

# CHINA BRIEF

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## China-Qatar Relations in Perspective

On June 5, Saudi Arabia announced it was cutting diplomatic ties with Qatar and closing its land border in response to Qatar “supporting terrorism.” Bahrain, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates quickly joined, and all denied airspace overflight rights to Qatari airlines. Saudi Arabia and its allies gave Qatar until July 4 to accede to a list of demands. For China, the spat between Saudi Arabia and its allies and Qatar is an unwanted complication between important economic partners.

China maintains close relationships with states on both sides of the Gulf. Its foreign policy statements describe both Saudi Arabia and Iran as “Comprehensive Strategic Partnerships” (全面战略伙伴关系) in the dense bureaucratese of the Ministry of Foreign Relations. This level of partnership means that China has built a deep relationship with both countries and maintains significant cooperation on security issues. By contrast, its relationships with Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain are primarily economic and defined as “Friendly Cooperative Relations” (友好合作关系). Examining China’s response to the Saudi embargo of Qatar as well as China’s broader relationship with the small but strategically important state provides insight into Beijing’s broader Middle East strategy.



Map by Peter Wood

In 2014, during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Qatar, the two countries upgraded their relationship to Strategic Partner (战略伙伴关系), a status that recognized Qatar's role not only as an economic partner but also as a security partner. In his speech at the signing of the joint statement on establishment of the relationship, Xi Jinping stressed the opportunities to improve military exchanges and work together to combat terrorism ([Xinhua](#), November 3, 2014). The text of the agreement laid out an expansive set of goals from increased security cooperation to security exchanges ([Xinhua](#), November 3, 2014). Qatari support for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-led Asia Development Bank were clearly highlighted in the agreement then, and repeatedly emphasized since by members of the foreign ministry ([MFA](#), May 18).

The improvement in relations and expansion to security and political cooperation was built on a solid economic relationship. Since 2013, China has been

the world's largest consumer of oil from the Middle East. Qatar is the world's leading exporter of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), and in 2014 was China's largest supplier of LNG, though imports appear to have moderated somewhat since then ([EIA](#), April 30, 2016).

While the rate of increase in China's demand for energy will likely decrease, the proportion of natural gas as a percent of total consumption is projected to double to 11 percent through 2035. **[1]** This demand is likely to increase the importance of the largest LNG exporting nations—particularly Qatar, Oman and Iran—to Chinese energy markets. The shift in Chinese imports could have consequences for its relations with the Gulf states.

China has largely managed to successfully navigate the animosity between Iran and Saudi Arabia, maintaining good relations with both countries. Chinese demand for oil has benefited all the states in the region, and Chinese weapons are increasingly sought

out by both states. China and Saudi Arabia have recently made moves to deepen their security cooperation and have a weapons export relationship that stretches dates back to the 1980s ([China Brief](#), March 2).

However, this delicate balance may be reaching a tipping point, as China continues to improve military relations with Iran and increase its support for the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria ([China Brief](#), August 22, 2016). Particularly since 2014, China's military exchanges and exercises with Iran have become more regular and more prominent, including a joint exercise held in mid-June of this year ([China Brief](#), February 4, 2015; [China Brief](#), March 7, 2016; [MOD](#), June 16).

A core part of Saudi Arabia's demands is that Qatar cut all ties with Iran ([People's Daily](#), June 24). These relationships make the recent flare-up between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and its allies all the more awkward for Beijing.

Responding to a question about China's stance on the crisis, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Hua Chunying's response was typically subdued: "We are aware of the reports. China hopes that the countries involved can resolve their differences through negotiation, remain united and together promote stability in the region" ([FMPRC](#), June 5).

In addition to maintaining economic relations throughout the Middle East, China is committed to expanding its ability to project military power across the region. This includes the aforementioned military exchanges, port visits and exercises with Oman, its naval base in Djibouti and additional bases in, according to a recent U.S. department of defense report, "countries with which it has long-standing, friendly relationships" ([DOD](#), June 6). This is understood to include Pakistan, with whom China has its closest diplomatic relationship—an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership" ([NBC](#), June 19; see map).

While the embargo against Qatar has not been extended to include petroleum, Qatar has yet to respond to Saudi Arabia's demands to its satisfaction, setting the stage for further escalation. Historically, China's non-interventionist foreign policy has allowed it to remain neutral in most inter-regional disputes. But as Iranian and Qatari LNG begin to make up a larger proportion of Chinese petroleum imports, and Chinese military involvement in the region becomes more pronounced, balancing between Iran and Saudi Arabia may no longer be possible.

### Notes

1. BP, World Energy Outlook, 2017 <http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/energy-economics/energy-outlook-2017/bp-energy-outlook-2017.pdf>

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## China, Russia Commit to "Dual Track" Approach Toward Korean Peninsula Issues

On July 4, North Korea launched a multi-stage Hwasong-14 ballistic missile. During the flight test, the missile reached an altitude of 2,300 km and a lateral distance of 900 km ([People's Daily](#), July 4). Though the test followed a "lobbed" trajectory (higher altitude over a shorter distance than in a true combat scenario), the altitude and other measures place the Hwasong-14 in the class of Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM).

The ICBM test is merely the latest in a growing list of actions by North Korea to put itself at odds with its northern neighbor. A nuclear test and satellite launch (widely viewed as a missile test) in early 2016 put stress on China-North Korea relations ([China Brief](#), February 8). This year

has seen no improvement, as North Korea used its annual military parade in April to showcase several new missile types, and there has been a steady drumbeat of additional missile tests ([Xinhua](#), April 15; [Xinhua](#), March 7). North Korea's actions have steadily increased calls for China to exercise its economic influence over its neighbor and "curb" its nuclear weapons and missile programs.

In March, Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi (王毅) attempted to reframe Chinese policy toward North Korea, recommending a "dual-track approach" (双轨并进) and "double suspension" (双暂停) ([MFA](#), March 8). As Wang explained, "[North Korea] may suspend its nuclear and missile activities in exchange for the suspension of large-scale U.S.-[South Korea] military exercises...We may follow the dual-track approach of denuclearizing the peninsula on the one hand and establishing a peace mechanism on the other" ([Xinhua](#), March 8). Wang also argued that China had "done its best" to bring the relevant parties to the negotiation table.

This new policy did little to mollify U.S. policymakers, who see China as having control over North Korea via its trade relationship. U.S. ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, for example, immediately responded to Wang's remarks by saying that "positive action" was needed from North Korea before negotiations were possible ([Reuters](#), March 8). In June, the 8th Strategic and Economic Dialogue between China and the United States yielded mostly platitudes ([People's Daily](#), June 8). A further meeting between U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi (杨洁篪) during the U.S.-China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue on June 21 ended with promises by both sides to

continue the "strict implementation" of UN Security Council Resolutions ([People's Daily](#), June 21).

However, just over a week later, furious with apparent Chinese inaction on trade with North Korea, the U.S. Treasury Department enacted sanctions against the Bank of Dandong for "continuing to serve as a gateway for North Korea to access the U.S. and international financial systems despite U.S. and UN sanctions" ([Treasury](#), June 29). Also included in the sanctions were Dalian Global Unity Shipping Co., Ltd., for transporting "700,000 tons of freight annually, including coal and steel products". [1] In response, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Lu Kang stated that "China has always opposed unilateral sanctions outside the framework of the Security Council" ([MFA](#), June 30).

