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Propaganda Themes at the CPPCC Stress the “Sinicization” of Religion

By John Dotson

Introduction

In March, the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference both convened their full annual sessions in Beijing. Collectively known as the “Two Sessions” (*Lianghui*, 两会), the annual meetings of these bodies comprise two of the largest annual events on the official political calendar of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The two institutions hold no real power, but the scripted agendas of their meetings often provide insights into the concerns and prioritized policy initiatives under discussion within the higher echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Of the two institutions, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (*Zhongguo Renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi*, 中国人民政治协商会议), or CPPCC, is the one less understood by many foreign observers. The CPPCC is a legacy of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, when it

was convened as a nominal representative body for the various parties and other political groups organized under the Communist-led coalition in the later stages of the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949). Since then, the CPPCC has continued official existence as a political advisory body for the government—while operating in reality as a propaganda forum stage-managed by the CCP United Front Work Department (*Zhongyang Tongzhan Bu*, 中央统战部), or UFWD.



Representatives of the PRC's state-controlled religious organizations, doubling as delegates to the CPPCC, hold a press conference on March 7, 2019. (Source: Global Times)

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1141560.shtml>

This year, a primary propaganda theme emerging from the CPPCC was the need to “persist in the Party’s leadership over religion [and] persist in advancing the Sinicization of our country’s religions” (*jianchi dang dui zongjiao gongzuo de lingdao, chixu tuijin woguo zongjiao Zhongguohua* / 坚持党对宗教工作的领导，持续推进我国宗教中国化). [1] The theme is not a new one, and dates back at least to 2016, when CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping gave a speech advocating a “socialism with Chinese characteristics theory of religion” (*Zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi zongjiao lilun*, 中国特色社会主义宗教理论) ([Xinhua](#), April 23 2016). The theme has since grown more prominent in official discourse, and in the lead-up to this year’s convening of the “Two Sessions,” official media indicated that “Sinicization” of religion would be an important topic to be discussed by the CPPCC ([Renmin Zhengxie Bao](#), January 10).

State-Controlled Religious Organizations Advocate for Greater Government Control

During the CPPCC, the primary mouthpieces for this ideological campaign were the state-sanctioned religious organizations of the PRC. These organizations operate under the cognizance of the PRC National Religious Affairs Administration (*Guojia Zongjiao Shiwuju*, 国家宗教事务局)—which was itself subsumed into the UFWD in spring 2018 ([China Brief](#), April 24 2018). During the March meetings of the CPPCC,

representatives of these state religious organizations lined up to parrot the official slogans of the “Sinicization” propaganda campaign. For example, at a combined panel discussion and press conference held on March 7th:

- Zhan Ru, deputy head of the China Buddhist Association, stressed the importance of promoting the “internal harmony of Chinese religions” under the leadership of the CCP;
- Dai Junfeng, leader of the Islamic Association of Kunming (Yunnan Province), stressed his organization’s efforts to “demonstrate national unity and progress, and integrate the study of classic doctrines with socialist core values;”
- Shen Bin, deputy head of the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association, stressed the need “to adhere to the leadership of the Communist Party of China, uphold the direction of Sinicization and strengthen the implementation of Regulation[s] on Religious Affairs” ([Global Times](#), March 10).

Most striking of all, the CPPCC was used as a forum to advocate the purging of foreign influences from Chinese religious practice. In a speech delivered before the CPPCC on March 11th, Xu Xiaohong, Chairman of the “Three Self Patriotic Movement” (*San Zi Aiguo Yundong*, 三自爱国运动)—the PRC’s official Protestant church—stated that the advent of Christianity in China was accompanied by “intense colonial aggression by the West.” Xu accused “anti-China forces in the West” of “trying to influence China’s social stability and even subvert China’s political power through the use of Christianity.” In light of this, Xu called for “continuous elimination of foreign imprints on China’s Christian churches,” and for China’s Christians to “continuously carry forward and practice the core values of socialism” ([Taiwan Central News Agency](#), March 12; [Hong Kong Free Press](#), March 13).



Rev. Xu Xiaohong, chairman of the “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” of state-sanctioned Protestant churches in China, addresses the annual meeting of the CPPCC in Beijing on March 11, 2019. Xu warned against “anti-China forces in the West” who are attempting to “to subvert China’s political power through the use of Christianity.” (Source: Three Self Patriotic Movement official website)

<http://en.ccctspm.org/newsinfo/11787>

CCP Anxieties Regarding Religion and Social Unrest

The ongoing campaign for “Sinicization” of religious practice has motivations that flow from CCP suspicions of three religious traditions in particular, all of which have been subject to renewed campaigns of repression over the past year: Lamaist Buddhism, suspect as an element of Tibetan and Mongolian cultural identity ([China Brief](#), July 10 2018; [China Brief](#), March 5; [HRW](#), March 20); unregistered Christian churches, and heterodox Christian offshoot sects such as “The Church of Almighty God,” which are viewed as potential sources of social unrest ([SCMP](#), September 10 2018; [China Brief](#), February 1); and Islam, which is subject to increasing repression as a suspected motivator for ethnic nationalism and “extremism” in Xinjiang ([China Brief](#), July 25 2018; [China Brief](#), March 5). Relative to “native” religions such as Taoism and Han Chinese-evolved Buddhism, these three religious traditions are subject to greater suspicions due to their “foreign” origins. [2] In light of the increasingly xenophobic and paranoid nature of CCP discourse under Xi Jinping, this factor makes them prime candidates for “Sinicization.”

However, the coordinated propaganda showcased at the CPPCC is also part and parcel of a broader drive over the course of the past year to reinforce the CCP’s control over all aspects of Chinese life: to include not only religious faith, but also culture ([China Brief](#), March 5) and public discourse ([Apple Daily \(HK\)](#), May 14 2018). Additionally, the propaganda themes featured at the CPPCC must be understood against the backdrop of evident CCP concerns for the direction of the country, and attendant prospects for social unrest ([China Brief](#), March 22; [China Brief](#), March 22). As long as the senior leadership circles of the CCP harbor anxieties about the security of their ruling status, the campaign for “Sinicization” of religion—as well as other aspects of civic life—is likely to continue.

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Notes

[1] There are differences of interpretation regarding the translation of the key Chinese-language term “*Zhongguohua*” (中国化)—which could be interpreted as “Sinicization” (implying an effort to bring something more closely into line with Han Chinese culture); or as “China-fication” (implying that the thing in question will be nationalized, and/or brought under firmer state control). English-language outlets of official PRC state media generally use the former translation; however, the latter translation arguably better captures the meaning behind the government’s drive to further *Zhongguohua* the practice of religion in China. For an authoritative commentary on the issue published under the name of the director of the CCP United Front Work Department, see: “You Quan: Persist in the Party’s Leadership over Religion, Persist in Advancing the Sinicization of Religion” [尤权：坚持党对宗教工作的领导，持续推进我国宗教中国化], *Xinhua*, March 20, 2019. <http://www.zyztz.gov.cn/tzyw/306776.jhtml>.

