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Snapshot: China's Eastern Theater Command

Delivering his work report to the National People's Congress, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang noted that "the Chinese mainland will resolutely oppose and contain 'Taiwan independence separatist activities'" ("台独"分裂活动) ([Xinhua](#), March 5). [1] President Xi Jinping, however, was even more explicit in early November 2016, when he said "1.3 billion Chinese people will oppose Taiwan independence. We have the ability, the determination and are prepared to deal with Taiwan independence. If we do not, we will be overthrown (推翻) by 1.3 billion people" ([Apple](#)

[Daily](#), November 2, 2016). China's ability to "deal" with Taiwan involves political and economic pressure. These tools have already seen some success as the number of countries that recognize Taiwan shrinks, and Taiwan's participation in international organizations is severely restricted. However, as China's military becomes more effective, military coercion is increasingly a viable option. An overview of China's Eastern Theater Command (ETC) provides some insight into the Chinese military's current capabilities against Taiwan.

China's Eastern Strategic Direction

Although eastern China is one of the most densely populated and important areas of the country, China's east coast has not always been

its primary strategic direction. Chinese military writings note that China's historical focus on ground forces arose out of a lack of maritime threats to China from the east. In ancient times, and again during the 20th century, the threat of land invasions from the west and north outweighed threats to the east and south. [2] With the renewal of ties with Russia in the mid-1980s the strategic focus shifted again to the east, raising the importance of aerospace and maritime forces.

In the mid-1990s, the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis put the region back in headlines. Missile launches in 1995 and 1996 prompted the United States to send two carrier strike groups to the area around Taiwan. The incident also revealed a number of deficits in PLA capabilities. While Taiwan remained a key issue for the PLA, its lack of sufficient maritime lift capacity, air superiority and even intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities meant that an invasion across the strait would not succeed. The U.S. navy's ability to operate without real challenge was another major problem, and Chinese defense planners recognized the need to have layered offensive and defensive systems to project power into the East China Sea.

The Japanese governments' 2012 purchase of the Senkaku Islands from a private owner sparked tensions and prompted widespread protests throughout China. Projecting power not just toward Taiwan but throughout the East China Sea gained additional importance. The Chinese government followed up on this by declaring an Air Defense Identification Zone in late November 2013 (*China Brief*, December 5, 2013). The area has since seen a steady increase in Chinese military aviation and maritime patrols (*China Brief*, October 26, 2016). Accompanying

these events, China's military has reformed and reorganized to better deal with security issues along its eastern strategic direction.

The military organizations responsible for most of eastern China have undergone a number of changes since the 1980s. Until 1988, China had 11 military regions (MR) including ones centered on Fuzhou in northern Fujian province and Nanjing. The Fuzhou MR was incorporated into the Nanjing MR, which, after the latest round of reforms, has been folded intact into the Eastern Theater Command. An important result of the 2015 military reforms is that the Theater Command acts as joint headquarters for Army, Navy and Air Force (*China Brief*, June 21, 2016). The Rocket Force also has units present in the ETC, although they are directly subordinate to the Central Military Commission, China's highest military body.

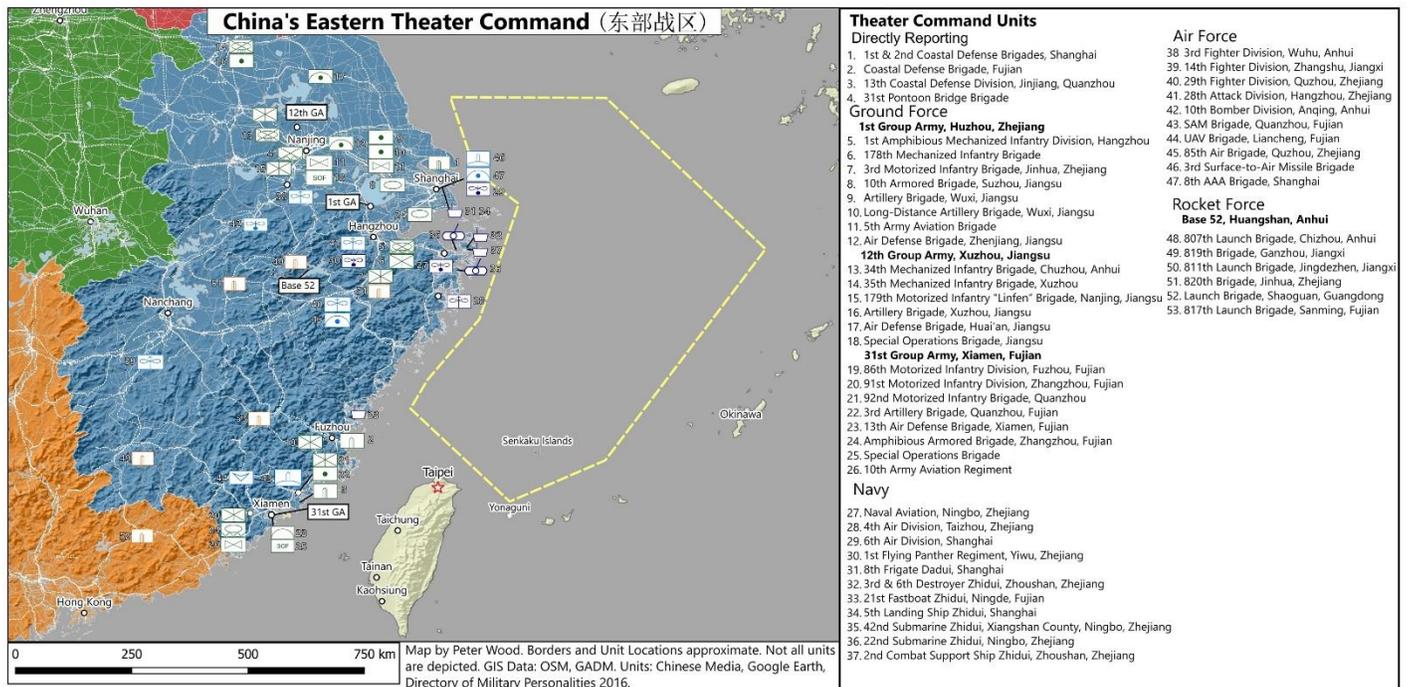
The Geography of Eastern China

The current ETC is composed of military units within the borders of Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces, as well as Shanghai Municipality. Together, their populations include over 280 million citizens and three of China's top ten ports—Shanghai, Ningbo, Xiamen. Bisected by the Yangtze River (长江), the region's geography is dominated by plains in the north portion and mountains in the west and south. A cluster of multi-million person megacities connected by high-speed rail dot the landscape between the

Province	Population (millions, 2015)
Anhui	69.5
Jiangsu	79.8
Jiangxi	52
Shanghai	24.2
Zhejiang	55.4
Total	280.9

ETC's headquarters in Nanjing in southwestern Jiangsu province to Shanghai on the coast. A number of large lakes, including Lake Tai (太湖), break up this geography. The three provinces and municipality on China's coast together

Jiangsu, and has mechanized brigades protecting Nanjing and northern Jiangsu. This central core of the ETC is also protected by the Air Forces' 3rd Fighter Division, with a variety of air interception units.



make up the Yangtze river delta (长江三角洲). So important is it to China's economy, industry and population, *The Science of Military Strategy*, a PLA textbook, describes this area, along with the Pearl River Delta in China's South, as one of its "centers of gravity" (重心所在). [3]

The Yangtze River connects eastern China with its central core, and the river plays a vital role commercially and logistically. The 1st Group Army, based in Huzhou, Zhejiang province contains a mix of units meant to defend the central coast of China. This includes an amphibious unit capable of operating in this environment of lakes and rivers that would also be used in a Taiwan scenario. The same group army contains well-equipped mechanized brigades and an armored brigade. Further to the north, the 12th Group Army is headquartered in Xuzhou,

China has its largest concentration of naval forces at the mouth of the Qiantang river (钱塘江). The East Sea Fleet is headquartered in Ningbo, and home to naval aviation units and several destroyer and submarine squadrons (*zhidui*; 支队), typically of 4–5 ships. PLA Naval Aviation units play an important role as they are responsible for patrolling the line between Taiwan and the PRC in the Taiwan Strait. Long-range naval H-6G bombers from Benniu air base regularly participate in long-distance patrols through the Miyako Strait and into the western Pacific.

The southern half of the ETC is dominated by rough terrain, and was the birthplace of the PLA's predecessor, the Red Army, in Nanchang, Jiangxi province. Jiangxi's mountains served a home base for a weakened Red Army in the early

stages of China's civil war. Now, Rocket Forces launch brigades present within the ETC are primarily located in the complicated terrain of Jiangxi and Anhui.

