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Is China Changing the Game in Trans-Polar Shipping?

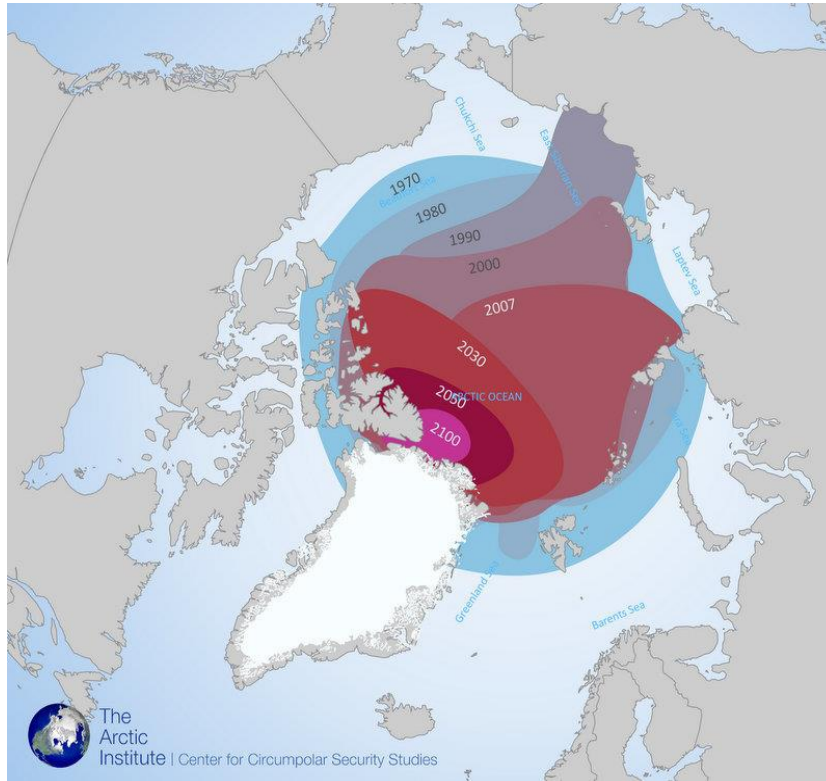
By Matt Schrader

For more than a decade, Russian policymakers have fruitlessly tried to turn the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which connects Asia and Europe along Russia's northern coastline, into a viable commercial shipping route (Jamestown Eurasian Daily Monitor, April 29, 2016). PRC financial muscle might finally be able to make their long-sought dream a reality. The idea has appeal for Chinese shipping companies, since it would cut between 1,370 and 4,600 kilometers off the trip between ports in China and Western Europe (CASS, February 28), theoretically saving both time and money by bypassing the Suez Canal. It also has appeal for Chinese policymakers; opening the NSR could secure access to natural resources and ease China's "Malacca dilemma" (China Brief, April 12, 2006).

Treacherous Sailing

At the moment the NSR is passable by normal cargo ships for only a few weeks each year, and transit speeds are lower than the Suez route because of ice in the water (Finnish Transport Agency, March 9). If global CO2 emissions continue to rise at current rates, however, the "majority of the Arctic Ocean is expected to be open water for half the year" by the end of this century, according to a 2017 report

by the UK Government Office for Science. A decrease in the extent of sea ice would vastly increase the usefulness of the NSR (see figure 1).



Source: The Arctic Institute

But the simple presence of open water does not a shipping route make, especially in the treacherous Arctic Ocean. Writing in Jamestown's Eurasia Daily Monitor in 2016, Dr. Vladislav Inozemtsev was scathing about the route's present economic viability:

There are no repair or fueling facilities suitable for modern ocean vessels anywhere along the entire route. Moreover, the icebreakers now in use are able to produce a 25-meter-wide ice-free passage, which means the NSR cannot be used by either Suezmax or Panamax container ships [which are nearly 50 meters wide] ... To make it appealing to the world's largest shipping companies, the Russian leadership will need to invest tens of billions of dollars in [a new generation of icebreakers] and local infrastructure upgrades. But to do this, transit tariffs will have to skyrocket, thus leaving the southern route [through the Suez Canal] as the best possible option for shippers. The NSR can function as an economical transit route only if foreign shippers are subsidized by the Russian government, which cannot be the case.

To all this must be added the fact that insurance rates are much higher for vessels operating in polar waters, and specially trained crews are needed to cope with the extreme conditions (UK Office for Science, July 2017). Shallow seabed at key points along the Russian coast also limits the size of ships that can pass (The Arctic Institute, November 2013).

China's entry onto the scene could be a game-changer. Where Russia lacks the political will and financial muscle to make the scheme commercially viable, the PRC may have the deep pockets, and the economic and strategic rationales needed to see things through to completion.

A "Polar Silk Road"

In a July 2017 meeting with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping declared Russia and China should "develop their cooperation on arctic shipping routes, jointly building a 'silk road on ice'" (People's Daily, January 28). The PRC's policymaking apparatus has responded to this signal from its top leader: China's State Council issued the country's first "Arctic White Paper" in January; PRC media coverage of the ice silk road has been positive and extensive; ministerial working groups from both countries are negotiating the outlines of potential cooperation; and PRC think tanks have been set to work expounding upon the potential benefits of the project.

The PRC analyses produced so far tend to frame new shipping routes as the most important outcome of Sino-Russian polar cooperation, followed closely by the potential for new natural resource extraction (CASS, February 28). They also mention the possibility that NSR shipping could help revitalize China's economically moribund northeast provinces. Geographically these provinces are much better positioned to take advantage of the shorter routes to Europe the NSR could provide, since the time difference between the NSR and the Suez for goods shipped from southern ports like Shenzhen and Hong Kong is negligible.

Outside observers should take these initiatives seriously. The CCP clearly believes in the long-term gains that can be reaped from financing polar infrastructure projects that are otherwise economically unviable, particularly when strategic justifications exist, such as securing access to natural resources, or cargo routes that ease the Malacca dilemma. PRC financial institutions provided \$12 billion of the \$27 billion necessary to bring Russia's massive new Yamal LNG project online. Prior to the PRC's involvement, the project was floundering (Eurasia Daily Monitor, September 28, 2009). Likewise, in Alaska, Chinese financing rescued a 1,300 kilometer LNG pipeline connecting the North Bank with the Pacific. Western oil majors pulled out of the project because the gas would have been too expensive to extract at prevailing market rates, even though it was one of Alaska Governor Bill Walker's signature initiatives (E&E News, April 17).