This is not the first time that Chinese banks have been implicated in helping violate UN resolutions. In 2005, the U.S. Treasury named Banco Delta Asia (汇业银行) in Macau a "primary laundering concern" for North Korea that among other things "handles the bulk of the DPRK's precious metal sales, and helps North Korean agents conduct surreptitious, multi-million dollar cash deposits and withdrawals" ([Treasury](#), September 15, 2005). Further measures in 2007 spooked the Bank of China into ceasing all transactions through Banco Delta Asia, which significantly hurt North Korea's money laundering operations ([Treasury](#), March 14, 2007; [Armscontrolwonk](#), June 4, 2007).

China's consistent inability to cut off trade with North Korea points to a broader unwillingness to step up sanctions. For Chinese leaders, the basic calculus remains the same: stepping up pressure on North Korea's economy means at a minimum loss of valuable trade and at worst the risk of a collapse of the North Korean regime.



China's current "dual track approach" and "double suspension" policies therefore represent its best outcome and would result in a de-fanged North Korea and reduced U.S.-South Korean military capability. Chinese policies gained additional support when, on July 5, Russia and China issued a joint statement on the Korean Peninsula committing the two parties to the policy while additionally condemning the deployment of the THAAD anti-missile system ([MFA](#), July 5).

Russia's participation in the joint statement marks an end to its conspicuous absence from involvement in the North Korean issue. Moscow continues to view U.S. presence in the region with greater trepidation than it does a fully capable North Korean nuclear program ([Eurasia Daily Monitor](#), March 28).

Like China, while a more stable situation on the Korean Peninsula would be welcomed, it is not, in fact Russia's greatest security priority. For China, Russian endorsement of its dual track/double suspension approach makes it even more unlikely that China will adopt a more strict approach to North Korea.

**Notes:**

1. Both Dalian and Dandong are important commercial hubs, Dalian on Bohai Gulf, and Dandong at the mouth of the Yalu River and astride the primary rail link between China and North Korea.

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## Nuclear Bomber Could Boost PLAAF Strategic Role, Create Credible Triad

Michael S. Chase

Chinese President Xi Jinping has charged the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) with transforming itself into a "powerful people's air force with integrated air and space and offensive and defensive capabilities" ([iFeng](#), September 1, 2016). This undertaking aligns with the capabilities prioritized in China's 2015 defense white paper, *China's Military Strategy*, and one that PLAAF Commander Ma Xiaotian has suggested his service must approach with a sense of urgency ([Defense White Paper](#), May 29, 2015; [iFeng](#), September 1, 2016). One important part of this transformation is strengthening the PLAAF's strategic deterrence and long-range strike capabilities. Xi has expressed personal interest in China's bombers. In February 2015 Xi and other members of the Central Military Commission visited a PLAAF bomber base near Xi'an to inspect China's newest bomber variant, the H-6K ([Xinwen Lianbao](#), February 17, 2015). China appears to have even more ambitious plans for its future strategic bomber force.

According to the Department of Defense's latest annual report to Congress on Chinese military power, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017*, the PLAAF "is developing a strategic bomber that officials expect to have a nuclear mission." **[1]** Indeed, the PLAAF, which has long seen its contribution to China's strategic deterrence posture overshadowed by the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) and more recently by the PLA Navy (PLAN), ap-

pears to be moving in the direction of developing a modern nuclear deterrence and strike capability of its own. A PLAAF nuclear bomber capability “would provide China with its first credible nuclear ‘triad’ of delivery systems dispersed across land, sea, and air.” [2]

### China’s New Strategic Bomber

PLAAF Commander Ma Xiaotian foreshadowed this development in fall 2016 when he publicly confirmed China’s development of a “next-generation, long-range strike bomber” ([China Daily](#), September 2, 2016). General Ma did not reveal any details related to the new strategic bomber, but subsequent Chinese commentary suggests it will be called the H-20, and that it will have both conventional and nuclear deterrence and strike missions. According to a February 2017 article that appeared in *China Youth Daily* and was published in English the next day on *China Military Online*, China’s new strategic bomber is likely to feature “good stealth performance,” very long range, a larger bomb load than China’s current bomber, the H-6K, nuclear and conventional strike capabilities, and “strong electronic combat capability” ([China Military Online](#), February 17). Additionally, the H-20 should be “capable of large-capacity data fusion and transmission,” so that it will be able to “serve as a C4ISR node and interact with large sensor platforms like UAV, early warning aircraft and strategic reconnaissance aircraft to share information and target data.” Although the authors are unclear about many of the details, including the potential targets the new bomber might hold at risk, its range, and other requirements, they underscore the importance of it having nuclear and conventional strike capability. With respect to “nuclear-conventional integration,” the authors write, “The new-generation long-range bomber will have both nuclear and regular strike

capability to hit the enemy’s key links and systemic weaknesses” ([China Military Online](#), February 17). The authors of the *China Youth Daily* article do not specify what type or types of munitions the new bomber will carry. Nor do they say anything about the possibility of adding nuclear strike capabilities for the PLAAF’s H-6K bombers, which China used to conduct long range patrols around Taiwan and in the South China Sea last year and are currently the PLAAF’s most advanced bombers. Of note, however, according to the May 2017 worldwide threat assessment the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency presented to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, China is pursuing not only air-launched cruise missiles for its aircraft but also “two, new air-launched ballistic missiles, one of which may include a nuclear payload.” [3]

### The PLAAF and Nuclear Deterrence

A nuclear role for the PLAAF would also likely enhance its status within the PLA and help realize its goal of becoming a “strategic air force,” a concept that calls for it to play a decisive role in protecting Chinese national security interests, field capabilities commensurate with China’s status as a major power, and enjoy an institutional status on par with the other services. This aspiration apparently requires the PLAAF to strengthen its strategic deterrence and strike capabilities as well as to enhance its ability to perform other warfighting and MOOTW missions. For the PLAAF, its transformation into a “strategic air force” is probably also focused on ensuring its bureaucratic status and influence are commensurate with those of the PLA’s other services, an important consideration in a traditionally ground force-dominated military.

Some observers credit the PLAAF's bomber force with at least a residual capability to deliver nuclear weapons. [4] According to the 2017 edition of the China military power report, however, the PLAAF "does not currently have a nuclear mission." [5] The PLAAF clearly had some capability to airdrop nuclear weapons early on, as demonstrated by China's nuclear testing program, but its nuclear bomber capabilities appear to have atrophied in the 1970s and 1980s. One possibility is that Chinese strategists concluded at the time that the PLAAF's antiquated bombers would be unable to penetrate enemy air defenses, and thus provided little value in terms of nuclear deterrence. Consequently, as China's land-based strategic missile capabilities increased in numbers and sophistication, the PLARF, (known as PLA Second Artillery Force until December 2015) supplanted the PLAAF as the cornerstone of nuclear deterrence in China.

As the PLAAF pursues its "strategic air force" vision, however, it now appears to have strong incentives to pursue a revitalized nuclear deterrence and strike mission and the associated nuclear capabilities as it modernizes its bomber force. This judgment is based on comments and writings by Chinese strategists that advocate the development of advanced bombers capable of conducting nuclear as well as conventional missions. These actions would improve the survivability of China's nuclear force if the bombers were operated in a survivable manner to assure survivability from a short-warning attack by potentially both increasing the number of targets for a potential adversary and allowing the bombers to escape an attack by launching for survival. They would also offer new strategic signaling options and an additional layer of nuclear strike options in the region beyond what is currently available with China's land- and sea-based strategic missile force.

