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In a Fortnight: Chinese Military Promises Aid to Syria

China has announced a shift in its foreign policy toward Syria. During a visit to Damascus on August 14, People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) Rear Admiral Guan Youfei (关友飞) noted that this year marks the 60th anniversary of relations between the two countries. He further declared that China has consistently supported political solutions to Syria's problems and the preservation of Syrian independence and sovereignty (*China Military*, August 15). RADM Guan, who is director of the Office for International Military Cooperation of the Chinese Central Military Commission, also committed to improving military-to-military cooperative ties, including training, and promised to extend humanitarian assistance.

While most meetings between Chinese and Syrian officials have focused on humanitarian aid, the commitment to military exchanges and training suggest that China may increase its role as the Syrian crisis

grinds to a conclusion. Overall, this move by China fits into a larger pattern of shifts toward a more engaged, and possibly militarily active foreign policy currently occurring across the Middle East and Africa (*China Brief*, June 1; *China Brief*, July 6). In late December China approved a counter-terrorism law that explicitly legalized the use of special forces and other units abroad, if approved by the Central Military Commission (*China Brief*, January 25). A recent article in the *PLA Daily* urging the use of special forces, particularly in a counter-terrorism context, seems to indicate that support for action is growing (*PLA Daily*, August 14).

China has maintained support for the al-Assad government during the five-year Syrian Civil War, describing its relations with Syria as a "just position" (正义立场). However, according to Chinese President Xi Jinping, a continuation of war in Syria without a decisive winner is "not sustainable" (*Chinese Embassy in Syria*, January 22; *China Brief*, January 25). In April China appointed Xie Xiaoyan (解晓岩) as special envoy to Syria to more directly represent Beijing's views (FMPRC, April 21). Perhaps reflecting a new sense of urgency, Xi Jinping replaced China's Ambassador to Syria Wang Kejian (王克俭)

with Qi Qianjin (齐前进)—although this could be a routine personnel change at the end of Wang’s two-year posting rather than a reflection of a loss of faith (Pengpai, August 11).

A core concern of Chinese leaders regarding Syria has been the return of radicals from Syria to China. Some 100 militants (primarily ethnic Uyghurs from China’s western Xinjiang province) are alleged to have joined the Islamic State (IS) (BBC Chinese, December 7, 2015). China has over the past eight years seen a spate of attacks planned or executed from abroad (*China Brief*, January 25).

Chinese think tanks have carefully monitored this situation. Researchers at the Ministry of State Security (MSS)–affiliated think tank China Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Jia Chunyang (贾春阳) and Gong Zheng (龚正), for example, have noted that the “defeat of IS on the battlefield does not mean failure,” and the shift in tactics (as evidenced from a number of attacks in Europe) are shifting the focus of counter-terrorism efforts (CICIR, July 31). Another CICIR researcher, Fu Xiaoqiang (傅小强) writing in *PLA Daily*, drew on China’s own revolutionary theory, urging the international community to unite to fight a “Protracted War” (持久战) against IS, across a wide range of fronts (*PLA Daily*, January 9). In regards to Syria, the Chinese government clearly prefers the continuation of the al-Assad government to the possibility of an even more violent and chaotic situation, in which the Syrian opposition or radical elements to win decisively.

More direct intervention in the conflict by China, through arms sales or training of government troops, could be motivated by fears that the al-Assad government’s forces could collapse following recent setbacks in Aleppo at the hands of Syrian rebel forces. Beijing may be trying to ensure that China has a seat at the negotiation table if some sort of peace is made. Another consideration is helping cement Russian influence in the region as a hedge against U.S. dominance of the region. Although Russian military support for the Syrian government has outlasted expectations, the airstrikes—which have begun using bases in Iran—are exacting a toll on the Russian military.

The Syrian government has had to rely heavily on Russian support, and is likely leveraged to the hilt with loans to Russian military equipment companies. An influx of additional supplies from China could open new sources of badly needed cash. China previously supplied the Syrian government with 500 anti-tank weapons in 2014. [1] Additionally, videos and images from the civil war indicate that a wide variety of Chinese weapons have been used in the conflict by both sides, though it is unclear whether they were directly transferred from Chinese suppliers or acquired via resellers.

Although it is highly unlikely that China will deploy a large force or even, as one widely disseminated and erroneous report suggested, its aircraft carrier to fight in Syria, it is clear that China is increasing the visibility of its support for Bashar al-Assad’s government to improve its level of influence in whatever resulting post-civil war government emerges.

Note

1. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Arms Transfer Database, accessed August 18, 2016.

Army Day Themes Laud Party Leadership, Highlights Discord

By Peter Mattis

On August 1st, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) celebrated the 89th anniversary of its founding. Units from the CMC to defense attaché officers overseas host receptions honoring the PLA’s historical achievements from its origins in the 1927 Nanchang Uprising to today. Indicative of the self-congratulatory air, Minister of National Defense Chang Wanquan toasted the PLA’s success: “under the leadership of the CCP, the People’s army has ... defeated powerful domestic and foreign enemies, overcome numerous difficulties ... accomplishing great feats

that will shine through the ages” (*PLA Daily*, August 1).

More importantly, Army Day (建军节) is one of the select times each year where important military-related themes are stressed in a number of articles across the central Party and military propaganda apparatus. In the last five years, for example, the day has been used twice to emphasize military-civil integration (军民融合), which has become a key component of Beijing’s military modernization strategy (*China Brief*, August 12, 2011; *China Brief*, August 22, 2014). [1]

The theme on display in a number of editorials this year was an important part of the PLA’s DNA, one of Mao Zedong’s famous aphorisms: “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party.” The second sentence is regularly repeated and repackaged in Chinese propaganda to remind the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) that it serves under the “absolute leadership of the Party” (*Qiushi*, July 31; *PLA Daily*, July 1; *Guangming Daily*, June 29). Despite the relentless repetition of these words, the theme of this year’s Army Day was the requirement and importance of the PLA’s absolute, unswerving loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). By itself this theme might not be suggestive of anything apart from a lack of imagination, as it was the propaganda theme in 2012 (*China Brief*, August 17, 2012). However, amid the anti-corruption campaign and an organizational overhaul, other anomalies, like the absence of an essay by a Central Military Commission (CMC) vice chairman, suggest discord rather than harmony in Party-Army relations or at least great fear that China’s future as envisioned by the CCP could be derailed.

Party Loyalty Makes the PLA Victorious

After ascending to the leadership of both the CCP and the CMC in late 2012, President Xi Jinping began a steady drumbeat of the need for the PLA to be able to fight and win wars. As Xi outlined the content of the “China Dream” to reclaim China’s rightful place in world affairs as a rich and powerful country during the first half of 2013, the PLA dimension, or

the “Strengthening Military Dream (强军梦),” had three tenets: “heeds the Party’s commands, able to fight and be victorious, and are exemplary in conduct (听党指挥、能打胜仗、作风优良).” The “Strengthening Military Dream” may not have received many explicit mentions—more often described as “strengthening military objectives” (强军目标)—but Xi Jinping’s influence was visible throughout the articles. The three tenets appeared frequently and framed the discussion, as in an article by Xu Xisheng, the officer responsible for PLA Air Force political work in the Central Theater Command. For Xu, belief in the CCP and its ideology provided the “calcium” that makes the military’s backbone strong, and the PLA’s loyalty ensures the “China Dream” comes to fruition (*People’s Daily*, August 1).

