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CHINA BRIEF NOTES:

Nihilism, Denialism, and Annihilation in New Xinjiang White Paper

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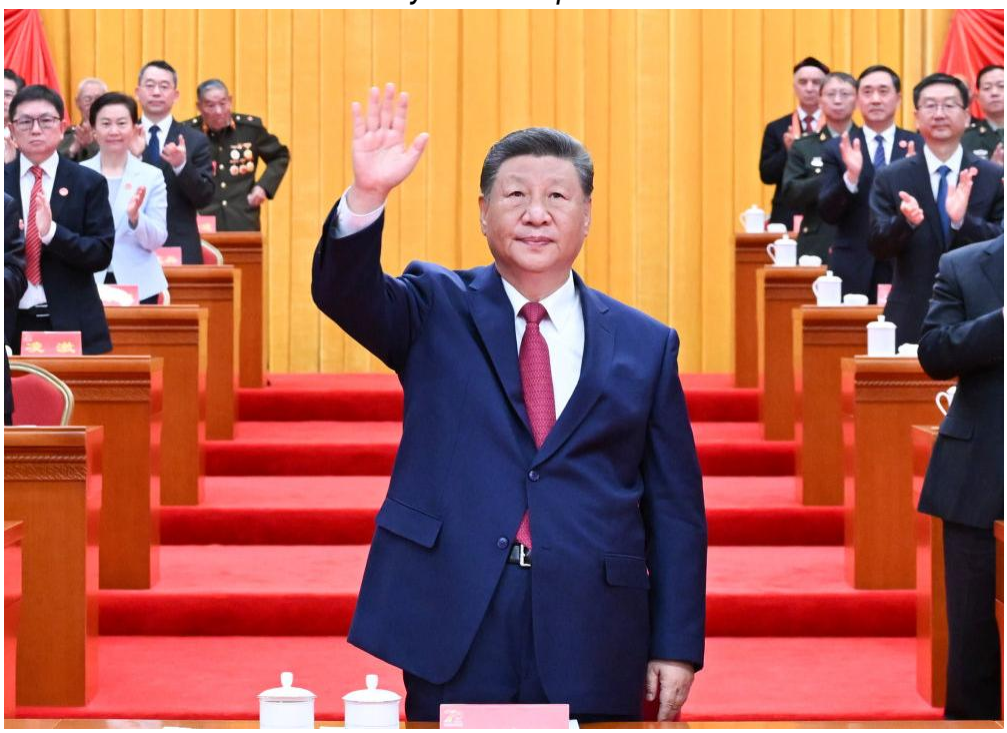

Xi Jinping raises his right hand during a ceremony to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the CCP's founding of Xinjiang as part of the People's Republic of China. (Source: Xinhua)

Executive Summary:

- Xi Jinping's personal imprimatur on the Party-state's policies in Xinjiang are unambiguous, according to a new white paper published to coincide with a central-level delegation to the region in late September.
- The Party uses cultural and historical arguments to justify its ongoing policies of cultural erasure in the region that have been characterized by governments, parliaments, and other entities as genocidal. The white paper celebrates many of these policies.
- In defiance of Western measures aimed at curbing human rights abuses, the government actively provides support to sanctioned entities, while senior officials reject accusations of forced labor, instead blaming the United States for "unemployment" in the region.
- Beijing's quest to normalize the situation in Xinjiang is part of a broader project that sees the region as strategically important, opening up the country to deeper trade and connectivity with Eurasia as part of its ultimate pursuit of national rejuvenation.

General Secretary Xi Jinping's centrality to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) project in Xinjiang is unambiguously clear in a new white paper issued by the State Council Information Office (SCIO). Titled "CPC Guidelines for Governing Xinjiang in the New Era: Practice and Achievements" (新时代党的治疆方略的成功实践), the document has been released to coincide with a central-level delegation Xi led to the region to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the region's founding under the PRC (CCTV, September 23). The text reads as a triumphal vindication of the Party's work. Pushing back against international human rights concerns, it is also replete with Orwellian passages eulogizing Xinjiang's advances in democratic processes and human rights (Xinhua, September 20).

The white paper reveals three aspects of Xi's Xinjiang policies: nihilism, denialism, and annihilation. First, it pushes a conception of Chinese history, culture, and civilization that provides a theoretical underpinning for the Party's domination of the region. Second, it denies evidence of genocidal actions, instead blaming the United States and other external powers for causing unrest in the region. Third, it celebrates policies of cultural erasure that seek to annihilate distinct cultural and religious practices in pursuit of forging a unitary ethnonational conception of the "Chinese nation" (中华民族).

Nihilism

Xi Jinping has long been deeply concerned about the metaphysical justification for the Party's rule. In a departure from his preferred Marxist mode, he often emphasizes the non-material, especially when discussing issues of culture (China Brief, October 20, 2023). This is evident in claims that Xinjiang is a "sacred territory" (神圣领土) and that national unity is the central government's "sacred mission" (神圣使命). Such pronouncements stem from fears of "cultural nihilism" (文化虚无主义). In recent years, the Party has feared external influences eroding the cultural bedrock of what it views as Chinese civilization. If not countered, these corrosive forces could lead to the collapse of not just the Party, but of Chinese civilization itself. In response, Xi has doubled down on ideology, asserting China's cultural identity as an existential foundation and firmly establishing the "spiritual identity of the modern civilization of the Chinese nation" (树立中华民族现代文明的精神标识) (Study Times, September 4, 2023; China Brief, March 28).

The notion of *Zhonghua Minzu* (中华民族), an ethnonationalist conception of the Chinese nation, is at the heart of the white paper. The first full sentence of the text begins with these words, which are followed in the third sentence by the claim that Xinjiang "has been an inalienable part of China's territory since ancient times" (新自古以来就是中国领土不可分割的一部分). The phrase also appears in the repeated articulation of the white paper's "central theme" (主线), which appears five times in the text: "Forging the consciousness of the *Zhonghua* national community" (以铸牢中华民族共同体意识为主线). As the scholar James Leibold has argued, the use of the verb "forge" (铸牢) indicates that this work is part of a broader "soul-casting" project, in which the CCP is "melting down the heterogeneity of minority cultures and recasting them in Party-defined norms" (Scroll.in, September 20). The Party is clearly aware of these connotations, and so in its official English translation opts for a softer term, "fostering."

A roster of hardline officials who see the nation through this particular lens have overseen Xinjiang policy in recent years. In 2020, Chen Xiaojiang (陈小江) was appointed as the director of the National Ethnic Affairs

Commission, which manages ethnic minorities within the PRC with the principal aim of promoting national unity. Chen was the first Han director of the commission in six decades. But his two successors, Pan Yue (潘岳) and, as of September 12, Chen Ruifeng (陈瑞峰), are also Han. Pan, in particular, is a well-known ethnonationalist official. In 2024, he led the publication of a compulsory textbook for university students that promotes a Han-centric cultural and racial nationalism (China Brief, May 24, 2024).

The Party's theories of culture and civilization—and its intolerant rejection of alternative approaches as nihilism—are intertwined with its view of history. Under the steerage of these officials and, ultimately, Xi Jinping, Party-sanctioned history has been made concrete in Xinjiang through the region's physical cultural infrastructure. According to the white paper, the regional government has preserved key ruins and sites that "reflect past central authorities' viable governance of Xinjiang" (中央政权有效治理新疆重点遗址遗迹保护展). This has been done, presumably, at the expense of preserving evidence that would support theories that conflict with this narrative. Meanwhile, 471 education bases for patriotism have been set up (SCIO, September 23). These efforts, downstream of the Party's theoretical work, help to justify policies of cultural erasure.

Denialism

Evidence from the last decade—evidence that the Party has gone to considerable lengths to repress—details the brutality of the regime. On the basis of this evidence, the U.S. government has characterized Xi's policies as genocide (U.S. Department of State, January 19, 2021). The same conclusion has been reached by the Uyghur Tribunal in the United Kingdom, as well as by Parliaments around the world (Uyghur Tribunal, December 2021). Even the United Nations, which Xi Jinping refers to as the "core" (核心) of the international system, refers to probable "crimes against humanity," recently expressing concern about policies "increasing criminalisation of Uyghur and other minority cultural expression" (UN OHCHR, August 31, 2022, October 1).

The Party denies these accusations. The white paper acknowledges that Xinjiang has faced an "unprecedented crisis of national extinction and racial annihilation" (亡国灭种的空前危机), but this particular quote refers to the actions of Western imperialists in the nineteenth century—something that was ultimately prevented when the CCP "wisely decided to peacefully liberate Xinjiang" (中共中央英明决策和平解放新疆) in 1955. Elsewhere, officials argue that it is in fact the United States that is perpetrating abuse in Xinjiang. At the press conference for the white paper's release, Chen Weijun (陈伟俊), Xinjiang's vice-chairman, said that "unjustified U.S. sanctions are violating the employment rights of workers of all ethnic groups in Xinjiang under the guise of human rights protection. If there is any forcing, it is the U.S. that is doing it by forcing unemployment" (SCIO, September 23).

By framing the United States and other countries as bad-faith actors whose "purpose is political manipulation and economic bullying under the guise of human rights protection" (实质是打着"人权"的幌子搞政治操弄和经济霸凌), the Party justifies doubling down on its abusive policies. The standing committee of Xinjiang's Party Committee has adopted resolutions "supporting the development of sanctioned enterprises and related industries" (支持受制裁企业及相关产业发展的有关决议). It also "actively provides services to sanctioned enterprises and supports them in legally safeguarding their legitimate rights and interests"

(积极为受制裁企业提供服务，支持企业依法维护自身合法权益). In this way, Xi is doubling down in the face of international backlash.

Annihilation

The white paper celebrates policies of cultural erasure in Xinjiang. Often, they are justified using Party-sanctioned history. For example, claims that the Chinese script has been "in constant use" (从未中断) in Xinjiang since the Western Han (roughly two thousand years ago) are used to support the government's efforts to "strengthen the teaching of the national standard language and script in schools" (学校国家通用语言文字教育教学持续加强). (In the press conference accompanying the white paper's release, officials praised clips of children in Xinjiang proudly saying, "I am Chinese" (SCIO, September 23).)

The Sinicization of religion (宗教中国化)—what the white paper's official translation euphemistically refers to as ensuring that religions "conform to China's realities"—is also justified in this way. The text claims that a "long-standing tradition of a unified China" (中华文明长期的大一统传统) exists and that "throughout history, successive central governments in China have regarded the promotion of mainstream values and the excellence of traditional Chinese culture as an indispensable component of their governance in Xinjiang" (中国历代中央政权都将弘扬主流价值和中华优秀传统文化作为治理新疆不可或缺的重要内容). As a result, the Party believes it is entitled to "carry out activities to promote the national flag, the Constitution and laws, socialist core values, and the fine traditional Chinese culture in religious venues" (开展国旗、宪法和法律法规、社会主义核心价值观、中华优秀传统文化进宗教活动场所活动). In reality, this entails preventing the observation of religious rituals and practice, and framing attempts to do so as subversive and extremist.

The Buck Stops With Xi

The white paper makes clear throughout that Xi Jinping holds ultimate responsibility for policies enacted in Xinjiang. The preface notes that "the Party Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core … has examined, planned, and deployed work in Xinjiang" (进入新时代，以习近平同志为核心的党中央 … 审视、谋划、部署新疆工作). Later on, it states that Xi "personally charts the course, sets the direction, and steers the ship" (亲自谋篇布局、把脉定向、领航掌舵). The conclusion, perhaps most emphatic, avers that the results of all policies in Xinjiang in the New Era are, "fundamentally, attributed to the leadership by General Secretary Xi Jinping as the core of both the CPC Central Committee and the entire Party" (根本在于习近平总书记作为党中央的核心、全党的核心领航掌舵). **[1]**

Xi's focus on Xinjiang is part of a decision to raise Xinjiang's importance in national policymaking. As the white paper states, Xi has "placed Xinjiang work in a prominent position within the overall work of the Party and the state" (把新疆工作放在党和国家工作全局的重要地位). This prominence can be tracked across PRC white papers. No other subject has been the focus of more white papers than Xinjiang in the last decade (see Table 1 below). At least one has been dedicated Xinjiang every year from 2014–2021, including three in 2019

(SCIO, accessed October 1). **[2]** It is also clear in the number of visits (four) that Xi has made as general secretary—more than any other autonomous region. **[3]**

Table 1: The 14 PRC White Papers on Xinjiang Published 2003–2025

English Title	Chinese Title	Source & Date
Xinjiang's History and Development	新疆的历史与发展	Xinhua, May 26, 2003
Xinjiang's History and Progress	新疆的发展与进步	Xinhua, September 21, 2009
XPCC's History and Development	新疆生产建设兵团的历史与发展	Xinhua, October 5, 2014
Historical Witness to Ethnic Equality, Unity and Development in Xinjiang	新疆各民族平等团结发展的历史见证	Xinhua, September 25, 2015
Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang	新疆的宗教信仰自由状况	Xinhua, June 2, 2016
Human Rights in Xinjiang Development and Progress	新疆人权事业的发展进步	Xinhua, June 1, 2017
Cultural Protection and Development in Xinjiang	新疆的文化保护与发展	Xinhua, November 15, 2018
The Fight Against Terrorism and Extremism and Human Rights Protection in Xinjiang	新疆的反恐、去极端化斗争与人权保障	Xinhua, March 18, 2019
Historical Matters Concerning Xinjiang	新疆的若干历史问题	Xinhua, July 21, 2019
Vocational Education and Training in Xinjiang	新疆的职业技能教育培训工作	Xinhua, August 16, 2019
Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang	新疆的劳动就业保障	Xinhua, September 17, 2020
Xinjiang Population Dynamics and Data	新疆的人口发展	Xinhua, September 26, 2021
Respecting and Protecting the Rights of All Ethnic Groups in Xinjiang	新疆各民族平等权利的保障	Xinhua, July 14, 2021
CPC Guidelines for Governing Xinjiang in the New Era: Practice and Achievements	新时代党的治疆方略的成功实践	Xinhua, September 20, 2025

Xinjiang's "strategic importance" (战略地位) lies in its role in national strategy. Critical to achieving the overarching goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is becoming the preeminent power in the international system (China Brief, September 5). This requires advancing economic goals, including expanding international trade and connectivity. As an "an important gateway of Chinese civilization to the outside world" (中华文明向世界开放的重要门户), Xinjiang's "One Port, Two Zones, Five Centers, and One Port Economic Belt" (一港、两区、五大中心、口岸经济带) is key, as it aims "to build a golden channel across the Eurasian continent and a gateway for opening up to the west" (打造亚欧黄金通道和向西开放桥头堡).

Conclusion

In Xi's conceptual arc, repressive policies in Xinjiang have engineered a historic transformation from chaos to stability, and now to governance (由乱到稳、由稳向治的历史性转变). Under this vision, the Party is now promoting Xinjiang as an increasingly normal part of the PRC. Officials are bullish, for example, on its prospects as a holiday destination, praising a "boom" in cultural activity, and a "hot" tourism sector (SCIO, September 23). **[4]**

One takeaway from the Party's increasing focus on Xinjiang over the last decade, especially in its external messaging, is that Xi himself and the regime more broadly feel vulnerable to international censure, knowing that their actions undermine their aspirations for moral legitimacy in the international system. Put another way, Xi protests too much: admission of ongoing policy support for sanctioned entities suggests policymakers are feeling the pain of international pressure.

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Notes

[1] The argument that Xi personally bears responsibility for policies implemented in Xinjiang is one that is shared by outside observers. The Uyghur Tribunal report states: "The Tribunal is satisfied that President Xi Jinping … bear[s] primary responsibility for acts that have occurred in Xinjiang," and that crimes committed "have occurred as a direct result of policies, language and speeches promoted by President Xi."

[2] White papers are intended primarily for an external audience. They appear either when Beijing perceives a need to proactively shape a narrative, or when it feels compelled to respond to bad press in overseas media (China Brief, April 22, 2011). This helps explain a near-constant stream of white papers focused on explaining the country's approach to human rights. It is also the reason for targeted white papers, such as ones on the PRC's rare earths policy and claims to the Diaoyu Islands in 2012, or on Taiwan in the summer of 2022 (SCIO, June 20, 2012, September 25, 2012, August 10, 2022).

