PLA’s New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1)

By Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr.

Note: This article is part of a series examining changes to China’s Military organizational structure and personnel. Part 1 examines what is known and unknown. Part 2 contains speculation as to changes that may occur in the future.

On December 31, 2015, the China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began its eleventh major reorganization since 1952. Most previous reorganizations focused on reducing the size of the infantry and bloated higher-echelon headquarters, turning over entire organizations, such as the railway corps, to civilian control, and transferring units to the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) and the People’s Armed Police (PAP). [1] To date, most Western analysis of the current reorganization has addressed the reasons for and policy implications of the current reorganization. Instead, this article addresses what is known about changes to the PLA’s organizational structure—the essential factor needed to inform any credible analysis of the reasons for and the implications of the current reorganization. [2]

Although there are lots of media reports and blogs writing about the reorganization, much of what has been written has been incorrect or based on specula-

tion. As a result, the “known” component of this article is based on official Chinese reporting in Chinese and English from the Ministry of National Defense’s (MND) website, *China Daily*, and Xinhua.

Although there are many media and blog articles about various parts of the reorganization, until the information is available in official PLA or Xinhua reporting, this article identifies them as “unknown” or “speculation.” Another issue arising from the variety of reporting on the reorganization is terminology. One example is the “official” English translation for the geographic groupings that are replacing China’s military regions (军区). For example, the PLA officially has translated the term “*zhanqu*” (战区) as “theater of war,” “theater,” and “battle zone”; however, various Western analysts have translated it as “war zone” and certain unofficial media reports have used “combat zone” (Bowen, January 9). [3] Due to the use of “Theater Command” in an article published by the Chinese MND announcing the official “standing up” ceremony on February 1, this article will use “Theater Command” (MOD, February 1).

What is “Known”

In November 2013, the Third Plenum of 18th Party Central Committee announced the decision to “optimize the size and structure of the army, adjust and improve the balance between the services and branches, and reduce non-combat institutions and personnel.” This rebalance is meant to correct the domination of the PLA Army, which with the Second Artillery, currently has 73 percent of the PLA’s total troops, followed by 10 percent for the Navy (PLAN) and 17 percent for the Air Force (PLAAF). The Central Committee also announced creation of a “joint operation command authority under the Central Military Commission (CMC), and theater joint operation command system” and to “accelerate the building of new combat powers, and deepen the reform of military colleges” (CNTV.com, November 16, 2015). This announcement pointed to upcoming changes in four main categories: 1) PLA personnel size and force structure, 2) command organization and structure from the CMC down to the unit level, 3) modern military capabilities as found in “new type combat

forces,” and 4) the PLA professional military education system of universities, academies, colleges, and schools.

Nearly two years passed before CMC Chairman Xi Jinping announced the first details of these reforms. At the September 3, 2015 military parade in Beijing, Xi proclaimed a reduction of 300,000 PLA personnel, bringing the size of the active duty PLA down to two million. An MND spokesman further clarified the cuts would be completed by the end of 2017 and would mainly affect “troops equipped with outdated armaments, administrative staff, and non-combatant personnel, while optimizing the structure of Chinese forces” ([Xinhuanet](#), September 3, 2015). The only specific unit reported so far to have been eliminated is the Nanjing Military Region Art Troupe, one of numerous performing arts troupes, which have traditionally provided entertainment for PLA units ([Global Times](#), January 25).

In November 2015, Xi declared the “current regional military area commands [also known as Military Region headquarters] will be adjusted and regrouped into new battle zone commands supervised by the CMC.” A three-tier combat command system from the CMC to theater commands to units would be created. But this system will be separate from the administrative chain of command running from the CMC to the four service headquarters to units. As such, service headquarters are responsible for “construction” functions, such as organizing, manning, and equipping units ([Xinhuanet](#), November 26, 2015). These changes will take place over the next five years through the year 2020. [4]

On the last day of 2015, Xi presided over the establishment ceremonies for the PLA Army’s leading organ (national-level headquarters) (PLAA), the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), and the PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) and named their respective commanders and political commissars ([Chinamil.com](#), January 1). The Army headquarters was charged to transform from “the regional defensive type to the full-spectrum combat type” and the Rocket Force, identified as China’s “core strategic deterrence power,” was upgraded to a full service (军种) from its former status of “an independent branch

treated as a service,” (兵种). Later the *PLA Daily* indicated Rocket Force units would be the same as the former Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) ([www.81.cn](#), January 10). As a service, the Rocket Force eventually could be expected to have its own distinctive uniform.

Though buried in an article about the reforms, another important target of the reforms was mentioned: reducing the size of the militia ([Chinamil.com](#), January 1). The militia is not part of the PLA, but one of three elements of the Chinese armed forces (the other elements being the active and reserve units of the PLA and the PAP). Militia units are commanded by the system of local PLA headquarters from provincial Military Districts down to Military Sub-districts/Garrisons to People’s Armed Forces Departments (PAFD) in counties and below. No details of the militia reduction have been announced, but this development opens the door for potential reductions also in local headquarters, particularly at the Military Sub-district/garrison and PAFDs at county and grassroots levels.

On January 11, 2016, a new CMC organization with 15 functional departments, commissions, and offices was announced ([Chinamil.com](#), January 11). One significant detail included was that the new CMC National Defense Mobilization Department will be responsible for “leading and managing the provincial military commands [i.e., also known as Military Districts],” a task previously assigned to Military Region headquarters. A photograph accompanying the announcement showed a total of 69 uniformed officers, of which 58 were PLAA/PLARF, six were PLAN, and five were PLAAF, which is not an auspicious start for greater jointness at the most senior levels of the PLA command structure.

On February 1, at a ceremony attended by the entire CMC, five new “theater commands” were established and their commanders and political commissars (PC) announced. In what appears to be their protocol order, the new headquarters are the Eastern (东部), Southern (南部), Western (西部), Northern (北部), and Central (中部) Theater Commands. [5] The new headquarters have been tasked to respond to security threats from their strategic directions, maintain

peace, deter wars and win battles, and assist in “safeguarding the overall situations concerning the national security strategy and the military strategy” (Chinamil.com, February 1). All theater commanders and PCs were senior Army officers. The theater commands will have Army, Navy, and Air Force components based, respectively, on the “relevant naval fleets” and air forces of the former Military Regions (MR)—Rocket Forces were not mentioned. On February 2, PLA Daily reported the formation of the Army headquarters under the Eastern Theater Command (东部战区陆军) in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, but the ceremony to establish the new headquarters had been held earlier on January 24. This first Army headquarters to be set up in one of the new theater commands is commanded by LTG Qin Weijiang (秦卫江), son of former Defense Minister GEN Qin Jiwei, with MG Liao Keduo (廖可铎) as PC (81.cn, February 2). [6] PLAAF Commander Ma Xiaotian presided over the creation of five PLAAF theater commands on February 5 (81.cn, February 5).

