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In a Fortnight: Chinese Military Aviation in the East China Sea

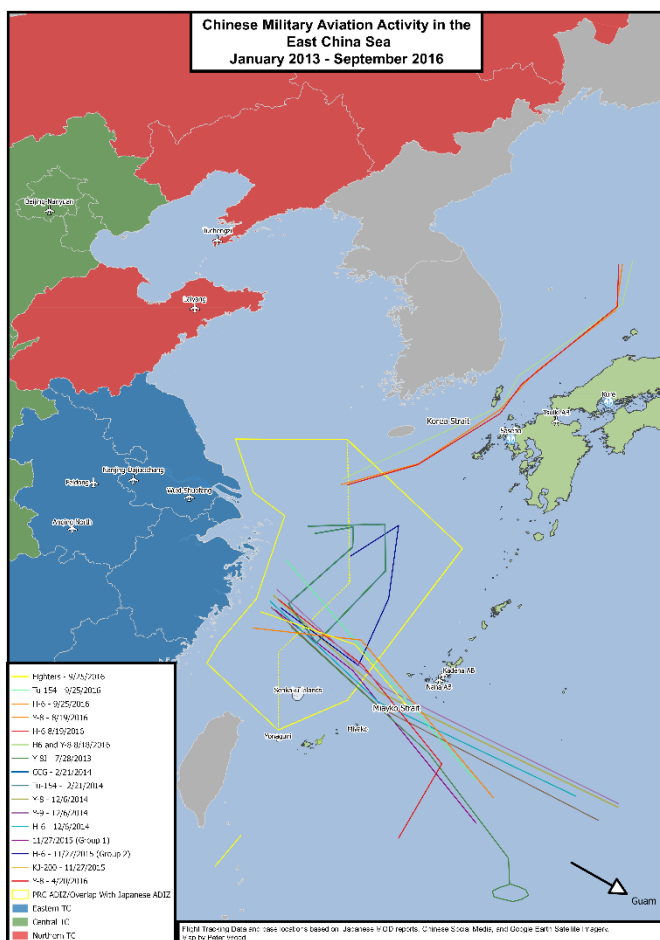
On September 25, the Chinese Air Force performed a series of long-range patrols through the Miyako Strait and into the Western Pacific involving more than forty aircraft ([Xinhua](#), September 25). PLA Air Force spokesperson and Senior Colonel Shen Jinke (申进科) emphasized the routine nature of the patrols and their role in enforcing China's announced Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) ([China Brief](#), September 3, 2014). These exercises, like those made by other countries, are meant to signal Chinese will to its neighbors, and form an important part of its training. Understanding the context and role of such exercises is important as the Chinese military gains confidence, increases the realism and tempo of its training and, uses such gestures to back up a foreign

policy that challenges the status quo in East Asia. Though information about these flights is precise, an examination of the aircraft involved, their bases, and what is represented by the schedule and flight paths they take, they can hint at important facets of doctrine and future combat missions and are significant steps toward building a clearer picture of what China wants to do with its Air Force and Naval Aviation.

For the United States and Russia, such flights are routine, as are their interception by fighter aircraft and other surveillance aircraft. But for China, long-distance patrols act as milestones and points of national pride. Other facets, such as an emphasis on nighttime operations (something that is routine for the United States) represent improvements over previous years, when Chinese aircraft only trained during the day. Other frequently mentioned aspects, such as "operating in complex electromagnetic environments" reflect core concepts of Chinese warfighting theory, which envisions a systematic degradation of the ability to communicate via radio, or navigate via GPS-type (Beidou) systems.

Significantly, the origin and frequency of the flights can tell observers a lot about Chinese training and maintenance. China is incrementally improving its ability to effectively monitor and control its air space and self-defined maritime borders. That task imposes significant burdens on China, requiring advanced, overlapping early warning and cueing radars, as well as sufficient fighter and surveillance aircraft. Each airframe is only good for so many flight hours. Intercepting other nations' aircraft, sending using advanced airborne sensors to search for submarines, or vacuuming up electronic signatures all impose costs that have to be justified in terms of pilot and sensor operator experience gained and military deterrence enhanced.

Drawn from a range of Chinese media sources and reports by the Japanese Ministry of Defense, the following map and database of Chinese military aviation exercises in the East China Sea is an attempt to provide additional context to these exercises.



Chinese Air Interception Database – 10/20/2016		
Full database with citations available here .		
Date	Type	Aircraft Tail Number – Affiliation
2013		
January 5, 2013	Y-12	Coast Guard
January 11, 2013	Y-12	Coast Guard
January 15, 2013	Y-12	Coast Guard
February 28, 2013	Y-12	Coast Guard
July 24, 2013	Y-8J	9321 PLA Naval Aviation 2nd Division, 4th Air Regiment, Laiyang, Shandong, North Sea Fleet
August 26, 2013	Y-12	Coast Guard - B-3826
September 8, 2013	H-6H (2)	81215 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, East Sea Fleet
October 1, 2013	Y-12	Coast Guard
October 25, 2013	Y-8J (2), H-6G (2)	H-6G: 81215 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
October 26, 2013	Y-8J (2), H-6G (2)	81218 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet

October 27, 2013	Y-8J Early Warning Aircraft (2), H-6G (2)	Y-8J: 9301, 9311: PLA Naval Aviation 2nd Division, 4th Air Regiment, Laiyang, Shandong, North Sea Fleet H-6G: 81217 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
November 16, 2013	Tu-154	
November 17, 2013	Tu-154	B-4015 34th Division, 102nd Air Regiment, Beijing-Nanyuan, PLAAF HQ

China Announces Establishment of East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone		
November 23, 2013	Tu-154, Y-8	B-4015: 34th Division, 102nd Air Regiment, Beijing-Nanyuan, PLAAF HQ Y-8: 30011
2014		
February 21, 2014	Tu-154, Y-12	B-4015: 34th Division, 102nd Air Regiment, Beijing-Nanyuan, PLAAF HQ, B-3826 China Coast Guard
March 9, 2014	Y-8 Electronic warfare aircraft, H-6H (2)	Y-8: 9351 PLA Naval Aviation 2nd Division, 4th Air Regiment, Laiyang, Shandong, North Sea Fleet
March 14, 2014	Tu-154	B-4015: 34th Division, 102nd Air Regiment, Beijing-Nanyuan, PLAAF HQ, Possible ASW role
March 23, 2014	Y-12	China Coast Guard

May 24, 2014	Su-27	Intercepted Japanese planes near Senkakus. The article claims the jet was part of 7th Air Division, but the identification number suggests it is part of the 33rd air division based in Chongqing which is equipped with the fighters. *note the Russian-made R-77 AAMs
June 12, 2014	Tu-154	
October 3, 2014	Y-9	9221: PLA Naval Aviation 4th Air Regiment, Laiyang, Shandong, North Sea Fleet
December 6, 2014	Y-9, Y-8J (2), H-6G (2)	81213 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
December 7, 2014	Y-9, Y-8J (2), H-6G (2)	81214 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
December 10, 2014	Y-8J (2), Y-9, H-6 (2)	81213 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
December 11, 2014	Y-8J (2), Y-9, H-6G (2)	H-6G: 81214 PLA Naval Aviation 1st Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet

2015		
February 14, 2015	Y-9	Y-9: 9241 PLA Naval Aviation 1st Independent Regiment, Laiyang, Shandong

February 15, 2015	Y-9	
May 21, 2015	H-6K (2)	H-6Ks: 20110 PLAAF, 10th Bomber Division, Anqing North, Anhui
First Flight Through the Miyako strait		
July 29, 2015	Y-9, Y-8J, H-6 (2)	H-6G: 81218 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
July 30, 2015	Y-9, KJ-200, H-6G	H-6: 81218 PLA Naval Aviation 6th Naval Aviation Division, Benniu/Danyang, Jiangsu, East Sea Fleet
November 27, 2015	H-6K (4), H-6K (4), Tu-154, Y-8, KJ-200	H-6Ks: 20119, 20211, PLAAF, 10th Bomber Division, Anqing North, Anhui B-4029: 34th Division, 102nd Air Regiment, Beijing-Nanyuan, PLAAF HQ, KJ-200: 33173 26th Special Mission Division 76th Early Warning regiment, Wuxi-Shuofang. Note that the presence of a KJ-200 on this particular mission likely indicates the presence of a unit commander acting as in-air coordinator. Under normal circumstances the commander remains in the base air traffic control tower.
December 7, 2015	Y-8 (2), H-6 (2)	

December 10, 2015	Y-8 (2), Y-9 (1), H-6 (2)	
December 11, 2015	Y-8 (2), Y-9 (1), H-6 (2)	

2016		
January 31, 2016	Y-9, Y-8 Early Warning Aircraft	Korea Strait Also entered KADIZ
April 20, 2016	Y-8J	Miyako Strait
August 18, 2016	Y-8 Early Warning (9321), H-6G (81311)	
August 19, 2016	Y-8 Early Warning (9321), 2 H-6G (81212, 81214)	Second day in a row Y-8 #9321 is photographed. Unclear whether the H-6Gs photographed on the second day was also part of the patrol on the 18th.
September 25, 2016	H-6 (4) (20015), Tu-154 (B-4015), Y-8 Intel (unclear, likely model), (2) Fighter Aircraft	

The scope and frequency of patrols is clearly increasing but overall numbers of strategic bombers and specialized aircraft remain limited. The diversity of aircraft that participate is noteworthy, with airborne early warning, electronic warfare, maritime surveillance as well as bombers and fighters all participating and practicing their respective roles. However, China's aviation modernization program, while significant, still faces a number of structural hurdles related to personnel and even basic equipment.

