

# The PLA Army at 90

Dennis J. Blasko

# Content

---

- Ch-ch-Changes
  - “Above the Neck”
  - “Below the Neck”
- New/Expanded Capabilities
- Conclusions

# Ch-ch-Changes

# Current Phase of Reform

---

- General outline announced in Nov 2013:
  - Optimize the size and structure of the 2.3 million PLA
  - Improve the joint operation command structure under the Central Military Commission and theater joint operation command system
  - Accelerate building “new-types of combat forces”
  - Deepen reform of military colleges
- First Phase, “Above the Neck” Reforms, 2015/16
  - 300,000-man reduction to be finished by end of 2017
  - Three-tier command structure by 2020; Theater Commands perform operational command; services perform “construction” leadership over units

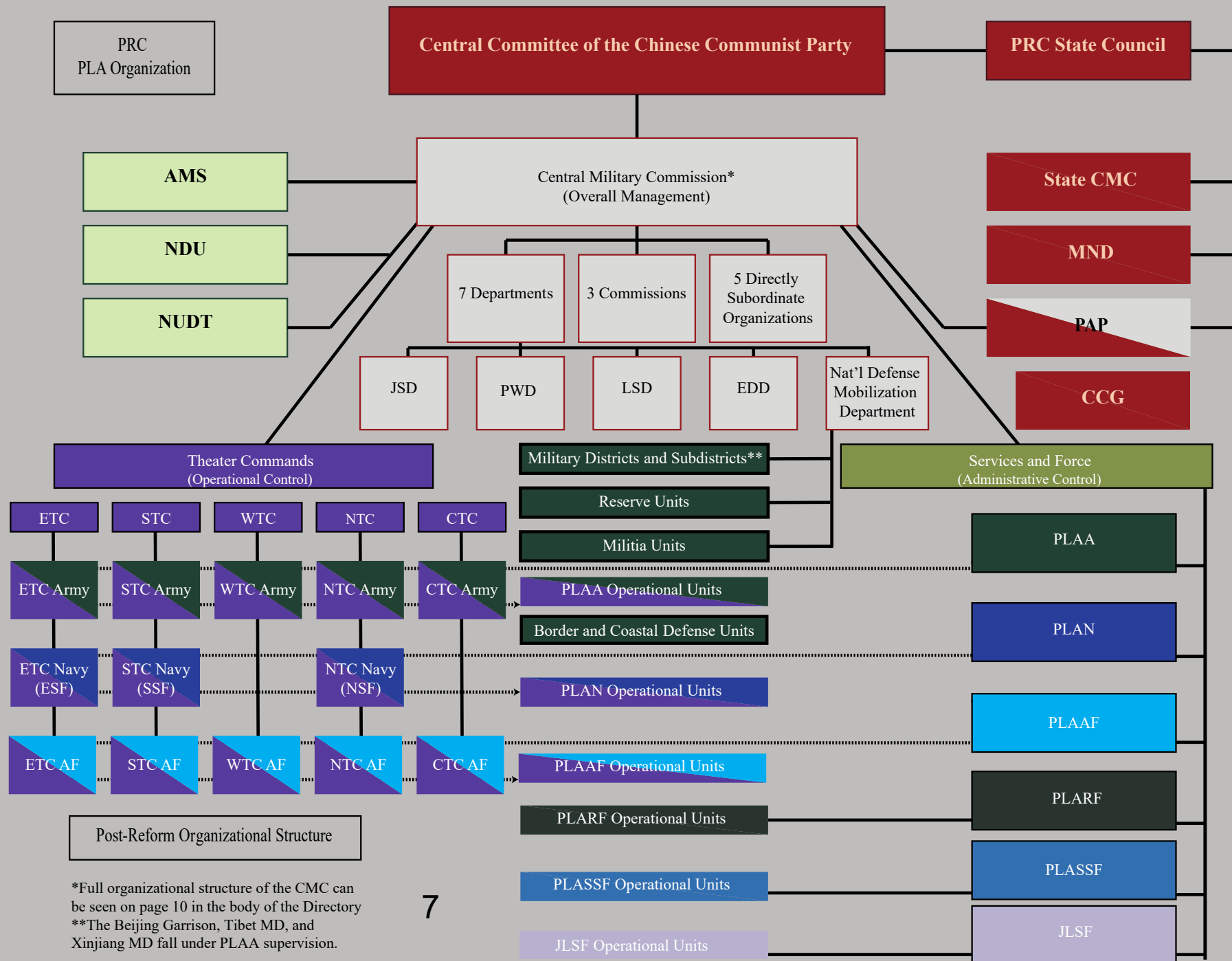
# “Below the Neck” Reforms

---

- Theater Command Army (service) headquarters, probably the most important new operational headquarters created, with dual command to Theater Command and to the new Army headquarters
- Theater Command Army headquarters have direct command authority over active duty Army units in their Theaters, including
  - “Mobile operational units,” i.e., 13 new group armies (GA) and independent operational divisions and brigades (in Xinjiang and Tibet MDs, Beijing Garrison)
  - Probably border/coastal defense units

# Army Operational Maneuver Units

Units	1997	2012	2016	2017
Group armies	24	18	18	13
Infantry divisions (mechanized, motorized)	90	26	20	6
Armored divisions	12	5	1	0
Infantry brigades (mechanized, motorized, mountain)	7	33	48	Roughly 80 Combined Arms Brigades
Armored brigades	13	13	17	Included above
SOF groups/regiments/brigades	7/0/0	3/1/5	0/2/9	15 Brigades
Army aviation regiments/brigades	7/0	7/4	5/7	14 Brigades



\*Full organizational structure of the CMC can be seen on page 10 in the body of the Directory

\*\*The Beijing Garrison, Tibet MD, and Xinjiang MD fall under PLAA supervision.

# New Army, TCA, and GA Leaders

---

- Massive changes in Army leadership from 2016 on
- Seven of 12 original Army/TC Army leaders have been reassigned since 2016 (red indicates no longer in billet)

Army Headquarters	Commander: <b>Li Zuocheng</b> /Han Weiguo Commissar: Liu Lei
ETC Army	Commander: Qin Weijiang Commissar: Liao Keduo
STC Army	Commander: <b>Liu Xiaowu</b> /Zhang Jian Commissar: Bai Lu
WTC Army	Commander: <b>He Qingcheng</b> /He Weidong Commissar: Xu Zhongbo
NTC Army	Commander: <b>Li Qiaoming</b> /Unknown Commissar: <b>Xu Yuanlin</b> /Si Xiao
CTC Army	Commander: <b>Shi Luze</b> /Zhang Xudong Commissar: <b>Wu Shezhou</b> /Zhou Wanzhu

- All 26 group army leaders were newly assigned to their positions; 21 of 26 reassigned from outside the region