The unsigned *PLA Daily* editorial for Army Day repeated the various platitudes about Chinese military modernization. The editorial opened and closed with the admonition that the PLA needed to “faithfully fulfill the sacred missions entrusted to it by the Party and the people” and unite with CMC chairman Xi Jinping. Where the military’s loyalty to the Party is not made explicit, the editorial describes PLA modernization as the “ardent desire of the Party and the people” (*PLA Daily*, August 1).

Outside the *PLA Daily*, the most important articles appeared in *Qiushi*, the journal of the Central Committee and the Central Party School. The first article was credited to the Party Committee of the Academy of Military Science (AMS), an institution that reports directly to the CMC. In each of the article’s six summary points, the Party’s control and/or “absolute leadership” (绝对领导) was emphasized. The PLA’s success, “going from victory to victory,” was attributable to the CCP’s leadership, and the CMC chairman was the person responsible for ensuring the PLA’s loyalty and adherence to the Party’s commands. Without the influence and leadership of the Party, the PLA will “lose its soul” as well as its “cohesion, vitality, and combat effectiveness.” The latter obviously a key requirement of being able to fight and win informatized wars (*Qiushi*, July 31).

The second article by a *Qiushi* commentator (评论员) also focused on the importance of the PLA adhering to the Party's commands, because China is "closer to the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation than at any time in history" and the security situation is complex. The key word for the party's leadership, according to the article, is "absolute," owing to the unique attribute of the PLA as a political army. This relationship "steals" the military from its weakest to its strongest members, making it a unique and innate part of the PLA's strength and past success. The article closed with a call for all military cadre to "rally more closely around the [CCP] Central Committee with Xi Jinping as General Secretary" (*Qiushi*, July 31).

The Fundamental Guarantee

The most striking feature of the call for PLA loyalty is the explicit naming the military as the guarantor of the CCP's leadership of the country. Although hints of this role often appear, it is more typical to note the PLA's importance to socialism with Chinese characteristics than to the CCP's political power and ability to govern. The *Qiushi* article authored by the AMS Party Committee described the PLA as providing the fundamental guarantee (根本保证) for China's long-term stability: "holding power requires holding the military (执政必执军), whoever's hands control the military is related to the country and nation's future destiny" (*Qiushi*, July 31).

The last time such strong language about the importance of the PLA to governing China was 2009 in an article "Why We Should Resolutely Resist Nationalization of the Military." The article, authored by the National Defense University Military Party History Research Center, made the case that separating the Party from the Army would undermine the PLA's loyalty to the state and, consequently, strip the state of one of its important sources of power. The absence of a unified Party and Army would open the window for "hostile foreign forces" to bring about China's downfall. It also invoked Deng Xiaoping's words that China is so stable because the Army stands with the Party (*PLA Daily*, May 7, 2009). More forcefully and perhaps more closely related to *Qiushi* article, a *Guangming Daily* article in 2008

stated "when the position of the ruling Party is threatened, we are bound to use military force to consolidate and defend [the Party's] executive power." Moreover, the Party's control of the military is "directly related to the political stability, economic and social development, as well as the fate of the country and nation" (*Guangming Daily*, July 25, 2008).

The Hu Jintao era, by contrast, saw much more typical language used to describe the PLA's role in preserving the Party's rule. In 2005, President Hu outlined the PLA's "New Historic Missions," which apart from clarifying the PLA's international role, reinforced the point that the PLA safeguarded the Party. An Army Day editorial in 2012, for example, softened the implications: "providing an important power and guarantee for consolidating the Party's ruling position, a strong security guarantee for national development, and a powerful strategic support for safeguarding national interests, and playing an important role in maintaining world peace" (*China Brief*, August 17, 2012). Xi used similarly low-key language in stating that "we must uphold the Party's leadership of the armed forces. This is central to the nature and mission of the armed forces, the future of socialism, the enduring stability of the Party, and the lasting peace of the country" (*People's Daily*, November 18, 2012). This last statement is the most forceful of any of Xi's statements about Party control in the three speeches on national defense in his collection of speeches and essays, *The Governance of China*. [2]

Parsing the Propaganda

Invoking the need for the PLA to heed the Party's commands may be one of the more difficult propaganda themes to interpret. As Michael Chase observed in 2012, "exhortations to remain obedient to the Party and resist calls for 'nationalization' have been a recurrent theme in official media for a decade or more, making it very difficult to discern whether anything truly unusual is afoot this time" (*China Brief*, August 17, 2012). In August 2012, the impending leadership transition and the disputes with Bo Xilai and, allegedly, Zhou Yongkang may have heightened leadership sensitivity to the role the PLA might play. Although the leadership transition obviously

has been settled, the last year and a half saw the beginning of PLA restructuring as well as the conclusion of the former CMC Vice Chairmen Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong investigations. The reforms also called for the cutting of 300,000 military personnel. The cuts prompted an ominous, but subsequently withdrawn, article in the *PLA Daily* arguing that unless these demobilized soldiers were cared for, the cuts would undermine social stability (*South China Morning Post*, November 19, 2015). Xi subsequently pushed for these soldiers to be employed, stating “failing to provide positions for demobilized officers under any pretext is not allowed”—a direct contradiction of Xi’s oft-stated promise to facilitate “the decisive role of the market in allocating resources” (Xinhua, June 7; *Xinhua*, January 18). These events plausibly could create turmoil in the Party-Military relationship, and disagreements over policy could explain why a CMC vice chairman did not contribute their own essay to the Army Day propaganda as is normally the case. The stronger language about the PLA as the guarantor of CCP power may be an attempt to remind the military officer corps that its fate is the same as that of the Party.

Alternatively, the CCP leadership may simply be expressing their insecurity about the threats to their regime and felt the need to remind both the PLA and the people that the military must be prepared to protect the government as it did in 1967 and 1989. Ample evidence has emerged in the last year that fears of foreign-influenced “colored revolution” or internal threats from civil society are driving policy in Beijing. The formal passage of the new State Security Law, Counterterrorism Law, Foreign NGO Law, the launch of National Security Education Day, and the forced confessions of rights lawyers and Hong Kong booksellers point toward heightened concerns about China’s political security or the need to reinforce the Party’s hold on power (*Xinhua*, April 14; *PLA Daily*, February 29; *China Brief*, January 25; *China Brief*, November 16, 2015). At the very least, the authorities see a pessimistic future when looking at the geopolitical environment and international competition (*PLA Daily*, August 1).

Conclusion

The theme of party control and the almost lackadaisical propaganda effort strikes a very odd chord, because the loyalty of the military to the Party has been a consistent principle since the days of Mao. The clear thread of CCP control over the military largely comes from the *PLA Daily* editorial and two *Qiushi* articles, because the normally well-orchestrated propaganda effort was absent. Instead of a series of thematically-linked essays across the central and military media, Army Day very nearly could have been any other day. This is not typical, and the Party-PLA relationship may now warrant more scrutiny than usual.

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Notes:

1. For the most searching examination of this issue, see, Daniel Alderman, “An Introduction to China’s Strategic Military-Civilian Fusion” in Joe McReynolds, ed., *China’s Evolving Military Strategy* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2016), pp. 334–349.
2. Xi Jinping, 谈治国理政 [The Governance of China] (Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 2014) pp. 215–216.

Taiwan’s Military Reforms and Strategy:

Reset Required

By Kevin McCauley

According to recently inaugurated President Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan’s military is in need of “drastic” reforms to address a number of problems including military officers’ lack of strategic guidance, limited resources, and issues with force structure, training,

morale and discipline (*Taipei Times*, July 5). President Tsai and her administration face serious defense reform issues requiring new and innovative solutions to counter PLA threats and overcome serious problems within the Taiwan military. Under former President Ma Ying-jeou and with the backing of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), Taiwan moved toward an all-volunteer force which has encountered serious obstacles that are reducing operational readiness and the capability to defend Taiwan (*China Brief*, August 23, 2013).