More general information about the reforms is expected to be announced officially over time, but many operational- and tactical-level details likely will only be learned by close analysis of the Chinese media. Since an objective of the reforms is to improve the “joint operation command authority” of the force, it will be necessary to restructure PLA officer corps billets to create new opportunities for non-Army personnel to serve in senior joint command and staff assignments. The new force and personnel structure may require changes to the PLA’s existing system of grades and ranks.

The Grade and Rank Foundation

The foundation for understanding the reorganization is the PLA’s 15-grade structure shown in Table 1, which was last modified in 1988. [7] Under the existing system, every PLA organization and officer is assigned a grade from platoon level to CMC to designate their position in the military hierarchy. Organizationally, units can only command other units of lower grade levels. For example, a corps leader grade unit is authorized to command divisions, but not vice versa. Officers are assigned grades along with military ranks. Each grade has two or more ranks assigned to that level. On average officers up to the

rank of senior colonel are promoted in grade every three years, while they are promoted in rank approximately every four years. In the PLA, an officer’s grade is more important than his rank. [8]

Part 2 of this article will address the options for changes in the grade and rank systems that appear likely to accompany the extensive changes anticipated in the PLA organization and structure. Table 1 is included here to assist in understanding the organizational changes already underway and discussed in Part 1.

Table 1: PLA’s 15-grade Structure since 1988

Grade	Primary Rank	Secondary Rank
CMC Chairman (军委主席) Vice Chairmen (军委副主席)	None General	
CMC Member (军委委员)	General	
MR Leader (正大军区职)	GEN/ADM	LTG/VADM
MR Deputy Leader (副大军区职) 副大军区职	LTG/VADM	MG/RADM
Corps Leader (正军职)	MG/RADM	LTG/VADM
Corps Deputy Leader (副军职)	MG/RADM	SCOL/SCPT
Division Leader (正师职)	SCOL/SCPT	MG/RADM
Division Deputy Leader (副师职) (Brigade Leader)	COL/CPT	SCOL/SCPT
Regiment Leader (正团职) (Brigade Deputy Leader)	COL/CPT	LTC/CDR
Regiment Deputy Leader (副团职)	LTC/CDR	MAJ/LCDR
Battalion Leader (正营职)	MAJ/LCDR	LTC/LCDR
Battalion Deputy Leader (副)	CPT/LT	MAJ/LCDR
Company Leader (正连职)	CPT/LT	1LT/LTJG
Company Deputy Leader (副连职)	1LT/LTJG	CPT/LT
Platoon (排职)	2 LT/ENS	1LT/ENS

New CMC Organizations

As mentioned above, on January 11, 2016, CMC Chairman Xi Jinping met with all of the new leaders of the reorganized CMC's directly subordinate elements. Table 2 provides information about the 15 functional sections comprised of seven departments (including the important General Office), three commissions, and five directly affiliated offices. The new CMC structure expanded its former subordinated elements through the incorporation of many functions previously found in the former four General Departments, namely the General Staff Headquarters (also known as the General Staff Department [GSD]), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Armament Department (GAD).

As can be seen from the new CMC structure, the biggest loser organizationally is the former General Staff Department and its leader, the Chief of the General Staff. The new Joint Staff Department has lost the GSD's oversight of military training and education, mobilization, strategic planning, and likely cyberwar and electronic warfare units, not to mention the personnel and functions transferred to the new Army headquarters. Moreover, the new Political Work Department is responsible for "human resources management," which implies that it has taken over the GSD's oversight of enlisted personnel in the former Military Affairs Department. If true, the new Political Work Department will be responsible for all personnel matters concerning both cadre and enlisted personnel.

Table 2 includes the current organization name, the name of the person who has been assigned as the leader, as well as that person's previous position and grade. Based on each person's previous grade, it is assumed that they are still filling a billet of the same grade. It is also assumed that the MR Leader Grade and Deputy Leader Grade will be renamed Theater Leader Grade (正大战区职) and Deputy Leader Grade (副大战区职), respectively.

While the new offices are identified as CMC "functional sections," it is not yet clear how the command or leadership relationships will work between the CMC leadership and the subordinate organizations. Also, while the general departments have gone away

in name, the functions of all four departments continue under the new CMC structure and the new organizations have retained their same CMC member as the Chief of Staff (formerly Chief of the General Staff) or Director (for the GPD, GLD, and GAD). Only one of the functional sections—the Agency for Offices Administration—appears to be a new entity, probably because it is not clear where its component offices came from (possibly a management office from each general department). The other functional sections can be traced back to their former general department or office and, in many cases, they have retained the same leadership. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, it is not yet clear what the organizational grade of the 15 sections will be. For example, the corps-grade organizations listed in Table 2 could reasonably be expected to be raised to a higher grade reflecting their apparent enhanced status as a CMC-subordinate organization; however, any such change will affect every billet in the organization.

Table 2: CMC Functional Sections

CMC Organization	Org. Assessed Grade	Leader	Leader's Previous Position	Leader's Previous Grade
General Office (办公厅)	Theater Deputy Leader	LTG Qin Shengxiang	Director CMC General Office	MR Deputy Leader
Joint Staff Department (联合参谋部)	CMC Member	Gen Fang Fenghui (房峰辉)	Chief of the General Staff	CMC Member
Political Work Department (政治工作部)	CMC Member	GEN Zhang Yang (张阳)	Director, GPD	CMC Member
Logistic Support Department (后勤保障部)	CMC Member	GEN Zhao Keshi (赵克石)	Director, GLD	CMC Member
Equipment Development Department (装备发展部)	CMC Member	GEN Zhang Youxia (张又侠)	Director, GAD	CMC Member
Training and Administration Department (训练管理部)	Theater Deputy Leader	MG Zheng He (郑和)	Deputy Commander, Chengdu MR	MR Deputy Leader

National Defense Mobilization Department (国防动员部)	Theater Deputy Leader	MG Sheng Bin (盛斌)	Deputy Commander, Shenyang MR	MR Deputy Leader
Discipline Inspection Commission (纪律检查委员会)	Theater Leader	Gen Du Jincui (杜金才)	Deputy Director, GPD & Secretary, CMC Discipline Inspection Commission	MR Leader
Politics and Law Commission (政法委员会)	Theater Deputy Leader	LTG Li Xiaofeng (李晓峰)	Chief Procurator, PLA Military Procuratorate	MR Deputy Leader
Science and Technology Commission (科学技术委员会)	Theater Deputy Leader	LTG Liu Guozhi (刘国治)	Director, GAD S&T Commission	MR Deputy Leader
Office for Strategic Planning (战略规划办公室)	Corps Leader	MG Wang Huiqing (王辉青)	Director, GSD Strategic Planning Department	Corps Leader
Office for Reform and Organizational Structure (军委改革和编制办公室)	Corps Leader	MG Wang Chengzhi (王成志)	Director, GPD Directly Subordinate Work Department	Corps Leader
Office for International Military Cooperation (国际军事合作办公室)	Corps Leader	RADM Guan Youfei (关云飞)	Director, MND Foreign Affairs Office (Director, GSD Foreign Affairs Office; Director, CMC Foreign Affairs Office)	Corps Leader
Audit Office (审计署)	Corps Leader	RADM Guo Chunfu (郭春富)	Director, CMC Auditing and Finance	Corps Leader?