[3] In September, Xi brought with him nine senior officials, including politburo standing committee members Wang Huning (王沪宁) and Cai Qi (蔡奇). Both men had accompanied Xi the previous month to Tibet, which also has been elevated in importance under Xi's tenure (China Brief, September 19).

[4] International actors, in acquiescing to or tacitly accepting Beijing's narrative, risk complicity in ongoing human rights abuses in the region. As research by the Uyghur Human Rights Project uncovered earlier this year, some of the biggest international hotel chains operate in Xinjiang, are exposed to forced labor, and operate in areas administered by the Xinjiang Production and Constructions Corps—a sanctioned entity (UHRP, April 25).

‘Mainlander’ Narratives Dominate Kuomintang Leadership Race

By Peter Mattis

KMT party chair candidates Hau Lung-pin(郝龍斌) (left), Cheng Li-wun (鄭麗文) (center), Lo Chih-chiang (羅智強) (right). (Source: Central News Agency)

Executive Summary:

- Leading candidates in the KMT party chair elections strongly self-identify as Chinese and are advocating to resolve cross-Strait tensions with a dialogue approach rooted in the 1992 Consensus.
- Notably lacking amongst the leading candidates is someone who represents the “Taiwanese” faction of the KMT, and the three leading candidates—Cheng Li-wun, Hau Lung-pin, and Lo Chih-chiang—all carry benign views of the PRC.
- These candidates are also skeptical of U.S. involvement in Taiwan, and they have questioned the current DPP administration’s policies towards the United States, especially concerning tariff negotiations.
- KMT local factions and the party establishment’s support seem strongest for Hau, but Cheng and Lo have secured support from key party grandees.
- The party chair will have to marshal unity within the KMT and work with the TPP to defeat the DPP in upcoming elections in 2026 and the next presidential election in 2028.

On October 18, registered members of the Kuomintang (KMT), or Nationalist Party, will have the opportunity to vote for a new party chair. This chair will be expected to lead the party into the next nationwide "nine-in-one" elections in 2026 and the presidential election in 2028. **[1]** They also will be the person who determines the party's cross-Strait policy (China Brief, July 11). In an interview in June, the outgoing KMT Chair Eric Chu (朱立倫) outlined many of the difficulties of the job. The challenges, according to Chu, ranged from fundraising and trying to lead the party with few resources to persecution by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Conventional wisdom has held that the KMT should have a unified party leadership and presidential candidate. This would make Taichung Mayor Lu Shiow-yen (盧秀燕) the early favorite, as she has been recognized in Taiwan as the most potent KMT presidential candidate for 2028. But Chu characterized the KMT chair role to a head coach who cannot expect to play on the field (UDN, May 26; Taipei Times, June 7). In the months since, three leading candidates have emerged, none of whom seem to be likely presidential candidates: Cheng Li-wun (鄭麗文), Hau Lung-pin (郝龍斌), and Lo Chih-chiang (羅智強).

From a U.S. perspective, the commonalities among Cheng, Hau, and Lo suggest a troubling direction for the KMT. Pro-U.S. lawmakers and party officials are notably absent from the race. Instead, the KMT's long-simmering resentment of the United States—stemming in part from historical U.S. betrayals in the 1940s and the normalization of relations with Beijing in 1979—continues to manifest in the candidates' public comments. All three believe that an accommodation can be reached with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in Beijing, retaining the Republic of China (ROC) and built around the "1992 Consensus" (九二共識) under which both sides recognize "One China, different interpretations" (一個中國，各自表述). To the extent that these candidates reflect the broader KMT membership, they indicate that the party increasingly believes that Taiwan's security runs through Beijing—not through Washington.

Predominance of KMT 'Mainlanders'

All three of the major KMT candidates are "mainlanders" (外省人). The term, which literally refers to people born outside of Taiwan Province, is used for those whose families are often no more than one generation away from China and often claim a Chinese identity. Both Cheng and Hau's fathers were KMT military officers who came to Taiwan as the CCP drove the nationalists from what would become the People's Republic of China (PRC) (BBC Chinese, April, 3, 2020; UDN, September 27). Lo's family hails from the then-ROC governed Dachen Islands off of Zhejiang Province, and evacuated to Taiwan in 1955 during the First Taiwan Strait Crisis when they were taken by the PLA (Presidential Office, Taiwan, February 20, 2015). All of them grew up in an environment that honored the KMT's legacy of patriotic resistance to Communist banditry (共匪) and held out for one day retaking the mainland (反攻大陸).

For many "mainlanders," Chinese identity forms a core part of their beliefs. Cheng, for example, has been explicit about this. She has said that under the KMT's leadership, Taiwanese people should be able to say, proudly and confidently, "I am Chinese" (我是中國人) (Liberty Times, September 29). Lo Chih-chiang stated that the most important aspect of cross-Strait relations and relations between the KMT and the CCP is, on an emotional level, self-identification as ethnically Chinese. He followed up by noting, "I am Taiwanese, I am Chinese, and my China is the Republic of China" (我是台灣人，我是中國人，我的中國是中華民國) (Facebook/Lo Chih-chiang, September 20).

That the leading candidates are all "mainlanders" indicates the full spectrum of KMT opinion is not being debated as part of the party's future direction. The KMT is no longer homogeneous in its traditional mainlander identity after several generations in Taiwan with no hope of unification on ROC, not CCP, terms. The party has a growing number of officials who are trying to find ways to reconcile the Taiwanese-ness of their electorate and the Chinese-ness of being the Republic of China. The absence of those officials from the KMT leadership conversation suggests that the party's powerbrokers are pushing the "mainlander" perspective, and/or that the party does not yet have a place for KMT's candidates more grounded in Taiwan.

Benign Views of the CCP's Intentions

All three candidates share benign views of the CCP, its intentions, and the kind of stability that can be brought to the Taiwan Strait. Each strongly supports the "1992 Consensus," seeing it as a guarantee for peace (CTI, September 27). Lo stated that the presidency of Ma Ying-jeou (2008–2016) proved the "1992 Consensus" can bring prosperity to Taiwan and stabilize cross-strait relations. Going further, Cheng said that if the DPP could be pushed aside and the KMT could bring order out of the current chaos by "crushing Taiwanese independence and fascism" (粉碎台獨、法西斯), then the "1992 Consensus" could usher in 100 years of peace (CNA, September 20). Both Lo and Hau stated their belief that communication and improved mutual understanding could stabilize relations with Beijing (Storm Media, August 29; CNA, September 23).

Hau probably has the most cautious appraisal of the CCP. Ahead of the PRC's military parade on September 3, Hau called for Taiwanese generals to avoid the parade. He noted that the CCP had invited his father, former Premier and former Defense Minister Hau Pei-Tsun (郝柏村), many times, but his father always refused. Hau said that China's achievements during the Second World War "belong to the Republic of China and cannot be mistaken or confused" (屬於中華民國，不能被錯置或混淆), adding that without the ROC's role Taiwan would not have become part of the republic (UDN, September 3). At the very least, Hau demonstrates an awareness of how the CCP politicizes cross-strait interactions, as he also beseeched the Taiwanese people to have confidence in their ability to counter united front work (CNA, September 23).

Hau also stated that it is important for the PRC to "respect the reality that the Republic of China exists," (中國應尊重中華民國存在的事實) and to have the PRC recognize that the "1992 Consensus is not the same as 'One Country, Two Systems'" (九二共識不等於一國兩制) (UpMedia, September 25). Hau concluded by saying that the mainland is unfriendly to Taiwan, citing PLAAF incursions and military exercises. If elected, Hau vowed to establish a defense think tank comprised of retired KMT generals to "defend the Republic of China, oppose Taiwan independence, and ensure the most reliable protection for national security and defense"(捍衛中華民國、反對台獨，讓國家安全與國防獲得最確切的保障) (TaiSounds, October 3).

Even with Hau's displeasure with PLA activity around Taiwan, the candidates are still not expressing the full range of sentiment within the party itself about CCP intentions. Others in the KMT have darker perspectives on what Beijing wants, including the destruction of the ROC, and fear that the CCP no longer cares who governs in Taiwan. The leadership race, however, appears to have firm boundaries on the range of acceptable views.

Against Defense Increases

The KMT candidates are not proponents of Taiwan increasing its defense spending. They prefer to view national security through the lens of stabilizing cross-strait relations. Speaking at the Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club last month, Cheng said that she did not support the defense budget surpassing 3 percent of GDP. She went on to say that "political reconciliation" (政治和解) with the PRC was the national security and defense armament Taiwan needed (Mirror Media, September 23). In a debate among the candidates, Luo also stated that he opposed increasing the defense budget to 5 percent of GDP, calling it an "unbearable burden for Taiwan" (台灣不可承受之重). Hau concurred, saying that 5 percent of GDP would consume approximately one third of the government's total budget. Unlike the other KMT candidates, however, he conceded that Taiwan needed both to prepare for war and to avoid war, calling cross-Strait stability and opposing Taiwan independence the best form of defense (UDN, October 2). Although this may go beyond the scope of the KMT chair, the contenders have not proposed alternative defense measures to build Taiwan's capabilities in the absence of a budget increase or to correct the damage done to the armed forces under the Ma administration (China Brief, April 22, 2011; June 7, 2013; August 22, 2016).

'No Kneeling to the United States'

Resentment and distrust of the United States have long been present in the KMT. Many party officials believe—with some justification—that the United States betrayed them during the Chinese Revolution, and again in the 1970s with the Kissinger-Nixon opening and the normalization of U.S.-PRC relations. Historical grievances might be left behind, but U.S. failures to deliver weapons Taipei has purchased, price gouging, and any reports of Taiwan surfacing in Washington's engagements with Beijing, continue to aggravate (Taiwan Reporter, October 10, 2021; Taiwan News, September 24, 2024; Focus Taiwan, November 20, 2024; War on the Rocks, March 28). In his conversation at the Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club, Cheng clearly expressed fears that Taiwan could once again become a bargaining chip between Beijing and Washington if it is too aligned with the United States: "Taiwan would inevitably be involved, but we wouldn't have any say in it" (Nikkei Asia, October 1).

At their worst, these sentiments come out in sarcastic and caustic comments. For example, following a CCP military exercise in June, Cheng mocked President Lai Ching-te's (賴清德) seeming inability to respond. She accused Lai of having no way to counter Beijing or the CCP and that, in the face of U.S. pressure, he kneels and fawns, offering up Taiwan's economic achievements: "If this isn't 'selling out Taiwan,' then what is? If this isn't 'squandering the family fortune,' then what is?" (這不叫賣台？什麼是賣台？這不叫敗家？什麼是敗家?) (CTI News, June 21). Hau also accused President Lai of undermining Taiwan's sovereignty in the ways that he acquiesced to U.S. requests (UDN, September 19).

All three candidates have framed the best way of dealing with the United States as balancing its relationship with the PRC. Hau, for example, has complained that Taiwan is practically paying tributary duties to the United States. He proposed "Three No's" (三不): "Be close to the United States, but do not kowtow; be peaceful with China, but do not be lapdogs of the CCP; be friendly with Japan, but not fawning" (親美不跪美、和中不舔共、友日不媚日) (UDN, September 19). In the same leadership debate, Hau said it is possible to be pro-American without kneeling before the United States (UDN, October 2). In August, Cheng said that the KMT

needed to adjust Taiwan's relationship with the United States in light of tariffs imposed by the Trump administration and strive for a greater Taiwanese role in the PRC's market as an antidote to U.S. pressure (CRNTT, August 4).

KMT's Future Leader not Receptive to U.S. Demands

The outcome of the KMT leadership race will shape the party in the years ahead. These years are critical, as the new leader will lead the party into both the "nine-in-one" elections next year and the presidential election in 2028. In the former, every position from local government to the Legislative Yuan will be up for grabs. They will be a test of the Lai administration's ability to address pressing domestic economic issues as well as the KMT's ability to build on its legislative majority. In 2028, the KMT be looking to break a three-election losing streak. Given that a split ticket with the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) in 2024 allowed President Lai to win the presidency without a popular majority, it is understandable that all the candidates have been careful to support the Blue-White alliance and avoid antagonizing TPP supporters (CTI News, September 10; CNA, September 20; UDN, October 3). As long as the TPP remains a viable political force, it can strip votes from the KMT's Taiwanese base that is sometimes uncomfortable with the "Chinese-ness" of the party's narratives.

The KMT chair race also has important implications for understanding who matters in the KMT today. Hau Lung-pin appears to be the party's internal favorite. Local faction leaders have tacitly placed their support behind him. This includes Fu Kun-chi (傅崐萁), the powerful legislative caucus whip, who has decided not to run but to throw his support behind Hau (ETtoday, September 23). Hau also secured endorsements from influential local political figures such as Pingtung Speaker Chou Tien-lun (周典論), Changhua Speaker Hsieh Tien-lin (謝典林), and former Taitung Speaker Wu Chun-li (吳俊立). In central Taiwan, former three-term Taichung Mayor Jason Hu (胡志強) has endorsed Hau (Tai Sounds, September 19; CTS News, September 22). Yunlin's Chang Jung-wei (張榮味), closely connected to Legislative Yuan President Han Kuo-yu (韓國瑜), is also backing Hau. Hau opted to skip the first KMT chairperson candidates' debate to meet Han Kuo-yu in Yunlin (CNA, September 20) Beyond the party's politicians, media figure and "Battle Blue" (戰鬥藍) founder Jaw Shaw-kong (趙少康) said that he would support Hau if he ran. This would provide Hau with deeper access to the party's conservative base and media resources (TVBS, September 4).

Lo Chih-chiang, meanwhile, has former President Ma Ying-jeou as a key supporter. Lo worked on Ma's campaign and as a senior staffer in the presidential office (Storm Media, August 29). Some polls, however, put Cheng Li-Wun as leading the race. Having emerged as an outside and unexpected candidate, her longstanding ferocity in defending the KMT and the Republic of China has earned her respect among former military officers and deep blue supporters (CTI News, September 10; Nikkei Asia, October 1). Former Interior Minister Lee Hong-Yuan (李鴻源) and former Legislative Yuan President Wang Jin-pyng (王金平) has endorsed Cheng, supporting generational turnover in KMT leadership (TVBS, September 30; UDN, October 1).

Notably absent from endorsements is Taichung Mayor Lu Shiow-yen, the early favorite to be the KMT presidential candidate in 2028. Although the election is still three years away, Lu leads one of Taiwan's most important cities and one that has flipped between DPP and KMT control. She has met with all three of the candidates, but has refrained from endorsing them—presumably out of concern for having comity with party

headquarters for her presidential run (UDN, September 21; CNA, September 25, September 30). Many previously believed that she intended to run for party chair, but it appears that she will focus her efforts on governing Taichung and preparing for a presidential run rather than trying to strengthen the KMT and making peace across the party's factions (Taipei Times, May 23; CNA, August 11).

For the United States, the KMT represented by these leadership candidates is unlikely to be receptive to U.S. entreaties about defense budgets or preparing for war. They lack a sense of urgency about the CCP threat. It is unclear whether they believe that Beijing actually would attack or blockade Taiwan, given their faith exhibited in the "1992 Consensus" as a shield. Blunt, untargeted U.S. pressure on the KMT as a whole or threatening to abandon Taiwan is more likely to reinforce problematic narratives discussed above. All three candidates—and many others in the party—think that the best counterbalance to U.S. pressure is a closer relationship with the PRC. Effective pressure would avoid "U.S. abandonment narratives" (疑美論) while addressing the genuine power structure within the KMT that can be seen from the candidates' scramble for endorsements.

Peter Mattis is the president of The Jamestown Foundation.

Notes

[1] In Taiwan, local elections have been referred to as "nine-in-one" elections since 2014. This is because candidates compete for nine different kinds of local government roles. These include city mayors, city councilors, heads of county and county-level city governments, members of county councils, heads of township offices, representatives in township councils, ward and village chiefs, and heads of indigenous districts, and council members of indigenous districts (Focus Taiwan, October 18, 2022).