What to Watch For

Among the things to follow closely, observers wanting to gauge the progress of the Sino-Russian joint effort should keep an eye on three indicators:

- 1) PRC investment in shipping infrastructure on Russia's northern coast;
- 2) PRC investment in Northern European transport infrastructure;
- 3) Sino-Russian joint development of extra-wide next-generation icebreakers.

PRC media reports indicate that the first two are in the exploratory phase [1]. The last is speculative, but not entirely implausible. Much like the rest of its Arctic agenda, it is unclear whether Russia can afford the \$2 billion-per ship price tag of its recently announced Lider-Class icebreakers—which could

open paths wide enough for Panamax cargo ships—without PRC financial assistance (Maritime Executive, January 3).

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Notes

[1] A prominent PRC think tank recently published a report outlining the need to build a “chain” of support and safety stations along the Russian coast to ensure the success of the Polar Silk Road (Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, April 18). Likewise, PRC media reports indicate PRC companies have held discussions with port and infrastructure authorities in Norway and Finland about infrastructure cooperation (International Financial News, October 10, 2017)

CCP Propaganda against Taiwan Enters the Social Age

By Russell Hsiao

At the height of the on-going controversial pension reforms debate in Taiwan, users of LINE—the most popular messaging application on the island—and other internet users reportedly began seeing a flood of messages and numerous websites that falsely claimed that the central government was planning to impose draconian restrictions on pensioners (*Liberty Times*, July 18, 2017). Alerted by the potential instability that such rumors may cause in a society already on edge over the issue, the Taiwan government quickly issued a statement denying the fake news (Pension.president.gov.tw, July 17, 2017). According to Taiwan’s national security apparatuses, a growing volume of disinformation are the products of “content farms” (内容农场) emerging from the People’s Republic of China (PRC) (*Liberty Times*, July 18, 2017).

The disinformation campaign concerning the pension reform is one example in a long history of the use of propaganda and disinformation as political tools across the Taiwan Strait. While Taiwan may have enjoyed an advantage at the beginning of the information war due to access to more resources and technology (e.g., help from the United States), that advantage is eroding as Beijing, while remaining a close authoritarian government, exploits the openness and transparency of Taiwan’s democratic and economic system to unduly influence Taiwan. Unchecked, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda and disinformation campaigns could have a corrosive effect on Taiwan’s democracy.

CCP Propaganda and Disinformation: 1949-1991

Propaganda and disinformation are used by the PRC as tools for political and psychological warfare (*Project 2049*, October 14, 2013). During the Chinese Civil War, both the Communist and Nationalist (Kuomintang, or KMT) armies spread false information to sow discord in enemy-controlled areas, spreading rumors about defections, falsifying enemy attack plans, and stirring up unrest in an effort to misdirect enemy planning. After the Nationalist government relocated to Taiwan in 1949, the propaganda and disinformation war continued as the two sides flooded propaganda and disinformation into enemy-controlled territories to affect public opinion and troop morale.

Starting in the 1950s and continuing until the 1990s, the two sides were engaged in an intense ‘Taiwan Strait psychological war’ (台海心战). Following the Second Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1958, while the two governments

were locked in an intense international diplomatic contest, engagements were limited to covert operations, subterfuge, and other efforts to encourage defections by enemy officers through psychological warfare. Ground-zero of the psychological war was between ROC-controlled Kinmen (金門) and PRC-controlled Xiamen (廈門), where the two sides used megaphones and radio stations to spread propaganda and disinformation into enemy territory. They utilized balloons and floating carriers to send leaflets and other objects seeking defectors, promising rewards and small gifts including underwear, toys, and cooking oil, among other messages meant to exert a psychological effect on the targeted population ([Phoenix TV](#), 2013). In an instructive example of how the CCP used propaganda and disinformation, in 1971 the PLA blasted propaganda leaflets over Kinmen touting the military successes of the Khmer Rouge (the CCP's allies) against the United States. The timing was not coincidental: in the same year Taipei was replaced by Beijing in the United Nations, and Communist triumphs in Vietnam and elsewhere in Southeast Asia had left the government in Taiwan panic-stricken. The propaganda touting a Communist victory was apparently meant to amplify the fear among the people at the time that the United States was unable to protect Taiwan [1].

Cross-Strait relations began to liberalize in the 1980s and the CCP officially shuttered its overt propaganda program from Xiamen in 1991 ([ETV News](#), October 13, 2013). On the surface, the war without gunfire that had lasted for over 40 years appeared to be over—this could not be farther from the truth. Rather, propaganda and disinformation found new outlets in the mass media and now new media ([Heritage Foundation](#), July 12, 2013).

A New Media Environment in Taiwan

New information and communication technologies has magnified propaganda and disinformation to an unprecedented degree. The viral aspect of social media has made it an effective tool for propaganda and disinformation. Taiwan has one of the highest Internet usage rates in the world, at 82.3 percent in 2017 ([Focus Taiwan](#), December 29, 2017), as well as a smartphone penetration rate of 73.4 percent ([Emarketer.com](#), December 16, 2016)—second in the world only behind Denmark. Taiwan also boasts a robust ICT industry with the sixteenth fastest Internet speeds in the world and fifth fastest in the Asia-Pacific ([Taipei Times](#), June 12, 2017). The two most popular social media platforms in Taiwan are Facebook and LINE. For instance, 75 percent of the population of Taiwan used Line in 2015. PTT, a bulletin-board service system similar to Reddit, is also popular ([Oxford University](#), June 16, 2017).

CCP Propaganda and Disinformation on Social Media

The CCP uses social media in a number of ways to spread propaganda and disinformation in its influence operations against Taiwan, as noted by analyst J. Michael Cole ([Taiwan Sentinel](#), January 19, 2017).

One important way is circulating fake imagery, in the hopes that it will go viral and be picked up on by traditional media outlets in Taiwan. In one instance, an image was posted on social media showing Chinese bombers flying near Taiwan's Jade Mountain. This photo was likely posted to instill fear in the hearts of the Taiwanese public. Even though Taiwan's defense ministry denied the veracity of the image, the denial came after the photo had already been widely shared ([Taiwan Sentinel](#), January 19, 2017).

Another time-honored tactic, reinvigorated by the social media era, is deliberately obscuring or misquoting statements made by Taiwanese persons, usually officials or ex-officials—whether in forums held in China or in interviews—in order to tarnish the person's reputation or mislead the readers into believing that the person supports a particular political position held by the CCP. These tactics, used by both China and Hong Kong-based media, have ensnared retired former generals, high-level defense officials, lawmakers, and even entertainers in a host of political controversies ([The National Interest](#), July 30, 2017).

