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Beijing Sends a Menacing Message in Its Lunar New Year Greeting to Taiwan
By John Dotson

Introduction

The Lunar New Year, which commenced on February 5th, inaugurated the “Year of the Pig” in the Chinese horoscope. The Lunar New Year is China’s largest annual holiday, and a traditional time for family gatherings, meals of dumplings, and gifts of **hong bao** (“red envelopes”) to children. However, on the eve of this year’s holiday another element was added to the season, and the cross-Strait relationship, in the form of a video propaganda message from the PRC to Taiwan. The video evoked the common cultural and ethnic ties of the two sides in a renewed call for reunification, while also bearing an unmistakable air of implied military menace.

The PLA's "War Eagles" Deliver the PRC's Message to Taiwan

The music video, titled "Our War Eagles Circle the Treasured Island" (**Wo de Zhanying Raozhe Yudao Fei**, 我的战鹰绕着宝岛飞), features the conceit of People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft flying around Taiwan, and gazing down upon the island's people and prominent landmarks. It also features montages of street and nature scenes from ground level in Taiwan, and cheerful scenes of happy children at play. Throughout the video, crooning lyrics extol the beauty of Taiwan and the common ties across the Taiwan Strait, while making appeals for reunification ("The Strait stands between unceasing mountains and waters... memories of your native soil are softly calling for you to return") ([Bandao News](#), February 4). [1]



A still image from the video –Our War Eagles Circle the Treasured Island,“ which shows an overhead view of Sun-Moon Lake (日月潭)– one of Taiwan’s most popular tourist areas, and one of the landmarks depicted as being overflown by PLA aircraft in the video.

However, the sentimental lyrics and imagery within the video stand in awkward combination with its clearly implied threats to employ military force against Taiwan. Aside from the various military aircraft featured in the video—the “War Eagles” of the song’s title—the video contains an image of the Taipei World Trade Center, with a PLA Air Force Airborne Corps pin superimposed in the foreground (**see accompanying image**). The video also ends with the image of a beach scene—unidentified, but presumably intended to represent a beach in Taiwan—with a PRC flag fluttering in the breeze.



**In a still image from the music video –Our War Eagles Circle the Treasured Island,“
a pin from the PLA Air Force Airborne Corps is featured in the foreground,
with the Taipei World Trade Center visible in the background.**

The video was produced by the PLA Airborne Corps Political Work Department (**Kongjiangbing Budui Zhengzhi Gongzuobu**, 空降兵部队政治工作部)—and as such, the video might be dismissed as the production of a lower-level echelon of the PLA, and therefore lacking in authoritative significance. However, this entity is a component of the PLA’s broader system for “political work,” which bears responsibility for political warfare and psychological operations directed against targets such as Taiwan. [2] Furthermore, in regards to a high-profile and sensitive issue like Taiwan, it is highly unlikely that such a video would be issued by a component of the PLA without sanction at the top echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Xi Jinping’s Earlier New Year Message to Taiwan

This Lunar New Year message from the PLA follows on the heels of a prominent speech delivered by CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping just after the calendar New Year, at a January 2nd event commemorating the 40th anniversary of the “Message to Compatriots in Taiwan” (**Gao Taiwan Tongbao Shu**, 告台湾同胞书). The original “Message,” announced on New Year’s Day 1979, was an open letter nominally issued by the PRC National People’s Congress, and published prominently in the **People’s Daily**. The statement called for renewed progress towards unification, declaring that “reuniting the motherland is the sacred mission that history has entrusted to the people of this era” [统一祖国，是历史赋予我们这一代人的神圣使命]. The 1979 message also called for an end to hostile military exchanges (such as occasional artillery duels) between the mainland and Taiwan-controlled islands along the coast, and proposed the “Three Links” (**San Tong**, 三通) of direct postal communication, direct travel, and trade between the two sides. [3]

In his January 2nd speech, Xi offered little that was new: he issued renewed calls for adherence to the 1992 Consensus (that there is one China, with differing interpretations as to what that might mean); for reunification based on the “one country, two systems” formulation; and for vaguely-defined “democratic consultation” regarding Taiwan’s future. He also pointedly asserted the PRC’s right to exercise military force, stating that “We make no promise to renounce the use of force and reserve the option of taking all necessary means” to prevent Taiwan independence ([China Daily](#), January 2).

Conclusions

The “War Eagles” video, with its odd combination of syrupy sentimentality and thinly-veiled intimidation, seems unlikely to sway many minds in Taiwan. However, it is part of a larger, long-term campaign to impress on Taiwan’s citizens the power of the PRC, and the ultimate inevitability of reunification on the PRC’s terms. For the PLA, it also serves a domestic political purpose: signaling to Xi Jinping and other senior leaders the PLA’s continued support for the CCP’s positions on Taiwan, and its readiness to employ force to prevent Taiwan independence. It’s a message strangely incongruous with the spirit of the Lunar New Year holiday—but one entirely consistent with the uncompromising stance that Beijing maintains towards Taiwan.

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Notes

[1] The original Chinese lyrics in these lines are: “那一弯海峡隔不断山水, 请海鸥转告我的兄弟姐妹” (“The Strait stands between unceasing mountains and waters... seagulls, please pass on a message to my brothers and sisters...”) and “我的战鹰绕着宝岛飞...捎来故乡的思念轻声唤你归” (“Our war eagles circle the treasured island, bringing the memories of your native soil, softly calling for you to return”). The full video is available for viewing at: “The Airborne Corps’ New Year’s Greetings MV: Our War Eagles Circle the Treasured Island” (空降兵部队贺岁MV: 我的战鹰绕着宝岛飞), **Bandao News** (original source **People’s Daily**), February 4, 2018. <http://news.bandao.cn/a/179076.html?from=message>.

[2] The PLA Airborne Corps Political Work Department (**Kongjiangbing Budui Zhengzhi Gongzuobu**, 空降兵部队政治工作部) is identified in the video’s opening credits as the organization that produced the video. For a discussion of the role of the PLA Political Department, see: Mark Stokes, **The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics**, Project 2049 Institute, October 14, 2013. <https://project2049.net/2013/10/14/the-peoples-liberation-army-general-political-department-political-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics/>.

