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In a Fortnight: Bomber Strikes Chinese Embassy in Bishkek; China Announces New Defense Transportation Law

On August 30, a car bomb exploded outside the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Three people were injured in the explosion. Fortunately the car bomb was not able to directly ram the embassy, though the explosion was strong enough to destroy the facade of one side of the building. One report described finding glass 300 meters from the site of the blast ([Global Times](#), August 30).

The bombing demonstrates that despite crackdowns by Central Asian states and vigorous cooperation with their Chinese counterparts, Uygher militant groups with ties to Syria continue to be able to successfully carry out operations and channel funds and people throughout the Eurasian space. Recently

released videos indicate that top leaders within the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP) have managed to elude U.S., Chinese, and Pakistani authorities and continue to urge Uyghers in China to carry out jihad—if necessary by traveling abroad ([Militant Leadership Monitor](#), August 31).

The bomber was identified by the Kyrgyz media as an ethnically Uygher citizen of Tajikistan ([CCTV](#), September 7). Kyrgyz authorities have also arrested a militant named Shamo Mamedov who was involved in helping militants get to Syria ([AKipress](#) [Kyrgyzstan], September 7). The car used in the attack belonged to a woman who is part of a broader network with strong links to Syria-based groups ([AKipress](#), September 6). The attack follows a pattern of attacks shifting to “soft” targets outside of mainland China. The Kyrgyz Security Council confirmed the bomber and other suspects are members of the TIP ([GuanCha](#), September 9).

Kyrgyzstan itself does not have a significant Uygher minority ([Chinese Embassy in Bishkek](#), July 4). However, after the breakup of the Soviet Union the

newly independent states in Central Asia had difficulty securing their borders. Many Uyghurs took advantage of this to leave China and settle in the region, often bringing their radicalized ideology with them ([China Brief](#), September 10, 2014). China's Xinjiang Province and Kyrgyzstan share an 850 kilometers border largely dominated by the Tianshan Mountains with only two official border crossings. China and members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) regularly carry out anti-terror exercises, featuring long-range bombing and, more recently cyberwarfare components. China and the other SCO members will carry out this year's "Peacemission-2016" during the latter half of September ([Observer](#), September 12).



The attack in Bishkek demonstrates that the training and experience gained by Uyghur fighters in Syria will have repercussions for Central Asian states. While China's own vast state security apparatus may be capable of detecting and preventing such attacks, weaker Central Asian or Southeast Asian states will be prime targets. Furthermore the connections between the attackers and their supporters to Syrian-based groups may further strengthen Chinese stated resolve to stabilize Syria and militarily support the Syrian government ([China Brief](#), August 22). On the side-lines of the G-20 Summit held in Hangzhou at the beginning of September, China and Turkey vowed to further deepen their counter-terrorism cooperation ([Xinhua](#), September 3), perhaps further indicating that China is hoping to place additional pressure on money and people transiting between Syria, Central Asia, and its own borders.

Defense Transportation Law

The National People's Congress (NPC) has issued a new Defense Transportation Law ([NPC](#), September 6). Speaking before the NPC on a draft of the law General Zhao Keshi (赵克石), head of the Logistics Support Department of the Central Military Committee (中央军委委员会后勤保障部) said that the new law would provide important guidance as China's economy develops and military reforms ([PLA Daily](#), April 26). The law is an update to guidance first issued in 1995 and then revised in 2011. This law and its predecessors are part Chinese efforts to augment the PLA's warfighting capability through close integration with civilian infrastructure.

The law has an extremely broad scope, and extends explicitly to every level of government from the county (县) up. It also embraces the full range of modes of transport: rail, highways, canals, waterways, air and even pipelines as well as all of their related infrastructure. Joint use of transportation is just one part of China's broader focus on Civil-Military Integration (CMI; 军民融合). CMI is a regular feature of editorials in official publications ([China Brief](#), August 22). As stated in China's 2015 Defense White Paper:

China encourages joint building and utilization of military and civilian infrastructure, joint exploration of the sea, outer space and air, and shared use of such resources as surveying and mapping, navigation, meteorology and frequency spectra. Accordingly, military and civilian resources can be more compatible, complementary and mutually accessible ([China's Military Strategy](#), May 29, 2015).

As part of its modernization efforts, the PLA is consistently improving its ability to deploy internally, practicing, for example, high altitude drops, long-distance amphibious operations and cross-country mobilization. It has also invested heavily in roads, rail and improved air and sea mobility.

In the case of air mobility, long a major bottleneck for force projection, China is currently embarked on a building program for several new aircraft, the first of which the Y-20 (Y for 运, transport), officially became part of the Chinese military in July ([81.cn](#), July 6). In the past the PLA has had to charter civilian aircraft abroad to accomplish deployment and evacuation operations ([China Brief](#), February 13, 2013). Other similar projects, including plans to work with Ukrainian aircraft maker Antonov to build more An-225s—the world’s largest transport aircraft—are in the works ([China News](#), September 8). But even a greatly expanded PLA strategic air-lift capability is unlikely to meet the full needs of a wartime PLA. However, given the leeway the transport law gives the government to use civilian aircraft in wartime, one can imagine the 380-odd passenger and cargo aircraft Air China’s fleet being transferred to direct PLA command.

In the maritime domain China already makes extensive use of paramilitary forces ([AMTI](#), September 11, 2015). The Chinese military recently carried out a drill in which a large number of civilian ships were suddenly ordered to join in a “multi-service joint drill” ([PLA Daily](#), September 11). This is particularly important as China works to improve its long-distance maritime force projection, or closer to home in a Cross-Strait scenario in which vast numbers of civilian transports would be needed to bolster the PLA’s own amphibious craft.

The PLA views CMI as a shortcut to rapid improvement of the PLA’s capabilities, as well as an ideologically convenient path to reinforce the ties between Party, Army and People. Economically China is pushing the creation of road, rail and air connections across broader Eurasia as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, largely through state-owned enterprises. The Defense Transportation Law reinforces the fact that such infrastructure is explicitly dual-use.

Beijing Contradicts “Rule of Law” Campaign in Crackdown

By Willy Lam

The recent trial of lawyers, legal assistants and NGO personnel who were detained during mass arrests more than a year ago has given the clearest indication to date of whether the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under President Xi Jinping is honoring his oft-repeated commitments to rule by law with Chinese characteristics. On July 9, 2015, more than 300 *weiquan* (维权; rights-protecting) lawyers, legal staff and rights advocates were detained on charges ranging from “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” to “inciting subversion of state power.” International watchdogs considered the mass arrests, dubbed the “709 Incident,” the largest-scale action against socially committed attorneys and NGO enthusiasts since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).

In early August 2016, more than a year after their initial detention a handful of the 24 lawyers and their associates were finally put on trial in a Tianjin court.

Moreover, 264 legal professionals and activists have remained under 24-hour police surveillance while 39 are not allowed to leave the country ([VOA](#), July 23; [Apple Daily](#) [Hong Kong], July 6; [Human Rights in China](#), June 10).

The legal professionals detained by police include nationally and globally recognized rights lawyers such as Zhou Shifeng, Wang Yu, Wang Quanzhang, Li Heping, Xie Yang, Li Chunfu, and Liu Sixin. Zhou and both Wangs were attorneys at the Beijing-based Fengrui Law Firm. Zhou Shifeng first gained recognition for representing underground Christians as well as the parents of the victims of melamine-tainted milk produced by unscrupulous dairy manufacturers. Wang Yu, who won the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize earlier this year, achieved national acclaim for defending human rights activist Cao Shunlin, who later died under suspicious circumstances while in police custody in

2014. She also represented renowned Uighur scholar and dissident Ilham Tohti. Wang Quanzhang, who is not related to Wang Yu, is a veteran counsel for persecuted Falun Gong practitioners. Li Heping is a Christian lawyer who has represented house church members and political dissidents. In 2008 he was awarded the Democracy Award for Religious Freedom given by the Washington-based National Endowment for Democracy ([Hong Kong Free Press](#), August 4; [BBC Chinese](#), August 2).