			Department	
Agency for Offices Administration (机关事务管理局)	Corps Leader	MG Liu Zhiming (刘志明)	Deputy Chief of Staff, Shenyang MR	Corps Leader

The Four Services and Strategic Support Force

Table 3 provides a list of the four services—PLAA, PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF—and the PLASSF (MOD, January 1). The table includes the current organization name, the name of the person who has been assigned as the leader, as well as that person’s previous position and grade. Based on each person’s previous grade, it is assumed that they are still filling a billet of the same grade.

The PLAA now has an official headquarters at the same level as the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF. Previously, the four General Departments served as the Army Headquarters and the Joint Headquarters for all the PLA. Second, the PLASAF, which was previously an independent [Army] branch treated as a service, is now a full service equal to the PLAA, PLAN, and PLAAF. Third, the PLASSF does not appear to be a “service.” It is a “force,” a status similar to that of the former PLASAF. The key is the Chinese terms: Second Artillery Force and the Strategic Support Force are “*budui*” (部队), which the PLA translates as “force,” while the PLAA, PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF use the term “*jun*” (军) and “*junzhong*” (军种), which means “service.” The Chinese use of the term “leading organ” for the PLAA, PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF is because the PLA does not have an official term for “headquarters.”

Table 3: PLA Services and Strategic Support Force

Organization	Organization Assessed Grade	Leader	Leader’s Previous Position	Leader’s Previous Grade
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Army Leading Organ (aka PLA Army) (陆军领 导机关)	Theater Leader	GEN Li Zuocheng (李作成)	Com- mander, Chengdu MR	MR Leader
PLA Navy (海军)	Theater Leader	ADM Wu Shengli (吴胜利)	Com- mander, PLA Navy	CMC Member
PLA Air Force (空军)	Theater Leader	GEN Ma Xiaotian (马晓天)	Com- mander, Air Force	CMC Member
PLA Rocket Force (火箭 军)	Theater Leader	GEN Wei Fenghe (魏凤和)	Com- mander, PLA Sec- ond Artil- lery Force	CMC Member
PLA Strategic Support Force (战略保 障部队)	Theater Leader	LTG Gao Jin (高津)	Comman- dant, Academy of Military Science	MR Leader

Table 4: PLA Theater Commands

Theater Commands

The new theater command organizational structure is one more step in the consolidation and evolution of Military Regions that began with 13 MRs in 1955 and then reduced them to 11 MRs (1970) and 7 MRs (1985). [9] After extensive speculation, on February 1, CMC Chairman Xi Jinping presided over the inauguration ceremony formally establishing the five new “theater commands” or “zhanqu” (战区), replacing the previous seven Military Regions. Table 4 shows the five new theater commands in protocol order along with the new commanders’ and political commissars’ names and rank, as well as their previous position and grade. Of note, four of the five commanders came from an MR that was not part of the new theater command, while four of the five PCs came from the same MR that formed the base for the new theater commands.

Organization	Organization Grade	Commander	Commander's Previous Position/Grade	Political Commissar	PC's Previous Position/Grade
Eastern Theater Command (东部战区)	Theater Leader (正大军区级)	GEN Liu Yuejun (刘粤军)	Commander, Lanzhou MR/ MR Leader	GEN Zheng Weiping (郑卫平)	PC, Nanjing MR/MR Leader
Southern Theater Command (南部战区)	Theater Leader (正大军区级)	GEN Wang Jiaocheng (王教成)	Commander, Shenyang MR/ MR Leader	GEN Wei Liang (魏亮)	PC, Guangzhou MR/MR Leader
Western Theater Command (西部战区)	Theater Leader (正大军区级)	GEN Zhao Zongji (赵宗岐)	Commander, Jinan MR/ MR Leader	LTG Zhu Fuxi (朱福熙)	PC, Chengdu MR/MR Leader
Northern Theater Command (北部战区)	Theater Leader (正大军区级)	GEN Song Puxuan (宋普选)	Commander, Beijing MR/ MR Leader	GEN Chu Yimin (褚益民)	PC, Shenyang MR/MR Leader
Central Theater Command (中部战区)	Theater Leader (正大军区级)	LTG Han Weiguo (韩卫国)	Deputy Commander, Beijing MR/ MR Deputy Leader	GEN Yin Fanlong (殷方龙)	Deputy Director, GPD/MR Leader

At a press conference following the official announcement of the theater commands, the MND

spokesman used the term “theater leader” (正大军区级) to identify the grade level of the new theater commands, which is the same term used for grade of the former MR leaders (www.81.cn, February 1). This arrangement suggests that Han Weiguo, shown as a LTG in the photograph of the establishment ceremony, likely will be promoted in rank and grade, even though he only received his second star in July 2015 and has been one of the Beijing MR deputy commanders.

The various announcements have not yet included specific details on the organizational structure of the new theater commands. Also, to date, there has been no official announcement as to what provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities the theater commands will include, or where the headquarters are located. At least four different maps have been published in the unofficial Chinese and Western media showing different sets of boundaries for the new theaters ([Tieba](#), January 15; nddtv.com, January 29; cjdbby.net; [Sina Blogs](#), January 27; [Phoenix](#), February 1).

Prior to the establishment of the theater commands, activities taking place clearly indicated the change was imminent. For example, in mid-January, *PLA Daily* announced that all seven MR newspapers had ceased operations ([China Daily](#), January 22). It is not clear whether the new theater commands will have their own newspapers or not. The websites for the former MRs were also shut down; however, they have been replaced by new theater websites (db.81.cn; nb.81.cn; xb.81.cn; b.81.cn, and zb.81.cn). Also, the Hong Kong-based *Wenweipo* published photographs of ceremonies transferring units from the Chengdu, Nanjing, and Lanzhou MRs, but did not specify where the units were now assigned ([Weiwepo](#), January 18). It is likely that similar ceremonies were held in the other military regions. Associated with the dissolution of the Military Regions, “transitional work offices” (善后办公室) were established to manage holdover personnel and property issues (Chinamil.com, February 2).

Unanswered Questions

Many unknowns concerning the reorganization remain. The following questions identify topics for further examination as the reforms unfold in the coming months and years.