[2] Congressional-Executive Commission on China, *2018 Annual Report*, p. 122.

<https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/Annual%20Report%202018.pdf>.

China's Seventh-Generation Leadership Emerges onto the Stage

By Willy Lam

Introduction—Could the Seventh Generation Be the Next in Power?

Much of China's future lies in the hands of cadres born in the 1970s—officials belonging to the “Seventh Generation” (7G) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In the last quarter of 2018, a dozen-odd of these forty-something officials were promoted to key regional positions as vice-governors, vice-ministers, or their equivalents. President Xi Jinping's decision to change the constitution in March 2018 so as to abrogate fixed terms of office for the state presidency of the People's Republic of China (PRC) has raised the possibility that, health permitting, Xi might serve as Party General Secretary until 2032—and State President until 2033—when he will be 80 years of age (Asia.Nikkei.com, March 15; Hong Kong Free Press, February 25, 2018). This in turn raises the possibility that Xi, as the so-called “eternal core” of the CCP leadership, might eventually pass his baton to a member of the Seventh Generation.

In accordance with the succession practices established in the 1980s by “Great Architect of Reform” Deng Xiaoping, former president Jiang Zemin (born 1926)—the “Third Generation core”—ceded power to Fourth Generation leader Hu Jintao (1942) at the 16th Party Congress in 2002. After serving two terms of five years, ex-president Hu handed over the reins of power to Fifth-Generation (5G) representative Xi Jinping at the 18th Party Congress in 2012. If Xi were following the CCP's recent conventions, he—and the majority of current Politburo Standing Committee members, all of whom hail from the 1950s—would be succeeded by Sixth-Generation (6G) cadres who were born in the 1960s. However, if Xi were to remain party boss until the 22nd Party Congress in 2032, a rising star born in 1960 would be 72 years old—and therefore four years past the PBSC retirement age of 68. [1] Thus, 6G movers and shakers already in the current 25-member Politburo—for example, Vice-Premier Hu Chunhua (胡春华, born 1963) and Chongqing Party boss Chen Min'er (陈敏尔, 1960)—seem to be out of the running to succeed Xi.

Since the 22nd Party Congress is still thirteen years away—and because 7G officials currently only occupy vice-ministerial level posts—it is too soon to speculate as to who will have the political skills and staying power to take over as the next CCP General Secretary. However, given that ministerial-ranked officials normally retire at the age of 65, the bulk of 6G cadres will start calling it a day by the middle of the 2020s. At a national conference on party organization held in July 2018, President Xi pointed out that “based on near-term requirements and long-term strategic needs, [leaders] in all regions and departments should nurture a specific quantity of superior young officials” (China News Service, July 10, 2018; China Youth Daily, July 10, 2018). The paramount leader's instructions were issued after a Politburo meeting held a week earlier, which was devoted to “discovering, propagating and elevating high-quality young officials” for the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Politburo noted that rejuvenation of the party leadership was a “major strategic task to ensure that there are successors working on the party's enterprise as well as

[the goal of] long rule and perennial stability for the nation” ([New Beijing Post](#), June 30, 2018; [Xinhua](#), June 29, 2018).

Who Are the Up-and-Comers of the CCP Seventh Generation?

Ten officials born in the early 1970s (*see chart*), the majority of whom having been promoted since mid-2018, seem to have a leg up in the jockeying for position that is a hallmark of the CCP’s cunning corridors of bureaucratic competition. With backgrounds including industry, engineering, and finance, these technocratic up-and-coming officials mostly serve as regional administrators. Three of these ten individuals have attained the rank of *changwei* (常委), or Member of the CCP Standing Committee (MSC), of provinces and directly administered cities. These three are: Liu Jie (刘捷, born 1970), an MSC of the Guizhou Provincial Party Committee as well as its Secretary-General; Zhuge Yujie (诸葛宇杰, born 1971), *changwei* of the Shanghai Party Committee as well as its Secretary-General; and Shi Guanghui (时光辉, born 1970), an MSC of the Guizhou Provincial Party Committee in charge of political-legal matters, including the key policy portfolio for “stability maintenance” (*weiwen*, 维稳). The PRC has long followed the practice of party committees—and particularly, their *changwei*—making policies, which are then executed by the governmental apparatus of the same level. Thus, a *changwei* of a region’s ruling party committee outranks the vice-governor or vice-mayor of the same province or city, who may not yet have made the standing committee ([Apple Daily \[Hong Kong\]](#), March 25; [South China Morning Post](#), January 5, [Jiangsu.sina.com](#), January 2; [China Economics Net](#), December 10, 2018).



Image: Shi Guanghui (center), appointed to hold the policy portfolio for “stability maintenance” on the Guizhou Provincial CCP Standing Committee, meets with police officials in the city of Bijie, November 2018.

Chart: Prominent Emerging Leaders of the CCP “Seventh Generation” Leadership

7G Cadre	Birth Year	Current Position	Major Past Position
Liu Jie 刘捷	1970	Guizhou Party Committee Secretary-General	Jiangxi Party Committee Secretary-General
Zhuge Yujie 诸葛宇杰	1971	Shanghai Party Committee Secretary-General	Shanghai Party Committee / Director of General Office
Shi Guanghui 时光辉	1970	Member of the Standing Committee, Guizhou Party Committee, in charge of law-enforcement	Shanghai Vice-Mayor
Yang Jinbo 杨晋柏	1973	Vice-Chairman, Guangxi Autonomous Region	Vice-Chairman, State Grid Corp of China
Li Yunze 李云泽	1970	Sichuan Vice-Governor	Vice-President, Industrial & Commercial Bank of China
Guo Ningning (f) 郭宁宁	1970	Fujian Vice-Governor	Vice-President of Agriculture Bank of China
Liu Qiang 刘强	1971	Shandong Vice-Governor	Vice-President, Bank of China
Fei Gaoyun 费高云	1971	Jiangsu Vice-Governor	Party Secretary of Changzhou City, Jiangsu
Zhou Liang 周亮	1971	Vice-Chairman, China Banking & Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC)	Deputy Secretary-General of the Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection (CCDI)
Li Xinran 李欣然	1972	Head of Discipline Department, CBIRC	Head of the Seventh Disciplinary Supervision Office, CCDI