AGI Has Quietly Become Central to Beijing's AI Strategy

By Matthew Johnson

The Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence (BIGAI), founded in 2020 with backing from the Beijing Municipal Government and PRC Ministry of Science and Technology. BIGAI was created as a flagship hub for advancing the PRC's state-backed pursuit of AGI. (Source: BIGAI)

Executive Summary:

- Pursuit of artificial general intelligence (AGI) is a top-priority project within the Party's increasingly centralized technology planning apparatus. Its success would both close the gap with U.S. firms and bind AGI models to Party-state governance, shaping how intelligent systems are aligned, deployed, and exported.
- Xi Jinping's 2018 Politburo session operationalized the *New Generation AI Development Plan*, defining frontier breakthroughs as a lever of national power. Starting in 2020, Beijing and other provinces had institutionalized AGI in local initiatives, and by August 2025 the State Council's *AI+ Action* plan codified AGI-linked targets into national modernization benchmarks.
- The Party-state's approach rests on two inseparable pillars: frontier breakthroughs to secure sovereign control of general intelligence, and diffusion across the real economy to sustain political legitimacy and commercial value. The two are treated as mutually reinforcing, not competing.
- AGI is now written into China's operating system for modernization. The MIIT meeting in June and the *AI+ Action* plan in August 2025 tied frontier models to industrial upgrading, governance standards, and long-term milestones to 2027, 2030, and 2035.
- Under the "new national system," state institutions, elite labs, and firms are mobilized in concert, while outward-facing efforts such as Alibaba's global intelligent network strategy show that Beijing views AGI not only as a domestic modernization tool but also as a lever of international power.

The State Council's August release of the *Opinions on Deeply Implementing the 'AI+' Action* reignited debate over whether Beijing is serious about artificial general intelligence (AGI) or focused only on embedding applied AI across the economy (State Council, August 26). Commentary has often leaned toward the latter, but Party sources and policy documents show a clear throughline: since the 2017 *New Generation AI Development Plan* first defined "generalizable" intelligence as a research horizon, AGI has steadily moved from implicit objective to explicit policy goal. By 2025, that goal was tied to modernization benchmarks and reinforced through Party-state planning at every level.

Beijing has built its AI strategy on two inseparable pillars: frontier breakthroughs in general models and broad deployment across the real economy. Central directives since 2018 have emphasized sovereignty over core technologies and original innovation, while local governments piloted AGI (通用人工智能) initiatives beginning in 2020. By April 2025, Shanghai had classified distinct AGI subfields, and General Secretary Xi Jinping urged the Politburo to "seize the decisive opportunity and win the advantage" (占领先机、赢得优势) in AI. Under this logic, diffusion and frontier research are mutually reinforcing mandates: deployment underpins political legitimacy and commercial value, while frontier breakthroughs secure "self-reliant" (自力更生) capabilities and open the path to AGI as a sovereign capability

This dual-track approach undercuts the notion that the People's Republic of China's (PRC) AI policy is "pragmatic" or application-first. To assume the Party is indifferent to AGI is to miss the architecture of the "new national system" (新型举国体制). Within this system, the state builds compute centers, funds competitions and research programs, and sets standards for model evaluation, safety, and ethics, while firms like Alibaba and ByteDance are expected to operationalize breakthroughs at scale (China Brief, February 28, June 30). The launch of DeepSeek R1 in early 2025, and pronouncements such as Alibaba CEO Wu Yongming's (吴泳铭) claim that "AGI is a certainty … the ultimate goal is ASI [artificial superintelligence]" (AGI 已是确定性事件 … 终极目标是 … ASI), highlight that the Party-state now views general intelligence as both attainable and necessary (Equal Ocean, September 24). Tracking policy documents alongside industry behavior shows that Beijing's strategy is not about choosing between diffusion and AGI but about fusing them into a comprehensive technological capacity. For competitors, this makes the AGI race a contest between political systems—one in which the PRC has tied frontier innovation and applied deployment into a single, state-directed project of geoeconomic power.

AGI Defines the Party's Comprehensive AI Strategy

From the outset, Beijing's leadership has treated AI as both an infrastructure for industrial upgrading and a frontier national project, setting the stage for the PRC's evolving pursuit of AGI as a critical objective of state technology planning.

In the Party's own lexicon, "frontier" has always encompassed AGI models: the State Council's 2017 *New Generation AI Development Plan* defines new-generation AI to include "data-driven general artificial intelligence mathematical models and theory" (数据驱动的通用人工智能数学模型与理论) and advances in "artificial intelligence with high explainability and strong generalization capabilities" (实现具备高可解释性、强泛化能力的人工智能), establishing generalizable intelligence as a core research target and policy

horizon (State Council, July 20, 2017). In October 2018, Xi Jinping convened the Politburo for a collective study session on AI. This was one of the first times the top leadership explicitly framed AI as a strategic lever for national power. He urged strengthening basic theory and called on scientists to "bravely venture into the uncharted zones of AI's frontiers" (勇闯人工智能科技前沿的"无人区"), aiming for transformative, disruptive breakthroughs in theory, methods, tools, and systems (在 … 理论、方法、工具、系统 … 取得变革性、颠覆性突破) (Xinhua, October 31, 2018).

Xi's 2018 directives operationalized the *New Generation AI Development Plan's* AGI objectives while linking them to economic development and technology self-reliance, describing AI as "a key strategic lever for us to seize the initiative in global scientific and technological competition and a vital strategic resource for promoting leapfrog development" (是我们赢得全球科技竞争主动权的重要战略抓手，是推动我国科技跨越发展、产业优化升级、生产力整体跃升的重要战略资源). His speech framed AI as a strategic frontier with open-ended, system-shaping implications: Xi emphasized multidisciplinary integration, theoretical leadership, and sovereignty over key technologies—a blueprint that presupposed AGI ambitions even if the term itself was not used.

Xi's next major intervention came nearly seven years later, in April 2025, just months after the release of DeepSeek R1, the first Chinese model widely perceived as a credible frontier breakthrough (China Brief, February 11). Xi told the Politburo that AI was already "deeply changing human production and lifestyles" (深刻改变人类生产生活方式) and stressed the need to "seize the decisive opportunity and win the advantage" (占领先机、赢得优势) in this domain (Xinhua, April 26). In keeping with the Party's lexicon of new generation AI (新一代人工智能) – first codified in 2017 to include generalizable intelligence – Xi placed equal weight on frontier breakthroughs and broad deployment. **[1]** He called for advances in "basic theory, methods, and tools" (基础理论、方法、工具) and the construction of a "autonomous and controllable, collaboratively operating AI basic software and hardware systems" (自主可控、协同运行的人工智能基础软硬件系统).

For the PRC's pursuit of AGI, this balance is telling: frontier research and diffusion are not competing priorities but mutually reinforcing pillars of strategy. Diffusion secures immediate returns in legitimacy and growth, while frontier breakthroughs open the possibility of achieving AGI as a sovereign capability. Xi made clear that the strategic stakes remain control across the entire technology spectrum: theory, models, chips, software, data, infrastructure, and governance. Rather than narrowing to applied AI, the Party's goal is comprehensive, "gaining the upper hand and securing an advantage" (占领先机、赢得优势) across all domains. In the wake of DeepSeek R1, this amounted to a tacit endorsement of AGI as an attainable horizon. The April 2025 Politburo study session thus marked the culmination of a seven-year evolution: from the *New Generation AI Development Plan*'s broad objective-setting to Xi's 2018 call for frontier breakthroughs, to a post-DeepSeek posture in which AGI is treated as a realistic extension of the Party's drive to prevail in global technological competition.

AGI Moves From Horizon to Policy Goal

Beginning in 2017–2018, PRC AI policy emphasized national sovereignty over core technologies, frontier research, and integration with the economy, but it stopped short of invoking "通用人工智能" (AGI) by name. Soon, however, references to AGI began to appear in formal policy and local initiatives, signaling a shift from implicit horizon to explicit agenda. With central benchmarks in place, local governments served as testbeds, using competitions, subsidies, and research platforms to translate the Party's frontier objectives into outcomes. This interplay between central direction and local experimentation laid the groundwork for AGI's explicit elevation to national strategy.

Beijing was the clear frontrunner in moving AGI from horizon to policy goal. In 2020, under the guidance and support of the Beijing Municipal Party Committee and government, the Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence (BIGAI; 北京通用人工智能研究院) was established, jointly backed by the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education and partnered with Peking and Tsinghua Universities. Founded and directed by UCLA-returnee and leading computer vision expert Song-Chun Zhu (朱松纯), BIGAI was tasked with advancing strategic, forward-looking, and foundational research on building "general intelligent agents" with human core cognitive abilities (Peking University Institute for Artificial Intelligence, March 15, 2023). This institutional foundation was followed in 2023 by the release of municipal measures tying AGI to Beijing's 2023–2025 plan for building a globally influential AI hub. These measures called for pooling and managing compute across multiple clouds, creating open pre-training datasets, funding large-model algorithm research, and "exploring new paths toward AGI" (探索通用人工智能新路径) through embodied and brain-inspired systems. They also emphasized building AGI evaluation platforms, developing operating systems and compilers for large models, and applying general intelligence to domains from governance to medicine, finance, and autonomous driving (Beijing Government, May 23, 2023). **[2]** This represented the first systematic subnational policy document to treat AGI as an achievable policy objective.

Other provinces followed suit. In December 2023, Inner Mongolia hosted the first "Tongzhi Cup" General Artificial Intelligence Innovation Application Competition in Ulanqab, which drew over 120 enterprises and was paired with the launch of a General AI–Industry Integration Innovation Center (Xinhua, December 23, 2023). Inner Mongolia is one of eight national "hub nodes" that are home to data center clusters, and Ulanqab's Grassland Big Data Valley has attracted investment from Apple and Huawei, among others (Substack/Sinocities, November 20, 2024; China Brief, September 25). Just days later, the Chinese Computer Federation and Anhui government co-hosted the 2023 National General Artificial Intelligence Innovation Application Competition in Wuhu. This event was tied to Anhui's "Three-Year Action Plan for General AI Innovation and Development" (2023–2025) and involved more than 300 project teams nationwide. Winning projects were eligible for financing, promotional support, and, in some cases, multimillion dollar provincial subsidies for projects that landed locally (Anhui Science and Technology Department, January 16, 2024).

By 2024–2025, momentum around AGI had moved beyond local pilots to higher-level institutions and national directives. The Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Software established an AGI High-Performance Software Innovation Center in 2024 to study large-model mechanisms, develop new paradigms for parallel software, and explore applications in scientific computing and related industries (ScienceHR Net, June 21, 2024). In April 2025, Shanghai followed suit with its *Notice on New Generation AGI Innovation 'Challenge and*

Leadership' Work, which singled out embodied, scientific, spatial, group, and brain-inspired intelligence as subfields of a comprehensive AGI agenda (Shanghai Economy and Informatization Committee, April 21). The timing overlapped with the Politburo collective study session on AI, where Xi urged his comrades to "seize the decisive opportunity and win the advantage" (Xinhua, April 26). Together, CAS's new AGI unit, Shanghai's explicit program, and Xi's renewed national guidance signaled that the Party now regarded breakthroughs in AGI as attainable.

AGI Anchors the Party's Strategy for New-Type Industrialization

By mid-2025, AGI had crossed a threshold: what had begun as a series of local pilots was now embedded at the core of national industrial strategy. In June, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) convened a meeting to study Xi's latest instructions and chart a course for embedding general models into the modernization of manufacturing. The readout directed units in the industrial system to "coordinate the layout of general large models and industry-specific large models" (统筹布局通用大模型和行业专用大模型), backed by expanded computing infrastructure, software–hardware integration, and industry-specific datasets. Notably, the meeting extended the Party's frontier-plus-application logic into industrial modernization: breakthroughs and deployment were to advance together, creating "powerful dynamism" (强大动能) for "new-type industrialization" (新型工业化) (MIIT, June 4). Officials ordered large models deployed in key industries for "full-process intelligent upgrading" (制造业全流程智能化升级), cultivation of "advantageous AI enterprises" (人工智能优势企业), and development of "high-level AI open-source communities" (高水平人工智能开源社区), while also mandating risk controls such as "deep synthesis detection technologies" (深度合成检测技术) and new ethical rules. Taken together, the meeting signaled that AGI had been written into the operating system of national industrial strategy, binding frontier models directly to the Party's agenda of comprehensive economic modernization.

The State Council's *Opinions on Deeply Implementing the 'AI+' Action*, issued in August 2025, again elevated AGI to the level of long-term national planning. The document framed AI as a force to "reshape human production and life patterns, drive a revolutionary leap in productive forces, and bring deep changes to relations of production" (重塑人类生产生活范式、促进生产力革命性跃迁和生产关系深层次变革) (State Council, August 21). Its emphasis on new-generation intelligent terminals and intelligent agents (新一代智能终端、智能体) signaled that Beijing viewed frontier model capabilities as central to economic and social transformation. Directing use of agents and foundation models as the bedrock of an "intelligent economy" (智能经济) and "intelligent society" (智能社会), the State Council effectively designated applied AGI as a national modernization benchmark.

The Opinions spelled out how AGI-adjacent capabilities were to be institutionalized across science, industry, consumption, governance, and global cooperation (China Brief, September 21). On the research front, it called for "accelerating the construction and application of scientific foundation models" (加速科学大模型建设应用) and for exploring "AI-driven new paradigms of scientific research" (人工智能驱动的新型科研范式). In industry, it urged firms to build "AI-native enterprises" (智能原生企业) with operating logics rooted in general intelligence, while promoting "model-as-a-service, agent-as-a-service" (模型即服务、智能体即服

务) as the backbone of future applications. And in governance, it envisioned "a new picture of human–machine symbiosis in social governance" (社会治理人机共生新图景), extending intelligent agents into public administration and security. By linking frontier model development to every sector of the economy and tying it to 2027, 2030, and 2035 milestones, the Opinions confirmed that the Party leadership now treat AGI as a goal whose realization is integral to both state capacity and the Party's claim on future global competitiveness.

That agenda is now being deepened through state–industry partnerships, as firms align their strategies with national directives and investors chase objectives defined by the state. Alibaba plans to make its Tongyi Qianwen model an open "Android for the AI era," dovetailing with Beijing's push for national data processing buildout and model services (Equal Ocean, September 24). Similarly, investment firm Shanda's (盛大网络) recruitment of Tsinghua associate professor Dai Jifeng (代季峰) to build an AGI venture aiming to compete with DeepSeek shows how private capital is already moving to match Party priorities (Leiphone, August 4).

Conclusion

Beijing's AGI strategy is aimed at building a complete ecosystem in which frontier research and applied AI advance together, supported by state-backed infrastructure, standards, and capital. Its pursuit of AGI is therefore not a quixotic moonshot, but part of an increasingly centralized political economy: breakthroughs in frontier areas are inseparable from state planning, infrastructure build-out, and policy direction. Under this "new national system," policy is already embedding general models into industrial planning (China Brief, June 16, September 26).

In the short run, this will mean more prescriptive targets on compute, model capability, and agent deployment, paired with governance that keeps frontier work "safe, reliable, and controllable"; in other words, shaped by Party priorities for internal security and political-military integration. In the medium-term, Beijing is likely to promote new national programs that treat large models as cyberneticist operating systems for the real economy and public services. **[3]** If successful, the PRC will not only narrow the gap with U.S. firms but also bind frontier AI development to Party-state governance, shaping how intelligent systems are aligned, deployed, and exported.

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Notes

[1] The document calls for policymakers to "promote the deep integration of AI technological innovation with industrial innovation, establish a collaborative innovation system led by enterprises that brings together industry, academia, research, and application, support the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, and open new avenues for strategic emerging industries and future industries" (要推动人工智能科技创新与产业创新深度融合，构建企业主导的产学研用协同创新体系，助力传统产业改造升级，开辟战略性新兴产业和未来产业发展新赛道).