# New/Old GA Affiliations and Leaders

Theater Command	New/Old GA	Position	Leader	Former Unit
Eastern TC	71st GA/	Commander/	Wang Yinfang*	38th GA/
	12th GA	Commissar	Xu Deqing*	47th GA
	72nd GA/	Commander/	Zhu Xiaohu*/	42nd GA/
	1st GA	Commissar	Wang Wenquan*	27th GA
	73rd GA/	Commander/	Hu Zhongqiang*/	14th GA/
Southern TC	31st GA	Commissar	Yang Cheng*	21st GA
	74th GA/	Commander/	Xu Xianghua*/	65th GA/
	42nd GA	Commissar	Liu Hongjun*	21st GA
	75th GA/	Commander/	Gong Maodong*/	27th GA/
Western TC	41st GA	Commissar	Qin Shutong*	1st GA
	76th GA/	Commander/	Fan Chengcai/	Western TC Army/
	21st GA	Commissar	Zhang Hongbing*	20th GA
	77th GA/	Commander/	Lin Huomao*/	26th GA/
	13th GA	Commissar	Li Zehua*	31st GA
	78th GA/	Commander/	Wu Yanan/	16th GA/
Northern TC	16th GA	Commissar	Guo Xiaodong	26th GA
	79th GA/	Commander/	Xu Qiling*/	Central TC Army/
	39th GA	Commissar	Yu Yonghong	14th GA
	80th GA/	Commander/	Wang Xiubin*/	1st GA/
	26th GA	Commissar	Zhu Yuwu	39th GA
Central TC	81st GA/	Commander/	Huang Ming*/	41st GA/
	65th GA	Commissar	Fang Yongxiang*	Eastern TC Army
	82nd GA/	Commander/	Lin Xiangyang*/	47th GA/
	38th GA	Commissar	Zhang Mengbin*	42nd GA
	83rd GA/	Commander/	Xie Zenggang*/	21st GA/
	54th GA	Commissar	Lu Shaoping*	16th GA

\* Indicates officer transferred from outside his original Military Region/Theater

Based on  
Reporting by  
The Paper,  
August 16, 2017

# Old/New Group Army Structure

# New Brigade Structure

Combined Arms  
Brigade

Multiple Combined  
Arms Battalions  
w/Firepower Company,  
plus

Artillery  
Battalion

Air Defense  
Battalion

Recon Battalion or  
Recon and Surveillance  
Company\*

Combat Support  
Battalion (or)

Engineer and Chemical  
Defense  
Battalion/Company

Communications  
Battalion/Company

Repair  
Battalion (or)

Service Support  
Battalion

Guard and Service  
Company

Information Support,  
Propaganda, Health  
Sections

# New Battalion Headquarters Organization

- Goal: Make combined arms battalions the “basic combat unit” capable of independent operations
- Previously only battalion commander, political instructor, deputies, and medic (no staff)
- As part of brigade reform, staff officers/NCOs added
  - Battalion master sergeant
  - Chief of staff
  - Four staff officers and 2 noncommissioned officers



# New/Expanded Capabilities

# New Capability: More Mobile Units

- Since 2006 trans-regional exercises have proven that units can move from region to region
- Has allowed for the number of large operational units to be reduced
- Requires civilian logistics support



# New Capability: Army Aviation

- All GAs have Army Aviation Brigades with mix of transport and attack helicopters
- Working on air assault operations
- Increasingly operating over water
- Two AABs now in NE China, near DPRK, previously only one



# New Capability: SOF

- All GAs now have SOF Brigades; smaller SOF units also found in divisions and brigades
- SOF units work closely with Army Aviation Brigades
- Perform mostly commando-style operations



# New Capability: Long-Range Rockets

- 300mm PHL03 multiple launch rocket system; range 150 km w/improved munitions
- Found in all/most GAs
- Routinely practice along coast as well as in the interior
- At least one unit now assigned to a Coastal Defense Brigade



# New Capability: New Air Defense SAMs

- A variety of new SAM and ECM systems have been introduced to the Army
- Air Defense Brigades take part in trans-regional exercises and exercises along the coast
- Must be integrated with joint air defense



# New Capability: EW/ECM

- Operational/tactical-level EW/ECM units found in GA air defense brigade electronic air defense battalion and service support brigades
- Tactical cyber capabilities appear to be mainly defensive



# New Capability: UAVs

- Small/Medium Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) mostly for reconnaissance and surveillance and EW/ECM
- UAV battalions and companies assigned to artillery brigades and other units such as combined arms brigades, SOF<sup>20</sup>, and



# New Capability: Border and Coastal Defense Units

- Former border/coastal defense regiments consolidated into brigades, except in Xinjiang and Tibet
- Some units command motorized infantry, artillery, and small amphibious craft and river patrol boats



# Conclusions

# Ultimate Objective

- Increase China's overall deterrence posture to protect Chinese sovereignty and interests
- Create “new-type” Army units that can contribute to joint maritime operations beyond China's coast out to several hundred miles

23



# Conclusions

---

- Reorganization will take time and is resulting in confusion and anxiety among the troops
- Personnel and units have been disbanded, transformed, transferred, and/or assigned new functions in a very short period of time
- More training, experimentation, and improved leadership capabilities are essential to develop unit proficiency
- Question: Are brigades/battalions becoming too big for optimal span of control (which may vary, but usually considered two to five subordinates)?

# Self-Assessments of Capabilities

---

- Army reforms seek to solve long-standing problems:
  - “Five Incapables” (2015): Some cadre cannot [1] judge the situation, [2] understand the intention of higher authorities, [3] make operational decisions, [4] deploy troops, and [5] deal with unexpected situations.
  - Battalion commander (2017): We remain weak in command, control, coordination, and cooperation, especially in employing new-type combat forces. We need to resolve these issues through even more combat-realistic training.

# Thank You, Any Questions?

Who's that guy sitting in front of Ken Allen?





# **Overview of the PLA Air Force's Organizational Reforms**

Ken Allen

Presented at the Jamestown Foundation's  
7<sup>th</sup> Annual China Defense and Security  
Conference

11 October 2017

# Topics

---

- Force Reduction
- Central Military Commission
- PLAAF Headquarters
- Theater Command Headquarters
- Theater Command Air Force Headquarters
- Corps Level
- Shift to a Brigade Structure
- Air Division and Air Brigade Structure Comparison
- Officer Career Path
- Future Changes?
- Shift to a Rank Structure?



Gen Ma Xiaotian



Lt Gen Ding Laihang

# Force Reduction

---

- As part of the PLA's 300,000-man downsizing, the PLAAF is reducing the number of personnel at higher levels and adjusting various headquarters across the board
- Reducing number of personnel at PLAAF HQ and Theater Command Air Force HQ
- Abolishing 2 former Military Region Air Force HQ and downsizing them to corps deputy leader-grade bases
- Abolishing division headquarters and upgrading regiments to brigades

# Central Military Commission

---

- Under the reorganization, “The CMC manages, the Theater Commands focus on warfighting, and the services engage in force construction”
- A PLAAF CMC Vice Chairman (Xu Qiliang)
- A PLAAF Member of the CMC (Ma Xiaotian)
- There is still only a limited number of PLAAF officers in leadership positions in the 15 CMC organizations
  - 1 Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff
  - Political Commissar, CMC Equipment Development Department
- Joint Operations Command Center
  - Permanent Air Force personnel

# PLAAF Headquarters

---

- Commander
  - Gen Ma Xiaotian stepped down as commander and serves as CMC member only until he retires in October
  - Lt Gen Ding Laihang assumed command in August
    - CMC Member in October?????
  - Number of deputy commanders reduced from 4 to 3
  - 1 deputy political commissar and 1 secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission
- Organizational Structure
  - 1<sup>st</sup> level departments: Staff, Political Work, Logistics, Equipment
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> level departments downsized as bureaus
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> level bureaus downsized, merged, or abolished
- Command Post?