In November 2016, Liu Jie set a record for the 7G leadership by becoming an MSC of Jiangxi Province at the age of 46. Liu first earned his spurs in the steel industry in Hunan Province: in 2000, Liu became Director of the Xiang Gang Second Steel Smelting Factory when he was just 30 years old. In 2011, he was transferred to nearby Jiangxi Province to serve as mayor of Xinyu. Liu got his big break five years later when he became an MSC of the Jiangxi Provincial Committee, as well as its Secretary-General. In mid-2018, he was assigned to Guizhou Province to serve in the same capacity ([The Paper \[Shanghai\]](#), May 17, 2018; [Sohu.com](#), May 17, 2018). Both Zhuge and Shi began their careers as engineers in state-run units in Shanghai before becoming administrators in municipal districts, which are roughly the equivalent of counties or prefectures in the provinces. After a stint in the maritime engineering sector of Shanghai, Zhuge rose up the ranks of the party committee of Yangpu District. He became Director of the General Office of the Shanghai Party Committee when he was 45 years old and was promoted Secretary-General last year ([Lianhe Zaobao \[Singapore\]](#), November 21, 2018; [Baidu News](#), November 20, 2018). After graduation from the prestigious Tongji University in Shanghai, Shi worked as an engineer and manager in different units of the municipal public works authority for 15 years. He switched to administration when he became a Deputy Head of the Jing'An District of Shanghai. Shi rose to become Secretary of the Party Committee of Fengxian District in 2011, and then one of several vice mayors of Shanghai in 2013. In late 2018, he was named an MSC of Guizhou Province ([Phoenix TV](#), April 24, 2017; [Caixin.com](#), April 24, 2017).

The next tier of 7G cadres consists of five vice-governors of major provinces. Guo Ningning (郭宁宁, born 1970) is one of the few female forty-somethings who have made it to the rank of vice-minister or equivalent. The native of Liaoning Province and graduate of Qinghua University spent most of her career in banking, rising to the post of Vice-President of The Agriculture Bank of China at the age of 46. She became a Vice-Governor of Fujian in late 2018. The fact that she is running a province where President Xi spent 17 years as a regional administrator may stand her in good stead in terms of promotion prospects ([New Beijing Post](#), November 23, 2018). Yang Jinbo (杨晋柏, born 1973), the youngest of the 7G officials in this survey, proved his technical and administrative capability in the energy sector. The native of Shaanxi rose to the post of Deputy General Manager of the China Nanfang Electricity Grid Corp at the age of 41. Last year, he was transferred to the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and was appointed one of its vice-chairmen (equivalent to vice-governor). Experience working with minorities is often considered a big plus when cadres are being groomed for the very top ([Caixin.com](#), November 29, 2018).

The other three 7G vice-governors are Li Yunze (李云泽, born 1970), Liu Qiang (刘强, born 1971) and Fei Gaoyun (费高云, born 1971)—of, respectively, Sichuan Province, Shandong Province and Jiangsu Province. A financial wizard, Liu has worked in the People's Bank of China, China Construction Bank and Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC). He attained the rank of Vice-President of ICBC, the world's biggest bank, in 2016 before being transferred to Sichuan last year as one of its eight vice-governors ([People's Daily](#), September 30, 2018). Like Fujian's Guo, Liu distinguished himself as an innovative manager in the Agriculture Bank of China. He served a brief stint as Vice-President of the Bank of China before being

moved to Shandong in September 2018 (Caixin.com, September 14, 2018). A native of Jiangsu, Fei spent almost his entire career in grassroots- and regional-level administrative posts in his home province. He rose to become party secretary of the large city of Changzhou in 2017 before being appointed a vice-governor of one of China's richest provinces (Caixin.com, January 31, 2018).

There are very few 7G representatives in the State Council, or elsewhere in the central government. This perhaps reflects President Xi's insistence on the predominance of party over state—and that important policies be made by CCP cadres at both the central and local levels. So far, two 7G government officials have been identified. Both work in one of the State Council's most important oversight agencies, the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC). Zhou Liang (周亮, born 1971) is one of the Commission's six vice-chairmen. Li Xinran (李欣然, born 1972) is head of the CBIRC's Disciplinary Inspection Department. Both Zhou and Li had served in the party's Central Commission for Disciplinary Inspection (CCDI), which is China's highest-level anti-graft agency (Huaxia Times, November 19, 2018; Securities Times, March 21, 2018).

Other Potential Rising Figures of the Seventh Generation

Apart from these members of the 7G leadership who have been fast-tracked for promotion in the party-state hierarchy, there are also other figures worth watching, who currently work in less politically sensitive areas such as mass- and united front organizations. A good example is Wang Hongyan ([汪鸿雁](http://Wang Hongyan), born 1970), who is Executive Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League (CYL). Wang had excelled in local-level administrations in Hubei Province before being inducted into the CYL's highest echelons in 2008. The fact that President Xi has spoken of the League in derogatory terms, however, could mean that she might make her main contributions in youth-related work (China-onway.com, February 20).

American-trained lawyer Li Bo (李波, born 1972) enjoyed a meteoric rise in the Legal Affairs Department and the Monetary Policy Department of the People's Bank of China after returning to China in 2004. Last year, he was appointed Vice-Chairman of the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, whose mission includes promoting China's image among overseas-Chinese communities (Finance.caixin.com, September 14, 2018).

Xi Jinping's Requirement for "Political Morality"

In the course of his own rise to power, and since he became CCP General Secretary in late 2012, Xi Jinping has appointed to senior party positions cadres known to him personally—and who have professed unqualified loyalty to the paramount leader. Members of the so-called "Xi Family Army" consists of Xi's underlings and associates when he served in regional posts in Fujian (1985 to 2002), Zhejiang (2002 to 2007) and Shanghai (2007). Other Xi protégés are his former classmates or officials associated with his home province of Shaanxi (China Brief, February 13, 2018). However, very few, if any, of the rising 7G leaders are known to have personal connections with the party's "highest commander" (*zuigaotongshuai*, 最高统帅). It is important to

note, however, that they have made the cut in two key criteria for promotion laid down by Xi. The first one is “professional competence coupled with morality, with morality coming first” (*decai jianbei, yide weixian* / [德才兼备以德为先](#)). In a recent article published by the party theoretical journal *Seeking Truth*, Xi vowed to “nurture a corps of high-quality cadres who are loyal and [morally] clean, and who can take up responsibilities.” Regarding the issue of “morality,” Xi said that it included “political morality, professional morality, social morality and family morality.” “Cadres must pass muster in these aspects,” he added. “The most important is that they must pass muster in political morality” ([People’s Daily](#), January 16; [People’s Daily](#), January 6).