Due Process Suspended

Twenty international legal and human-rights NGOs signed a petition to Beijing asking President Xi to “uphold the rule of law” in handling 709 cases. Signatories included the Amsterdam Bar Association, the Australian branch of the International Association of People’s Lawyers and the International Commission of Jurists ([AP](#), July 9). That these *weiquan* attorneys and activists were only put on trial 13 months after their arrest is only one among many violations of due process by the party-state apparatus. The spouses of the rights defenders were not told where they were held. The authorities also denied requests by relatives to hire lawyers for the accused. This was despite a petition signed by 60 attorneys nationwide asking the authorities to honor Chinese law by allowing the detained access to legal help. Moreover, several of the most prominent *weiquan* lawyers and advocates were forced to make so-called televised confession of guilt while they were subjected to interrogation by police. The confessions were then broadcast and publicized in Chinese and Hong Kong media. Yet the CCP leadership’s most controversial tactic is to play the “patriotic card” by insinuating that the rights defenders were under the influence of “hostile anti-China forces in the West,” usually a code name for the United States ([VOAChinese.com](#), July 10; [Ming Pao](#) [Hong Kong], July 10; [Chinadigitaltimes.com](#), January 7).

Sentencing for suspects willing to go on record denouncing the West for “spreading chaos” in China have been relatively light. During trials in the week beginning August 1, Zhou Shifeng was given a seven-year term for “subversion of state power.” While Zhou did make a televised confession shortly after his arrest in July last year, he did not accuse

“hostile anti-China forces” of wreaking havoc in China. Zhou’s Feng Rui lawfirm associate Wang Yu, however, was granted bail, a lenient dispensation in the Chinese judicial system. Two other rights activists who had worked with Feng Rui lawyers were given jail terms. Hu Shigen, the pastor of a house church and a veteran dissident, was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years for “subversion of state power.” Zhai Yanmin, who was also accused of the same crime, was given a suspended three-year sentence ([BBC Chinese](#), August 4).

It turned out that the lenient treatment accorded Wang Yu and Zhai Yanmin was due to their having made additional confessions in August that laid into “anti-China Western powers.” In an interview with selected media in China and Hong Kong, Wang asserted that “foreign organizations have interfered in human rights cases in China with the purpose of wreaking havoc on the country.” She claimed that lawyers at Feng Rui had received training in Britain, Sweden and Thailand on “ways and means to smear the Chinese government using human rights cases.” Referring to the Ludovic Trarieux International Human Rights Prize award, Wang said: “I do not recognize and approve of such an award. As a Chinese citizen, I will never accept such an award.” Accusing other rights attorney of being the pawns of hostile forces in the West, Wang said: “I won’t be used by them anymore” ([Radio Free Asia](#), August 1; [Theinitium.com](#) [Hong Kong], August 1). As for Zhai, who was accused by police of orchestrating demonstrations to protest cases of miscarriage of justice, he said in recent interviews with Chinese and Hong Kong media that he was now convinced that “hostile forces outside China and some people in China with ulterior motives” were trying to break up the country. From now on, he said, “I will not go down the road of crime while being blinded by words such as ‘democracy,’ ‘human rights’ or ‘the public good’” ([Amnesty.org](#), August 4; [South China Morning Post](#), August 2).

At the same time, a dozen odd state-owned media, including the micro-blogging networks of the Supreme People’s Procuratorate and the Communist Youth League, ran a video accusing the United States of provided support to human rights lawyers as well as separatist movements in Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan

and Hong Kong. Entitled “If you want to change China, you need to first step over our bodies,” the five-minute feature showcased the conspiracy theory of the U.S. sowing dissension and internal unrest in a host of countries including Iraq, Libya and Egypt. While various Chinese media have accused the U.S. and other Western powers of providing aid to China’s NGOs, it was the first time that a link was made between China’s 400-odd rights attorneys and the U.S. government ([Japan Times](#), August 7; [Time \(Asia\)](#), August 4; [Chinachange.org](#), August 3).

The Hong Kong-based China Human Rights Lawyers Concern Group pointed out that the televised confessions made by the lawyers were most likely made under duress. In Wang Yu’s case, the Group noted what while Wang was supposedly granted bail, neither her relatives nor colleagues could locate her. “Wang’s husband was also arrested for ‘inciting subversion of state power’,” said CHRLCG. “Her son and parents are under round-the-clock surveillance by the police in their homes in Inner Mongolia” ([CHRLCG Statement](#), August 3) Eva Pils, a specialist in Chinese law at King’s College, London, said while the forced confessions of attorneys appeared concocted, Beijing hopes that ordinary citizens will buy the propaganda. “The fact that the statements they [rights attorneys] make are scripted and unconvincing—especially to those who knew them before they were ‘disappeared’—apparently doesn’t matter much from the authorities’ perspective,” Pils said. “They are presumably aiming at a broader audience of casual viewers meant to associate *weiquan* lawyers with troublemakers; and vilifying human rights advocates as manipulated by foreign enemy forces is part of that effort.” The legal expert said Beijing’s message was clear: “Lawyers are expected to help the Party-state, not oppose it by insisting on defending their clients’ human rights.” [1]

Beijing has also been using questionable—and legally dubious—methods to suppress another group of “trouble-makers”: journalists and intellectuals who are committed to universal values and truthful reporting. A case in point is the closure of one of China’s most influential political journal, *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (炎黄春秋), which was run by the former associates of the Party’s liberal icons, former general secretaries Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang. Du

Daozheng, former Director of the National Press and Publication Administration, was publisher of the monthly, while Hu Dehua, the son of late Party chief Hu, was Vice-Publisher. Perhaps due to its special background, the magazine, which had a circulation of 200,000, had been tolerated despite its advocacy of political reform and civil rights. And while it was “sponsored” by the Chinese National Academy of Arts (CNAA)—a unit of the Ministry of Culture—the agreement between *Yanhuang Chunqiu* and CNAA spelt out clearly that the journal had full say over issues such as personnel and finance ([South China Morning Post](#), July 18; [Ming Pao](#), July 18).

In mid-July, however, CNAA leaders told *Yanhuang Chunqiu* that it had sacked Du, Hu and other senior editors. Moreover, CNAA dispatched its own staff to occupy the magazine’s premises and to take over the operations of its computers and website. Du, 92, who told foreign media that the CNAA had violated the law, instructed Mo Shaoping, one of the best-known rights lawyers in Beijing, to sue the Association. That it is unlikely that the reformers will have their way, however, was demonstrated by the fact the Beijing court refused to accept the case. Moreover, new staff installed by the CNAA put out the August edition of the magazine despite protests made by Du and Hu that the editorial and writing teams of the original *Yanhuang Chunqiu* had nothing to do with the new, heavily censored product ([Apple Daily](#), August 5; [Radio French International](#), July 22).

In light of President Xi’s on-going power struggle with factions in the Party such as the Shanghai Faction led by former president Jiang Zemin as well as the free-thinking associates of liberal icon Hu Yaobang, it is understood that the closure of *Yanhuang Chunqiu* was Xi’s signal that a wider purge of officials and intellectuals might be in the offing. Historian Zhang Lifan said while Party elders close to the liberal wing of the CCP wanted to use the *Yanhuang Chunqiu* to help the Party and country, the regime did not want to heed their advice. “They want to save the Party, but the party doesn’t want to be helped,” he said. “When you’re mighty and powerful, you don’t need people to nag you” ([The Diplomat](#), July 19). Zhang and other commentators, however, have deplored the illegal means by which Party censors had

taken over the much-admired journal. Ousted publisher Du even compared the authorities' crackdown on *Yanhuang Chunqiu* to the "lawlessness of the Cultural Revolution" (New York Times Chinese Edition, July 20; Radio Free Asia, July 18).

Conclusion

At a CCP Central Committee plenary session held in Beijing two years ago, President Xi vowed that he would respect the Constitution and the law. The Party chief reiterated that "no organization or individual can act outside the parameters of the law." According to the "Decision on major issues concerning comprehensively advancing rule of law" passed at the plenum, judicial independence would be guaranteed. Officials would be given demerits or held accountable if they are found interfering in judicial cases. "Officials will be criticized in public notices if they influence judicial activities or meddle in a particular case," the document added. "Judicial injustice can inflict a lethal damage to social justice," it said (Xinhua, October 24, 2014; People's Daily, August 29, 2014). Beijing's handling of the human rights lawyers, NGO activists and liberal editors, however, has proven that the CCP is determined to use its quasi-police state apparatus and propaganda machinery to prop up the authority of the Party—and "core" leader Xi Jinping—at all costs.