[3] See: “Complete Text of ‘Message to Compatriots in Taiwan’” [《告台湾同胞书》全文] **The Observer** [观察者], January 2, 2019. https://www.guancha.cn/politics/2019_01_02_485383.shtml.

The “16+1” Initiative and Poland’s Disengagement from China

By Łukasz Sarek

Introduction

The China—Central and Eastern European Countries Cooperation Initiative (China—CEEC), organized in 2012, is an ambitious program intended to facilitate economic, technological, and cultural exchanges between the PRC and partner nations in Europe. The program is also frequently referred to as the “16+1” Initiative, in reference to the sixteen European countries who have joined the program. [1] Poland was one of the initiators, and a prospective leader, in the 16+1 Initiative: as a regional power and participant in multiple regional initiatives, as well as an important hub in the transportation corridors between China and Europe, Poland seemed to be well positioned to become a major partner for China. Additionally, Poland is a country with a rapidly-growing market economy, which has displayed openness to Chinese economic activities—to include a significant presence for the Chinese telecommunications company Huawei ([China Brief](#), February 1; [Synopsis](#), February 2).

These factors have all made Poland a key partner for China in the 16+1 Initiative. However, the progress of bilateral cooperation within the China-CEEC framework has been slow and ineffective. Boosting economic cooperation is one of the key goals of the 16+1 Initiative, but the program’s declarations have not yet translated into tangible benefits for Poland and other CEEC countries. The 16+1 Budapest summit in November 2017, and a subsequent summit in Sofia in July 2018, have not offered significant practical solutions and viable opportunities for member countries. In addition, the ripples of tension between Beijing and Washington have also been felt in the Central and East European (CEE) region, as the White House has pressed states to choose sides in the conflict. The Polish government has decided to align its foreign policy with the United States at the expense of ties with China—which may create serious impediments for the development of the 16+1 Initiative.



PRC Premier Li Keqiang (front row, fifth from left) poses with European leaders at the China-CEEC (16+1 Initiative) summit in Budapest, Hungary in November 2017. (Source: Bulgarian National Television)

Poland Distances Itself from the “16+1”

Polish officials first began to signal disappointment with the 16+1 program in autumn 2017. Following the 16+1 Budapest summit in November 2017, then-Prime Minister Beata Szydło highlighted positive opportunities within the program, but she also admitted that China is “a demanding partner” ([Polskie Radio](#), November 27 2017). In January 2018, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki expressed his dissatisfaction with Poland’s trade deficit with China, and praised U.S. President Trump for his contrasting “free and fair trade approach” ([Forsal.pl](#), January 28 2018). In July 2018, Morawiecki chose to attend a gathering in Częstochowa organized by the influential Roman Catholic Radio Maryja, leaving Vice Premier Jarosław Gowin to represent Poland at the 16+1 summit in Sofia, Bulgaria ([TVP Info](#), July 8 2018; [Office of the Polish Premier](#), July 7 2018).

Recent comments have moved beyond the economic sphere. At the “Future of Trans-Atlantic Relations” (FOTAR) conference held in November in the German city of Hamburg, PM Morawiecki said that China poses a challenge to NATO, as well as the wider democratic world ([Dziennik.pl](#), November 17 2018). Just prior to Christmas, the Polish Foreign Ministry issued a communiqué on cybersecurity threats from China ([Twitter](#), December 21 2018). Such concerns were further reinforced in January, when two men were arrested in Poland on charges of alleged espionage linked to Huawei ([Sinopsis](#), February 2). Leading Polish officials announced a review of the use of Huawei equipment in the public sector ([CRN.pl](#), January 15)—although officially, the recent ABW (Polish Internal Security Agency) operations targeted individuals and are not aimed at Huawei as a company ([TVP Info](#), January 11; [Radio Wnet](#), January 16).

Disappointments in the Economic Relationship with China

The lack of expected economic benefits has been a primary reason for Poland’s disengagement from China. Exports to China from “16+1” members have seen ups and downs: mediocre results in 2014 (.35% increase) turned into a slump in 2015 (down 16.15%), followed by promising up-ticks in 2016 (up 7.57%) and 2017 (up 22.39%). However, there is a bleaker picture behind these numbers. The value of exports to China increased from 10.5 billion U.S. dollars (USD) in 2013 to merely 11.7 billion USD in 2017. By contrast, imports from China grew much faster: from 57.8 billion USD in 2013 to 73.2 billion USD in 2017. The “Visegrad Four” countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), or V4, have more than a 75% share of total exports to China among 16+1 members, and around 80% of imports. The average trade deficit growth pace rate for the V4 was higher than for other countries in 16+1, with Poland recording the highest growth rate. Hungary was the only V4 country recording a moderate trade deficit decrease. [2]

Polish exports to China, which gained a little momentum in 2017 with 20% growth, lagged in the first ten months of 2018, growing only 11%. Poland’s trade deficit with China grew steadily between 2013 and 2017 (seeing a minor slip only in 2015), with imports exceeding exports roughly by a factor of ten. The cumulative trade deficit was above 106 billion USD for the years 2013-2017 ([Asia Research Centre](#), July 2018). Dissatisfaction with the growing trade deficit has been expressed on many occasions by senior Polish officials—to include PM Morawiecki, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Poland’s ambassador to China ([Polska Agencja Prasowa](#), November 23 2017; [Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), April 6 2018).

Additionally, overall Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI) in Poland through the end of 2017 were mediocre at best, with a range between as much as \$1 billion USD or as low as \$130 million USD, depending

on the methodology ([Synopsis](#), August 25 2018). FDI that occurred in 2018, with a declared value of over \$50 million USD, doesn't make a significant difference ([Bankie.pl](#), January 21). Chinese financing for infrastructure projects is also not an attractive option for the Polish government, which has better options—with EU funding as a primary choice ([OSW](#), September 15 2017).