The CCP also uses proxy organizations to spread fake news. Taiwan is a democracy with a diverse civil society, an openness which can also make it vulnerable. And indeed, observers have noticed a troubling uptick in the infiltration of Taiwan's civil society by proxy organizations associated with CCP's United Front Work Department, with possible financial ties to the PRC government (USCC.gov, April 5). These United Front organizations may then be used to propagate disinformation, as was reported in the case of some anti-pension groups, and counter perspectives from other segments of Taiwan's civil society (Liberty Times, July 18, 2017).

Finally, the CCP has also begun to use computational propaganda, in the form of bots, social media, and content farms, to saturate Taiwan's information space with pro-Beijing political propaganda. According to a report published by Oxford University:

... computational propaganda has allowed Beijing to insert itself into the battleground of domestic Taiwanese politics, so much so that various (dis)information campaigns can no longer be solely attributed to the KMT and other pan-blue forces, which adds to the confusion. In recent cases, Chinese disinformation efforts have overlapped with—and in some cases appear to have co-opted—traditional blocking action by opposition legislators and civic groups opposed to reforms. These recent cases include protests against pension reform, government plans to limit the (environmentally unfriendly) burning of large quantities of incense and ghost money at Buddhist temples, and limits for the Tsai administration's Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program" (Oxford University, June 16, 2017).

Conclusion

The CCP has a long history of using propaganda and disinformation against Taiwan. In social media it has found a fertile information environment to amplify its time-honed tactics of political and psychological warfare. Flooding Taiwan's society with propaganda and disinformation can weaken its people's trust in democratic institutions and lead to political instability.

The challenge is not lost on Taiwanese officials and civil society. For instance, Taiwan government is reportedly taking a long-term approach, attempting to tackle the problem of fake news through public education by including topics such as "media literacy" on the curriculum in schools (TIME, April 7, 2017). To counter the challenge of dubious news sources on LINE, private developers created a bot that will inform users whether or not a suspicious links is providing false information, and provide relevant facts on the issue (Oxford University, June 16, 2017). Taiwan's national security apparatuses have also reportedly ramped up surveillance programs to monitor the connections and finances of potential proxy groups and individuals with ties to Beijing (Taipei Times, March 13, 2018).

In general, propaganda and disinformation exploits the openness of democratic institutions and can undermine the people's ability as citizens to think and act effectively and collectively. The CCP's ultimate goal is the subjugation of Taiwan under the PRC, and propaganda and disinformation are means to weakening morale and people's resistance towards that political end.

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Notes

[1] For an overview of these and other CCP psychological warfare techniques at the time, see this extensive article by SGM Herbert A. Friedman (Ret.): <http://www.psywarrior.com/NationalistChinesePropaganda.html>.

Corralling the People's Armed Police: Centralizing Control to Reflect Centralized Budgets

By Adrian Zenz

On March 21, the Chinese government announced a major restructuring of the People's Armed Police (PAP) that will relegate all but one of its current units to other ministries, meaning that these units' staff will no longer be part of the military service ([National Audit Office](#), March 21). This came on the heels of another important change in December 2017, when command over the PAP, which had been shared between the Central Military and the State Council, was assigned exclusively to the former ([South China Morning Post](#), December 28, 2017).

Both changes are expressly designed to disentangle civilian and military affairs and are set to solidly enshrine central government control over this crucial domestic security force ([Global Times](#), March 21). Generally, the ability of local authorities to utilize PAP forces for their own purposes, including breaking up popular protests against corrupt officials by firing into crowds, has long been a concern for the central government ([China Brief](#), June 19, 2008). Beijing's fears of local power abuses involving the PAP were likely heightened in 2012 when former Chongqing Party chief Bo Xilai deployed the PAP against his police chief Wang Lijun. If regional power holders were ever to directly challenge the central government, the potential ability to control both PAP and public security forces would pose a severe threat.

This article demonstrates, through a close analysis of PRC domestic security spending, that the recent PAP reforms have sought to align unit command structures with existing spending distribution patterns. Put differently, central control of the PAP will now better reflect the central government's control of the PAP's budget. However, for restive minority regions where PAP forces closely interact with other security forces and where different PAP units jointly respond to security incidents, the implications of the intended simplification of military and civilian security structures are far from clear. While the planned changes will enforce strong vertical control, they may make more difficult the horizontal interactions between different security forces needed to address local developments.

Additionally, the analysis reveals how central-local PAP spending distribution patterns cause significant subsidization effects especially for restive minority regions such as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The implication is that actual domestic security expenditures in Xinjiang and elsewhere are substantially larger than their already very high regional domestic security budgets ([China Brief](#), March 12).

Domestic Security Budget Sub-Categories

Since its bloody involvement in the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has been reluctant to act as an enforcer of domestic stability. This role was instead relegated to the PAP. In terms of equipment and strike capability, the PAP with its armored personnel carriers is equivalent to light infantry, placing it between the more heavily armed PLA and the regular police forces.

The PAP remains a secretive entity. Extremely little has been published on its budgets, let alone on spending distributions between its internal units or different regional levels. Shambaugh even argued that PAP expenditures are not included in domestic security budgets, and are therefore unknown [1]. However, PAP expenses are consistently listed (although not always disclosed) in these budgets.

Domestic security budgets on all regional levels typically contain the following sub-categories: People's Armed Police (PAP, 武装警察), the public security organs (公安机关) which are administered by the Ministry of Public Security (国家公安部), the court system (法院系统), the judicial system (司法系统) which includes

the prison system (监狱系统), the prosecutorial system (检察院系统), state security (国家安全) which is administered by the Ministry of State Security (MSS; 国家安全部), and the expenditures of the National Administration for the Protection of State Secrets (NAPSS; 国家保密局), the Chinese equivalent of the American National Security Agency (NSA).

National Domestic Security Spending by Budget Sub-Category

Prior to 2010, PAP expenditures were the only disclosed national domestic security budget sub-category. Since then, several other budget sub-categories have begun to be published (Table 1). Between 2010 and 2016, the spending shares of these sub-categories within total domestic security spending remained largely constant, with PAP and public security accounting for around 18 and 50 percent respectively.

Spending category	2007	2010	2014	2016
Domestic security (total)	348,616	551,770	835,723	1,103,198
...PAP	58,517	93,384	157,154	177,681
...Public security	n/a	281,631	420,575	574,128
...Prosecutorial system	n/a	n/a	51,170	65,634
...Court system	n/a	54,395	76,262	101,509
...Judicial system	n/a	15,969	24,152	31,078
...Anti-smuggling police	n/a	1,065	1,858	2,437
...Uncategorized	290,099	105,326	104,552	150,731

Table 1. National domestic security spending in million RMB. Source: Ministry of Finance National General Public Budget Expenditure Tables (final accounts).