The coastal cities of Xiamen and Fuzhou, situated directly across the strait from Taiwan are also home to a large concentration of forces. The PLA Ground Forces' headquarters is located in Fuzhou, and the area is well protected by Air Force and Ground Force air defense units, including long-range surface to air missiles that cover the entirety of the Taiwan Strait. Amphibious and Special Forces units vital to an invasion of Taiwan are also present under the 31st Group Army.

Joint Operations

The ETC's Commander is Liu Yuejun (刘粤军) and its Political Officer is Zheng Weiping (郑卫平). Liu and Zheng are both ground force commanders with experience in China's former Guangzhou military region in the south. Liu even participated in China's last military conflict, its short border war with Vietnam in 1979 ([The Taiwan Link](#), April 3, 2016). In any conflict, these men would need to coordinate closely with their subordinate commanders of the Ground Forces, Navy and Air Force, as well as the Rocket Force commander. In March 2016, in the midst of the shift to theater commands, Liu and Zheng coauthored an editorial in the Communist Party's journal *Seeking Truth* in which they described the creation of the theater commands as a key enabler of joint operations ([Seeking Truth](#), March 31, 2016).

The PLA has made progress in learning how to conduct joint operations, but the complications of conflict on its eastern seaboard also

necessitates coordination between Theater Commands, particularly the Southern and Eastern Commands ([China Brief](#), July 22, 2016). China's two marine brigades, for example, are located near Zhanjiang in Guangdong province. Although Shanghai is home to a landing ship squadron, such forces would need to work together. Other units would need to be redeployed from other theater commands. This would allow, for example, strategically important areas to rapidly increase their air defenses by redeployment from the Central TC to the area around Fuzhou, as recently practiced by an HQ-9 Surface-to-Air Missile ([ChinaMil](#), October 12, 2016).

The PLA regularly practices the types of operations it would need in a Taiwan scenario. Amphibious units practice long-distance movement overland as well as maritime operations ([China Brief](#), August 4, 2015). The *Liaoning*, China's test-bed aircraft carrier, has recently begun live-fire air superiority and anti-ship operations ([China Brief](#), December 21, 2016). As China completes and brings online its own indigenously built carriers, both operations could be used off the northeastern coast of Taiwan. Air Force and Naval Aviation have conducted joint long-distance patrols near Taiwan and through the Miyako Strait ([China Brief](#), October 26, 2016).

The Rocket Forces also play an important role in the ETC's offensive power projection. There are at least four Rocket Force Launch Brigades in the ETC, under Base 52 in Huangshan, Anhui, as well as an additional brigade in Shaoguan, Guangdong. According to the latest Annual to Congress on the Chinese military, some 1,200 short- and medium-ranged ballistic and cruise missiles

Chinese Missile Numbers and Growth									
			NASIC, 2009		DoD Report to Congress, 2011		NASIC, 2013	DoD Report to Congress, 2015	DoD Report to Congress, 2016
System	Class	Range (km)	Missiles	Launchers	Missiles	Launchers	Missiles & Launchers		
DF-11, DF-15	SRBM	>1,000		200+	1,000-1,200	200-250	~1,200		
DF-16 (CSS-11)	SRBM	800-1,000							
DF-21 & DF-21A (CSS-5)	MRBM	1,700		>50	75-100	75-100		<1,200	1,200
DF-21C&D (CSS-5 M 5)	MRBM	1,500		>30					
DF-26	IRBM	<3,000							
DF-3	IRBM	<4,000		5-10	5-20	5-20			
DF-4 (CSS-3)	IRBM	<5,000		10-15			10-15		
DF-5A (CSS-4)	ICBM	12,900	N	20	50-75	50-75	~20		
DF-5B* (CSS-4 M 5)	ICBM	>12,900						50-60	
DF-31 (CSS-10 M.1)	ICBM	>8,000		>15	50-75	50-75	5-10		75-100
DF-31A (CSS-10 M2)	ICBM	<11,200		>15			<15		
DF-41* (CSS-X-20)	ICBM	>15,000							
JL-2 + (CSS-NX-14)	SLBM	7,200							48*
DH-10/CJ-10	LACM	<1,500			200-500	40-55			
KD-88	LACM	200							

Sources: Sean O'Connor, *I&A*, Vol. 1, No. 11, December 2011; NASIC Ballistic and Cruise Missile Threat, 2009, 2013; Annual Report To Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015. Notes: * 12 X 5 Jln. Class SSBNs; + Missile is believed to be MIRV-capable

Chart by Peter Wood

are aimed Taiwan and beyond. (See chart for specific numbers).

These forces would be expected to strike quickly at air bases and ports in Japan as well to neutralize threats. The Rocket Force even dubs its advanced DF-16 SRBM the "Okinawa Express" ([People's Daily Online](#), February 15).

Though beyond the scope of this discussion, network warfare units under the Strategic Support Force in Shanghai, Quanzhou and elsewhere would play an important role in any Eastern Theater Command campaign. A large number of signals intelligence units are also present opposite Taiwan ([TheTaiwanLink](#), August 8, 2016). Rocket Force units, along with operations by the Strategic Support Force against key ISR infrastructure would take the lead in attacking Taiwan or Okinawa in a conflict.

Conclusion

Chinese rhetoric regarding Taiwan and Japan have gone through several cycles. Ahead of the Communist Party's 19th Party Congress later this year, it is possible that such rhetoric has a political rather than strategic meaning. However, the PLA continues to modernize, and Taiwan's military deterrent continues to suffer due to budgetary and political issues ([China Brief](#), [August 22, 2016](#); [October 4, 2016](#)). The United States itself is reexamining its own policies toward East Asia, introducing an additional element of uncertainty. However, despite the many changes that China's military strategy has undergone, it unlikely that the Eastern strategic direction will lose importance any time soon. If conflict breaks out between China and another country, the Eastern Theater Command will play a leading role.

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Notes

1. While such language has long been part of official statements on Taiwan, it is a recent edition to the NPC report. A review of the 2014, 2015 and 2016 NPC Work reports did not find similar language, although the 2015 report included the phrase "opposing independence".
2. *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], 3rd ed., Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2013, p. 32
3. *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], 3rd ed., Beijing: Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2013, p. 101

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China's Navy Gets a New Helmsman (Part 2): Remaining Uncertainties

By Andrew S. Erickson and Kenneth Allen

Part 1 of this series discussed Vice Admiral Shen Jinlong's background, meteoric rise, and recent promotion to PLAN Commander. However, his appointment raises a number of questions about his role in the PLA Navy's modernization, his promotion's implication for China's promotion system, and about his predecessor's continued presence on the Central Military Commission. *Part 2* will explore these important factors in depth and suggest possible conclusions and implications.

Promotion to commander of the PLA Navy has traditionally carried with it appointment to the PLA Central Military Commission (CMC), China's highest military decision-making body. However, the latest Chinese state media reports state that Admiral Wu Shengli still serves on the CMC ([Xinhua](#), March 5). In his capacity as a high-ranking CCP member, Wu has been a full member of the CCP Central Committee since 2007, serving on the 17th and 18th Committees. It remains uncertain when and how, or even if, Shen will assume similar roles. Perhaps there is a deliberate overlap so that Wu can help Shen learn the ropes.

During the 1990s and 2000s, there was a generally consistent path to full general/admiral and to CMC Member, combining rank and grade promotions that rarely occur simultaneously (China Brief, July 22 and August 5, 2010). However, it has always remained unclear who de-

cides the appointment of any key leadership positions in the CMC, including the vice chairmen, the minister of national defense, directors of the four departments, and the services, as well as the theater command leaders. Shen's appointment then raises a number of questions: 1) did Wu Shengli submit Shen's name, or not, or as one of several names; 2) did the PLAN Party Standing Committee submit several names and then vote; 3) did the CMC vice chairmen or Xi Jinping submit Shen's name; and 4) does the full CMC vote on the final contenders? 5) What if any role did personal connections (*guanxi*)—known to be a key factor in selecting any PLA leaders at multiple levels—play in his selection? **[1]** Examination of the steps used for promotion and notable exceptions to these rules provides a framework for understanding the dynamics at play during Shen's promotion.

Although none of the six previous PLAN commanders, including Shen, have had similar career paths, they have met the required time-in-grade and time-in-rank requirements (See [Table 2](#) in [Part 1](#) of this series) (*China Brief*, [July 22, 2010](#); [August 5, 2010](#)). **[2]** While the bullets below show the pattern in 2010; it is clear that the PLA is already adjusting past practices to meet Xi's new requirements.