“16+1” and China’s Bilateral Relations in Central and Eastern Europe

The economic disappointments of 16+1 are explained in part by the model imposed by Beijing, wherein the initiative is not truly a regional development mechanism—rather, it is a “regional institutional gathering that masks the bilateral nature of the relations that are being established primarily between countries.” [3] As a result, Beijing and other member countries have been unable to find a common thread for the 16 European countries to create an integrated community with common objectives.

There are some signs that China will try to better address the needs of specific 16+1 members. Agricultural cooperation, e-commerce, and transportation have been singled out as prioritized sectors for future development. However, to develop more effective cooperation, two major elements will be required: detailed analysis of the sectors where trade can be mutually beneficial, and China relaxing access to its markets. Questions remain as to whether Beijing will be willing and able to follow through on this latter course of action.

The “16+1” Initiative and the Role of the European Union

Disappointments with trade have been amplified by political issues connected to the European Union (EU). The influence exercised by Russia and China has prompted different reactions among CEE states: it is a concern for some countries (such as Poland and the Czech Republic), while it has been embraced by others (such as Hungary and Serbia). Warsaw's concerns have until recently been muted, as lackluster progress on economic issues was partially offset by the political benefits that Poland has obtained from 16+1. The EU is anxious about the positions on China taken by the eleven states that share both EU and 16+1 membership, and about their high level of cooperation with Beijing ([European Parliament](#), July 2018). [4] As one of the key countries in 16+1, Poland could leverage its parallel position within the EU, and use the Chinese card to press Brussel and Berlin for concessions.

The loudest EU critic of growing Chinese influence in the CEE region has been Germany—which uses many countries in the region as parts of its own production chains, and treats them as part of an informal sphere of political influence ([China-CEEC Think Tanks Network](#), August 7 2017). Facing the growing anxiety in Berlin over the 16+1 structure, Beijing decided to appease Germany, and has invited Berlin to participate in the initiative's meetings. Despite this, 16+1 continues to be seen by some in Europe as a Chinese wedge into the EU.

The “Three Seas Initiative” as a Potential Alternative for “16+1”

Mediocre economic benefits and diminishing political opportunities for bilateral cooperation within the 16+1 framework have been two of the primary reasons for Poland's disengagement from China. However, Warsaw is also strongly motivated by a desire to cultivate closer relations with the United States—which is an important source of security not only for Poland, but also for other NATO countries. Recent diplomatic spats between the EU and the United States—amplified by Washington's efforts to deal directly with EU member

states on a bilateral basis—have been treated by the Polish government as an opportunity to strengthen its position in Europe as a staunch U.S. ally ([European Council on Foreign Relations](#), December 19 2018).

Warsaw is pursuing a regional agenda that strengthens its position in the EU, while also engaging Washington. The “Three Seas Initiative” (TSI), which has garnered the support of U.S. President Trump, is part of this effort ([Central European Financial Observer](#), July 18 2017). The TSI was initiated jointly by Poland and Croatia, and comprises the twelve member states of the EU located between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas. [5] The initiative is primarily focused on the development of energy, transportation and digital networks. It has a narrower scope than 16+1, and it will not provide a simple replacement for the wide agenda of the Chinese-led initiative ([Uniwersytet Lodzki](#), 2018). However the detailed list of projects, including specific pipelines, rail lines, and highways, seems to better match regional needs than do the vague plans included in the 16+1 declarations ([Three Seas Initiative](#), September 2018).

Conclusions

Poland, one of the pillars of the 16+1 Initiative and a former enthusiast of closer relations with the PRC, has dramatically changed its attitude. 16+1 has not delivered economically for the majority of its participants, and its “one size fits all” model has failed to take into account the specific situations of individual countries. Minor adjustments declared in the course of 16+1 summits in Budapest and Sofia are a good start, but remain insufficient to satisfy the needs of China’s partners. Beijing’s close cooperation with Russia, and its courting of Berlin, also do not make the PRC a particularly attractive partner for Poland. Polish authorities have decided to put more focus on their bilateral ties with the United States—and with regional projects such as the Three Seas Initiative—rather than deepening cooperation with China.

Poland’s disengagement from China is likely to have a significant impact on the future of the 16+1 Initiative. A majority of 16+1 countries have also gained very limited benefits from the program—and if they follow the examples of Poland and the Czech Republic in distancing themselves from China, that will negatively impact PRC plans in Central and Eastern Europe. The decoupling from China is not preordained: Poland and other countries are interested in maintaining ties with Beijing, and the 16+1 structure still holds potential benefits for its members. However, to successfully reboot cooperation, the Chinese side will need to offer more of concrete value to Poland and other countries in the region.

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Notes

[1] The sixteen European members of the China-CEEC Initiative are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia. For summary information about the program, see: “Cooperation Between China and Central and Eastern European Countries,” official English-language website of China-CEEC, undated, <http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/>; and “About 16+1,” Republic of Latvia website for the China-CEEC program, undated, <http://ceec-china-latvia.org/about>.

[2] The trade statistics in this paragraph are the author’s own calculations, based on UN Comtrade data.

[3] This problem is acknowledged even in publications produced by China’s official China-CEE Institute, associated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. See: **16+1 Cooperation and China-EU**

Relationship, China-CEE Institute, November 2018 (p. 8).
<https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/161-cooperation.pdf>.

[4] **16+1 Cooperation and China-EU Relationship**, China-CEE Institute, November 2018 (p. 65).
<https://china-cee.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/161-cooperation.pdf>.

[5] The twelve members of the “Three Seas Initiative” are: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. See: Three Seas Initiative Summit webpage, 2018. <http://three-seas.eu/about/>.