Military Reforms and Reductions

A centerpiece of Taiwan's military reforms is the transition to an all-volunteer force, a goal that has now been pushed back to beyond 2017. This planned "all-volunteer" military would actually serve as the peacetime core of a larger wartime military that would mobilize reserve units as well as integrate reservists into active-duty units during a crisis. Under the current system, more than 140,000 reservists are subject to only 5–7 days of training in disaster relief and basic training including administrative tasks every two years, with a maximum of two call-ups in every eight year period, but Taiwanese military officials noted frequent abuse of even this minimal mobilization—as many as 21 percent of reservists in 2016 exploited loopholes, such as booking trips overseas before their mobilization, to avoid being called up.

The reforms included a planned force reduction from 400,000 to 215,000 personnel. However, the inability to attract the necessary quality and quantity of volunteers is forcing reductions below what the military had considered essential to execute the national defense strategy. Failure to recruit volunteers has forced the military to continue supplementing the force with conscription past 2015 when it was planned to have ended, forcing the MND to continue conscription into 2017 (*FocusTaiwan*, August 16). The revised reform plan launched in 2015 will reduce the military below 200,000 by the end of 2019 in order to match the numbers of volunteers recruited. Some estimates project the military's end strength will be around 170,000 (*China Post*, June 8; *China Post*, May 27).

The inability of the military to meet the quota of volunteers has left active duty units understrength, putting the transition to an all-volunteer force in doubt. Many issues contribute to low recruitment rates, including inadequate compensation and benefits, a general low regard for military service, better opportunities in the civilian economy, and falling birth rates. The Republic of China Military Academy is facing declining numbers of applicants, with enrollment falling short by 210 students in 2016 in part due to qualified applicants deciding instead to enroll in civilian universities. President Tsai has publicly acknowledged the effect of staff and personnel shortages on combat readiness. Fewer bodies means more stress and additional burdens for troops who must perform multiple tasks (*Taipei Times*, June 18; *China Post*, June 8).

There are additional indications of morale problems. Taiwan legislators have recently criticized the military over personnel leaving service by questionable means, particularly officers. An unusually large number of officers are reportedly being treated for psychiatric disorders at military hospitals, with legislators calling for an investigation of officers claiming mental health issues to enable them to retire early with pensions. On the other hand, volunteer soldiers claiming an inability to adapt to military life are forced to fulfill their service (*Taipei Times*, June 1).

The 2009 Quadrennial Defense Review published during President Ma's administration stated that the minimum level of defense expenditure was no less than 3 percent of GDP to support a force of 215,000. However, during his presidency the defense budget continued to decline to about 2 percent of GDP. The lack of urgency on defense issues during Ma's administration is no doubt tied to his assessment that a conflict is not likely. President Ma's administration also failed to assess the high cost associated with the transition from a conscript to a volunteer military requiring higher pay and benefits to attract qualified personnel. The defense budget under the new DPP (Democratic Progressive Party) administration is not scheduled to reach 3 percent of GDP in 2017 due to Taiwan's current financial situation, despite urging by Senator John McCain and others that Taiwan's 2.1 percent of GDP defense spending is inadequate. The

increasing amount of the defense budget that is devoted to personnel, 50 percent of the 2013 defense budget, is limiting weapons procurement, 25 percent of the defense budget in 2013, as well as training and readiness (*China Brief*, June 7, 2013; *Taipei Times*, May 8, 2015; *Focus Taiwan*, June 21; *Taipei Times*, June 11). [1]

Combat Training versus Disaster Relief

Taiwan's military has a number of training problems that need to be addressed in order to enhance wartime operational capabilities. Recently a supersonic Hsiung-feng II anti-ship missile was accidentally fired from a corvette at Zuoying Navy Base. The missile traveled approximately 75 km and hit a Taiwan fishing trawler in waters near Penghu killing the boat's captain and injuring three crew. A Taiwan Navy NCO, a second class petty officer and the weapon systems operator, mistakenly fired the missile during a training drill when he switched from simulation to combat mode, exhibiting poor training with no officer present. This incident is the most recent symptom of poor training and lack of discipline within the Taiwan military. The military also experiences a lack of realistic combined arms and joint training that reduces operational capabilities. The anti-ship missile accident, combined with public criticism of a recent incident of Marines torturing and killing a dog at a military base, has raised questions in Taiwan about military morale and discipline, as well as a need to improve operational guidelines (*China Post*, July 2).

Since Taiwan was hit by the deadly Typhoon Morakot in 2009, the Taiwanese military has emphasized disaster relief training. As President Ma put it, "There is little chance of war breaking out, but natural disasters happen almost every year." He announced that the military should purchase "weapons systems" that could be employed during wartime and peacetime to enhance disaster relief (*China Post*, January 12). The Taiwan Army in particular spends substantial training time each year conducting disaster relief exercises with civil authorities to prepare to respond to frequent natural disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes (*Military News Agency*, April 18). President Ma also diverted 15 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters from the 60 purchased for the Taiwan Army to the

National Airborne Service Corps (NASC) to boost the organizations disaster relief capabilities. His administration was criticized for the move since the Black Hawks were originally purchased to replace aging UH-1 Iroquois helicopters. The Army Aviation and Special Forces Command's 601st Army Aviation Brigade (3rd Theater of Operations) and 602nd Army Aviation Brigade (5th Theater of Operations) are key units supporting the two field armies in northern and central Taiwan. Critics believed that Eurocopter AS365 Dauphins should have been purchased for NASC as a less expensive alternative that still met the requirements of rescue missions (*China Post*, March 24). The time allocated to disaster relief training takes valuable time away from combat oriented training and lowers operational readiness to respond to PLA threats.

Military training is hampered by terrain in built-up areas or mountainous regions that forces the Army to rely on small training areas that cannot accommodate realistic combined arms training. For example, the single Joint Operations Training Base in Pingtung County in southern Taiwan is relatively small, and has been on the receiving end of protests from local residents over environmental concerns, and fines from the local government over damages caused by live fire at the base. In fact, this training area is actually designated as a joint live fire range rather than as a training area for conducting joint operations and maneuver. Military exercises also have been reduced elsewhere in response to public protests or disruptions (*Taipei Times*, September 10, 2015; *China Post*, December 15, 2015; *China Post*, September 11, 2014). Limited space and extensive restrictions on training areas further degrade the Taiwan military's capability to execute combat missions in a crisis.

Military Strategy and the PLA Threat

President Ma initiated a "Hard ROC" defense strategy based on the strategic concept of "resolute defense and credible deterrence," and a military reform and reduction plan intended to build a "small but smart and strong" modern force. The strategic intent was to build an "impregnable defensive force that ...could not be dislodged, shattered or breached by a numerically superior enemy..." [2] However, inva-

sion is not the only method mentioned in PLA discussions of Taiwan. The PLA threat facing Taiwan includes the following: the “Three Warfares” (public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare); information warfare; joint blockade; joint firepower strike, and joint island landing campaign.