- **Step One:** A LGEN/VADM in a Theater Command (TC) (former MR) Deputy Leader-grade *moves laterally* to a second position in the same grade. Relevant TC 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 TC deputy commanders
 - TC 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 a TC (former MR) leader-grade billet for at least two to three years. As shown below, the PLA as a whole has only three TC (MR) Leader-grade billets that are relevant to the path to becoming the PLAN commander:
 - 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 approximately three years as a LGEN/VADM in a TC (MR) leader-grade position, they receive a *rank promotion* to full general. However, it is theoretically possible that some adjustments may have been made in 2016 as a result of the restructuring of the PLA.
- **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.

The primary reason for this four-step process was to help eventual CMC members broaden

their areas of expertise beyond just their service experience. Prior to 2004, such experiences were vital, as only Army officers were on the CMC. Despite the addition of the commanders of the Air Force, Navy, and Rocket Forces, the Ground Forces still predominate. Although the PLA has always had general guidelines for promotions, politics has frequently intervened. A review of how the CMC has been organized since the PRC was created in 1949 shows that the CMC's structure has been adjusted multiple times to allow certain personnel to take key positions. [3] If Shen does, in fact, become a CMC Member in late 2017, this will be one of those cases.

Although the PLA has generally implemented the four-step process in recent years, several changes have occurred under Xi in order to allow certain people to fill key billets. [4] In this, as in other areas, Xi is making bold efforts at restructuring, but the methods that he is using leave institutions, processes, and rules unclear. This lack of predictability is both confusing and of potential concern. While piecemeal rule changes are thus clearly underway to meet new directives from a powerful Xi, the full extent and overarching logic of Xi's new rules will not become fully apparent until the 19th Party Congress this autumn.

Options for Shen

Although it is clear that Shen has become the PLAN commander, it appears that Wu has retained his position as a CMC member until at least the 19th Party Congress in late 2017. As such, Shen most likely received a promotion in grade from TC Deputy Leader to TC Leader on the day he took office.

Based on the steps noted above, however, the following are potential obstacles to Shen becoming a CMC member:

1. Shen will not receive his third star under the current rank structure until at least mid-2019, which is confusing to foreign navies who deal with him in terms of military relations since most foreign naval commanders are four stars. This is similar to Wu Shengli's situation when he became the commander in August 2006 but did not receive his third star until July 2007. It is not clear which officers will have three stars and four stars. Furthermore, it is not clear who will remain on the CMC following the Party Congress (*China Brief*: Part 1, [February 4, 2016](#); Part 2, [February 23, 2016](#)). As such, there is a possibility that (a) Shen will have his two stars upgraded to three stars but retain the rank of Vice Admiral; (b) he could get a fourth star early.
2. Shen will only have about ten months' time-in-grade as a Theater Command (Military Region) Leader-grade officer, which is similar to Wu Shengli's situation when he became the commander but did not become a CMC Member for 14 months until the 17th Party Congress in 2007. [5]
3. It is not clear if Shen has served as an alternate member of the CCP Central Committee, which appears to have been a criterion for other service commanders.

Shen not meeting these criteria would raise important questions: What does that say about him, the PLAN, or a possible overall change of criteria for other leaders? One possible explanation is that, at Xi's behest, either the PLA as a

whole or the Navy, in particular, is rethinking the criteria regarding who could best serve as PLAN commander. For example, whereas the PLAAF's next commander, General Yi Xiaoguang, has met all of the criteria to replace General Ma Xiaotian, Shen clearly has not yet met all of the criteria to replace Wu. At the same time, however, the Second Artillery Force (now Rocket Force) made an exception for Wei Fenghe by promoting him in both rank and grade before he had met the previous criteria. Although Shen's tenure may be overshadowed by Wu's continued presence on the CMC, he is taking over the day-to-day operations of the PLAN at a pivotal moment.

Admiral Shen's Role in PLAN Modernization

In critical respects, the contribution of Shen's predecessor Admiral Wu Shengli is unprecedented in its thoroughgoing nature. That is to take nothing away from Admiral Liu Huaqing, who served as the PLAN commander from August 1982 to January 1988 before becoming a CMC Vice Chairman; in a manner that has been likened to Theodore Roosevelt's impact as a sea power promoter, including as Assistant Secretary of the Navy ([CIMSEC](#), October 8, 2014). Liu did nothing less than rescue the PLAN from stagnant backwaters and set it on a modern course. But it was Wu who took the PLAN to an entirely new level of sophistication through complex intensive development long after most easier, simpler improvements had already been made. In a conservative service that prizes conformity, Wu did so as a forthright, vision-driven disciplinarian. His forceful personality was both noteworthy and well suited for this demanding task. Similar in the degree to which Admiral Hyman Rickover transformed the U.S. Navy in the realm of nuclear propulsion, Admiral Wu has transformed the PLAN overall—no small feat.

Wu's transformation required a sea change in the missions, organizational structure, and institutional culture of China's navy to a degree that would challenge any service. Rather than cloistering himself within the PLAN's hierarchy, Wu injected himself directly in virtually every conceivable aspect of its development, including a growing interaction with foreign navies. Thanks to such thoroughgoing efforts, it can truly be said that Wu leaves the PLAN a fundamentally different service from the one he inherited in 2006. His instrumental contributions to force structure and operations catapulted the PLAN from a largely coastal defense force still focused in part on fast missile boats to an emerging blue-water expeditionary force with modern warships and submarines that are increasingly well-networked and supported at home and abroad. It is intensifying counter-intervention capabilities along China's maritime periphery in concert with missile and air forces ashore while expanding its influence and reach farther away.

Despite Wu's determined efforts and the ubiquity of his fingerprints, however, the PLAN's transition remains ongoing, leaving much for Shen to accomplish. To better understand how Shen may ultimately find his own place in the lineage and legacy of PLAN commanders, it helps to consider what his Commander in Chief Xi Jinping may ask of him. Shen shares Xi's emphasis on realistic training. In 2003, as director of a "naval vessels training center," Shen was credited with establishing a "new comprehensive training system for new-type vessels," involving substantial shore-based simulation capabilities ([China Youth Daily](#), August 3, 2003; [PLA Daily](#), January 1, 2003). In 2007, as Commander of the North Sea Fleet's 10th Destroyer

Flotilla (支队; *zhidui*), Shen was quoted as emphasizing “actual combat experience” and the maintenance of “information superiority” ([China Youth Daily](#), September 7, 2007; People’s Navy, December 11, 2006). “Efficient and rapid formation of a combat force requires resolutely stressing military training,” he stressed (PLA Daily, December 3, 2007).

In 2011, as Commandant of the Naval Command College, Shen helped to develop a 31-person “Blue Force Center” that served as a “whetstone” in honing opposition force exercises targeting principal foreign opponents along the “formidable enemy” model, particularly their “command decision-making procedures and methods of operation” under realistic conditions of the “future maritime battlefield.” Having supported multiple PLAN fleets in online exercises, monitored real world events, and produced and submitted reports to PLAN leadership, the Center is credited with “accelerating the transformation of the naval troops’ combat power generation model” (People’s Navy, June 21, 2014). Shen was also credited with improving integrated joint instruction and training, and embracing stricter assessment criteria for a “Training and Assessment Program Outline”: “If you lower the requirements in peacetime training, you are bound to suffer a great loss in wartime” (People’s Navy, October 14, 2011; [PLA Daily](#), October 6, 2011; People’s Navy, February 10, 2014). Such achievements may be one of a variety of ways in which Shen caught the attention of and impressed his superiors, as well as their civilian masters.

Finally, unfolding events will likely make Shen’s South Sea Fleet experience particularly germane. With Shen’s elevation, moreover, in the

first instance of a non-ground forces officer assuming charge of a Theater Command, former North Sea Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai (袁誉柏) was promoted to head the South Sea-focused Southern Theater Command on or before January 13, 2017 ([Global Times Online](#), January 22; [Global Times](#), January 22).

Conclusion

For Xi, the PLAN is a versatile foreign policy tool and indispensable to realizing his vision of the “China Dream.” This role brings heightened opportunities and challenges for Shen’s service. For a variety of reasons the U.S. and China appear headed for greater tension in the Near Seas, particularly the South China Sea. Yuan’s elevation may likewise represent a new level of resolve and operational focus for Beijing regarding the South China Sea. While politically prestigious and budgetarily lucrative, however, the PLAN’s responsibilities in these troubled waters will impose constant challenges and the risk of sensitive mistakes—a significant burden for Shen.