The Balochistan Insurgency and the Threat to Chinese Interests in Pakistan

By Adnan Aamir

Introduction

On November 23, 2018, insurgents of the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) attacked the PRC Consulate in Karachi, Pakistan. The assault resulted in the deaths of seven people, including two police officers and three of the attackers ([Dawn](#), November 23 2018). One month after this incident, the BLA commander responsible for the attack—Aslam Baloch, alias “Achoo”—was himself killed in a suicide attack in the Afghan city of Kandahar ([Tolo News](#), December 26 2018). Despite the death of their leader, the BLA has vowed to continue attacks on Chinese interests in Balochistan ([Balochistan Post](#), December 26 2018).



Smoke rises over the PRC Consulate in Karachi after an attack by militants of the Baloch Liberation Army, November 23, 2018. (Source: Twitter)

The BLA is one of the oldest, and arguably the largest, of at least six nationalist-separatist militant groups fighting against the Pakistani government for an independent Balochistan—a large province occupying the southwestern region of Pakistan, with its provincial capital in the city of Quetta ([Terrorism Monitor](#), January 25). The November 2018 incident in Karachi raised the question as to why the BLA would seemingly turn aside from its struggle with Pakistan's government in order to make a symbolic attack against a foreign country. The answer is found in the PRC's extensive investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and how Baloch nationalists view the Chinese presence in their region.

Why Would Baloch Insurgents Target Chinese Interests in Pakistan?

Inaugurated in April 2015, CPEC is a bilateral agreement between Pakistan and China to develop an extensive economic and infrastructure corridor through Pakistan—one which will ultimately connect the port of Gwadar in southern Pakistan to the city of Kashgar, in China's Xinjiang Province ([China Brief](#), July 15 2015; [China Brief](#), January 12 2018). Under the CPEC program, China is to provide \$62 billion USD to Pakistan to develop port facilities in Gwadar, energy generation projects, transportation infrastructure, and industrial zones ([Business Recorder](#), April 13 2017; [Express Tribune](#), April 17 2017). The stated aim of CPEC is to uplift the economy of Pakistan, and to allow the country to serve as an effective corridor for China's broader "Belt and Road Initiative" ([Planning Commission of Pakistan](#), December 19 2017).

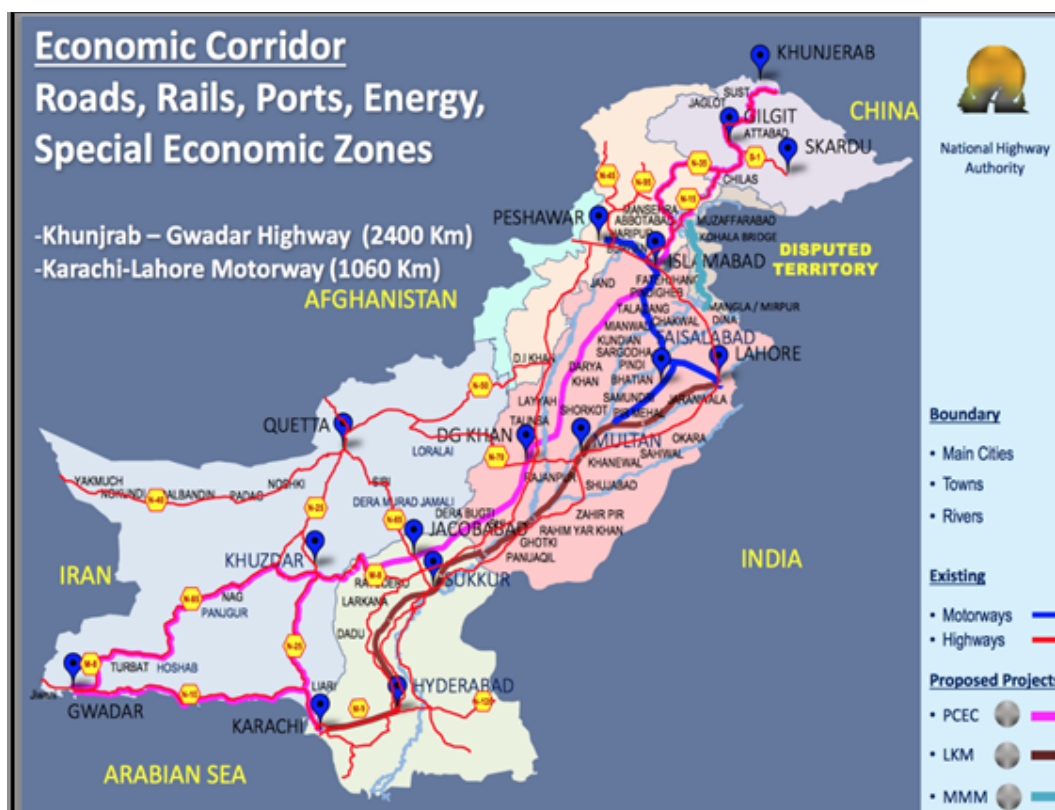


Image source: [Daily Times \(Pakistan\)](#), February 16, 2017.

Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan is currently experiencing an armed insurgency that started in 2005, when veteran Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti became embroiled in a dispute with then-President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf. The differences initially centered around royalties from natural gas mined in the resource-rich town of Dera Bugti, in northeast Balochistan. Later on, the building of military cantonments in Balochistan, and the development of Gwadar port by China, also became reasons for conflict ([The Quint](#), August 26 2017). On August 26, 2006, Nawab Akbar Bugti was killed in a mountainous region of Balochistan; although the Pakistani government denied killing Bugti, Baloch groups blamed the state of Pakistan for his assassination, and thus the armed insurgency was further intensified ([Dawn](#), August 27 2006).

Since that time, Baloch insurgents have alleged that the PRC is a “partner in crime” with Pakistan's national government in looting the natural resources of Balochistan ([The Balochistan Post](#), November 25 2018). China has been involved in projects affecting southwest Pakistan even before the advent of CPEC: for example, in addition to the development of Gwadar, the PRC state-owned China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) received a contract in the 1990s to extract gold and copper from the Saindak mine in Balochistan. Baloch nationalists allege that such projects represent exploitation of the mineral resources of Balochistan by Chinese interests ([Dawn](#), January 7 2018).

