

# LARGE AND IN CHARGE

## Civil-Military Relations under Xi Jinping

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Chinese military modernization has made impressive strides in the past decade.<sup>1</sup> The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has achieved progress in key technological areas, ranging from precision-guided missiles to advanced surface ships and fighter aircraft; PLA personnel are more highly trained and skilled, capable of carrying out increasingly complex operations near to and farther away from China's shores; and Chinese military doctrine has been updated to emphasize modern, joint maneuver warfare on a high-tech battlefield.<sup>2</sup> This progress has been undergirded by significant increases in Chinese defense spending every year since 1990.<sup>3</sup> Taken together, these changes better enable the PLA to fight what the U.S. Department of Defense describes as "short-duration, high-intensity regional conflicts."<sup>4</sup>

As the title of a 2015 RAND report suggests, however, PLA modernization has been "incomplete."<sup>5</sup> Among the major weaknesses outlined in that report is the PLA's antiquated organizational structure, which had experienced few major changes since the 1950s. Key problems include the lack of a permanent joint command and control (C2) structure, inadequate central supervision—which bred corruption, lowered morale, and

inhibited the development of a professional force—and institutional barriers in the defense research and development (R&D) process.<sup>6</sup> Prior military reforms made only limited and incremental adjustments to the PLA's structure; more comprehensive reform efforts stalled in the face of bureaucratic resistance.

Since the early 1990s, PLA reformers had argued for comprehensive changes to the military's structure. There were two basic reasons. First was the trend of modern warfare toward joint operations, most notably in the maritime and aerospace domains. This required the PLA to rebalance from the army to the navy and air force, and to institute a joint C2 structure that could integrate the capabilities of all the services as well as command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets. The need to conduct effective joint operations in multiple domains only increased as China's national economic and political interests expanded outward to the maritime periphery and, later, to a global scale.<sup>7</sup> Second, the general departments and military regions had amassed too much power and were too poorly supervised, leading to growing financial waste and corruption throughout the force. This, in turn, raised serious concerns about PLA combat readiness and proficiency.<sup>8</sup>

To address these problems, the PLA embarked on a series of institutional reforms during the Central Military Commission (CMC) chairmanships of Jiang Zemin (1989–2004) and Hu Jintao (2004–2012). Important changes included reducing the PLA's size by 500,000 in 1997 and 200,000 in 2003; establishing a professional noncommissioned corps (NCO) in 1998; increasing resources to the navy, air force, and Second Artillery Force in 2004; and restructuring the research, development, and acquisition process in 1998.<sup>9</sup> However, more fundamental changes to the PLA's C2 and administrative structure eluded reformers. Resistance to change was likely strongest among the potential losers of reform, including the ground forces and general departments. Moreover, the relative weakness of Jiang and Hu within the military made bureaucratic opposition much harder to overcome.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, Xi Jinping has been willing to invest significant amounts of time and political capital in pushing forward an ambitious PLA reform agenda. Prior to the initiation of the reforms, Xi's signature military initiative was the directive that the PLA must focus on "fighting and winning an informationized war."<sup>11</sup> Xi appears to place a high personal priority on sovereignty and territorial disputes; a more effective military would be an important tool in strengthening China's ability to resolve these disputes on favorable terms.

Revelations about widespread corruption within the PLA and the limited authority that former CMC Chairman Hu wielded over senior PLA officers also raised important questions about Chinese Communist Party (CCP) control over the military.<sup>12</sup> The corollary to Mao Zedong's dictum that "political power grows from the barrel of a gun" is that "the Party must always control the gun." The extent of corruption within the PLA—and the fact that neither political ideology nor existing supervisory mechanisms could control it—was evidence that Party control over the PLA had eroded, perhaps to dangerous levels. More broadly, Xi appears to believe that emphasizing ideological conformity and obedience to Party central leadership are necessary conditions for continued CCP rule.

A final point involves the extent to which Xi seeks to overturn the norms of CCP collective leadership that Deng Xiaoping painstakingly constructed.<sup>13</sup> Given Xi's apparent desire to build his personal power at the expense of collective leadership norms, the military is an area where he (as the sole member of the Politburo Standing Committee with direct responsibility for military issues) has important advantages over potential political rivals. If Xi's efforts to reassert CCP control over the PLA also build his personal authority over the military and create a senior officer corps that is personally loyal to him, this would be an important political asset.