Given the fact that the majority of the 7G cadres have had ample professional qualifications in areas such as finance and engineering, they seem best placed to satisfy Xi’s stringent requirements on professional capability. The fact that a disproportionately large number of 7G leaders have banking experience seems to reflect the Xi leadership’s concern with fiscal prudence at a time when the nation’s total social debt is estimated to be around three times that of national GDP ([South China Morning Post](#), February 15). In a 2016 speech, Xi urged cadres to take a firm hold of “new development concepts.” These concepts, the President noted, referred to “intellectual and professional requirements because new development ideas include new knowledge, new experience, new information and new requirements that are filled with the characteristics of the times” ([People’s Daily](#), January 3, 2016). According to Central Party School professor Wang Dongqi, “ceaselessly raising the ability and level of cadres’ professional mind-set, professional attainments and professional ability” would also help them acquire a higher political stature and take up more political responsibilities ([People’s Daily](#), September 7, 2018).

At the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference held last month, cadres of all levels were asked to “even more tightly unite under the party central authorities with comrade Xi Jinping as their core” ([China Brief](#), March 22). If, as has been widely suspected, Xi and his closest advisers have equated “political morality” with the profession of total fealty to the “party core,” declaration of loyalty to Xi may trump even the best performance in both professional pursuits and public administration. The promotion prospects of the 7G novices, and the extent to which they can contribute to sound and reform-oriented administration, thus depends in no small part on whether Xi is willing to honor his pledge: that candidates for top-level appointments must come from the “five lakes and the four seas”—that is, a rich diversity of backgrounds in terms of both experience and factional connections ([Youth.cn](#), May 19, 2015).

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Notes

[1] The CCP Constitution contains no specification on the length of tenure of the General Secretary. It also says nothing about the retirement age of members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), the nation's highest ruling council. However, the convention that when the five-yearly party congress is convened, a cadre who has reached the age of 68 can no longer be considered for the PBSC is well observed. Exceptions, however, have been made for General Secretaries. Thus, at the 15th Party Congress in 1997, Jiang, who was then 71, was allowed to serve five more years as both PBSC member and General Secretary.

China's Diplomatic Moves Amidst the India-Pakistan Conflict

By Adnan Amir

Introduction

On March 13th, diplomatic representatives of the People's Republic of China (PRC) placed a hold on a draft resolution under consideration at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)—a resolution intended to designate Maulana Masood Azhar as a global terrorist ([Business Today \(India\)](#), March 14, 2019). Maulana Masood Azhar is the founding leader of Jaish-e-Muhammad (“Army of Muhammad”—JeM) ([Militant Leadership Monitor](#), March 5). On February 14th, a suicide bomber killed 42 Indian paramilitary troops in the town of Pulwama, in Indian-administered Kashmir; in the aftermath, JeM quickly claimed responsibility for this attack ([Al Jazeera](#), February 14). This incident dramatically escalated the tensions between Pakistan and India: on February 26th and 27th, both countries bombed each other, and were on the brink of full-scale war before the international community stepped in to mediate.

As a result of blocking the resolution against Masood Azhar, the PRC has been criticized for having double standards on the issue of terrorism. On one hand, China is cracking down on its own Uighur Muslim population under the pretext of terrorism; while on the other hand, it is providing diplomatic cover to an alleged terrorist wanted for masterminding attacks in Indian-administered Kashmir. However, the actions of the PRC are part of a consistent pattern of pursuing its interests: protecting Pakistan and countering the rise of India; retaining the interest of Pakistan in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by coming to its support; and seeking to prevent any threat to PRC interests on the part of groups in Pakistan.

Terrorism and China's Response in the U.N. Security Council

In the wake of the Pulwama bombing, France—which held the presidency of the UNSC for March 2019—introduced a draft resolution, backed by the United States and United Kingdom, to formally designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. This proposed resolution was entered under the framework of the informally-named “Al Qaida Sanctions Committee” (or “1267 Committee”) formed pursuant to UNSC

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Resolution 1267 ([UNSC](#), October 15, 1999). If approved, this resolution would have put a global travel ban on Azhar and frozen his assets. However, on March 13th the PRC formally placed a “technical” hold on the resolution, effectively killing it. This was the fourth time that China so acted to protect Masood Azhar in the UNSC ([Nikkei Asian Review](#), March 15). The official explanation offered by Chinese diplomats and media for the hold was that the PRC needed “more time... to conduct a comprehensive evaluation” of the resolution and its merits; and that in the meantime, an orderly UNSC process would “help related countries solve their issues through dialogue and discussions, and avoid complications that could have an impact on regional peace” ([Global Times](#), March 14).



Image: A file photo of the PRC's U.N. Ambassador, Ma Zhaoxu. [Source: The Wire (India)]

The PRC's actions have attracted criticism in Western media on grounds that it is practicing double standards in regards to terrorism ([Foreign Policy](#), March 21). In contrast to its go-slow position regarding Masood Azhar and JeM, the PRC has taken a hardline position domestically: it has been credibly accused of holding hundreds of thousands of Muslims in detention centers in Xinjiang Province ([China Brief](#), May 15 2018; [China Brief](#), November 5 2018), and has defended these detentions as necessary measures to control extremism and terrorism in its southwestern region ([Global Times](#), October 17, 2018).

PRC Motivations in Protecting Masood Azhar

Why the different standards? There are three reasons why the PRC has risked the ire of the global community by blocking UNSC resolutions against Masood Azhar:

1) Protecting the Interests of its Long-term Partner Pakistan

Pakistan has been a strategic partner of China since 1962. During the last 57 years regimes have changed along with international politics, but Pakistan's relations with China have remained close. China helped Pakistan during its wars with India, against the Soviet Union in the Afghan War, and also with the

development of Pakistan's nuclear program ([Times of India](#), January 28, 2017). Likewise, China has consistently stood with Pakistan in the UN Security Council. Over the years, India has lobbied for multiple UNSC resolutions against Pakistan-based groups that India claims are involved in terrorism. However, as a permanent member of the UNSC, China has used its veto power generously to provide diplomatic cover for Pakistan. If the UNSC designates Azhar, or others like him, as terrorists then it will not only damage the international standing of Pakistan, but also potentially generate problems for Pakistan internally.

2) Countering the Rise of India

China attempts to indirectly counter India by supporting its arch-nemesis Pakistan. India stands as a major impediment to China's goals to become the undisputed leader of Asia. Although the size of the Indian economy is nowhere near that of China, India is projected to overtake China as the world's most populous country by the year 2024 ([Times of India](#), June 21, 2017), and its military power presents a potential challenge to the PRC in South Asia. In addition to that, India has also given refuge to the Dalai Lama since 1959, and is home to the Tibetan government-in-exile. Therefore, China is apprehensive of India's rise and perceives it as a threat not only to its own aspirations of global dominance, but also for the security of Tibet ([China Daily](#), April 5, 2017).