Additionally, Baloch rebels believe that China is militarily supporting Pakistan's government in its efforts to crush the Baloch insurgency. In a 2018 interview, the slain BLA commander Aslam Baloch stated that “China is looting resources in Balochistan in the name of mega projects by calling it CPEC,” and that elements of the Chinese Army were present in Balochistan to support the government ([ANI News](#), November 27 2018). However, the claim of Aslam Baloch that the Chinese military is present in Balochistan has not been substantiated by other sources.

As a result of such stated grievances against the Chinese government, the BLA and other Baloch insurgent groups have conducted a series of attacks against Chinese interests. In August 2018, the BLA carried out its first ever suicide attack, targeting a bus carrying Chinese engineers; the bomber failed in the attempt, and only six people were wounded without any loss of life ([Xinhua](#), August 11 2018). The attack on the PRC consulate was also explicitly part of a strategy to pressure Chinese companies to leave Balochistan: a BLA video recorded before the attack warned Chinese investors to stop exploiting the resources of Balochistan, or else the attacks would continue ([Aditya Raj Kaul Tweet](#), November 23 2018).

Pakistan's security agencies have claimed to foil at least one additional major attack directed against Chinese residents in Pakistan. In December 2018, Pakistan officials foiled a plan to attack Chinese workers on the East Bay Expressway in Gwadar, seizing weapons and ammunition that Baloch insurgents had stockpiled for that purpose ([Samaa Digital](#), December 6 2018). This attempt by Baloch insurgents was thwarted, but it is unlikely to be the last.

Have Attacks by Baloch Insurgents Affected the Progress of CPEC in Pakistan?

The attacks mounted by the BLA and other Baloch insurgent organizations have significantly impacted PRC economic projects—most particularly, by inhibiting the free movement of Chinese persons in the region. In June 2017, a Chinese couple was abducted from Quetta; their dead bodies were subsequently discovered in the Balochistan town of Mastung ([Dawn](#), June 9 2017). Under these circumstances, the PRC issued a security advisory in December 2017, which warned its citizens to limit their travel in Balochistan and to exercise utmost precaution ([China Daily](#), December 9 2017). Chinese remain present in Gwadar, where they work under strict security protection. In Quetta, Chinese persons are unable to move freely, and must travel with security squads whenever they meet officials of the Balochistan government [1].

Moreover, the attacks by Baloch insurgents have increased the security costs of CPEC. In order to protect Chinese personnel working on CPEC projects, Pakistan has raised a special security division comprised of more than 15,000 personnel. This division is entrusted with the task of protecting Chinese personnel so that they can work on CPEC projects without being harmed. In addition to this security division, Chinese firms working in Pakistan have also hired private security guards. In the wake of the BLA attack on the PRC consulate, the security costs of CPEC are likely to increase even further ([South China Morning Post](#), November 27 2018).

What Is the Impact on Pakistan-China Relations?

Statements issued by the governments of both Pakistan and China in the aftermath of the Karachi consulate attack indicate that relations between the two countries are still strong. The PRC Embassy in Islamabad expressed its trust in the ability of Pakistan to protect its citizens and institutions, and stated that attempts to undermine China-Pakistan relationships are “doomed to fail” ([PRC Embassy in Pakistan](#), November 23 2018). Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Imran Khan, described the consulate attack as a conspiracy to sabotage the economic and strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China; Pakistani officials have further alleged that the consulate attack was orchestrated from India ([South China Morning Post](#), November 25 2018).

However, other developments indicate that the relationship between the two countries may not be as good as the aforementioned statements suggest. In the autumn of last year, Pakistan was facing a severe balance of payment crisis: Pakistan only had foreign exchange reserves sufficient to finance two months’ worth of imports ([Asia Times](#), October 12 2018). In these circumstances, Prime Minister Khan traveled to China to ask for a bailout package. However, China refused an urgent bailout package for Pakistan, and stated that further negotiations would be required before reaching an agreement to financially bailout Pakistan ([South China Morning Post](#), November 3 2018). Subsequently, Pakistan was left with no choice but to ask Saudi Arabia for a bailout package, which the oil-rich kingdom agreed to provide ([Dawn](#), October 24 2018).

The Afghanistan Angle

The impact of the Balochistan insurgency on Pakistan-China relations is further complicated by factors connected to Afghanistan. On Christmas Day 2018, BLA commander Aslam Baloch reportedly called a meeting of his lieutenants in the Aino Mina neighborhood of Kandahar, in order to decide upon their future courses of action. A suicide bomber disguised as a beggar exploded himself near Aslam Baloch, killing both the BLA leader and his deputies ([Times of Islamabad](#), December 26 2018). The news of this suicide attack went viral on social media in Pakistan on December 25, and was confirmed by Afghan media the next day ([Tolo News](#), December 26 2018).

The assassination of Aslam Baloch in Kandahar appears to support Pakistan's longtime claim that Afghan territory is being used by Baloch insurgents to launch attacks inside Pakistan. The Pakistani foreign office demanded that the Afghan government investigate the matter, and explain the presence of a wanted terrorist on Afghan soil ([Dawn](#), January 4).

Furthermore, the issue of Baloch insurgents has been raised in the ongoing negotiations between the Taliban and the U.S Government. Taliban representatives have reportedly demanded that the United States must ensure that Baloch insurgents are not allowed to use Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan ([Global Village Space](#), January 28). Experts in Pakistan believe that with the help of China, Pakistan's government can achieve a diplomatic victory by using its influence with the Taliban to ensure that the Afghan and U.S. governments agree on evicting Baloch insurgents from Afghanistan—and that this will ensure security and smoother implementation of the CPEC program in Pakistan ([Dawn](#), January 20).

Conclusions

The resolve of the BLA to attack Chinese interests has not fully diminished, and the organization will likely continue to target Chinese interests. Given the extent of China's economic presence in the region, and the vast and sparsely populated land areas of Balochistan—both of which present a challenge to government security forces—the BLA will likely find future opportunities to strike out at CPEC. The capability of the BLA to effectively plan and organize deadly attacks has likely been reduced—at least temporarily—by the death of its leader Aslam Baloch, but it has not been defeated as an organization.