This chapter is organized in four parts. The first section examines problems in civil-military relations in China from a historical, theoretical,

and empirical perspective. It focuses on identifying the problems that PLA reforms are intended to solve: ineffective information-sharing between military and civilian authorities, corruption and cronyism, and a perceived waning of ideological commitment to Party ideals and values within the PLA. The second section examines how specific organizational and political aspects of the reforms are intended to address these problems. Given that the reforms will adversely affect the organizational and personal interests of some parts of the PLA and some PLA senior leaders, reformers anticipated resistance. The third section examines some of the political tools and tactics that Xi has used to push reforms through. The conclusion assesses whether this political strategy is likely to succeed in building a PLA that is more capable of executing joint operations to “fight and win wars” and in reasserting CCP control—and perhaps Xi’s personal authority—over the Chinese military.

### **Problems in Chinese Civil-Military Relations**

A key dilemma for civil-military relations is how to build an army strong enough to fight and win the nation’s wars that does not pose a threat to a civilian regime or social order.<sup>14</sup> In mature democracies, the problem is often alleviated by military professionalism and broad acceptance of the principle of civilian control, aided by institutions such as legislative oversight, the rule of law, and a free press.<sup>15</sup> In these circumstances, militaries can serve as a professional warfighting force but are constrained in the extent to which they can (or desire to) interfere in domestic politics. In transitional democracies and some civilian-led authoritarian states, the problem is more acute because of weak social norms and weak institutions limiting military encroachment into internal affairs. Indeed, in many cases the military played a pivotal role not only in the founding of the regime but also in post-revolutionary governance.<sup>16</sup> Getting the military out of politics in such cases is no easy feat.

Chinese reformers have learned firsthand how difficult it can be to extricate the military from political affairs. During the Mao era, the PLA

played a key role in elite politics as well as in domestic governance. Uniformed officers held high Party posts and on occasion became so powerful (and had ideas so divergent from Mao's) that they had to be purged, as in the cases of Peng Dehuai and Lin Biao. The military also played a role in social and economic affairs at the grassroots level, most notably during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>17</sup> During this period, shared belief in Marxism-Leninism by civilian and military elites helped CCP leaders exercise what Samuel Huntington called "subjective control" over the PLA.<sup>18</sup> Common ideology and objectives were reinforced by "objective control" measures such as the political commissar system and the CMC, which gave the top CCP civilian leader formal authority over military decisions. Following Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping and his co-reformers sought to reduce the military's role in political affairs, including encouraging the PLA to focus on its professional military responsibilities. However, this required an uneasy bargain in which the PLA was granted significant autonomy over its own affairs and given compensation for limited defense budgets in the 1980s by being granted permission to engage in a range of commercial activities.<sup>19</sup> Reduced oversight and encouragement to participate in China's booming civilian economy proved to be a potent recipe for wide-scale corruption.

Deng's successors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, had to wrestle with the consequences of this bargain. Both Jiang and Hu sought to make the PLA into a more competent warfighting force, as well as to revise China's national security architecture to cope with a more diverse set of security challenges, but neither was able to fully implement their plans. For instance, Jiang's 1998 decision to remove the PLA from business ventures was only partially successful, as many of these enterprises were simply transferred to close relatives of senior officers.<sup>20</sup> The creation of a National Security Council (NSC)-like entity, which Jiang and Hu both supported in order to produce more effective responses to regional crises, was stunted in part due to the PLA's unwillingness to share information with civilian officials or coordinate with civilian ministries.<sup>21</sup> The problem was

exacerbated by Jiang and Hu's lack of knowledge of military affairs and limited influence within the military; neither had served in the PLA nor had significant ties to it.

Thus, Xi Jinping inherited a military that was making incremental progress toward jointness and where Party control over the PLA had eroded significantly in some areas. Xi recognized that the lack of effective civilian (and especially Party) oversight limited the military's ability to become a truly professional force focused on fighting and winning wars. At worst, the military might not follow the Party's orders in the event of a national crisis. This was especially worrisome given the perception that China was facing increasing national security challenges both at home and abroad, such as separatism, maritime disputes, and strategic challenges from the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Xi wrestled with several distinct but interrelated civil-military challenges. These included the military's reluctance to share information and intelligence with civilian authorities, corruption and cronyism, and a perceived waning of ideological commitment to Party ideals and values within the PLA. These challenges are discussed in turn.