The CMC:

Will the CMC departments/commissions/offices and theater headquarters become true “joint” organizations with a balanced mix among members from each of the four services plus the PLASSF?

The MND:

Has the role of MND been changed? Previously, the MND was not in the chain of command from the CMC to MRs to units. The latest official announcements do not insert the MND into the operational or administrative chain of command. In September 2015, a three-part series of articles laid out a very aggressive reorganization that basically took all non-combat and combat-support organizations and placed them under MND; however, it does not appear that this has occurred (gwy.yjbys.com, September 2, 2015; gwy.yjbys.com; gwy.yjbys.com). Will there be any significant changes to the role of the MND in the new structure?

Personnel Cuts:

Although one of the first announcements Xi made about the reorganization concerned a 300,000-man downsizing, to date, no specifics have officially been announced other than the abolition of the performing arts troupe in the Nanjing MR (MOD, January 22). How will the remaining 2 million personnel be balanced among the services? Even if all 300,000 cuts were made only to the Army, it would still amount to some 63 percent of the 2 million-man force. Therefore, the other services would need to receive additional billets to better balance the force. This has been done in the past by reassigning entire units from one service to another.

How will the PLA’s 2 million personnel be divided among officers, uniformed civil cadre, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and conscripts/volunteers? In 2003, the PLA implemented a 200,000-man downsizing, of which 85 percent were officers, including

over 200 one-star generals and admirals. In addition, about 70 junior officer specialty billets were turned over to NCOs. To date, thousands of NCOs have now filled those billets; however, they are still called “acting” (代理) leaders.

Will the local headquarters system of provincial Military Districts, Military Sub-districts, and Peoples Armed Force Departments be altered?

Operational Units:

What operational units will be disbanded? A review of internet sources since January 1, 2016 indicates that all 18 group armies remain operational. Will there be any change to the organization and subordination of the PLAN’s three fleets? Currently, all three fleets are reported operational. [10] There has been no official reporting on any changes in PLAAF units (MOD, February 2).

The Strategic Support Force:

To what headquarters (or CMC) is the PLASSF subordinate? What units comprise the PLASSF? What are the specific missions of the PLASSF? How many personnel are in the PLASSF? The reporting that the PLASSF will include responsibility for space-related activities as well as cyber/electronic warfare-related activities raises the likelihood that former GAD launch and monitoring bases and GSD Third Department Technical Reconnaissance Bureaus will be re-subordinated to the PLASSF, but this remains to be confirmed. Additionally, will any other operational units that previously were directly subordinate to the various General Departments be reassigned to the CMC functional departments, such as other intelligence, electronic warfare, political warfare, and logistics units?

Militia and the Reserves:

In addition to reductions in the militia, will PLA reserve units undergo change? Some active duty units equipped with older weapons could be transferred to either the reserves or militia.

Education:

What is the status of the Academy of Military Science, National Defense University, and National University of Defense Technology? Will they continue to be directly under the oversight of the CMC? What changes will occur in the PLA system of educational academies and schools? Will the number of new students be reduced because of the 300,000-person reduction? Will new academies be formed or former academies transformed into new entities based on changes in personnel and force structure? For example, will more NCO schools or more command academies be established?

Will PLA-wide guidance be issued establishing education and experience requirements for officers to be considered qualified as joint officers?

The People's Armed Police (PAP):

Will there be any changes to the CMC and State Council/Ministry of Public Security's dual command of the People's Armed Police? If so, this will require a change to the National Defense Law. Will the size and composition of the PAP remain the same?

Conclusion

As can be seen thus far, the PLA is in the early stages of an extensive and complex reorganization, the objective of which is to enhance CMC Chairman Xi Jinping's goal for "...conducting military reform and building a strong military... on the road of building a strong military with Chinese characteristics" ([MOD](#), January 12). The amount of available information is limited, as the reorganization is being implemented in a deliberate step-by-step manner and details revealed piecemeal; the "unknowns" far exceed the "knowns." The changes are likely to continue through the 19th Party Congress in 2017 with full implementation possibly as far away as 2020—previously identified as the intermediate milestone year in the modernization process with the final goal of completion by the middle of the century. Part 2 of this report moves deeper in to the area of speculation and will discuss the options and ramifications of reforming the grade and rank system along with the prospects for reform of the CMC itself.

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Notes

1. See Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds, *The PLA as Organization* v2.0, p. 34, found at <http://www.pla-org.com/downloads/>.
2. See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) hearings on January 21, 2016 found at www.uscc.gov/Hearings/hearing-developments-chinas-military-force-projection-and-expeditionary-capabilities.
3. For the PLA's official definition see: *Military Terminology of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (中国人民解放军军语), Beijing: Academy of Military Science Press, September 2011, p. 77; The 2012 and 2015 Defense White Papers both referred to *zhanqu* simply as "theater"; an article in the official Chinese news agency Xinhua, by contrast, translated *zhanqu* as "battle zone" ([Xinhua](#), November

26, 2015). Most recently, The PLA's English website used the term "Theater Command" ([Chinamil.com](http://chinamil.com), February 2).

4. This system of dual responsibilities is similar to, but not exactly the same, as the U.S. military's division of responsibilities between combatant commands and the services.
5. This order breaks from the previous precedence that reflected the sequence in which the various regions were brought under control from the Kuomintang.
6. Qin's previous grade was MR Deputy Leader; Liao's was Corps Leader.
7. Pollpeter and Allen, p. 19.
8. Pollpeter and Allen, pp. 10-15.
9. Pollpeter and Allen, p. 54.
10. Evidence of the status of the respective fleets can be found below:
 East Sea Fleet: http://navy.81.cn/content/2016-01/19/content_6862367.htm;
 North Sea Fleet: http://navy.81.cn/content/2016-01/26/content_6868961.htm;
 South Sea Fleet: http://navy.81.cn/content/2016-01/26/content_6868928.htm.

The Strategic Support Force: China's Information Warfare Service

By John Costello

On December 31, 2015, Xi Jinping introduced the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF; 火箭军), Strategic Support Force (PLASSF; 战略支援部队), and Army Leadership Organ. The move came just within the Central Military Commission's deadline to complete the bulk of reforms by the end of the year. Most media coverage has focused on the Rocket Force, whose reorganization amounts to a promotion of the PLA Second Artillery Corps (PLASAF) to the status of a service on the same level of the PLA Army, Navy, and Air Force. However, by far the most interesting and unexpected development was the creation of the SSF.

According to official sources, the Strategic Support Force will form the core of China's information warfare force, which is central to China's "active defense" strategic concept. This is an evolution, not a departure from, China's evolving military strategy. It is a culmination of years of technological advancement and institutional change. In the context of ongoing reforms, the creation of the SSF may be one of the most important changes yet. Consolidating and restructuring China's information forces is a key measure to enable a number of other state goals of reform, including reducing the power of the army, implementing joint operations, and increasing emphasis on high-tech forces.