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Notes:

1. Author's interview with Dr. Pils, August 10

Assessing Who Will Be the Next PLA Navy Commander

By Ken Allen



Admiral Wu Shengli, who has been the commander of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) since August 2006, a Member of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Central Military Commission (CMC) since October 2007, and a member of the CCP's Central Committee since 2007, will have to retire based on his age (born August 1945) no later than the 19th Party Congress in late 2017. This article addresses the requirements to become not only the next PLAN commander but to also become a concurrent CMC Member. It then examines who is qualified and is not qualified to assume those positions based on the current criteria. [1]

It is important to note that, over the past two decades, the PLA has adjusted the structure of the CMC and made exceptions to selection criteria and policies to allow certain people to fill CMC billets. Although no exceptions were made for Wu when he became the PLAN commander, exceptions were made for Wei Fenghe when he became the commander of the PLA Second Artillery Force (now PLA Rocket Force) and for the current CMC Vice Chairman, Fan Changlong. However, the PLA Air Force has so far adhered to all of the criteria for its next commander, Yi Xiaoguang. As such, the PLAN may very well have to "break the rules" regardless of which options it chooses.

Brief History of PLAN Commanders

As shown in Table 1, since the PLAN was created in April 1949, the PLAN has had a total of seven commanders (ONI, [China's Navy 2007](#)).

Table 1: PLAN Commanders since 1949

Name	Command period	Age Assumed Position	Age Left Position	Reason Departed	Specialty
Wu Shengli	Aug 2006 – Present	61	(72)	(Expected 2017)	Surface
Zhang Dingfa	Jun 2003 – Aug 2006	59	62	Deceased	Subsurface
Shi Yunsheng	Nov 1996 – Jun 2003	56	63	Relieved of Duty	Naval Aviation
Zhang Lianzhong	Jan 1988 – Nov 1996	56	65	Retired	Subsurface
Liu Huaqing	Aug 1982 – Jan 1988	66	72	CMC Vice Chairman	Army political commissar, S&T, R&D
Ye Fei	Jan 1980 – Aug 1982	66	68	National People's Congress Vice Chairman	Army & Navy political commissar, miscellaneous government
Xiao Jinguang [2]	Jan 1950 – Dec 1979	46	76	Retired	Army political commissar

PLA's 15-grade Structure

In the PLA, every organization as well as every officer is assigned one of 15 grades that are more important than corresponding primary and secondary military ranks that are typically associated with an individual or position. [3] Therefore, the basis for the assessment in this article revolves around the current 15-grade structure, which was implemented in 1988 when Zhang Lianzhong was the commander (*China Brief* [February 4](#) and [February 23](#)). As shown in Table 2, only four grades—CMC Vice Chairman, CMC Member, Military Region (MR) Leader, and MR Deputy Leader—are relevant to this article. [4] Table 2 shows the primary and secondary ranks assigned to each grade, as well as the mandatory retirement age for each grade. Note that the mandatory retirement age of 65 for MR Leader-grade officers was not implemented until 1995. Furthermore, according to Alice Miller of the Hoover Institution, retirement norms for CMC members appear to have only been consolidated during Hu Jintao's leadership of the CMC (2004–2012). According to one account, regular members of the CMC were expected to retire at 70, though with the possibility under some circumstances at 72. At the 16th Party Congress in 2002 and again at the 17th Congress in 2007, a lower retirement norm of 68 appeared to dictate retirement of Politburo members. However, the mandatory retirement age is based on their age at the time of the Party Congress. Specifically, if someone turns 68 at any time during the calendar year in which the congress is held, then they must retire at the time of the congress (*The PLA as Organization v2.0*, 2015; *China Brief*, [July 22](#) and [August 5](#), 2010).

Table 2: Grades, Ranks, and Retirement Ages

Grade	Primary Rank	Secondary Rank	Retirement Age
CMC Vice Chairmen CMC Member	GEN/ADM (3 stars)	N/A	68*
MR Leader	GEN/ADM (3 stars)	LGEN/VADM (2 stars)	65
MR Deputy Leader	LGEN/VADM (2 stars)	MGEN/RADM (1 star)	63

Promotion Steps to the CMC

According to John Corbett (COL, USA-ret), as of 2010, there was a generally consistent pattern that demonstrates the path to full general / admiral and to CMC Member, which combines rank and grade promotions that rarely occur at the same time. The pattern consists of the following four observable steps (*China Brief*, [July 22](#) and [August 5](#), 2010); however, there are always exceptions to every rule, particularly when it serves the needs of the military and Party:

- **Step One:** A LGEN/VADM in an MR Deputy Leader-grade *moves laterally* to a second position in the same grade. Relevant MR Deputy Leader billets in the PLAN include:
 - PLAN deputy commanders and chief of staff (e.g., Director of the Staff Department)
 - PLAN Fleet commanders, who serve concurrently as Theater Command deputy commanders
 - Theater Command permanent deputy commanders and chief of staff (e.g., Director of the Joint Staff Department)
- **Step Two:** As a general rule, in order to replace the PLAN, PLA Air Force (PLAAF), and PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) [former PLA Second Artillery Force (PLASAF)] commanders as CMC members, their successors must first serve in an MR leader-grade billet for at least two to three years. As shown below, the PLA as a whole has only three MR Leader-grade billets that are relevant to the path to becoming the PLAN commander: [5]
 - Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff Department (former Deputy Chief of the General Staff / DCGS)
 - Commandant, PLA Academy of Military Science (AMS)

- Commandant, PLA National Defense University (NDU)
- **Step Three:** After three years or so as a LGEN/VADM in an MR leader-grade position, they receive a *rank promotion* to full general; however, some adjustments may have been made in 2016 as a result of the restructuring.
- **Step Four:** In order to become a CMC Vice Chairman or CMC Member, the officer must also be a member of the CCP Central Committee.

Although the PLA generally implements the four-step process, there are always exceptions to the rule.

Exceptions

During the 16th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum in 2004, the CMC added the PLAN and PLASAF commanders as CMC Members for the first time. Although the PLAAF commander was also added, this was less of a new precedent as two other PLAAF commanders had previously served on the CMC (NASIC, *People's Liberation Army Air Force 2010*). [6] As a general rule, the commander and political commissar (PC) have the same grade as their organization; however, in this case, each of the three commanders were given a "policy promotion" to CMC Member even though the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLASAF (now PLARF) are only MR Leader grade organizations. Even so, the PC is the secretary of the Party Committee and the commander, who has a higher grade, is the deputy secretary.

The amount of time that someone must serve in an MR Leader-grade billet before becoming a CMC Member-grade officer has apparently changed. For example, when Wu Shengli was appointed as the PLAN commander in August 2006 to replace Zhang Dingfa, who had terminal cancer and died in December 2006. Wu had only served as an MR Leader-grade officer in a DCGS billet for 26 months, and he only had two stars for three years. In addition, he was not a member of the CCP Central Committee. As a result, when he became the PLAN commander, he

did not receive his third star until July 2007. In addition, he was not placed on the CMC as a CMC Member-grade officer and did not become a CCP Central Committee member until the 17th Party Congress in October 2007. Although he was not an official member until October 2007, he most likely attended all of the CMC meetings but just didn't get a formal vote.

The policy apparently changed by the time Wei Fenghe replaced Jing Zhiyuan as the PLASAF commander in October 2012. For example, Wei had only served as a DCGS for 22 months when he became the commander at the 18th Party Congress and received a rank promotion to general at the same time after having already served as a lieutenant general for four and a half years. He was also added as a CMC Member one month later.

CMC Vice Chairmen

As Table 3 shows, there does not appear to be a set pattern for the appointment of CMC vice chairmen, except that, with the exception of Fan Changlong, each appointee previously served as a CMC Member (*China Brief*, [July 22](#) and [August 5](#), 2010). Whereas the 16th Party Congress' CMC had three vice chairmen, one of whom served concurrently as the Minister of Defense, the 17th and 18th Party Congresses have had only two vice chairmen, neither of who is serving concurrently as the Minister of Defense. Of note, although two military officers have served on the CCP Politburo for at least the past two decades, none have served on the Politburo Standing Committee since Liu Huaqing retired in 1996.

Vice Chairman	Previous Position
Fan Changlong (2012–Present)	Commander, Jinan MR (not a CMC Member) (2004–2012)
Xu Qiliang (2012–Present)	Commander, PLAAF and CMC Member (2007–2012)
Guo Boxiong (2002–2012)	Executive DCGS and CMC Member (1999–2002)
Xu Caihou (2004–2012)	Director, General Political Department & CMC Member (2002–2004)
Cao Gangchuan (2002–2007) & concurrent Minister of Defense (2003–2008)	Director, General Armament Department & CMC Member (1998–2002)
Zhang Wannian (1995–2002)	Chief of the General Staff & CMC Member (1992–1995)
Chi Haotian (1995–2002) & concurrent Minister of Defense (1995–2003)	Chief of the General Staff & CMC Member (1987–1993); Defense Minister & CMC Member (1993–1995)

Who is Eligible to Replace Wu Shengli?