[2] These could be akin to Chile's "Project Cybersyn" (see, for instance, Medina, Eden. *Cybernetic Revolutionaries: Technology and Politics in Allende's Chile*. MIT Press, 2011).

[3] The full title of the measures is "Several Measures for Promoting the Innovation and Development of General Artificial Intelligence in Beijing" (北京市促进通用人工智能创新发展的若干措施).

Comprehensive National Power Part 2: Seven National Development Strategies

By Erik R. Quam

A propaganda poster calling for the implementation of and displaying the names of the seven national development strategies. (Source: redocn.com)

Executive Summary:

- Since 1992, the Party has enshrined seven national development strategies in the Party Charter, embedding development of "comprehensive national power" (CNP) at the heart of its approach to governance.
- In the first phase (1992–2008), three strategies focused on strengthening science and education, as well as sustainable development, based on the assessment that economic and technological competition would become the dominant aspect of international struggle.
- A second phase, beginning in 2008, sought to address uneven development across the system and continue building CNP in the context of an increasingly unstable international environment.
- Throughout this period, the United States has been viewed as the main adversary. This was most striking in 2013, when Xi argued that strategic competition with the United States was unavoidable and that the country needed to double down on self-reliance—a remarkable assessment to make at the height of U.S.-PRC engagement and cooperation.
- The Military-Civil Fusion Development Strategy, unveiled in 2015, is perhaps the most significant of the seven. Described as essential for optimizing the other strategies and enabling the country to move to the center of the world stage, it calls for establishing a singular, national strategic system to advance simultaneous economic and national defense strength.

In 1992, the Chinese Communist Party leadership saw a world in transition. The 1992 Government Work Report pronounced that the "old pattern of the world" (世界旧的格局) had ended but that a new one, centered on multipolarity, had not yet emerged. In the meantime, during what General Secretary Jiang Zemin (江泽民) heralded a "new era" (新时代), hegemony and power politics had become the biggest source of instability in the international system (Xinhua, February 16, 2006; Xinhua, August 1, 2008; Study Times, January 4, 2021). "For the relatively long-term," Jiang told assembled diplomats in 1993, "the United States is still our main diplomatic adversary" (在今后一个较长时期内，美国仍是我们外交上打交道的主要对手) (Reform Data, July 7, 1993). And as he explained in his report to the 16th Party Congress, competition in comprehensive national power is becoming increasingly fierce" (国际局势正在发生深刻变化。世界多极化和经济全球化的趋势在曲折中发展，科技进步日新月异，综合国力竞争日趋激烈) (Xinhua, August 1, 2008).

The problem, in Jiang's view, was that the People's Republic of China (PRC) was relatively weak compared to the United States. This assessment was based on measures of comprehensive national power (CNP; 综合国力). CNP, according to scholars in the PRC who study it, is the aggregate strength of a state based on an array of factors across a variety of domains (China Brief, September 5). The most fundamental goal of a CNP system is to enhance the country's capacity for survival and development. Its ultimate goal is achieving national rejuvenation (Huang Shuofeng, August 2006). **[1]**

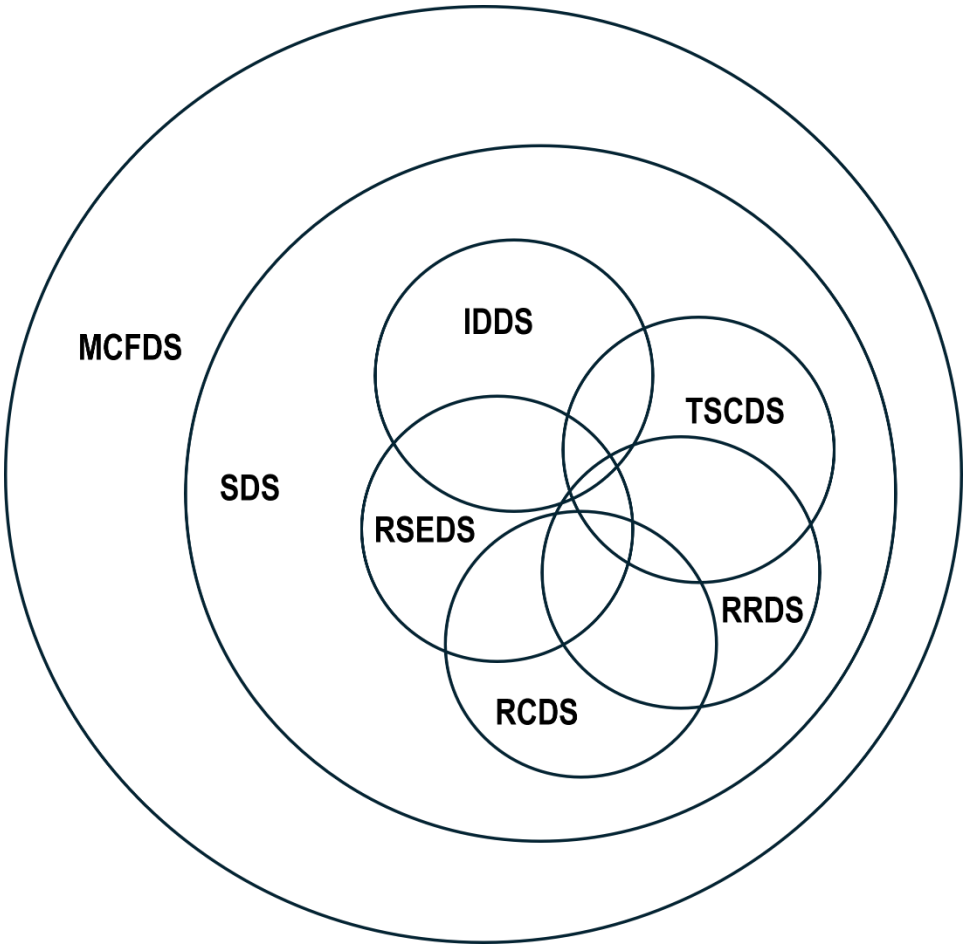
The Party believed—and still believes—that the United States dominated the global system in terms of CNP. In the early 1990s, Jiang assessed that CNP competition based on economic and technological strength had become the "dominant aspect of international struggle" (国际斗争的主导方面)—an assessment would persist until the 20th Party Congress thirty years later (Reform Data, January 13, 1993). **[2]** To ensure the PRC's survival and, as Jiang explained in the 14th Party Congress Report for the first time, to achieve its ultimate goal of national rejuvenation, it had to build up strength in the core elements of CNP to rival, and perhaps one day surpass, the United States (Party Member's Net, October 9, 1992).

In pursuit of this goal, the Party embedded CNP development at the heart of its approach to governance. An addition to the 1992 Party Charter that also appeared in the 14th Party Congress Report stated that any course of action must be decided based on whether it is conducive to the development of productive forces, whether it raises the living standards of the people, or whether it enhances CNP. This framework is known as the "Three Advantages" (三个有利于). Initially outlined by Deng Xiaoping in his 1992 "Southern Tour" speech, it formed the ideological basis for the entire period of reform and opening and has appeared in nearly every party congress report since.

As part of this approach, the Party launched and implemented a series of seven national development strategies. Formed on the basis of assessments of CNP development, these offer guidance to senior leaders in determining the allocation of resources to address newly emerging contradictions within the PRC's development model. They are listed as follows, in the order in which they appear in the Party Charter (but not in chronological order of when they were implemented) (Party Members Net, October 22, 2022):

- Rejuvenation through Science and Education Development Strategy (RSEDS; 科教兴国战略)
- Talent Strong Country Development Strategy (TSCDS; 人才强国战略)
- Innovation-Driven Development Strategy (IDDS; 创新驱动发展战略)
- Rural Revitalization Strategy (RRS; 乡村振兴战略)
- Regional Coordinated Development Strategy (RCDS; 区域协调发展战略)
- Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS; 可持续发展战略)
- Military-Civil Fusion Development Strategy (MCFDS; 军民融合发展战略)

Figure 1: The PRC's Integrated National Development Strategies



(Source: Author's Graphic)

Phase One (1992–2008): Building CNP Under American Hegemony

Rejuvenation through Science and Education Development Strategy

In 1995, the CCP launched the "Rejuvenation through Science and Education Development Strategy" (RSEDS; 科教兴国战略). This was the first of three national development strategies unveiled across the ensuing decade designed to underpin pursuit of CNP. It was based on an understanding that science and education are critical to human resource power under CNP measures and that the "quality" (素质) of human resources is a decisive factor in economic growth. **[3]**

Talent development is central to building high-quality human resources and thus is core to the RSEDS. As Xi said at a 2023 Politburo study session, "talent competition has become the core of [CNP] competition. Educating people for the Party and the country is the key to realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the second centenary goal amid great changes unseen in a century" (人才竞争已经成为综合国力竞争的核心。为党育人、为国育才，是百年未有之大变局下实现中华民族伟大复兴和第二个百年奋斗目标的关键所在) (China Education News, June 1, 2023).

Official guidance on the RSEDS explained that S&T progress had become "the main driving force for economic growth" (经济增长的主要推动力) and "the focus of international economic competition and [CNP] competition" (国际竞争和综合国力较量的焦点) (Worker's Daily, May 3, 1996). Following the strategy's launch, the Ministry of Education implemented a series of efforts to push the development of a university system capable of achieving its goals. These included Project 211 and Project 985, which sought to develop world-class institutions of higher education. **[4]** In 2016, as the PRC prepared to launch a second wave of policies to drive the development of the education system, Xi explained that "when education is strong, the country is strong" (教育强则国家强). He went on to announce that the leadership had made a "strategic decision" (战略决策) to accelerate the construction of world-class universities to enhance the nation's core competitiveness" (增强国家核心竞争力) (People's Daily Online, December 9, 2016). This led to the "Double First Class" (双一流) strategy, which launched in 2017 (Xinhua, October 18, 2017).

The RSEDS was intended to drive development, not only of science and technology (S&T), but also of economic and national defense strength, and, as a second order effect, international influence strength (Reform Data, May 26, 1995, June 14, 1996). In the Party's conception, the interrelated nature of CNP as a giant, complex system means that success in the implementation of the RSEDS drives many of the other national development strategies outlined below.

Sustainable Development Strategy

The Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS; 可持续发展战略) was also launched in 1996, and was included in the 15th Party Congress Report the following year (NDRC, March 17, 1996 [archived link]; (People's Daily Online, September 12, 1997). Emphasizing core elements of CNP, it called on the PRC to balance economic development, social development (including the "quality" of the people), and natural resources, and

to promote ecological and environmental protection. Official guidance from 2003 also called for management of the flow of resources across the system (State Council, January 14, 2003; China Brief, September 5).

Recognition of the risks of unbalanced development emerged in the early 1990s as a priority for the PRC government to address (Ministry of Ecology and Environment, September 22, 2009). SDS documentation explains that the strategy is centered on resolving several contradictions: between fast economic growth and environmental disaster, rapid development and lagging social development, economic and social development across different regions, and between some existing policies and regulations and the actual needs for implementing sustainable development (State Council, January 14, 2003).

The SDS also informed the 2004 launch of Hu Jintao's signature "Harmonious Society" (和谐社会) policy, which sought to ensure the promotion of harmony between humanity and nature. Hu's policy promoted the "coordinated development of urban and rural areas" (城乡协调发展) that later became foundational to the Regional Coordinated Development Strategy and the Rural Revitalization Strategy (see below) (State Council, October 11, 2006; Xinhua, November 15, 2013).

Talent Strong Country Development Strategy

The Talent Strong Country Development Strategy (TSCDS; 人才强国战略), occasionally rendered as the "Strategy to Develop a High-Quality Work Force," was launched in 2003. It builds on the RSEDS but focuses more on the people themselves. The people have long considered within the CCP (and most Socialist systems) as a resource of the state, and the quality of the population is a core element of CNP.

The centrality of talent was identified early by CNP scholars. Huang Shuofeng (黄朔风) listed the "science and technology team," comprising scientists, engineers, and technical staff, as a key sub-index of S&T power (Huang Shuofeng, 1992, p. 169). This was echoed by Hu Jintao in a 2008 speech, who said that improving the "ideological and moral quality and scientific and cultural quality of the entire nation, especially in the creation of a large team of high-quality talents" (提高全民族的思想道德素质和科学文化素质，尤其必须造就一支庞大的高素质人才队伍), was important for enhancing CNP and international competitiveness (Xinhua, May 4, 2008). Xi reiterated the importance of talent as a resource in a 2013 speech, explaining that "talent competition has become the core of [CNP] competition" (人才竞争已经成为综合国力竞争的核心) (Xinhua, October 21, 2013).

Phase 2 (Post-2008): Amassing CNP As Rivalry Develops

The second phase of development strategies crafted to orient the PRC toward pursuit of CNP started around 2008. It began with a baseline assessment that the PRC had become the second most powerful country in the world and was quickly closing the gap with the United States. It also assessed that the world was growing less stable. These two evolving perspectives meant the PRC had to rapidly resolve domestic problems by addressing a new primary contradiction and uneven development across the system. The Party introduced four development strategies to address those challenges over the next decade. While largely focused on alleviating domestic issues, the strategies also have been implemented with a view to reshaping the PRC's international environment. As the scholar Yan Xuetong (阎学通) explained in 2014, Beijing seeks to change the character

of the international system, and "changes in [CNP] are the first factor affecting changes in the international pattern" (综合国力变化是影响国际格局变化的第一要素) (Yan Xuetong, 2014 [archived link]). **[5]**

Innovation-Driven Development Strategy

The first of the four second-phase strategies, the Innovation-Driven Development Strategy (IDDS; 创新驱动发展战略), was unveiled in 2012 in the 18th Party Congress Report (Xinhua, November 17, 2012). The strategy focuses on promoting indigenous innovation and reducing reliance on external actors. As Xi emphasized in a 2013 speech, S&T innovation "is the strategic support for improving social productivity and [CNP]" (是提高社会生产力和综合国力的战略支撑) (People's Daily, October 2, 2013). This description also appeared in the "Outline" of the IDDS issued in 2016, which described S&T innovation capabilities as the core support of national strength, economic transformation, and national defense modernization—three key elements of CNP (Xinhua, May 19, 2016).

The CNP literature ties leading-edge technology capabilities to S&T strength, but also to international influence. This is because being a dominant technology producer has spillover effects, from shaping supply chains to setting global norms and rules for technology use. Xi also made this connection in Ro , saying that innovation-driven development is "driven by the [domestic] situation" (形势所迫) and that the country's economic aggregate, social productivity, CNP, and S&T strength had stepped up to a new level (Xinhua, October 1, 2013). In 2023, the State Council Information Office (SCIO) commemorated the decennial of the IDDS, noting that the country had expanded research and development (R&D) expenditure from $145 billion to $455 billion, with R&D intensity rising from 1.9 percent to over 2.5 percent. The article went on to explain how IDDS implementation was enabling the PRC to provide technology globally, again emphasizing the downstream foreign policy power and international influence power effects of the IDDS (SCIO, March 10, 2023). The investments appear to be paying off. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, as of 2025, the PRC has finally broken into the top 10 most innovative countries, up from 43rd in 2010 (WIPO, September 16).

While recognition of the need for independent innovation goes back to at least the 1990s, a new international environment in 2012 demanded a new urgency. As Xi explained in 2013, "in the increasingly fierce global competition for [CNP], we have no more choices and must take the path of independent innovation" (在日趋激烈的全球综合国力竞争中，我们么有更多选择，非走自主创新道路不可). He warned that if the PRC was not at the forefront of innovation, it would always be behind (People's Daily Online, March 3, 2016). This stark framing reflected anxieties about relying on S&T from international partners. Even though S&T strategies had long emphasized the importance of international collaboration, Chinese scholars and Party leaders had expected that the United States eventually would try to fully contain the PRC's rise. "In the past," Xi said, "everybody wanted to sell you technology. Now that you have developed, no one is willing to sell you technology because they are afraid you will become bigger and stronger. We can have no illusions about the introduction of new and high technologies. Core technologies, especially national defense technologies, cannot be bought with money" (过去你弱的时候谁都想卖技术给你，今天你发展了，谁都不愿卖技术给你，因为怕你做大做强。在引进高新技术上不能抱任何幻想，核心技术尤其是国防科技技术是花钱买不来) (Xinhua, February 28, 2016).