One such example is how China deals with maritime aircraft maintenance. Cleaning aircraft that operate at sea incurs additional heavy maintenance costs. Salt water is corrosive and can damage the skin of the aircraft and interfere with sensitive equipment. This requires bases with units that regularly fly over water to have what are essentially large water sprayers like a car wash for aircraft (“wash racks”). U.S. standard operating procedures for naval aircraft (NAVAIR 01-1A-509-2) requires comprehensive cleaning with fresh water and solvents every seven days for aircraft operating at sea. However, a review of satellite imagery of Chinese air bases identified above as well as other PLA Naval Aviation bases revealed no similar facilities. Circumstantial evidence, such as large pools of water in empty spaces on relevant airfields shortly after patrols are known to take place (and no rain is known to have fallen) appear to indicate that the Chinese military relies on traditionally spraying down of its aircraft after long missions by hand.

Despite the sometimes alarmist presentation of the military patrols through the East China Sea by Western media, and the chest-beating tone in Chinese media, such actions really only represent an aspirational capability. China’s military technology has made great strides, but training, and equipment still lag far behind many of its neighbors, not to mention the United States. Tracking investment in new, long-range fighters (such as the Su-35), strategic bombers and specialized aircraft such as early warning and tankers will provide one indication that China is building an air force capable of credible long-range operations. But these platforms can only be brought online with any degree of effectiveness if pilot and maintenance training receive major investment. Specialized support infrastructure, such as the “wash racks” described above, would be an easily detectable indication that China was going to increase its tempo of oversea military flights.

Going forward, continued attention to these patrols in the East and South China Seas, with the context of training, equipment and maintenance capabilities can provide China’s neighbors and the United States a useful metric for measuring its progress as its mili-

tary continues its modernization program and attempts to enforce its views of maritime and aerospace sovereignty in East Asia.

Note on methodology:

1. In most cases, information about these flights, as well as the tracks used in the map are drawn from Japanese MOD reports. Other countries in East Asia, do not report interceptions, due to political sensitivities, or, in the Philippines case, inadequate early warning radar coverage and aircraft. For events presented by the Chinese press, they are less generous with data and do not provide maps of routes taken by aircraft, though in some cases context clues or deliberate background images provides some additional context as to where they have gone. To the degree that it is possible to identify aircraft by serial numbers (bort numbers) I have included them in the table. Some reports do not include the numbers or use unclear photos. Where possible multiple methods of identification have been used, such as verifying that specified bases are home to the listed aircraft with Google Earth imagery. In terms of interpretation, training cycles and even weather should be taken into consideration for Chinese air operations. The Sea of Japan (and nearby areas), for example, sees heavy rainfall and high winds between April and September, particularly June, July and August, periods that roughly correlate with lower incidents of interceptions. Readers are invited to let me know if I have missed anything.

Additional References:

Andreas Rupprecht and Tom Cooper, *Modern Chinese Warplanes: Combat Aircraft and Units of the Chinese Air Force and Naval Aviation*, Houston: Harpia, 2012.

The Stable Door and Chollima: Chinese Computers and North Korean IT

By Matt Brazil

In early 2016, Chinese border authorities reportedly cracked down on exports to North Korea due to irritation over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile tests. Despite these and previous sanctions, computers and electronics appear to be freely available in Pyongyang. Such electronics play a vital role in enhancing the strength of the North Korean state, in particular its own cyber capabilities and advanced weapons programs. The flow of chips and other electronic components, an obvious target for Chinese assertion of economic influence over North Korea appears to have been largely ignored. It seems, in short, that China has let the proverbial horse bolt out the stable door: over the past decade, increasingly fast computing became available to the Pyongyang regime. North Korea may already have developed an IT sector sophisticated enough to help design, make and test nuclear weapons and missiles—and even the supposed PRC export crackdown appears to have been temporary. [1]

How did Pyongyang acquire advanced computing over the past decade? Several possible pathways for these sales are apparent, notably the hundreds of independent Chinese distributors of Western CPUs and computers. A thorough assessment of the impact of such imports would require close examination of the records of these U.S. and other companies and their Chinese distributors, but could be accomplished with carefully planned U.S.-China cooperation.

Defining North Korean Computing and IT

A CIA analyst observed ten years ago that Pyongyang employed a small number of analysts to seek open source intelligence on the Web. Evidence suggests that the North Korean IT sector has expanded rapidly since then. [2] Well-known Dutch consultant

Paul Tjia, who promotes trade with Pyongyang, estimates the isolated country has perhaps 10,000 IT professionals at work with more graduating each year from several institutions. In 2010–12, Tjia observed that North Korean IT professionals appeared usefully employed *by foreign partners* in unexpected ways, some working for joint ventures like Nosotek (NK-German) and Hana Electronics ([Youtube](#), August 25, 2009; [NKnews](#), September 9, 2015). [3] Tjia also noted North Korean companies with outsourcing contract partners in Europe, Japan, and South Korea, in the fields of graphic design, cartoon and animation work ([Pyongyang SEK](#), April 6). North Korean firms even contract to write software for IT security and access control systems ([ACM](#), August 2012; [IEEE.org](#), September 2012). Mr. Tjia is still at work: in September of this year, he led a European trade mission to Pyongyang seeking budget IT work, among other deals ([gpic.nl](#))

Though overall North Korean imports from China dropped in January of this year, they surged higher in August ([KEI](#), October 4). However complicated the big picture, it is clear that computers have entered North Korea in increasing quantities in the past decade, and still are doing so (table 1). Specifically, advanced laptops with U.S.-made CPUs were observed at the Pyongyang Spring Trade Fair in May—albeit for lower prices and probably in lower quantities compared to neighboring China (photos below). North Korean—“Blue Sky” brand desktops ([푸른하늘 Purun Hanul](#), a China-NK joint venture) with American made I3 and I5 CPUs were also observed at the show ([DPRK360.org](#), May 2016). In ordinary public institutions, older Dell desktops with 486 to Pentium architecture have also been observed ([IMD](#), April 5).



Above: Purun Hanul laptops at Pyongyang Spring International Trade Fair - May 2016



Above: ASUS booth at the Pyongyang Spring Trade Fair, May 2016. Sources: DPRK 360 on Youtube and DPRK 360 FaceBook page, May 2016



English class, Pyongyang Library, March 2016. The teacher controlled presentations with a desktop, and about 20 older Dell desktops were visible in an adjacent room. Photo courtesy Professor Arturo Bris, IMD Switzerland.

North Korea's very active missile and nuclear weapons development programs and its developed cyber infrastructure all point to increasing reliance on advanced computing capabilities. [4] Any serious effort to interrupt Pyongyang's efforts in these areas should include an examination of how computers reach the regime, and a reevaluation to improve relevant trade controls.

Lips and Teeth: Dandong-Sinuiju-Pyongyang

Chinese organizations are reported to have 167 supercomputers of the world's top 500, compared to 165 in the US. Almost all of China's Tianhe series machines are powered by U.S.-made CPUs, though

the latest and fastest reportedly, the *Shenwei*, (神威, aka: Sunway TaihuLight) supposedly only uses domestically-produced parts. The processors at the heart these supercomputers are multicore CPUs arranged in parallel—yielding the kind of number crunching power needed to forecast the weather, create and attack communications ciphers, simulate nuclear bomb blasts, and design missiles, among other things ([PCWorld](#), [TheNextPlatform](#), and [phys.org](#), June 20).

UN Security Council Resolution 2270, to which China agreed, prohibits the transfer to North Korea of computers and IT equipment that could contribute to nuclear weapons development. [5] Of concern to American companies and other firms dealing in U.S.-made components is preexisting American law, the Export Administration Act, controlling almost all sales to North Korea other than medicines and food. [5] Despite UN and U.S. controls, the goods still go there. Many roads lead to Pyongyang, as underlined by the activities of North Korean operatives who comb the world for luxury goods in the service of Kim Jong Un's "gift politics" ([Youtube](#), May 2014). But the easiest and shortest path for computers entering North Korea is likely through the Chinese border metropolis of Dandong.

Just 900 meters across the Yalu River from the North Korean town of Sinuiju, Dandong must seem like a wonderland of lights and a cornucopia of goods. Besides Dandong's restaurants, bars, well-stocked grocery outlets, and department stores, the city boasts a large number of North Korean "trade representatives," large and small, and 15–20,000 North Korean workers in Chinese-managed factories. Over 80 percent of North Korea's imports come from China, and two thirds or more of North Korea's entire foreign trade passes through Dandong ([OEC, 2013; nknews.org](#), September 28). At different times in 2016, a more restrictive regulatory atmosphere in the Chinese city supposedly made open discussions on commerce, especially computer sales, difficult ([finance.sina.com](#), April 1). However, besides overall trade, Chinese statistics show that PRC computer exports to North Korea have again resumed, and are higher than previous times (table 1), just as concerns have arisen that PC sales in China may soon decline ([Wall Street Journal](#), January 15).