Mainland coercive threats to Taiwan include the “Three Warfares,” information and cyber operations. The MND’s *2015 National Defense Report* concludes that China has been conducting the “Three Warfares,” integrated into the *PLA Political Work Regulation*, against Taiwan since 2003. [3] Taiwan plans to establish a cyberwarfare force proposed by the DPP in 2015. A cyber headquarters would employ some 6,000 personnel and integrate communications, electronics and information; intelligence and surveillance; digital warfare; and the Communications Development Office responsible for signals intelligence (SIGINT). The MND intends to recruit information technology experts from the civilian sector to upgrade the military’s capabilities (*Taipei Times*, May 27; *Taipei Times*, June 12). However, the significant number of documented mainland espionage cases and cyber intrusions indicates a serious level of infiltration of the military and hemorrhaging of sensitive information on operational planning and capabilities that could prove fatal during a conflict. The Ministry of Transportation and Communications (MOTC) reported a scale of mainland cyber-attacks reaching the level of a “quasi-war,” noting that mainland actors have infiltrated key national defense, diplomatic, utilities, air traffic control and telecommunications systems (*China Post*, May 12; *Taipei Times*, March 18; *China Post*, April 28; *VOA News*, April 28).

A PLA air and maritime blockade could be initiated to coerce Taipei or to gain air and sea dominance in preparation for island landing operations. The PLA is currently capable of successfully blockading Taiwan held outer islands with a combination of PLA Navy (PLAN), PLA Air Force (PLAAF), PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) and PLA Army (PLAA) conducting maritime and air interdiction, joint fire strikes, mining, and information dominance or information blockade operations. Taiwan and the U.S. Department of Defense currently assess that the PLA can

impose a partial blockade against Taiwan. Alternatively, the PLA could attempt to impose a virtual blockade against Taiwan by declaring exercise or missile closure areas on approaches to Taiwan. [4]

PLA joint fire strikes could support blockade or island landing operations, or represent a stand-alone campaign to coerce Taipei. PLA joint fire strike capabilities threaten to overwhelm Taiwan air defenses including early warning and radar systems, disrupt command and control, destroy or neutralize air and naval bases, and critical infrastructure, as well as neutralize Taiwan’s leadership or break the population’s will to resist. The *Taiwan 2013 Quadrennial Defense Review* assessed the PLA Rocket Force as deploying ballistic and cruise missiles with greater accuracy and maneuverability capable of striking Taiwan with the intent to block or disable Taiwan forces and deny intervention by the U.S. [5]

The PLA could successfully conduct a joint island landing against Taiwan held outer islands. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) assesses that the PLA could accomplish an invasion of a small Taiwan held island with little or no warning. An amphibious landing against Taiwan would represent a complex, phased joint operation. Sea, air and information superiority would be initial requirements, followed by joint fire strikes to neutralize or destroy key Taiwan forces and capabilities. Logistics support for the operation including landed ground and airborne forces would be complex and difficult. DoD assesses that the PLA is not currently capable of a full scale invasion of Taiwan without a multiyear ramp up in capabilities and most importantly construction of additional amphibious landing ships. [6]

The Way Forward

President Tsai and the DPP have serious defense issues to address, with no easy solutions. An immediate problem is the military reform and reduction plan the DPP inherited. The all-volunteer system is not working, placing stress on an understrength military which is leading to discipline, morale and operational problems. Taiwan demographics make a return to conscription problematic, but a combination of vol-

unteers supplemented by conscription to meet minimum required force levels could provide a solution to maintaining the necessary force. Reaching a fully manned active duty force could reduce stress on personnel, raise morale, and increase discipline within a force experiencing disturbing problems.

The MND has identified 3 percent of GDP as the minimum requirement of the defense budget to meet assigned military missions. Inadequate assessment of the pay and benefit requirements for the transition to the all-volunteer force has exacerbated the problem by further reducing available funds for equipment modernization, training and operations as the defense budget has declined since 2008. It is clear that the DPP will not be able to meet the 3 percent of GDP minimum defense budget in the 2017. President Tsai's administration will need to rethink Taiwan's national security strategy and prioritize mission requirements in response to inadequate funding for the military.

Improved training is necessary to increase combat capabilities. Combined arms and joint training need to be increased. Enhanced combined arms training for the Army will be difficult without expansion of key training facilities or establishment of a national training center with adequate size for combined arms battalion training. Joint training, particularly by the Taiwan Air Force and Navy, should be increased, supplemented by joint simulation training. Reserve training should be increased, as the current call-up twice during an 8-year period for 5–7 days is inadequate to provide a minimal requirement for combat training. Disaster relief training currently takes time away from active duty and reserve combat training, reducing wartime readiness and capabilities. Resolving the competing demands of disaster relief units and the military should be the new administration's top priority.

President Tsai and her advisors need to seriously rethink and reprioritize the ROC's military plans and modernization to meet the most immediate mainland threats. The PLA is currently capable of conducting several operations that present serious challenges to the ROC, in particular information warfare, blockade, and joint firepower strikes. Current PLA amphibious and airborne landings represent a threat

against Taiwan held islands, but not against Taiwan proper due to the lack of amphibious and air transport lift required to land and sustain an invasion force, although this could change in the future. Taiwan military missions and limited modernization resources should therefore focus on the more immediate threats. Taiwan is beginning to address the information warfare threat. PLA joint fire strikes that could destroy or neutralize air and naval bases, and air defenses, and growing blockade capabilities that could isolate the ROC require inexpensive solutions capable of surviving and countering this threat. The ROC needs to address military manning, training, strategy, and modernization priorities in the face of budget constraints that have weakened combat effectiveness in the face of Beijing's military reforms and increasingly assertive posture toward territorial issues.

Kevin McCauley has served as senior intelligence officer for the Soviet Union, Russia, China and Taiwan during 31 years in the federal government. He has written numerous intelligence products for decision makers, combatant commands, combat and force developers, as well as contributing to the annual Report to Congress on China's military power. Mr. McCauley has a forthcoming book, "Russian Influence Campaigns against the West. From the Cold War to Putin."

Notes

1. Ministry of National Defense, *2009 Quadrennial Defense Review*, pp. 12–14.
2. Ministry of National Defense, *2009 Quadrennial Defense Review*, pp. 4–17.
3. Ministry of National Defense, *2015 National Defense Report*, pp. 52–53.
4. Ministry of National Defense, *2013 Quadrennial Defense Review*, pp. 20–21; U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016*, pp. 59 and 88–89.
5. Ministry of National Defense, *2013 Quadrennial Defense Review*, pp. 19–20.
6. U.S. Department of Defense, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016*, pp. 89–90.

The PLA's Latest Strategic Thinking on the Three Warfares

By Elsa B. Kania

Beijing's response to the unfavorable South China Sea arbitration outcome has highlighted an important aspect of its military strategy, the "three warfares"

(三战). Consisting of public opinion warfare (舆论战), psychological warfare (心理战), and legal warfare (法律战), the three warfares have been critical components of China's strategic approach in the South China Sea and beyond. In peacetime and wartime alike, the application of the three warfares is intended to control the prevailing discourse and influence perceptions in a way that advances China's interests, while compromising the capability of opponents to respond.

Beijing has sought to delegitimize the arbitration process and achieved some success in undermining the coalescence of consensus in support of the ruling, while engaging in coercive signaling and deniable attempts to punish the Philippines. China's response has also included—"regularized" "combat readiness patrols" over the South China Sea by H-6K bombers, as well as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks against Philippine government websites ([China Military Online](#), August 6; [China Military Online](#), July 19; [InterAksyon](#), July 15). Consistently, Beijing has attempted to advance narratives that frame itself as the upholder of international law, while claiming that the U.S. is to blame for the "militarization" of the South China Sea ([China Military Online](#), June 23). For instance, official media has frequently characterized the arbitration process as a "farce," and China's ambassador to the U.S., Cui Tiankai, has argued that the arbitration case would "undermine the authority and effectiveness of international law," justifying China's rejection of it as a defense of "international justice and the true spirit of international law" ([Xinhua](#), July 12; [PRC Embassy to the U.S.](#), July 13).