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Notes

1. Alison A. Kaufman and Peter W. McKenzie, Field Guide: The Culture of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, CNA, February 2009, <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a495052.pdf>. Kenneth W. Allen and John F. Corbett, "Predicting PLA Leader Promotions," in Andrew Scobell and Larry Wortzel, eds., *Civil-Military Change in China: Elites, Institutes, and Ideas After the 16th Party Congress*, (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, September 2004). Peng Wang & Jingyi Wang, "How China Promotes Its Military Officers: Interactions between Formal and Informal Institutions," Lecture, University of Hong Kong, October 11, 2016, <https://sociology.hku.hk/events/how-china-promotes-military-officers/>. Peng Wang, "Military Corruption in China: The role of guanxi in the buying and selling of military positions," *China Quarterly*, Volume 228, December 2016, pp. 970-991, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/div-classtitlemilitary-corruption-in-china-the-role-of-span-classitalicguanxispan-in-the-buying-and-selling-of-military-positionsdiv/970EC9E8D37441C1E03B4F055A39D42F>
2. Exceptions that the PLA has permitted to date include the following: During the

16th Central Committee's Fourth Plenum in 2004, for the first time, the CMC incorporated the PLAN and PLASAF commanders as Members. Although the PLAAF commander was also added to the CMC, this was less novel as two other PLAAF commanders had previously served there. Typically, the commander and political commissar (PC) have the same grade as their organization. In this instance, however, each of the three commanders was given a "policy promotion" to CMC Member even though the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLASAF (now PLARF) are only MR Leader grade organizations. When Wu became the commander, he apparently had to meet the above criteria. Specifically, when he was appointed as the PLAN commander in August 2006 to replace Zhang Dingfa, who had terminal cancer and died in December 2006, he had only served as an MR Leader-grade officer in a DCGS billet (MR Leader grade) for 26 months. As a result, he was not added to the CMC until October 2007. Although he was not an official member until October 2007, he most likely attended all of the CMC meetings but was unable to cast a formal vote. Furthermore, whereas previous service commanders all had their third star upon taking office, Wu did not receive his third star until 11 months after he became the commander and one month before he became a CMC member. In addition, Wu was not a member of the CCP Central Committee when he assumed command and did not become a CCP Central Committee member until the 17th Party Congress in October 2007. 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.

3. “The Central Military Commission,” in Hu Guangzheng, ed., *China Military Encyclopedia Version 2, Military Organization (军制) Volume 1*. Beijing: China Encyclopedia Publishing House, July 2007, pp. 22 – 31. This volume updates the information from 1995 to 2005.
4. There are always exceptions, however, such as the case of General Wei Fenghe. 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. On December 31, 2010, Lieutenant General Wei Fenghe (魏风和) was promoted in grade from his position as the Second Artillery chief of staff (e.g., Director of the Headquarters Department) with the grade of MR deputy leader (副大军区职) to become the first Second Artillery officer to serve as one of the deputy chiefs of the General Staff (DCOGS) with the grade of MR leader. The sole purpose of this promotion was to allow him to have the proper grade so that he could become the next commander. When Wei became the Second Artillery commander on October 26, 2012, he was also promoted in

grade. He did not receive his third star until November 2012.

Renewable Energy and the PLA’s Next Generation of Self-Sufficiency (Part 2):

By Wilson VornDick

Part One of this series examined the state of renewable energy in China and the connections between civilian and military industry partners. Part Two looks in detail at the PLA’s developing energy strategy both on the mainland and, increasingly on offshore islands at the center of territorial disputes.

Chinese interest in alternative forms of power are not a wholly new endeavor for the Chinese government or PLA. In fact, lower-level units have been experimenting and promoting renewable energy sources for over a decade. A 2007 treatise by two members of a PLA unit stationed in Tibet describes the varieties of renewables that can create “independent power generation” (独立发电系统) reveals the interest in renewables at the lower levels of the PLA. **[1]** Although the PLA does not yet have a permanent global presence outside of its new base in Djibouti, many units are stationed in remote areas. Units in Tibet often operate far from home bases. China’s offshore islands—in the southern stretches of the South China Sea and closer to the mainland in the East China Sea also face logistical challenges. As the PLA strives to achieve “informatization” (信息化)—connecting units together with each other and to intelligence,

surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) infrastructure—the demand for local power will only rise. Increasingly the PLA is turning to renewables to address these growing power demands.

Logistic Self-Sufficiency in the PLA

Military self-sufficiency is not new to the PLA. In fact, the legacy of military self-sufficiency stretches back to the Han Dynasty with the *Tuntian* system (屯田制), a practice in which troops would open wasteland and grow grain for sustenance. As University of Macau professor You Ji points out, the PLA has carried this legacy forward since its founding in 1927 when it engaged in “earnings generation” from subsistence farming, which has now spawned a web of businesses and other ventures. These additional revenue and resource streams helped reduce the state’s direct budget for general upkeep of the PLA. Of particular note is that a “bulk of the PLA’s self-generated funding” comes from “the conversion of the national defense industrial complex to civilian production.” These are either directly run by the PLA or managed by one of its civilian defense industrial surrogates. [2] After the civil war in 1949, the PLA never fully cleaved itself from its business ties primarily because it did not transition from its “guerilla army” footing. The PLA struggled with abiding to Maoist standards of self-reliance and independent production. [3] Although reforms under President Jiang Zemin in 1998 reduced the PLA’s involvement in business and recent reforms under Xi have continued this trend, the PLA remains involved in production elsewhere, and as laid out in part one of this series, it is clear that the PLA’s has significant ties to the renewable energy sector. [4]

At the same time, portions of China’s 2015 Defense White Paper, “China’s Military Strategy” could be interpreted as promoting renewables, though they are not directly specified ([China-Daily](#), May 26, 2015). The strategy, for example, states that “pushing ahead with logistics modernization” will “innovate modes of support” and “develop new support means” so as to “build a logistics system that can provide support for fighting and winning modern wars, serve the modernization of the armed forces, and transform toward *informationization*”. Renewables fall in line with these goals by alleviating traditional energy distribution needs for the PLA and offer an alternative means of support, especially at fixed sites and installations. Further, efforts and systems will be pursued with the goal of “independent innovation” and “sustainable development” so as to develop “weaponry and equipment system which can effectively respond to *informationized* warfare and help fulfill the missions and tasks.” The primacy of *informationization* is key—the PLA no longer requires just sustenance to survive, but also electrical energy to execute its digitized operations. Beyond powering basic life support functions like heating, cooling, or lighting, the PLA of the 21st century will require sustainable, independent, and secure power sources to run its servers, computers, and combat systems in order to fulfill *informationization*.

Renewables on Offshore Installations

Moreover, the PLA is already moving in this direction. In October 2016, Xi and Premier Li Keqiang visited an exhibition in Beijing highlighting stronger civ-mil cooperation on various systems including “hybrid power stations” ([Xinhua](#), October 19, 2016).



(Imagery courtesy of Planet Labs; Inset Photo Hainan Daily)

In recent satellite imagery, solar panels can be seen on facilities in and around the Ningbo Naval Base and on buildings on Sansha Island. Meanwhile, hybrid power stations that combine

wind turbines with solar panels are becoming more commonplace, especially on China's islands and *terraclaims*. A local news report on Tree Island (赵述岛), just north of Woody Island (永兴岛) in Sansha Administrative Zone, touts one such hybrid power station that desalinates the water for local fishermen ([SanshaHiNews](#), February 14, 2017). What appears to be the same solar panel installation is visible on satellite imagery from March 6. The same island is being expanded, and may eventually be militarized in the same way that Woody Island has ([The Diplomat](#), February 13).

Wind turbines and solar farms of various sizes are present on Nanji (南麂岛) and Nanri (南日岛) Islands in the East China Sea as well as Johnson Reef in the South China Sea. In particular, recent analysis of Johnson Reef reveals a hybrid power station with substantial solar-generating capacity ([CSIS](#), February 24).



Solar panels (in yellow circles) on Nanji Island next to a military helicopter base.

Nanji Island is home to a number of fishing villages which could surely benefit from local renewable power generation, but it is also host to a newly built helicopter base. In 2014 construction began on a series of nine military helicopter landing pads. As of 2015 these landing pads have been covered in a camouflage pattern. The island's location to the north of Taiwan also suggests a strategic use for the base, such as anti-submarine operations in the event of a conflict ([China Brief](#), March 6, 2015).