Additionally, the future course of the Baloch insurgent threat to CPEC projects will be dependent in part on the outcome of peace talks in Afghanistan. If Taliban demands are implemented, then the capability of the BLA to shelter in Afghanistan will be further diminished. However, if the Afghan negotiations break apart without a settlement, then the BLA will likely continue to use Afghanistan as a safe haven from which to attack Chinese interests. Ultimately, the ongoing negotiations between the Taliban and the United States may be the single most important factor affecting the security of CPEC projects and Chinese residents in Pakistan.

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Notes

[1] Author's Interview with a government official, Quetta, August 20, 2018.

The Chinese Navy's Marine Corps, Part 2: Chain-of-Command Reforms and Evolving Training By Dennis Blasko and Roderick Lee

Editor's Note: This is the second part of a two-part article discussing organizational reforms and evolving missions for the PLA Navy (PLAN) Marine Corps. The first part, in our previous issue, focused on the growing order of battle for the PLAN Marines. This second part focuses on the creation of a service branch headquarters for the PLAN Marines, and their expanding training for expeditionary warfare and other missions. Taken as a whole, this two-part article provides significant new information and analysis to update the December 3, 2010 China Brief article titled [–China's Marines: Less is More.](#)

New Marine Headquarters Established

Along with increasing the number of PLA Marine Corps (**Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Haijun Luzhan Dui**, 中国人民解放军海军陆战队) combat units, a corps-level Marine Corps Headquarters also has been formed. Its first commander is Major General Kong Jun—who shared responsibility with Political Commissar Yuan Huazhi, until Yuan was reassigned in early 2019 ([Pengpai News](#), May 27 2017; [Pengpai News](#), January 15). Kong spent most of his career in the Army rising through the ranks as an armor officer and commander in the former 12th Group Army. After being assigned to the Marines, he led the Marine formation that took part in the July 2017 parade at Zhurihe Training Base in Inner Mongolia. Yuan spent most of his career as a naval political officer with service in the South Sea Fleet—where the two existing Marine brigades have been located—but was transferred to the Air Force. His successor has not yet been identified. The two leaders are assisted by deputies and a staff; among the headquarters staff, Senior Colonel Chen Weidong, former commander of the 1st Marine Brigade since at least 2010, is now a deputy chief of staff ([PLA Daily](#), July 29 2018). Due to his long experience in the Marines, he is likely to move up the ladder as leadership positions become available.

The location of the new Marine Corps Headquarters appears to be near Chaozhou, Guangdong, just north of Shantou and slightly to the east of Jieyang, where a new Marine brigade is stationed ([Xiangqiao Regional Government](#), July 26 2018). By locating its headquarters outside of Beijing, the Marine Corps organization parallels the PLA Air Force Airborne Corps—which maintains its headquarters in Xiaogan, (Hubei Province), and which also commands subordinate brigades dispersed in multiple regions. By locating its headquarters a great distance from many of its subordinate units, this structure implies that the Marine Corps is not intended to deploy and fight as an organic whole, as may be the case for Army group armies. Instead, like the Airborne, Marine brigades likely are conceived and designed to be employed independently, but supported by other elements of its parent service. As such, Marine brigades do not appear to be directly subordinate to the Theater Command Navies in whose regions they are located; rather, they fall under the direct command of Marine Corps Headquarters (MCHQ).

A major responsibility of the MCHQ will be to manage the distribution of the increasing number of missions Marine units are now required to support. These real-world tasks include: providing forces to the Gulf of Aden escort mission, which rotates among the three fleets roughly every four months; deploying personnel to the Djibouti Support Base, which opened in August 2017; and manning garrisons and newly constructed facilities in the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. The Headquarters will also manage training for the brigades, determining which units travel to what training areas and participate in which military competitions and exercises, both within and outside of China. It also will coordinate with the fleets to ensure that Marine units are available for service and joint exercises. Undoubtedly it will also inspect training and other brigade activities, such as political indoctrination, logistics, and maintenance.

Expanded Training Since 2014

For most of the past two to three decades, Marine brigades conducted the majority of their training in the South China Sea and near their bases on the Leizhou Peninsula. Most training was conducted independently, supported by Navy assets, and focused on island and reef operations. Only on a few occasions—such as the Peace Mission 2005 exercise with Russia on the Shandong peninsula—did Marine units engage in joint training outside of southern China. After Peace Mission 2005, Marine units began to exercise more often with foreign militaries, both in China and overseas. These opportunities increased as Navy task forces assigned to the Gulf of Aden escort mission traveled to and from their patrol duties, stopping along the way for port visits or bi-lateral exercises. Marine units have also hosted a variety of foreign visitors to their garrisons and opened a few of their exercises to outside observers.

Those training patterns changed in 2014 when the Marine Corps conducted its first winter training at the Zhurihe Training Base in Inner Mongolia. This was followed by trips to the Taonan Training Base in Jilin in 2015 and Korla, Xinjiang in 2016, which also included elements from the Navy SOF Regiment ([PLA Daily](#), January 31 2015). In addition to the cold weather, units had to contend with desert, forest, and plateau terrain,

very different from the sub-tropical climate and terrain in southern China. In a second out-of-area exercise in 2015, jungle training was conducted in Yunnan in August 2015 ([PLA Daily](#), August 25 2015). In early 2018, Marine units, apparently including newly formed units, returned to Yunnan and also exercised simultaneously in Shandong ([PLA Daily](#), March 16 2018). In July 2018, the PLA hosted the “Seaborne Assault” competition for Marine units as part of the International Military Games 2018 in Shishi, Quanzhou city (near Jinjiang and at one of the new Marine brigade’s garrisons) ([PLA Daily](#), July 23 2018). These changes in Marine training indicate the determination of the PLA leadership for the Marine Corps to be ready to perform expeditionary missions in any terrain and climate.