The IDDS was therefore a forward-looking recognition that the strategic competition with the United States that emerged around 2018 was unavoidable. One remarkable feature of this assessment is that it was made at the height of U.S.-PRC engagement and cooperation under the umbrella of the Strategic and Economic Dialogue. Yet by 2022, the Party experts' earlier assessment seemed to have come to pass. A Chinese Academy of Social Sciences report noted that technological competition with the PRC had become "an important part of the U.S. diplomatic strategy" (美国外交战略的重要内容) (CASS, "Annual Report on International Politics and Security (2022)", 2022, p.58).

Regional Coordinated Development Strategy

The Regional Coordinated Development Strategy (RCDS; 区域协调发展战略) launched in 2014. It was framed as "an inevitable requirement and support for promoting high-quality development" (推动高质量发展的必然要求和重要支撑) and Chinese-style modernization (People's Daily, February 1, 2024). A 2018 State Council Opinion claimed that this new mechanism for coordinated regional development would significantly reduce regional development gaps and play an important role in building a modern economic system to meet the people's growing needs for a better life (Xinhua, November 29, 2018).

A focus of development since the 1990s, the RCDS was elevated to a national strategy in 2014 to address the new primary contradiction identified in 2017 and what Xi Jinping characterized as "unbalanced" and "uncoordinated" development across the Chinese system, especially between different regions. An information campaign in 2022 and 2023 emphasized that unbalanced development "mainly refers to the unbalanced development of various regions, fields, and aspects which restricts the improvement of the overall development level" (主要是各区域各领域各方面存在失衡现象，制约了整体发展水平提升；发展不充分) (Economic Times, September 20, 2023).

The RCDS seeks to correct imbalances stemming from Deng's maxim to allow some to get rich first, with an emphasis on the Special Economic Zones along the east and southeast coast of the PRC. These were the first areas to open up to the world in the 1980s, leading to rapid expansion of development and wealth in those regions that was not matched across the rest of the country (Xinhua, February 25, 2024).

Military-Civil Fusion Development Strategy

Elevated to a national strategy in 2015, the Military-Civil Fusion Development Strategy (军民融合发展战略) is fundamentally a systems design strategy. It reflects the giant, complex system Huang Shuofeng described in his 1992 and 2006 books, as well as the focus of CNP on the allocation of resources across an entire system. It also owes much to the lasting impact of Qian Xuesen (钱学森) and his team at National Defense University that did so much of the cybernetics work in the 1980s that frames systems thinking in the PRC today.

Under the MCFDS, the CCP seeks to establish a "National Strategic System and Capabilities" (NSSC; 国家战略体系和能力). This is a singular, national strategic system formed through a "deep fusion" of 12 sub-systems, comprised of six systems within the nominally civilian economic system and six more within the national defense system. Between these sub-systems, bureaucratic and other barriers are designed to be eliminated, allowing for the free flow of technology, finance, talent and other national resources (all key indices

of resource strength, economic strength, and S&T strength under the CNP rubric). In designing this system, the MCFDS is critical to advancing simultaneous economic and national defense strength. It also is intended to help address concerns with unbalanced development across the PRC.

The MCFDS has important implications for the PRC's status in the international system. As one set of academics noted in 2017, elevating the development of military-civil fusion into a national strategy "is the inevitable logic for China to move to the center of the world stage" (Jiang Luming et al., 2017). **[6]**

According to PRC scholars, the NSSC will enable the optimal pursuit of all seven national development strategies, with the "capabilities" drawn from the constituent elements of CNP. At least two Chinese analysts writing on the NSSC have explained the national strategic capabilities of the NSSC as a translation process; that is, translating current CNP into future CNP (Zhan Jiafeng, 2005; PLA Daily, October 10, 2014). **[7]**

Rural Revitalization Development Strategy

The Rural Revitalization Development Strategy (乡村振兴战略; RRDS) was announced at the 19th Party Congress, at which time it was also added to the Party Charter (Xinhua, September 26, 2018). The CCP considers rural revitalization a historic task related to the construction of a modem socialist country (People's Daily, April 1, 2018). **[8]** Rural economics and the livelihood of the rural population—which now exceeds 500 million—has been a central focus of the Party since Mao's rural reforms in the 1950s. Xi explained this importance in 2023, emphasizing that without agricultural power, which is a key sub-index within CNP elements, the country will not develop into a modem, powerful socialist country (Xinhua, March 15, 2023).

The 2018–2022 Rural Revitalization Strategic Plan described its rationale as resolving the main contradictions in Chinese society in the new era and ensuring achievement of the "Two Centenary Goals" and the "China Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation." This indicates that assessments of national conditions (the new primary contradiction) drive strategy for CNP development (Xinhua, September 26, 2018). By way of explanation, the *People's Daily* wrote that "at present, China's economic strength and [CNP] have increased significantly, and it [now] has the material and technical conditions to support agricultural and rural modernization" (当前，中国经济实力和综合国力显著增强，具备了支撑农业农村现代化的物质和技术条件) (People's Daily, December 19, 2017). This framing of national development in terms of CNP is further evidence to suggest that the indices identified by CNP-focused scholars continue to be used to understand the PRC's national conditions. CNP studies are concerned primarily with how resources can be allocated across the overall system. By recognizing that the PRC has the requisite CNP to support rural modernization, the CCP leadership can allocate resources appropriately. As such, CNP is both the *target* for modernization and the *means* to achieve it.

The RRDS reflects multiple areas of the theoretical framework of CNP, including Wu Chunqiu's (吴春秋) 1998 systems analysis of the importance of balanced development across national sub-systems and the basic definition of CNP as a reflection of development strength. According to Huang Shuofeng and others, development across these systems relies on political strength within the constituent elements of CNP and the ability of the government to correctly assess the systems and marshal resources across those systems to ensure their even development.

Conclusion

The seven strategies outlined above are deeply interrelated in practice. Three of them, the RSEDS, the TSCDS, and the IDDS, all work together to develop resources and capabilities that drive the hard power elements of CNP, including economic strength, S&T strength, resource strength, and national defense strength. They are frequently referred to in CNP literature as the "three-in-one" strategy, or the "trinity" (三位一体). For instance, the 20th Party Congress Report calls for deeply implementing these strategies, explaining that education, science and technology, and talents are the "basic and strategic support" (基础性、战略性支撑) for comprehensively building a modern socialist country (Xinhua, October 25, 2022). **[9]** Figure 1 above illustrates the integration of the seven national development strategies developed to address the PRC's modernization.

For decades, leadership speeches, central Party documents, and national development strategies have been emphatic about the criticality of S&T and talent in order to prevail in competition with the West. They have also highlighted the need to collaborate internationally to develop domestically in those areas. This theme, prevalent in the TSCDS, IDDS, and MCFDS, demonstrates both a Chinese vulnerability (reliance on the West to advance S&T-driven agendas for CNP) and a complicated vulnerability in the United States and other advanced technology producing countries, where Chinese (and foreign) talent helps drive innovation. However important the contributions it makes to the United States and other technology ecosystems might be, that talent remains defined within the CNP literature as a resource for CNP competition that the CCP will draw from to prevail in strategic competition.

Development strategies codified in the Party Charter remain an important signpost to PRC priorities for development and signals of continued PRC reassessments of the country's national conditions. The Party continues to actively implement all seven, despite significant international pressure on the MCFDS from 2017–2021. This pressure led the CCP to remove references to the MCFDS from most national-level documents, but it did not remove it from the Party Charter, despite other modifications to that document in 2022. The MCFDS began to reemerge in Party documents in 2024 as international pressure subsided. Analyzing the seven national development strategies in the Party Charter provides a map of how Chinese leaders assess progress in their pursuit of rejuvenation through different stages of development. This in turn helps shed light on how Chinese leaders likely assess the country's domestic conditions for survival and development, and, ultimately, progress toward rejuvenation and CNP development.

This article reflects the sole views of the author. They do not reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or the Department of the Navy.

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Notes

[1] Shuofeng Huang, *Rivalries Between Major Powers: A Comparison of World Power's Comprehensive National Power* [大国转量：世界主要国家综合国力国际比较] (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2006), 63.

[2] This passage framed international struggle as being based on CNP. It goes on, however, to state that "military means" still play an important role.

[3] Huang Shuofeng, *Comprehensive National Power Theory* [综合国力论], (Beijing: China Academy of Social Sciences Press, 1992), 103; Huang, *Rivalries Between Major Powers*, 2006, 228–9; Men Honghua [门洪华], Hu Angang [胡鞍钢]. "The Rising of Modern China: Comprehensive National Power and Grand Strategy" [现代中国之崛起：综合国力与大战略]. *Strategy & Management*, no. 3 (2002). 5–6.

Population control is a key aspect of managing human resources, according to the SDS. Along these lines, the 10th Five-Year Plan laid out efforts to "control the population size and improve the quality of the population" (控制人口增长，提高出生人口素质) (State Council, March 15, 2001).

[4] Project 211 (211 工程) was launched to raise the level of research standards of high-level universities and cultivate strategies for socio-economic development by establishing 100 world-class universities by the beginning of the 21st Century. Between 1995 and 1998, the 112 universities admitted to Project 211 received 70 percent of national research funding and 80 percent of doctoral students. See Fei Shu, Cassidy R. Sugimoto, and Vincent Larivière, "The Institutionalized Stratification of the Chinese Higher Education System," *Quantitative Science Studies* 2, No. 1 (2021): 327–34; Michael A. Peters, "The Double First-Class University Strategy: 双一流," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 12 (2018): 1075–79.

[5] Xuetong Yan, *How to Understand the International Situation and My Country's Foreign Policy* [如何认识国际形势和我国外交政策], *Secretary Work* 10 (2014).

[6] Luming Jiang, Weigai Wang, and Zuchen Liu, *Discussion on Military-Civil Fusion Development Strategy* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2017), 34.

[7] Jiafeng Zhan [詹家峰], "A Brief Analysis of the Relationship Between National Strategic Capabilities and Comprehensive National Power" [国家战略能力与综合国力关系浅析], *Modern International Relations* [现代国际关系], no. 4 (2005).

As Zhan writes, "National strategic capabilities serve as the bridge connecting existing CNP with future CNP, forming a chain: existing CNP → national strategic capabilities → future CNP" (国家战略能力是沟通和连接现有综合国力与未来综合国力的桥梁，即现有综合国力→国家战略能力→未来综合国力) … "CNP forms the foundation for national strategic capabilities, and national strategic capabilities also exert a reciprocal influence on CNP" (综合国力是国家战略能力形成的基础，而国家战略能力对综合国力也具有反作用) … "national strategic capabilities exert a powerful constraining influence on CNP, impacting its expansion and development" (国家战略能力又对综合国力发挥着强大的制约作用，影

响着综合国力的提升与发展). Multiple Chinese scholars have used this framing of the link between CNP and national strategic capabilities. For instance, the PLA Daily article cited here uses almost verbatim language.

[8] Jinping Xi. "*On "Three Rural Areas" Work* (Beijing: Central Party Press, 2022), 275.

[9] This relationship also reflects the Party's evolving view of Chinese modernization: Deng first declared that S&T are the primary productive forces; Jiang added that talent is the key resource; and Xi combined these with innovation as the key driving force.

The Three Pillars Underpinning the 2027 Centennial Military Building Goal

By Rena Sasaki

Screenshot from a 2022 CCTV report on the Centennial Military Building Goal. (Source: CCTV)

Executive Summary:

- Chinese analysts see achievement of the 2027 Centennial Military Building Goal as being based on advances in three key dimensions: military modernization, military readiness, and anti-corruption work.
- Western analysts frequently link the 2027 Goal to readiness—if not a deadline—for a Taiwan scenario.
- Chinese sources rarely link the 2027 Goal explicitly to reunification with Taiwan, but a 2023 article by the vice president of the Academy of Military Sciences that does so suggests a shift in public discourse.
- Internal governance, which includes anti-corruption work, has been linked to military readiness more frequently since 2022, with sources portraying it as integral to achieving the 2027 Goal.

Near the end of an article published in August in the *PLA Daily* that reflected on the legacies of the Second War, the author looks ahead to the future. Highlighting the importance of Five-Year Plans in the history of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the author ties the upcoming 15th plan to the "2027 Centennial Military Building Goal" (the "2027 Goal"; 建军一百年奋斗目标). This goal, according to a soldier interviewed for the piece, "is right in front of our eyes" (近在眼前) (PLA Daily, August 11).

The "2027 Goal" was first framed in the 14th Five-Year Plan as an effort to accelerate military development, improve force readiness, and enhance deterrence capabilities in time for the 100th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Xinhua, November 3, 2020). Subsequent Chinese sources suggest that there are three key dimensions to the 2027 Goal. Of these, two—military readiness and anti-corruption work—are seen as essential to progress in the ultimate dimension: military modernization.

Broad consensus exists between Chinese and Western analysts that the PLA seeks to modernize its military through advancing structural reforms, technological innovation, and joint operational capabilities. Dissensus persists, however, over PLA readiness. There is less disagreement over the third dimension, anti-corruption work, but only because it has received so little attention in the West, despite official discourse in the PRC increasingly framing corruption as a structural obstacle to modernization and combat readiness, and thus to the 2027 Goal.

Divergent Chinese and Western perspectives on the three interrelated dimensions of the 2027 Goal reflect different views on threat perceptions, strategic priorities, and what constitutes military strength. Clarifying these differences can lead to more accurate assessments of what PRC officials mean when they discuss this goal.

Military Modernization

The CCP first introduced military modernization as part of the 2027 Goal in October 2020 during the 5th Plenum of the 19th Central Committee (Xinhua, November 3, 2020). This represented a departure from previous plans, which had pegged key modernization goals to 2035 (achieving full modernization) and 2049 (reaching world-class military status). In March 2021, during an annual session of the National People's Congress (NPC), CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping reaffirmed that the 2020, 2035, and 2049 three-step arrangement remained intact, but said that the 2027 Goal was considered a necessary additional step to ensure military development (Xinhua, March 11, 2021).

Western scholars broadly agree that military modernization is the core of the PLA's 2027 Centennial Goal. For instance, Timothy R. Heath views the goal as an effort to accelerate reform of informatized and intelligentized warfare capabilities (Rand, January 27). The dissolution in 2024 of the Strategic Support Force and the established a new Information Support Force (ISF) is part of this process. This reorganization, which was intended to centralize key battlefield information capabilities and enhance the PLA's ability to conduct integrated joint operations, are also internally regarded as steps to fulfill the PLA's 2027 modernization goal (China Brief, April 26, 2024 [A], [B]). Other analysts similarly view 2027 as a transitional milestone in the PLA's modernization trajectory. John Culver has emphasized readiness through improvements in command systems, weapons, and logistics; Gokireddy H. Bindu and Amrita Jash have underlined the role of military-civil fusion in driving modernization under the 2027 Goal; and Kyle Amonson and Dane Egli have interpreted modernization as a necessary precondition for a potential military campaign against Taiwan, with 2027 marking a capability

threshold (Amonson, Kyle & Dane Egli, April 24, 2023; Gokireddy H. Bindu and Amrita Jash, 2024; Lowy Institute, February 12). **[1]** Despite variations in emphasis, these sources converge on the view that military modernization, whether for deterrence, reform, or potential conflict—is the unifying element of the 2027 goal.