Within sub-categories, there are notable differences between central and regional level spending. Most PAP expenses (73.2 percent) are funded by the central government (Table 2). In contrast, public security and other domestic security related expenditures are mostly incurred at regional levels.

Spending category	Central level only	National	Central level share of national spending
Domestic security (total)	174,191	1,103,198	15.8%
...PAP	129,994 (75%)	177,681 (16%)	73.2%
...Public security	19,698 (11%)	574,128 (52%)	3.4%
...Prosecutorial system	902 (1%)	65,634 (6%)	1.4%
...Court system	1,121 (1%)	101,509 (9%)	1.1%
...Judicial system	344(0.2%)	31,078 (3%)	1.1%
...Anti-smuggling police	2,391 (1%)	2,437(0.2%)	98.1%
...Uncategorized	19,741 (11%)	150,731 (14%)	13.1%

Table 2. 2016 Domestic security spending in million RMB. Source: Ministry of Finance, Local Government's General Public Budget Expenditure (final accounts).

More detailed provincial spending breakdowns permit us to estimate likely national spending shares on uncategorized items (Table 3) [2]. The resulting figures leave little space for substantial hidden spending categories (compare also Table 4) [3]. Also, current public sector wage levels indicate that RMB 178 billion should be

completely sufficient for the estimated 1.5 million PAP staff [4]. It is therefore likely that the disclosed PAP budget corresponds to the force's actual spending.

Spending category	National total	Share of total domestic security spending
All uncategorized spending	150,731	14.1%
...Prison system	99,000 (est.)	9.0% (est.)
... Coercive isolated detoxification	24,000 (est.)	2.2% (est.)
...State security (domestic operations)	24,000 (est.)	2.2% (est.)
...NAPSS	2,400 (est.)	0.2% (est.)
...Remaining uncategorized spending items	1,330 (est.)	0.3% (est.)

Table 3. Estimated breakdown of uncategorized domestic security spending.
Sources see [2].

Regional Domestic Security Spending Breakdowns

The breakdowns shown in Table 2 are available for provincial and regional budgets, with varying disclosure levels. Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) budgets exclude "classified items" such as domestic security, while Xinjiang even goes so far as to break down MSS and NAPSS expenditures (TAR government, 7 August 2017).

A comparison of several provinces and regions shows limited differentiation in regards to domestic security spending breakdowns (Table 4). PAP expenditure shares are likewise fairly stable [5]. Considering that the PAP plays a much larger role in restive minority regions such as Xinjiang or Qinghai, limited regional variation is likely explained by the fact that many PAP expenses are covered by the central government.

Spending category	All provinces *	Xinjiang	Beijing	Heilong-jiang	Guang-dong	Qinghai	Hainan	Guangxi
Year	2016	2016	2016	2016	2017	2016	2015	2017
Domestic security spending as share of total spending	5.8%	7.3%	5.9%	5.0%	8.0%	4.7%	6.2%	5.0%
Domestic security spending shares by sub-category								
...PAP	5.1%	5.0%	5.5%	4.5%	4.6%	5.4%	13.1%	7.0%
...Public security	60%	58%	51%	56%	64%	53%	47%	55%
...Prosecutorial system	7%	4%	3%	8%	5%	9%	8%	7%
...Court system	11%	8%	8%	12%	8%	12%	12%	12%
...Judicial system	3%	3%	1%	3%	2%	5%	3%	4%
...Prison system	n/a	8.0%	12.5%	n/a	7.4%	11.3%	7.4%	8.3%
... Coercive iso-lated detoxification	n/a	1.9%	n/a	n/a	2.3%	n/a	2.9%	2.3%
...State security	n/a	2.4%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.2%
...NAPSS	n/a	0.02%	n/a	0.18%**	0.05%**	n/a	0.02%	n/a
...Uncategorized	14%	9.8%	18.9%	16.5%	7.0%	4.7%	6.4%	2.6%

Table 4. 2016 domestic security actual spending shares for entire provinces or regions. Source: regional government finance departments (final accounts). * Excluding central government spending. ** Only provincial administrative level (省本级) figure (Guangdong data from 2015).

Spending Distribution Between People's Armed Police Units

Prior to the most recent reform proposal, the PAP consisted of five major units. The most important and largest force are the Domestic Security Troops (DST; 内卫部队). Of an estimated 1.5 million troops, about 800,000 are thought to belong to the DST. [see 4] In the future, the PAP will only be composed of the DST, with the remaining troops, including those responsible for fire-fighting and border defense, transferred to the control of other ministries.

Per capita, Qinghai and Xinjiang spend twice as much on the PAP overall as the average of all provinces and regions (Table 5). Unfortunately, most PAP spending figures are only available for provincial or autonomous regional administrative, which excludes all sub-provincial spending and makes interprovincial comparisons more difficult (China Brief, March 12, figure 1).

Region	Total PAP spending		PAP Spending Breakdown (in million RMB)			
	million RMB	per capita	Domestic Security (DST; 内卫)	Border Defense (边防)	Fire fighting (消防)	Guards (警卫)
Entire provinces/regions						
Qinghai (2016 actual)	386.7	65.2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Xinjiang (2016 actual)	1,499.4	63.5	174 (11.6%)	441 (29.4%)	603 (40.2%)	22.7 (1.5%)
Guangxi (2017 actual)	1,989.0	29.2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guangdong (2017 actual)	5,531.0	15.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
All provinces and regions (excl. central level, 2016 actual)	47,687.0	34.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Provincial/regional level only						
Xinjiang (2016 actual)	696.0	36.7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Inner Mongolia (2016 actual)	838.2	33.3	145 (17.3%)	232 (27.7%)	152 (18.1%)	78 (9.3%)
Hainan (2016 actual)	256.6	27.9	44 (17.2%)	111 (43.2%)	64 (25.1%)	10 (3.8%)
Qinghai (2018 budget)	103.9	17.5	37 (35.6%)	6 (5.8%)	47 (45.2%)	12 (11.5%)
Fujian (2017 adjusted budget)	290.2	7.5	65 (22.4%)	54 (18.5%)	83 (28.6%)	12 (4.0%)
Guangxi (2016 actual)	288.1	6.0	61 (21.0%)	47 (16.3%)	103 (35.8%)	26 (9.1%)
Sichuan (2016 actual)	322.4	3.9	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Shandong (2017 budget)	320.9	3.2	64 (19.9%)	31 (9.5%)	204 (63.5%)	23 (7.0%)
Guangdong (2015 actual)	282.9	2.6	66 (23.4%)	97 (34.3%)	95 (33.6%)	36 (12.7%)
Hunan (2017 actual)	170.0	2.5	73 (42.9%)	11 (6.5%)	72 (42.4%)	14 (8.2%)
Liaoning (2017 actual)	54.9	1.3	22.2 (40.4%)	12.8 (23.3%)	11.8 (21.5%)	8.1 (14.8%)

Table 5. Domestic security PAP spending. Source: national and regional government finance departments.