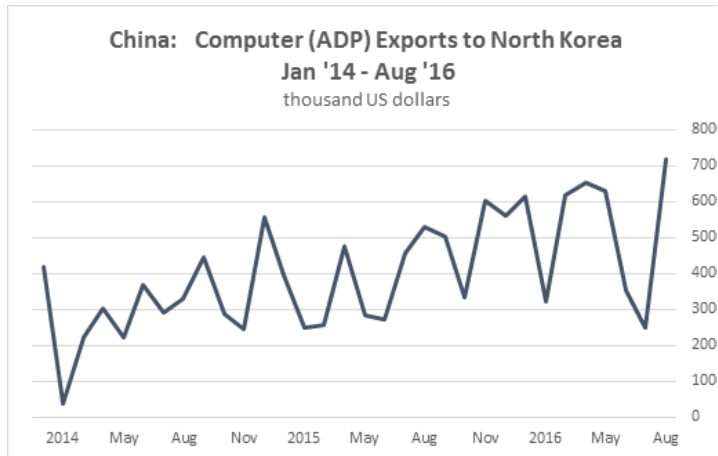


Table 1. Source: PRC statistics via William Brown, “China’s North Korea Trade Surges in August,” in “The Peninsula, 4 October 2016

Although the North Korean market is small in comparison to China, high-end laptops appear to be bound for Pyongyang with little if any restriction. Multiple methods to ship cargo from China to North Korea are available, prominent among them the Chinese State Postal Bureau, aka: China Post, according to an experienced logistics executive (Author Interview, October). But what about more powerful servers, and even parallel processor supercomputers, that could assist in North Korean weapons development?

Recent information indicates that North Korea’s “private intranet,” the Kwangmyong (광명 光明) network, has just 28 websites, the servers for which could be in North Korea or China ([UK Telegraph](#), September 21). Its existence therefore provides no hint about high-end computing in North Korea, because websites like those visible on Kwangmyong could be hosted on a laptop and could easily be based in China itself. However, North Korean missile and nuclear development efforts would likely be a magnet for the multi-CPU servers and more powerful parallel supercomputers readily available in China.

The secretive nature of nuclear and missile development work makes analysis difficult with currently available data. However, given the critical nature of proliferation concerns, giving up does not seem like an acceptable option.

Conclusion

Both the U.S. and Chinese governments profess interest in slowing or stopping North Korea’s nuclear program ([Folkw.cn](#), September 24). The two governments have the authority to examine relevant sales records of U.S. and other companies that make the CPUs and computers observed in North Korea, their Chinese distributors, and Chinese joint venture partners with Pyongyang. A joint examination by China and the U.S. would begin to shed light on the current situation: how many advanced laptops and desktops are in North Korea? How many machines are dedicated to civilian end-use? Is there information that points to military end-use? Are there indications of supercomputer use in North Korea? Would the harvest of such data allow analysts to refine projections about the future of North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs?

At a time when the PRC and the U.S. seek areas of cooperation, this problem offers an opportunity to accomplish something substantial that would serve the interests of both nations.

Matthew Brazil is a non-resident Fellow at The Jamestown Foundation. He has worked in Asia as a soldier, US diplomat and a corporate security manager. With Peter Mattis, he is the co-author of an upcoming work on Chinese intelligence operations.

Notes

1. Kim Il Sung launched the *Chollima* (천리마 千里马) Movement in December 1956 to spur self-directed worker enthusiasm. The winged horse that can travel 1000 *li* in a single day remains a symbol of North Korean determination to catch up to the rest of the world in industry and technology. Hy-Sang Lee, *North Korea: A Strange Socialist Fortress* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000), pp. 27-28.
2. Stephen Mercado, “[The Hermit Surfers of Pyongyang](#)”, June 27, 2008
3. GPI Consulting <<http://www.gpic.nl/en/>>
4. Jenny Jun, Scott LaFoy, and Ethan Sohn, “North Korea’s Cyber Operations” CSIS, December 30, 2015, pp. 5–7.<<https://www.csis.org/analysis/north-korea%E2%80%99s-cyber-operations>>

5. Measure 17 in [UN Security Council Resolution 2270](#), dated March 2, 2016, prohibits “teaching or training in advanced physics, advanced computer simulation and related computer sciences” if it could assist in North Korea’s nuclear program.
6. [Part 746.4](#) of the US Export Administration Regulations and the country specific guidance on [exports to North Korea](#) require an U.S. Individual Validated License for exports or re-exports to North Korea except for food and medicines. This would include computers.

Taiwan-Japan Ties Deepen Amid Chinese Assertiveness

By Lauren Dickey

If there is one issue leaders in Taipei and Tokyo can find common ground on, it is China’s destabilizing and assertive behavior. Beyond the impact of Chinese actions within the region, both Taiwan and Japan also share an economic dependency upon the mainland Chinese market. United by a common perception of the Chinese threat and geostrategic vulnerability, Taiwan has thus sought relations with Japan that are in many ways unofficial in name only. [1] Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen’s administration recently passed its first one hundred days in office. The months and years ahead offer ample opportunity for Taiwan to continue to deepen ties with Tokyo, addressing existing sources of tension while developing more robust defense, economic, and law enforcement cooperation. A closer Taiwan-Japan partnership would further contribute to the U.S.-led regional alliance structure, a strategic objective that is in the national interest of both Taipei and Tokyo.

Intraparty Networks Linking Taipei and Tokyo

Unique to the Taiwan-Japan unofficial relationship is a long tradition of intraparty support between Japanese Diet members and their counterparts located predominantly in Taiwan’s Legislative Yuan and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Pro-Taiwan parliamentarians have turned to various working groups that, while ideologically different, all endeavor to support Taiwan at the international level.

Arguably the most influential non-partisan group is the Liberal Democratic Party’s (LDP) Youth Division, where current senior LDP members—including Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, former Minister of Finance Shoichi Nakagawa, and former Minister of Economy, Trade, Industry Takeo Hiranuma—once served. This spring, Japan’s main opposition party, the Democratic Party, voted to change its name from *Minzhudang* to *Minjindang* (民主党 to 民进党; democratic progressive party), a symbolic transformation that did not disappoint Taiwan’s ruling DPP and offered additional justification for future intraparty cooperation ([Phoenix News](#), March 13). Likely to further bolster future cooperation is the September election of Taiwanese-Japanese journalist and politician, Renho Murata, as the Democratic Party’s leader. Deemed the “Daughter of Taiwan” by Taiwanese media, Renho is known for her links to Taiwan’s Democratic Progressive Party, outspoken critiques of Japan’s handling of the “one China” dilemma, and desire to “play a role on behalf of Taiwan” ([Taipei Times](#), August 16, 2004; [TVBS](#), February 24, 2010; [BBC Chinese](#), September 15).

The extent of the Taiwan-Japan relationship, however, depends just as much upon the stance of Taiwanese politicians as their counterparts in Tokyo. In the 1980s and 90s, former President Lee Teng-hui set a strong precedent for close ties, praising what Japan had done for Taiwan during the colonial period and welcoming Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF) officials and diplomats on quasi-official visits. Ties during the Chen Shui-bian period warmed to the point that Chen called upon Tokyo to implement a Japanese Taiwan Relations Act ([Epoch Times](#), November 1, 2006). During the Ma Ying-jeou presidency the tide began to change and cross-Strait ties largely took precedence over Taiwan-Japan. Ma was seen by many as anti-Japan, stating in a 2008 meeting with Japan’s then-representative to Taiwan, Masaki Saito, that improvements to Taipei’s relations with Beijing would enable Taiwan and Japan to boost their own “friendly” ties ([ROC Office of the President](#), August 1, 2008).

Even as Ma focused on rapprochement with mainland China, his legacy of gradual improvements to the Taiwan-Japan relationship should not be overlooked. During Ma’s tenure, Taiwan-Japan tourism

gained added momentum. Tourists could travel visa-free, drivers licenses were mutually recognized, working holiday opportunities for young people were established, and Japanese tourists to Taiwan exceeded 1.6 million in 2015 ([Japan Interchange Association](#), June 22 and 28, 2010; [ROC Tourism Bureau](#), 2015). Ma's peace initiative, an effort intended to shelve East China Sea territorial disputes in favor of dialogue and resource sharing, also helped ease pre-existing geopolitical tensions ([ROC Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), September 7, 2012).

While the Tsai administration should continue to build upon past efforts to deepen the Taiwan-Japan relationship, her administration's comparative advantage lies in its intraparty connections and non-official channels maintained by the DPP over the last several decades. Just as a faction of anti-Japan, pro-China exists within the pan-blue KMT-led constituency, so too does a pro-Japan, anti-China cohort reside within the pan-green DPP-led network. Tsai reinforced the role of this network in her pre-election trip to Japan, where she met with the Democratic Party of Japan's secretary general, visited the Japanese cabinet offices, and held a closed-door conversation with Prime Minister Abe ([CRNTT](#), October 8, 2015; [Storm Magazine](#), October 9, 2015; author interview, July 2016). Her resolve to promote strong interpersonal relationships as a mechanism for further developing the overall Taiwan-Japan relationship is clear—a priority reciprocated by a Japanese envoy shortly after her election ([Taipei Times](#), January 18).