The Strategic Support Force in Chinese Media

Top Chinese leadership, including President Xi Jinping and Ministry of Defense spokesman Yang Yujun have not provided significant details about the operational characteristics of the SSF. Xi has described the SSF as a "new-type combat force to maintain national security and an important growth point of the PLA's combat capabilities" ([MOD](#), January 1).

On January 14, the SSF's newly-appointed commander, Gao Jin (高津) said that the SSF will raise an information umbrella (信息伞) for the military and will act as an important factor in integrating military services and systems, noting that it will provide the entire military with accurate, effective, and reliable information support and strategic support assurance (准确高效可靠的信息支撑和战略支援保障) ([CSSN](#), January 14). [1]

Senior Chinese military experts have been quick to comment on the SSF, and their interviews form some of the best and most authoritative insights into the role the new force will play in the Chinese military. For instance, on January 16th, the *Global Times* quoted Song Zhongping (宋忠平), a former PLASAF officer and a professor at the PLARF's Equipment Research Academy, who SSF as a "fifth service" and, contrary to official reports, states it is not a "military branch" (兵种) but rather should be seen as an independent military service (军种) in its own right. [2] He continues by stating that it will be

composed of three separate branches: space troops (天军), cyber troops (网军), and electronic warfare forces (电子战部队). The cyber force would be composed of “hackers focusing on attack and defense,” the space forces would “focus on reconnaissance and navigation satellites,” and the electronic warfare force would focus on “jamming and disrupting enemy radar and communications.” According to Song, this would allow the PLA to “meet the challenges of not only traditional warfare but also of new warfare centered on new technology” ([Global Times](#), January 16).

By far the most authoritative description of the Strategic Support Force comes from People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo (尹卓). As a member of both the PLAN Expert Advisory Committee for Cybersecurity and Informatization (海军网络安全和信息化专家委员会) and the All-Military Cybersecurity and Informatization Expert Advisory Committee (全军网络安全和信息化专家委员会, MCIEAC) formed in May 2015, Yin is in the exact sort of position to have first-hand knowledge of the SSF, if not a direct role in its creation.

In an interview published by official media on January 5th, 2016, Yin stated that main mission will be to enable battlefield operations by ensuring the military can “maintain local advantages in the aerospace, space, cyber, and electromagnetic battlefields.” Specifically, the SSF’s missions will include target tracking and reconnaissance, daily operation of satellite navigation, operating Beidou satellites, managing space-based reconnaissance assets, and attack and defense in the cyber and electromagnetic spaces” and will be “deciding factors in [the PLA’s] ability to attain victory in future wars” ([China Military News](#), January 5).

Yin also foresees the SSF playing a greater role in protecting and defending civilian infrastructure than the PLA has in the past:

“[The SSF] will play an important role in China’s socialist construction. Additionally, China is facing a lot of

hackers on the internet which are engaging in illegal activities, for example, conducting cyber attacks against government facilities, military facilities, and major civilian facilities. This requires that we protect them with appropriate defense. The SSF will play an important role in protecting the country’s financial security and the security of people’s daily lives” ([China Military News](#), January 5).

Yang Yujun, MND spokesman, also suggested that civilian-military integration will form a portion of the SSF’s mission, but stopped short of clarifying whether this meant the force will have a heavy civilian component or will be involved in defending civilian infrastructure, or both ([CNTV](#), January 2).

Yin noted that the SSF will embody the PLA’s vision of real joint operations. In Yin’s view, military operations cannot be divorced from “electronic space,” a conceptual fusion of the electromagnetic and cyber domains. The SSF will integrate “reconnaissance, early warning, communications, command, control, navigation, digitalized ocean, digitalized land, etc. and will provide strong support for joint operations for each military service branch.” Indeed, this view was also echoed by Shao Yongling (邵永灵), a PLARF Senior Colonel who is currently a professor at the PLA’s Command College in Wuhan. She suggested that the SSF was created to centralize each branch of the PLA’s combat support units, where previously each service had their own, resulting in “overlapping functions and repeat investment.” Consolidating these responsibilities in a central force would allow the military to “reduce redundancies, better integrate, and improve joint operational capabilities” ([China Military News](#), January 5).

Taken together, these sources suggest that at its most basic, the SSF will comprise forces in the space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains. Specifically, sources indicate the SSF will most likely be responsible for all aspects of information in warfare, including intelligence, technical reconnaissance, cyber attack/defense, electronic warfare, and aspects of information technology and management.

Force Composition

Rear Admiral Yin's comments in particular suggest that at a minimum the SSF will draw from forces previously under the General Staff Department's (GSD) subordinate organs, to include portions of the First Department (1PLA, operations department), Second Department (2PLA, intelligence department), Third Department (3PLA, technical reconnaissance department), Fourth Department (4PLA, electronic countermeasure and radar department), and Informatization Department (communications).

The "Joint Staff Headquarters Department" (JSD) under the Central Military Commission will likely incorporate the 1PLA's command and control, recruitment, planning, and administrative bureaus. Information support organs like the meteorology and hydrology bureau, survey and mapping bureau, and targeting bureau would move to the SSF.

The GSD's intelligence department, the 2PLA will likely move to the SSF, although there is some question as to whether it will maintain all aspects of its clandestine intelligence mission, or this will be moved to a separate unit. The Aerospace Reconnaissance Bureau (ARB), responsible for the GSD's overhead intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance mission will most likely form the center of the SSF's space corps. The 2PLA's second bureau, responsible for tactical reconnaissance, will also move to the SSF. This will include one of its primary missions: operating China's long-range unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV). [3]

The SSF will unify China's cyber mission by reducing the institutional barriers separating computer network attack, espionage, and defense, which have been "stove-piped" and developed as three separate disciplines within the PLA. The 3PLA's technical reconnaissance and cyber espionage units will likely move, including the national network of infamous technical reconnaissance bureau's (TRB), the most famous of which is Unit 61398. The 4PLA's electronic countermeasures mission will likely form the core of a future electronic warfare force under the SSF, and the its secondary mission of computer network attack (CNA) will also likely also move under the SSF.

Finally, the entirety of the Informatization Department will likely move to the SSF. This will unify its mission, which has expanding over the years to include near all aspects of the support side of informatization, including communications, information management, network administration, computer network defense (CND), and satellite downlink.

Drawing the bulk of the SSF from former GSD organs and subordinate units is not only remarkably practical, but it is also mutually reinforcing with other reforms. Firstly, it reduces the power and influence of the Army by removing its most strategic capabilities. Previously the PLA Army was split into two echelons, its GSD-level headquarters departments (部门) and units (部队) and Military Region-level (MR; 军区) operational units. GSD units did not serve in combat or traditional operational roles, yet constituted some of China's most advanced "new-type" capabilities: information management, space forces, cyber espionage, cyber-attack, advanced electronic warfare, and intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance. The creation of the Army Leadership Organ effectively split the Army along these lines, with lower-echelon forces forming the PLA Ground Forces and the higher-echelon units forming the Strategic Support Force.