From an organizational perspective, nuclear capabilities could help bolster the PLAAF's "strategic air force" reputation as it compares itself to other major air forces like the USAF and Russian Air Force. The PLAAF very likely sees its new strategic bomber in this context. The *China Youth Daily* article cited above indicates that the new strategic bomber marks the PLAAF's "transformation from a big force to a strong force," and states that a modern long-range strategic bomber represents "an indispensable part of a major country's strategic strike system" ([China Military Online](#), February 17). Specifically, according to the authors, "The large long-range bomber has always been a weak point for the PLA Air Force, which is at the critical juncture of moving from quantitative accumulation to qualitative change and from being a big force to a strong force." Furthermore, they argue, "The new-generation LRSB will considerably improve China's strategic attack capability and make the PLA Air Force a strategic air force in the true sense." Finally, turning from the bomber's implications for the PLAAF, the authors emphasize its importance "for countering nuclear blackmail from superpowers, solving surrounding maritime disputes that impede China's rise, and preserving world peace" ([China Military Online](#), February 17).

From an institutional interests perspective, the status of PLA Rocket Force as China's "core force for strategic deterrence" and the rising prominence of the PLAN's contribution to the nuclear deterrence mission—reflected in its Jin-class SSBNs and its plans for follow-on SSBNs and SLBMs in the future—suggests the PLAAF could lose ground if it doesn't play a role in this area as well. In that sense, adding a nuclear capability would likely give the PLAAF an opportunity to increase its prestige while bolstering its contri-

bution to the broader strategic deterrence mission. Other organizational incentives for regaining a nuclear mission include strengthening of the PLAAF's status vis-à-vis the other services, especially now that the PLAN has a nuclear mission as well as the PLARF. Rather than ceding this area to the PLARF and PLAN, the PLAAF might seek a voice on matters of China's nuclear strategy and force modernization, not to mention a share of the budget associated with the PLA's nuclear mission. Finally, the PLAAF might want its own capabilities to strike certain enemy targets, rather than relying exclusively on other services to hold those targets at risk.

There are also several possible bureaucratic downsides for the PLAAF if it develops nuclear capabilities. One of these could be the risk of embarrassment or other more severe consequences resulting from any potential error related to nuclear weapons storage, handling, transportation, or security, areas in which it would need to develop and refine capabilities it presumably has not maintained for many years. Additionally, the costs of assuring the physical security and operational reliability of the nuclear weapons could be considerable. On balance, however, regaining a nuclear mission would likely boost the PLAAF's role and support its transformation into a "strategic air force," while also giving China an increased menu of options for strategic signaling and regional nuclear deterrence and strike operations.

### **Implications for the United States**

The PLAAF appears to be moving toward a nuclear deterrence and strike role with the development of new bomber capabilities. If realized, China for the first time would have an operationally deployed nuclear triad. The possibility of an emerging nuclear mission for the PLAAF, and of

this change in China's nuclear posture, highlights the importance of discussions related to the implications for strategic stability and nuclear issues in the US-China relationship. Such discussions should take place as part of the US-China military-to-military relationship, such as during senior leader and counterpart conversations and exchanges. Continuing to develop and use a common lexicon to address nuclear issues is one critically important component of this dialogue. Although the PLAAF will need to display its nuclear bomber capabilities if it wants them to be useful for deterrence purposes, the longstanding reluctance of PLARF leaders to engage in detailed discussions of nuclear issues at an official level suggests that, at least initially, PLAAF leaders might not be receptive to such exchanges either. Thus, early discussions on the PLAAF's nuclear role would probably need to take place at a non-governmental, informal Track 2 level, or by incorporating more PLAAF participants into existing Track 2 or Track 1.5 (informal, semi-official) exchanges.

The United States will also need to consider the regional security implications of a nuclear PLAAF, particularly regarding concerns about extended deterrence and strategic stability in Northeast Asia. U.S. allies, especially Japan, may be concerned that PLAAF nuclear bomber capabilities could be part of a more varied set of regional nuclear strike options and might suggest movement away from China's longstanding nuclear no first use (NFU) policy. Any such developments could create new challenges for extended deterrence, underscoring the importance of continuing to strengthen U.S.-Japan exchanges on these issues.

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**Notes**

1. Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2017 (CMPR 2017), May 15, 2017, p. 61, [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.PDF](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2017_China_Military_Power_Report.PDF)
2. CMPR 2017, p. 61.
3. Defense Intelligence Agency, "Worldwide Threat Assessment," May 2017, p. 10, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Stewart\\_05-23-17.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Stewart_05-23-17.pdf).

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## Xi Jinping and China's Traditionalist Restoration

Zi Yang

In 1934, confronted with rising pro-communist sentiments in his country, Chiang Kai-shek, leader of China's Nationalist Party, launched the neotraditionalist New Life Movement (新生活运动) as part of a comprehensive anti-communist program that sought to use traditional values as a counterweight against Bolshevik-inspired revolutionist ideas. Fast forward to today's China and the head of China's Communist Party is actively promoting a wave of neotraditionalism. Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the need to "advance and enrich outstanding traditional Chinese culture (中华优秀传统文化)" (CCP News, July 22, 2015). Why is Xi following this strategy and what are his end goals? In addition to immediate political aims, Xi's neotraditionalist pol-

icy is part of a long-term vision to remake Chinese culture and society by weaving together selected traditional values with contemporary national consciousness.

### Xi Jinping's Neotraditionalism

In politics neotraditionalism means "the deliberate revival and revamping of old cultures, practices, and institutions for use in new political contexts and strategies" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). After assuming the presidency, Xi has repeatedly touted traditional Chinese culture to the public. Xi's emphasis on culture mirrors the strategy of his fallen rival Bo Xilai, whose signature campaign as the party secretary of Chongqing was the neo-Maoist "Sing Red and Strike Black (唱红打黑)," a revival of Mao-era culture and the suppression of criminality. While comparable to Bo on the "strike black" front, Xi's cultural policy is less about "singing red," yet it appeals to a much broader base of Chinese conservatives rather than just the extreme Left.

While Xi has emulated Mao's statecraft in many ways, his neotraditionalism deviates from the Maoist path (*China Brief*, March 6, 2015). In sharp contrast to the iconoclastic Mao, who viewed the "old society" (旧社会) with contempt, Xi declared traditional thought and culture the "soul" (灵魂) of the nation (*Xinhua*, August 8, 2016). "Outstanding traditional culture is a country and nation's basis for continuation and development. Losing it is the same as severing a country and nation's lifeline" (*Phoenix News*, September 5, 2016). Thus, "A country and nation's power and prosperity must always be supported by a flourishing culture. The prosperous development of Chinese culture is the prerequisite to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (*Phoenix News*, September 5, 2016).

Xi's use of traditional culture goes much further than his predecessor Hu Jintao, who also used Confucian rhetoric. Xi believes outstanding traditional culture is the "foundation" of the Party's culture and "vital wellspring" of the Party's set of socialist core values (社会主义核心价值观)—an astonishing statement that positioned traditional culture as the basis of the official code of behavior that governs all party members ([Guangming Online](#), June 21; [Qiushi](#), September 13, 2016). In a November 2016 speech to the country's writers and artists, Xi urged them to "devote major efforts in propagating traditional culture.... Extract essence and draw energy from the treasure vault of Chinese culture.... [And] not to blaspheme ancestors" ([Xinhua](#), November 30, 2016).