Yet, the presence of renewable energy plants on or around PLA facilities should not surprise PLA watchers. First, renewables complement the PLA's vast amount of fixed sites, such as barracks, arsenals, and airfields. In fact, the presence of renewables may signal PLA permanence. Second, an independent, off-the-grid power source can be used both *offensively* and *defensively* so it adheres to the PLA's basic military tenant of *preparation for military struggle* (PMS) (军事斗争准备). As such, PMS safeguards peace, contains crises, and wins wars, per the *2015 Defense White Paper*. Third, renewables decrease the large logistics and sustainment "footprint" of the PLA, especially in remote locations such as the South China Sea and China's sparse border frontiers. If just one of the wind turbines previously identified on Johnson Reef is, in fact, a 500 kilowatt (kW) variant and is operating at optimal capacity, that turbine could produce the energy equivalent of 500 pounds of coal or 35 gallons of petroleum for one hour ([EIA](#)). For perspective, roughly 100 Watts is required to power one laptop for an hour. If the wind turbines spotted on Nanri or Nanji Island are the larger, 1.5 Megawatt (MW) variant such as the *Ming Yang* model 1.5-82/80IIIA, a single turbine could generate enough power for a small village or minor instal-

lation. However, the large number of wind turbines at both locations suggest that more power could be generated, possibly enough to power a small town or large installation. Further, additional energy could be provided if the turbines are paired to a broader energy storage network and infrastructure that includes batteries. Fourth, renewable energy resources are in line with and support the PLA's drive toward informationization. Finally, renewables, such as solar panels or wind turbines, can be readily replaced or repaired if they are disturbed or damaged by natural causes or other, whereas existing infrastructure, such as extensive powerlines or relay stations, may be more difficult.

It is important to note that renewables are not an energy "silver bullet" for China's civilian or military energy needs. First, it is likely China will remain committed in the near term to its traditional and existing energy infrastructure that is primarily supplied by coal power. Second, currently existing renewable techniques and technologies are mostly limited to fixed sites or static platforms. It is doubtful that on-board renewables will be powerful or compact enough to support complex, torque-intensive, and power-dependent platforms or systems, like the Chinese *MBT-3000* main battle tank, anytime in the near future. However, it is more probable that an all-electric or hybrid variant of the "Warrior" (勇士) tactical vehicle, supported by a network of renewable recharging stations, would be produced. Nevertheless, it may be some time before renewables become portable and powerful enough to support extensive expeditionary sites or larger, mobile platforms and systems. But, as renewables proliferate and China is slowly weaned off its traditional energy sources, the overall net impact from renewables is that they

will make the PLA less vulnerable and more resilient.

Conclusion

China's recent investment in renewables appears to be part of the convergence of political, social, economic, environmental, and national security goals. It is likely PLA and China watchers are witnessing the beginning of a broader and more pronounced energy strategy, one that forges ahead with a new generation of PLA self-sufficiency based on renewables.

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Notes

1. [Baidu Baike](#), 中国人民解放军 77625 部队; Zheng Liguo and Baishu Hua, “可再生资源独立发电系统简介” [Introduction of Renewable Energy and Independent Power Generation Systems], *Rural Electrification*, no. 11 (2007), pp. 50–51.
2. You, Ji. *The Armed Forces of China*. London: I.B. Taurus & Co., 1999; pp. 65–67. See also Blasko, Dennis J. *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 2006.
3. Mulvenon, James. *Soldiers of Fortune: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Military-*

Business Complex, 1978-1998. New York: Routledge, 2015.

4. Elements of the PLA's production units remain and are used to develop remote areas such as the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (中国新建集团).

The Evolution of the PLA's Red-Blue Exercises

By David C. Logan

In the summer of 2016, the PLA completed the most recent round of its “Stride” (跨区) exercises, a series of large-scale military training exercises that prominently feature simulated opposing force confrontations. Militaries and other national security actors have for decades utilized “red teams” to improve training and operations. Red teams provide a dynamic adversary and present the blue or “home” team with a more challenging and realistic training exercise. Sometimes red teams may even be tasked with mimicking a specific country or military unit. In the U.S. and other Western countries, the “Red” force typically represents the adversary, but in China, the designations are reversed, with “Red” units representing the PLA and “Blue” units representing the opposing force.

Red-Blue exercises are valuable opportunities to evaluate a military's capabilities, enhance the difficulty and realism of training exercises, and to prepare for future conflicts against a specific adversary. According to one account, “Using a fierce Blue Force in this manner in exercises, in

one aspect imagines the functional requirements of enemy units and in another aspect also confirms that the actual combat level of our army continuously increases year by year. Whether the Blue Force is strong or weak, in one aspect simulates the real situation of potential opponents and in another aspect also establishes the current level of capabilities of the Red Force" ([China Youth Daily](#), July 24, 2015).

Chinese observers of the PLA have long lamented personnel shortcomings in terms of education, "old-style thinking," and training ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2013). The incorporation of more complex weapons systems and planning for joint operations have only further increased the need for high-quality personnel, but training has reportedly been overly scripted and unrealistic. The focus on Red-Blue exercises is part of a larger push to improve overall force training.

Though the PLA incorporated Red-Blue exercises later than its Western military counterparts, such training is not entirely new to the PLA. The first PLA confrontation exercises reportedly began in 1985. [1] Despite the potential of Red-Blue exercises, the PLA has failed to fully exploit them. Past exercises were overly scripted and designed more to bolster the reputation of the participating troops rather than improve their operational readiness. In recent years, however, the PLA has attempted to expand, systematize, and professionalize the use of Red-Blue exercises. These exercises provide indicators of the capabilities and threat perceptions of the PLA.

Red-Blue Exercises within the PLA

Two of the more prominent Red-Blue exercises within the PLA are held as part of the annual "Stride" exercises conducted at the Zhurihe (朱

日和) military facility in Inner Mongolia and the "Firepower" (火力) exercises conducted at the Qingtongxia (青铜峡) facilities in Ningxia, though smaller service-specific exercises often incorporate Red-Blue elements ([China Military Online](#), July 12, 2016; [Xinhua](#), July 26, 2016). The Zhurihe facility even plays host to a dedicated Blue Force established in 2014 with personnel from the PLA's 195th Mechanized Infantry Brigade.

It is unclear to what extent the confrontation exercises are intended to prepare forces for actual anticipated conflicts against specific adversaries or are merely meant to enhance the difficulty and realism of the exercises. The Red-Blue exercises are portrayed as a good opportunity to study and learn from the combat tactics of foreign armies ([China Military Online](#), June 5, 2015). Western observers have noted the use of American military doctrine or buildings bearing resemblance to Taiwan government buildings as indications that the PLA was rehearsing for specific conflicts like an invasion of Taiwan ([China Brief](#), February 20, 2015; [The Diplomat](#), August 11, 2015). Reports have indicated that Red Teams are not meant to represent any specific adversary but, rather, are to let PLA troops "confront a 'standardized' enemy on a 'standardized' battlefield and to test whether or not their preparation methods, tactics, and training methods are effective" ([Guancha](#), July 24, 2016). However, some of the participating troops are described as "the main brigade of the main force preparing for the Taiwanese military" and other reports have highlighted the success of a First Group Army armored brigade—troops which are "responsible for countering Taiwanese independence—which managed to penetrate into the central base of the opposition Blue Forces" ([Guancha](#), July 24, 2016; [Sina](#), July 21, 2016).

The confrontation exercises are a chance to experiment, and this past year's Stride exercises reportedly saw a number of battlefield innovations. One Red Force unit from the Southern Theater Command struggled with intense electromagnetic interference in an effort to simulate a more realistic battlefield, especially conditions of challenging electronic warfare ([Guancha](#), July 24, 2016). The unit, however, managed to maintain communications by replacing some of the firmware in its communications equipment and installing new software code supposedly written by members of the unit. The unit was the only one able to successfully maintain all communications capabilities throughout the exercises. One unit equipped with outdated equipment was unable to lob smoke bombs toward the Blue Force, which was necessary to provide cover for an impending Red Force assault. Instead, they used traditional fireworks to create a rudimentary smokescreen and successfully cover their advance ([Guancha](#), July 24, 2016).

Expanding and Improving the PLA's Red-Blue Exercises

In the past, China's Red-Blue exercises have suffered from numerous shortcomings. Past exercises have been criticized as overly formulaic, with participants and commanders overemphasizing the outcome of the exercise, with little attention paid to lessons learned or ways to improve. Commanders were apparently too focused on the overall outcome of the training (i.e. a "win" or a "loss") and often failed to incorporate the lessons of the exercise. ([PLA Daily](#), March 13, 2016). In previous years, during the post-exercise review sessions, troops from the defeated Red Force were called "resentful" at the performance of the Blue Force and some commanders were reported as "chagrined and

ashamed" at their defeat ([China Youth Daily](#), July 24, 2015). Some reports have explained how, in an attempt to bolster the reputation of the participating units, the Red Force was often given important information about the Blue Force and that scenarios were designed so that the Red Force would always win ([Rocket Force News](#), April 29, 2016). One PLA officer criticized a perceived overemphasis on the pursuit of glory and individual success, saying "This idea is not correct and training will become more and more distant from actual combat" ([PLA Daily](#), March 13, 2016).