Stumbling Blocks Between Taiwan and Japan

The Tsai administration's push to broaden Taiwan-Japan cooperation will not, however, be obstacle-free. Even if Tokyo rationalizes exchanges with Taipei as both "private and regional"—as in the 1998 Japan-China joint declaration—it is nonetheless likely to face staunch opposition from Beijing ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), November 26, 1998). Moreover, some have argued that Tokyo's orientation toward Taiwan is inseparable from the status of Sino-Japan and Japan-U.S. relations, which may constrain attempts to deepen relations. [2]

These macro-level challenges are further complicated by ongoing sore spots in the Taiwan-Japan relationship. While both share concerns over Chinese incursions into territorial waters, Taipei and Tokyo remain separated over the disputed Diaoyutai/Senkaku in the East China Sea with both staking claims as sovereign territory ([Phoenix News](#), October 10, 2015; [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), April 13). Further at sea is Okinotori reef, what Japan has asserted to be an island and thereby entitled to an exclusive economic zone for its fishers ([Central News Agency](#), April 26). After a Taiwanese fishing vessel and its crew was arrested for encroachment of Japanese waters at Okinotori, Tsai pragmatically decided to pursue negotiations rather than legal recourse to resolve fishery disputes—a stark departure from Ma's dispatch of military vessels to safeguard Taiwanese fishermen. Stalled since late July, press reports suggest the maritime dialogue has yet to materialize because Taipei has requested more time to prepare its agenda ([United Daily News](#), April 28; [BBC Chinese](#), May 1; [Focus Taiwan News](#), July 26; [China Post](#), August 10).

At the social level, the Tsai administration will encounter one of the few negative historical memories older generations of Taiwanese still retain of the Japanese. During World War II, over 2,000 Taiwanese comfort women provided services under duress at Japanese military brothels; of the 58 women that survived the war years, only three are still alive in Taiwan today ([Focus Taiwan News Channel](#), December 29, 2015). While Tokyo recently agreed to pay reparations to South Korean comfort women, Taipei's pursuit of a similar solution has heretofore been unsuccessful ([United Daily News](#), December 30, 2015). Nevertheless, Taiwanese sentiment toward the Japanese remains largely favorable—with a record 56 percent of Taiwanese claiming Japan as their favorite country—a boon to the Tsai administration as it works to sustain momentum for its redefinition of ties with Japan ([Japan Times](#), July 20).

Building a More Robust—But Still Unofficial—Relationship

Despite the aforementioned impediments, there is reason to remain optimistic for expansion of Taiwan-

Japan linkages. Turning first to defense cooperation, Japan has been committed to defend the waters around Japan since the cross-Strait missile crisis of 1995–96, codifying its security concern in a joint statement with the United States in 2005 ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan](#), February 19, 2005). The “gray zone” situations in northeast Asia highlighted in Japan’s 2013 National Defense Program Guidelines incentivize greater military-to-military links, as does the reality that a Chinese-reclaimed Taiwan will put Beijing’s forces significantly closer to Japanese territory. [3]

It is thus in Tokyo’s own strategic interests to ensure Taipei can acquire greater ability to deter against reunification through military might. Japan could support Taiwan, for instance, by lending current or retired shipbuilding experts and engineers from Mitsubishi and Kawasaki to Taiwan as it launches its indigenous submarine program. Technology from the *Soryu*-class of diesel-electric submarines is less likely to be shared with or sold to Taiwan—given the risk of Chinese espionage—but that does not restrict Japan from offering knowledge and guidance to Taipei. Additionally, while some experts have suggested Japan could support Taiwanese development of unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) for littoral patrols, it is presently unrealistic to expect such cooperation to materialize since Japan’s UUV fleet is still a work-in-progress.

Given the rapid speed at which the Chinese People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is developing its submarine fleet, of greater assistance to Taiwan than additional anti-surface warfare capabilities would be increased anti-submarine capabilities, such as the multi-mission Kawasaki P-1. A more robust ability to detect PLAN submarines would benefit both sides’ interest in tracking movement of the East Sea fleet; Taiwanese defense officials would be better able to notify their counterparts in Tokyo, as in 2004 when Tokyo was notified of PLAN nuclear submarines entering Japan’s territorial waters ([People.com.cn](#), June 21, 2007).

Potential defense cooperation between Taiwan and Japan extends well beyond the realm of new platforms and capabilities; a forthcoming memorandum of understanding on humanitarian assistance between

private organizations from both sides is case in point ([China Post](#), September 27). The Japanese Self-Defense Forces regularly conduct humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HA/DR) training—oftentimes in partnership with U.S. forces—and could readily include the Taiwanese armed forces. Taiwan is suitably qualified to participate, given its frequent military deployments in response to earthquakes, typhoons, and other natural disasters in the region. [4] The two militaries previously cooperated in Taiwan’s annual *Han Kuang* exercises (漢光演習)—partaking in cyber simulations in 2005 and 2006, notably during then-DPP President Chen Shui-bian’s second term. As any savvy China watcher would expect, the Japanese presence at *Han Kuang* both years was taken by Beijing as an intentional strengthening of Taiwan’s interoperability with Japanese and U.S. forces ([People.com.cn](#), June 21, 2007; [International Pioneer Guide](#), February 25, 2005). A decade later, with Beijing’s perception and misperception of defense cooperation guaranteed to persist, the Tsai administration would nonetheless benefit greatly from resurrecting joint training with Japanese forces in the *Han Kuang* exercises.

Additionally, Japan is in the midst of a two-year process to stand up its own Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB), a force modeled after the U.S. Marine Corps and reliant upon Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force soldiers to build a new unit of 3,000 rapidly deployable troops ([USNI News](#), January 25). In the long-term as the operational capabilities of Japanese marines deepen and it can operate farther afield, perhaps Tokyo can aid Taiwan in reversing the self-destruction to its own thinning Marine Corps. The reinterpretation of Japan’s constitution could further enable the ARDB to assist in the defense of a partner nation like Taiwan ([Japan Times](#), September 26). In the near-term, however, as Tokyo defines the missions set of its marines and trains the new unit accordingly, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces can instead support joint training with the Taiwanese in the maritime and air domains. This could entail assisting the Taiwanese military in a transition to light artillery and anti-ship cruise missile missions, in exploring the feasibility for both a 30,000-ton landing helicopter dock and alternatives to expensive precision-guided weapons and targeting systems. Finally, in the cyber domain, Taiwan’s Computer

Emergency Response Team Coordination Center (國家電腦事件處理中心) and the Japanese National Information Security Center would benefit from an institutionalized relationship and information sharing, enabling identification of at-risk networks and developing response mechanisms to Chinese cyber incursions. [5] All defense cooperation must be adroitly handled, however, as Tokyo cannot officially send a defense attaché to its representative office in Taipei, nor will it be likely to collaborate on big-ticket defense items despite ending its ban on weapons sales abroad.

Taiwan and Japan could also tap into joint law enforcement mechanisms. In the maritime domain, the growth of China's maritime militia—and swarm tactics in Japanese waters—requires investment to keep pace with the demands of maritime patrols ([Japan Times](#), August 7). The Chinese tactic of shifting the onus of coercion to Tokyo will succeed insofar as the Japanese coast guard and naval forces are deterred from mounting a response adequate to defend their territorial waters; and the same can be said for Taiwanese-claimed waters. On land, increased joint cooperation between criminal investigation agencies has recently gained new momentum after Taiwanese authorities busted a drug ring responsible for smuggling amphetamines to Japan and Taiwan via fishing boats, human bodies, and luggage. Links between the crime ring and Japanese crime gangs compelled the Taiwanese authorities to seek the cooperation of their Japanese counterparts—a positive step that could be further developed to encompass human trafficking and the sex trade in both countries ([United Daily News](#), September 5).

As a final area for deepening their unofficial relationship, Taiwan's place as Japan's third largest trading partner and tenth largest customer suggests there is ample room for greater economic coordination. Both stand to benefit from the other being more integrated into the regional economic order, particularly given the extent of interdependence within the semiconductor and small electronics manufacturing industry. [6] To this end, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga offered his support for Taiwan's bid to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) ([Office of the Prime Minister and His Cabinet](#), January 18). Perhaps even longer-term, the possibility for a Japan-Taiwan free

trade agreement (FTA) would further integrate Taiwan into the Asia-Pacific economic order. In the near-term, however, Tsai must re-evaluate a Ma-era decision to cut off food imports from Fukushima and its neighboring prefectures after the 2011 Dai-ichi nuclear power plant meltdown. Japanese authorities are eager to boost economic well-being in the affected areas—even going so far as to purchase U.S.-made equipment to run tests to prove food product safety ([Taipei Times](#), April 27, 2015).

Conclusion

While the risks of increased unofficial Taiwan-Japan collaboration are significant—endeavors that would undoubtedly stoke the ire of Beijing—the rewards of pursuing greater cooperation should not be underestimated. Closer Taiwan-Japan ties offsets Taipei's dependence on both the United States and China. For Washington, such ties are also in the American interest of rebalancing within Asia: more robust Taiwan-Japan ties effectively reinforce the U.S. hub-and-spoke system by aligning Taipei with one of the United States' most important regional allies. Defense ties are of particular importance in this regard, with both Japan and the United States eager to protect the Tokyo-Guam-Taipei (TGT) triangle encompassing maritime disputes and enabling regional power projection. Economic cooperation and greater collaboration across law enforcement agencies will but further strengthen Taipei's ties to an important U.S. partner in the face of continued Chinese assertiveness. The task ahead for President Tsai is thus not whether closer collaboration with Japan should be sought out, but how to effectively initiate and sustain such coordination to the benefit of both countries and the United States.

Lauren Dickey is a Ph.D. candidate in War Studies at King's College London and the National University of Singapore where she focuses on relations between China and Taiwan. She is also a member of the Pacific Forum Young Leaders Program at CSIS.