Secondly, separating these capabilities into a separate SSF allows the PLA Army to concentrate on land defense and combat. Nearly all personnel staffing the supposedly joint-force GSD units were Army personnel and by-and-large these units were considered Army units, despite serving as the *de facto* joint strategic support units for the entire PLA military. Giving the SSF its own administrative organs and personnel allows the PLA Army to concentrate solely on the business of ground combat, land defense, and fulfilling its intended roles in the context of China's national defense strategy.

Finally and most importantly, separating the second, third, fourth, and "fifth" departments—as the Informatization Department is sometimes called—into their own service branch allows them to be leveraged to a greater degree for Navy Air Force, and Rocket Force missions. More than anything, it allows them

to focus on force-building and integrating these capabilities across each service-branch, thereby enabling a long-sought “joint-force” capable of winning wars.

In many ways, taking GSD-level departments, bureaus, and units and centralizing them into the Strategic Support Force is making official what has long been a reality. GSD-level components have nearly always operated independently from regional Group Army units. Separating them into a separate service is less of an institutional change and more of an administrative paper-shuffle.

Integrated Information Warfare

The Strategic Support Force will form the core of China’s information warfare force, which is central to China’s strategy of pre-emptive attack and asymmetric warfare. China’s new military reforms seek to synthesize military preparations into a “combined wartime and peacetime military footing.” These “strategic presets” seek to put China’s military into an advantageous position at the outset of war in order to launch a preemptive attack or quickly respond to aggression. [4] This allows China to offset its disadvantages in technology and equipment through preparation and planning, particularly against a high-tech opponent—generally a by-word for the United States in PLA strategic literature.

These presets require careful selection of targets so that a first salvo of hard-kill and soft-kill measures can completely cripple an enemy’s operational “system of systems,” or his ability to use information technology to conduct operations. Achieving this information dominance is necessary to achieve air and sea dominance, or the “three dominances.” [5] A PLA Textbook, *The Science of Military Strategy*, (SMS) specifically cites space, cyber, and electronic warfare means working together as strategic weapons to achieve these ends, to “paralyze enemy operational system of systems” and “sabotage enemy’s war command system of systems.” [6] This includes launching space and cyber-attacks against political, economic, and civilian targets as a deterrent. The Strategic Support Force will undoubtedly play a central role as the information warfare component of

China’s warfare strategy, and will be the “tip of the spear” in its war-plans and strategic disposition.

Remaining Questions

Despite what can be culled and answered from official sources and expert commentary, significant questions remain regarding the structure of Strategic Support Force and the roles it will play. For one, it is unclear how the Strategic Support Force will incorporate civilian elements into its ranks. Mentioned in 2015’s DWP and the more recent reform guidelines, civilian-military integration is a priority, but Chinese official sources have stopped short in describing how these forces will be incorporated into military in the new order (MOD, May 26, 2015). Previously, the General Staff Department research institutes, known as the “GSD RI’s”, acted as epicenters of civilian technical talent for strategic military capabilities. If the Strategic Support Force is primarily composed of former GSD units, then these research institutes will be ready-made fusion-points for civilian-military integration, and may take on a greater role in both operations and acquisition. Even so, the civilian piece is likely to prove vital, as they will undoubtedly serve as the backbone of China’s cyber capability.

Secondly, it is unknown specifically what forces will compose the Strategic Support Force, or the full extent of its mission. When official sources say “new-type” forces, they could mean a wide range of different things, and the term can include special warfare, intelligence operations, cyber warfare, or space. At a minimum, a consensus has emerged that the force will incorporate space, cyber, and electronic warfare, but the full extent of what this means is unclear. It is also unknown, for instance, if the space mission will include space launch facilities, or whether those will remain under the CMC Equipment Development Department, a rechristened General Armament Department. Where psychological operations will fall in the new order is also up for debate. Some sources have said that it will be incorporated into the SSF while others have left it out entirely.

Finally, although it is clear that the SSF will act as a service, it remains unclear if the CMC will also treat

it as an operational entity, or how the CMC will operationalize forces that are under its administrative purview. It is unlikely that the military theaters will have operational authority over strategic-level cyber units, electronic warfare units, or space assets. These capabilities will likely be commanded directly by the CMC. This logic flies in the face of the new system, which requires that services focus on force construction rather than operations and warfare. The solution may be that the SSF, as well as the PLARF, act as both services and “functional” commands for their respective missions.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the strategic support force needs to be understood in the broader context of the reforms responsible for its creation. One on hand, the reforms are practical, intending to usher China’s military forces into the modern era and transform them into a force capable of waging and winning “informatized local wars.” On the other hand, the reforms are politically motivated, intending to reassert party leadership to transform the PLA into a more reliable, effective political instrument.

The Strategic Support Force, if administered correctly, will help solve many of the PLA’s problems that have prevented it from effectively implementing joint operations and information warfare. The creation of an entire military service dedicated to information warfare reaffirms China’s focus on the importance of information in its strategic concepts, but it also reveals the Central Military Commission’s desire to assert more control over these forces as political instruments. With the CMC solidly at the helm, information warfare will likely be leveraged more strategically and will be seen in all aspects of PLA operations both in peace and in war. China is committing itself completely to information warfare, foreign nations should take note and act accordingly.

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Notes

1. A Chinese-media report on Gao Jin’s military service assignments can be found at <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/sz/2016-01-01/doc-ifyneept3519173.shtml>. Gao Jin’s role as commander of the SSF is noteworthy in two respects: One, he is a career Second Artillery officer, so his new role muddies the waters a bit in understanding whether the SSF will be a force composed of Army personnel but treated administratively separate from the Army—not unlike the former PLASAF-PLA Army relationship—or will be composed of personnel from various services and treated administratively separate from all forces. Secondly and more important to this discussion, before his new post as SSF commander, Gao Jin was head of the highly-influential Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) which besides being the PLA’s *de facto* think-tank (along with the National Defense University), is responsible for putting out the *Science of Strategy*, a wide-reaching consensus document that both captures and guides PLA strategic thinking at the national level. The most recent edition published in 2013 was released under his tenure as commandant of AMS and many of the ideas from that edition have found their way into the 2015 defense white paper, December’s guide on military reforms, and many of the changes made to China’s national defense establishment. His new role could be seen as CMC-endorsement of *SMS*’s views on China’s strategic thought.
2. Song’s description of the SSF contradicts official-media descriptions of the service, which had suggested that the service will occupy a similar echelon to that of the PLASAF before it was promoted to full military service status equal to the other branches.
3. Ian M. Easton and L.C. Russell Hsiao, “The Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Project: Organizational Capacities and Operational Capabilities,” 2049 Institute, March 11, 2013. p. 14.