In recent years, the PLA has sought to both increase the frequency of Red-Blue exercises and the quality of those exercises. The confrontation exercises have even attracted high-level attention in recent years. China's 2013 Defense White Paper specifically identified "force-on-force training" as a goal for enhancing troop training and exercises. According to the White Paper, "The various services and arms are intensifying confrontational and verification-oriented exercises and drills. Based on different scenarios, they organize live force-on-force exercises, online confrontational exercises, and computer-simulation confrontational exercises." [2]

The 2014 Stride exercises were conducted under a new motto intended to convince participants to focus on lessons learned and not overly emphasize the outcome of the exercises. Units were urged to "Emphasize testing, not comparison; emphasize substantive effect, not form; and emphasize review, not winning or losing" (重检验不重评比、重实效不重形式、重检讨不重输赢) ([China Youth Daily](#), July 25, 2014). One report noted that after three years of effort, there had

been recent progress in casting off the “prejudicial thought that ‘Red must always win, Blue must always lose’” ([PLA Daily](#), March 13, 2016).

In addition to the dedicated Blue Force at Zhurihe, both the Theater Commands (and former Military Regions) as well as the individual services have reportedly emphasized the establishment of Blue Forces, the expansion of their numbers, and the improvement of their quality ([China Youth Daily](#), July 24, 2015). Prior to the military reforms, both the Beijing and Nanjing Military Regions had established their own dedicated Blue Forces. The PLA Air Force unveiled its first dedicated Blue Force at 2015’s Firepower exercises held in Shandan, Gansu ([China Military Online](#), September 8, 2015; [China Youth Daily](#), July 24, 2015). The newly formed PLA Rocket Force earlier last year announced the creation of its Blue Army Teaching and Research Section, led by Colonel Diao Guangming (刁光明) ([PLA Daily](#), April 17, 2016). Colonel Diao, who has reportedly participated in more than 20 confrontation exercises, has pushed for more difficult and complex training situations, saying “Those whose peacetime training is overly nice will suffer greatly when they take the battlefield” ([PLA Daily](#), April 17, 2016).

For 2016’s Stride exercise, the PLA Army’s training department issued “Evaluation Standards for Simulated Blue Force Drills” in an effort to further systematize and improve Red-Blue exercises ([PLA Daily](#), August 9). The document is meant to provide guidance to units acting as Blue Force in drills as well as standards to evaluate the performance of those units. The evaluation standards are divided into three sub-categories measuring whether the Blue Force’s performance resembles the adversary, is realistic, and is challenging. Under the guidelines, the

Blue Force would be evaluated in categories such as deployment, tactics, command and control, and safety measures.

The 2016 Stride exercises featured a number of other changes to improve the realism of the exercises. While participants in previous Stride exercises were recommended by superior command units, last year’s participants were chosen at random from the Army units of each of the Theater Commands ([Xinhua](#), July 15, 2016). In the past, Red Forces were only assigned offensive roles, but last year were responsible for both offense and defense ([Xinhua](#), July 15, 2016). More of the exercise was conducted at night and there was a deliberate attempt to incorporate the use of “new type” forces such as “special forces, technological reconnaissance, aerospace reconnaissance, and electromagnetic interference” ([Xinhua](#), July 15, 2016). In evaluating participant’s performance, the weight assigned to the commander’s performance was increased from 20 percent to 35 percent ([Xinhua](#), July 15, 2016).

The PLA’s home teams have not fared well as the PLA’s Red-Blue exercises have become less scripted and more realistic. Reports about the outcome of the 2014 Stride exercises noted that Red teams suffered six losses compared to only a single win against the opposition Blue Force ([China Youth Daily](#), February 13, 2014). Those losses were incurred by Red Forces composed of forces from six of the seven former Military Regions and the “death rate” of the Red Forces was reported at 70 percent ([People’s Daily Online](#), July 24, 2015). Since the establishment of the dedicated Blue Force at Zhurihe, the unit has participated in all three annual Stride exercises conducted at the Zhurihe facility and has amassed a cumulative record of 31 victories

compared to just two losses ([Guancha](#), April 28, 2016).

In a particularly striking example from 2014, Blue Force troops posing as representatives from a local government with sacks of potatoes and cabbage in tow, managed to infiltrate the Red Force camp ([Global Times](#), August 28, 2014). When the Red Force commander came out to greet the false representatives and receive their gifts, an artillery barrage distracted the Red Force guards. In the ensuing chaos, the incognito Blue Force troops managed to capture the Red Force commander.

There have been reports of some limited progress, however. The “big news” of 2016’s Stride exercise was that the Red Team managed to score a simulated “kill” of the Blue Team commander, Senior Colonel Man Guangzhi (满广志) ([Guancha](#), July 24, 2016). In the past, the frustratingly low success of the Red Forces in these confrontation exercises had given rise to a rallying cry of “Capture Man Guanzhi, crush 195,” a reference to both the 195th Mechanized Infantry Brigade, the PLA unit assigned the role of the Blue Force, and Senior Colonel Man . Although the killing of the Blue Force commander was not enough to turn the tide of the exercise in the Red Force’s favor, it was recognized as evidence of progress.

The Red Forces of the newly established PLA Rocket Force appear to have conducted several Red-Blue confrontation exercises independent of the other services. They have been marginally more successful but have still struggled. Since the beginning of the year, the official newspaper of the PLA Rocket Force has run a multi-part series on training improvements made to the PLA Rocket Force and Second Artillery since the 18th

Party Congress. One recent article in the series noted that, during a recent string of Red-Blue exercises, the Red force had a record of five defeats and two victories (*Rocket Force News*, March 22).

Conclusion

The weaknesses of the PLA’s training systems are well documented and have been seen as a drag on the PLA’s operational capabilities ([PLA Daily](#), October 12, 2014). [3] The recent reforms to the military’s Red-Blue exercises will likely help improve the training and operational capabilities of the PLA, as well as the Chinese military’s own understanding of the tactics of potential foreign adversaries. At the same time, the growth and professionalization of the PLA’s Red-Blue exercises also provide a valuable source of information about the threat perception and future trajectory of the PLA. The equipment, tactics, and objectives of the participating troops will reveal the kinds of scenarios PLA anticipates are most likely in the future. For example, the incorporation of a greater diversity of forces shows a greater turn toward realism in training. The fact that earlier rounds of prominent Red-Blue exercises only assigned friendly Red Forces to an offensive role, along with occasional references to Taiwan suggest that perhaps confrontation exercises are conducted with an eye to a future contingency involving Taiwan. However, the practice of randomly selecting participants may help foster broad-based improvement in confrontation training throughout the PLA, but will complicate efforts of both the PLA to focus confrontation training and for observers to discern threat perceptions based on what units are selected. These exercises will also provide an opportunity to better gauge the actual operational capabilities of the PLA.

Gaps still remain in the realism of these exercises. Despite its recent emphasis on joint operations, it appears that the PLA has been somewhat slower to develop complex multi-service confrontation exercises. Most of the Red-Blue exercises carried out so far appear to have been conducted between units of the same service and recent reports on exercises have emphasized seemingly small indicators of progress. For example, as late as 2015, one report highlighted the fact that a PLA Air Force targeting officer had been embedded with a PLA Army combat group (*PLA Daily*, June 9, 2015). The lack of multi-service Red-Blue exercises likely imposes a limit on the realism of such exercises as units confront Blue Teams with only a limited range of capabilities. For example, confrontation exercises involving the PLA Rocket Force have used “electronic Blue Teams” confined to a base, presumably only capable of simulating certain kinds of electronic enemy harassment (*PLA Daily*, April 19, 2016). The lack of dedicated Blue Teams may also hinder the ability to simulate well-coordinated enemy operations. The Rocket Force has been recently described as assembling Blue Teams in a perhaps ad hoc fashion by “drawing from different units technical reconnaissance, electronic warfare, special operations and other elite forces” (*PLA Daily*, September 8, 2016).