Military Readiness

Military readiness is a key dimension of the 2027 Goal, but there is little consensus over what the precise object of that readiness is. CCP statements stress that achieving the 2027 Goal will strengthen the PRC's ability to safeguard its sovereignty and national security, though they avoid directly linking modernization reforms to Taiwan policy (Qiushi, July 31, 2024). While the U.S. Department of Defense's China Military Power Reports highlight 2027 as a critical benchmark for PLA modernization, the Chinese military sources cited in the report also do not explicitly establish a direct link between the 2027 Goal and a Taiwan contingency. Rather, they suggest that the capability developed through modernization reforms could compel Taiwan's leadership to the negotiation table (CSIS, December 21, 2021; U.S. Department of Defense, December 18, 2024). Some additional writings by Chinese academics, think-tank scholars, and current and former military officials that discuss a timeline for actions over Taiwan, often refer to scenarios far later 2027 (China Brief, June 21).

Western analysts remain split on whether readiness refers to a potential Taiwan contingency. Admiral Philip Davidson, a former commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, testified before Congress in 2021 that the threat from the PRC could manifest "in the next six years." Although he did not explicitly mention 2027, his remarks have often been interpreted as aligning with concerns about a potential Taiwan contingency around the centennial military goal timeline (U.S. Naval Institute, March 9, 2021). Other Western analysts and U.S. military officials have frequently framed the 2027 Goal in this way, too. Another group of scholars have questioned these claims, arguing instead that 2027 is a military modernization milestone rather than a Taiwan unification deadline. In 2021, Brian Hart, Bonnie Glaser, and Matthew P. Funaiole argued that 2027 is primarily a symbolic centennial goal, aligning with the CCP's broader military roadmap (China Brief, March 26, 2021). Heath, meanwhile, has suggested that the PLA's modernization remains focused on CCP regime stability rather than preparing for war, pointing to institutional inefficiencies and untested combat readiness as major obstacles to a large-scale military operation (Rand, January 27).

Several factors may explain why Chinese leaders view accelerated preparations for Taiwan contingencies as necessary by 2027 (Ryan Hass, *Stronger: Adapting America's China Strategy in an Age of Competitive Interdependence*, 2021; Hal Brands and Michael Beckley, *Danger Zone: The Coming Conflict with China*, 2022). Militarily, Chinese strategists may believe that the PLA has a window of opportunity in the second half of the current decade. This is based on assessments of its relative advantage over Taiwan's military and on a likely U.S. response prior to the deployment of new technologies or alliance shifts that could shift the military balance in the region. Economically, the CCP faces slow economic growth, rising debt, and global supply chain risks in high-tech sectors where Taiwan's semiconductor industry plays a critical role. Domestically, Xi may seek to strengthen his political legitimacy by promoting the goal of "national rejuvenation" (中华民族伟大复兴). This is particularly important as Xi enters his third term in office, as he has suggested that political disagreements between the two sides "cannot be passed on from generation to generation" (总不能一代一代传下去) (MFA, January 2, 2019; Matt Pottinger, *The Boiling Moat: Urgent Steps to Defend Taiwan*, 2024).

A 2023 Chinese article could represent an important intervention in this debate. Written by He Lei (何雷), a Lieutenant General (中将) and Vice President of the Academy of Military Sciences, and titled "Ensure the On-Schedule Realization of the Centennial Military Goal, Strive to Create a New Situation in National Defense and Military Modernization" (确保如期实现建军一百年奋斗目标，奋力开创国防和军队现代化新局面), the article is one of the first semi-official Chinese military publications to explicitly link the 2027 Goal to reunification with Taiwan. This marks a notable shift in the PRC's public strategic discourse (*Military Science*, 2023).

He links the 2027 Goal to the fulfillment of "four strategic pillars" (四个战略支撑) entrusted to the military in the new era. These include: (1) safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity (捍卫国家主权、安全和领土完整); (2) achieving national unification (着实现祖国完全统一), particularly regarding Taiwan; (3) protecting the PRC's expanding overseas interests (维护国家海外利益); and (4) maintaining regional and global peace and stability (维护地区和世界和平稳定). He argues that the PLA must achieve the 2027 goal as scheduled in order to possess the capabilities required to carry out these strategic missions under increasingly complex security conditions. In recent years, according to He, "'Taiwan independence' separatist forces" ('台独'分裂势力), emboldened and supported by "anti-PRC elements in the United States and the West" (美西方反华势力), have intensified activities that threaten peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and undermine the prospects for peaceful unification. Citing Xi Jinping's report to the 20th Party Congress, He emphasizes that resolving the Taiwan question and achieving national reunification is the CCP's unwavering historical mission, the shared aspiration of all Chinese people, and an essential requirement for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

By linking the 2027 Goal to Taiwan, He indirectly validates Western concerns that the PRC's military buildup is at least partially driven by Taiwan-related capabilities. His acknowledgment signals that the PLA sees Taiwan as a major factor in its force development priorities, even if he does not explicitly call 2027 a deadline for military action. Although Taiwan has long been identified as the PLA's "primary strategic direction" (主要战略方向), the association of the 2027 Goal with achieving national reunification is a new rhetorical development. Previous PRC statements tended to frame military modernization and Taiwan contingencies separately, whereas He Lei's 2023 articulation marks a clearer integration of the two objectives within the PLA's modernization agenda.

Anti-corruption

Prior to 2022, anti-corruption efforts within the PLA were largely framed as political initiatives aimed at restoring Party control over the military rather than as measures directly linked to combat effectiveness. For instance, the chapter of the 14th Five-Year Plan devoted to the 2027 goals made no mention of anti-corruption. In his report to the 20th Party Congress, however, Xi explicitly linked the two. Xi called for strict Party governance (全面从严治党) and urged the military to persist in rectifying conduct, enforcing discipline, and combating corruption (正风肃纪反腐). His speech was later published in *Qiushi*, the official theoretical and policy journal of the CCP, underscoring its enduring relevance (Xinhua, October 16, 2022; Qiushi, July 31, 2024).

By mid-to-late 2023, an intensifying emphasis on combat readiness (备战打仗) was causing a discursive shift. Suddenly, corruption began to be portrayed as a structural threat to the PLA's modernization and operational effectiveness. By 2024, this linkage was further cemented in official discourse. To establish absolute Party control over the PLA, Xi Jinping has implemented anti-corruption measures such as institutionalizing political rectification campaigns, strengthening oversight of senior officers, reinforcing ideological discipline across units, and strengthening joint civil-military auditing systems (Ji You, *China's Military Transformation: Politics and War Preparation*, 2016). **[2]** These measures aim to curb corruption and to enhance the PLA's internal cohesion, reliability, and warfighting capability. More recently, media has defined anti-corruption as both an "offensive" and a "protracted" campaign (攻坚战持久战) that is essential to achieving the 2027 Goal (PLA Daily, January 1, 2024).

Conclusion

PRC writings on the 2027 Centennial Military Building Goal differ from Western perspectives on their analyses of the goal's structural priorities. The latter tend to adopt an externalist lens, emphasizing deterrence, regional power projection, and the prospect of military action over Taiwan. This frequently leads to interpreting 2027 as a benchmark for PRC readiness to challenge U.S. dominance and, if necessary, forcibly resolve the Taiwan issue. PRC discourse, by contrast, embeds the 2027 goal within a framework of political control, institutional reform, and ideological loyalty. Modernization and preparedness remain central, but internal governance, particularly anti-corruption and Party discipline, is increasingly framed as indispensable to military effectiveness. Corruption is portrayed not just as a moral failing but as a systemic risk to cohesion and combat performance, making political purification and loyalty enforcement vital for ensuring the PLA's reliability in high-pressure scenarios.

These discursive differences reflect fundamentally different assumptions about military strength. Unlike the West, which generally measures strength in terms of in capabilities and intentions, the PRC also emphasizes political reliability and ideological purity. Some PRC sources, especially starting around 2023, explicitly link the 2027 Goal to Taiwan, underscoring how unification has become more central to PLA planning. At the same time, the anti-corruption campaign—still underexplored in Western accounts—has been recast within the PRC as a core condition for modernization and warfighting readiness. A fuller understanding of the 2027 Goal therefore must include a balanced assessment, recognizing how both external capabilities and internal governance together shape the PLA's transformation by 2027.

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Notes

[1] Bindu, Gokireddy H. & Amrita Jash. "China's Shift from CMI to MCF: Military Modernization and the Defense Industry at the Core." *Issues & Studies.* Vol. 60, No. 3 (2024); Amonson, Kyle & Dane Egli. "The Ambitious Dragon: Beijing's Calculus for Invading Taiwan by 2030." *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* Vol. 6, No. 3 (2023): 37–53.

[2] You, Ji. *China's Military Transformation: Politics and War Preparation.* Polity, 2016.

Yarlung Tsangpo Hydropower Fuels PRC's Energy-Computing Strategy

By Owen Au and Ryan Wu

A man walks passed a government sign on a walkway on the Yarlung Tsangpo river on June 4, 2021. (Source: Kevin Frayer/Getty Images)

Executive Summary:

- Tibet's Yarlung Tsangpo hydropower project, which broke ground in July, is set to become the world's largest hydropower installation.
- Officials see it as a key pillar of the PRC's energy sovereignty and a step toward implementing the "total national security concept" and the "new energy security strategy."
- Beijing wants renewable energy sources in western China to power a surge of computing power and data centers as it seeks technological primacy, something Tibet could assist with.
- Challenges persist, and the project has no fixed deadline in sight. Tibet's remote location, extreme climate, and low level of development make integrating the region as a "national data hub node."

On July 19, Premier Li Qiang (李强) launched construction of the Yarlung Tsangpo hydropower project (雅鲁藏布江下游水电工程) in Nyingchi in the Tibet Autonomous Region, hailing it as the "project of the century" (世纪项目) (CCTV, July 19). For the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Yarlung project is an unprecedented engineering and energy gambit. At an estimated Renminbi (RMB) 1.2 trillion ($168 billion)—five times the cost of the Three Gorges Dam (三峡大坝)—it is slated to be the world's largest hydropower installation (Xinhua, July 19). The design calls for five cascading stations burrowed into Tibet's Great Bend gorge that, once completed, could generate up to 300 billion kWh per year, enough to power the homes of 300 million people (China Energy News, August 9, 2021; Ta Kung Pao, January 7).

International observers have warned that the Yarlung project could serve as a "water weapon" against downstream India and Bangladesh (The Guardian, July 21). This perspective often overlooks the its domestic logic as part of the PRC's aims to become an "energy powerhouse" (能源强国) (CCTV, April 13, 2022). Under these ambitions, the Yarlung project is intertwined with the country's surging demand for computing power amid intensifying global technology competition.

Beijing Sees Hydropower as Grid Stabilizer

Beijing's long-running ambition to build a hydropower plant on the Yarlung Tsangpo river aligns with a drive for energy security. As General Secretary Xi Jinping has insisted, "the energy rice bowl must be held in our own hands" (能源的饭碗必须端在自己手里) (People's Daily, January 7, 2022). Currently, coal remains the country's main source of electricity generation, accounting for over 60 percent of supply (IEA, accessed September 16). Dependence on coal is not sustainable, however, and it clashes with Beijing's "dual-carbon" (双碳) goals to peak carbon emissions by 2030, reduce emissions by 7–10 percent by 2035, and reach carbon neutrality by 2060 (Xinhua, October 24, 2021; September 24). As the world's largest carbon emitter, the PRC is also bracing for the costs of carbon tariffs (Xinhua, March 20, 2023).

To diversify, the PRC has poured investment into renewables. By 2024, it had spent over $800 billion on its energy transition, more than the United States, European Union, and United Kingdom combined (Securities Times, June 19). Solar and wind have been the main focus, accounting for nearly 80 percent of new capacity in the last five years, and nearly half of all installed capacity (National Energy Administration [NEA], January 20, 2021, July 23). Their intermittent output, however, makes them unsuitable to substitute for coal as the foundation for the national grid. Hydropower, by contrast, has gained appeal as a stabilizer due to its controllable, predictable output.

Under the 14th Five-Year Renewable Energy Plan, Beijing promoted "integrated hydropower–wind–solar power bases" (水风光综合基地一体化), with hydropower providing flexibility and "peak-shaving" (调峰潜力) to support wind and solar (NDRC, June 2022). A pilot project on the Yalong River in Sichuan Province successfully demonstrated this synergy: the first stage of a hydro–solar complementary project (雅砻江水光互补项目) was completed in 2023 (Economic Daily, June 2, 2023; People's Daily, March 22, 2024).

Beijing Believes Tibet is Key to Achieving National Ambitions

In line with the PRC's energy transition goals, the Yarlung project is intended as the next milestone in the decades-old West-to-East Power Transmission Program (西电东送), which seeks to generate electricity in western China before channeling it to high-demand coastal regions in the East (Economic Information Daily, August 23, 2024). Tibet is often called the PRC's "water tower" (中华水塔), and for good reason. Its theoretical hydropower potential exceeds 200 GW, roughly 30 percent of the national total (Tibet Daily, August 25, 2015). The lower reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo alone could support 60–80 GW of hydropower capacity (China Opinion, July 23). Chinese analysts tout the Yarlung project as the "core project" (重点工程) of west-east power transfer, and officials say that it is mainly intended for "outward transmission" (外送消纳) to the eastern provinces (Our China Story, July 22; CINN, August 1). As part of this plan, a super-grid linking Tibet to the Guangdong–Hong Kong–Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) will send renewable electricity to coastal industrial centers in about 9 milliseconds, delivering over 43 billion kWh per year to the GBA (CPECC, August 8; CCTV, September 16).

Beijing portrays the dam as a strategic investment in frontier innovation. The project doubles as a proving ground for cutting-edge technology: intelligent tunnel-boring machines (TBMs) carve tunnels through Himalayan rock; Geographic Information System (GIS) drone swarms monitor mountain fissures; and AI-assisted 3D printing is used to build infrastructure (Tsinghua News, May 23, 2022; Sin News, July 21; Jiaying Technology, accessed September 16). Officials also have lauded the project as providing a "strong energy guarantee" (强有力的能源保障), moving the PRC closer to its vision of a secure, self-reliant energy system (Ngari Administrative Office, April 18, 2014). Some state-affiliated media have even suggested that surplus electricity could be exported via grid links to South Asian neighbors (藏电南送) like Bangladesh, positioning Tibet as a clean energy hub and fostering cross-border integration (Ta Kung Pao, July 22).

When work on the dam began, authorities set up a new central state-owned enterprise (SOE)—China Yajiang Group (中国雅江集团)—to build and operate the project (Xinhua, July 19). The creation of this company signals that Yarlung is deemed a national priority on par with the Three Gorges Dam (Ditan, July 24). Yajiang Group's leadership is drawn from the PRC's top energy firms. Its inaugural chairman, Yu Bing (余兵), is a deputy head of the National Energy Administration (国家能源局) and a former general manager of China Energy Investment Corporation (国家能源集团) (NEA, accessed September 16; CHN Energy, accessed September 16). Over 100 personnel were mobilized from China Three Gorges Corporation (CTG; 中国长江三峡集团) and other giants to jump-start planning (Business Observer, July 21).

Speaking at the Yajiang Group's launch ceremony, PRC Vice Premier Zhang Guoqing (张国清) stressed that the new company was intended to "implement the total national security concept and the new energy security strategy" (总体国家安全观、能源安全新战略) (Xinhua, July 19; Party Members Net, accessed September 16; Economic Daily, September 9). In other words, the project is cast as a pillar of the PRC's energy sovereignty, and a strategic "energy security ballast" (能源安全压舱石), rather than just another infrastructure venture (People's Daily Online, September 19, 2023). Yan Zhiyong (晏志勇), the chairman of the Power Construction Corporation of China (中国电建) who also spoke at the launch, went even further.

He argued that tapping the Yarlung Tsangpo is five strategic projects in one, advancing the country's ecological, national security, livelihood, energy, and international cooperation ambitions (HK01, February 13). This expansive framing underlines how Beijing sees the dam as a keystone investment advancing multiple core interests.

Energy and Computing Power Converge

The Yarlung project could also assist Beijing in its quest for technological primacy, providing the energy needs to support the buildout of a massive national network of data centers—the market for which grew nearly 250 percent from 2019–2024 (Zhiyan Consulting, February 20; China Brief, February 28). Hailed as the "engines" (引擎) of the digital economy, these "electric tigers" (电老虎) have become outsized energy consumers (People's Daily, May 25). Some scholars project that their energy consumption could double by 2030 to account for around 5 percent of the national total (Journal of Beijing Institute of Technology, March; IEA, accessed September 16).