4. *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], 3rd ed., Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013. p. 320.
5. *Ibid.* p. 165.
6. *Ibid.* p. 164.

DPP-Dominated Taiwanese Legislature Begins Session

By Jessica Drun and Vincent Wang

On January 16, Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan's opposition party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), swept the presidency with 56 percent of the vote. The election also marked a major win in the concurrent legislative election, where DPP for the first time secured a majority, winning 68 of a total 113 seats. While media attention has focused on the presidential contest, control of the Legislative Yuan (LY) is likely to have a greater impact. ***

An examination of the circumstances under which these elections occurred point to new possibilities for the island—and for its relationship with the Mainland. The past eight years under the administration of current President Ma Ying-jeou brought about unprecedented levels of engagement and détente with Beijing. While his policies have resulted in a series of cross-strait agreements, such as the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA)—a preferential trade agreement—many have yet to see the fruits of economic engagement with the Mainland and believe that the KMT's approach to secure these agreements have fundamentally eroded the island's ability to withstand economic pressure from China. The electoral results demonstrated that the KMT's campaign rhetoric, which largely emphasized its economic successes, failed to gain traction.

The makeup of the new LY presents the DPP with the opportunity to push such policies forward. A potential coalition with the New Power Party (NPP), the third largest party with five seats, could give the DPP the supermajority needed to amend existing legislation and leave them closer than ever before to the three-fourths majority needed to revise the Republic

of China (R.O.C.) Constitution ([Legislative Yuan website](#), [accessed January 20]). [1] If this proves successful, Beijing fears that they could fundamentally erode the R.O.C.'s interpretation of the one China principle and present future complications in cross-strait interactions. A breakdown of the 2016 elections is thus particularly telling and shows the extent to which Taiwan's political landscape has shifted and Tsai's government has been given a mandate.

Taiwan's Voting Districts

The KMT, which held 81 seats in 2008 and 64 seats after the 2012 elections, dropped to an all-time low of 35 seats this year. The drop at the ballot box is due in part to the DPP making inroads in KMT strongholds in middle and northern parts of the island. These gains are particularly significant when structural constraints are considered.

Constitutional reforms passed in 2005 under the previous DPP president streamlined Taiwan's parliament, reducing the number of seats by half to 113 and instituting a two-vote system, with 73 seats elected through a first-past-the-post, single member district system and 34 seats determined by proportional representation via party list (the remaining six seats are reserved for aboriginal voters by single-nontransferable vote) ([Legislative Yuan](#) [accessed January 20]). This system, however, inadvertently worked against the DPP by making certain seats that have traditionally been KMT-leaning, such as the seats for Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu and for aborigines, less likely to be contested. [2] These seats are also disproportionately represented: a study undertaken by a DPP legislator in 2005 found that these districts in total hold nine seats but have an equivalent population to the single seat that represents all of Yilan, which comprises most of northeastern Taiwan. [3] However, since each county is required to have at least one seat, votes in some districts carry more weight than those in others ([Legislative Yuan](#), [accessed January 20]). In Taiwan's unicameral system, such an imbalance can have major political effects—particularly if one party is dominant in an area. [4]

The structure put in place by the 2005 reforms also consolidated Taiwan's two-party system. To receive any proportional seat, a party must receive at least 5

percent of the party ballot ([Legislative Yuan Website](#), [accessed January 20]). The high threshold barred many smaller parties from the LY, reflected in the results for the 2008 legislative elections, which saw a reduction in the number of third-party legislators. [5] By contrast, the 2016 election saw the participation of an unprecedented number of small parties, though only three small coalitions were able to gain seats in the LY: the New Power Party (NPP), the People First Party, and the Non-Partisan Solidarity Union ([China Times](#), January 18).

The scope and extent of the DPP's reach, particularly into traditional KMT strongholds, served as a resounding repudiation of the KMT's policies and the Ma administration, indicating a loss of the KMT's mandate to govern and sending a signal to Beijing that it will need to deal with other players on the cross-strait stage. Legislation that a DPP-controlled LY is likely to put forth may also be cause for concern for the Mainland, on both a functional level (in terms of the content passed) and a symbolic one (in the DPP's ability to more-or-less singlehandedly bring about structural changes to the establishment).

The Legislature's Inner Dynamics and Taiwan's Future

The new legislators will take their seats on February 1, starting the Ninth Legislative Yuan and bringing with it a set of new legislative priorities. Unlike the last DPP President during the 2000s, Chen Shui-bian, Tsai will not need to contend with a divided government and should face little opposition from the LY. However, President Ma's rivalry and infighting with LY President Wang Jin-pyng (and fellow KMT member) and his inability to pass targeted policies through the Legislature has shone light on the discord that exists even when electoral victories have given a party a clear mandate. [6] Consequently, the relationship between the next President of the LY and Tsai will play a prominent role in how Taiwan's future government functions.

Currently, there are clear indications that Tsai will push through a series of reforms of the Legislative Yuan, many of which were blocked when the KMT had a majority ([New Talk](#), October 23, 2015). These reforms seek to enhance transparency within the LY,

increase its effectiveness, and foster more professionalism among legislative staff members. Perhaps most critically, the reforms aim to transform the LY presidency into a nonpartisan post, or one less beholden to party interests ([Storm Media](#), January 17). Structurally, the majority party will still determine the LY presidency, but the post will require the LY President to act more in the interest of all parties. On January 21, the DPP Standing Committee endorsed three main principles that a nonpartisan LY President and Vice President must adhere to: not to participate in any party-related event, not hold any party-related position, and not participate in any inter-party platform when LY members negotiate legislations ([Apple Daily](#), January 21). This move has support from within both the two main parties, with Tsai and certain KMT legislators indicating their willingness to introduce legislation toward this end. Consequently, the next LY President must be capable and adept at working across party lines and coalitions, as well as be willing to concede some of the powers that had previously come with the post ([Storm Media](#), January 17). The next LY President will also likely be responsible for instituting reforms, amending Constitutional procedures, and improving the LY's image ([Storm Media](#), January 18).

To preserve party cohesion, Tsai originally deferred to the DPP legislators to select the next President and Vice President of the LY as well as the Caucus Leader ([Next Mag](#), January 18). Three major DPP legislators immediately declared their intent to run for the LY Presidency: Ke Chien-ming, the longest serving DPP legislator to date and perennial DPP Caucus Leader; Su Jia-chuan, a former DPP Secretary-General and Tsai's running mate in 2012; and Chen Ming-wen, a loyal member of the "Tsai faction" and former Jiayi County Magistrate. On January 29, these three legislators came together and announced that Su will be the DPP's LY candidate and implied that Ke will remain as the Caucus Leader ([Storm Media](#), January 29). According to some sources, Tsai threw her support behind Su, and pressured various DPP factions and legislators to follow suit ([Storm Media](#), January 28). The party has decided that with Su as the LY President, Tsai can implement LY reforms smoothly and work with the KMT to normalize LY operations. Tsai also indicated a desire to see Ke remain as Caucus Leader, a nod to

his ability to whip the DPP votes and ensuring legislators fall in line in future votes.