### Information-Sharing

As part of the Deng Xiaoping-era bargain that reduced the PLA's political role, the military was granted extensive autonomy to manage its own affairs. From the "principal-agent" perspective, this autonomy created a number of information asymmetries between the Party (the "principal") and PLA (as its "agent").<sup>23</sup> Civilian Party elites had limited insight and control over the PLA's internal finances, R&D activities, and perhaps even some operational decisions. The fact that a significant share of PLA revenue was coming from "off-budget" commercial activities before the 1998 divestiture reduced the effectiveness of budgets as an instrument of civilian control. The PLA also kept tight control over military intelligence and information about Chinese military capabilities and operations as a bureaucratic advantage, and it was often reluctant to share this information with either senior leaders or civilian ministries (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which occupied

a lower bureaucratic grade). At the heart of the problem was an extremely thin institutional nexus between the civilian Party elite and PLA—only the CMC Chairman himself bridged this divide.<sup>24</sup>

Limited information-sharing contributed to a number of secondary civil-military problems. The first was prolific corruption and financial mismanagement within the PLA (discussed below). Second was the inability of senior leaders to anticipate and manage key decisions and announcements from the PLA. Two prominent examples were the negative international response to the January 2007 test of an antisatellite weapon, which appeared to catch Hu and other civilian officials off guard, and the January 2011 test of a J-20 stealth fighter, which led to a diplomatic kerfuffle as it coincided with the visit of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to Beijing. Although there are several possible explanations for these incidents, the most convincing is simply that Hu and his advisors were not kept abreast of the specific operational details and timing of the tests.<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that the PLA had gone rogue, but, as PLA expert Andrew Scobell argues, does suggest that it was able to act roguishly—or in a way that caused embarrassment to top Party officials.<sup>26</sup>

A third problem was China's limited ability to coordinate effective civil-military responses to domestic and foreign crises. One of the key drivers for proposals to institute a Chinese NSC was the perception of weak and ineffective whole-of-government responses to incidents such as the May 1999 accidental North Atlantic Treaty Organization bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade and the April 2001 collision of U.S. and Chinese military aircraft in the South China Sea.<sup>27</sup> Part of the problem, as already noted, was the PLA's bureaucratic disincentive to share military information and cooperate with civilian ministries. To be sure, the military was represented on the National Security Leading Small Group, which was intended to facilitate stronger coordination, but this was only an ad hoc arrangement with little institutional support and no ability to compel the PLA to share information or respond to requests from civilian agencies.

### Corruption and Cronyism

Another legacy of Deng's bargain with the PLA was ineffective external (as well as internal) supervision of the military, often resulting in corruption and mismanagement. The most well-known examples of graft within the PLA are those that came to light following the anti-corruption campaign initiated by Xi and his colleagues at the end of 2012 (which was not limited to the PLA but covered the entire Party apparatus and state organizations as well). Those cases involve investigation and purges from the Party of high-ranking cadres such as former CMC vice chairmen Xu Caihou and Guo Boxiong, and former General Logistics Department deputy director Gu Junshan, who was suspected of selling military ranks. However, corruption was found at many levels of the PLA, and in many areas. More quotidian examples of malfeasance include the unlawful privatizing of military housing, disobeying traffic regulations, travelling extravagantly, and abusing retirement benefits.<sup>28</sup> PLA-run businesses, such as military hospitals, were also frequent targets of corruption allegations.<sup>29</sup>

System-wide corruption had several major negative consequences for civil-military relations. First was that Party leaders may not have been able to rely on the PLA as an effective warfighting instrument. No military, of course, is optimized for combat when some (if not many) of its senior officers earned their positions through bribes rather than professional qualifications. Second was the military's resistance to reform. As early as 1998, then PLA Chief of the General Staff Fu Quanyou warned that substantial reforms to the PLA's size and structure would be difficult because they would "inevitably involve the immediate interests of numerous units and individual officers."<sup>30</sup> It is likely that graft-prone parts of the PLA, such as the political work and logistics systems, were particularly averse to restructuring. Third were the negative effects that corruption likely had on morale among those personnel who were genuinely interested in serving the Party's, rather than their own, interests.