Policy has underpinned this rapid scaling of data infrastructure. In 2022, the State Council urged faster development of a nationally integrated big data center system (全国一体化大数据中心体系) to coordinate computing power, algorithms, data, and applications (State Council, January 12, 2022). And in August, the State Council called for deeply integrating AI with public governance and industrial development, aiming to raise the national adoption rate of smart devices and AI agents above 70 percent by 2027 (State Council, August 21; China Brief, September 21).

Expanding data centers and high-performance computing facilities have made uninterrupted electricity a necessity. Brief blackouts or seasonal shortages can disrupt systems and reveal vulnerabilities in digital infrastructure. The PRC still struggles to meet power demand, especially in the populous east, as seen most acutely during parts of 2021 (The Paper, September 28, 2021). As a result, companies operating data centers have faced tighter energy quotas (IDC News, October 20, 2021). To better balance electricity consumption and computing needs, five State Council departments (and a central Party organ) issued a 2023 document advocating "energy–computing application centers" (能源算力应用中心) under a "computing + energy" framework (MIIT, October 8, 2023). More recently, Beijing announced plans to further integrate data, computing, electricity, and network resources (数、算、电、网) (State Council, August 21).

The PRC's western regions offer advantages in this energy–computing equation. High-altitude climates in the west slash the cooling costs that drive up data centers' power usage effectiveness (Applied Energy, October 2020). Shifting data centers west also eases strain on coastal power grids. Most important, western China is rich in renewable and hydro resources that can advance the PRC's "green data center" (绿色数据中心) agenda (NDRC, July 3, 2024). Key to realizing this goal is the "Eastern Data, Western Computing" (东数西算) strategy, which encourages tech firms to site data centers in China's west (The Paper, July 13, 2024; China Brief, February 28). Under the strategy, authorities have designated ten "data center clusters" (数据中心集群) across eight "national hub nodes" (国家枢纽节点), where companies enjoy preferential support for data center construction, inter-provincial transmission capacity, and backbone network integration (NDRC, May 24, 2021). (See Table 1 below.) In 2023, Beijing made this vision binding: it banned new large data centers outside

the designated nodes and urged AI training and inference centers in the east to shift westward (NDRC, December 25, 2023).

Table 1: Comparing the PRC's National Hub Nodes

National hub node	Geographical location	Reason	Strategic position
Beijing–Tianjin–Hebei	Eastern coastal	• Densely populated • Innovation hub • Huge demand for computing power	• Coordinating computing resources among nearby cities • Providing real-time computation
Yangtze River Delta			
Greater Bay Area			
Chengdu–Chongqing	Western inland		
Inner Mongolia		• Abundant renewable energy sources • Ideal climate conditions for data centers	• Undertaking background processing, offline analysis and storage backup • Serving as a national base for non-real-time computing
Ningxia			
Gansu			
Guizhou			

(Source: Created by the authors based on official documents)

Tibet: The PRC's Emerging Computing Pivot

Within the "Eastern Data, Western Computing" framework, Tibet is emerging as a potential hub. The region embodies nearly all of the natural advantages of western China: its high-altitude, low-humidity, low-temperature, and low-oxygen climate; its remoteness from urban load centers alleviates electricity demand pressures; and Tibet's status as the PRC's "water tower" indicates abundant clean power to support data center operations (Xinhua, September 26, 2024).

Local officials are eager to put Tibet on the national computing map. National planners have left open the possibility of creating additional hub nodes "as development needs dictate" (根据发展需要，适时增加国家枢纽节点), and the local government has openly lobbied to integrate the region into the "Eastern Data, Western Computing" scheme by designating Lhasa as a hub node (NDRC, May 24, 2021; Tibet Business News, January 7, 2024). Under a "Digital Tibet" campaign (数字西藏), local authorities are pouring investment into data infrastructure and digitization to attract data centers and tech companies to Lhasa, and some tech giants have already launched digital projects in the region (Xinhua, August 4, 2022; Digital Tibet Development Office,

September 26, 2024). The region's first AI computing center, "Yajiang 1" (雅江 1 号), opened in 2025 and has signed cooperation agreements with multiple AI firms (Tibet Daily, June 20).

Tibet's limitations, however, mean it is yet to be considered as a hub under the national schema. Unlike western tech hubs such as Guizhou or Gansu, Tibet has poor logistics, a weak economy, and a shortage of skilled technicians. Its digital infrastructure lags other regions. Only in late 2024 was Tibet approved to host a national-level Internet Exchange Point (IXP; 国家级互联网骨干直联点), which had previously meant added latency and cost to Tibet's data traffic, limiting its integration into national data and computing networks (Communications Administration of the TAR, October 24, 2024).

Beijing is stepping up support to tackle bottlenecks, designating the Sichuan–Tibet Railway and related highways as top-priority projects under the 14th Five-Year Plan for "building a strong transportation power" (建设交通强国) and ramping up the Tibet Aid Program (TAP, 对口援藏) (Ministry of Transport, March 30, 2022; China Brief, November 15, 2024). State-owned telecoms companies have also pledged to deepen cooperation in Tibet, with a focus on 5G networks, AI, and data centers (Xinhua, June 24; Lhasa Daily, December 18, 2024).

The Yarlung project is thus pivotal to regional development plans. The $168 billion initiative encompasses the hydropower dam itself, new inter-regional transmission lines, and logistics infrastructure (Sina Finance, July 21; China Energy Observer, September 15). Meanwhile, the Yajiang Group is recruiting talent nationwide for the project, seeking experts who can "adapt to long-term work in Tibet" (能适应长期在藏工作) (China Yajiang Group, August 10). One study estimates that the Yarlung project will create over 100,000 jobs in Tibet, more than 60 percent of them technical roles (Luoyang Normal University, July 30). Such an influx would draw talent, capital, and industries over the next decade and, if successful, could unlock Tibet's natural advantages and embed the region in the PRC's growing high-tech ecosystem.

Conclusion

The Yarlung project aims to unlock Tibet's clean energy potential and lay the groundwork for the region to become a powerhouse in the PRC's drive for energy self-reliance. Tibet's climate also makes it an advantageous site for advancing Beijing's computing power ambitions and has spurred efforts to integrate the region more deeply with national energy and infrastructure plans.

Tibet nevertheless remains a challenging region to operate in. While the Yarlung project has finally broken ground, it has no fixed deadline in sight. The same goes for other regional integrative infrastructure projects. Tibet's remote location and extreme climate also present as many challenges as they do advantages. As a result, Tibet is yet to be designated a national data hub node. The general trend is positive, however, and over the coming decade Tibet is likely to rise in significance to the Party as it becomes more central to its agenda for the country.

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Cyberspace Force Equipment and Developments in the PRC's 2025 Military Parade

By Thomas Yun Zhe He and Ying Yu Lin

A signal-jamming vehicle featured in the PLA's military parade on September 3. (Source: YouTube)

Executive Summary:

- The parade equipment of the Cyberspace Force indicates that the PLA has drawn lessons from the Russia–Ukraine war, seeking to avoid making the same communications mistakes on future battlefields.
- The reorganized Cyberspace Force has already demonstrated its battlefield communications capability during disaster relief operations in the Tibet earthquake, but it still requires training and validation in actual combat conditions.
- There is a clear discrepancy between official reports and the actual equipment of the Cyberspace Combat Formation, suggesting that the PLA is deliberately releasing misleading information.

On September 3, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held a military parade to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II (China Brief, August 28; Xinhua, September 3). For the CCP, the parade provided an opportunity to present the results of military reforms initiated by General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2015. As the People's Republic of China (PRC) pursues great power status, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) views demonstrating capabilities commensurate with that status as a crucial task.

The Cyberspace Force (CSF) is a key unit in the PLA's pursuit of intelligentized warfare. Formed alongside the Information Support Force (ISF) and the Aerospace Force (ASF) when the Strategic Support Force dissolved in 2024, it is a critical part of PLA reforms over the last decade (PLA Daily, April 20, 2024; China Brief, April 26, 2024 [A], [B], April 25, July 11). CSF equipment showcased during the parade offers valuable insights into the force's technical and strategic developments.

An appendix containing 14 images of equipment referenced in the text appears at the end of this article.

Information Operation Groups in the Military Parade

The 2024 reorganization of the Strategic Support Force established the PLA's organization into four services and four branches (PLA Daily, April 20, 2024). The 2025 military parade was therefore the first opportunity to observe the PLA's new structure. As newly established units, the ISF, ASF, and CSF each took part as branch-level formations in the march-past column and participated in the mobile column under the information operations group (YouTube/CCTV, September 3). **[1]**

Official media coverage of the equipment on display included detailed model specifications for other formations, but not for the CSF. This suggests a desire to maintain secrecy regarding telecommunications and cyber-related equipment, while also allowing the PLA to employ official publicity as a means of intelligence deception. For example, media reports on the Cyberspace Combat Formation stated that the unit displayed four types of equipment. Footage from the parade's live broadcast, however, revealed that the CSF in fact displayed six types of equipment (see Figure 1, 2, 3 & 4) (YouTube/CCTV, September 3). This discrepancy indicates that the CCP is using misinformation to obscure external understanding of its cyberspace capabilities.

The six types of Cyberspace Combat Formation equipment on display corresponded to the functions ascribed to it in official PLA propaganda. These include command and control, reconnaissance and sensing, and cyber-electromagnetic countermeasures. These functions can be inferred by examining the external features of equipment on show and comparing them with similar equipment in past parades. They include the following:

1. **New unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) data relay system:** Positioned in the front row of the Cyberspace Combat Formation, this system included a total of four units. Since the start of the Russia's war in Ukraine, the PLA has been developing UAV-mounted communications equipment to avoid the communications failures faced by the Russian military. These units were equipped with multi-rotor UAVs and supplemented by a square-shaped cooling device. This suggests that the system is a battlefield network communications relay, using UAVs to link front-line communications and information systems and transmit signals to the unit, which then functions as a temporary base station (see Figure 5).
2. **Data spectrum monitoring vehicle:** The PLA has previously displayed vehicles similarly equipped with multiple antennas capable of detecting VHF, UHF, and microwave signals (Ministry of National Defense

(Taiwan), December, 2021). This latest model features noticeably larger antennas, expanded equipment compartments, and a larger carrier vehicle, suggesting it may be an upgraded version of earlier vehicles (see Figure 6).

3. **Signal-jamming vehicle:** This was one of the systems not advertised in official coverage. With a circular dish mounted on the vehicle's roof, it resembles the signal-jamming vehicle displayed in the 2019 parade, suggesting that it performs the same battlefield signal-jamming function (see Figure 7 & 8).
4. **Electromagnetic reconnaissance and jamming vehicle:** Like the data-spectrum reconnaissance vehicle, this vehicle is fitted with a fishbone antenna array and mounted on a truck chassis. Its likely function is battlefield electromagnetic spectrum reconnaissance and jamming (see Figure 9 & 10). Similar equipment was also exhibited at the 2019 parade, although in that instance it was mounted on the Chinese "Mengshi" (猛士) armored vehicle. Both likely serve the same purpose, but an enlarged equipment compartment on the new model suggests additional functionalities.
5. **Network communication node vehicle:** This is the other system that was not mentioned in official coverage. This vehicle's exterior resembles the electromagnetic reconnaissance and jamming vehicle. It is similarly fitted with a fishbone antenna, though the tip of this antenna is formed by different elements. The vehicle also has a larger equipment compartment, more cooling devices, and fewer antennas (see Figure 11 & 12). Based on these features, it is likely a battlefield network communications node/center.
6. **Information jamming vehicle:** Identical in appearance to the information jamming vehicle displayed at the 2019 parade, this vehicle is fitted with additional cooling systems (see Figure 13 & 14). It is therefore assessed to be an upgraded version, with a likely function of battlefield signal jamming.

Most of the equipment displayed by the Cyberspace Combat Formation are intended for network relay and jamming purposes, judging by their appearances. This indicates that the CSF is primarily responsible for battlefield network communications and electronic interference, specializing in the development of integrated cyber-electromagnetic warfare capabilities. At the same time, the PLA's introduction of vehicle-mounted communications systems integrated for the first time with UAVs suggests that it has drawn lessons from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, deciding to incorporate them into its equipment development.

The Frontline and Rear-area Missions of the Cyberspace Force

Past research on the PLA's cyber units has often centered on PLA-linked advanced persistent threat (APT) groups and their intrusion techniques, with relatively little analysis of hardware systems. The 2025 parade provides an opportunity to examine equipment and assess the CSF's potential missions beyond cyber intrusions. The CSF is now clearly developing with a stronger emphasis on integrated cyber-electromagnetic warfare (网电一体战).

The CSF and the ISF have already proven their ability to conduct frontline communications and line restoration. In January, when an earthquake struck Shigatse in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the PLA dispatched units for disaster relief, with the CSF deployed to the affected area to establish communications, followed later by the ISF, which carried out fiber-optic network repairs (Xinhua, January 8; PLA Daily, March 13). While maintaining communications in a disaster zone differs from operating under battlefield conditions, the Tibet earthquake relief effort indirectly demonstrated the wartime functions of the two PLA branches and provided them with operational experience.

The CSF's activities clearly extend beyond exploiting network vulnerabilities and creating malware for cyber intrusions. Like other PLA services, it instead is required to conduct cyber and electronic warfare on battlefield frontlines. This may explain why it maintains technical reconnaissance bases and other military facilities in each major theater to support its front-end communications and jamming tasks as well as its back-end cyber-intrusion missions (China Brief, April 25). As a newly established service, however, the CSF will likely need time and training to integrate with other PLA services before it can achieve truly effective joint operational capabilities.

Conclusion

Cyberspace Force equipment displayed in the September 3 military parade were clear upgrades to the PLA communications and electronic jamming systems seen in 2019, and also included the debut of new UAV-integrated systems. These upgrades suggest that the PLA has learned lessons from shortcomings in information and electronic warfare during the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Discrepancies between official reporting on the Cyberspace Combat Formation equipment and those actually displayed can be interpreted as deliberate misinformation, obscuring an external understanding of the CSF. This indicates the persistent need to scrutinize the accuracy of official disclosures.

Finally, the CSF hardware on display demonstrates that the PLA's cyber units are not limited to conducting cyber intrusions but are also tasked with frontline missions such as network relay and electronic jamming. While the force's battlefield communications capability has been practiced during disaster relief operations in Tibet, its performance in an actual wartime environment has yet to be proven.

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Notes

[1] The march-past columns (徒步方队) are composed of personnel from various PLA services, each representing the active branches and functional units of the PLA. The mobile columns (装备方队) showcase the PLA's equipment, displaying the active platforms used by different branches of the PLA.

Appendix: Imagery of Cyberspace Force Equipment at the September 3 Parade

Figure 1: The Cyberspace Combat Formation

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 2: Promotional Photos of the Four Pieces of Cyberspace Combat Formation Equipment

(Source: PLA Daily)

Figure 3: Two Pieces Cyberspace Combat Formation Equipment not Reported by PLA Daily

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 4: New Features on the Cyberspace Combat Formation Equipment

The harpoon-shaped radar (red circle) features a solid arrowhead, while the one identified in the blue circle shows an antenna. The fuselage section highlighted by the red box is shorter, compared to the one in the blue box. (Source: YouTube)

Figure 5: A New-Type UAV Data-Relay System

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 6: A Data Spectrum Monitoring Vehicle

(Source: PLA Daily)

Figure 7: A Signal-Jamming Vehicle

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 8: Side View of a Signal-Jamming Vehicle

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 9: An Electromagnetic Reconnaissance and Jamming Vehicle

(Source: PLA Daily)

Figure 10: Fishbone Antenna of an Electromagnetic Reconnaissance and Jamming Vehicle

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 11: A Network Communications-Node Vehicle

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 12: Side View of a Network Communications-Node Vehicle

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 13: An Information-Jamming Vehicle

(Source: YouTube)

Figure 14: Side View of an Information-Jamming Vehicle

(Source: PLA Daily)

New Documentary Promotes PLA Development

By Emerson Tsui

Screenshot from *Gongjian* Episode Four, "Venturing Into New Frontiers" (勇闯新域). (Source: CCTV)

Executive Summary:

- A new documentary on the People's Liberation Army (PLA), *Gongjian*, presents an array of military hardware while showcasing operational competence.
- Highlighting the latest *Fujian*-class aircraft carrier and recent nuclear missiles tests while underscoring Party loyalty and spirit of sacrifice, the documentary signals to domestic and international audiences the country's military capacity and political resolve to advance its strategic objectives.
- The documentary is a tool of cognitive warfare. While useful for tracking material developments and gaining insight into PLA priorities, it avoids reference to precise metrics that might help gauge readiness.