These aspects of Beijing's response should be contextualized by China's theoretical framework for the "three warfares." Beyond the South China Sea, this approach has been manifest in a variety of recent cases, including also the East China Sea dispute, China's opposition to THAAD, and intensifying pressures on Taiwan. The PLA's evolving strategic thinking on the three warfares, which is linked to its emphasis on information warfare, could influence its efforts to utilize such techniques in future contingencies.

Progression of the PLA's Approach to Three Warfares:

Although the three warfares constitute a relatively recent addition to Chinese strategy, the PLA's approach to public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare has been formalized and already advanced considerably. Based on the 2003 and 2010 Political Work Regulations (政治工作条例), the three warfares, under the aegis of "wartime political work" (战时政治工作), were the responsibility of the General Political Department of the former General Staff Department, which, through the recent organizational reforms, has become the Political Work Department (政治工作部), subordinate to the Central Military Commission (CMC) ([CPC.com.cn](#), December 5, 2003; [China Brief](#), February 4). In 2005, the CMC ratified—and the former General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department, and General Armaments Department jointly promulgated—official guidelines (*gangyao*, 纲要, literally "outline" or "essentials") for public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare, officially incorporating the concepts into the PLA's education, training, and preparation for military struggle. [1] While these *gangyao* themselves are not publically available, the open-source PLA literature on the three warfares, which dates back to the mid-2000s, constitutes a valuable resource for analysis and comparison. [2]

Several recent texts present authoritative perspectives on the three warfares and illustrate the extent of their integration into the PLA's strategic thinking and officers' curricula. These include the latest editions of influential PLA texts on military strategy, the 2013

Academy of Military Science (AMS) edition of *Science of Military Strategy* (SMS, 战略学) and the 2015 National Defense University (NDU) SMS, as well as teaching material used by the NDU, *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare* (舆论战心理战法律战概论). [3] Based on these texts, China's use of the three warfares constitutes a perceptual preparation of the battlefield that is seen as critical to advancing its interests during both peace and war.

Three Takes on the Three Warfares:

2013 Science of Military Strategy:

The 2013 AMS SMS highlighted the significance of the three warfares as a force multiplier in military operations and political or diplomatic scenarios alike. [4] In particular, the text introduced the concept of *huayuquan* (话语权) through the use of information, belief, and mentality (信息—信仰—心智). Although, in more general or colloquial usage, the term might seem to imply the “right to speak” or “freedom of speech,” the *quan* (权) in this context apparently alludes not to rights (权利) but rather to power or authority (权力). In this regard, the concept refers to the capability to control the narrative in a given scenario and might therefore be translated as “discursive power.” [5] To contest *huayuaquan* requires “the integrated usage” of public opinion warfare, legal warfare, and psychological warfare. These three warfare operations should be complementary and mutually reinforcing in future wars or in political and diplomatic struggle.

According to the text, the use of the three warfares in a particular circumstance should be adapted based on the operational context and intended outcome. In particular, the authors argue that achieving international sympathy and support, while diplomatically seizing the initiative, can “provide a powerful pillar to support the whole operational activity.” For instance, if the operational intention must be hidden, the use of propaganda to influence public opinion can reinforce the stratagem of “making a feint to the east and attacking in the west” (声东击西). [6] So too, three warfare operations can have a strong “psychological

frightening force” (心理震慑力) against an adversary. Although this text does not define the three warfares or discuss their usage in further detail, this focus on their importance, including in deception, indicates recognition of their potential utility in a range of circumstances.

2014 Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, and Legal Warfare:

This 2014 text, which serves as discipline teaching materials (学科教材) for the NDU, presented a comprehensive overview of the three warfares, including their primary missions, historical development, theoretical foundation, basic principles, implementation, and tactics. [7] The text illustrates the NDU's sustained efforts to develop a “science of the three warfares” (“三战”学), which are considered a “major innovation” in the PLA's political work, and to integrate the concepts into its curriculum. [8] This is informed by the study of variety of traditional, ideological, and contemporary precedents, from the ancient Chinese emphasis on the use of “strategems” (谋略) to the U.S. military's perceived engagement in analogous practices. At a basic level, the primary purpose of the three warfares is to influence and target the adversary's psychology through the utilization of particular information and the media as “weapons.” In particular, the three warfares are seen as critical to increasing the PLA's “soft power” (软实力) and contributing to its success in future wars. As warfare has evolved toward greater “informationization” (信息化), the three warfares have evidently achieved a “breakthrough” beyond their “traditional scope and model,” becoming an “organic” aspect of national strategy and warfare.

While the three warfares “permeate” the “whole course” of military struggle, their functions have also expanded and are relevant to the PLA's increasingly “diversified” military missions. In particular, the relevant functions include:

- control of public opinion (舆论控制)
- blunting an adversary's determination (意志挫伤)
- transformation of emotion (情感转化)
- psychological guidance (心智诱导)

- collapse of (an adversary's) organization (组织瓦解)
- psychological defense (心理防御)
- restriction through law (法律制约)

In more general terms, the primary missions are to seize the “decisive opportunity” (先机) for controlling public opinion, organize psychological offense and defense, engage in legal struggle, and fight for popular will and public opinion. Under the aegis of these missions, this requires efforts to unify military and civilian thinking, divide the enemy into factions, weaken the enemy's combat power, and organize legal offensives.

According to the text, the implementation of the three warfares should be guided by certain basic principles. These emphasize integration with national political and diplomatic struggle; revolving around the launching of military operations; rapidly taking advantage of the “decisive opportunity” (先机); engaging in offense and defense, with an emphasis on offense; and the integration of peace and warfare (平战结合). Such principles imply advancing a highly coordinated approach that involves proactive peacetime preparation of the perceptual domain in order to enable the PLA to rapidly seize the initiative in a crisis or conflict scenario.

In its entirety, this NDU text highlights the PLA's focus on these informational, non-kinetic aspects of modern warfare and its extensive efforts to formulate a complex theoretical approach, with a focus on implementation, education, training, and the construction of specialized forces. Beyond the traditional applications of the three warfares, the text also displays efforts to innovate in the application of these concepts to new contexts, such as counterterrorism and stability protection (反恐维稳), international peacekeeping, protecting transportation and escort (保交护航), and closing and controlling borders (封边控边).

2015 Science of Military Strategy:

The 2015 NDU SMS provides an overview of public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal

warfare and guidance regarding their implementation. According to the text, public opinion warfare involves using public opinion as a weapon by propagandizing through various forms of media in order to weaken the adversary's “will to fight” (战斗意志), while ensuring strength of will and unity among civilian and military views on one's own side. Psychological warfare seeks to undermine an adversary's combat power, resolve, and decision-making, while exacerbating internal disputes to cause the enemy to divide into factions (阵营). Legal warfare envisions use of all aspects of the law, including national law, international law, and the laws of war, in order to secure seizing “legal principle superiority” (法理优势) and delegitimize an adversary. Each of the three warfares operates in the perceptual domain (认知领域) and relies upon information for its efficacy.