# Theater Command HQ

---

- 7 Military Regions reduced to 5 Theater Commands
- Leadership: Possible PLAAF commander for 1 Theater Command
- Organizational Structure
  - PLA Army HQ created
  - 1<sup>st</sup> level: Joint Staff Department, Political Work Department, Logistics Department, Equipment Department; joint responsibilities
    - Concurrent deputy commander and chief of staff
    - Concurrent deputy political commissar and director, Political Work Department
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> level departments downsized as bureaus; joint responsibilities
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> level bureaus downsized, merged, or abolished
- PLAAF personnel
  - 1 permanent Theater Command deputy commander
  - Theater Command Air Force commander serves as concurrent Theater Command deputy commander
- Command Post – permanent Air Force billets

# Theater Command Air Force HQ

---

- 7 Military Region Air Force HQ to 5 Theater Command Air Force HQ
  - Lanzhou and Jinan MRAF HQ transition to corps deputy leader-grade bases
- Leaders
  - Commander is concurrent TC deputy commander
  - Number of deputy commanders reduced
- Organizational Structure
  - 1<sup>st</sup> level: Staff Department, Political Work Department, Logistics Department, Equipment Department
    - Concurrent deputy commander and chief of staff?
    - Concurrent deputy political commissar and director, Political Work Department?
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> level divisions but downsized
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> level branches downsized, merged, or abolished

# Corps Level (Below the Neck)

---

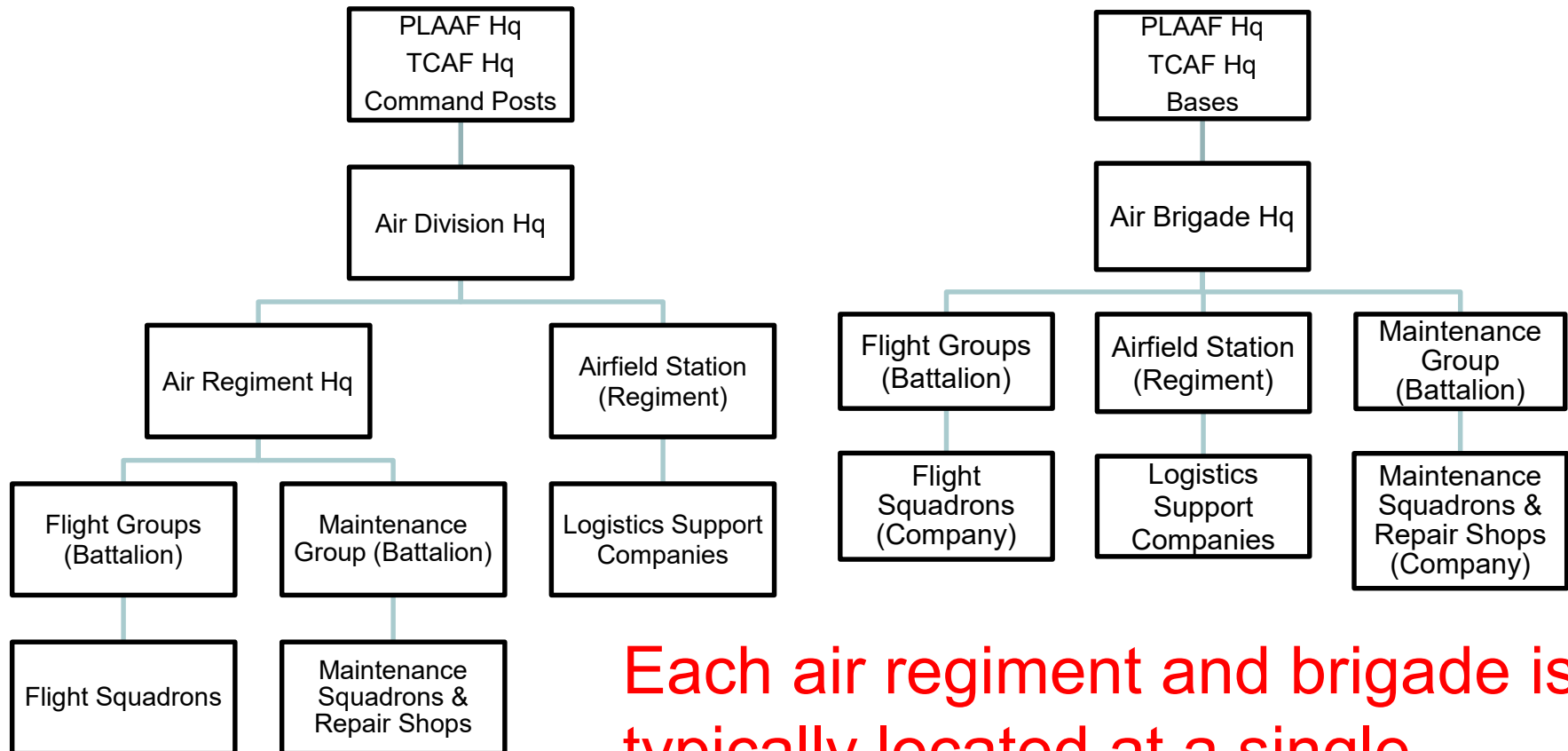
- Corps level = corps leader and deputy leader grade
- Began in 2017
- (15<sup>th</sup>) Airborne Corps
- Bases being created (corps deputy leader)
  - Former command posts and Lanzhou/Jinan MRAF HQ
- Some command posts still exist
- Organizational structure
  - Staff Department, Political Work Department, Logistics Department, Equipment Department
- Responsibilities: Command all air brigades, SAM, AAA, and radar units in their geographic area of responsibility<sup>34</sup>

# Shift to Brigade Structure

---

- SAM and AAA brigades: Early 2000s
- Flight college air brigades (2011-2012)
- Operational unit fighter and attack brigades
  - No bomber air brigades ---- yet
- Specialized unit air brigades
- Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) brigades
- Test and Training Base air brigades
- Airborne Corps
  - Airborne brigades, transport air brigade, special ops brigade
  - Airborne Corps helicopter regiment most likely to become a brigade
- Transport and search and rescue (SAR) air brigades<sub>35</sub>

# Air Division & Brigade Structure Comparison



Each air regiment and brigade is typically located at a single airfield

# Officer Career Paths

---

Billet	TCAF HQ	Base HQ	Division HQ	Brigade HQ	Regiment HQ
	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
<b>Commander/PC</b>	TC Dep Ldr	Corps Dep Ldr	Div Ldr	Div Dep Ldr	Regt Ldr
<b>Deputy Commander/PC</b>	Corps Ldr	Div Ldr	Div Dep Ldr	Regt Ldr	Regt Dep Ldr
<b>Chief of Staff</b>					
<b>Dir, PWD</b>					
<b>Dep Chief of Staff</b>	Corps Dep Ldr	Div Dep Ldr	Regt Ldr	Regt Dep Ldr	Bn Ldr
<b>Dep Dir, PWD</b>					
<b>Dir/PC, Logistics Dept</b>					
<b>Dir/PC Equipment Dept</b>					
<b>Dep Dir, Logistics Dept</b>	Div Ldr	Regt Ldr	Regt Dep Ldr	Bn Ldr	Bn Dep Ldr
<b>Dep Dir, Equipment Dept</b>					
<b>Dir, 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Dept</b>	Div Dep Ldr	Regt Dep Ldr	Bn Ldr	Bn Dep Ldr	Co Ldr
<b>Dep Dir, 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Dept</b>	Regt Ldr	Bn Ldr	Bn Dep Ldr	Co Ldr	Co Dep Ldr

# Future Changes?

---

- Renaming 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> level departments at the division, brigade, and regiment levels
  - Staff Department
  - Political Work Department/Division
  - Support (Logistics and Equipment) Department/Division
- More concurrent deputy commander and chief of staff billets
- Fewer deputy commanders
- More concurrent deputy political commissar and director of the Political Work Department billets
- More Chief Master Sergeant billets?