India is constantly facing the menace of terrorism: terrorists have attacked the Indian parliament, its financial hub Mumbai, and launched countless attacks in Kashmir. These attacks not only affect the growth of the Indian economy, but also prevent it from attaining the status of a fully secure country ([India Today](#), October 6, 2015). India wants to get rid of its terrorism problem, and it believes that the only way to do so is to confront Pakistan. Each and every time India blames Pakistan for acts of terrorism, China provides diplomatic cover to Pakistan in the UN Security Council—therefore, the PRC is effectively aiding terrorist groups that target India [1].

Despite this, Beijing still does not want to confront India directly. It not only engages in trade with India at levels much higher than Pakistan, but also continues to reach out to India through diplomatic connections. Therefore, right after blocking the resolution against Azhar, China expressed its desire for diplomatic dialogue with India ([South China Morning Post](#), March 16). Such steps are intended to help the PRC manage India's reactions to the moves made by China against India's interests, especially in the UNSC.

3) Retaining the Support of Pakistan for the CPEC

The third reason that motivated China to block the resolution against Azhar was its ongoing effort to retain the whole-hearted support of Pakistan for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an ambitious \$62 billion infrastructure program the PRC has pledged for Pakistan's economy ([China Brief](#), 05 January; [China Brief](#), February 15). The former Pakistani Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government of PM Nawaz Sharif signed the CPEC agreements with China; however, ever since assuming office in 2018, the incumbent

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party-led government of Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan has expressed reluctance to carry forward with CPEC.

Razak Dawood, a PTI cabinet member, has demanded that CPEC projects should be postponed for one year, and reviewed to ensure that they consistent with the interests of Pakistan ([Pakistan Today](#), September 30, 2018). Even the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, has said that Pakistan will ask China to review the CPEC agreements. This change in policy angered Beijing, which refused to assist Pakistan last year when the country desperately needed a bailout to support its troubled economy ([Dawn](#), November 3, 2018). Pakistan sought help from Saudi Arabia and the UAE instead to prevent a foreign exchange default.

Following this squabble in autumn 2018, relations have mended in 2019, and Pakistan is currently making a renewed push for progress in CPEC. Pakistan has allocated additional funds to develop CPEC infrastructure projects in the southern province of Balochistan ([Express Tribune](#), March 22, 2019)—a region that has recently seen threats to Chinese citizens and PRC infrastructure projects from separatist insurgents ([China Brief](#), 15 February). PM Imran Khan has also agreed to attend the Second Belt and Road Forum scheduled to be held in Beijing later this month.

4) Purchasing Security for PRC Interests in South Asia

There is an additional security dimension to the PRC's diplomatic protection for Masood Azhar and JeM: China relies in part on Pakistan to secure its southwestern border region. With the help of Pakistan, China has cracked down on the Uighur militants who were operating under the umbrella of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) ([Dawn](#), September 2, 2015). Therefore, the PRC wants to retain a strategic relationship with Pakistan to secure its borders—especially at a time when Beijing has cracked down on Uighur citizens *en masse* in Xinjiang.

Furthermore, CPEC roads pass near Pakistan-administered Kashmir, which is the operating area for Jaish-e-Muhammad. If the PRC had supported sanctions against Azhar, there was a fear that JeM might have attacked Chinese interests in Pakistan. In that context, experts believe that China's moves in the UNSC have a two-fold benefit: (1) they deflect the possibility of JeM directing attacks against Chinese interests and citizens based in Pakistan; and (2) they smartly mute any possible criticism by Islamic groups in Pakistan of Beijing's mass internment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. [2]

The Challenge Continues

Despite shrewd moves by China on the diplomatic chessboard, the challenge is far from over. The United States has introduced a new resolution in the UNSC against Masood Azhar. This resolution is not part of the 1267 Sanctions Committee—which means that, unlike previous resolutions, the debate on this latest resolution will not be kept behind closed doors. China can still veto this resolution, but this time it will have to

publicly explain the reasons for any veto—which is the aim of Washington behind this move ([Live Mint](#), March 28). The PRC Foreign Ministry has reacted strongly to this move, and has criticized it as an act that undermines the authority of the 1267 Committee. Beijing continues to urge UNSC members to allow time and space for dialogue on the matter of Masood Azhar ([PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), March 28).

This latest move by Washington has placed China in an awkward position: now once again it has to defend Masood Azhar in the UNSC, at the potential cost of its public standing and reputation. However, as explained above, the PRC will still oppose this resolution in order to protect its interests, which are interlinked with Pakistan. This means that relations between China and India will likely further deteriorate in the near future owing to this ongoing battle in the UN Security Council. However, Beijing will continue to defend Pakistan, pursuing the course of action that best serves its interests.

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Notes

[1] Author's interview with Dr. Mohan Malik, Professor at Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Hawaii, USA.

[2] Ibid.

Learning Without Fighting: New Developments in PLA Artificial Intelligence War-Gaming

By Elsa Kania

The Opportunities and Challenges of Intelligentization

A lack of recent experience in combat is often characterized as a major liability and potential disadvantage for the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in any future conflict scenario. [1] Despite notable advances in its capabilities in recent years, apparent shortcomings remain in the “software” of the PLA's training and readiness, and perhaps even its will to fight and courage ([China Brief](#), December 1, 2016). The People's Republic of China (PRC) has not been at war since its 1979 conflict with Vietnam—of which several current military leaders, including members of the Central Military Commission, are veterans—and there are intense concerns today about the perils of “peace disease.” Today, the PLA's contemporary experiences in military operations other than war (MOOTW), including counter-piracy and peacekeeping operations, offer only limited experience of direct relevance to potential high-end conflict scenarios. In future fights, the PLA could confront a range of difficulties that could include the apparent rigidity of its command structure, and the relative inexperience of its officers and enlisted personnel. Despite major reforms, the PLA could continue to

struggle with joint operations, even as it seeks to leverage a new doctrinal approach that is still being formulated ([Diplomat](#), June 6, 2017). At the same time, the PLA is redoubling its efforts in military innovation, rapidly developing and looking to operationalize emerging technologies—particularly artificial intelligence (AI)—that may require major adaptations in concepts, structures, and training.

For the PLA, Xi Jinping's exhortation to prepare to "fight and win" future wars may thus prove a daunting endeavor. How is the PLA attempting to overcome such critical challenges? While seeking to enhance the realism and sophistication of "actual combat" (*shizhan*, 实战) training, the PLA is also expanding its activities in war-gaming and adopting new techniques in training, including the use of virtual reality to enhance realism and enable psychological conditioning ([Xinhua](#), January 17, 2017). In this regard, these aspects of the PLA's exploration of new directions in military innovation will inform its response to what it sees as a "Revolution in Military Affairs" (*junshi geming*, 军事革命), or RMA, which is catalyzed and deepened by today's emerging technologies ([Xinhua](#), August 20, 2014). In particular, AI is seen as a critical strategic technology that is transforming today's "informatized" (*xinxihua*, 信息化) warfare to future "intelligentized" (*zhinenghua*, 智能化) warfare ([CNAS](#), November 2017).