The 2015 SMS emphasizes the “tight connection” of three warfares as an “integrated whole” that should be utilized synthetically. From the authors' perspective, public opinion warfare and legal warfare primarily operate at the strategic level of warfare, whereas psychological warfare is often implemented at the campaign and tactical levels. If effectively implemented, the three warfares have the potential to establish favorable conditions for battlefield success and eventual victory.

For public opinion warfare, the requirements outlined are to “demoralize one's opponent by a show of strength” (先声夺人), “create momentum to control the situation” (造势控局), “assail strategic points” (抨击要害), and “seek the avoidance of injury” (趋利避害). In particular, it is critical to be the first to release information in a contingency and actively guide public opinion in order to achieve and preserve the initiative on the “public opinion battlefield.” Beyond efforts to exploit an adversary's shortcomings, the opponent's attempts to engage in public opinion warfare must also be countered. For example, this approach is reflected in Beijing's attempts to influence domestic and international public opinion with regard to the U.S. role in Asia—including claiming that the U.S. is at fault for regional tensions and the “militarization” of maritime territorial disputes, while frequently denouncing U.S. “hegemony” and pursuit of “absolute security.”

The principles articulated for psychological warfare focus on “integrating [psychological attacks] and armed attacks with each other” (与武力打击相结合), “carrying out offense and defense at the same time, with offense as the priority” (攻防并举以攻为主), and “synthetically using multiple forms of forces” (综合运用各种力量). In this regard, psychological warfare is envisioned as closely integrated with all forms and stages of military operations in order to intensify the efficacy of conventional attacks. The implementation of psychological warfare should also focus on taking advantage of “opportune moments” and “striking first” to seize the initiative, based on the efforts of multiple forms of psychological warfare forces, including those from the armed forces, reserves, and society. For instance, the intensification of psychological pressures against and attempted intimidation of Taiwan at times of tension or crisis, especially recently during Tsai Ing-wen’s presidency, reflects the application of such an approach, which has been carried out by the PLA’s “Three Warfares Base,” Base 311 in Fuzhou ([Taiwan Link](#), August 8).

The implementation of legal warfare, which seeks to provide legal support to operational success, is informed by the principles to “protect national interests as the highest standard” (以维护国家利益为最高准则), “respect the basic principles of the law” (尊重法律的基本准则), “carry out [legal warfare] that centers upon military operations” (围绕军事行动展开), and “seize standards [and] flexibly use [them]” (把握规范灵活运用). This approach emphasizes the necessity of a nuanced understanding of relevant domestic and international law in order to engage in “legal struggle” and achieve the initiative. In the context of the South China Sea dispute, this has involved the utilization of rather tortuous interpretations of international law to oppose the Philippines’ position and seek to delegitimize the arbitration process.

Conclusion

Based on these texts, the PLA perceives public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare as of distinctive strategic and operational significance, and the three warfares are evidently being incorporated more sys-

tematically into its overall thinking on military strategy. While the conceptualization of the three warfares in these recent texts builds upon the prior PLA literature and thinking on the concepts, these sources particularly highlight the complementarities among the three warfares and the importance of their synthetic integration with conventional military operations. This approach is also informed by the PLA’s concerns about countering the perceived “ideological assaults” (意识形态攻击) of “hostile forces” via the Internet ([PLA Daily](#), August 12). In practice, this involves attempts to take advantage of prior peacetime preparation of this perceptual battlefield to establish favorable conditions for going on the offensive to seize the initiative. Since this is a dimension of strategic competition in which China has already demonstrated the efficacy of its efforts, understanding the three warfares will continue to have immediate, real-world relevance.

Looking forward, the PLA’s future approach to the three warfares could continue to evolve in accordance with its recent and ongoing strategic, doctrinal, and also organizational changes. Beyond the recent changes in Chinese military strategy, with the 2014 revision of the PLA’s military strategic guidelines (*fangzhen*, 方针), overdue changes to its operational regulations (作战条令) or doctrine also seem to be occurring ([China Brief](#), April 21). The PLA appears to remain in the process of working toward the official promulgation of a fifth-generation doctrine, and the underlying campaign outlines (战役纲要) and combat regulations (战斗条令) might include revised guidance for the implementation of the three warfares, given the recent focus on advancing the PLA’s three warfares “science.” Despite the limitations of the available sources, these three texts present the latest available perspectives on the PLA’s evolving strategic thinking on the three warfares and thus can inform analyses of the PLA’s implementation of these concepts.

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1. Wu Jieming [吴杰明] and Liu Zhifu [刘志富], *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, [and] Legal Warfare* [舆论战心理战法律战概论], National Defense University Press, 2014, p. 1.
2. For prior discussions of the three warfares, see prior analyses, including: Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, “The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics,” *Project 2049*, October 14, 2013. “China: The Three Warfares,” prepared for Andrew Marshall, Director of the Office of Net Assessment, by Professor Stefan Halper, May 2013. Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Legal Warfare,” Heritage Foundation, May 21 2012. Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: Chinese Public Opinion Warfare and the Need for a Robust American Response,” Heritage Foundation, November 26, 2012. Dean Cheng, “Winning Without Fighting: The Chinese Psychological Warfare Challenge,” Heritage Foundation, July 12, 2013.
3. The Science of Military Strategy (SMS) is an authoritative text, typically used as teaching materials for senior PLA officers, that articulates the PLA’s thinking on military strategy in multiple domains and contexts. The latest AMS edition of SMS was the focus of a recent book (Joe McReynolds, *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, Jamestown Foundation, 2016), but there has been less published analysis on the 2015 NDU text thus far. Since the AMS plays a more direct role in the formulation of military strategy, the 2013 SMS text might be more authoritative than the 2015 NDU edition. Nonetheless, this NDU text also presents a more recent and perhaps reasonably influential perspective that merits closer examination. Concurrently, it is important to recall that such works are primarily theoretical and reflect the viewpoints of these influential institutions, rather than the PLA as a whole. Given such caveats, these texts’ respective content on the three warfares should not be taken as official articulations of the PLA’s strategic or doctrinal approach but rather constitute more theoretical discussions of the concepts that can inform future analysis of these topics.
4. Academy of Military Science Military Strategy Research Department [军事科学院军事战略研究部], eds., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学]. Military Science Press, 2013, p. 131.
5. John Costello and Peter Mattis, “Electronic Warfare and the Renaissance of Chinese Information Operations,” in Joe McReynolds, *China’s Evolving Military Strategy*, Jamestown Foundation, 2016.
6. This particular saying from the *Thirty-Six Stratagems*, which has been variously attributed to Sun Tzu and Zhuge Liang, seems to have originated from various aspects of Chinese written and oral military history.
7. Wu Jieming [吴杰明] and Liu Zhifu [刘志富], *An Introduction to Public Opinion Warfare, Psychological Warfare, [and] Legal Warfare* [舆论战心理战法律战概论], National Defense University Press, 2014, pp. 1–7, 14–20, 62–69, 121–132, 133–143, 226.
8. The text was formulated with high-level support from NDU starting from 2009 and authored by a committee of scholars under the leadership of two relatively senior NDU professors as a culmination of that process.
9. Xiao Tianliang [肖天亮], eds., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学]. National Defense University Press, 2015, pp. 216–218.