China has even begun to bring its Red-Blue exercises to the international stage. In September of last year, units of both the PLA Navy and the Russian Navy participated in joint exercises in the South China Sea (*Xinhua*, September 11, 2016). The exercises, which marked the fifth round since the two countries began the exercises in 2012, for the first time included Red-Blue confrontation exercises (*PLA Daily*, September 14, 2016). This year, the Marine Corps carried out

live-fire drills as well as island-seizing operations (*Xinhua*, September 11, 2016).

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1. David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 95.
2. The text of the 2013 white paper, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, is available at http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7181425.htm.
3. See, for example, Michael S. Chase, et al., “China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA),” *RAND Corporation*, February 2015, especially pp. 43–124.

Xinjiang's Rapidly Evolving Security State

By Adrian Zenz and James Leibold

The recent military rallies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), with machine-gun toting police and armored personnel carriers parading through the streets of the region's major cities, foreground the ongoing instability in

China's far western region ([Tianshan](#), February 28). Since the July 5, 2009 riots in the regional capital of Urumqi, thousands have died in violent clashes between the Muslim Uyghur minority and the Han-dominated Party-state. In response, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has built a multi-tiered security state with, among other components, the recruitment of nearly 90,000 new police officers and a 356 percent increase in the public security budget ([Foreign Affairs](#), December 23, 2016). According to Chinese President Xi Jinping, Xinjiang is now the "frontline" in China's battle against "terrorism," and consequently a testing ground for new policing and surveillance methods ([Xinhua](#), April 28, 2014).

Using data gleaned from public service postings, it is possible to map the development of this security state in Xinjiang. Beginning in 2006, XUAR public and civil service jobs have been publically advertised on the Chinese Internet in an effort to increase transparency. These recruitment adverts contain a range of useful information, such as the number and types of positions plus specific requirements for residency, ethnicity, and education, among other details. By aggregating recruitment adverts across hundreds of regional websites and then disaggregating and analyzing the resulting data, we have compiled a unique dataset that chronicles the ballooning security footprint in Xinjiang. **[1]**

Viewed in aggregate, the figures reveal a massive spike in police recruitment since 2012, with Xi Jinping personally praising local constabularies as the "fists and daggers" of China's counter-terrorism effort ([Xinhua](#), April 28, 2014). In fact, the number of advertised police jobs exceeded 30,000 in 2016 more than the figures from 2008–2012 combined. In part, this is an exercise in

catching up with wealthier, coastal regions, but over time, the target sharpened to focus on sources of unrest in remote, chiefly Uyghur, parts of Southern Xinjiang. Last year, the outgoing Xinjiang Party Secretary Zhang Chunxian declared success, claiming that "the situation in Xinjiang is becoming ever more stable and the number of violent incidents has declined substantially as local authorities strengthen their ability to prevent and fight terrorist activities" ([Renminwang](#), March 9, 2015). Yet the situation remains tense, with his successor Chen Quanguo implementing an even more comprehensive and intrusive policing strategy ([China Brief](#), February 6, 2016).

Data collected from job postings reveals four stages in the Party-state's incremental securitization strategy in Xinjiang:

Stage 1 (2009–2011): Responding to the 2009 Urumqi Riots

Despite claims that Wang Lequan ruled Xinjiang with an "iron-fist" during his fifteen-year tenure as Xinjiang Party Secretary (1994–2010), advertised police recruitment was relatively small prior to the 2009 violence. Yet the 7.5 Incident was a wake-up call, with top Party officials deeply embarrassed by the scale of the violence in Urumqi and their inability to quickly quell the unrest. The situation only stabilized after Beijing rushed 14,000 People's Armed Police (PAP, 武警) forces as well as the relatively recently formed Special Police Units (SPUs, 特警) from 31 provinces to Xinjiang ([China Digital Times](#), July 10, 2009; [Sina xinwen](#), August 17, 2009). In response, the XUAR government initiated its first-ever recruitment of SPU officers by advertising 2,655 positions in December 2009.

While SPUs existed in Xinjiang prior to 2009, their numbers were insufficient to deal with large-scale security threats. SPU officers are heavily equipped with sub-machine guns and bulletproof vests. Physical requirements for admission are also very demanding, with new recruits subject to intense mental and physical training ([Guojia gongwuyuan ju](#), April 27, 2011; [Zhongguo Gansu wang](#), January 18). At that time, the state was intent on investing large sums for the creation of a highly trained and heavily equipped strike force.

The second part of the state's response to the 7.5 Incident was an investment in new personnel across the public security agencies in the XUAR, which includes the regular police force (人民警察). Total security-related recruitment, across all agencies and job types, doubled, rising from 6,876 positions in 2006–2008 to 15,841 in 2009–2011. XUAR officials evidently sought to quickly boost the region's undermanned security personnel after Zhang Chunxian succeeded Wang Lequan as Party Secretary in April 2010.

Stage 2 (2012–13): Expanded Policing and Surveillance in the Rural South

In January 2012, the new secretary of the XUAR Political and Legislative Affairs Committee Xiong Xuanguo announced the recruitment of 8,000 new police officers in order to beef-up security ahead of the 18th CPC National Congress in autumn of that year ([Tianshangwang news](#), February 1, 2012). This intake advertised 11,559 security-related positions, a 57 percent increase in adverts over 2009 and the highest figure yet for Xinjiang. The principal focus was Southern Xinjiang, due to XUAR officials' conviction that the violence perpetrated in Urumqi come from Uyghur migrants from the south. [2]

For the first time in 2012, XUAR officials committed themselves to fully implementing the one village, one policeman (一村一警) scheme, which had been rolled out in various Eastern provinces from the early 2000s ([China Brief](#), September 4, 2015). Under this policy, a single police officer leads up to three assistant police staff (协警 or 辅警) in each rural village or hamlet ([Tianshangwang news](#), February 1, 2012). The latter are a highly informal police force. Assistant police are only supposed to assist regular police officers in their duties, and (in theory) do not possess any enforcement rights (行政执法权). These positions come with lower salaries because pay levels are determined by the local authorities at the county or city district levels. The combination of lower pay, contract-based employment, and lower recruitment requirements renders the assistant police force a highly strategic component of a multi-tiered policing strategy, placing a large garrison of low-skilled security staff under smaller numbers of more highly equipped and trained police.

Most of these assistant police officers were recruited to man small, community-based police sub-stations (警务室) across the XUAR ([Xinjiang Daily](#), December 29, 2012). [3] These comprise both fixed structures and bus-like units that can be transported with trucks, which facilitates a highly mobile form of policing. Correspondingly, 71 percent of the region's 2012 police sub-station recruitment targeted regions with a Uyghur population share of 40 percent or higher, far more than in 2009, when only 40 percent of all security-related recruitment targeted such Uyghur regions. [4] Moreover, 78 percent of advertised police sub-station recruitment positions in 2012 were designated for rural regions, compared to only 42 percent in 2009.

The establishment of a police sub-station network was by no means a Xinjiang innovation. Rather, by the end of 2006, police sub-stations were commonplace across most urban regions of China, while more developed provinces, like Zhejiang, extended their reach into rural communities as well ([Xinhuanet](#), February 5, 2007). Their accelerated implementation in Xinjiang was, at least partially, a response to a string of violent attacks on state targets in Uyghur regions beginning in 2012, as well as a possible factor underlying retaliator attacks.

Stage 3 (2014–2015): Grid-Style Community Policing and Big Data Surveillance

Following a series of high-profile terror attacks, including a suicide car bombing in Beijing (October 2013), train station stabbing in Kunming (March 2014) and market bombing in Urumqi (April 2014), Party officials announced a nationwide counter-terrorism campaign, with Zhang Chunxian declaring a “people’s war on terror” in Xinjiang and Chinese president Xi Jinping calling for “walls made of copper and steel” and “nets spread from the earth to the sky” to capture these “terrorists” ([People’s Daily](#), May 26, 2014; [Xinhua](#), May 29, 2014).

In response, XUAR security-related recruitment again surpassed the 10,000 position mark. The 2014 intake continued the 2012 trend away from a well-equipped, expensive policing force toward a more cost-efficient yet surveillance-intense posture, with most of the new positions based on casual employment contracts.