During his work report to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, Xi Jinping urged the PLA to "Accelerate the development of military intelligentization [*junshi zhinenghua*, 军事智能化] and improve joint operations capabilities and all-domain operational capabilities based on network information systems" ([Xinhua](#), October 27, 2017). This authoritative exhortation seems to elevate "intelligentization," which involves leveraging AI technologies to enable and enhance a range of future military capabilities, as a guiding concept for future Chinese military modernization. Clearly, China recognizes AI as integral to future national competitiveness, with the potential to change the global balance of power. These ambitions to "lead the world" in AI were prominently highlighted in the launch of the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan (*Xinyidai Rengong Zhineng Fazhan Guihua*, 新一代人工智能发展规划) ([PRC State Council](#), July 20, 2017). This plan also calls for the PRC to "Strengthen the use of new generation AI technologies as a strong support to command decision-making, military deductions [*junshi tuiyuan*, 军事推演, *e.g.*, *war-gaming and operations research*], and defense equipment, among other applications." The interest in the application of "military deductions" has included the use of AI in war-gaming (*bingqi tuiyuan*, 兵器推演), as well as complex simulations. In particular, the PLA's apparent progress in the use of AI in war-gaming provides an initial indicator of its attempts to explore new concepts of operations for the dynamics of intelligentized operations, while also seeking to enhance the acumen and preparedness of its officers and personnel for future warfare.

PLA Experimentation with AI War-Gaming

The application of AI to war-gaming could provide an invaluable instrument as the PLA seeks to train for and explore the dynamics of future warfare, influenced by a strategic culture that concentrates on military *science*. In fact, some of these applications of AI have a long history within the PLA, including early initiatives to apply expert systems to military operations research that date back to the late 1980s and 1990s. [2] In recent

years, the PLA's National Defense University (NDU) has taken the lead in the development of more advanced techniques for wargames ([War on the Rocks](#), February 17, 2015). These advances have occurred under the leadership of Major General Hu Xiaofeng (胡晓峰), who is currently exploring the integration of AI into wargaming, while also examining new directions for decision support. For instance, the level of realism from a more artificially intelligent "blue force" (*lan jun*, 蓝军)—the PLA's equivalent of a "red team"—could increase the value of exercises for both training and evaluating the military balance relative to a powerful adversary. For Chinese military strategists, among the lessons learned from AlphaGo's victories was the fact that an AI could create tactics and stratagems superior to those of a human player in a game that can be compared to a war-game. In that regard, AlphaGo appears to have served as an inspiration of sorts for this new direction in PLA war-gaming, along with related conceptual exploration of the potential of AI in future command and control. At the same time, the expansion of war-gaming within the PLA can contribute to training future commanders who may develop greater skills in strategic thinking and command decision-making, which is a current weakness for the PLA ([War on the Rocks](#), February 2019).



Image: A video screen background from the 2017 "National Wargame Competition" (Quanguo Bingqi Tuiyan Dasai, 全国兵棋推演大赛) sponsored by the China Institute of Command and Control.

As the PLA seeks to advance theoretical innovations in order to prepare for future warfare, the introduction of AI to war-gaming activities can provide not only training, but also a means of studying and even seeking to "design" future intelligentized warfare. In September 2017, the China Institute of Command and Control (CICC) co-sponsored the first national Artificial Intelligence and Wargaming Forum convened at NDU's Joint Operations Academy, which debuted an AI system called "Prophet 1.0" (*Xianzhi 1.0*, 先知1.0), developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Automation ([Science Network](#), September 29, 2017). Prophet 1.0 proved victorious over the human teams, seven to one, with no human intervention in the process ([Global Times](#), September 28, 2017). In December 2017, in another round of competition, Prophet 1.0 again beat top teams in this human-machine confrontation (*renji duikang*, 人机对抗) with a three to one record ([Science](#)

[Network](#), December 28, 2017). Evidently, this initial “AI commander” served as a proof of concept for future advances in AI in war-gaming, including through generating data that could be used in machine learning to enhance their sophistication. Such activities are starting to extend across a range of Chinese military and civilian research and educational institutions, with plans to evolve from simpler scenarios of land warfare to the complexities of naval, aerial, air-sea, and cyber battlefields. Between September and December 2018, there was another round of war-gaming competitions titled “Prophet • Battle Sage” (*Xianzhi • Bingzheng*, 先知•兵圣) in which participants from a number of universities, research institutes, and technology companies competed to test their AI agents in war-gaming ([CICC](#), September 4, 2018). This competition, involving “human-machine confrontation” and “machine-machine confrontation,” was intended as an open test platform to improve the capabilities of the AI agents involved and the human players.

As the PLA appears to prioritize leveraging AI in decision support for commanders on the future battlefield, initial efforts to develop an “AI commander” in war-gaming may contribute to future progress. For instance, in April 2018 the Chinese Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology (CALT) convened an intelligent human-machine competition (*zhineng ren-ji duikang sai*, 智能人机对抗赛) called “Decisive Victory” (*Juesheng Qianli*, 决胜千里). This competition involved an “AI commander program” (*rengong zhineng zhihuiguan chengxu*, 人工智能指挥官程序) known as “Xiao Yi” (小奕), which confronted human players from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Tsinghua University—and reportedly defeated them six to two ([CALT](#), April 23, 2018). This platform for human-machine intelligent confrontation involves games that can “simulate applied decision-making processes,” enabling sophisticated confrontations, including a competition against the AI agent developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Automation. Decisive Victory has been described as an open platform to support the research, development, and training of intelligent decision-making models for aerospace domain systems, thus contributing to the continued development of intelligent game technologies. However, any attempts to transition from these scenarios of ‘game confrontation’ to the actual battlefield will inevitably prove challenging, given the much greater complexity inherent in actual combat.

Conclusion and Implications

Going forward, the PLA’s evident interest in the application of AI to war-gaming constitutes a notable direction of development. Although debates persist regarding the extent to which the PLA can be a “learning organization,” such experimentation and competitions could contribute to training and conceptual improvements. To date, the PLA appears to be undertaking these activities at greater scope and scale relative to the United States, seemingly motivated by a hope of ‘designing’ the shape of future warfare. These activities can produce data that is valuable to training AI systems for advances in war-gaming and novel techniques for decision-making. Concurrently, the PLA appears to be expanding its use of simulations, as well as virtual reality, to support more realistic training, and this experimentation could contribute to the refinement of initial concepts and theories.