Chinese Foreign Policy in South Sudan: View From the Ground

By Abigaël Vasselier

During China's foreign policy in South Sudan is undergoing significant changes due to a deteriorating security situation and uncertain relations with the South Sudanese government. On July 10, two Chinese peacekeepers were killed outside Juba, the capital of South Sudan ([People's Daily Online](#), July 11). Several other peacekeepers wounded and as a result, much of the embassy staff and several civilian workers were also evacuated ([SCMP](#), July 17). Social tensions and an economic downturn had previously prompted the Chinese embassy to repeatedly issue warnings to Chinese citizens working in the country ([Chinese Embassy South Sudan](#), [February 1](#), [March 16](#), [July 9](#)). Diplomatically there are other indications that Chinese forces and companies in the country are not entirely welcome. These events take place against a larger ongoing recalibration of China's foreign and security policy in Africa (*China Brief*, [June 1](#); [July 6](#)).

Until the outbreak of civil war in 2013, Chinese companies saw South Sudan as a great economic opportunity. Investment in the oil sector grew rapidly, leading to a significant rise in the number of Chinese nationals living there. After 2013, expectations were somewhat moderated but a largely stable situation had given investors hope that the situation could stabilize. However, by the beginning of 2016, even before the most recent outbreak of violence, concerns about China's presence had already resulted in a downturn in relations. In May, rumors spread in Juba that Chinese representatives were calling for the resignation of South Sudan's Finance Minister, David Deng Athorbei. At the root of crisis was the "Note 2016046" signed by Ma Qiang (马强), China's Ambassador to South Sudan, and addressed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 18, in which he expressed his disappointment in Athorbei's characterization of Chinese oil production in South Sudan as exploitative ([Nyamilepedia](#), June 7).

China's interests in South Sudan, and the necessity of navigating its complex politics have required China to be more directly involved politically than it traditionally prefers, skirting Beijing's long-held principle of non-interference.

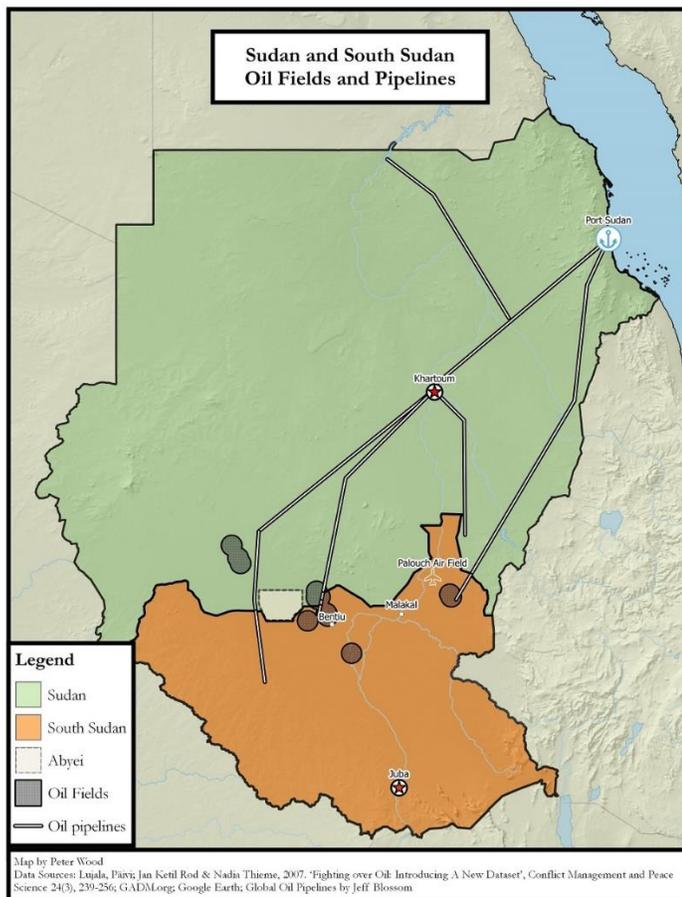
China's Interests in South Sudan

After 30 years of civil war, South Sudan was created in 2011 as part of an international strategy to reshape Eastern Africa. Recent attempts by the international community to establish a transitional government have ended in several outbreaks of violence. In August 2015, the international community brokered the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS). This deal brought together the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU), led by President Salva Kiir of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and the first Vice President Riek Machar, from the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO) in April 2016 ([South Sudan Tribune](#), April 28). Elsewhere in the leadership of the TGoNU are ministers from the Former Detainees (FDs) and Other Political Parties (OPPs).

With major economic and political interests in South Sudan, Beijing has strongly advocated for an end to the political crises and violence in the country. With the support of the Juba Chinese Businessmen's Association and the Chinese Embassy, more than 7,000 Chinese citizens are currently working in the country (including the United Nations Mission in South Sudan - UNMISS) and over 50 Chinese companies are operating in the country. [1]

Chinese investment in Sudan's oil sector predates South Sudan's independence. After independence, a consortium led by China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) with Malaysia's Petronas and India's ONGC Videsh remained, developing oil fields in the newly created state. [2] However, the South Sudanese government has closed most of the oil fields. Along with the threat of violence, this forced Chinese oil companies to seriously cut back their plans for the area after December 2013. Presently, China imports 46 percent of South Sudanese oil via Port Sudan in the Republic of Sudan, but has not restarted exploring options for the construction of new pipelines

since 2013. [3] As of June 2016, Palouch is the only remaining field in production oil (see map for more detail).



Since January 2014, oil production has averaged 163,000 barrels per day, with oil revenue equaling roughly \$20 million per month. Much of this revenue is siphoned into a large number of poorly supervised South Sudanese bank accounts, creating doubts about the future profitability of CNPC's investments in the country and making the South Sudanese government grateful to CNPC for not leaving in 2013. [4] However, under economic and social pressure, Juba may have to renegotiate the terms of its agreement with CNPC. [5] The Asia Directorate at the South Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirms that Beijing needs to help South Sudan in the security, mining and agricultural sectors. However, this same source argues that Juba first needs to strengthen the institutions before further opening up South Sudan's natural resources to Chinese development. [6]

With these priorities in mind, the South Sudanese central government has set up mechanisms to limit China's development of the country's resources. With their profits at stake in the aftermath of independence, Beijing turned the federal structure of South Sudan into an advantage: Chinese companies bypassed the central government and took their requests directly to county administrations. Following an increase in Chinese demands being sent to the state governors, the central government decided in 2012 to centralize all such requests at a "China Desk" at the Ministry of Finance. In 2016, continued tensions between the Finance Minister and the Chinese Ambassador led to a transfer of this "China Desk" under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in 2016. The Asia director of the Ministry is currently setting up a "Ministerial Working Group" gathering a group of technical experts with undersecretaries for each minister involved. The Ministry will select the Ministerial Working Group's panel of experts, and they will work together on the projects submitted to China inside the framework of the last Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit. Several interviewees suggested that Chinese aid is profit-oriented, leading to a misunderstanding between Beijing and Juba and raising the possibility of a conflict over aid in the future. [7]

China and the Mediation Process

Many South Sudanese politicians and thinkers recognize that China's economic interests in the country have required Beijing to be politically engaged, contradicting its policy of non-interference in local politics. Beijing is currently mediating between South Sudan's two main political parties in an effort to stabilize the country, which in turn would guarantee the security of its interests. As one member of South Sudanese civil society put it, "Chinese interests would not be secured during the [civil] war so only talking to the government would not work. Thus, engaging with all parties to reach peace was the best way to proceed." [8]

As one of its first experiences mediating between various political entities in a transitional process, China has engaged with a wider variety of actors than it usually does. In the aftermath of the independence,