# Shift to a Rank Structure?

---

- Will the PLA abolish the 15-grade structure and replace it with only a 10-rank structure?
- If so, when?
- How will officers work their way up their career path?
- Rank adjustments
  - Add a 4-star flag officer rank
  - Abolish the senior colonel rank
  - Change the automatic 4-year rank promotion system up to colonel
  - Have one rank cover more than one grade level
  - Change the system for mandatory retirement age based on one's grade
- If the grade structure is retained, a “brigade leader grade” will most likely be created to replace the “division deputy leader grade”

# Conclusions

---

- Limited PLAAF personnel in leadership billets in the 15 CMC organizations but growing in Theater Command Headquarters
- The PLAAF HQ's leadership structure is changing
- Fewer deputy commanders and deputy PCs at all levels
- PLAAF leaders in the Theater Commands
  - Commander billet?
  - Possible political commissar billet?
  - Permanent and concurrent deputy commander billets
  - Concurrent Theater Command deputy commander and chief of staff billet
- The PLAAF's functional and administrative organizational structure is changing
- We can expect more changes below the corps level
- We can expect a continuing shift to air brigades for the aviation branch

# **The PLA Rocket Force:**

## ***Joint Missile Operations in the Western Pacific***



**Mark Stokes**

**China Defense & Security Conference 2017**

**The Jamestown Foundation**

**October 11, 2017**

# Overview

---

- PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) Campaign Theory
- PLARF and Joint Command and Control
- Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations
- PLARF Force Structure
- PLARF Operations and Training

# PLARF Campaign Theory

- Long range precision strike is defining the future strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific region
  - Long range precision strike is key to gaining strategic advantage by application of military force via platforms operating in or passing through air and space
- A missile campaign as integral component of PLA joint firepower warfare
  - Coordinated use of C4ISR, PLA Rocket Force conventional theater missiles, PLA Air Force/Navy strike assets, and information/electronic warfare
- Reliance on increasingly advanced conventional ballistic and land attack cruise missiles to offset weaknesses in conventional fixed wing assets
  - Capabilities developed for a Taiwan scenario could be applied in other territorial or sovereignty disputes around the PRC's periphery
- Joint missile operations a vital element of territorial air defense
  - Intended to suppress adversary strike capabilities at their source.
- General force planning path toward increased range, precision, survivability, and lethality

- Joint Anti-Air Raid Campaign
- Joint Blockade Campaign
- Joint Island Attack Campaign

DF-15B



DF-11A



DF-16



DF-21C/D



DH-10



DF-26



# PLARF and Joint Command and Control

## Peacetime

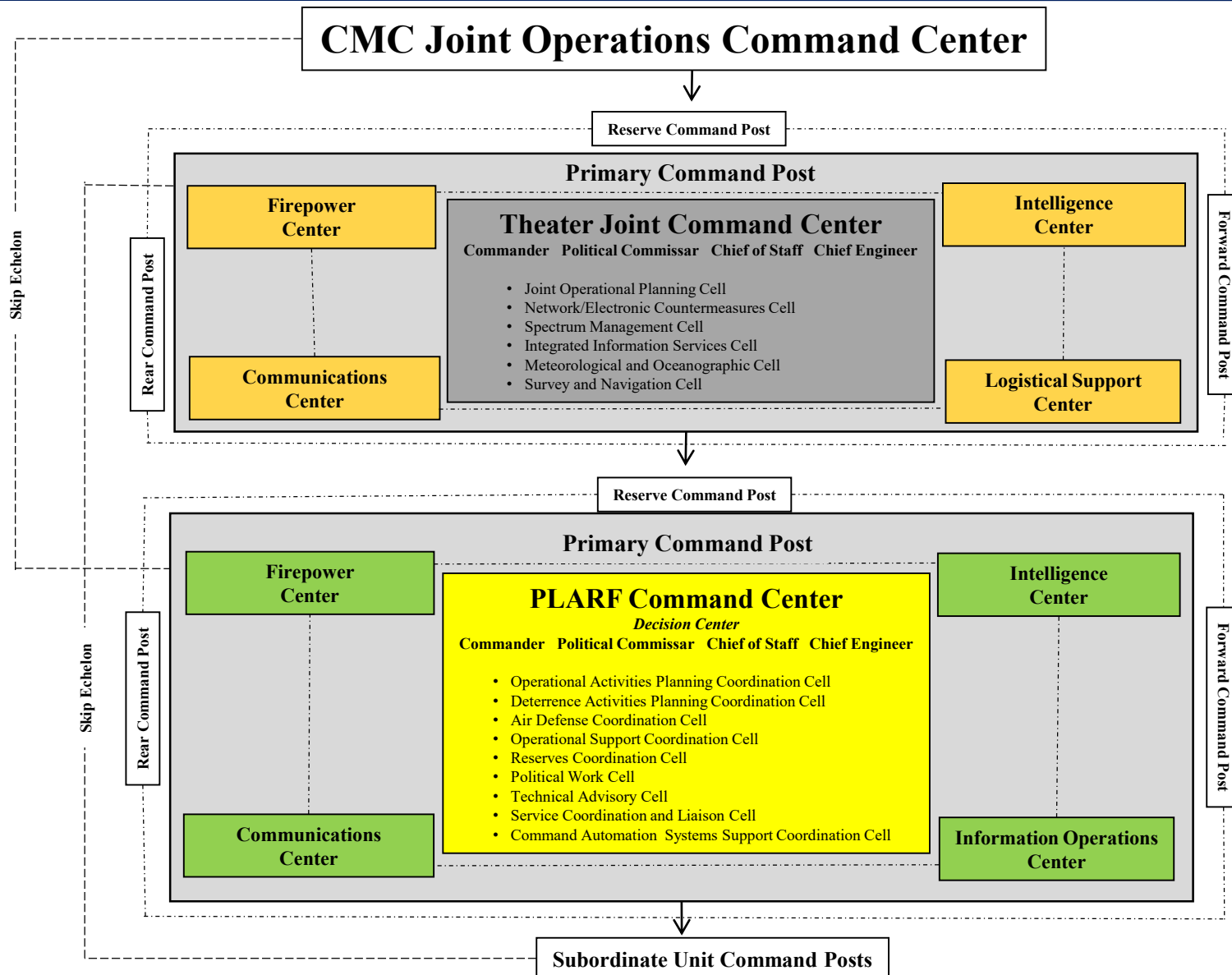
- The CMC and PLARF Party Committee exercise peacetime control of China's strategic missile forces through six corps-level bases and a central nuclear warhead storage and handling complex
  - Independent of Theater Commands
- Launch brigades and support regiments administratively subordinate to a corps-level base command
- PLARF liaison officers probably assigned to CMC Joint Command Center and Theater Command Joint Command and Control Centers
- PLARF engineering units reportedly responsible for construction of national- and theater-level underground C2 centers