This section discusses who the possible contenders are to replace Wu as the concurrent PLAN commander and CMC Member and what contingencies

might have to be implemented in order to actually meet the criteria.

Given that Wu did not turn 68 until after the 18th Party Congress in 2012, he was allowed to remain as the commander until the 19th Party Congress in late 2017, at which time he will be 72 and will have to retire. Ironically, at the time of the 18th Party Congress, Wu and then PLAAF commander Xu Qiliang were the only two CMC Member-grade officers who were qualified in terms of the time-in-grade criteria to become CMC Vice Chairmen. It appears that three things happened. First, the Army, who controlled the CMC at that time, was not willing to allow two non-Army officers to serve as the Vice Chairmen. As a result, General Fan Changlong, who had served as the commander of the Jinan Military Region as an MR Leader-grade officer for eight years became one of the two Vice Chairmen along with Xu Qiliang. In other words, Fan “skipped a grade” (e.g., CMC Member) to become a Vice Chairman-grade officer, which is almost unprecedented for any grade level in the PLA’s history; however, the PLA has historically adjusted the CMC membership to meet certain goals. [7] On the other hand, if Xu Qiliang had not become a Vice Chairman, then General Ma Xiaotian, who would have reached age 65 in August 2014, would have had to retire at that time and would not have become the PLAAF commander at the 19th Party Congress. It is the author’s opinion that Wu Shengli personally chose to remain as the PLAN commander because he felt he could make more of a difference for the PLAN by staying in that position.

Admiral Sun Jianguo as a Potential Candidate

By applying the grade criteria to determine who will replace Wu, there is only one eligible person today, and that is Admiral Sun Jianguo, who is currently one of the six Deputy Chiefs of the Joint Staff with the grade of MR Leader (*China Brief*, June 20; [August 18, 2015](#); [February 7, 2014](#)). Although there are also exceptions to the rule, the PLAN has painted itself into a corner, since Sun Jianguo turns 65 in February 2017 and should retire at that time unless he becomes the PLAN commander and a concurrent CMC Member before he retires.

As such, concerning Sun Jianguo, there are three options. First, Wu could step down as the PLAN commander before Sun turns 65. Since Sun became a Deputy Chief of the General Staff (now Joint Staff) in January 2009 and received a promotion to admiral in July 2011, he already has enough time in grade and rank to assume both positions. Sun was also an alternate member of the 17th Party Congress in 2002 and a full member of the 18th Party Congress in 2012. Second, the PLA could make an exception and allow Sun to remain on active duty past his mandatory retirement age, so that he can assume both positions at the 19th Party Congress. Third, Sun retires before the end of 2016 to allow someone else to have the MR Leader grade for at least a year before the Party Congress. Whoever that person is would replace Wu at the Party Congress; however, because he would not have enough time in grade, he would not automatically be made a CMC member. It also depends on when that person receives his third star.

Other Options

Another option, which most likely will not happen, is that the PLAN, PLAAF, PLARF commanders, as well as the newly created PLA Army’s (PLAA) commander, are not added to the CMC as CMC Members at the 19th Party Congress; however, if this occurs, whoever replaces Wu would have to retire at age 65 (*China Brief* [February 4](#) and [February 23](#)). Yet another option is to bring in a non-navy officer as the PLAN commander as happened in the early years of the PLAN with Ye Fei and Xiao Jinguang. Although this is highly unlikely, exceptions have been made recently for PC billets. For example, the current PLAN PC, Admiral Miao Hua, had never spent a single day in the PLAN before becoming the PC in December 2014, at which time he was “promoted in rank” from lieutenant general to Navy lieutenant general (e.g., vice admiral) (Sina.com, December 24, 2014). He received his second star in July 2012 and his third star in July 2015 (CCTV, August 2, 2015). In addition, General Tian Xiushi, who served as the PLAAF PC from October 2012 to July 2015, was a career Army officer and had never served in the PLAAF (*China Brief*, Parts [One](#) and [Two](#), March 4, 2013).

The Next Tier

Should Sun Jianguo depart from the picture, the next group of eligible personnel at the MR Deputy Leader-grade level include the six PLAN deputy commanders, the PLAN chief of staff, the three fleet commanders, and PLAN officers who are serving as permanent Theater Command deputy commanders and chiefs of staff. However, only certain personnel are eligible based on their time-in-grade and time-in-rank. Furthermore, even if one of them were selected at the end of 2016 or any time in 2017, they would not have served enough time as an MR Leader-grade officer to receive the grade of CMC Member. As such, they may be in the same situation that Wu Shengli was in when he became the commander in 2006 but wasn't added to the CMC until 2007. Table 4 provides a list of the personnel who meet the grade and rank requirements.

Table 4: Other Eligible PLAN Personnel

Name	DOB (age)	Current Position	Date Assumed Position	Previous Position	MR Deputy Leader Grade	Rank
Tian Zhong	1956 (60)	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jan 2014	Commander, North Sea Fleet	Dec 2007	VADM (2009)
Liu Yi	1955 (61)	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jul 2011	PLAN Deputy Chief of Staff	Jul 2011	VADM (2012)
Ding Yi	1959 (57)	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jan 2014	Commander, North Sea Fleet Aviation	Jul 2013	VADM (2014)
Jiang Weilie	1955 (61)	PLAN Deputy Commander	Dec 2014	Commander, South Sea Fleet	Nov 2010	VADM (2012)
Yuan Yubai	1956 (60)	Commander, North Sea Fleet	Jul 2014	Chief of Staff, North Sea Fleet	Jul 2014	VADM (2015)
Su Zhiqian	1955 (61)	Commander, East Sea Fleet	Jan 2011	Commander, South Sea Fleet	Jan 2009	VADM (2010)
Shen Jinlong	1956 (60)	Commander, South Sea Fleet	Dec 2014	Commandant, Naval Command College	Dec 2014	VADM (2016)

As a general rule, deputy commanders are listed on the Standing Committee in protocol order based on their priority, not on the time that they assumed their billet or their age. However, not all deputy commanders are on the Standing Committee.

Based on the information in Table 4, the most logical candidate is VADM Tian Zhong, who has been one of the PLAN deputy commanders since January 2014 and is currently listed as first in protocol order on the Standing Committee among the six deputy commanders (*Renmin Haijun*, July 6; Baike.Baidu). [8] He was promoted in grade to MR Deputy Leader in December 2013, when he became the commander of the North Sea Fleet and a concurrent deputy commander of the Jinan MR. Tian was promoted to

RADM in 2001 and VADM in 2009, making him competitive for promotion to Admiral in 2017. He also became a member of the CCP Central Committee during the 18th Party Congress in 2012. Since Tian was born in 1956, if he is not promoted in grade, he will have to retire at age 63 in 2019.

Although Liu Yi is listed second in protocol order as a PLAN deputy commander, he does not have the command experience that Tian Zhong has and has only served in one MR Deputy Leader-grade billet so far. The third deputy commander who is a possible contender is VADM Ding Yi, who is listed third in protocol order. Furthermore, no information was found for either of them being selected as an alternate member of member of the Party Standing Committee. If neither of them are promoted in grade, they will have to retire at age 63 in 2018 and 2022, respectively.

Although Jiang Weilie became a deputy commander in December 2014 and previously served as the commander of the South Sea Fleet, both of which are MR Deputy Leader-grade billets, he does not yet appear to be a member of the PLAN's Standing Committee. Theoretically, if he were a top contender, he would be on the Standing Committee and listed at the top of the protocol order. The one factor that he does have in his favor is that he was selected as an alternate member of the 18th Party Congress' Central Committee in 2012. If he is not selected as the next commander, he will have to retire in 2018 at age 63.

Concerning the three fleet commanders, each of whom are also concurrent Theater Command deputy commanders, Su Zhiqian has served the most time in MR Deputy Leader-grade billets and has been a VADM since 2010. He has also served as the commander in two separate fleets; however, he has not been selected as an alternate or member of the Central Committee.

Conclusions

There is little doubt that Admiral Wu Shengli will retire as the commander of the PLA Navy and as a concurrent CMC Member at the time of the 19th Party Congress in late 2017. However, the question is who is qualified from a grade and rank perspective, as

well as having served on the Central Committee, to replace him for both billets. Today, only one person, Admiral Sun Jianguo, meets the criteria of becoming a CMC Member based on the PLA's 15-grade structure; however, based on the PLA's mandatory retirement regulations for each grade, he may have to retire before the Party Congress, thus leaving a black hole for any possible successors. Two possible options are 1) for Wu to step down at the end of 2016 and allow Sun to take his place, or 2) for the PLA to make an exception and allow Sun to remain on active duty past his mandatory retirement age of 65. Either of these options, as well as selecting one of the current PLAN deputy commanders as not only the commander but as a CMC Member and Central Committee Member, will set a precedence for the promotion process for all of the services in the future.