Of great interest is that many regions provide PAP spending breakdowns in line with PAP unit divisions. They show that regional PAP spending tends to be dominated by fire fighting and border defense. While no such breakdowns are published for central government PAP spending, provincial and lower-level figures allow us to infer that the bulk of PAP DST spending is covered by Beijing, while regional spending focuses on the other units.

This is even more evident at sub-provincial or city levels (Table 6). Here, DST spending shares can be as low as single-digit even in highly restive minority regions. For example, Urumqi's 2016 PAP expenditure was dominated by fire fighting (85 percent), with DST making up a paltry 6.7 percent. In Kashgar, a highly restive Uyghur majority city in China's far west, 98.2 percent of PAP expenses that year were spent on fire fighting. Moreover, both of these cities' total per capita PAP expenditures remained well below Beijing, Guangzhou and Qingdao [6]. Since southern Xinjiang is virtually blanketed by the PAP, these figures reveal the extent to which domestic security in such regions is funded by Beijing.

Region	Total PAP spending		PAP Spending Breakdown (in million RMB)			
	million RMB	per capita	Domestic Security (DST; 内卫)	Border Defense (边防)	Fire fighting (消防)	Guards (警卫)
Provincial/regional level only						
Shannan City (TAR, 2016 actual)	78.7	207.1	61 (77.5%)	6.8 (8.6%)	10.9 (13.9%)	0
Aba Prefecture (Sichuan, 2015 actual)	73.3	78.8	14.3 (19.5%)	0	55.1 (75.2%)	0
Beijing (city level only, 2016 actual)	911.9	67.1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Guangzhou (2016 actual)	416.2	57.8	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Qingdao (2015 actual)	429.4	46.7	14.6 (3.4%)	60.3 (14.1%)	354 (82.4%)	0.4 (0.09%)
Turpan City (XUAR, 2016 actual)	21.1	33.5	2.9 (13.7%)	0	17.4 (82.5%)	0.6 (2.6%)
Ali District (TAR, 2018 budget)	22.3	20.3	1.7 (7.6%)	2.7 (12.1%)	17.9 (80.3%)	0
Urumqi (XUAR, 2016 actual)	47.5	17.7	3.2 (6.7%)	2.3 (4.8%)	40.4 (85.1%)	1.7 (3.6%)
Ili District (XUAR, 2015 budget)	71.4	15.3	7.3 (10.2%)	12.9 (18.1%)	46.3 (64.8%)	0
Harbin (2016 actual)	111.5	11.6	8.5 (7.6%)	1 (0.9%)	87.5 (78.5%)	4.2 (3.8%)
Kashgar City (XUAR, 2016 actual)	4.94	7.1	0.09 (1.8%)	0	4.85 (98.2%)	0

Table 6. Domestic security - PAP spending. Source: regional government finance departments.

Estimating Xinjiang's Central-Local Security Spending Transfer Effect

In order to estimate central-local security spending transfer effects, we need to know Xinjiang's PAP troop sizes. While there are no official figures, PAP numbers in 2008, prior to the 2009 Urumqi riots, were reported at approximately 70,000 (likely pertaining to the DST); an anecdotal account from 2013 cites a troop size of 200,000. [7] It is reasonable to assume that presently, Xinjiang's DST alone number anywhere between 80,000 to 160,000.

If we estimate that about 80 percent of central government PAP expenses are spent on the DST (since other units are largely locally-funded), then it can be inferred that anywhere between 10 to 20 billion RMB of central level PAP funding in 2016 was spent on Xinjiang. The higher estimate roughly compares to the 17.5 billion RMB that the region spent on public security that year, and amounts to two-thirds of its entire domestic security spending (of 30.1 billion RMB). In contrast, Xinjiang's own PAP expenditures that year only amounted to 1.5 billion RMB, up to half of which may have been on the DST. [8] If correct, then 93 to 96 percent of Xinjiang's DST budget is funded by Beijing.

A comparison with public sector wage levels confirms the general accuracy of this rough approximation. If Xinjiang spent about half of its 2016 PAP budget (750 million RMB) on the DST, it could only pay the wages of about 7,000-7,500 staff. [9] Clearly, the region only sustains its troops with massive central funds. Similar estimates for the TAR are unfortunately precluded by a lack of information about its PAP troop size and budget.

Conclusions

Recent restructurings align PAP unit and command structures with spending distribution patterns. The vast majority of PAP domestic security troops (DST) are funded by Beijing, while other units along with public security forces are largely locally-funded. When the PAP is reduced to the DST (and the coast guard), then both the command and nearly all PAP budget control will firmly rest with the central government.

The potential consequences of increasing central control for local stability maintenance dynamics are significant. Without access to PAP command, local officials may have to rely more strongly on regular police forces for daily stability maintenance. In addition, all PAP units have to mobilize their forces in the case of domestic security incidents. The fact that PAP units with significant local funding shares such as fire fighting will no longer be controlled by public security agencies renders such mobilizations more complicated.

The original rationale behind a mixed vertical and horizontal system of control was to permit a degree of local autonomy in line with local expertise and needs, while allowing the Party to retain ultimate control ([China Brief](#), March 24, 2016). With the horizontal PAP command chains largely removed, it is questionable whether the CMC command chain lends itself to being involved in the complexities of daily security operations. In most regions, the PAP remains in the background, only called upon for emergencies. However, in restive minority regions such as Xinjiang or Tibet, it is heavily involved in daily policing tasks, with estimated expenditures in Xinjiang roughly corresponding to those of regular police forces. While the state is "disentangling" military and civilian domestic security regimes, security maintenance in these regions is actually predicated upon their constant interaction.

In this respect, the restructuring of the PAP exemplifies the same inherent contradictions as Xi Jinping's wider structural reforms. By strengthening vertical mechanisms of control and punishment at the expense of horizontal coordination and cooperation, China's new governance systems discourage local experimentation and adaptation, decreasing the effectiveness of local policy implementation ([East Asia Forum](#), December 20, 2016). In restive regions, the proposed changes to the PAP could have a similarly problematic effect on stability maintenance management.