Xi's analog to the "little red book," titled *Classical Aphorisms by Xi Jinping* (习近平用典) was published in 2015. The preface, "Draw Power from Chinese Culture" trumpets Xi as a role model in learning and applying traditional ethics, and calls on the nation to build the present and future with those values in mind. Unusually for a book dedicated to speeches and writings of the Communist Party's general secretary, the volume contains zero quotes from Marx and Mao. Instead, reading like an emperor's handbook, it is divided into chapters on various aspects of governance filled with Xi's favorite classical maxims.

### The Traditionalist Restoration

Following this spirit, the Party Central Committee and the State Council released an outline of China's cultural revival project in January 2017 titled "Opinions on the Implementation of the Development of Outstanding Traditional Chinese Culture" ([Xinhua](#), January 25). Interestingly,

Xinhua's English-language service only published a brief synopsis of this document, perhaps to minimize international attention ([Xinhua](#), January 26).

This is the first time the central leadership became directly involved in traditional culture-related work ([Xinhua](#), February 6). The Party will lead the project with the whole society in participation. Cultural revival will be selective depending on the Party's vision and will affect all spheres of life including education, arts, architecture, holidays, historic preservation, and even urban planning. Besides counterbalancing perceived cultural xenophilia, the project's goals include assuring the continuation of traditional culture, raising the public's cultural awareness, safeguarding cultural security, strengthening China's soft power, and the modernization of national governance ([Xinhua](#), January 25).

A publicity campaign has also been in place to mobilize public opinion. On February 7, 2017, the *People's Daily* published an editorial titled "Salute our Cultural Traditions" where it argues a rising China needs self-confidence predicated upon traditional culture ([People's Daily](#), February 7). Two weeks later, another article suggests assigning greater value to "traditional culture education" ([People's Daily](#), February 23). A March 2017 article calls for greater traditional education among the Chinese youth, characterizing it as a "soul-casting project" (铸魂工程) ([People's Daily](#), March 23).

In June, Shandong Province became the first in China to institute outstanding traditional Chinese culture classes for all primary and secondary school students. The curriculum will be based on the Four Books and Five Classics (四书五经) that constitute the core of Confucian learning ([China News Online](#), June 26). Chinese

teachers can now get a certificate in traditional culture education. The training program includes ancient philosophy, basic classical Chinese, traditional arts, pedagogical methods, and high-level special subject studies ([Sina News](#), June 13).

Outside of the schoolyard, new television shows are experimenting with ways to popularize traditional culture ([China Economic Net](#), April 12). Symposiums are being held across China to discuss local modes of cultural revival ([China Finance Online](#), April 19). People's Liberation Army servicemen were told to seek courage and devotion from traditional culture and lion-hearted heroes of ancient China ([PLA Daily](#), February 9). Beyond business calculations, entrepreneurs are considering methods to promote universal Chinese values via the "One Belt One Road" initiative ([Mingcheng News Online](#), April 16). In distant corners like Xinjiang's Hutubi County and Wusu City, sworn Marxist cadres have now become eager pupils of Confucian and Legalist treatises ([Sina News](#), May 16; [Sina News](#), May 19). Even prisons are organizing traditional art performances and Confucianism lessons to "awaken" the good conscience of inmates ([Red Net](#), May 19; [Xinhua](#), May 8, 2016). A nationwide revival of traditional values is taking shape.

### Why is Xi Fixated on Neotraditionalism?

Xi's neotraditionalism is not a newly minted part of his public persona. Xi's habit of using classical allegories and adages in public communication can be traced back to his early years as a county administrator. **[1]** While his personal interest in traditional China might have to do with family upbringing—his father Xi Zhongxun was from the conservative northwest—the employment of neotraditionalism in politics benefits Xi and the Party both immediately and in the long run.

Marxism and its various incarnations has lost all appeal with ordinary Chinese. The arcane language and concepts of Marxism were never popular with the public to begin with. Even during the heydays of socialism from 1949 to 1978, people were encouraged to read Mao's vernacular essays rather than Marx or Lenin's works. The Chinese additions to Marxism—Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Three Represents, and the Scientific Development Concept—although still serving as guiding ideologies to the Party, spark minimal interest with the common people.

The Party's deep-seated fear of color revolutions (颜色革命) means it needs a robust set of conservative cultural values to offset the attraction of westernization and liberalization ([Huffington Post](#), August 27, 2016). Moreover, according to veteran China watcher Willy Lam, one item among Xi's unpublicized agenda is to turn the Chinese Communist Party into a "perennial ruling party" ([YouTube](#), July 16, 2015). In order for this to happen, a perennial ideology is a requirement. Since adopting liberalism is not an option, the only recourse is returning to the well-trodden path of traditional China, where emperors and mandarins ruled for centuries based on classical philosophy.

The breakdown of morality (道德) is an issue concerning many Chinese. According to a survey conducted by *China Youth Daily*, 89.3 percent of respondents believe there is "cultural deficiency" in present-day Chinese society, among which 45.7 percent think the "deficiency" is "very serious" ([Guangming Online](#), March 7). A majority of Chinese feels that there is no moral constrain on the behavior of anyone. Even soft-spoken ex-Premier Wen Jiabao remarked: "the downward spiral of morality has reached a very serious point" ([Sina News](#), April 18, 2011). While this

“spiritual vacuum” has multiple origins, the yearning for restoration of traditional virtues is common. Research shows cultural conservatism (文化保守主义) is making a comeback. In response to the question “How would you evaluate the role of traditional Chinese culture in contemporary everyday life,” 28.9 percent of 2,976 survey participants chose “very important,” 47.4 percent “important,” and only 3.5 percent chose “unimportant.” [2] In an era of materialism and greed, many are searching for spiritual fulfillment (PRI, May 5).

As a conservative and an outspoken critic of decadence, Xi has a personal interest in curing China’s social ills by bringing back time-tested values (Xinhua, January 16, 2014). [3] Politically, however, Xi’s investment in the “spiritual market” repositioned himself as the defender of traditional China in a *kulturkampf* against corrosive social vices and foreign cultures—which almost one-in-three (28.9 percent) Chinese believe have “adversely affected traditional Chinese culture” (Guangming Online, March 7). Aligning himself as defender of traditional values fortifies his personality cult with more substance and appeal. This is a calculated move on part of Xi, as it enhances his popularity as a crusader for conservative aspirations, and diverts criticisms against the Party’s disastrous cultural policies in the past that are largely responsible for today’s spiritual crisis.

## Conclusion

Xi Jinping’s China is witnessing the unfolding of a cultural revival campaign. Although state-driven cultural revival is a win with the mostly conservative Chinese, the Party-state’s leading position in the campaign means it has all the power to determine what is an “outstanding (优秀)” element of traditional culture. It is therefore

very unlikely that China can truly achieve a cultural renaissance based on the principle of “let a hundred schools of thought contend (百家争鸣)”. Yet perhaps this campaign can open up forums for debate about culture in contemporary China—then the possibility is endless. In the coming months, expect more on the cultural front from China’s highest-ranking neotraditionalist.