When Wu Shengli became the PLAN commander in August 2006, he was not allowed to become a CMC Member for over a year because he did not have enough time in grade. Furthermore, he did not have enough time-in-rank to be eligible to receive his third star. As such, he did not receive his third star until July 2007 and did not become a CMC Member until October 2007. In 2012, the PLA apparently reduced the time required for the PLARF commander, Wei Fenghe, to serve in an MR Leader-grade billet (Deputy Chief of the General Staff) before becoming the commander and a concurrent CMC Member. Although a few PLAN personnel could easily be promoted in grade to become the PLAN commander with the grade of MR Leader, none of the potential candidates, including current PLAN deputy commanders or fleet commanders, will come close to meeting even the lowest time criteria for becoming a concurrent CMC Member-grade officer.

For comparison purposes, the PLAAF has been grooming General Yi Xiaoguang to replace General Ma Xiaotian as the commander at the 19th Party Congress. In order to do this, Yi became one of the Deputy Chiefs of the General Staff (now Joint Staff) with the grade of MR Leader in August 2014 and was promoted to full general in July 2016. In addition, when the time comes for the new PLA Army (PLAA) commander, General Li Zuocheng, to be added to the CMC, he will have already served in an MR Leader-

grade billet as commander of the Chengdu MR since July 2013 and received his third star in July 2015.

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Notes

1. Of note, the PLAN does not have Chinese equivalent terms for Western naval ranks, such as admiral, captain, commander, or lieutenant. The PLAN uses Army ranks in Chinese publications and merely adds "Navy" in front of each rank, such as "Navy general" (海军上将); however, it translates it as "admiral" in English publications. In Chinese, the PLAN identifies the U.S. Navy's Chief of Naval Operations (美国海军作战部) and as a "Navy general" or just a "general" (上将).
2. At the age of 46, Xiao Jinguang became the Navy's first commander. Technically, he held the position until December 1979. In 1962, however, Xiao came under attack from Defense Minister Lin Biao, and Lin relieved him of his PLAN duties in January 1967. When Lin's plane went down over Mongolia in September 1971, Xiao was reinstated but came under immediate attack from Mao Zedong's wife, Jiang Qing. For all practical purposes, the PLAN's political commissar, Li Zuopeng, ran the Navy from 1962 until he was arrested immediately after Lin's plane crash.
3. In the PLA, officers receive a grade promotion every three years up to Regiment Leader and a rank promotion every four years up to colonel. After that, they must still serve a minimum number of years in their current grade and rank before receiving separate grade and rank promotions, which rarely occur at the same time.
4. Note: The PLA will most likely rename the MR Leader and MR Deputy Leader grades to

Theater Command Leader and Theater Command Deputy Leader grades, respectively, around the time of the 19th Party Congress in late 2017 (*China Brief*, [February 4](#) and [February 23](#)).

5. For example, PLAN Commander Zhang Dingfa served as the AMS commandant from November 2002 until he became the PLAN commander in 2003 and CMC member in September 2004. Wu Shengli, former PLAAF Commander Xu Qiliang, and current PLARF Commander Wei Fenghe all served as a DCGS until they became their service's commander.
6. Liu Yalou was a CMC member from November 1956 to May 1965, and Zhang Tingfa was a member from August 1977 to September 1982.
7. *PLA Encyclopedia*, December 2007
8. ONI, *The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century*, 2015

PLA Yijiangshan Joint Amphibious Operation: Past is Prologue

Kevin McCauley

China and Russia are staging a Joint naval exercise in the South China Sea. The exercises are meant, in part, to practice joint island assaults and other amphibious operations ([China News](#), September 11). The PLA's emphasis on improving joint training, amphibious modernization and landing exercises supports President Xi's current military reforms that are focused on accelerating joint operations capability (*PLA Daily*, July 26; [People's Daily Online](#), August 19; [China Military Online](#), July 14). As the PLA transitions from the current "coordinated capability" to an "integrated joint operations capability," the PLA's successful Yijiangshan (一江山) joint island landing campaign in 1954–1955 provides some insight as

well as a benchmark for how the PLA would currently conduct joint operations. Coordinated joint operations consist of the services operating towards the common objectives of the operational plan, but with little interaction except at higher echelons; integrated joint operations envisions the employment of joint task forces down to the tactical level supported by advanced communications. Currently the PLA is operationalizing components of integrated joint operations, including improving key areas of joint command, an advanced command information system, and formation of integrated modular joint task forces.

Between 1954–1955, the PLA conducted a successful, small joint island landing campaign against Kuomintang (KMT) nationalist forces defending two Yijiangshan islands off the Zhejiang coast. Involving units from the Air Force, Army and Navy, the PLA considers this campaign their first joint operation. The KMT's loss of the Yijiangshan Islands made the nearby Dachen islands (大陈群岛) defensive system untenable. The Dachen islands were considered a staging area for attacks on the mainland and the KMT loss of these islands reduced the Republic of China's capacity to threaten the coast in this area. [1] PLA planning, command, coordination, and intelligence preparation were critical to the successful operation.

Establishing a Joint Command Structure

Since the PLA did not have an established peacetime joint command structure at the time, the East China Military Region (MR), with Central Military Commission (CMC) approval, established an Eastern Zhejiang Frontline Headquarters in August 1954 to command the joint campaign. [2] The joint command structure included a Navy Command Post (CP), Air Force CP, Landing CP, a Political Work Group and a Joint Logistics headquarters. The East China MR Chief of Staff (CoS) Zhang Aiping (张爱萍) served as commander and political commissar for the joint operation. [3]

Preparing Joint Coordination

Coordination planning between the services was critical as the PLA acknowledged its general lack of modern operational knowledge, as well as a poor un-

derstanding between the services of the other service's tactics and weapons characteristics. Additionally, the services expressed doubts and concerns over the conduct of the operation. Therefore, the Eastern Zhejiang Front Command initiated exchange visits to promote understanding between the services and eliminate concerns. The joint command also held a commanders' conference to examine coordination issues and establish coordination methods. [4]

As a result, the joint command developed a coordination planning table with the support from Soviet advisors. The joint command conducted a series of exercises to prepare the force. The services first conducted separate training, followed by joint and political training. Amphibious landing exercises were conducted at a peninsula resembling the actual Yijiangshan landing sites. The exercises helped develop a better understanding between the services, established coordination procedures, as well as resolving newly identified issues. [5]

Key command and coordination issues were resolved between the ground forces and PLAN during the sea crossing and landing operations. During embarkation of the landing force, the Army and PLAN jointly commanded; the PLAN commanded during the sea crossing; the Army and PLAN jointly commanded during the amphibious assault phase; and the Army took command during combat on the island. [6]

Additional coordination issues included dispatch of aviation and artillery liaison to infantry battalions to coordinate firepower support and relay the infantry units' location and fire support requirements. Aviation representatives were also assigned to various command posts for coordination. Artillery and aviation units coordinated their fires to avoid having artillery fire strike aircraft conducting close in ground strikes. Coordination between the PLAAF and PLAN was accomplished by dispatching PLAAF liaison to the command ship to relay PLAN requirements for aviation support. [7]

The Joint Amphibious Operation

Overall PLA forces totaled some 10,000 personnel, with 5920 personnel engaged in the landing opera-

tion. The joint force included the following: four infantry battalions from the 60th Infantry Division, the PLA had no Marines at that time; 5 artillery battalions plus 4 batteries with 295 artillery and anti-aircraft guns of various types; 184 PLAAF and PLAN aircraft; and 186 ships. The KMT defenders consisted of 1,100 troops, 51 artillery of various types, and 8–12 vessels. [8]

The joint operation consisted of two main phases: seizing command of the air and sea in order to cover pre-war training, blockade and isolate the KMT defenders, and create the conditions for a successful landing operation. Ground force officers first took a coastal defense vessel to survey the island terrain in late August 1954. Intelligence collection in support of the campaign began in earnest in September 1954. Reconnaissance included ground forces establishing observation posts, formation of an amphibious reconnaissance unit, and the capture of prisoners; PLAAF photo reconnaissance of the islands; and the PLAN surveillance of the island and beach reconnaissance to determine water depth, current velocity and direction, and identification of obstacles. Operations to gain air and sea superiority for the Yijiangshan campaign began in November 1954 as a prerequisite for the landing operation. [9]