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Notes

[1] Shambaugh, David, "China Goes Global" (2013, p.328, note 15). Conversely, see Wang, Shaoguang, "China's Expenditure for the People's Armed Police and Militia" (2003, Chinese University of Hong Kong). This article's author's research further indicates (contrary to Shambaugh) that state security expenses (for domestic operations) are likewise included in domestic security.

[2] See Table 4 for details and sources. Spending estimates for state security were based on a population-weighted sample (2016 population figures) from provincial (regional) administrative level budgets for (m stands for million RMB): Xinjiang (2016 actual, 696m), Qinghai (2018 budget, 180m), Guangdong (2015 actual, 1,348m incl. Guangzhou and Shenzhen), Liaoning (2017 actual, 250m), Fujian (2016 actual, 397m), Guangxi (2016 actual, 356m), Inner Mongolia (2017 budget, 330m), Hainan (2016 actual, 188m), Hunan (2017 actual, 696m). Due to their unique security situation, Xinjiang and Qinghai were only weighted at 40 percent in order to prevent them from skewing the sample. This results in an estimated average national state security spending figure of 15.4 billion RMB. While for some regions such as Xinjiang and Guangxi, nearly all state security

spending occurs at the regional administrative level, cities in Guangdong had substantial related spending figures of their own. Consequently, the national average has to be adjusted by an unknown margin. In order to account for this as well as an unknown amount of central government state security spending, it was decided to set the state security spending share within domestic security at 2.2 percent (comparable with related shares for Xinjiang and Guangxi). This results in the 24 billion RMB estimate (or 17,35 RMB per capita). Notably, Xinjiang and Qinghai's per capita state security spending is nearly twice as high as the national average (30.6 and 30.4 respectively).

[3] For example, Heilongjiang, which did not publish separate figures for prison system, coercive isolated detoxification or state security in its 2016 accounts, featured a large (16.5 percent) share of uncategorized domestic security spending - comparable to the national share. In contrast, regions that provided comprehensive breakdowns had small percentages of uncategorized expenses (Table 4). Only Xinjiang and Beijing had substantial uncategorized items remaining, but these are unique regions with particularly intense securitization regimes.

[4] Troop size estimates: Blasko, Dennis, "The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century" (2006, p.23); [CGTN](#) (December 31, 2017); Chinese [Wikipedia](#). No statistics are available on average annual PAP human resource expenses. At the 2016 average annual public sector wage of 67,569 RMB, the average annual cost of a PAP member to the state (including employer expenses and various subsidies) can be roughly estimated at 80,000 RB (source: National Bureau of Statistics). If 70 percent of the national PAP budget was spent on wages and related costs, the state could support 1.55 million PAP troops. In this, the PAP benefits from the fact that many (if not most) of its research and development expenses are likely paid out of the military budget.

[5] While Hainan's 2015 PAP expenditure share was unusually high, it was likely a spike. On the provincial administrative level, the provinces' PAP expenditures in 2015 were 50 percent higher than in 2016 and 130 percent higher than the 2017 PAP budget.

[6] In the TAR, regional differences in per capita PAP spending and related distributions are much greater. However, since the TAR's administrative-level PAP figures are not disclosed, interpretations of its sub-regional spending data are problematic. It is however likely that in these remote and mountainous regions, the state is particularly relying on PAP forces for domestic security.

[7] [BBC](#) (July 7, 2013), [Tiexue.net BBS](#) (user post from December 25, 2017).

[8] In 2016, Xinjiang spent 1,499.4 million RMB on the PAP, of which 856.6 million was borne by the regional administrative level. Sub-regional budgets indicate that local DST spending shares are unlikely to exceed 15 percent. Even if 75 percent of administrative level PAP expenses fell on the DST, which is actually quite likely, Xinjiang's overall DST spending share would not exceed 50 percent (or 750 million RMB). Sources: regional finance department.

[9] Estimated based on Xinjiang's annual average public sector wage of 63,739 RMB, with an added 20 percent for an estimated annual average PAP staff cost of about 76,500 RMB (source: National Bureau of Statistics). Since average per capita PAP human resource expenses are not published, this is only a rough approximation.

The Rise and Rise of the United Front Work Department under Xi

By Gerry Groot

The March meeting of China's two national level parliaments, the National People's Congress and the Chinese Peoples' Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), was notable for more than just formalizing the abolition of term limits for state president. It also signaled the end of much of the pretense of separation between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and key government institutions, including the three government departments responsible for ethnic affairs, religion and Overseas Chinese affairs, whose functions will now be largely subsumed by the CCP's own United Front Work Department (UFWD).

At least the names of the three departments—the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the State Administration for Religious Affairs and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council—will likely live on, at least in nominal terms, because of their usefulness when dealing with Westerners unused to the reality of the party-state. More importantly, however, this change reflects a return to policies of ethnic assimilation and party leadership over religion in ways not seen since the 1950s, when Mao Zedong oversaw China's forced transition to socialism. It also implies an unprecedented extension of Party influence abroad.

Clarified Lines of Authority

As Andrew Batson has pointed out, CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's reorganization of the PRC's government serves the useful purpose of greatly simplifying lines of responsibility and administrative complexity, as well as making the centrality of the Party (and of Xi himself) crystal clear ([Andrew Batson](#), April 5). While previously, the UFWD was the key actor within each of the three government ministries, driving their policies from within, they were nevertheless different organizations with sometimes differing interests, incentives and personnel (with some overlap). The resultant gaps sometimes resulted in deviation from the line set down by the central leadership via the UFWD, particularly at lower levels, and in frictions between the different interests.

By unequivocally placing the UFWD at the center, many of the problems and inefficiencies of the old system can be overcome, at least in theory. The Department itself is now even more under the direct control of the CCP's Central Committee via the Committee's new Leading Small Group on United Front Work, substantially increasing its ability to impose its policies downwards as intended.

Most importantly, since assuming Party leadership in 2012, Xi himself has been forcefully promoting united front work and the UFWD, most notably by appearing at the national United Front Work Conference of 2015. Xi has also raised the status of the Department's work and its place within the bureaucracy in ways which make a career in it much more attractive and should help attract better quality cadres. United front work after all, often involves working with individuals and groups that have proven politically dangerous in the past, a reality borne out by the falls from grace of past leaders like Li Weihan under Mao and Yan Mingfu in the wake of the student movement of 1989 [1].

Administrative and bureaucratic rationales aside, there are also ideological reasons for consolidating CCP control over the government departments responsible for executing UFWD policy, in ways that parallel important previous phases of united front work.

The United Front Over Time

The success of united front work in the CCP's long struggle against the Guomindang was the reason that Mao Zedong declared it one of the CCP's three "magic weapons" (along with the Red Army and Party building, AKA ideological indoctrination) [2]. But from 1949 to 1956 the UFWD was redeployed to use selected allies and Party

institutions to force the assimilation of the urban middle classes and the handful of formerly rich Chinese who had not fled abroad and minimize the loss of expertise needed to build socialism.