The 2014 recruitment drive introduced several new employment categories, signaling the regime’s efforts to extend the reach of what offi-

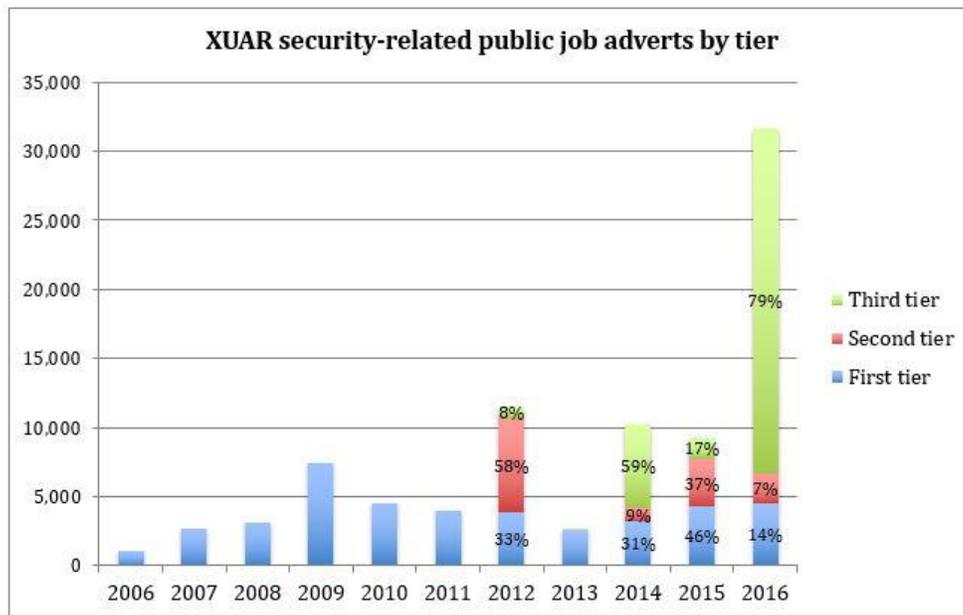
cial were now calling grid-style social management (社会网格化管理). Grid management employs CCTV cameras, mobile Internet technologies and big data analytics to monitor all suspicious activities within a discrete geometric zone. This approach was first trialed in Beijing and Shanghai during the early 2000s and gradually rolled out in the frontier regions of Xinjiang and Tibet after the 2008–2009 unrest ([China Tibet News](#), November 3, 2014; [Yaxinwang](#), January 24, 2013).

In 2014, security recruitment included, for the first time, video surveillance (视频监控) staff. Following the 7-5 Incident, XUAR authorities installed millions of new security cameras, initially in major urban areas like Urumqi but increasingly across rural and remote communities. To maximize their surveillance capabilities, dedicated police technicians were now employed. Other new recruitment categories included patrol and prevention (巡逻防抗) as well as grid patrol and prevention (网格化巡控) staff. Most of these positions were poorly paid and hired on a short-term contract basis. Unlike the previous focus on the rural south, patrol and prevention staff were recruited equally across the XUAR.

The evolution toward new surveillance-oriented, technology-focused security jobs continued in 2015 with the introduction of internet surveillance and prevention (网络监看) positions on top of the existing internet security (网络安全) job category first introduced in 2009. At the same time, 2015 also witnessed a resurgence of more formal recruitment, with 2,502 new positions for police sub-station officers and 3,478 public security or SPU officers. The 2015 intake evidently aimed to shore up staff numbers across all levels of this evolving multi-tiered security apparatus. With a total of 9,314 security-

related adverts, its size remained slightly below that of the 2012 and 2014 intakes.

Stage 4 (2016-): “Convenience Police Stations” and the Massive Expansion of Surveillance Manpower



Source: XUAR civil service, public service and local-level informal public job announcements

Source: XUAR civil service, public service and local-level informal public job announcements

However, the largest boost in policing capabilities took place in 2016. A total of 31,687 security-related positions were advertised, more than a three-fold increase over the previous year. This unprecedented recruitment drive sought to boost the Party-state’s surveillance capabilities across all regions of Xinjiang, as only 35 percent of advertised positions were designated for regions with a Uyghur population of 40 percent or higher.

Notably, 89 percent of these new hires were associated with so-called convenience police stations (便民警务站), which are currently being

built across the XUAR in the tens of thousands. Chen Quanguo had first introduced these stations in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in 2011, where media reports praised them as Lhasa’s “unquenchable lights” ([Sohu news](#), April 3, 2015). [5] After being transferred to Xinjiang

in August 2016, Chen ordered their construction across Xinjiang. In comparison to the more mobile police sub-stations, convenience police stations are (in most cases) sophisticated concrete and bullet-proof installations ([Xinhua](#), October 27, 2016). They house basic medical equipment, umbrellas, charging stations for mobile phones, and many other “convenient” community services, and are festooned with decorative elements or

even ethnic colors and styles. Japan’s *kōban* (交番) or “police box” system is one source of inspiration for Chinese security official ([Renmin Anquan](#), March 3, 2009), although so-called community-based policing is now an international normal.

Local media have praised these convenience police stations as “bringing zero-distance service” (让服务零距离) to the people of Xinjiang ([Urumqi city government](#), October 28, 2016). Yet, their real purpose is surveillance, cleverly designed to make Orwellian levels of securitization more palatable, while bringing 24-hour “zero-distance” policing to an ever-increasing number of neighborhoods. During a recent inspection tour, Chen Quanguo called on these new police officers to

response to any signs of trouble in under a minute's time ([Tianshan](#), February 21). The combination of low-skilled foot-soldiers stationed in and around convenience police stations and high-tech equipment connected to extensive information processing systems has dramatically increased the Party-state's surveillance capabilities, providing what local media claims is "complete coverage without any chinks, blind spots, or blank spaces" ([Boertala bao](#), November 3, 2016).

Conclusion: A State of Insecurity?

The unprecedented security-related recruitment in 2016 completes what we can tentatively call a three-tier policing strategy in Xinjiang. The top tier consists of regular police officers and the SPU police force that are recruited through the civil service and employed on stable, long-term contracts. The middle tier is composed of sub-station police officers who form localized hubs of policing, often in rural and remote regions with low levels of previous securitization. Finally, the third and lowest tier consists of various types of assistant police staff, mostly hired through informal, contract-based recruitment channels. The third-tier is designed as a cost-effective way to leverage the capabilities of the upper two tiers and provides the staffing capacity for grid-style and community-based policing. Between 2012 and 2016, 52 percent of all security-related recruitment in Xinjiang fell into this bottom tier, vastly increasing the panoptic gaze of the Party-state across China's largest territorial unit. This surge in recruitment is continuing in 2017. In January and February alone, the region advertised just under 10,000 new police jobs, nearly all of them third tier positions ([Weikouwang](#), February 28, 2017; [Offcn.com](#), March 6, 2017).

The implications for Xinjiang and China are complex. On the one hand, this more intrusive form of policing has dramatically increased the ability of the Party-state to patrol and control anti-state activities at a local level. The result has been fewer reported terror attacks in Xinjiang from mid-2013 onward, although reporting on such incidents are frequently suppressed. Yet, on the other hand, this heavy-handed approach also creates an atmosphere of insecurity by legitimizing increasingly intrusive surveillance measures that are chiefly focused on the Uyghur minority. In recent months, Southern Xinjiang has experienced at least three violent attacks, as some Uyghurs first buckle and then lash out against this now all-encompassing state pressure ([RFA](#), September 19, 2016; [Reuters](#), January 5; [RFA](#), February 15). This exacerbates the Uyghurs' sense of cultural and physical insecurity as they feel increasingly under siege in their own homeland. By widening the gap of distrust and misinformation between the Uyghur minority and the Han-dominated Party-state, securitization directly undermines long-term social stability — ironically the very aim that it seeks to achieve.

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NOTES

1. These figures are limited to public security agencies (公共安全) and do not include recruitment of the People's Armed Police (人民武装警察) nor the Ministry of State Security (国家安全部). Also, recruitment for the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, 兵团) is not included. Available data for both Xinjiang and other provinces, such as Qinghai and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), indicate that on average, approximately 80 to 90 percent of advertised positions are actually awarded. See [Fischer and Zenz \(2016\)](#) for a detailed account of the methodology.
2. Xu Ping and Wang Ping, "Investigative research into the Uyghur floating population and the 7.5 incident" [7.5 事件与维吾尔族流动人口调查研究], 调查与研究 *Investigation and Research*, 2009 (internal, restricted distribution): pp. 28–40.
3. The informal police staff stationed in rural police sub-stations are referred to as either "police sub-station policemen" (警务室民警) or "village policemen" (村警).
4. Of all advertised positions within the 2012 police sub-station intake, 6,738 were for regular officers and 955 for assistant police officers. The latter marked the first time that Xinjiang recruited security-related staff through temporary job contracts.
5. Very similar installations with slightly different names had previously been inno-

vated in other regions of China, for example "police service stations" (警务综合服务站) in Wuhan since 2012 ([Sina News](#), August 1, 2012). However, the latter do not seem to offer such a wide range of "convenient" citizen services, and are hence more akin to the Japanese *kōban* (discussed below).

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