Notes

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3. Thomas S. Wilkins, “Taiwan-Japan Relations in an Era of Uncertainty,” *Asia Policy* 13 (2012): pp. 113–132.
4. Alain Guilloux, “Taiwan’s humanitarian aid/disaster relief: Wither or prosper?,” Brookings Institution, August 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/taiwans-humanitarian-aiddisaster-relief-wither-or-prosper/>.
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Holding Up Half the Sky? (Part 2) – Women in Combat Roles in the PLA

Elsa Kania and Kenneth Allen
October 19, 2016

This is Part 2 of a two-part series on women in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Part 1 examined the historical trajectory of and context for the expansion of women’s roles in the PLA. Part 2 examines the recruitment and organizational representation of the PLA’s female officers and enlisted personnel, particularly those in combat roles, in further detail.

Women are starting to have enter combat roles for the PLA in greater numbers. Despite their long history of service in the PLA, female officers (cadre) and enlisted personnel (approximately five percent of

the overall force), have only taken on a range of new positions throughout the PLA Army, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, and the Strategic Support Force, as well as the People’s Armed Police over the last decade ([China Military Online](#), April 15, 2015). While the number of women joining the enlisted force and their acceptance into the PLA’s officer academic institutions remain restricted by informal and often even explicit quotas, PLA female officers and enlisted personnel have made notable contributions in a variety of roles, from aviation to special operations and missile launches. Since the PLA has never conscripted female enlisted personnel, all women in the PLA are recruited or volunteer.

While the first article in this series considered the historical trajectory of and context for the expansion of women’s roles within the PLA, this article reviews the recruitment process for women and examines in detail the multiple services, branches, and billets in which women have served throughout the PLA within the past decade or so. Such analysis not only offers an interesting comparison to the integration of women into combat roles in the U.S. and other militaries worldwide but also reveals an understudied dimension of the PLA’s efforts to recruit and retain an overall “high quality” (高素质) officer and enlisted force. This expansion of women’s roles in the PLA will likely continue, and a higher number of women might eventually advance to operational or support command positions. However, women seeking to enter the PLA often face a glass ceiling in the form of existing recruitment processes, and their opportunities for promotion have been likewise constrained. In most cases, women are part of an all-female subunit, instead of mixed subunits (e.g., squads, platoons, and companies). Looking forward, if it intends to take fuller advantage of the available human resources, the PLA might eventually alter existing restrictions on the recruitment of female officers and enlisted personnel.

Personnel

As of 2016, there were approximately 115,000 female enlisted personnel and officers throughout the 1.3 million-member PLA. [1] Despite an expansion of roles, this total may decrease due to the ongoing 300,000-troop drawdown due to be completed by 2017 (*China Brief*, February 4).

Historically, the majority of women in the PLA have served in medical, communications, logistics support, and propaganda (e.g., song and dance troupe) roles. However, within the past decade or so, there has been a significant expansion in the roles of PLA females onto the battlefield. Increasingly, small, low-level female subunits often seem to have female leaders/commanders, and political officers (at the company level), but there have not yet been many instances of females leading all-female or mixed-gender organizations at higher levels.

Enlisted Force

Unlike men who are both conscripted and recruited, women are not conscripted into the PLA; however, women have been recruited in limited numbers to become enlisted personnel. According to China's Military Service Law (兵役法), women can be recruited (征集) based on the "armed forces' requirements" (军队需要) (全国征兵网, March 13, 2014). After the latest revision to the recruitment requirements for females, the age requirements were differentiated based on educational background, such that high school graduates aged 17–19, college students aged 17–22, the graduates of vocational schools aged 23 or younger, and college graduates aged 24 or younger were eligible to apply (MOD, October 10, 2009; MOD, November 6, 2009). Notably, when the PLA implemented its first Chief Non-commissioned Officer (士官长) system at the brigade, regiment, battalion and company levels in 2015, it included the first female (女士官长), which was characterized as

an indication of the increasingly "important function" of women within the PLA's Non-commissioned Officer (NCO, 士官) corps (*People's Daily*, June 10, 2015; *China Armed Forces*, Vol. 1, 2015).

Female enlisted recruits apparently face a more rigorous and selective process. There are differentiated requirements for the recruitment of female enlisted personnel into the PLA. Although the PLA does not administer a standardized aptitude test to conscripts and recruits, the 2009 "Female Enlisted Personnel Recruitment Work Trial Procedures" (女兵征集工作试行办法) introduced an assessment system that involved a physical quality assessment (身体素质评定) (with 70 points as a basis and deductions for those outside of the standard height, vision, and weight parameters); an academic background assessment (学历评定) (e.g., 70 points for vocational students or 85 points for undergraduate students), and an "interview examination" (面试考查) (with between 70 and 100 points awarded). The "comprehensive assessment" and final selection process used these three components while adding points based on age and Communist Party membership. Unusually, the interview included the criteria of having a "talent" or a "special skill" (才艺专长) for which points would be awarded included in the selection process (MOD, November 6, 2009). In practice, this meant that women seeking to enlist in the PLA, unlike their male counterparts, were required to perform in a "talent show," often involving a song or dance routine, for their recruiters. Understandably, this requirement sparked debate and criticism at the time (*China News*, December 1, 2009). Although the latest female recruitment procedures (女兵征集办法) don't explicitly include those requirements, there continues to be an unspecified "comprehensive quality assessment" (综合素质考评) (*National Recruitment Network*, May 27).

Although there is not an official maximum for the number of women recruited as enlisted personnel, certain implicit restrictions continue to limit their numbers. For instance, only 124 of the 20,000 total personnel who were conscripted and recruited from Hainan Province in 2016 were female, accounting for less than 7 percent of the female applicants ([South Sea Online](#), August 12).

Officer Corps

The recruitment process for PLA officers (cadre) also appears to require higher standards from female applicants. According to the Ministry of Education, explicit “male to female admissions ratios” (男女生录取比例) are not permissible except in military, national defense, public security, and other “specialized institutes,” which presumably do establish and adhere to such set ratios ([People’s Daily](#), September 26, 2013). The enrollment of female cadets in at least some of the PLA’s sixty plus academic institutions, including the National University of Defense Technology, appears to be limited ([NUDT](#), August 6, 2015). Evidence suggests that there are few female cadets in officer academic institutions, and certain institutions and majors probably prohibit women’s enrollment altogether. In this regard, like unlike female students applying to China’s civilian universities, female applicants seemingly face different and often higher standards for acceptance ([Caixin](#), October 13, 2014).

The National Defense Student (国防生) program, which was created in 1998 and is approximately equivalent to the U.S. Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) similarly restricts the enrollment of women. Since a high proportion of graduates from the National Defense Student program go on to the special technical career track, the majority of female officers graduating from this program are unlikely to serve in operational or support command positions. Although there was initially a five percent maximum

for the number of female students enrolled in the program, that restriction seems to be applied inconsistently across the civilian academic institutions involved in the program, or perhaps to have been relaxed somewhat since (*Xinhua*, December 24, 2007; *China Brief*, November 30, 2011). For instance, as of 2015, Peking University’s National Defense Student program limited the number of female undergraduate students to 10 percent and the number of female graduate students to 20 percent ([北大](#), May 6, 2015).

Services, Forces, and Branches

The PLA’s Army, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, and the Strategic Support Force, as well as the People’s Armed Police, all incorporate women into their officer and enlisted ranks. While the majority of female PLA officers and enlisted personnel have traditionally served primarily in medical, communications, logistics support, academic, and propaganda roles, women have increasingly taken on a variety of combat roles. In fact, as Chinese media pointed out after the U.S. officially opened all combat roles to women in 2015, the PLA considers itself to have been ahead of the U.S. by twenty years in this regard, since it established a contingent of female marines (海军女子陆战特遣队) in the late 1990s (*Global Times*, December 5, 2015). Since then, the PLA’s various services, forces, and branches (combat arms) have introduced a variety of female organizations.

Although PLA women have traditionally served in all-female organizations, there are several examples of mixed-gender organizations that have been established in recent years. The men and women of the PLA are increasingly training together and to the same standards, yet women may still receive differential treatment from their leaders in certain ways. The following section, while not fully comprehensive, offers an initial review of the range of combat roles that women have taken on throughout the PLA to illustrate the varied nature of their participation.