## Wartime

- Nuclear and conventional brigades likely would fall under separate operational command structures
- CMC chairman likely retains exclusive control over the allocation of nuclear warheads through the PLA's central warhead storage and handling complex
- Selected launch brigades and support regiments from one or more bases likely would be assigned to a Theater Command PLARF component
- Independent command and control system links PLARF headquarters in Beijing with base commands and brigades
- PLARF interoperability with Theater Commands through Integrated Command Platform (ICP)

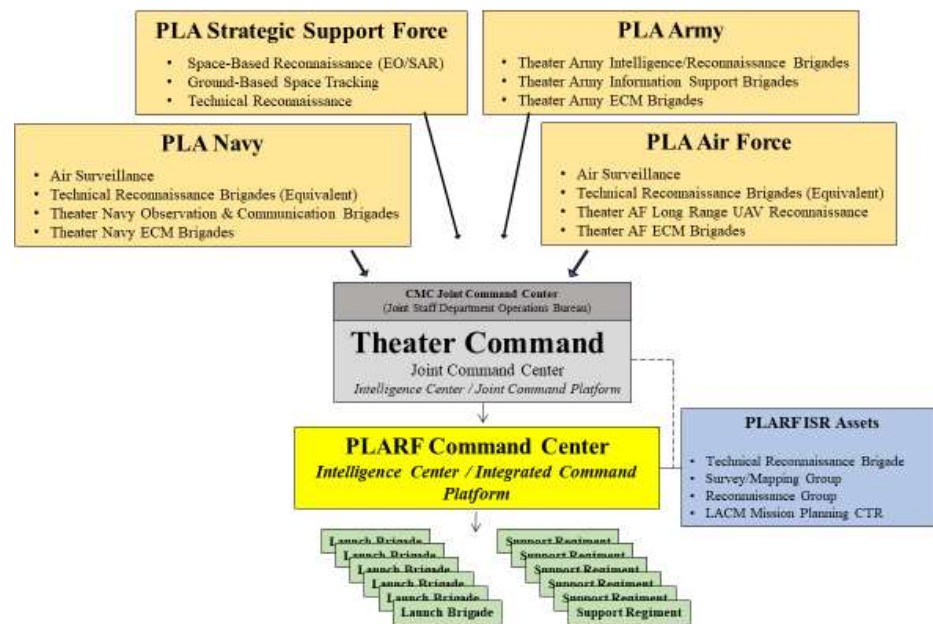
# PLARF and Joint Command and Control

## Wartime



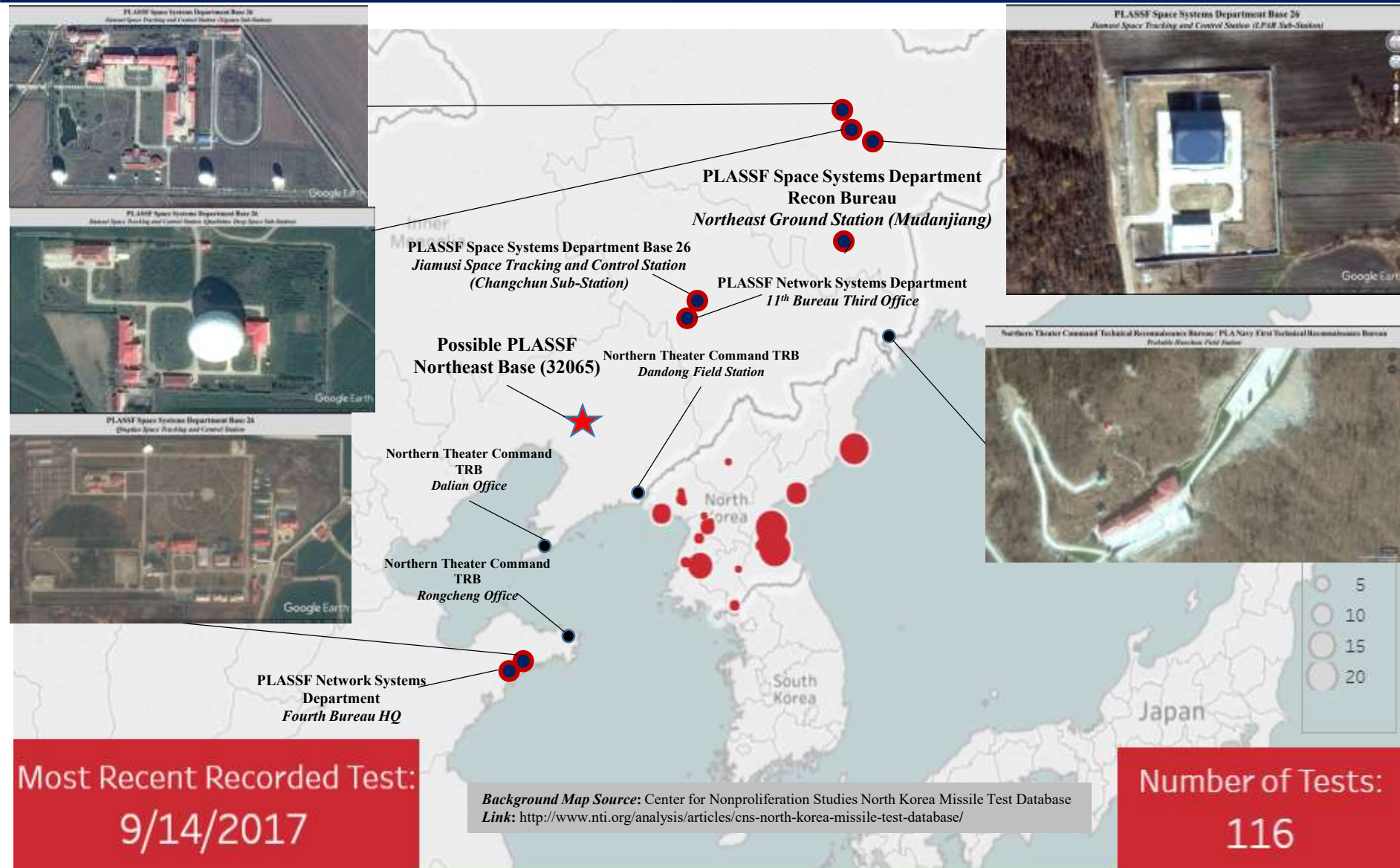
# Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations

- Ground-based space surveillance support for PLARF concealment, camouflage, and deception
  - PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF)
- Air surveillance support for force protection against counterstrikes
  - PLA Air Force (PLAAF) / PLA Navy (PLAN)
- Joint ISR support for PLARF targeting and bomb damage assessment
  - PLASSF space-based electro-optical and synthetic radar satellites
  - PLA Army (PLAA), PLAAF, and PLAN technical reconnaissance (fixed and mobile)
  - PLAA, PLAAF, and PLAN electronic reconnaissance (fixed and mobile)
  - PLAN maritime observation and communication (fixed and mobile)
  - Airborne ISR
  - Maritime militia



## Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations

*Notional PLA Strategic Support Force Assets in Northeast China*



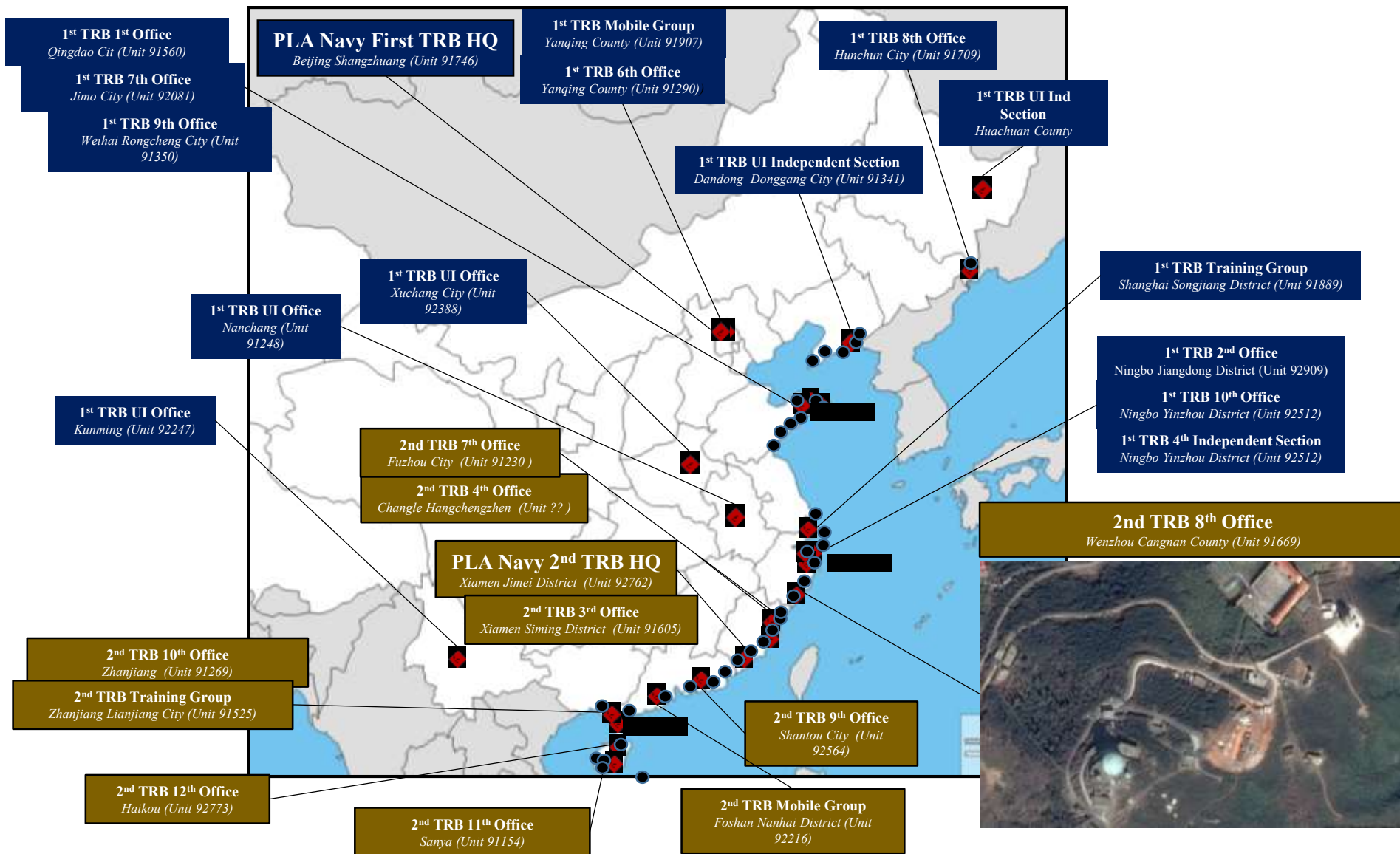
# Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations

## *PLA Army Technical Reconnaissance System*



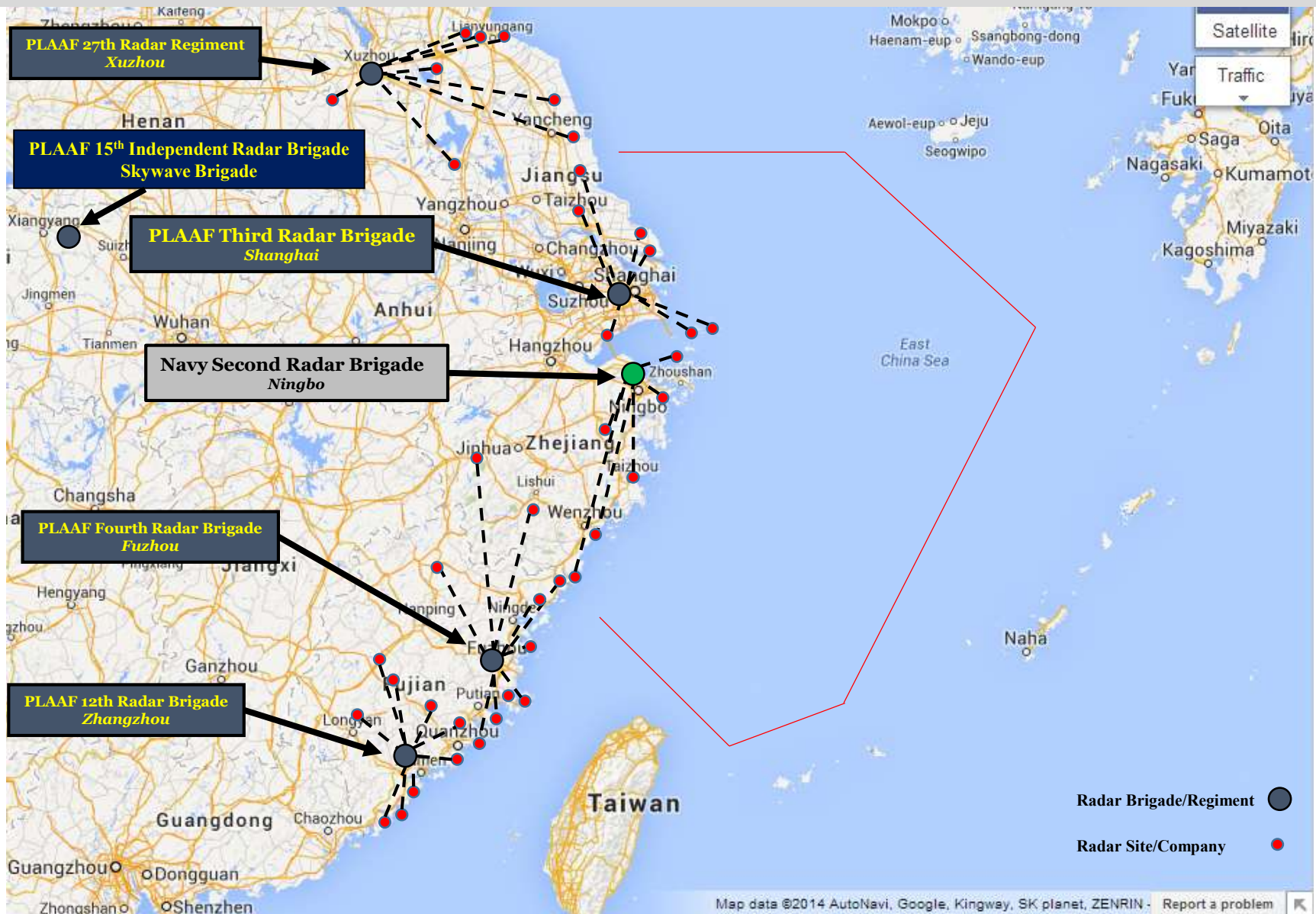
# Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations

## PLA Navy Technical Reconnaissance / Observation & Communications System



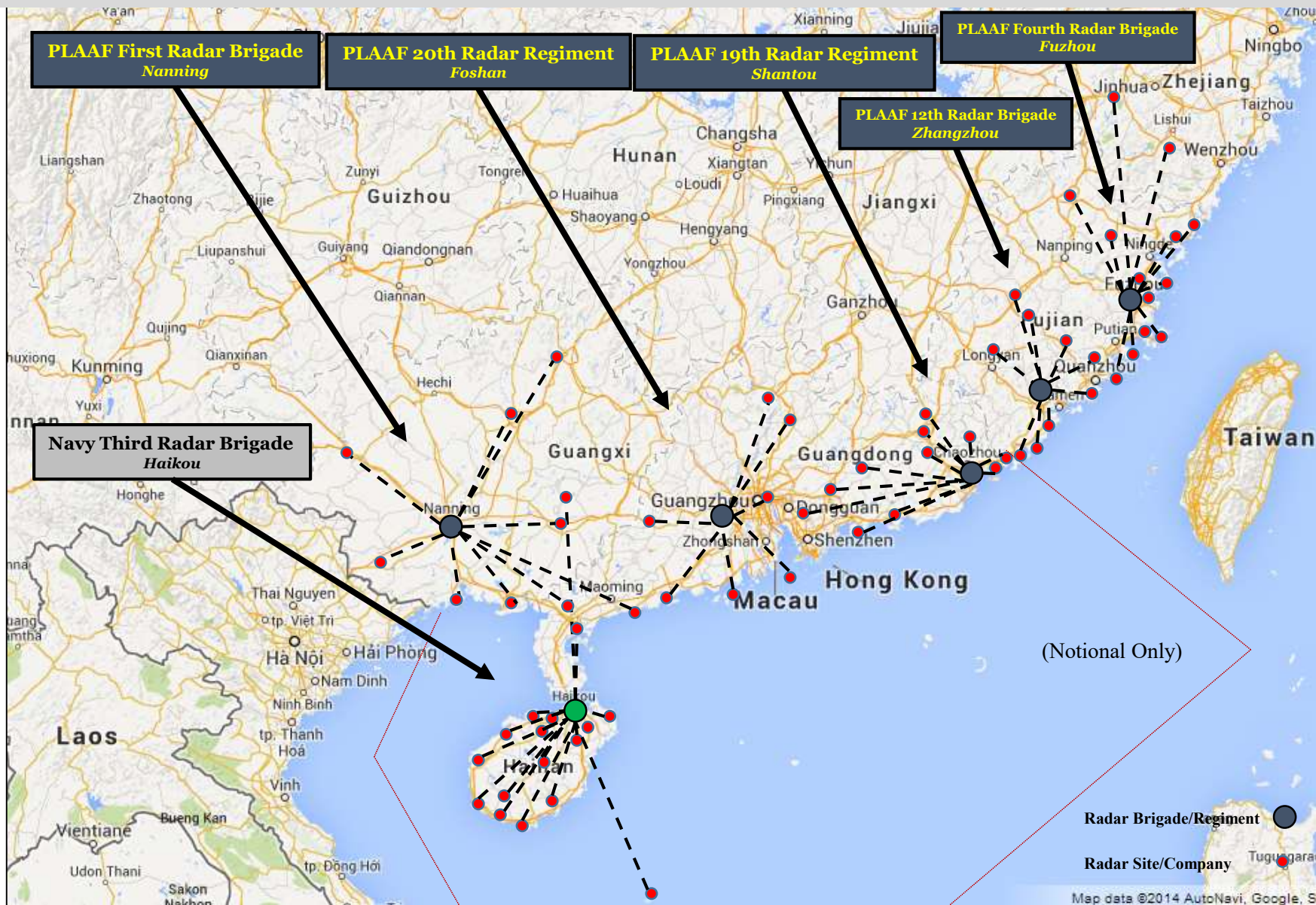
# Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations

## PLA Air Surveillance System



# Joint ISR Support for PLARF Operations

## *Air Surveillance System*



# PLARF Force Structure

- Change in True Unit Designations and Military Unit Cover Designations
- Reassignment of selected missile brigades from one base to another
- Possible consolidation of base-level warhead regiments under central depot (former Base 22)
- Consolidation of engineering units under single corps-grade base
- Introduction of conventional-capable intermediate range ballistic missile system (DF-26)
- Possible establishment of at least four new missile brigades in last two-three years

## Possible New Units

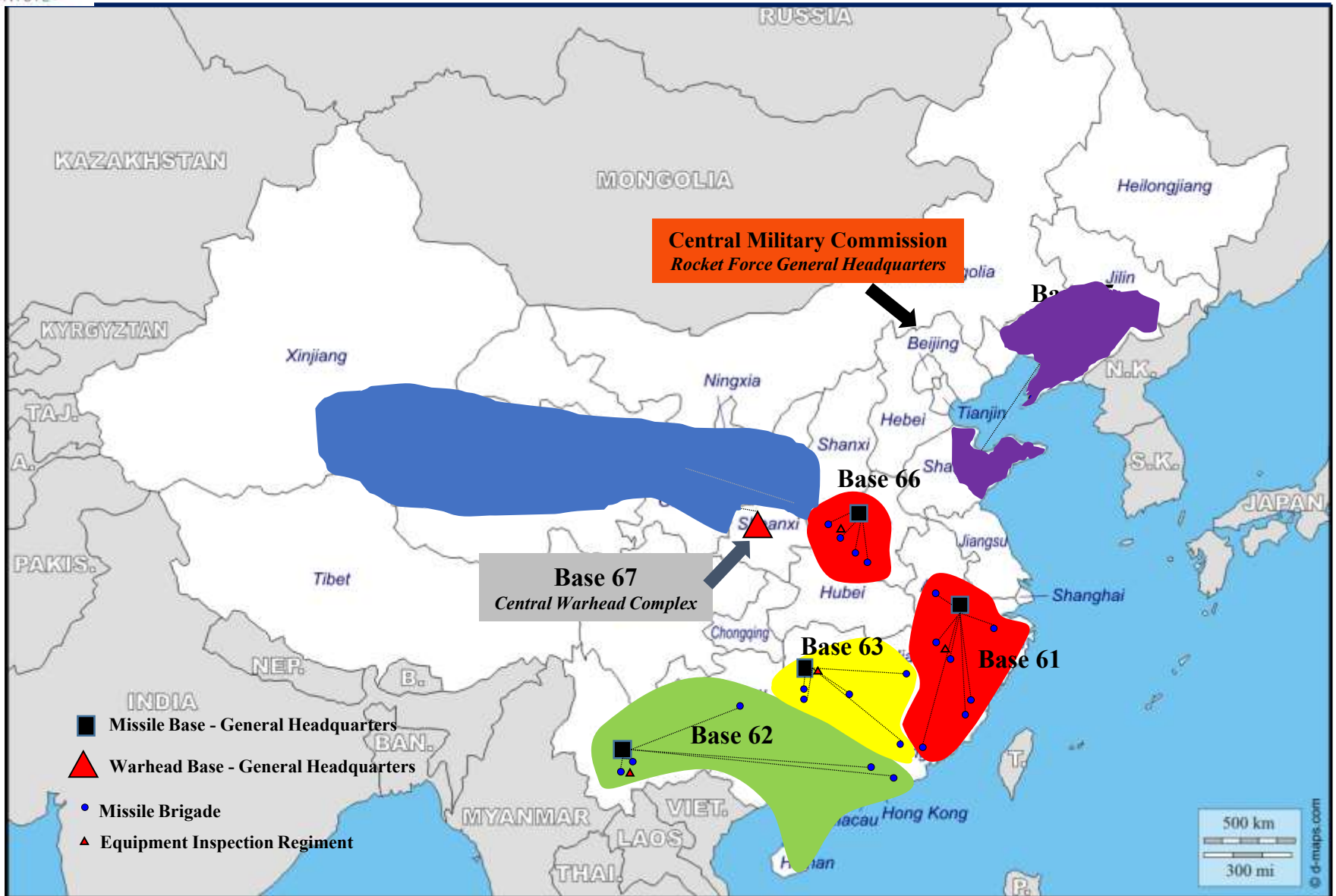
96727部队  
627 Brigade  
Puning  
Base 62