The amphibious landing consisted of three phases. The first phase was the firepower preparation and sea crossing operations commencing at 0800 on January 18, 1955 and lasting until 1330. Aviation fire strikes by bombers and fighter-bombers were launched against artillery positions and communications facilities on the Yijiangshan and Dachen islands to destroy key targets endangering the amphibious force and achieve information superiority. Firepower strikes then began against KMT defensive positions. Under cover of the PLAN, PLAAF and artillery firepower, the landing forces sailed in three columns towards the Yijiangshan landing beaches. KMT artillery conducted barrage fire against the formations, with PLA coastal artillery and aviation countering with firepower suppression against the artillery positions. [10]

The second phase was the amphibious assault at over twenty landing sites lasting from 1330 to 1500 on

January 18, 1955. Naval forces screened the operation to the northeast and southwest, and aircraft screened to the south as well as providing cover over Yijiangshan. The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 178th Infantry Regiment, 60th Infantry Division landed on the larger northern island along the western and northern coast, with the 3rd Battalion in the second echelon. The 2nd Battalion, 180th Infantry Regiment landed on the southwestern end of the smaller southern island. Bombers and fighter bombers conducted a second firepower preparation, with gunboats providing direct fire support destroying and suppressing KMT frontline fortified positions, and paralyzing command and control. Under covering fire, the three infantry battalions conducted the initial assaults on the two islands and secured beachheads. A landing command post was established on land at 1500. Five KMT warships counterattacked from the Dachen islands, but PLA aviation forced them back to their anchorage. [11]

The third phase consisted of combat to seize the islands lasting until 0200 on January 19, 1955. Propaganda and psychological operations were conducted against the defenders during the offensive. The landing force quickly broke through the enemy forward positions, and executed small group assaults on enemy defensive points throughout the islands. The enemy troops were defeated by 1750, and the landing forces began establishing a defense of the islands. The strategic consequence of the seizure of the Yijiangshan islands was that KMT control of the Dachen islands was rendered untenable, and KMT forces were evacuated in February 1955 under cover of the U.S. Navy and Air Force. [12]

The preparation and planning ensured the successful execution of the coordinated joint operation. Despite the lack of an established joint command structure, joint coordination procedures and limited knowledge between the services of each other's capabilities, the joint commander's careful preparation of the forces, and in particular the attention to intelligence collection and resolving coordination issues between the services, and emphasis on seizing air, sea, and information dominance contributed to the victory. Problems included several instances of poor organization and execution of the operational plan, and unauthor-

ized changes to the plan without consulting with superior headquarters. The PLA continues to resolve joint command and coordination procedures with the establishment of joint theater commands, and PLA publications such as *Science of Joint Tactics* and *Joint Operations Research* discuss these subjects in detail, and the latter book uses the Yijiangshan operation as a lesson learned for joint command and coordination. The Yijiangshan joint operation is an example of the PLA's ingenuity and flexibility successfully solving operational problems.[13]

Recent Areas of Improvement

Currently the PLA is transitioning from coordinated joint to integrated joint operations. While full implementation of an advanced integrated joint operations capability remains aspirational, the PLA has been incrementally improving their joint operations capabilities for more than a decade in the areas of joint command and coordination, fielding a more modern command information system, and conducting exercises with modular integrated joint task forces. While problems remain, the PLA's capability to conduct joint operations is continually improving while working to identify and eliminate deficiencies.

The recent acceleration of military reforms by President Xi has jump started the effort to improve joint operations capabilities by establishing peacetime theater joint commands in place of the Army centric MRs, and emphasizing improvements to joint exercises and professional military education. The creation of the theater joint commands is an important step in removing impediments and moving towards a joint force. However, it will take time for the new headquarters to fully develop joint command and coordination procedures. The emphasis on training joint officers will support these efforts. The PLA is examining more flexible command and coordination measures to allow for greater initiative, realizing that the operational plan might not survive long in a modern, dynamic battlespace. While the PLA continues to prefer to follow the operational plan as long as possible, initiative and flexibility by commanders to respond to unforeseen situations or take advantage of fleeting opportunities are advocated as long as units achieve their assigned objectives. [14]

An integrated C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) system, or command information system in PLA parlance, represents the necessary foundation for both system of systems and integrated joint operations. The PLA is fielding integrated communications systems to better support joint forces at the campaign and tactical levels as part of the regional integrated electronic information system (区域综合电子信息系统 *qūyù zònghé diànzǐ xìnxī xìtǒng*), a key program in C4ISR modernization efforts. A component of the system is the integrated command platform (一体指挥平台 *yītǐ huà zhīhuī pǐngtái*) reportedly promoting integration of forces in part through the ability to share information, as well as promote improved real-time command and battlefield transparency. Importantly the command information system is intended to provide sensor-to-shooter integration with intelligence fusion and display of a common operating picture through an integrated battlefield situation map display. The new system is intended to solve interoperability problems prevalent in previous command and control systems. Problems continue including incompatibility between old and new systems, different technical standards and interface formats, as well as inadequate training of personnel. [15]

Another key component of integrated joint operations is developing modular integrated joint force groupings. These operational system of systems (作战体系 *zuòzhàn tǐxì*) have been exercised for over a decade in the form of joint campaign formations (联合战役军团 *liánhé zhànyì jūntuán*) and joint tactical formations (联合战术兵团 *liánhé zhànshù bīngtuán*). The PLA appeared to begin testing joint tactical formations in exercises as early as 2004. The focus transitioned to include increased joint campaign formation exercises by 2009. The ability to flexibly task organize joint forces at both the campaign and tactical levels will optimize the force mix for specific combat missions, and advanced command information systems will better integrate the joint forces. The integration of joint forces at lower echelons—the campaign and tactical levels—significantly improves the PLA’s joint operations capability over the coordinated joint operations where the services conduct operations according to the operational plan working

towards assigned objectives, but with little integration of the services. [16]

While the PLA acknowledges problems and is working towards solutions, the PLA also identifies improvements in its joint capabilities. A recent authoritative publication by the Academy of Military Sciences, *Science of Joint Tactics*, concludes that the PLA has achieved significant improvements in long-range force projection and maneuver, reconnaissance and surveillance, long-range fire strikes, and information offensive and defensive capabilities. [17] These are important capabilities improving joint operations.

Advancing Joint Operations Capabilities

If the PLA were to conduct a joint operation currently, it would tend to be more coordinated than integrated. The PLA successfully conducted a coordinated joint operation, albeit small in scale, during the Yijiangshan island landing campaign, and the PLA is currently capable of conducting such a joint operation particularly against an adversary in the South China Sea. Careful preparation, planning, intelligence preparation, and attention to coordination between the joint forces are key elements to a successful coordinated joint campaign. A larger scale joint operation in a fast changing battlespace, particularly against an advanced military, could be problematic currently if the PLA were forced to deviate significantly from the operational plan. Under such circumstances command and control, and coordination between forces could be stressed greatly. However, the PLA does believe that a near-term conflict would be small-scale, short duration, with limited forces and objectives. Such a limited conflict would match current PLA joint capabilities, as long as the conflict did not escalate, which would always be a possibility. [18]