Women in Combat Roles in the PLA
<u>PLA Army (Ground Forces)</u>
<i>Infantry Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2014, the PLA's first peacekeeping infantry battalion (维和步兵营), which included a female enlisted force infantry squad (女子步兵班) of 13 women, was deployed to South Sudan (<i>Xinhua</i>, December 22, 2014). • Female medics (女军医) previously participated in peacekeeping operations, including in the Congo, Lebanon, and Mali (e.g., <i>China Military Online</i>, May 19, 2015). • In 2015, within the Northern Theater Command's 39th Group Army (陆军第 39 集团军) in Liaoning Province, the female enlisted personnel of an all-female Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) station (无人机站), established within a motorized infantry reconnaissance company (摩步旅侦察情报连), took on responsibility for battlefield reconnaissance, target positioning, directing artillery fire, and combat damage assessments (<i>PLA Daily</i>, October 28, 2015; <i>China Military Online</i>, July 28, 2015). The performance of these "seemingly weak females" in their first opposition-force live drill was characterized as "in no way inferior to male enlisted personnel" (丝毫不逊于男兵) (<i>PLA Daily</i>, October 28, 2015).
<i>Armored Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Southern Theater Command's 14th Group Army (第 14 集团军) in Yunnan Province includes an armored brigade (装甲旅) with a component group of female enlisted personnel (女兵群体), who were characterized as likely to prove themselves

as "not at all inferior" to their male counterparts if a war were to break out, given their operational performance (<i>China Military Online</i> , April 29).
<i>Artillery Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An artillery brigade in the former Lanzhou Military Region included a female platoon (女兵排), which was praised for training "meticulously" to the same standards and thus "showing the spirit and style of new era female enlisted personnel" (<i>China Military Online</i>, March 26, 2014).
<i>Air Defense Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the Northern Theater Command's 40th Group Army (第 40 集团军) in Liaoning Province, a female missile company (女子导弹连) was established within an air defense brigade (防空旅) in 2014 (<i>China Military Online</i>, April 15, 2015). It subsequently was lauded for its "outstanding performance" and reportedly created a new record for its firing of a certain type of missile (<i>CNTV</i>, March 11). • A squad (班) of six female enlisted personnel from an air defense brigade (防空旅) in the Western Theater Command's 47th Group Army (第 47 集团军) participated in the Shandan-A (山丹-A) part of the "Firepower 2016" exercise (<i>Huoli</i>, 火力-2016) (<i>China Military Online</i>, August 16).
<i>Aviation Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2013, the first female helicopter aviators were transferred to Army Aviation from the PLAAF. [2] • In 2014, Army Aviation's first female armed helicopter pilots (武装直升机女飞行员) completed their training and assumed their billets (<i>PLA Daily</i>, October 31, 2014).
<i>Special Forces:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2013, the former Beijing Military Region established the PLA's first female

special operations company (女子特种作战连) within the 38th Group Army in Hebei Province, which except for the male company commander (连长) was composed of only female officers and enlisted personnel (官兵), (*Xinhua*, March 30, 2013; *China Military Online*, April 15, 2015).

- Female special forces operators have engaged in advanced parachute training and reportedly train alongside and to the same standards as their male counterparts (*Xinhua*, May 16, 2013; *China Military Online*, July 5).
- During the Peace Mission (和平使命) 2014 multinational exercise, organized through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at China's Zhurihe Training Base in Inner Mongolia, a female special forces company (女子特战连) participated in anti-terrorism exercises focused on urban combat, living and working alongside their male counterparts, yet also served as a member of the military "parade team" (阅兵方队) (*China Military Online*, June 11). Despite that additional decorative function, the female special forces subunits (分队) (e.g., battalion and below) involved were responsible for a variety of "combat oriented tasks" including reconnaissance, hostage rescue, and the interrogation of prisoners.

PLA Navy

Surface Branch:

- In 2010, the PLAN's first female crew (女舰员) started to train within the North Sea Fleet and eventually became its first female enlisted sailors (女水兵) (*PLA Daily*, February 18, 2013). From approximately 2012 onward, the PLAN has regularly deployed female enlisted sailors and officers onto ships alongside their male counterparts in a variety of roles, including navigation and

sonar (e.g., *China Military Online*, August 11; *China Military Online*, March 10; *China Military Online*, April 15, 2015).

- In 2013, eight female enlisted sailors (女水兵) deployed aboard the Type 052 Luh-class destroyer *Harbin* to take part in its escort mission in the Gulf of Aden (*PLA Daily*, February 18, 2013). Eleven women also deployed on the *Peace Ark*, China's military hospital ship (*China Pictorial*, June 10, 2013).
- Such long-term deployments of female enlisted sailors and officers have evidently become routine, and a PLAN escort fleet's deployment to the Gulf of Aden in 2016 included twenty-four females (*China.com*, August 11). Notably, five percent of the total PLAN personnel on the Liaoning, China's first aircraft carrier, are women (*China Military Online*, April 15, 2015).
- In 2014, the first 20 female "ship command specialty" (舰艇指挥专业) cadets graduated from the Dalian Naval Ship Academy (大连舰艇学院). One of them will probably become the PLAN's first female vessel commander (舰长) (*People's Daily*, July 12, 2014). Among them was the PLAN's first Uighur female officer, who previously served on the Liaoning (*People's Daily*, July 14, 2014).

Subsurface Branch:

- There has been no mention of women serving with the PLA's subsurface forces. Although there does not appear to be any women in some other PLA branches, such as the PLAAF's antiaircraft artillery branch, the PLAN's submarine force is reportedly the only combat arm of the PLA to maintain an outright ban against recruiting women (QQ, June 14).

Aviation Branch:

- The PLA Navy has not yet had any female aviators.

<i>Marines:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The history of the PLAN's female marines reportedly dates back to the late 1990s, when the Marine Corps' recruitment of female officers and enlisted personnel first started. [3] The initial such contingent was established (女子陆战特遣队) under the aegis of the South Sea Fleet (China.com, May 22, 2009). • The PLA's female marines reportedly train intensively and to the same requirements as their male counterparts (PLA Pictorial, June 5, 2007; China Military Online, June 30). • In 2016, the PLA's female marines traveled abroad for the first time, when a female reconnaissance platoon (两栖侦察女兵队) deployed on the <i>Changbaishan</i> landing vessel as part of the multinational exercise "Blue Attack" ("蓝色突击") in Thailand (PLA Daily, July 6).
<i>Coastal Defense Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are female enlisted personnel within the PLAN's coastal defense (海防) combat arm, including those stationed in Fujian (China Military Online, May 15, 2014).
<u>Air Force</u>
<i>Aviation Branch:</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 1951, the PLA Air Force has recruited and trained over 500 female aviators (女飞行员), which includes all crewmembers (China Brief, June 22, 2012). • In 2010, a group of female first lieutenants became China's first female fighter pilots after graduating from a 44-month training program (Xinhua, June 28, 2013; China Air Force Network, January 12). • The PLA's female fighter pilots have also completed overwater parachute landing training (China Military Online, April 29, 2014). Four of these female fighter pilots flew K-8 Advanced Fighter Trainers over Tiananmen during the September 2015 military parade and are now part of the PLAAF's J-10 Bayi Flight Demonstration Team (Xinhua, September 11, 2015). • New female aviators will be recruited every three to five years, not every seven or eight, and will be chosen from sixteen different provinces, rather than twelve (Global Times, November 23, 2014). • See "China's Air Force Female Aviators: Sixty Years of Excellence" for a more detailed account of their history and progress (China Brief, June 22, 2012).
<i>SAM Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2014, a female missile company (女兵导弹连) responsible for operating short-range surface-to-air missiles was established in the former Shenyang Military Region Air Force, (China Military Online, April 15, 2015).
<i>AAA Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are no available references to female enlisted personnel or officers serving in the antiaircraft artillery branch.
<i>Airborne Branch:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PLA's first female paratroopers unit (女子空降队) was established in 1991, and there is already a "considerable" number of

female paratroopers in the PLAAF's 15th Airborne Corps. (*Air Force World*, June 2).

- The first female airborne reconnaissance guide team (女子侦察引导队) to enter the PLA's airborne forces completed its training in 2016 (*PLA Daily*, May 31).

Radar Branch:

- In 2001, the first twelve female cadets graduated from the PLAAF Radar College (空军雷达学院), becoming the PLA's first radar specialty female officers with a bachelor's degree (*PLA Daily*, July 13, 2001). There continue to be a number of female enlisted personnel and officers within the radar branch (e.g., *Xinhua*, May 22, 2015).

Rocket Force

- The Rocket Force, which was formerly the Second Artillery Force, established its first female missile launch company (女子导弹发射连) in 2011 and then a second such company in 2012, both of which were responsible for the operation of tactical ballistic missiles (*China Military Online*, April 15, 2015). The first female missile launch company, which is subordinate to the PLARF's 1st Conventional Missile Brigade under the aegis of Base 52 in Anhui Province, was officially incorporated as a combat unit in 2014 (*Huojianbing Bao*, April 9, 2014). The first female commander of this missile launch company had previously served as a non-commissioned officer (*Huojianbing Bao*, October 12, 2013).

Strategic Support Force

- Relatively limited information is available about the Strategic Support Force at this point, but its personnel presumably include female officers and enlisted personnel who were previously associated with the former General Staff Department's (GSD) Third

(3PLA/Technical Reconnaissance) and Fourth (4PLA/Electronic Countermeasures & Radar) Departments, as well as those affiliated with certain former GSD Research Institutes and various other *budui* transferred to the SSF (*China Brief*, February 8). For instance, female enlisted personnel from a particular communications terminal long-distance platform (通信总站长途台), which may have been part of the former GSD Informationization Department, are now associated with the SSF (*Global Times*, September 26).

Conclusion

This organizational overview illustrates that female enlisted personnel and officers have been increasingly serving in a range of combat roles throughout the PLA, in addition to more traditional roles, such as medical and communications personnel. Based on the available information, women in the PLA are only formally prohibited from serving on submarines, and there are still a small number of combat arms that do not yet seem to have established female units. While most PLA women seemingly still serve in all-female subunits, there has been some progression toward integrated training, including for the PLAAF's female aviators. Although only a few PLA female officers have taken on operational unit command positions, there are indications that a small number of women, including in the PLAAF and PLAN, are starting to take on and could eventually advance in these roles.

Although women still constitute only about five percent of the PLA, this expansion of their roles could eventually result in an increase in their numbers and impact. However, for the time being, restrictive recruitment policies continue to limit the entrance of and often impose higher standards upon female applicants. In this regard, the PLA is presently failing to adequately take advantage of all of the available human resources. There are indications that attitudes

are starting to change, and policies may eventually follow (e.g., PLA Daily, July 3). Looking forward, the PLA's ability to integrate women effectively into the operational force and to confront attitudes that have historically imposed a glass ceiling upon their advancement also offers a metric of its ability to adapt its prevailing organizational culture in response to new conditions.