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## Notes

1. 知之深 爱之切 (Zhizhishen, aizhiqie, December 1, 2015, pp. 35–57. (Douban Books).
2. Liu Shaojie (刘少杰), Ideological Shifts in Contemporary China (当代中国意识形态变迁), Central Translation Agency (中央编译局), 2015 (Google Books).
3. Liu Wei (刘伟), “论习近平传统文化观的形成根据与实践要求,” *Theory and Reform* (理论与改革), September 14, 2016, pp. 44–45. <http://oversea.cnki.net/kcms/detail/detail.aspx?recid=&File-Name=LLGG201605012&DbName=CJFD2016&DbCode=CJFD>

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## Swarms at War: Chinese Advances in Swarm Intelligence

Elsa Kania

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) anticipates that future warfare will be "unmanned, invisible, and silent" ("无人、无形、无声"战争), with ever higher degrees of "intelligentization" (智能化). [1] PLA strategists expect that future, autonomous combat involving unmanned systems, as well as the joint operations of unmanned and manned systems, will have a dramatic impact on traditional operational models ([PLA Daily](#), January 5, 2016). Future UAV swarming (无人机集群) will involve "intelligentized" and semi- or fully autonomous systems. [2] The PLA recognizes the disruptive potential of these techniques, which could be used for saturation assaults (饱和攻击) to overwhelm the defenses of high-value targets, including perhaps U.S. fighter jets or aircraft carriers ([Science and Technology Daily](#), March 29; [China News Network](#), November 2, 2016; [China Military Online](#), December 31, 2016).

Chinese advances in artificial intelligence, including deep learning techniques, have enabled considerable progress in swarm intelligence. There is technical and conceptual research, development, and testing ongoing across Chinese academic institutions, the private sector, defense industry, and military research institutes to support such capabilities. At this point, given the limited information available and the relative opacity of these efforts, it is difficult to compare U.S. and Chinese advances in swarm intelligence. Nonetheless, the PLA has closely tracked U.S. initiatives focused on swarm tactics (e.g., [Science and Technology Daily](#), March 29; [Science and](#)

[Technology Daily](#), May 30, 2016) and seeks to develop countermeasures and comparable capabilities. Looking forward, the PLA's advances in intelligent unmanned systems and swarm tactics could serve as a force multiplier for its future military capabilities.

### Chinese Breakthroughs in Swarm Intelligence

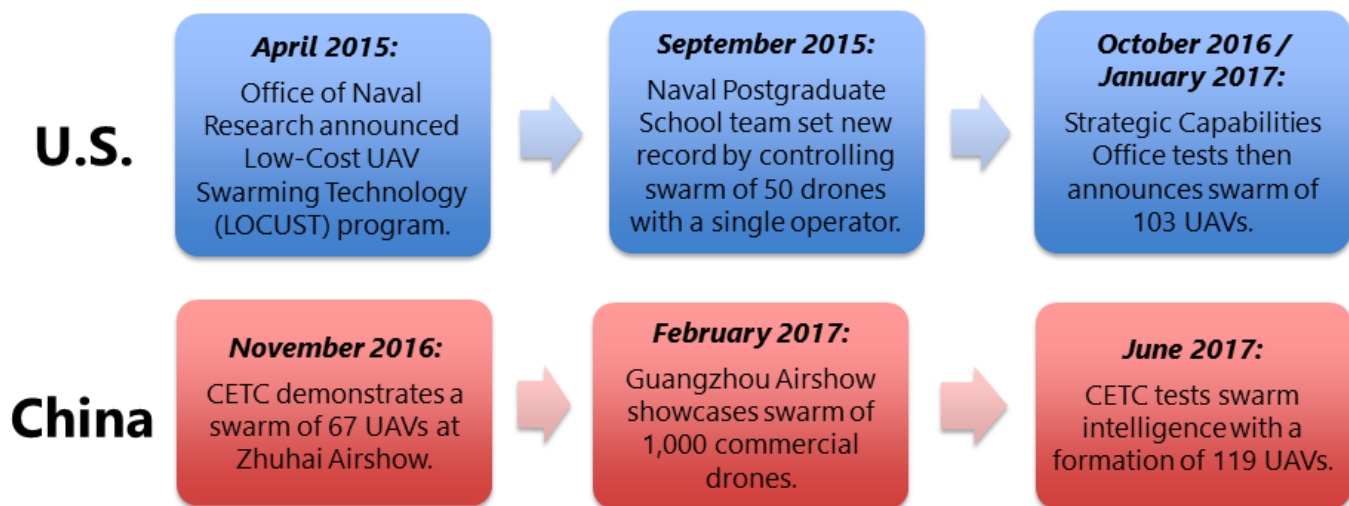
During the fall 2016 Zhuhai Airshow, official media prominently featured Chinese breakthroughs in swarm intelligence. To date, the efforts of the China Electronics Technology Group Corporation (CETC) appear to be the most advanced. In November 2016, CETC, in partnership with Tsinghua University and Posong Technology (泊松技术), revealed its progress in swarm intelligence with a formation of sixty-seven small fixed-wing UAVs utilizing autonomous swarm control and dynamic centerless networks with communication and coordination among UAVs ([CETC](#), November 1, 2016; [China Military Online](#), November 6, 2016). Such swarms could be used for reconnaissance, strike, jamming, and other missions. For instance, CGI sequence available in media reports at the time showed the swarm formation in action, first hunting and then dive-bombing and destroying an enemy missile launcher ([Weibo](#), November 6, 2016). This technique possesses advantages in efficiency and survivability due to the distribution of capabilities across the system, as well as lower costs for offense relative to the difficulty of defending against a swarm.

In the spring of 2017, a formation of 1,000 UAVs at the Guangzhou Airshow by a private company reportedly again broke records ([Global Times](#), February 14). At the time, military experts quoted in Chinese media similarly highlighted that this technique could be used to create a distributed system with payload modules mounted on small drones ([Global Times](#), February 14). However, the actual sophistication of this particular effort—and potential linkage to military efforts—is unclear.

profile Chinese tests have seemingly deliberately followed U.S. tests and demonstrations with larger ones of their own.

### China's National Initiatives in Artificial Intelligence

China's future capabilities in swarm intelligence, military-use AI, will be enabled by high-level plans and extensive funding. China's new national roadmap for artificial intelligence ad-



Once again, in June 2017, CETC demonstrated its advances in swarm intelligence with the test of 119 fixed-wing UAVs, beating its previous record of sixty-seven ([Xinhua](#), June 11). This swarm engaged in catapult-assisted takeoffs and demonstrated complex formations. At the time, CETC commentary highlighted that swarm intelligence is future of intelligent unmanned systems, and CETC UAV expert Zhao Yanjie (赵彦杰) characterized future intelligent swarms as a disruptive force to “change rules of the game” in warfare ([Xinhua](#), June 11).

Although it is difficult to compare the sophistication of U.S. and Chinese efforts, these high-

vances an ambitious agenda for the development of this critical emerging technology through 2030 ([MoST](#), February 16). According to Minister of Science and Technology Wan Gang, this framework will focus on building up national capabilities in artificial intelligence, the applications of AI technologies, policies to handle resulting risks (e.g. job losses), and international collaboration ([Xinhua](#), June 29). This development plan will also establish a special fund for research and development, while seeking to “rapidly gather AI talent,” including through encouraging foreign companies to establish R&D centers for AI technologies in China ([South China Morning Post](#), June 29). This initiative, also referred to as “Artificial Intelligence 2.0,” will focus on areas including big data, intelligent sensing,

cognitive computing, machine learning, and swarm intelligence ([Xinhua](#), November 18).