Conclusion

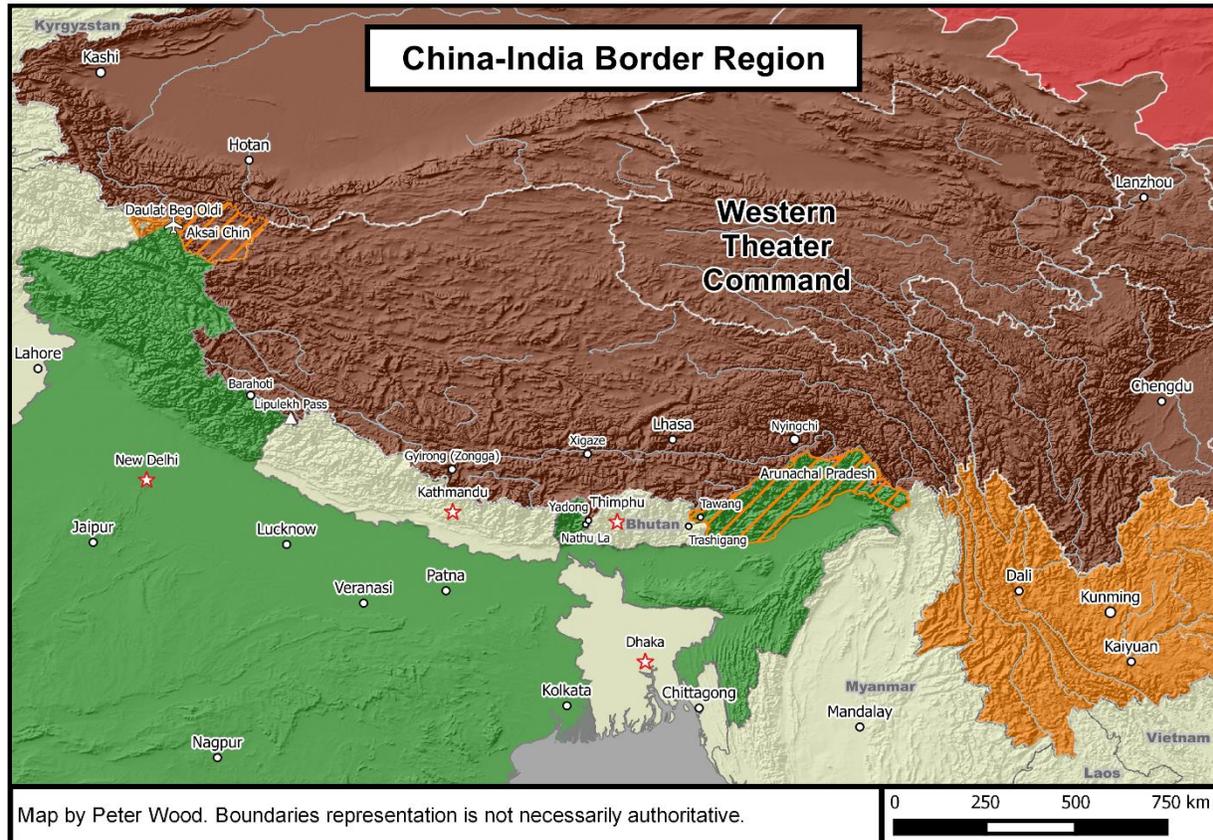
The PLA has advanced in key areas for more than a decade as it builds an integrated joint operations capability. These areas include joint command and coordination, an integrated C4ISR system, and employment of modular joint task forces at the campaign and tactical echelons during exercises. President Xi’s ac-

celeration of military reforms emphasizes the advancement of joint operations capabilities, including joint training and education. While full implementation of an integrated joint capability will require time, the PLA has progressively enhanced its joint capabilities for over a decade, is better prepared to conduct joint operations now, and with successful implementation of the current military reforms in 2020, should continue improving integrated joint capabilities.

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Notes

1. *Joint Operations Research*, (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2013), p. 200; Note that in December 1954 the U.S. and Republic of China signed a Mutual Defense Treaty after preparations for the joint landing operation had begun, coming into force in March 1955. However, the treaty only covered the main island of Taiwan and the Penghu archipelago, excluding Taiwan-held outer islands near the mainland coast including Kinmen, Matsu, and the Dachen island groups. Thus, China did not have to prepare for possible U.S. intervention.
2. China established six Military Regions in 1950, which were increased to 12 during 1955, 13 in 1956, reduced to 11 in 1968, seven in 1985, and finally reorganized into five Joint Theater Commands in 2016.
3. *Joint Operations Research*, pp. 28–29.
4. *Joint Operations Research*, p. 204.
5. *Joint Operations Research*, pp. 205–206; *Armed Forces First Battle Yijiangshan*, (Beijing: PLA Press, 2004), pp. 76–86.
6. *Joint Operations Research*, pp. 204–205.
7. *Joint Operations Research*, p. 205.
8. *Joint Operations Research*, p. 28 and 204.
9. *Armed Forces First Battle Yijiangshan*, pp. 71–76; *Joint Operations Research*, pp. 29 and 200.
10. *Joint Operations Research*, p. 201.
11. *Joint Operations Research*, p. 201; *Armed Forces First Battle Yijiangshan*, pp. 282–283.
12. *Joint Operations Research*, pp. 29–30 and 201.
13. *Joint Operations Research*, pp. 206–207.
14. [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#), August 15, 2016; [China Brief](#), April 9, 2014; *Science of Joint Tactics*, (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2014), pp. 169–174.
15. [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#), April 24, 2010, "Incorporating Joint Military Training Into Track of System of Systems Operations Capability Building;" [Jiefangjun Bao](#), January 23, 2006; [Jiefangjun Bao](#), March 1, 2016; [Jiefangjun Bao](#), March 25, 2016
16. [Jiefangjun Bao Online](#), October 28, 2004, "Joint Training forms Joint Operations Capability;" [Jiefangjun Bao](#), March 15, 2005, "Integrated Training from Theory to Practice;" [Jiefangjun Bao](#), October 13, 2009, "Jinan Theater Armed Forces Joint Training..."
17. *Science of Joint Tactics*, pp. 185–186.
18. *Science of Joint Tactics*, p. 185.



China and India's Border Infrastructure Race

By Sudha Ramachandran

In July, China reportedly crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the de facto border between India and China, at Barahoti in India's northern state of Uttarakhand on at least two separate occasions. In addition to Chinese aircraft carrying out reconnaissance sorties in the area, 20–25 soldiers of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) reportedly crossed into the demilitarized zone at Barahoti ([Cankaoxiaoxi](#), August 2; [Times of India](#), July 31). These incidents again highlighted India's poor overland connectivity near the 3,488-km-long disputed border with China. The border post at Barahoti, for instance, is dependent on

a single road that stops 20 km short of the LAC. Beyond that road, human porters and pack animals must carry supplies to the border post ([India Strategic](#), September 2013). [1] While both countries are engaged in extensive road and rail building projects on their respective sides. Chinese progress, however, has significantly outpaced India's. Indian Roads have been allowed to deteriorate and rail connections are non-existent and there is mounting concern in India that poor overland links to the LAC could prove costly in the event of a military confrontation with China.

In a bid to bridge this gap, India is strengthening force levels and military infrastructure along the LAC. The number of troops at border posts is growing; posts that were once manned by platoons now host companies ([The Telegraph](#), July 18). India is raising a Special Mountain Strike Corps of 80,000 soldiers capable of launching offensive action in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) ([Indian Express](#), February 8). Along the western portion of the LAC

armored regiments of T-72 tanks are augmenting this capability. Four regiments of the BrahMos short-range supersonic missile in Arunachal Pradesh will add to India's conventional military deterrence in the eastern sector ([The Hindu](#), July 19; [Indian Express](#), August 3). India's air power and infrastructure has grown too. Sukhoi-30 MKI combat aircraft are flying from new bases in eastern and northeastern India and at least half-a-dozen squadrons of the indigenous Akash surface-to-air missile guard India's airspace in the eastern Himalayas. [2] Old Advanced Landing Grounds (ALGs) are being refurbished and new ALGs and air stations built closer to the LAC ([Times of India](#), August 22, 2014; [The Pioneer](#), August 20).

India's Defensive Mindset

India's humiliating defeat in the 1962 war with China left a deep impact on its national psyche that is reflected in its defense and nuclear policies. In the aftermath of the war, India adopted a defensive strategic mindset toward China, most visible in its decades-long hesitation to build roads near the LAC. Indian policy makers feared that new roads near the LAC would facilitate the rapid advance of Chinese troops into the Indian heartland in the event of another Sino-Indian war. Consequently, up to the mid-2000s, India consciously let existing roads near its border with China fall into disuse and refrained from constructing new ones. In 2006 India's Cabinet Committee on Security, its topmost policy-making body on national security, finally green-lit construction of 73 strategic roads near the LAC ([The Hindu](#), June 30, 2006). While military considerations drove the decision to upgrade border infrastructure, improving facilities and economic opportunities for communities living in remote border areas also played a role in the policy ([India Strategic](#), September 2013).

However, plans to improve this infrastructure are significantly behind schedule. According to the 19th report of its Parliamentary Select Committee for Defence, of the 73 strategic India-China Border Roads that the government approved for construction in 2006–07 and planned to complete by 2012, just 21 roads have been built so far. Work on two roads is yet to begin ([Indian Express](#), May 6). Plans for new railway lines are even further behind. In 2010, India

identified 28 strategic railway lines in areas bordering China, Pakistan and Nepal, prioritizing 14 of them as strategically important for national security. Construction has not yet begun on any of them ([Indian Express](#), July 6).