After 1978, a revived UFWD worked hard to re-motivate those bourgeoisie, capitalists and intellectuals who survived Mao's thought reform and political purges, in order to overcome the failings of the centrally-planned economy. Significantly, the first area to be revived, even before Mao died, was with Overseas Chinese as the Party sought to rehabilitate its reputation abroad, and use the talents and connections of this group to provide markets for goods and secure investment to help modernize China's outdated industries.

From the 1980s until approximately 2015, the Department expanded the scope of its work to take into account the profusion of new interest groups emerging from economic pluralization, including new entrepreneurs, those working for foreign companies, and lawyers etc. At the 2015 United Front Work Conference, even more new groups were added, including social media personalities, Chinese students studying abroad and recent Chinese emigres, the so-called "new Overseas Chinese."

There was an element of urgency behind the UFWD's expansion as it sought to understand and cope with a much more complex society. New groups had to be controlled, integrated and represented in the CPPCC system to forestall the development of anything that might resemble a civil society space. Thus, the independent creation of any new bodies that might independently represent any sort of collective interest is criminalized, while a profusion of non-governmental organizations that emerged during the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao administration have also been increasingly constrained and subject to Party oversight and control.

A New, Harder Line

Significantly, Xi's rise to power has seen important divergences from previous corporatist policies of recognition-representation-control. Most well-known is the crackdown on idiosyncratic expressions of Christianity in Zhejiang Province (between the gaps between the UFWD and SARA [3]), which resulted in the demolition of large crosses on churches and even the full scale demolition of some churches and cathedrals ([Telegraph](#), May 19, 2014). This dramatically increased attention to religion has spillovers into ethnic affairs, notably the Buddhism of China's Tibetans and the Islam of its Uyghurs, Kazakhs and even of the Hui (ethnically Chinese Muslims). Here, Sinification seems to be going hand-in-hand with what seems, for all intents and purposes, like forced assimilation and, particularly in the case of China's Muslim population, a dramatic securitization if not outright militarization of policy. Accompanying this intensification of overt control is the stepped up use of surveillance and artificial intelligence technologies to assist in monitoring and regulation ([The Guardian](#), January 18).

This new emphasis on assimilation rather than accommodation has seen rather dramatic reversals of policy on issues such as language. Bilingual teaching has given way to concentration on teaching in Mandarin and efforts to protect or promote the Tibetan language have been dealt with harshly ([RFA](#), January 4). Many thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of young Uyghurs have been sent to "re-education" camps often on only the merest suspicion of even *potential* support for separatism, independence or Islamic extremism ([RFA](#), March 22). Even Qurans and previously allowed religious texts have been confiscated ([RFA](#), September 27, 2017). It seems the Party wishes to revise even the most key religious texts to suit its own needs,

These actions and many others seem *prima facie* inimical to the promotion of harmonious bonds between the Party and key elements of the population and are a far cry from decades of policies designed to maximize national unity. They are not changes that Xi would have undertaken lightly.

Old Solutions, New Failures?

Here the role of history and ideology become important. Much of the rationale for the shift in policy seems to revolve around Xi Jinping's rise and his analysis of what the Party must do to both survive and to achieve his

vision of national rejuvenation. Xi takes very seriously those Party analyses undertaken in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc which stressed the loss of Party control over the levers of government, the failure to take ideology seriously enough, the alleged role of “hostile foreign forces” and civil society forces like churches, and the growth of ethnic consciousness among the USSR’s many minority nationalities (SCMP, November 18, 2013). The UFWD’s new policies reflect his determination to prevent anything similar from happening in China.

In many ways then, the hardline turn in today’s united front work parallels the 1950s, which saw the urban bourgeoisie forced to undergo “thought reform”, and to give up their old ways, old ideals and any connections to the West in order to be accepted as proletarians by the Party and the people. At that time too, Christians had to accept the reorganization of their churches and a complete break with the West, while ethnic minorities had to surrender all rights to self-determination other than those implied by the creation of the so-called “autonomous regions” [4]. Yet all these measures failed in important ways, and failed at a time when the CCP was much more able to contain outside influences. Among the consequences was the retreat into passivity by many people made fearful of the future, and a stifling of innovation and progress. Indeed, the consequences of Mao’s reactionary response to the 1957 Hundred Flowers campaign, first in the form of the Anti-Rightist campaign and later the Cultural Revolution, were the reasons that reform and opening up was eventually needed.

Today, China is both connected to the rest of the world in ways unimaginable in the 1950s, and has grown wealthy as a consequence. Xi is either unaware of this history, or perhaps believes that technologies like AI can help contain any negative consequences. However, it would probably be safer to bet that like Mao, Xi too has begun to overreach.

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Notes

[1] The fall of another former head, Ling Jihua in 2014 was almost certainly more about corruption engaged in before he was made head of the UFWD rather than any activity after assuming that role.

[2] Much of this history is summarized in the book *Managing Transitions: The Chinese Communist Party, United Front Work, Corporatism and Hegemony*, Groot (2004).

[3] For some examples of this idiosyncratic activity, see the examples collected by Ray Wang in Ray Wang and Gerry Groot (2018) “Who represents? Xi Jinping’s Grand United Front Work, legitimation, participation and consultative democracy,” *Journal of Contemporary China* – DOI: 10.1080/10670564.2018.1433573 Ray Wang and Gerry Groot.

[4] China’s five autonomous regions are province-level units nominally set aside for specific ethnic groups. In practice they function little differently from provinces in the degree of control exercised by the CCP.

One Step Forward, One Step Back for PLA Military Education

By Ying Yu Lin

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's sweeping reorganization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 2016 was meant to shake up ossified bureaucracies, boost operational jointness and technical ability, and refocus the PLA on its mission to "fight and win wars" ([China Brief](#), January 12). It is thus unsurprising that military academies and schools in China have seen significant reorganization since the initiation of the 2016 reforms, with some changes modeled on the training systems used in the United States and Taiwan. While some progress has been made towards desired outcomes, including combatting entrenched corruption within the PLA officer corps, significant obstacles remain, particularly in building cooperation across branches within services, and promoting the civil-military cooperation necessary for an effective civilian office reserve corps.