Through China's national strategy of military-civil fusion (军民融合), the PLA will seek to take advantage of relevant civilian advances in artificial intelligence to enable military applications. **[3]** At the CMC level, the PLA has reportedly established an Intelligent Unmanned Systems and Systems of Systems Science and Technology Domain Expert Group (军委智能无人系统及体系科学技术领域专家组) ([Hunan Daily](#) via Weibo, October 30, 2016). Such a group could be responsible for establishing strategic objectives and requirements, while perhaps also liaising with academia and industry. For instance, members of the group reportedly visited a new testing area for self-driving cars, which was also to be used to test military unmanned combat vehicles.

In practice, military-civil fusion could be achieved through partnerships between military and civilian research institutes or companies. For instance, in late 2016, the Military-Civil Fusion Intelligent Equipment Research Institute (军民融合智能装备研究院) was established as a collaboration between the North China University of Technology (北方工业大学) and a private technology company, Zhongbo Longhui (Beijing) Information Technology Company, Ltd. (中博龙辉(北京)信息技术股份有限公司) ([China Science and Technology Online](#), November 28, 2016). The institute has received support from the Naval Equipment Research Institute, the Army Equipment Department, the Rocket Force's Unit 96658, and other military organizations ([People's Daily](#), November 4, 2016). It will pursue research in intelligent robotics, artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, and military brain science.

Chinese national-level research and development efforts will likely enable civilian and military applications. In 2017, China established its first national deep learning laboratory. This lab, under the leadership of Baidu, one of China's premier technology companies, in partnership with Tsinghua University, Beihang University, and the Chinese Academy of Sciences will research deep learning, computer vision and sensing, computer listening, biometric identification, and new forms of human-computer interaction ([South China Morning Post](#), February 21, 2017). Of note, Beihang University is closely linked to the development of military aeronautical and astronautic technologies, including research focused on UAV swarming and manned-unmanned teaming (see below).

### Future Research and Development

Although the PLA's research on a number of topics and projects remains relatively nascent, it will be important to continue to track the progression of such research and development based on the available sources. The Central Military Commission (CMC) Equipment Development Department's Scientific Research and Procurements Bureau (科研订购局) issued guidelines for pre-research funding under the 13th Five-Year Plan ([Equipment Development Department](#), August 1, 2016), through which included funding will be directed to a number of topics that relate to or could enable UAV swarming, including:

- research on "bee swarm" (蜂群) UAVs on self-organizing network architectures, associated monitoring and control technologies, swarm networking and positioning technology, and network anti-jamming technologies.

- highly reliable autonomous flight control technology for new energy ultra-long endurance UAVs
- technologies for intelligent identification of targets and adaptive patterns for analysis based on deep reinforcement learning with large-scale remote sensing data
- methods for brain-like learning algorithms able to engage in sensing in unstructured environments

- China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation's (CASIC) Third Institute's UAV Technology Research Institute
- Harbin Institute of Technology's National Key Laboratory of Robotic Systems and Engineering
- Tsinghua University
- Beihang University
- Harbin Engineering University
- Northwestern Polytechnical University

As of 2017, the National Defense Science and Technology Key Laboratory Fund (国防科技重点实验室基金) has also committed to fund multiple projects related to artificial intelligence and UAV swarming, including the following:

- intelligent task planning technology to improve the management of unmanned swarms based on deep learning (China Aerospace Radio and Electronics Research Institute)
- artificial intelligence methods for unmanned vehicles to adapt in complex maritime environments (Harbin Engineering University)
- comprehensive decision-making, management, and control technology for advanced UAVs, including control and management technology for manned-unmanned cooperation, in order to achieve the integration, intelligentization, and networking of advanced aircraft (Beihang University)

At present, multiple military and civilian research institutes appear to be working on swarming UAVs, based on their published research and patents on the topic, also including, but not limited to: [4]

- China Electronics Technology Group Corporation

### The Disruptive Potential of Swarms at War

Looking forward, the PLA is clearly seeking the capability to leverage adaptive, intelligent unmanned systems across multiple domains of warfare, including with swarming tactics and manned-unmanned teaming. [5] The Academy of Military Science's authoritative textbook, *The Science of Military Strategy*, anticipates future unmanned systems that utilize intelligent, nano, and micro technologies will have an "increasingly prominent function" on future land, sea, aerial, and space battlefields. [6] In the future, highly automated (自动化) and intelligent weaponry composed of unmanned systems is also anticipated to replace traditional weapons.

Indeed, PLA thinkers expect that future land, sea, air, and space battlefields will be full of unmanned combat weapons, forming a 'multi-dimensional, multi-domain unmanned combat weapons battlefield system of systems' ([PLA Daily](#), February 21). The PLA has closely, consistently tracked U.S. efforts in swarm tactics through DARPA within the framework of the Third Offset strategy and related defense innovation initiatives (e.g., [PLA Daily](#), May 18; [Sohu](#), April 22). Although its approach is thus informed by U.S. efforts, the PLA's future initiatives could diverge from that of the U.S., including with a



focus on asymmetric applications that target high-value U.S. weapons platforms.

The PLA recognizes the disruptive operational potential of intelligentized unmanned systems and swarming tactics. Chinese advances in swarm intelligence enable this disruptive technology, considered “a breakthrough for future unmanned combat,” according to Zhao Jie (赵杰), director of the 863 Plan Intelligent Robotics Expert Group ([China Military Online](#), November 6, 2016). In particular, the anticipated advantages of intelligent swarming UAVs include their functional distribution, high system survivability, and low operational cost, as CETC UAV export Zhao Yanjie has also noted ([Sohu](#), April 22). These systems could engage in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), offensive operations, whether independently or in coordination with other weapons systems, as well as electronic warfare, thus supporting critical areas of strategic deterrence, operational confrontation, and tactical operations ([Sohu](#), April 22).

### China’s ‘Counter Offset’? – Competing to Innovate

Chinese advances in swarm intelligence—and the known research and development undertaken to date—constitute a critical example of its strategic competition with the U.S. in defense innovation. For the PLA, certain disruptive technologies, including those associated with the Third Offset, are believed to be “strategic commanding heights” (制高点) in great power competition, with the dual advantage of “effective deterrence” and victory in war-fighting ([PLA Daily](#), May 7, 2016). For instance, future PLA intelligent unmanned systems could also serve as an asymmetric means through which to target high-value U.S. weapons systems, including aircraft carriers.

The PLA’s strategic objective of strengthening the military through science and technology (科技强军) will take advantage of a coordinated national strategy of “innovation-driven development.” The PLA seeks to “overtake [the U.S. military] around a corner” (弯道超车) through cutting ahead, rather than taking the same track, by achieving technological, conceptual, and organizational innovation in strategic frontier (战略前沿) technologies. Ongoing U.S. defense innovation initiatives must take into account the trajectory of Chinese military innovation in critical technological domains.