While women in the PLA continue to be characterized as “beautiful scenery in the barracks” (军营一道亮丽的风景), the PLA has gradually progressed to recognize their potential contributions and impact in future informationized warfare (China Military Online, April 15, 2015). Evidently, the PLA has also realized that changes in the nature of warfare as a result of technological trends will require a different type of force, and it has appreciably altered its approach to recruitment in an effort to attract educated, “high quality” personnel. However, the PLA's future expansion of the recruitment of and opportunities for women—a pragmatic military imperative—might continue to be constrained by prevailing societal dynamics and attitudes.

Elsa B. Kania is a recent graduate of Harvard College and currently works as an analyst at the Long Term Strategy Group.

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

Notes:

1. No detailed statistics are available. See also: Mady Wechsler Segal, Xiaolin Li, and David R. Segal, “The Role of Women in the Chinese People's Liberation Army.”
2. Kenneth Allen, “PLA Air Force, Naval Aviation, and Army Aviation Aviator Recruitment, Education, and Training,” Jamestown Foundation, 2015.
3. Li Faxin, *The PLA Marines*, China Intercontinental Press, English version, January 2013, pp. 100–112.

Downsizing the PLA, Part 1: Military Discharge and Resettlement Policy, Past and Present

By John Chen

This is Part 1 of a two-part series on the PLA's planned personnel reduction and its implications in two parts. Part 1 summarizes Chinese military discharge mechanisms and discusses key trends and changes in discharge and resettlement policy since the last troop reduction in 2004. Part 2 identifies and assesses the major challenges posed by the downsizing effort amidst slowing economic growth, PLA modernization efforts, and state-sector economic reform.

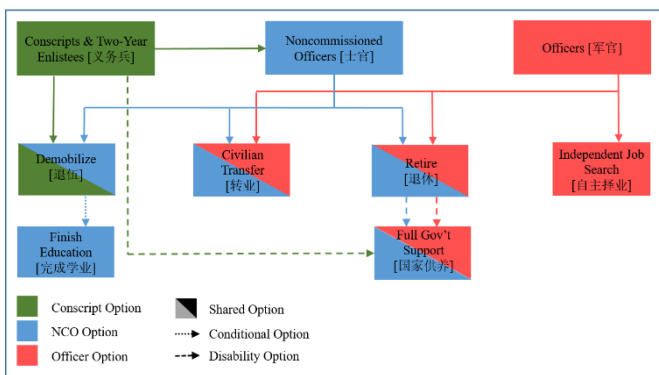
Former Chinese military personnel represent a large and important constituency within Chinese society. Large numbers of young, mostly rural men and women join the PLA through China's conscription system and either leave the PLA or continue their careers after a two-year stint. A smaller number stay on and advance through the ranks, or increasingly, join from universities to become officers. Retired PLA personnel have also become a vocal political force, evidenced most recently during a protest in which more than 1,000 veterans gathered in front of the

Ministry of Defense to seek redress for unpaid discharge allowances and benefits (New Tang Dynasty News, October 11). In September 2015, Xi Jinping announced that 300,000 military personnel would be downsized, reducing the total size of the PLA from 2.3 million personnel to 2 million (People's Daily, September 11, 2015), potentially further complicating the issue of veteran dissatisfaction. A year into the downsizing, few concrete details have emerged about the reduction and its implications for the Chinese economy and society that must absorb the downsized troops, one of the Chinese Communist Party's most important constituencies. A close look at this demobilization process and the PLA's plans for larger troop reductions provides important insights into the reorganization program and long-term modernization goals.

Leaving the PLA: Discharge and Resettlement Policies

Soldiers leaving the PLA have a number of separation options available to them according to their grade and time in service. [1] The following descriptions of separation options and major benefits draw heavily on previous scholarly research and Chinese language sources from official state media, and are summarized below in Figures 1 and 2. [2]

Figure 1: Separation Options for PLA Servicemen



(Double click to be taken to a full sized chart on the Jamestown website)

Figure 2: Separation Options and Major Associated Benefits for PLA Servicemen

Separation Mechanism	Eligibility	Major Associated Benefits
Demobilize [退伍]	Conscripts; NCOs with less than 12 years of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-time demobilization subsidy (4,500 RMB (\$674) per year of service) One-time independent job-searching subsidy (2,000 RMB) (\$300) One-time healthcare subsidy Pro-rated last month's living expenses Following month's living expenses (750 RMB) (\$112)
Finish Education [完成学业]	NCOs demobilized more than a year ago that have tested into a full-time higher education program, and are independently job-searching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tuition subsidy: 8,000 RMB (\$1200) per year for undergraduate programs; 12,000 RMB (\$1,800) per year for graduate programs Up to 2 years' free access to local government vocational education
Civilian Transfer [转业]	NCOs with more than 12 years of service; division-leader grade officers with less than 30 years of service; battalion-leader grade officers or lower with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salary equivalent to pay level at time of discharge; years in military service count toward civilian retirement Living expenses subsidy: none for less than 8 years of service; 3 months' salary for 8-9 years of service; additional 1 month's salary for each year of service beyond 9, up to 16 years

	less than 20 years of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home settlement subsidy: 4 months' salary for 14 years of service or less; additional half-month's salary for each year of service beyond 15 years
Independent Job Search [自主选择]	Battalion and regiment-leader grade officers with more than 20 but less than 30 years of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly pension payment worth 80 percent of monthly salary • Job search subsidy: 1 month's salary for every year of service under 15 years; additional 1.5 month's salary for each year of service beyond 16 years • Same living expenses and home settlement subsidies as civilian transfers
Retire [退休]	NCOs and officers at the age of 55 or with 30 or more years of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full monthly pension • One-time living expenses subsidy: 4 months' salary • Home settlement subsidy: 8 months' salary for troops returning to rural areas; 6 months' salary for troops returning to cities
Full Government Support [国家供养]	Conscripts, NCOs, and officers disabled in public service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthcare, caretaking, and housing allowances • Annual compensation payments corresponding to disability level and type, ranging from 5,000 RMB (\$750) to 52,000 RMB (\$7,800)

As late as 2007, conscripts and two-year enlistees appeared to have only one main option for separation from the PLA. They could choose to simply be released from service [退伍] after their two-year service commitment with no government obligation to provide job placement, or they could decide to extend their term of service and become non-commissioned officers, after which they would enjoy the separation benefits and options described in the next section. Those that chose to leave have traditionally returned home and continued their old way of life. [3]

Conscripts and two-year enlistees that left after fulfilling their service obligation were entitled to certain benefits, including a small resettlement allowance and assistance in job-hunting. However, these entitlements had often been ignored or doled out unevenly across China, sparking complaints and aggravating civil-military tensions. [4] Dissatisfaction with inconsistent disbursement of benefits led the central government to codify the benefits available for discharged conscripts. The most obvious changes are manifested in 2011 revisions to the Military Service Law [中华人民共和国兵役法] and Enlisted Personnel Resettlement Regulations [退役士兵安置条例], which declared conscripts eligible for a one-time independent job-searching subsidy [自主就业一次性退役金], in which they would look for a job themselves and collect a one-time job-searching subsidy from the military (People's Frontline News Weixin, August 8, 2015). As of September 2015, this one-time payment was 4,500 RMB (\$674) for every year of service (PLA Daily Reporter's Weixin, September 7, 2015).

Today, demobilized personnel receive a one-time demobilization subsidy [退伍补助费] of 2,000 RMB (\$300), a one-time healthcare subsidy [退伍医疗补助费], a subsidy consisting of next month's allowance [离队下月津贴], prorated living expenses for the month they leave [离队当月剩余天伙食费], and living expenses for the month after demobilization [离队下月伙食费] totaling up to 750 RMB (\$112), in addition to the job-searching subsidy detailed above and additional healthcare and retirement subsidies (PLA Daily Reporter's Weixin, September 7, 2015).

Conscripts and Two-Year Enlistees [yi wu bing; 义务兵]

Non-commissioned officers (NCO) [shi guan; 士官]

Non-commissioned officers enjoy more separation options and benefits than conscripts do. As of 2007, enlisted personnel that had served up to an additional 6 years beyond their initial two-year conscription period were considered junior NCOs [初级士官] and were eligible only for demobilization [退伍]. Non-commissioned officers who had served 8–16 years beyond their initial two-year conscription period were referred to as mid-level NCOs [中级士官], and were eligible for transfer to civilian state positions [转业] after 10 years of total service. Senior-level NCOs [高级士官], or NCOs that had served at least 14 years beyond their conscription period, were eligible to retire [退休] after 30 years of total service. [5]

Major changes to discharge and resettlement policy enacted in 2011 expanded resettlement options and simplified discharge benefits. Revisions to the Military Service Law outlined five major discharge and resettlement options: independent job-searching [自主就业], government job placement [安排工作] (also known as civilian transfer, or *zhuan ye* 转业), full retirement [退休], government support [供养], and completion of education [继续完成学业] (National People's Congress, October 29, 2011). The 2011 revision to the Enlisted Personnel Resettlement Regulations simplified eligibility rules for military discharge benefits: NCOs who had served less than 12 total years would receive essentially the same benefits as conscripts, including the same one-time independent job-searching subsidy of 4,500 RMB (\$674) per year of service from the military along with possible further financial subsidies from local provincial and municipal governments (State Council, November 1, 2011). NCOs who had served more than 12 years were eligible for government job placement (also known as *anzhi*, 安置), while those who had served at least 30 years, were disabled in war or public service, were 55 years or older, or had to retire for health reasons were eligible for full retirement or government support (State Council, November 1, 2011).