What lessons will the PLA learn from these war-gaming activities? Could the PLA develop unique theories of victory and concepts of operations for future “intelligentized” operations? Might the PLA overestimate the applicability of lessons learned in these activities to the complexities of real-world warfare? Could the uncertainties of a new era of intelligentized warfare increase the likelihood of miscalculation of the military balance? At present, the PLA remains in the process of speculation and experimentation, ahead of full implementation. [4] In the process, the tendency to leverage AI in efforts to compensate for self-diagnosed weaknesses could remain a significant influence on the direction of developments. In the absence of opportunities to “learn from fighting” (*zai zhanzheng zhong xuexi zhanzheng*, 在战争中学习战争), innovations in AI in war-gaming could prove to be leading factors influencing future conceptual innovations by the PLA.

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Notes

[1] For a thoughtful discussion of the ways in which combat experience can matter but is contingent upon other factors, see: Timothy R. Heath, “China’s Military Has No Combat Experience: Does It Matter?”, RAND, November 27, 2018.

<https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/11/chinas-military-has-no-combat-experience-does-it-matter.html>

[2] Deborah R. Harvey and Barbara R. Felton, “Military Operations Research in China: A Defense S&T Intelligence Study,” March 1994, DST-1820S-187-94. This document was regraded unclassified and released in March 1998.

[3] AlphaGo is a computer program designed by Deep Mind Technologies, an AI development company in London. In a series of high-profile matches from 2015-2017, AlphaGo decisively defeated a series of world-class human opponents in the complex board game *go*. See: “The Story of AlphaGo So Far,” Deep Mind Technologies, undated. <https://deepmind.com/research/alphago/>.

[4] For reference on the theoretical framework that informs my thinking on these dynamics, see: Thomas G. Mahnken, “Uncovering Foreign Military Innovation.” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 4 (1999): 26-54.

The “Algorithm Game” and Its Implications for Chinese War Control

By Howard Wang and John Dotson

Editor’s note: A recent China Brief article referenced the concept of the “algorithm game” as a theoretical concept connected to developments in artificial intelligence and future Chinese military operations. (See: Brent Eastwood, [“A Smarter Battlefield?: PLA Concepts for ‘Intelligent Operations’ Begin to Take Shape.”](#) February 15, 2019). This article builds upon that earlier discussion, and is intended to further explore the concept of the “algorithm game”—as well as the potential implications of this idea for evolving PLA ideas regarding future warfare and escalation management.

Introduction

In early 2019, Li Minghai (李明海), a senior faculty member with China's National Defense University (NDU), published a pair of articles that offered a new set of terms and theoretical ideas related to the incorporation and operationalization of emerging technology by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). [1] Li is a prominent military academic—holding dual positions as director of the National Security Studies Institute at NDU, and as deputy secretary of NDU's Communist Party Committee—as well as holding the rank of senior colonel (*da xiao*, 大校) in the PLA. [2] In these recent articles, Li introduced a new term into military discourse: the “algorithm game” (or alternately, the “algorithm chess game”) (*suanfa boyi*, 算法博弈), which was presented in the context of conflict between first-tier military forces in a dawning age of “intelligentized warfare” (*zhinenghua zhanzheng*, 智能化战争). [3]

This term is not an original creation: *suanfa boyi* is the core of the Chinese translation of “algorithmic game theory” (算法博弈论, *suanfa boyi lun*), an academic discipline that blends elements of computer science, game theory, and behavioral economics to examine strategic decision-making in the context of “games” containing multiple actors with competing interests. [4] Nor is this discussion of an “algorithm game” in national security affairs limited solely to military channels: for example, Professor An Bo (安波) of Nanyang Engineering University has discussed how the application of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithmic game theory will allow the state to more efficiently employ resources for a broad range of domestic security missions—to include protecting infrastructure from terrorists, conducting border patrols, and even “opposing internet rumors” (*duikang wangluo yaoyan*, 对抗网络谣言) that could threaten social stability ([CNBlogs](#), April 20, 2017).

Discussions of “intelligentized” warfare are not new, and have been used with increasing frequency by PLA writers in recent years ([Strategy Bridge](#), June 8, 2017). However, concepts such as those introduced in Li's articles—and the concept of the “algorithm game” in particular—appear to represent a nascent effort to develop a doctrinal framework for how AI and game theory could be integrated into future military operations by the PLA. Some of these ideas also bear potential relevance for the PLA's longstanding goal of achieving effective “war control” in a military clash with either another great power, or a significant regional opponent. This article seeks to illuminate some of these emerging concepts—at least at an elementary level—and to examine how they might connect to PLA ambitions to seek battlefield information and command superiority, as well as to effectively control escalation in a future armed conflict.

The “Algorithm Game” in Future Military Operations

In his early 2019 publications, Li Minghai addressed the importance of grasping the “mechanisms for victory in intelligentized warfare” (*zhinenghua zhanzheng de zhisheng jili*, 智能化战争的制胜机理)—which is to say, a military environment in which information technology and AI-enabled weapons systems are critical factors on the battlefield. In recent years, “informationized warfare” (*xinxihua zhanzheng*, 信息化战争) has

been the primary paradigm discussed in PLA writings; however, Li maintains that this will be superseded by a new paradigm of “intelligentized” warfare, which will be fundamentally different in nature: “In comparing informationized warfare and future intelligentized warfare, the winning mechanisms have seen a clear change... operational key factors are changing from 'information in the lead' to 'machines leading in battle’” ([CASS](#), February 22).

According to Li, “calculation superiority” (or alternately, “algorithmic superiority”) (*suafu youshi*, 算法优势) will be key in this new environment: “The mode of military confrontation is transforming from a 'clash of systems' to an 'algorithm game', and calculation superiority is [becoming] the leading element of warfare superiority.” Li even predicts that some aspects of military decision-making could become automated, with the emergence of a “digital staff” (*shuzi canmou*, 数字参谋) resulting in “decision-making transforming from 'human brain decisions' to 'AI decisions’” ([PLA Daily](#), Jan. 15, 2019). As a component of this calculation superiority, Li places great stock in the ability of integrated sensors and computing systems to eliminate the confusion inherent to chaotic battle environments: “Calculation superiority in future war [will] allow for rapid and accurate forecasts of the battlefield situation, bringing forth the optimum innovative battle methods”—which could even result in “realizing the warfare objective of 'winning without fighting’” ([PLA Daily](#), Jan. 15, 2019).