Limited budget, bureaucratic red tape, corruption, difficult terrain, limited working seasons in high-altitude areas and difficulties in securing environmental clearances and acquiring land held by tribal communities are often blamed for the slow progress of India's border infrastructure projects. [3] In addition, the "old defensive mindset persists among powerful sections in the defense establishment," an Indian official said. Plans to construct a 1,800-km highway linking Tawang to Vijaynagar—running the entire stretch of the McMahon Line, which India recognizes as the border in the eastern sector—were strongly opposed by the military, which cited "security considerations" for a road so close to the disputed border. The Ministry of Defence finally approved the road after it was realigned ([Mail Today](#), June 23 and [The Tribune](#), August 5). [4]

Chinese Roadbuilding

While India began planning new roads near the LAC only a decade ago, Chinese road building in the Himalayan region began as early as 1950. From the start, Beijing's approach to overland infrastructure has been robust, even aggressive and formed an integral part of its Tibet strategy. Beijing needed roads and railway lines to assert and consolidate control over Tibet. So central was road building to Beijing's Tibet strategy that "road construction was treated as combat." Indeed, in the run up to China's annexation of Tibet, Chairman Mao ordered the PLA to "advance while building roads." Roads linking Xinjiang, Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan with Tibet were built at great human cost and against all odds, and pursued with determination as they facilitated the transport of troops to Tibet to quell unrest. Economic development of Tibet was another priority, and railway lines and oil pipelines soon followed. [5]

In recent decades, China's roads and railway lines in Tibet have expanded toward its borders with India, Nepal and Bhutan. The Golmud-Lhasa railway line, which was inaugurated in 2006 and linked to Xigaze

in 2014, is being extended to Gyirong, a land port near the border with Nepal, and to Yadong, a trading center that is a few kilometers from Nathu La, a vital mountain pass linking Tibet with the Indian border state of Sikkim. There are also plans to extend this railway line to Nyingchi, a trading center and garrison town just north of Arunachal Pradesh, and onward to Dali in Yunnan province. Running parallel and close to the McMahon Line, the Lhasa-Nyingchi-Dali rail would enable the PLA's 14 Group Army headquartered in Kunming, with its divisions at Dali, Kaiyuan and Kunming to be deployed rapidly to along the McMahon Line ([Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses](#), [NDTV](#), August 15, 2014 and [China Daily](#), August 5).

This extension of its Himalayan roads and railway lines up to its borders with South Asia would not only facilitate China's mobilization of troops in the event of military confrontation with India but also, this is enhancing Beijing's influence in these countries. Roads linking China with Nepal, for instance, are providing the latter with an alternative trade option to its current enormous dependence on trade with and through India ([China Brief](#), November 16, 2015). It has prompted Nepal to turn to China to meet a part of its fuel requirements. Such trade would expand further if the plan to extend the Xigaze-Gyirong rail to the Nepali capital, Kathmandu, materializes ([Global Times](#), May 24). China has even proposed extension of Xigaze-Gyirong-Kathmandu rail line up to Nepal's border with the Indian state of Bihar. Beijing can be expected to pursue this project, as it is trade with the large Indian market that would make trans-Himalayan trade economically profitable for China ([Business Standard](#), May 24).

The impact of train-loads of Chinese goods flooding its markets concerns India, especially in light of its own weak logistic network. As a Sikkim government official pointed out in 2008, "when Chinese goods by the train-load arrive at Nathu La India would be able to send back mere truck-loads." [6] Indian analysts admit that China's road and rail links near the LAC "have important significance for regional trade." But given the unresolved border dispute and tensions between the two neighbours, "India should be conscious of the security implications," points out security analyst Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan. [7]

Advantage China

China's improved infrastructure in the TAR and near the LAC has added immensely to its military capacity. China's ability to rapidly deploy forces has increased "tremendously with the infrastructure built up over the last decade." All-weather roads and rail infrastructure in addition to a number of airstrips that have come near the LAC give it an "edge in deploying forces." With the improved infrastructure, China can now deploy up to 32 divisions (previously only 22), and, importantly do so year-round. Additionally, China's creation of logistic and fuel depots near border regions suggest that China is attempting to improve its ability to not just rapidly deploy forces but also to sustain them for a significant period of time. [8] Clearly, China's infrastructure development gives it a huge advantage over India at the LAC.

India's capacity for an effective counter-deployment has been undermined by its torpid approach to improving its overland travel infrastructure near the LAC. Chinese border roads run almost up to the LAC or even cross the LAC into the Indian side; a road in the Siri Jap area in Ladakh runs 5 km into Indian territory, for instance ([Times of India](#), May 26, 2013). Indian border roads, in contrast, stop well ahead of the LAC, sometimes even 50–70 km from the disputed border ([Asian Age](#), July 21). [9]

Daulat Beg Oldie, India's most significant outpost adjoining Aksai Chin, is yet to be linked by road. Tawang, an important bone of contention in the Sino-Indian border dispute, has just a single, narrow, potholed road linking the town to Bum La, the last border post on the Indian side of the McMahon Line. Conditions on the Tawang-Bum La Road are so poor that it takes three hours to cover the 30 km distance. Even trucks and other heavy vehicles cannot ply this road. While the condition of this road hasn't improved since 1962, the Chinese have constructed a four-lane highway running within 4 km of the McMahon Line. It takes the Chinese a mere 45 minutes to reach the Bum La Post from Sonajung town, which lies 37 km from the McMahon Line on the Chinese side ([Arunachal Times](#), June 6, 2012 and [Outlook](#), October 22, 2012).

The absence of roads to the LAC means that supplies for outposts in forward positions have to be airlifted. This is the case with Daulat Beg Oldie, for instance, where supplies must be airlifted, leaving personnel and operations here extremely vulnerable to poor weather conditions and enemy action ([India Strategic](#), September 2013). The absence of roads and rails would be felt especially in a time of crisis. India's mobilization of forces to forward posts would be severely hampered as it will have to depend on aircraft to augment force levels. Importantly, the full potential of augmenting troop levels, raising strike corps and improving air strike and defense capabilities are likely to be tapped only if these are supported by robust road and rail links. In the latter's absence, "the cruel Himalayan terrain reduces even the largest divisions to isolated groups of soldiers sitting on widely separated hilltops" ([Business Standard](#), April 25, 2013). With a strong road and rail network, India could reduce force levels in the forward areas and station them instead at lower altitudes, with better weather conditions. It could rush troops to the borders when needed; trucks and trains would enable it to move large numbers of soldiers at short notice. This makes it imperative for India to focus its attention on improving overland links to the LAC.

The plans for strategic roads and railways could make a positive difference. Construction of the Tawang-Vijaynagar highway and the Guwahati-Tawang Road via Tashigang in Bhutan could reduce India's current vulnerabilities along the McMahon Line. The latter, for instance, would not only reduce dependence on the current Tawang-Bum La route but also allow for bypassing the Se La pass that is prone to avalanches and landslides. It would also cut travel time between Guwahati and Tawang by six hours ([Indian Express](#), October 16, 2014 and [Arunachal Times](#), April 30). Besides, the Indian government plans to construct three strategic railway lines—the Missamari-Tawang railway line, Murkongselek-Pasighat-Tezu-Parasuramkund-Rupai line and the North Lakhimpur-Along-Silapathar line—in the Northeast. Of these, the Missamari-Tawang railway line would strengthen logistic support to the strategic Bum La post. Missamari is home to an infantry division, air force station, oil depots etc. Troops stationed at the base here could be transported in large numbers

via train to Tawang within hours ([Economic Times](#), May 10, 2015).

Conclusion

The Himalayan region places tough logistic burdens on militaries operating there, making improvement of roads and rails a priority for China and India. While framing their infrastructure projects in economic terms, China's progress has real strategic implications. Though the Indian government has often promised to prioritize its own building programs, these have yet to pan out.

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Notes

1. The LAC is divided into three sectors: the "western sector" between Ladakh and the Aksai Chin, the "central sector" between Uttarakhand and Tibet, and the "eastern sector" that divides Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh from Tibet. India lays claim to 38,000 sq km of territory in Aksai Chin that is under Chinese control and China claims 90,000 sq km of land that roughly approximates Arunachal Pradesh. The central sector in which Barahoti falls is the least contentious sector.
2. A Squadron consists of two batteries, each composed of four launchers.
3. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan and Rahul Prakash, "Sino-Indian Border Infrastructure: An Update," ORF Occasional Paper no. 42, New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, May 2013, pp. 20–21.
4. Author's Interview, Indian Ministry of Home Affairs official, New Delhi, August 24, 2016.
5. John W Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 80–88.

6. Author's Interview, Government of Sikkim official, Gangtok, December 26, 2008.
7. Author's Interview, Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, Senior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation in New Delhi, August 23, 2016.
8. Ibid.
9. Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan and Rahul Prakash, "Sino-Indian Border Infrastructure: An Update," ORF Occasional Paper no. 42, New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, May 2013, pp. 6–10.

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