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### Notes:

1. Academy of Military Science Military Strategy Research Department [军事科学院军事战略研究部], eds., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], Military Science Press, 2013, pp. 97–98.
2. At this point, there are several different terms used, seemingly somewhat interchangeably, to refer to concept of swarm intelligence (e.g., “集群智能,” “群体智能”). According to the official PLA dictionary, intelligent weapon (智能武器) is defined

- as: “weapons that utilize artificial intelligence technology for autonomously pursuing, detecting, and destroy enemy targets, often, composed of information collection and management systems, knowledge base systems, assisting strategic decision systems, and mission execution systems, such as intelligent ammunition and military-use robots.” All-Military Military Terminology Management Committee [全军军事术语管理委员会], *People's Liberation Army Military Terminology* [中国人民解放军军语], Military Science Press [军事科学出版社], 2011, p. 660.
3. While this term might also be translated “civil-military integration,” I choose to use the translation “military-civil fusion” for the purposes of this piece. For a more detailed analysis of China’s efforts in military-civil fusion, see: Greg Levesque and Mark Stokes, “Blurred Lines: Military-Civil Fusion and the “Going Out” of China’s Defense Industry” Pointe Bello, December 2016, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/569925bfe0327c837e2e9a94/t/593dad0320099e64e1ca92a5/1497214574912/062017+Pointe+Bello+Military+Civil+Fusion+Report.pdf>
  4. The CMC Equipment Development Department, the successor to the former GAD, and the new CMC Science and Technology Commission (军委科技委), which has been characterized as a Chinese version of DARPA, may also undertake leading roles in this effort.
  5. This list has been compiled based on a review of available patents related to UAV swarming. It is likely not comprehensive but seeks to illustrate the range of research institutes involved in relevant research areas. Further details are available upon request.
  6. For instance, there has been exploratory research on the command and control of formations of manned and unmanned systems by researchers affiliated with the Navy Equipment Department. Chen Xiaodong [陈晓栋], Liu Yuefeng [刘跃峰], and Chen Zhoudong [陈哨东], “Manned and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Formations Command and Control Systems, Decision-Making, and Distribution” [有人/无人机编队指挥控制系统决策分配], *Electro-Optics and Control* [电光与控制], 2013.
  7. *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], pp. 97–98.

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## The United Front Work Department: “Magic Weapon” at Home and Abroad

Marcel Angliviel de la Beaumelle

Earlier this year, the Sydney Morning Herald and ABC Four Corners released in-depth investigative reports on the influence of Chinese Communist Party agents in Australian politics ([ABC](#), June 4; [Power and Influence](#); [Sydney Morning](#)

[Herald](#), March 3). These reports are based on a longstanding investigation by the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), Australia's counterintelligence agency, into Chinese Communist Party (CCP) efforts to exert influence in Australian politics. While the CCP employs many means for 'soft-power' influence, an important but understudied organization involved in sub-official contacts at home and abroad is the United Front Work Department (UFWD). In addition to exerting influence abroad, the UFWD has broad responsibilities for policies within China. Further highlighting the central role of the UFWD in CCP thinking, Chinese President and CCP Party Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the UFWD to China's rejuvenation.

## Organization

Despite its relative obscurity, the United Front Work Department (中共中央统一战线工作部) has a high place within the CCP hierarchy as a working organ (办事机关) of the CCP Central Committee (中共中央委员会), "the central administrative and decision-making body of leading party, state, and military officials." [1] This places the UFWD at an approximate level to other Central Committee organs such as the General Office, the Organization Department, the International Liaison Department, the Propaganda Department, and the Policy Research Office, although the exact hierarchy remains polemical. [2]

Sun Chunlan (孙春兰) heads the UFWD, assisted by seven deputy directors (一正七副). The leadership also includes Su Bo (苏波), the group leader for the Central Commission on Discipline Inspection for United Front Work Group. The Department itself is divided into offices (办公厅/室), bureaus (局), and subordinate units (所属事

业单位), namely mass organizations (人民/民众团体). The nine numbered Bureaus each specialize in either a particular facet of united front work or a geographic location. Bureaus three, six and nine, for example, cover Hong Kong, Taiwan, Overseas Chinese, Tibet and Xinjiang. However, it is unclear how different bureaus manage their consequently overlapping responsibilities. For instance, there is no clear guideline on how the Tibet Bureau, responsible for "harmonizing Tibetan socioeconomic development," interacts with the Ethnic and Religious Work Bureau, and the Economics Bureau.

United Front Work Department Structure	
First Bureau (一局)	Party Work Bureau (党派工作局)
Second Bureau (二局)	Ethnic and Religious Work Bureau (民族、宗教工作局)
Third Bureau (三局)	Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, & Overseas Liaison Bureau (港澳台、海外联络局)
Fourth Bureau (四局)	Cadre Bureau (干部局)
Fifth Bureau (五局)	Economics Bureau (经济局)
Sixth Bureau (六局)	Independent & Non Party Intellectuals Work Bureau (无党派、党外知识分子工作局)
Seventh Bureau (七局)	[Tibet Bureau]
Eighth Bureau (八局)	Bureau for New Social Class Representatives Work (新的社会阶层人士工作)
Ninth Bureau (九局)	[Xinjiang Bureau]
<b>Note:</b> "[ ]" indicates that the official title is unconfirmed	

These bureaus display the outsized role ethnic minorities and non-Party representatives (无党派代表人士) play in the CCP's efforts to secure said groups' support. The creation of a Tibet Bureau in 2006, and a Xinjiang Bureau in 2017, demonstrate the Party's desire to exert more direct control in the civil government's handling of these regions, and perhaps also as a consequence of the gargantuan security apparatus developing in those regions ([South China Morning Post](#), May 5; [China Brief](#), May 14; [China Brief](#),

February 6). As the UFWD has grown in size and stature, it should come as no surprise that the Party vanguard increases its role in reaching out to those for whom China's promised "Great Rejuvenation" (伟大复兴) has not yet materialized. For instance, the UFWD has played an active role in promoting the CCP's poverty alleviation policies, especially in "old revolutionary base areas"—particularly Shaanxi province and Northeast China—left behind by the new market economy ([United Front](#), May 20; [China Brief](#), February 20, 2016).

Although a CCP-organization, rather than part of the Chinese state apparatus, the UFWD closely collaborates with the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议 - CPPCC), an advisory body which meets every year at the same time as the unicameral National People's Congress (全国人民代表大会 - NPC). The CPPCC serves as a means of representation by interest group rather than geographic focus for vast swathes of the population, but holds no executive power. Instead it makes recommendations to the Party leadership. In contrast to the NPC, where 60 percent of delegates are party members, 60 percent of CPPCC delegates are either non-affiliated, with any political party or part of the eight CCP-aligned "democratic parties". **[3]** The CPPCC Chairman, Yu Zhengsheng (俞正声), is fourth in Party hierarchy and is a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, the highest organ of power in Chinese bureaucracy after the Party Chairmanship. He also heads the Central Committee Coordinating Small Group for Xinjiang Work (中央新疆工作协调小组) and the Central Committee Coordinating Small Group for Tibet Work (中央西藏工作协调小组), roles he is well suited for given his position at the CPPCC. **[4]** Through these organizations, the Party is able to

guide state and Party policy. As Chinese President Xi Jinping repeatedly emphasizes, united front work has an important role to play in contemporary Party policy, both within the China and abroad.

### Rising Importance

Although the UFWD held 20 meetings between 1995 and 2006, no significant conference occurred until May of 2015, when the UFWD held its first work conference in nine years under the name of 'CCP Central Committee's Conference on United Front Work' (中央统战工作会议). The 'Central' qualifier represented a rise in status for a previously 'national' (全国) conference. The elevation in status corresponded with Xi's new vision for the department as laid out in a September 2014 speech celebrating the CPPCC's 65th birthday. In that speech he referred to united front work as a 'magic weapon' for the 'Chinese people's great rejuvenation', one to be used by the CCP to seize victory, construction, and reform ([Xinhua](#), July 30, 2015). At the 2015 conference, Xi Jinping outlined a new direction of the UFWD:

"Throughout our history, the Party has always placed the United Front and united front work in an important position within party-wide work. [...] Presently, our situation and our mission have undergone significant change. The larger the change, the more the United Front under the 'new situation' (新形势) needs to be developed, the more united front work needs to be carried out. [...] united front work is party-wide work" ([Xinhua](#), May 20, 2015).