Image: In a photo from 2015, Li Minghai (right) poses for a photo celebrating a donation to support a PLA military monument in Suizhou (Hubei Province). (Source: [Suizhou Government](#))

The PLA’s Quest to Achieve Effective “War Control”

Some of these emerging aspirational ideas bear implications for another strand of PLA thought: the effort to achieve effective “war control” (*zhanzheng kongzhi*, 战争控制). In the 2013 edition of *The Science of Military Strategy* (SMS), an authoritative volume of PLA strategic thought published by the Academy of Military Science, war control is described as the ability to precisely control and adjust warfighting intensity and

scope (*ketiaokong wuli*, 可调控武力) in relation to achieving the national policy objectives (*shixian guojia zhengce*, 实现国家政策) for which the war is fought. [5]

In light of the potential destructiveness of modern warfare, the 2013 SMS instructs that wars fought under “informationized” conditions must be strictly managed such that the conflict does not: 1) escalate to threaten national survival; 2) simultaneously cause domestic and external crises; 3) cause fundamental harm to Chinese economic interests; or 4) compromise objectives in national development. [6] PLA strategic theory appears to otherwise tolerate significant risks—and maintains that within these parameters, war can be safely, if precisely, escalated as an efficacious means of realizing the PRC’s policy objectives. In order to guarantee that strategic escalations under informationized conditions do not violate the four boundary conditions, PLA writers have acknowledged the need to improve “combat operations control” (*zuozhan xingdong kongzhi*, 作战行动控制) to an extremely high level of precision ([PLA Daily](#), April 12, 2014).

Within this paradigm, predicting and managing adversary reactions is critical. PLA writers describe successful combat operations control development as a transition from unidirectional to bidirectional control: one in which PLA commanders have control over their own forces, but also exert some degree of control over opposing forces by attacking their weapons and information systems—and thereby limiting the enemy’s operational choices. Therefore, PLA writers have discussed the need for dynamic combat operations control responsive to real-time battlefield developments—dispersing the fog of war with information systems that instantaneously integrate (*shunshi yitihua*, 瞬时一体化) battlefield decision-making processes by synchronizing combat operations, and effectively managing the conversion between offensive and defensive confrontations among geographically dispersed forces. These are herculean challenges for any commander, and in an informationized war where both parties are attempting such control, PLA writers argue that victory will be decided by the party with the superior technological foundation ([PLA Daily](#), April 12, 2014; [Guangming Daily](#), May 20, 2015).

The PLA concept of war control depends on the premise that the PLA can escalate conflict to achieve desired policy outcomes within acceptable costs. Western analysts have criticized this vein of Chinese strategic thought as overconfident and overly theoretical—and indicative of a false belief that the PLA can advance geopolitical positioning and military technology to the point of making the world “safe for war.”[7] Yet this is precisely what some PLA writers anticipate is possible through superior technology—and strategists such as Li Minghai appear to propose that bidirectional, dynamic control can be potentially realized through advances in AI technology.

Conclusions

Despite discussion of the concept in the authoritative *Science of Military Strategy*, war control has yet to be clearly codified as PLA warfighting doctrine. War control remains an aspirational concept: one that cannot be effectively realized without both combat operations control, and knowledge of the adversary’s intentions and

reactions, that lays beyond apparent human capability. However, the vision of intelligentized warfare advanced by Li Minghai and others may provide a framework for PLA strategists who seek to overcome the obstacle of human limitations by placing machines in the lead of the decision-making process—thus potentially enabling the PLA to implement war control and other strategies once considered aspirational.

Thus far, to the authors' knowledge, ideas such as those proposed by Li Minghai have not been incorporated into official PLA doctrinal publications—and therefore, they cannot be viewed as authoritative. However, Li Minghai's professional positions, and the fact that his writings have been published by prominent state institutions, both suggest that these ideas reflect emerging aspirational concepts under consideration within the doctrinal circles of the PLA.

The “algorithm game” and similar concepts involving military-use AI bear implications for the PLA's long-standing discussions regarding war control and escalation management. In idealized theoretical terms, the greater battlefield awareness offered by AI-empowered sensor platforms, and the “calculation superiority” of advanced computing systems, could bring the PLA a significant step closer to achieving the cognitive dominance necessary to dial up or down the intensity of military operations. However, it remains to be seen whether an AI system could truly integrate decision-making processes effectively amidst the chaos and complexity of multi-domain combat; furthermore, it is an open question as to whether PLA soldiers and commanders would be willing to cede human agency in favor of decisions made by computers. For now, the algorithm game and war control both remain theoretical constructs for PLA authors—but ones worth watching as the Chinese military grapples with the future incorporation of AI into its force structure and operations.

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Notes

[1] The two articles published by Li in early 2019 are: "Where Are the Changes to Winning Mechanisms in Intelligentized Warfare?" [智能化战争的制胜机理变在哪里], *PLA Daily*, Jan. 15, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2019-01/15/c_1210038327.htm; and "Winning Mechanisms in Intelligentized Warfare" [智能化战争制胜机理], *Front Line Magazine* [前线杂志], No. 2, 2019 (Feb. 22, 2019), republished by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, http://www.cssn.cn/dq/bj/201902/t20190222_4834830.shtml.

[2] For mention of Li Minghai's positions and military rank, see: "Our School Holds an Unveiling Ceremony for the Cyberspace Security Institute" (我校举行网络空间安全学院揭牌仪式), *Sohu.com*, Sep. 22, 2018, http://www.baidu.com/link?url=0iR_8f2M1DC6RrV8LxJz2YpfINrj19E_wisHt5HUq5WGpU6ipe9H3EWVYvXJRh-Q&wd=&eqid=9a2195e1000881b0000000065c9e4c45; and Li Minghai, "Mechanisms for Victory in

Warfare and Military Transformations" [战争制胜机理与军队变革], *Cankao Xiaoxi Net* [参考消息网], Dec. 22, 2015, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-12/22/c_128555274.htm.

[3] Li Minghai, the author who is the primary focus of this article, did not originate the term "intelligentized warfare" (*zhinenghua zhanzheng*, 智能化战争), which is now widely discussed in PLA and other government-affiliated publications. For one such example, see: Shi Xiaogang (石小刚), "Intelligentized Warfare Patterns and Countermeasure Tactics" [智能化战争形态及应对策略], Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, July 5, 2018. http://news.cssn.cn/zx/bwyc/201807/t20180705_4496198_1.shtml.

[4] Nisan, Roughgarden, Tardos, Vazirani (eds.), *Algorithmic Game Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. xxi-xv. <https://www.cs.cmu.edu/~sandholm/cs15-892F13/algorithmic-game-theory.pdf>.

[5] Military Strategy Research Department, PLA Academy of Military Science, *The Science of Military Strategy*; [战略学], 3rd ed., (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2013) [军事科学出版社], pp. 110. <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/china/sms-2013.pdf>.

[6] *Ibid.* pp. 123-124

[7] Lonnie D. Henley, "Evolving Chinese Concepts of War Control and Escalation Management" in *Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan's Security*, eds., Michael D. Swaine, Andrew N.D. Yang, and Evan S. Medeiros with Oriana Skylar Mastro, (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), pp. 100-101