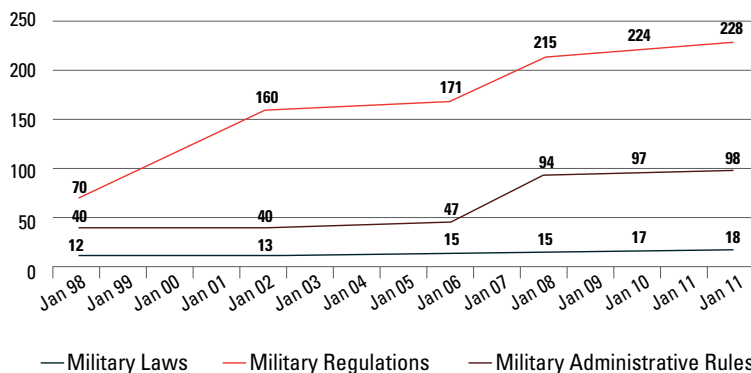
A key factor contributing to corruption in the PLA was the lack of effective self-policing. At a theoretical level, authoritarian regimes often



try to overcome principal-agent problems and concomitant information asymmetry through two means: creating quasi-independent supervisory mechanisms, such as secret police, and by instituting rules and norms intended to shape behavior toward that preferred by the regime.<sup>31</sup> The PLA attempted both techniques, but with limited results. First, beginning in its formative period in the 1920s, the PLA developed an “interlocking and reinforcing” system of political commissars, Party committees, and discipline inspection commissions. These helped to ensure Party control by, respectively, ensuring that Party decisions were followed at each level, managing appointments, and investigating violations of rules governing Party members in the PLA.<sup>32</sup> Because these “objective” mechanisms to control the military were all implemented by PLA officers, their effectiveness depended on political commissars acting as loyal members of the Party (that is, having the correct “subjective” political values and interests) rather than pursuing their individual or PLA institutional interests. Instead of objective and subjective control mechanisms being mutually reinforcing, failure of the subjective mechanisms eroded the effectiveness of the objective mechanisms. The widespread incidence of corruption in the PLA demonstrated that these control mechanisms were not effective and that in some cases, such as graft in the promotion system, the supposed monitors were complicit in the problem.<sup>33</sup>

A second effort to strengthen objective control mechanisms, beginning in the 1980s, involved efforts to regularize [*zhenggui hua*, 正规化] the PLA by instituting laws and regulations governing military activities. This was part of a larger transformation of governance in China from a system based on fiat [*renzhi*, 人制] to one based on laws [*fazhi*, 法制] that was designed to prevent abuses of power and promote better management of Party and state affairs. Hence, the Party restored military ranks (which had been eliminated during the Cultural Revolution) in the late 1980s, and issued regulations on issues such as recruitment, promotions, retirement, procurement, and auditing.<sup>34</sup> Figure 1 depicts the increase in laws and regulations from 1998 to 2012. However, cultivating a rule of law within

**Figure 1. Increase of PLA Laws and Regulations, 1998–2012**



Source: Adapted from Shinji Yamaguchi, “Xi Jinping’s Military Reform and Party-Military Relations in China,” paper presented at the Japanese Association of International Relations, October 14, 2016.

the PLA was bedeviled by various obstacles. As Chinese law expert Susan Finder notes, those problems include the lack of professionalization of military courts and prosecutors, gaps in military legislation, isolation of the military judicial system from its civilian counterpart, and perhaps most seriously, commanders who think that “their word is law.”<sup>35</sup>

### Ideological Laxity

The most nebulous, but also perhaps the most nefarious, problem in China’s civil-military relations involved concerns about the Party’s waning ideological appeal within the PLA. In Huntingtonian terms, this suggested a decline in the Party’s subjective control of the army. Speaking at the November 2014 Gutian political work conference—held at the site of a 1929 gathering that cemented the PLA’s status as subordinate to the Party—Xi stated that the most fundamental political problems were ideological, including those related to “ideals and beliefs,” “Party spirit,” and “revolutionary spirit.”<sup>36</sup> A *PLA Daily* commentary published shortly thereafter stated that the root of the ideological malaise was the clash of competing value systems, in which the ideas of PLA members are becoming “more independent, more selective, more changeable, and more diversified.”<sup>37</sup> Although not explicit, this certainly refers to concerns about foreign, and especially Western,

ideological influence both in the PLA and in the larger society (from which the military draws its personnel).