Xi noted that students studying abroad are a valuable and new focus of united front work. Xi also called on cadres to strengthen and perfect united front work targeting new media (新媒体) representatives so as to “allow them to struggle to purify cyberspace” ([Xinhua](#), May 20, 2015).

Shortly thereafter, at a July 30 Politburo meeting, Xi created a Leading Small Group (LSG) on United Front Work (中央统一战线工作领导小组) ([Xinhua](#), July 30, 2015). Xi has used LSGs as policy coordination centers to circumvent the levathan bureaucracy of the CCP, indicating a willingness to realize the lofty goals in his speeches. [5]

Since the 2015 speech, the UFWD has formed two new bureaus: the Xinjiang Bureau (this bureau is not explicitly named as such), and the Bureau for New Social Classes Work (新的社会阶层人士工作局). Although Xi frames united front work as part of his comprehensive vision, the groundwork for the establishment of the Bureau for New Social Classes Work has been laid for years. [6] In support of this integration, the United Front Work Department has carried out yearly, 50-student classes for New Social Class Representatives every year since 2004 (they were under the purview of the Sixth Bureau), thus creating a “New Social Class talent pool” ([FMPRC](#), Accessed June 21). Hu Jintao would later emphasize the targeting of New Social Class representatives in his last United Front Work Conference in 2006, without significant bureaucratic outcomes ([United Front](#), October 9, 2010). Despite the significant emphasis placed on domestic affairs, united front work has long included overseas operations.

While the CCP employs many means through which it seeks foreign intelligence, the UFWD is distinct from other organizations in its overt and

benign appearance. [7] United Front organizations abroad often operate in the open with names alluding to ‘peaceful reunification’ (code for Taiwan work) or ‘friendship association’ (Sun Chunlan was elected to head the Chinese Overseas Friendship Association in 2015) ([The Paper](#), August 17, 2015, [COFA Official Website](#), Accessed June 6, 2017).

#### 区委常委、统战部部长谢伟带队走访侨鑫集团

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The two main figures highlighted by the Sydney Morning Herald and ABC Four Corners reports are Dr. Chau Chak Wing (AKA Zhou Zerong 周泽荣), and Huang Xiangmo (黄向墨 AKA Huang Changran 黄畅然). Dr. Chau Chak Wing is an Australian citizen, but a provincial-level member of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (中国人民政治协商会议) and owns a newspaper in China and the Australian Express. Despite Dr. Zhou’s claim that “as to the entity referred to by the ABC as the ‘united front work department’, I have no idea what this is,” netizens were quick to point to a meeting between Dr. Zhou and the Tianhe UFWD (see inset image, center) ([The Australian](#), June 27; [Twitter](#), June 26).

Tianhe Standing Committee Chairman, District UFWD Head Xie Wei (谢伟), along with his dep-



uty and Head of Taiwan Bureau Xue

Jianbin (薛健斌) visited him at the Kingold Group, accompanied by the Chairman for Chen Jiansheng (陈健生). ([Tianhe UFWD Website](#), March 1, 2016). Huang Xiangmo is president of the Australian Council for the Promotion of the Peaceful Reunification of China (澳洲中国和平统一促进会—[ACPPRC Official Website](#), Accessed June 16), and has chaperoned Qiu Yuanping (裘援平) the head of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the PRC's State Council (国务院侨务办公室) during her visit to Australia with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang ([OCAO Official Website](#), Accessed June 16; [ABC](#), June 4; see inset photo – in blue on the left). The United Front work department and the overseas organizations it liaises with play an important role in shaping political attitudes in their respective countries and developing contacts for the Chinese government and businesses.

## Conclusion

While most observers have focused on united front work in Taiwan, the scope of the department's mission is both foreign and domestic. Within China, the UFWD plays a vital policy development and coordination role, especially for ethnic and religious minorities. Abroad, the UFWD has had a hand in developing political and business ties with overseas Chinese, bringing investment and research benefits, as well as helping the CCP shape foreign views of China. Xi Jinping's repeated urging that the Party make use of the UFWD as a "magic weapon" to realize the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese People makes it clear that he sees it as an important tool for the CCP. The bureaucratic changes he has implemented lends further credence to this judgment. As China continues to deal with complicated domestic issues involving minorities and attempts to shape opinions abroad, the United Front Work Department will undoubtedly be in the vanguard.

*Marcel Angliviel de la Beaumelle is an independent researcher who has worked at the Center for New American Security and the Jamestown Foundation. He is proficient in Chinese.*

## Notes

1. China's Political System, Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 2016
2. Traditionally, the UFWD has been the lesser of the CC working organs, but given the personal prominence of Department Head Sun Chunlan and Deputy Wang Zhengwei within the Party, Groot has argued "that the Department ranks marginally ahead of both the Central Department of Organization and that of Propaganda." Given Wang's premature

departure from this position in early 2016, it would be interesting to check if the current deputies maintain this imbalance. See: Gerry Groot, "United Front Expands Under Xi Jinping," The Australian Center on China in the World, Yearbook 2015, <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2015/forum-ascent/the-expansion-of-the-united-front-under-xi-jinping/>.

3. China's Political System, 2016
4. For a thorough description of Leading Small Groups see: Alice Miller, "The CCP Central Committee's Leading Small Groups" China Leadership Monitor, no. 26, September 2, 2008, <http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/uploads/documents/CLM26AM.pdf> and "More Already on the Central Committee's Leading Small Groups," China Leadership Monitor, no. 44, July 28, 2014, <http://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm44am.pdf>; for a visual presentation of the most prominent LSGs and their Heads, see Jessica Batke and Matthias Stepan, "The Who's Who of China's Leading Small Groups," Mercator Institute of China Studies, updated May 2017, <https://www.merics.org/en/merics-analysis/china-mapping/the-whos-who-of-chinas-leading-small-groups/>.
5. Miller, 2008, 2014.
6. During the celebration of the CCP's 80th anniversary in 2001, Jiang Zemin pointed out that Chinese social composition changed after the reform and opening with the introduction of new classes of people included skilled workers, entrepreneurs, employees of foreign owned companies... "These new classes are united with workers, peasants, intellectuals, cadres, and PLA Commanders and

fighters. They are also builders of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." (FMPRC, Accessed June 21)

7. For a presentation of the various other means employed, see: Peter Mattis, "China's Espionage Against Taiwan (Part I): Analysis of Recent Operations," *China Brief*, November 7, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-espionage-against-taiwan-part-i-analysis-of-recent-operations/>; Peter Mattis, "China's Espionage Against Taiwan (Part II): Chinese Intelligence Collectors," *China Brief*, December 5, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-espionage-against-taiwan-part-ii-chinese-intelligence-collectors/>; and John Dotson, "Retired Taiwan Officer Exchanges Offer Insight into a Modern 'United Front,'" *China Brief*, October 14, 2011, <https://jamestown.org/program/retired-taiwan-officer-exchanges-offer-insight-into-a-modern-united-front/>.

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