PLAN Marine Corps command and staff personnel examine maps in the course of a cold weather training exercise in Inner Mongolia, March 2015. (Source: Xinhua)

PLAN Marine Corps Education

With the number of Marine Corps personnel roughly tripling in size and its missions expanding, one might assume that the PLAN Marine Corps Academy (海军陆战学院) in Guangzhou would also expand to provide education and training for aspiring PLANMC officers. However, the Marine Corps Academy is not currently listed among the PLA’s 37 professional education institutions. As a component of PLANMC restructuring, the Marine Corps Academy has been converted into a training base; it remains active in this capacity, but it does not appear to provide college education to young Marine Corps personnel. [1] Accordingly, Marine officers and NCOs will be educated in other academies—some perhaps with Marine Corps Departments—and undergo specialized training at the training base or within their unit.

Conclusions

The 2018 Department of Defense (DOD) report to Congress states that “large-scale amphibious invasion is one of the most complicated and difficult military operations.” As such, amphibious operations require specialized equipment (both for landing and for naval/air support forces), extensive training, and intricate planning and timing in execution. Accordingly, considering the previously existing Marine and Army amphibious units and new Marine units under development, DOD concludes:

The PLA is capable of accomplishing various amphibious operations short of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan. With few overt military preparations beyond routine training, China could launch an invasion of small Taiwan-held islands in the South China Sea such as Pratas or Itu Aba. A PLA invasion of a medium-sized, better-defended island such as Matsu or Jinmen is within China’s capabilities. [2]

Campaigns against small or medium islands in China’s near seas likely would involve hundreds to the low thousands of troops delivered over the beach by a portion of the PLA Navy’s roughly 50 medium landing ships (LSM) and tank landing ships (LST) and scores of additional smaller landing craft, supported by ship-based helicopters and land-based aircraft. These assets are dispersed among all three fleets, but could be concentrated for an amphibious campaign. The Navy’s relatively new Type 071 Landing Platform Dock (LPD) large amphibious ships also could provide support to assaults on small or medium islands. Numerous civilian roll-on/roll-off ships and other transport ships may not be necessary for such limited operations, but would likely be employed in larger campaigns after a port is secured.

For missions beyond China’s three seas, the Navy’s fleet of six Type 071 LPDs, the first of which entered service in 2007, is the PLAN’s primary means of moving Marine units over long distances. These ships each can carry approximately a battalion of infantry, about 20 to 30 vehicles, and two to four helicopters for extended periods of time. Additional Type 071s are expected to enter service; and several new, larger amphibious ships, generally called the Type 075 amphibious assault ship (LHA), likely will also enter the force in coming years ([Office of Naval Intelligence](#), 2018; [National Interest](#), March 31 2017). Depending on the availability of ships, multiple battalions, amounting to a brigade or more, could be at sea for several weeks or months. In addition to combat, anti-terrorist, or deterrence missions, these forces could be used for disaster relief or emergency evacuation operations. But assembling a multi-ship, multiple battalion task force, with some degree of sea-based air support, is probably is at least a decade away as sealift is added and the PLA Marine Corps expands its resources and capabilities.

The expansion of Marine Corps is a major component of the goal to develop the PLA into a “world-class military” by the middle of the century (2049). When fully manned, equipped, and trained, the Marine Corps will provide Chinese leaders with options previously unavailable. As in Djibouti, PLA Marines will continue to be

seen in places they've never been seen before. And, as they sing in their 2018 recruiting and propaganda videos, "We are different!" ([PLA Daily](#), March 11 2018; [PLA Daily](#), December 21 2018).

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The views and opinions expressed herein by the authors do not represent the policies or position of the U.S. Department of Defense or the U.S. Navy, and are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Notes

[1] *People's Navy*, December 18, 2017.

[2] U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018*, p. 95.

<https://media.defense.gov/2018/Aug/16/2001955282/-1/-1/1/2018-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT.PDF#page=11&zoom=auto,-85,733>.

A Smarter Battlefield?: PLA Concepts for "Intelligent Operations" Begin to Take Shape By Brent M. Eastwood

Introduction

CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has shown himself to be a great enthusiast for the subject of artificial intelligence (AI). He is often photographed for propaganda purposes meeting with scientists at various research centers around the country, and has delivered high-profile speeches on the importance that AI development holds for China's future ([South China Morning Post](#), October 31 2018; [Xinhua](#), November 1 2018). This intensive AI focus on the part of the PRC leadership has generated concerns among national security circles in the United States and other countries that emerging AI technologies will be incorporated into the Chinese military—and there is ample evidence that PRC political and military leaders do indeed see AI as a critical component of their country's future military capabilities ([CNAS](#), February 6; [MIT Technology Review](#), February 7).

Most of China's current AI military research is focused on hardware—such as robotic tanks and vehicles, autonomous drones, and remotely-piloted submarines. These pursuits are heavy on mechanical engineering and traditional research and development. They also fit within a broader pattern that has been noted by PLA scholars for the past two decades: the development of advanced weapons and military technologies as part of the “assassin’s mace” concept, in which the PLA will seek to conduct crippling asymmetric blows against potential opponents. [1] Previous examples of “assassin’s mace” weapons might have included the deployment of an anti-ship missile versus an aircraft carrier; however, assassin’s mace weapons might now include the use of big data, the Internet of Things, or cloud computing integrated with next-generation weaponry.

However, in regards to the future course of PLA weapons development, there is much more to consider than just technology—what, for example, about the tactics and doctrine accompanying the technology? Are Chinese military thinkers and academic institutions grappling with the complex issues associated with integrating new technologies into combat operations? The answer is yes: in one prominent example, the Academy of Military Science (**Zhongguo Junshi Kexue Yuan**, 中国军事科学院), or AMS, arguably the PLA’s premier institution for doctrinal development, is now focused on a significant program of reform and academic outreach intended to allow the PLA to better integrate and employ AI, robotics, and intelligent manufacturing ([China Brief](#), January 18).