The election of the LY's leaders will occur at the start of the session, four months prior to Tsai's inauguration. Even with Ma still in power, there are two or three pieces of legislative policies that the DPP would like to pass ([Storm Media](#), January 18). The most urgent legislation the DPP wants to pass outlines the terms of the presidential transition. This would include a freeze on personnel appointments and a smooth transfer of official and top-secret documents—the latter in response to fears that notes on the prior administration's negotiations with Beijing could be misplaced or destroyed ([Apple Daily](#), January 20; [UDN](#), January 21). A second piece of legislation, spurred by yet another round of ECFA negotiations right before the election, would create oversight mechanisms for future cross-Strait negotiation ([Economic Daily](#), January 6). Many DPP supporters and legislators would also like to pass legislation on political parties' properties, a move clearly aimed at the KMT's massive wealth and economic seizures under martial law, which has been a perennial point of contention in Taiwan's elections since democratization. This third piece of legislation may only be taken up after Tsai's inauguration. This legislation may be a nod to Taiwan's need for proper truth and reconciliation, but has also been seen as furthering the divide between the “Chinese” and “Taiwanese” identity in Taiwan.

The Ma administration would most likely oppose all three, but without any veto power, Ma's only resort is to send legislation back to the LY for further review and to delay passage. Instead, it may be in his best interest to work with the DPP LY members on these legislations, in order to ensure that KMT views are somewhat reflected. Nonpartisan policies may also provide another viable route to inter-party cooperation. The lame-duck Ma administration and the KMT LY Caucus could collaborate with the DPP-controlled LY during the four months of divided government on strengthening food safety regulation, lowering the voting age from 20 to 18 (though this would require a constitutional amendment), and instituting a form of absentee voting.

After two electoral defeats, it may be in the KMT's best interest to work with the DPP-dominant LY. A cooperative Ma administration would acknowledge the desire of voters for change and their repudiation of the Ma administration's policies. With a potentially deal-making LY President, cooperating on passing popular legislation early on may generate good-will for the KMT Caucus in the LY. With the consolidation of power by the DPP in the 2014 local and 2016 national elections, the KMT has been effectively locked out of policymaking in most constituencies. The next four months will thus be critical to the future of not just the KMT in the Legislative Yuan, but also the KMT as a whole, particularly in its salience to policymaking.

With the uncertainty of how future cross-Strait relations will develop, it is also important for the Ma administration to work hand-in-hand with the incoming DPP LY majority to promote a positive cross-Strait relationship. As of writing, Tsai Ing-wen has maintained her stance of “maintaining the status quo” with China. Meanwhile, Beijing has called on her to reaffirm the “92 Consensus,” a set of principles Beijing and the Ma administration has built its *détente* upon. Some see Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council's unreturned calls via a direct hotline to China's Taiwan Affairs Office after Tsai's election as a harbinger of downward spiral ([China Review](#), January 28). While Tsai is unlikely to radically change cross-Strait policy herself, Beijing may be wary that some DPP legislators who are more outspoken about Taiwanese independence will function as her proxy on the issue. With the LY now in DPP control, there is a fear that more independence-minded DPP legislators could push for legislation that challenges the “status quo,” including legislation to establish a Republic of Taiwan, petition for UN membership, or even hold a national referendum on Taiwan's independence. Perhaps as a sign of things to come, several DPP and NPP legislators have also proposed overturning Pro-Mainland changes to educational curriculum instituted by the Ma administration—a signal of de-Sinification to Beijing ([Liberty Times](#), January 28).

Conclusion

In short, while the relationship between the new legislators and between the new Legislature and president-elect Tsai is yet to be seen, their interaction will ultimately shape Chinese perceptions of the new government. If the new LY functions relatively smoothly and if the two branches of government are able to soften the blue-green divide—as the new administration has called for—then Chinese wariness of the DPP government is likely to rise. Without a counterbalancing political force, the PRC will likely worry that the DPP administration will be politically unencumbered and would promote moves toward independence and recognition, in spite of continued reassurances in maintaining the status quo. This factor will play into the types of policies Beijing chooses to use toward the island, be it a “carrot” or a “stick” approach based on assessments of the direction of the overall relationship. Further complicating this is the matter of public opinion. If the public’s trust in the Legislative Yuan increases and shows confidence in the system, then Beijing will have another factor to contend with: the failure of its concerted effort to win the “hearts and minds” of Taiwan’s people.

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Notes

1. The New Power Party’s platform includes: normalizing Taiwan’s position as a country, enhancing minority rights, strengthening mother-tongue education, increasing Taiwan’s international presence, and perhaps most significant to Beijing, amending any Constitutional clauses that muddle Taiwan’s status as a country.

New Power Party “基本主張”
<<https://www.newpowerparty.tw/pages/基本主張>>.

2. Kinmen, Matsu, and Penghu are island clusters between Taiwan proper and the mainland. The strategically important islands bristle with military bases whose soldiers and their families have traditionally voted for the KMT. Kinmen and Matsu, especially, are right off the coast of Fujian Province, P.R.C., but the Taiwanese still classify these as counties under Fujian Province, R.O.C.
3. Chen Chaozheng, National Policy Foundation “單一選區兩票制對台灣未來政黨政治發展的影響”
<<http://www.npf.org.tw/2/3705>>.
4. The study also indicated that—given the political landscape of the time—the DPP would need 40 seats or 61 percent of the 66 competitive seats to win more than half of the district seats, while the KMT only needed 40 percent, as 13 of the 79 district and aboriginal seats were locked in in the KMT’s favor; According to official electoral statistics, in 2008, the DPP received 38.2 percent of the votes in the district seats, but only 13 seats, while in 2016, the KMT received half a percentage more at 38.7 percent but received 20 seats.
Central Election Committee “第 07 屆立法委員選舉 - 選舉分析明細類”
<<http://db.cec.gov.tw/histMain.jsp?voteSel=20080101A2>>.
5. The People First Party (FPF) went from 20 seats to 1 and the Taiwan Solidarity Union was kicked out of the LY altogether.
Central Election Committee “第 07 屆立法委員選舉 - 選舉分析明細類”
<<http://db.cec.gov.tw/histMain.jsp?voteSel=20080101A2>>.
6. A substantive round up of Ma and Wang’s rivalry could be found here.
Lu Huixuan, UDN “單一選 Q&A 單一選”
<<http://blog.udn.com/ntlutw/8971538>>.

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