Before and After the Reforms

Prior to the 2016 reforms, PLA military education was jointly controlled by each of the four general departments of the Central Military Commission (CMC). In the 2016 military reforms, the four general departments of the CMC were re-organized and transformed into 15 functional departments and organs. ([Xinhuanet](#), Dec.18, 2017). After the disbandment of the four general departments in the 2016 military reforms, all military academies and schools have been placed under the joint control of the CMC Training and Administration Department (CMCTAD), and the appropriate service branch ([TAKUN](#), July 29, 2017).

According to open source information, there were a total of 67 military academies and schools in China before the military reforms, with 15 attached to the People's Armed Police (PAP) alone. With the new military structure in place, the number has now dropped to 43, which were made public by China's Ministry of National Defense in June 2017 ([Xinhuanet](#), June.30, 2017). They include two schools directly subordinate to the CMC, namely the National Defense University (NDU) and National University of Defense Technology (NUDT), 35 under the control of the services and service branches, and six belonging to the People's Armed Police (PAP).

The re-organization of military academies and schools was not meant to eliminate any of them; rather, many were re-organized as branches of larger existing universities, with the goal of streamlining and facilitating policy coordination. The most noticeable example is the two universities directly subordinate to the CMC, the NDU and the NUDT, which absorbed, respectively, seven and five formerly separate military academies following the re-organization ([People Daily](#), March.23).

The Objectives of Reform

The consolidation of military academies and schools had a number of objectives, which we might divide into practical, political, and professional.

At a very practical level, one of the goals of the reorganization was to slash redundant bureaucracy and reduce costs. This, however, had the important *political* side effect of reducing the number of positions available for generals. One of the most important considerations for CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping in his reorganization of the military was breaking the systems that tended to breed corruption. Before the consolidation, most of the academies and schools were headed by major generals, who generally had significant resources at their disposal, and were thus prone to corruption. One example was former NDU President General Wang Xibin, one of the generals removed from power in CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's ongoing anti-corruption campaign ([China Military](#), Feb 24, 2017).

A professional goal of military academy and school reform was to build links between military academies and individual PLA services. The newly established PLA Strategic Support Force (PLASSF), for example, was assigned two new military academies: the Aerospace Engineering University, which grew out of the Armament College of under the former General Armaments Department, and the Strategic Support Force Information Engineering University, which merged the PLA Information Engineering University with the PLA College of Foreign Languages., both of which were under the former General Staff Department ([China Military](#), Jun 13, 2017).

Building links between the services and military schools is part and parcel of the guiding principles behind this round of military reforms, which place the CMC in charge of managing the PLA, theater commands in charge of operations, and the individual services in charge of training and equipping troops, or “build-up”, in the jargon of the PLA. This build-up directly charges services with personnel development. In this respect it differs from other militaries such as Taiwan’s, an indication that the PLA may be short of highly competent personnel. Particularly lacking are officers of major and lieutenant colonel rank and below who understand joint operations, an issue that has cropped up repeatedly in military exercises during recent years ([China Military](#), Mar 20, 2017).

The Limits of Jointness

One of the greatest challenges for the PLA post-reform is the ability of its generals to understand and apply the concept of joint operations. The PLA itself is aware of the issue; its publications frequently speak of the PLA’s lack of high-ranking staff officers, particularly in group armies and in theater command joint command centers ([China Military](#), May 5, 2016). The problem is particularly pressing at the moment, since the PLA command and staff officers assigned to the newly created theater commands and joint command centers are drawn from the PLA’s army, navy, air force, and rocket force, and may find it difficult to move past their pre-existing “service-centered” mindsets.

Before the military reforms, each service had sought help from technology experts to overcome technical barriers hindering inter-service cooperation. But different services still have different command structures and planning processes, making it difficult to execute joint command. The new theater command joint operations are likely to reveal previously hidden coordination problems, problems that go beyond culture, service jargon, and mapping practices to more fundamental issues of personal habits and ways of thinking that cannot be easily changed through structural reforms. ([China Military](#), Jan 12, 2017)

Although the reorganization of PLA military academies and schools is designed, in part, to help address some of these training issues, there are important structural limitations that may limit the ability of these schools to change entrenched cultures. The PLA’s model differs from that used by the US and Taiwan, in which army, navy, and air force academies do not train and educate cadets in ways that prepare them to serve as members of any specific service branch upon graduation. In the PLA, cadets choose their service branch before being admitted to military academies. In other words, high school graduates who want to become surface ship officers will choose to study at Dalian Naval Academy, while those who wish to serve on submarines will opt to study at PLA Navy Submarine Academy in Qingdao, Shandong Province. Cadets at the two schools will have limited exchange opportunities during their four-year undergraduate studies. Similar problems have been found with the PLAA’s Infantry Academy, Armored Academy, and Artillery Air Defense Corps Academy, all of which independently recruit cadets from high school, and do not cooperate on joint training for cadets ([Gaokao](#), March, 22, 2016).

This speaks to the depth of the training gulf separating service branches, even within individual PLA services. Officers serving in different branches of a service might never have chances to meet each other, let alone their counterparts in other services. The PLA is attempting to solve the problem through training provided by the NDU, but the PLA’s sheer size means it may take a period of many years before the effects become noticeable in training exercises ([Xinhuanet](#), July 10, 2017).

The End of the Reserves

The PLA has also failed to institute reserve programs of the kind used in Taiwan and the US. China scrapped the “national defense student” program, or the “reserve officer” program, in 2017, saying it had not achieved its expected results. (China Military, May 26, 2017). The reasons show the enormous distance the PLA must still travel to institute military education programs of the sort that are commonplace elsewhere.

The main reason for the program to be cancelled was reserve officers’ failure to integrate themselves into the military, indicating the wide gap that still exists between the PLA and the civil sector. Officers graduating from military academies and those not from the system are treated differently, making it difficult for reserve officers to integrate themselves into combat units. They were, generally speaking, not well liked within their units. Those who graduated from universities in big cities did not have sufficient military training before becoming officers, nor did they go through the baptism of barracks life prior to formal military service. Some reserve officers, after reporting to their units, found their jobs had nothing to do with their prior studies. Over time, reserve officers thus became a source of headaches within the military (Initium Media, Sep,23, 2016).

By contrast, officers promoted from within the regular ranks tend to be more popular, since they are more likely to rise in the ranks (and pull subordinates with them), and more familiar with military culture. This also makes them more likely to be too close to their subordinates, and more likely to develop problems like cheating and corruption (China Military, May 22, 2017).

Conclusion

The PLA’s recent reorganization is merely the first step towards promoting a more joint force. Although the PLA and its political leadership are both aware of the vast gulf separating PLA training from global best practices, entrenched institutional cultures and the sheer size of the force both mitigate against change. Redrawing lines on an organizational chart was challenging enough, but for the PLA, the real hard work of embracing jointness has barely begun.

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