Of greatest concern for Party leaders were signs of a renewed discourse of nationalization [*guojia hua*, 国家化] and depoliticization [*fei zhengzhi hua*, 非政治化] in the PLA. A 2014 essay in the Party's flagship journal *Qiushi* explained that the idea of rebranding the PLA as a national (and not a Party) army has blurred the understanding of "some officers and men" in the PLA about the principle of the Party's "absolute leadership" over the military. The author stated that "some" have also "blindly admired" Western models of civil-military relations, in which armies serve national goals, and not those of individual political parties. If those ideas gained prominence, the PLA would "lose its soul" and thus its ability to defend the Party.<sup>38</sup>

These arguments are not new, but rather rooted in the Party's anxieties about the impact of Western influence—an inevitable consequence of China's economic opening—on the Party's grip on power. The case of the Soviet Union, in which a similar opening contributed to the end of one-party rule, is never far out of mind. Regarding the PLA, concerns peaked during the 1989 Tiananmen crisis, when some PLA units refused to obey orders to disperse the student protesters. This was blamed on unnamed Western conspirators as well as on ousted Party General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, whose alleged support for "nationalization" of the army was believed to have weakened Party control.<sup>39</sup> The crisis led to an increased emphasis on political work in the PLA, including a major emphasis on the Party's "absolute leadership" of the military. In the ensuing years, the same themes were stressed at regular intervals. In 2007, for instance, CMC Vice Chairman Cao Gangchuan argued that "some hostile forces" had made it their goal to "separate the military from the Party leadership," while in 2011 CMC member Li Jinai blamed "domestic and foreign hostile forces" for spreading similar ideas.<sup>40</sup> Xi's comments at the Gutian conference and elsewhere are fully consistent with this pattern.

Whether the problem of ideological laxity has become more serious since Xi took office is difficult to assess. Senior PLA officers continue

to ritualistically proclaim their loyalty to Xi and the Party in speeches and meetings. It is not clear who, if anyone, in the PLA actually supports delinking the PLA from the Party.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, there are two reasons to think that Xi's exhortations are more than a simple reminder. First is the declining relevance of Marxism as a guiding concept within the Party-state (witness, for instance, senior PLA officers who spend as much time purchasing luxury goods as they do attending meetings on their visits to the United States). Second is the increasing role of nationalism as a growing ideological force within China. CCP leaders have tried to compensate for the declining relevance of Marxist ideology by positioning the Party as the only vehicle for fulfilling nationalist goals such as building China into a powerful and respected state and resolving outstanding territorial disputes, including the status of Taiwan. However, this approach means that support for the Party based on nationalism is conditional on its performance in achieving nationalist goals. It is not hard to imagine deep resentment within the PLA toward leaders viewed as unduly soft toward China's perceived enemies and perhaps even talk about ineffectual Party leaders as national traitors [*maiguozei*, 卖国贼]. That does not mean that a nationalist coup is likely as in the Soviet Union in 1991, but it does mean that the Party has to continually reassert its influence in the army.

### **Structural and Procedural Changes**

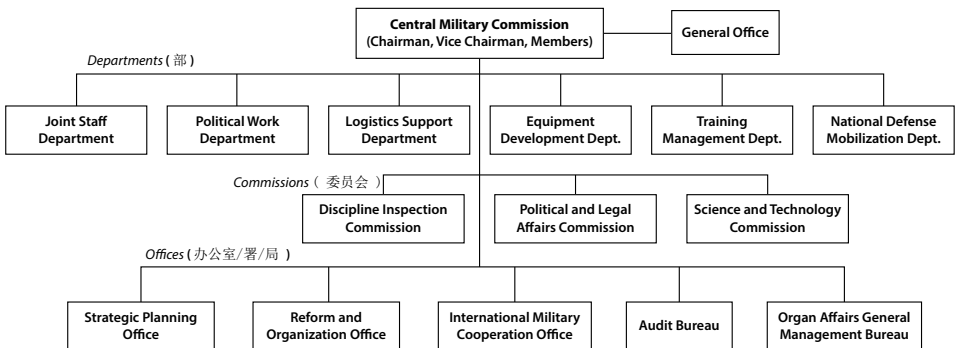
An initial sign of Xi's intent to strengthen Party control over the PLA came at the Third Plenum of the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2013. At the plenum, the Party decided in general terms to upgrade management of the PLA, noting the need for more effective leadership, bureaucratic processes (such as those related to the PLA's personnel, budgetary, and procurement systems), and laws and regulations. In addition, the plenum sought to better integrate the military into the broader national security system by creating a national security council (NSC).<sup>42</sup> These changes were designed to increase objective control in the PLA by reducing the problems of limited information-sharing and corruption. At the same time, there was an

added emphasis on political work in the PLA, as evidenced by Xi’s speech at the Gutian conference. This sought to strengthen subjective control, especially by reiterating Party loyalty within the army. Party control was also strengthened by changes to the personnel assignment system featuring more frequent rotation of senior officers. This section discusses these changes.