96725部队  
625 Brigade  
Jianshui  
Base 62

96744部队  
644 Brigade  
Hanzhong  
Base 64

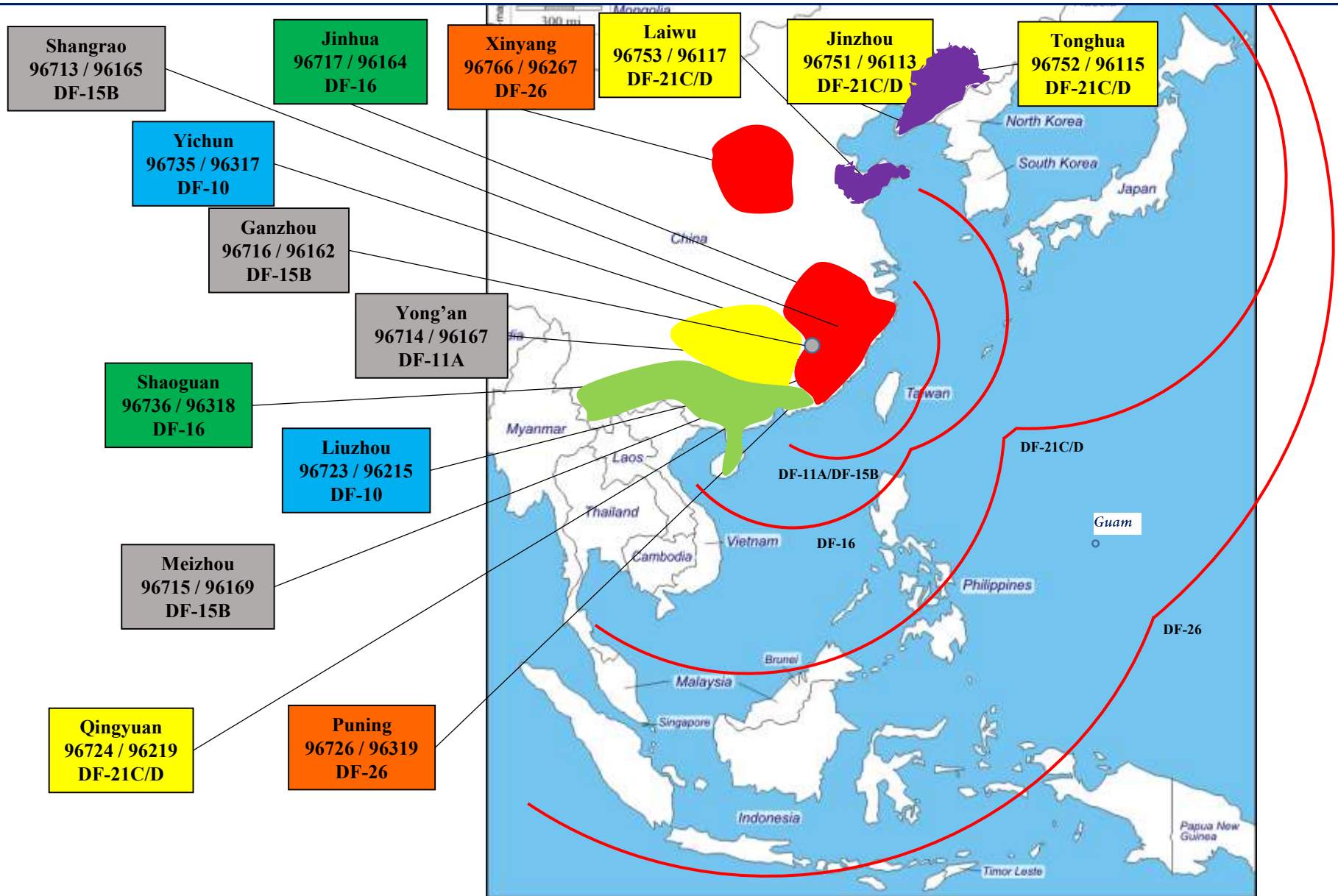
96754部队  
654 Brigade  
Dalian  
Base 65

## PLARF Force Structure



# PLARF Force Structure

## *Conventional PLARF Operational Ranges (Notional)*



# PLARF Operations and Training

## • PLARF Annual Military Training Guidelines

- Emphasis on command training and all levels, including operational planning, command and control, and emergency response

## • Individual and unit training

## • Field Training and Drills

- Command, control, communications
- Readiness
- Equipment support / underground missile prep training
- Logistics support / transregional mobility
- Confrontation training
- Nuclear, chemical, biological (NBC)

## • Live Fire Exercises

- Test and evaluation
- Operational readiness

## • Joint Training and Exercises

- Testing of Integrated Command Platform / “Fusing” into joint command system
- Joint logistics support training (eg., fuel, PLAAF mobility, etc)
- Personnel familiarization
- Tianjian exercises
- Joint Mission Action / Stride joint exercises



# PLARF Officers with Joint Experience

**Wei Fenghe**  
魏凤和



**Wang Jiasheng**  
王家胜



**Yin Fanglong**  
殷方龙



**Gao Jin**  
高津



**Shao Yuanming**  
邵元明



**Wu Guohua**  
吴国华



**Zhang Zhenzhong**  
张振中



**Yang Chuansong**  
杨传松



**Chen Guangjun**  
陈光军



**Deng Yu'en**  
邓玉恩



## Others

- Tan Jianming (谈建明)
- Zhang Shengmin (张升民)

# Conclusions

---

- PLARF missile operations can be carried out independently or jointly
- PLARF bases independent from Theater Commands
- Heavily reliant on PLASSF and Services for ISR
- Expanded, changing force structure
- Relatively limited joint training and exercises