China began funding several projects for the government and supported the SPLM in building up the newly-born country. The years 2013–2014 represented the high point of Sino-South Sudanese relations, culminating with the sale of Norinco (北方工业) weapons in July 2014 to South Sudan's armed forces, the Sudanese People Liberation Army (SPLA) (*China Brief*, October 10, 2014). The deal cemented Beijing as a trust-worthy partner for the South Sudanese government, and as an opponent for the rebels—which subsequently became the SPLM-IO. As a result, on the eve of the outbreak of civil war in December 2013, the Chinese government appeared to be directly supporting the Dinka SPLM against the Nuer rebels. This, in turn, put more pressure on the Chinese government and businesses. As violence escalated in Bentiu and Malakal (see map), 400 Chinese oilfield workers had to be evacuated by the South Sudanese army. [9]

The 2013 civil war triggered a rebalancing of China's relations with the different parties and further engaged it in the mediation process. China attempted to strengthen relations with the government via the Norinco arms deal. At the same time, however, Beijing invited a delegation of rebels to China to meet Chinese officials and begin building trust. In terms of political structure, Beijing is advocating for a one-party system to maintain unity and avoid having ethnicity-based politics. In this scenario the SPLM would be the overarching structure for the different South Sudanese political groups. Today “the opposition sees China as a key player to speak for economic power. If there is no talk with China, they will stick to supporting the government.” [10]

There are also rumors in Juba that China is still arming both parties. Several sources confirmed that an alleged arms deal with the rebels could be linked to the protection of oilfields controlled by the rebels. This shows that “China engages with the two parties on their own terms” which turns to be quite harmful for the peace agreement. Despite this, China continues to be engaged in the search for conflict resolution: Zhong Jianhua (钟建华), China's Special Representative for African Affairs, was sent by Beijing to meet with both parties and start the mediation process. [11] China is playing a key role in the mediation

process, supporting the UN in the management of Internally Displaced People (IDPs), engaging the South Sudanese army through financial donations (including a recent donation of \$1 million) and by sending special representatives. However the South Sudanese government would like China to further engage in the stabilization of the country despite Beijing's claim that they don't have the capacity. [12]

At the Crossroads of Perceptions

Chinese efforts to build a positive image across the spectrum of the South Sudanese society through gifts, aid and mediation have not affected the mainstream perception of China in South Sudan. In fact, the domination of government-government exchanges have so far limited any serious change in perceptions among ordinary South Sudanese. This is further reinforced by the tight links between the Chinese UN mission, its Embassy and Chinese businesses.

Some areas have seen improvement in relations. The South Sudanese civil society and government welcomed the arrival of Chinese troops in the UNMISS. The peacekeepers are engaging with local communities and frequently visit Juba University to interact with students. Chinese businesses are also engaging the local community. The Chinese business association came first in late 2013 to donate medicine and food items to IDPs. The largest Chinese company in the country, CNPC, funded the creation of the Protection of Civilians Camp 3 in Juba by paying to clear the land, build fences and set up the first tents. A new computer laboratory in Juba University was also built with funds from CNPC. [13]

Nonetheless, people-to-people exchanges remain limited. Most Chinese workers in South Sudan have limited English language skills. One of those interviewed noted that Chinese intellectuals and officials in China are much more open to discussions than Chinese working in South Sudan. [14] The combination of a language barrier and perhaps a reluctance to discuss issues in South Sudan further limits dialogue outside of government-to-government communication. This has led to widespread South Sudanese dissatisfaction with Chinese businesses.

From Bilateral to Multilateral Engagement

Even though China prefers bilateral engagement, the complex and unstable situation in South Sudan has forced Beijing to engage on a multilateral level with new partners. In fact, Chinese organizations have decided to be part of some joint initiatives in this transition process, and have a seat at the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (JMEC) which monitors the implementation of the 2015 peace agreement. Even though Chinese representatives “passively observe the discussion in multilateral settings,” they are represented in almost all the weekly or monthly meetings organized by the international community in Juba. Their engagement with the recent International Monetary Fund (IMF)’s mission to South Sudan demonstrates that Beijing is also learning how to “better coordinate with other major players to exert pressure altogether.” [15] This pressure would be the main driver of China’s alignment on the IMF’s position. The international community also advocates for China to play a larger role in mediating this crisis at a regional level. Even though Beijing does not appear as a game changer in the peace process, it could use its close relations with Sudan to mediate between the two neighbors. China needs peace to proceed with oil production. [16] The next meeting of the friends of JMEC will take place in Khartoum and will be chaired by China and Sudan.

China’s engagement through the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) displays a shift in its security policy in Africa (ECFR, June 14). In December 2014, Beijing announced the arrival of 700 combat troops in UNMISS. Far away from the oil fields, they were assigned to protect the UN House and the Protection of Civilians camp 1 (PoC1) in Juba. Given the level of violence in the country, being based in Juba appeared to be the safest assignment that the Chinese battalion could receive. UN staff saw this as a litmus test for further engagement in peace-keeping operations, as their lack of experience raised questions among UN officials about their real capabilities to protect PoC1 and the UN House. [17] As the recent attacks on the compound emphasized, however, the situation in Juba is also perilous, and Chinese peacekeepers’ responsibilities and need to prove themselves up to the job has become even more important.

Conclusion

With major investments in oil and a military presence in the UN mission, South Sudan has been a land of challenges and opportunities for China. In this volatile political and economic context, Beijing has taken a number of new political postures such as mediating between parties, deploying a battalion of PLA soldiers as part of a UN mission, engaging on a multilateral level on peace process, and supporting the IMF requests. The eruption of violence in July between the SPLM and the SPLM-IO will most likely reshuffle the relations between the two governments, further putting Chinese foreign policy principles under pressure and highlighting a variety of changes in China’s foreign policy in this transitional period.

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Notes

All interviews were conducted by the author in June 2016 in South Sudan.

1. Interview of an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. This contrasts with the numbers given by the MOFCOM which counts 140 Chinese companies in South Sudan and 2,000 Chinese on the ground.
2. Given that CNPC is the major shareholder of this consortium, a Chinese official presides this consortium assisted by a South Sudanese Vice-President.
3. Interview of a member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly. On December 15th, 2013, a civil war erupted between the Nuers and the Dinkas. This conflict opposing the government and the rebel is still ongoing.
4. Interviews of a member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly and an official of the

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
5. CNPC signed a six-year agreement with the South Sudanese government in December 2014 to increase oil production in three blocks and to rehabilitate aging oil fields.
 6. Interview of an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.
 7. Interview of an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; Member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly; Interview of an active member of the South Sudanese civil society. China has identified 10 key projects that is willing to fund through a commitment of \$60 billion for the African countries. Each Chinese Embassies will serve as a proxy for the government to receive proposals and grant loans. These \$60 billion are divided into « Ten major plans to improve cooperation with African countries »: \$5 billion grants in interests' free loans, \$35 billion for preferential loans, 5 billion additional capital for China-Africa development bank, \$5 billion for special loans for entrepreneurs, \$10 billion for African production capacity.
 8. Interview of a member of South Sudanese civil society organizations.
 9. A scholar at Juba University confirmed that the Chinese compounds in the oil fields are still protected by the South Sudanese army; Interviews with a South Sudanese think-tanker and an active member of South Sudanese civil society organizations.
 10. Interviews with a South Sudanese think-tanker, a Professor at Juba University, and a member of the South Sudan Legislative Assembly.
 11. Interview of a Professor at Juba University.
 12. Interview of a member of the South Sudanese civil society.
 13. Ibid
 14. Interview of a Professor at Juba University; Interview of a member of the South Sudanese civil society.
 15. Interview of European diplomat in South Sudan; Interview of a member of the South Sudanese civil society.

16. Interview of a European diplomat in South Sudan.
17. Interviews of UN officials.

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