On August 1, the anniversary of the founding of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Central Military Commission's (CMC) Political Work Department released its latest documentary. Titled "Forging Ahead: Resolutely Building a World-Class Military" (攻坚——矢志强军向一流; hereafter, *Gongjian*), the documentary has garnered 6.1 billion cumulative views in terms of "cross-media reach," according to a Ministry of National Defense (MND) spokesperson (MND, August 15).

Created to promote "Xi Jinping Thought on Strengthening the Military," *Gongjian* selectively highlights elite PLA units and milestone breakthroughs, and pushes two key messages: first, that the country is progressing smoothly toward the PLA's Centennial; second, that the PLA can and will secure the interests of the CCP and Chinese people.

Key Themes

Political slogans and combat doctrine:

Episode One's refrain, "orders are as immovable as a mountain" ("军令如山"), anchors the series' narrative around meeting the PLA's 2027 Centennial Military Building Goal (建军一百年奋斗目标) (China Brief, September 25). Across episodes, the Xi-era triad "be able to fight, dare to fight, fight to win" (能打仗、敢打仗、打胜仗; 随时能战) appears frequently. This slogan stresses obedience, endurance, and multi-domain integration (People's Daily Online, August 6, 2015). The finale closes on Xi's statement to "Bear the heavy and honorable burden, remain confident of victory, and overcome all obstacles" (担起 … 光荣 … 沉甸甸 … 的担子 … 坚定必胜信心，排除万难去争取胜利), an allusion to a Mao Zedong quote delivered at the 7th Party Congress that is framed as a watershed meeting shaping Party history and the Sino-Japanese War (CCP News; China Military Online, January 4).

ICBM Sea Test and Land-Based Launches:

Gongjian's first episode also references a publicly acknowledged intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test launch that landed in the western Pacific in 2024. The launch was protested by Japan and Pacific states for lack of prior warning (Asia-Pacific Leadership Network, November 18, 2024). Further details remain unconfirmed, such as the missile type, payload, and impact point (NHK; Ministry of National Defense, September 25, 2024; ASPI, October 15, 2024). **[2]** The episode also shows a PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) brigade and a land-based launch exercise, in a clear attempt to signal resilience despite recent purges and reorganization.

The Fujian Displays Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System

The *Fujian* aircraft carrier (CV-18) is the focus of Episode 4. The PLA's third indigenously designed carrier, *the Fujian* was first launched in 2022, ten years after the commissioning of its first, the *Liaoning* (CV-16), in 2012. That year, the Report to the 18th Party Congress called for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to become a "strong maritime power" (海洋强国) (Xinhua News, November 10, 2012; People's Daily, June 17, 2022). As seen in *Gongjian*, the shipbuilding industry and research and development for its aircraft have been key targets for achieving this goal.

While there is no set date for the *Fujian* to enter service, the documentary says that it is currently in the "final phase" (进入最后的攻坚时刻); but the platform is clearly more advanced than its two predecessors. Unlike the *Liaoning* and the *Shandong*, the *Fujian* has an electromagnetic catapult-assisted take-off system, footage of which is on display in *Gongjian* (CCTV-7, August 4). On September 22, the PLA released images of the *Fujian* launching and recovering three aircraft using this system, something that likely took place during sea trials this summer (China Brief, July 31; Xinhua, September 22). Once operational, the *Fujian* could field aircraft across the Western Pacific (Xinhua News, May 25).

Signals in practice (readiness and deterrence):

Gongjian also includes vignettes of training, exercises, and confrontation to signal escalation competence. For instance, maritime confrontation with the Philippines at the Second Thomas Shoal (仁爱礁) appears in the second episode, and the same episode also features the PLA Air Force's successful expulsion of an "enemy helicopter" (驱离外机) in the East China Sea, and the fifth episode highlight the first dual-carrier operation beyond the Second Island Chain (China Brief Notes, July 31).

These scenes foreground contested theaters, such as Taiwan, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, and the Western Pacific. Displaying joint C2ISR capabilities, **[3]** they put forward a consistent message of deterrence: maintain high readiness, move first tactically if needed, and sustain the system under pressure, while leaving hard performance unstated.

Signal: Joint readiness in priority theaters and the doctrine behind it:

Episode Three, *"Joint Task for Victory"* (合力制胜), highlights the PLA's emphasis on inter-system confrontation ("未来的作战是体系的对抗") as the decisive feature of future warfare. It walks through Eastern Theater Command's Joint Sword-B (联合利剑-B) drills around Taiwan, framed as anti-access/area-denial (联合海域封控) training. The PLA has used military exercises as a deception tactic in the past, and Taiwanese and U.S. analysts have argued that the PLA could shift "from exercise to combat" (由演轉戰) when required (INDSR, September 6, 2023; China Brief, November 1, 2024; U.S. Naval War College, September 23). **[4]** The episode sequences air–sea information integration, featuring coordination on the C2ISR "kill chain" (杀伤链) and "information chain" (信息链) between the PLA National Defense University and the Information Support Force (信息支援部队) (CCTV-7, August 4).

Series Emphasizes Readiness and Party Control

Through pairing operational footage with demonstrations of modern military hardware, *Gongjian* broadcasts the PLA's capabilities and competence. This emphasis on readiness and seizing the initiative is hardwired into PLA doctrine, and is evident in historical behavior, such as the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the 1969 Sino-Soviet clashes, the 1979 Sino-Vietnam War, and three Taiwan Strait crises (National Defense University Press, 2022). It is also apparent in the show's teaser line: "Every post and position echo with the determination of Chinese soldiers pressing the attack" (每一个岗位战位，都响彻着中国军人攻坚的声音).

Gongjian repeatedly ties combat spirit to Party control. The line "do whatever the Party orders" (党叫干什么就干什么) frames elite-unit vignettes as proof of Party-Military cohesion. Specifically, the first and final episodes revisit the Battle of Triangle Hill (三角高地戰役) during the Korean War, which saw thousands of deaths across 42 days of protracted engagement. Despite superior casualties on the Chinese side, the People's Volunteer Army was able to retain their original positions. **[5]**

In the official narrative, the battle was significant in halting the "enemy forces" (敌军), justifying the sacrifices made (China Military, October 22, 2020) during the Korean War, known as "Resisting the United States and assisting the (Democratic People's Republic of) Korea" (抗美援朝) among the PRC public. The clip featured in *Gongjian* sees active PLA personnel paying tribute and pledging to carry on the "glorious tradition" (光荣传统). While valorizing the war dead, the segment also serves to signal that the PLA has a high tolerance for risk and loss when it perceives security threats, and that absolute loyalty (绝对忠诚) to the Party could serve to consolidate such tolerance (MND, October 30, 2024).

Conclusion

Gongjian is a tool of political and information warfare that highlights PLA milestones and progress, focusing on three themes: pursuit of "national rejuvenation" under CCP leadership, political discipline in the PLA, and readiness to use force if required. As with all such messaging, the PLA *Gongjian* portrays is not quite the same PLA that exists on the ground. The series does not demonstrate hard metrics such as sortie rates, availability, or C2ISR endurance under real-time engagement; ongoing corruption issues are not mentioned; and the PLA's lack of combat experience for over 45 years remains a likely source of anxiety for its leadership. Therefore, while useful for tracking material developments and gaining insight into PLA priorities, the documentary is unable to provide answers on the genuine state of military readiness and competence.

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Notes

[1] These included the J-35 fifth-generation stealth fighter, J-15 attack jet and KJ-600 airborne early warning and control aircraft.

[2] Analyses often suggest that the missile could have been a DF-41, DF-26, or DF-31AG, but this remains unproven.

[3] C2ISR stands for command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

[4] Ian Easton. "China Maritime Report #50: Foggy With a Chance of Surprise Attack: PLA Amphibious Deception in a Taiwan Scenario." *CMSI China Maritime Reports*. U.S. Naval War College, September 2025. Easton references Zhang Aiping (张爱萍), who in 1955 directed PLA amphibious forces to conduct exercises directly across from the Dachen Islands "to reinforce the false impression that they were his real target."

[5] Also known as the Shangganling Campaign (上甘岭战役) or Operation Showdown, this battle occurred between October 14 and November 25, 1952. Its significance to the course of the war is debated, as are precise casualty figures. A 2024 television drama, *Shangganling* (上甘岭) was broadcast on CCTV to commemorate the battle (CCTV, October 14, 2024).

Rare Earth Regulation Shifts From Decentralized Planning to Centralized Control

By Shijie Wang

China Rare Earth Group Engineers Conducting Field Exploration (Source: China Rare Earth Group)

Executive Summary:

- Beijing has shifted its rare earth management model to a "total volume control" system, in which annual production caps are set centrally and allocated directly to enterprises. This reflects tighter centralization and a new focus on controlling overall output rather than mandating production targets.
- New measures released in August derive authority from the Mineral Resources Law and the Rare Earth Regulations, elevating rare earth governance from earlier measures implemented in 2012 and reinforcing Beijing's ability to close loopholes and strengthen enforcement.
- Industry participation is now limited to state-designated groups, and all production and sales must be recorded on a centralized traceability platform. This ensures rare earths remain firmly under central control, reduces opportunities for illicit flows, and enhances Beijing's leverage in global competition.

On August 22, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), together with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), jointly issued the "Interim Measures for the Administration of Total Volume Control over Rare Earth Mining and Rare Earth Smelting and Separation" (稀土开采和稀土冶炼分离总量调控管理暂行办法), replacing the "Interim Measures for the Administration of Rare Earth Directive Production Plans" (稀土指令性生产计划管理暂行办法) issued in 2012 (MIIT, August 22).

The new regulation retains some characteristics of a planned economy, with output still under the control of the central government. It also introduces upgrades and revisions to how the industry is regulated, enhancing central oversight, reducing the power of local governments, and digitizing data collection on supply chain flows.

State Advances Regulatory Authority Over Sector

The 2012 measures had as their legal basis two State Council instruments: the "Several Opinions on Promoting the Sustainable and Healthy Development of the Rare Earth Industry" (院关于促进稀土行业持续健康发展的若干意见) and the "Notice on Including Tungsten, Tin, Antimony, and Ionic Rare Earth Minerals in the List of Minerals Subject to State-Protected Exploitation" (院关于将钨、锡、锑、离子型稀土矿产列为国家实行保护性开采特定矿种的通知). By contrast, the latest document draws authority from the "Mineral Resources Law" (矿产资源法) and the State Council's "Rare Earth Regulations" (稀土管理条例) (Changzhou Government, June 13, 2016; MIIT, August 22). In other words, the new measures are backed by much stronger authority, including by legislation passed by the National People's Congress (NPC). This indicates that Beijing is elevating rare earth management from administrative regulation to statutory regulation, underscoring its intent to ensure long-term and stable control over the sector. It also reflects the use of legal coercive force to make it more difficult for local governments and enterprises to exploit loopholes for their own parochial interests.

In terms of scope, the 2025 version expands upon the 2012 document by adding "monazite concentrate" while removing "recycled resources". According to a PRC metallurgical expert, monazite concentrate is rich in neodymium and praseodymium, which are essential raw materials for producing high-performance rare earth permanent magnets—key components in both the new energy sector and the defense industry (Author interview, 12 September). By contrast, the recycling of rare earth resources largely can be driven by market forces and therefore no longer requires inclusion under central planning. This shift reflects Beijing's move toward more precise regulation focused on high-value strategic minerals, while allowing less critical resources to be guided by market mechanisms—a classic case of "grasping the big while letting go of the small" (抓大放小)..

Beijing Centralizes Control and Shifts From Quotas to Caps

The 2012 regulation adopted what was called a "directive production plan" (指令性生产计划) system. In practice, this meant that MIIT divided the annual production quota into two installments—one for the first half of the year and one for the second half—and delegated these quotas to provincial governments, which then distributed them to enterprises. Second-half annual quotas typically were adjusted based on enterprises'

performance in the first half of a given year, as well as fluctuations in market demand and changes in environmental protection requirements.

The 2025 regulation, by contrast, introduced a "total volume control" (总量控制) system. Under this model, MIIT, the NDRC, and the MNR jointly determine the national annual production ceiling each year. This overall ceiling is then allocated directly to enterprises, meaning that each enterprise's annual production cap is set at the beginning of the year. Enterprises no longer need to fulfill a planned production target; they only need to ensure that their output does not exceed the assigned cap. Moreover, in the 2025 regulation, provincial governments no longer participate in distributing quotas. Instead, they simply receive a copy of the central government's allocation to enterprises and pass this information down to the lower-level authorities.

This change reflects a shift in Beijing's concerns. Rather than fearing insufficient supply, the risk today is that oversupply could weaken the strategic value of rare earth minerals and diminish the PRC's leverage in international competition. The diminished role of provincial governments also illustrates Beijing's tightening of direct central control over rare earth production. This could be a response in part to past rumors of collusion between local authorities and enterprises to evade production limits and profit from illicit rare earth trading (Mingpao, May 19).

National Security Concerns Have Driven New Approach

Although security considerations were evident as early as 2010, when the PRC implemented rare earth export restrictions against Japan, the past decade has entrenched this logic, with national security increasingly overriding environmental priorities in Beijing's rare earth governance. The shift across the two sets of measures reflects this creeping securitization. First, regarding enterprises, the 2012 document listed four requirements that any company had to meet to apply for rare earth quotas through provincial-level industry regulators. These provincial authorities would conduct a preliminary review, submit the application to the central government for final approval, and then relay the results back to the applicant. In other words, any enterprise that met the requirements could apply for quotas. By contrast, the 2025 regulation no longer allows enterprises to apply on their own. Instead, the MIIT, together with the MNR, determines the list of eligible companies while explicitly prohibiting "other organizations or individuals" (其他组织、个人) from engaging in rare earth mining or smelting and separation. This is another indication of the political center's centralizing impulse, especially when it comes to resources it deems strategically significant. It follows the now-complete consolidation of many firms into six major state-owned rare earth groups, which has enabled such strict management (People, August 19, 2014). An additional benefit of this approach, from Beijing's perspective, is that it effectively prevents illicit sales of strategic resources and ensures that they serve national objectives.

Second, the 2025 measures transition management of the industry from a paper-based to a digital system. From now on, enterprises must upload production, sales, and circulation data into a national rare earth product traceability platform, enabling full-chain tracking of product flows—who produces, who buys, and where the products ultimately go (MIIT, accessed September 25). The new document also emphasizes that enterprises must comply with data security obligations. This upgraded traceability system allows the central government to bypass provincial intermediaries and directly monitor corporate production and sales in real time, while networked systems make data falsification far more difficult.

Conclusion

Beijing's management of the rare earth industry has shifted in the last decade toward centralized control of rare earths as a strategic resource. This shift, codified in the latest measures released jointly by three central ministries, is both a domestic industrial policy adjustment and an embodiment of Xi Jinping's concept of "holistic (or comprehensive) national security" (整体国家安全观). By strengthening its direct grip on a sector in which the PRC remains dominant, Beijing now has even greater capacity to exert leverage on the U.S. electronics and defense industries, which remain reliant on PRC inputs. Coupled with an expanded toolbox of economic weapons that it is increasing willing to deploy, and absent progress in the United States and allied countries to develop a separate rare earth supply chain, the PRC is set to remain dominant for years to come.

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