PLA personnel perform testing on an unmanned tank, March 2018. (Source: CCTV)

The PLA Seeks to Develop “Intelligent Operations”

The reforms at AMS are not occurring in isolation. Another key component of the PLA’s efforts to integrate new technologies is the emerging concept of “intelligent operations” (**zhinenghua zuozhan**, 智能化作战). Although the concept appears to still be evolving, an article from the official **Xinhua** state news service has defined intelligent operations thusly: “Intelligent operations have AI at their core, and use cutting-edge technologies throughout operational command, equipment, tactics, and other areas... they must be understood by the core concepts of ‘system intelligence is central,’ ‘full use of AppCloud,’ ‘multi-domain integration,’ ‘brain-machine fusion,’ ‘intelligent autonomy,’ and ‘unmanned struggle for mastery’” in the battlefield environment. [2]

An article from the **PLA Daily** has predicted dramatic impacts from the advent of intelligent operations, predicting that this new form of warfare will “break through traditional time and space limits of cognition,” “reconstruct the relationships between humans and weaponry,” and “bring about entirely new models of command and control” ([PLA Daily](#), July 26 2018).

Two Chinese researchers, Shen Shoulin and Zhang Guoning, have identified another aspect of intelligent operations in the form of “cognitive confrontation” (**renzhi duikang**, 认知对抗), in which the key objective will be to achieve decisive supremacy over enemies in terms of information and awareness. As a result, future operations will attack enemy perceptions and understanding of the battlespace by “taking the cognitive initiative and damaging or interfering with the cognition of the enemy based on the speed and quality of the cognitive confrontation.” Such a struggle will replace traditional warfare concepts that have emphasized the control of physical domains such as the land, air, and sea ([National Interest](#), May 30 2018).

In January, analyst Li Minghai from the **PLA Daily** went into further detail on intelligent operations, and the related concept of “intelligent warfare” (**zhinenghua zhanzheng**, 智能化战争). Li asserts that “future intelligent warfare is a three-dimensional, all-field warfare.” He further predicts that it will rely heavily on unmanned systems, which will “greatly reduce the ‘observation-judgment-decision-action-cycle’” faced by units in combat ([Xinhua](#), January 15.)

The “Algorithm Game” and Other Aspirational Notions for Intelligent Operations

Li Minghai also introduced a curious notion called the “algorithm game” (**suanfa boyi**, 算法博弈), describing how this provides an advantage in warfare; in so doing, he builds on what Shen and Zhang detailed with their cognitive initiative concept. According to Li, various algorithms can predict what happens on the battlefield, and may therefore offer a cognitive advantage to PLA soldiers. Li’s supreme “algorithm” reduces the fog of war and helps fighters achieve better situational awareness: “The party that grasps the

advantages of the algorithm in future war can quickly and accurately predict the situation on the battlefield, innovate the optimal method of warfare, and achieve the war purpose of ‘winning before the war.’” Li’s algorithm concept is based on big data and speed of computational power, especially with the use of quantum computing: he believes that quantum computing can “quickly propose flexible and diverse operational plans and countermeasures against the changes in the enemy’s situation, constantly disrupting the enemy’s attempts and deployments.” ([Xinhua](#), January 15) [3]

Beyond the “algorithm game,” Li also proposes other aspirational ideas that could become a part of intelligent operations in the future. For example, he describes a “cloud brain” that would link combat units to an intelligent network, while battlefield decision-making and weapons control systems would be integrated on an undefined “net.” Meanwhile, intelligent warfare would combine this “net” with a “smart cloud” that would provide situational awareness (or what Western militaries might call intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance). Somehow this system would be available to the common soldier, but how this would happen is not clear. Li mentions the use of a neural network to enhance the cloud-brain’s information and decision making, but he offers no concrete steps to make it a reality ([Xinhua](#), January 15).

Conclusions

Chinese military writers are definitely applying innovative thinking to consideration of modern technology and its connection to warfare. Cognitive initiative will prove to be an important and revolutionary concept should Chinese intelligent warfare doctrine develop in a way that can trickle down to use by the PLA’s lower echelons. Capabilities such as cloud brain intelligent decision-making may be many decades away from real implementation, but they remain intriguing aspirational goals.

The emerging Chinese theorists of intelligent operations are attempting to address what Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz called the “fog of war”—the collected uncertainty and confusion that reigns on the battlefield. Intelligent operations and intelligent warfare could offer answers to this age-old problem. The PLA should be given credit for thinking big to solve problems that participants in warfare have grappled with for generations: cognitive advantage, speed, early warning, and first-mover advantage. They are creating an underlying strategic doctrine for AI and other cutting-edge technologies in future warfare; if they can implement this successfully, the PLA will possess an obvious advantage in future conflicts.

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Notes

[1] The concept of “assassin’s mace” (**shashoujian**, 杀手锏) remains controversial, and scholars continue to debate exactly what the term means. For one of the earliest and most extensive examinations of the term,

see: Jason Bruzdinski, "Demystifying Sha Shou Jian: China's 'Assassin's Mace' Concept" in **Civil-Military Change in China: Elites, Institutes, and Ideas After the 16th Party Congress** (U.S. Army War College, Sep. 2004), pp. 309-364. <http://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1686.pdf>.

[2] See: "Is This the Start of a Military Revolution? Six Major Keywords for Deciphering Intelligent Operations" (掀起新的军事革命? 六大关键词解读智能化作战), **Xinhua News Service**, March 1, 2018. <https://baijiahao.baidu.com/s?id=1593693342902366286&wfr=spider&for=pc>. (Original text: "智能化作战，是以人工智能为核心的前沿科技在作战指挥、装备、战术等领域渗透...可以从制智为要、泛在云联、多域一体、脑机融合、智能自主、无人争锋"等核心概念来理解和把握。")

[3] The key difference between quantum computing and conventional computing is the use of the quantum bit or "qubit." Classical bits can only hold a binary value of 0 or 1, but a qubit can hold a combination of 0 and 1 at the same time. This makes their computing power formidable and faster. The other major difference is that quantum computing is much more energy efficient; as problems that need computational power evolve and require more energy consumption, this is a great advantage.