Officers [jun guan; 军官]

Officers and cadre [干部] have the most options available for separation from the PLA and enjoy greater benefits than enlisted personnel. [6] Officers are required to apply for separation from the PLA. Of those whose applications are accepted, officers who have served for 30 years are eligible for full retirement [退休]. Division-leader grade officers with less than 30 years of service and officers at the battalion-leader grade or lower with less than 20 years of service are to be transferred to civilian state employment [转业]. Battalion and regiment-leader grade officers who have served between 20 and 30 years are allowed either to accept a transfer to a civilian government job or accept a partial pension while they independently seek employment in the private sector [自主择业] (News of the Chinese Communist Party, January 19, 2001). [7]

Officers transferred to civilian positions are entitled to the same levels of pay and benefits they would have earned at their duty grade level in the PLA, and their years in military service count toward retirement at their civilian positions (State Council, July 31, 2015). Civilian transfers also collect subsidies for living expenses [生活补助费] and home settlement [安家补助费] (Ministry of National Defense, March 11, 2015). [8] Officers that choose to independently seek employment accept an 80 percent pension that persists unless they accept a job in the government sector (State Council, August 24, 2001). They are also eligible for a job search subsidy [自主择业补助费] on top of the living expenses and home settlement subsidies offered to civilian transfers (Ministry of National Defense, March 11, 2015). [9] Officers that retire collect full pensions and are eligible for a number of allowances, including one-time payments for living expenses and home settlement, along with housing, healthcare, and other benefits (Ministry of National Defense, March 11, 2015). [10] The subsidies vary in size according to different conditions: the living expenses subsidy is equal to four months' pay, and the home settlement subsidy consists of eight months' pay for troops returning to rural areas and six months' pay for those returning to cities (Ministry of National Defense, March 11, 2015).

Regulations stipulate that most officers transferring to civilian government positions must return to the location of their original household registration [*hukou*; 户口], although at least one expert notes that some officers are allowed to stay in base housing and household registration reform may have loosened restrictions on where downsized personnel go. [11] Additional consideration is made for the locations of spouses or parents, although the policy does not elaborate on who makes the decision (News of the Communist Party, January 19, 2001). Those leaving the PLA under the auspices of independent job-searching [自主择业], as well as aviation and naval officers who have served 10 or more years, are also allowed a degree of flexibility in resettlement (News of the Communist Party, January 19, 2001). Although most officers will be placed according to their original *hukou*, decommissioned officers can also be placed in regions as needed by the nation (News of the Communist Party, January 19, 2001). A personnel management researcher at the PLA Logistics Academy noted that government departments in central and western China were “eagerly hunting for talented people,” indicating that some officers may simply be transferred to locations as needed rather than transferred home (China Military Online, September 9, 2015).

Full Government Support [guojia gongyang; 国家供养]

A special discharge option for all military personnel who are disabled in public service is full government support [国家供养], and includes considerable disability compensation payments based on the level and type of disability. Disabilities are classified on a scale of severity from 1 to 10 (Level 1 is the most severe) and sorted by combat, work, or illness disabilities. Personnel with disability ratings from Level 1 to Level 4 are eligible for full government support, and receive substantial compensation payments in addition to healthcare and housing allowances (Ministry of National Defense, March 10, 2015). For instance, enlisted personnel with Level 1 disabilities can receive a yearly compensation payment between 49,000 RMB (\$7,335) for illness and 52,000 RMB (\$7,784) for combat disability (Ministry of National Defense, March 10, 2015).

Key Trends in Discharge and Resettlement Policy

Changes in the PLA’s military discharge and resettlement processes since the last major troop reduction in 2003 can be characterized in three main ways:

First, conscripts and two-year enlistees have increasingly enjoyed greater benefits for their service, and as the PLA continues to seek more college-educated personnel, it will continue to feel compelled to better enforce existing military discharge policy and improve the conscript demobilization package by providing more generous benefits. The 2011 revisions to military discharge policy afforded much greater financial assistance to these personnel by opening up independent job selection to a group that was simply demobilized and returned home in the past. Some demobilized conscripts ostensibly leave the force with marketable job skills and useful certifications such as a driver’s license, although their employment prospects are in doubt in an economy that increasingly values higher-skilled workers. [12] The PLA faces no shortage of available conscripts as it transitions from an all-conscription force to a hybrid force with an increasing proportion of volunteer enlistees, but in recent years it has been forced to relax physical standards to attract better-educated personnel (China Daily, June 17, 2014). [13] As it continues to compete with the private sector for college-educated personnel, the PLA will have little choice but to continue increasing expenditures on demobilized conscripts as one way to attract desired talent.

Second, the PLA has placed increasing emphasis on higher education as an exit pathway, especially for its enlisted personnel. This is evident in the various incremental revisions to NCO discharge and resettlement policy. Starting in 2011, NCOs who have been demobilized for longer than a year, have tested into a full-time higher education program, and are participating in independent job-searching are also entitled to a yearly tuition subsidy of up to 6,000 RMB (\$900) from provincial level governments—a figure that was adjusted upwards in 2014 to 8,000 RMB (\$1200) a year for undergraduate programs and 12,000 RMB (\$1,800) a year for graduate programs (Central People’s Government, October 31, 2011; Ministry of Fi-

nance, July 18, 2014). Demobilized enlisted personnel that choose independent job selection are also entitled to attend local government vocational education for up to two years at no cost (China Military Online, November 6, 2014).

Third, the civilian transfer process for officers has become increasingly competitive. Though the burden of resettling transferred officers is the legal responsibility of local governments and rejecting officers is not allowed, there appears to be a priority order for the best positions (News of the Chinese Communist Party, January 19, 2001; PLA Daily, July 5; Beijing Daily, July 15). In the interest of transparency, a 2012 document issued by the CPC Central Committee Organization Department [中组部], Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security [人社部], and the former PLA General Political Department [总政治部] stipulated that division and regimental-level officers eligible for civilian transfer would undergo an evaluation process [考核] that assigned civilian positions based on moral virtue, grade, military rank, length of service, specialty skills, hardship duty, and military commendations. Eligible officers at the battalion-level or lower would undergo the above evaluation process and an additional testing process [考试] administered by the receiving province, consisting of a written test and an in-person interview (Inner Mongolia Ministry of Human Resources, January 21, 2012). The competitive nature of civilian transfers has generated anxiety over transfer prospects, exemplified in a letter from a young company commander to the *PLA Daily*, in which the letter writer worries that he should apply for civilian transfer earlier rather than later in order to secure a better position, even though he does not yet qualify for transfer by virtue of grade or time in service (*PLA Daily*, July 5).

Conclusion

It is clear that the PLA and the relevant civilian agencies have adopted a series of discharge mechanisms and adapted them according to various needs and pressures. The PLA's desire for college-educated enlisted personnel precipitated an increase in benefits for demobilized conscripts, while the looming expense and difficulty of finding jobs for NCOs led of-

ficials to highlight education as an increasingly important pathway for demobilized enlisted troops. The opacity of the officer civilian transfer process prompted officials to clarify the process in an attempt to defuse criticism from the affected group. In each case, the PLA and the relevant civilian agencies have taken deliberate steps to address a need or a potential problem. Will these steps be enough for Chinese civil society to weather the latest troop reduction? The challenges and implications of the reduction are addressed in Part 2 of this series.

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Notes:

1. Chinese laws do not appear to specify transfer to the People's Armed Police (PAP) as a regularly available option for soldiers leaving the PLA, although past reductions have transferred entire PLA units to the PAP. Considering the amount of state media attention surrounding other downsizing methods and goals, such wholesale transfers are unlikely to represent a significant portion of the ongoing force reduction.
2. For a seminal treatment of Chinese military discharge policies in the open literature, see Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, "Demobilization and Resettlement: The Challenge of Downsizing the People's Liberation Army," in *Civil-Military Relations in Today's China*, eds. David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunness. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007).
3. Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, "Demobilization and Resettlement," pp. 260–261.
4. Ibid.
5. Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, "Demobilization and Resettlement," p. 262.
6. The term cadre [干部] includes both military officers and PLA civilians [*wenzhi ganbu*; 文职干部]. The more specific Chinese term for

“officer” is *junguan* [军官], but PLA military discharge regulations tend to use *jundui ganbu* [军队干部] in reference to officers. This article uses “officers” to refer to both uniformed military officers and PLA civilians.

7. See also Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, “Demobilization and Resettlement,” pp. 263–266.
8. See Figure 2 for more detail.
9. See Figure 2 for more detail.
10. Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, “Demobilization and Resettlement,” p. 260.
11. Ken Allen notes that the PLA has allocated money for improved off-base housing, and reports that corps deputy-leader grade officers and up are allowed to keep their on-base housing after separation from the PLA.
12. Kivlehan-Wise cites anecdotal evidence documenting this trend, which likely applies to rural conscripts more than those from the cities. See Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, “Demobilization and Resettlement,” p. 268.
13. Dennis J. Blasko writes that new recruits are “drawn mostly from a pool of over 10 million males that reach conscription age annually,” suggesting that conscript supply still outnumbers demand. See Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), p. 59.

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