### Improving Information Flows

Two sets of structural changes were designed to increase the Party’s ability to understand and control PLA activities. First was disbanding the 4 general departments and replacing them with a new system of 15 offices, departments, and commissions reporting directly to the CMC. This is depicted in figure 2. This change was intended to reduce the influence of the general departments, which had become powerful enough to limit the CMC’s ability to exercise “unified command” over the military.<sup>43</sup> Specific functions previously ensconced within the general departments, such as training, mobilization, and strategic planning, were placed under direct CMC control. Moreover, as discussed below, supervisory organs including the Audit Office, Political and Legal Affairs Commission, and Discipline Inspection Commission also became direct CMC reports. This meant that information on PLA affairs that once would have gone through the general departments (and thus was subject to manipulation) would now be able to

**Figure 2.**



reach CMC members directly.

A second change was the establishment of the NSC. Although the Third Plenum was vague about the nature of this organization, the Politburo soon clarified that it is a Party organ under the Central Committee and that it would be led by Xi. The two vice chairmen are the second- and third-ranking Party members (currently Li Keqiang and Li Zhanshu). Although perhaps focused more on internal than external challenges, the NSC is designed to improve information-sharing and coordination between the PLA and civilian agencies, which if successful could increase the chances for effective crisis response. The organization will do this by maintaining a permanent structure, unlike the ad hoc National Security Leading Small Group, and by including PLA representation at a senior level and as staff liaisons.<sup>44</sup> Anecdotally, the NSC has already begun to improve information flows by forwarding situation reports from the PLA's East China Sea joint operations command center to senior Party officials.<sup>45</sup>

However, these changes are at best only a partial solution to the information asymmetries inherent in Party-army relations. One problem is that the PLA still retains control of military intelligence and information about military capabilities and operations, and it can decide what information to share with civilian Party elites. Another problem is that the institutional nexus between Party and PLA remains thin, located mainly in Xi's hands. The reforms did not increase the involvement of civilians in military affairs (though it might be expected that Xi's successor, when named, could become a CMC vice chairman).<sup>46</sup> A third challenge is that significant power over diverse issues remains in the hands of the general departments' successor organizations, namely the CMC Joint Staff, Political Work, Logistics Support, and Equipment Development departments. Those departments have considerable bureaucratic clout and opportunities to shape the decisionmaking agenda.

### Reducing Corruption

The PLA also enacted a series of structural reforms to reduce corruption

and promote more effective internal governance. A first change came in October 2014, when the PLA Audit Office was returned to the CMC from the General Logistics Department, where it had resided since 1992. The office's director explained that the transfer was meant to enhance "independence, authority, and effectiveness" of auditors within the military, allowing for greater supervision of "high-level leading organs and cadres."<sup>47</sup> A *PLA Daily* report noted that, between 2013 and 2015, the office had audited 4,024 cadres at or above the Regiment Leader level, resulting in 21 dismissals, hundreds of demotions and other penalties, and recovery of 12.1 billion RMB (approximately \$1.9 billion in 2018 U.S. dollars) in losses due to waste and mismanagement.<sup>48</sup>

Further changes were made as part of a CMC reorganization announced in January 2016. The Discipline Inspection Commission, which had been part of the General Political Department (GPD) since 1990, was returned to the CMC. The PLA also announced that teams of discipline inspectors had been created and would be conducting investigations of Party members across the PLA, just as the Central Discipline Inspection Commission has conducted investigations of Party members in the civilian bureaucracy and in state-owned enterprises as part of Xi's anti-corruption campaign. CMC Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang encouraged the inspectors to "take advantage of their new standing" within the PLA to verify "officers' political loyalty, power, and responsibility."<sup>49</sup> In addition, hotlines were established so that military members could anonymously report Party violations to the Discipline Inspection Commission.<sup>50</sup> On January 15, 2018, the PLA formally issued a new CMC Inspection Work Regulation governing the discipline inspection process and specifying the responsibilities of the CMC Inspection Work Leading Small Group, its subsidiary inspection groups, and similar bodies established in the services and the People's Armed Police.<sup>51</sup> Another organizational change was the transfer of the Political and Legal Affairs Commission, responsible for military courts and prosecutors, from the GPD to the CMC.

These reforms were potentially useful because they extricated supervisory functions from the corruption-prone general departments and gave

investigators, judges, and auditors greater bureaucratic independence from those they were supposed to be supervising. Status as part of the CMC also gave these units more authority and allowed CMC leaders (including Xi) to exercise tighter control. This was not so much an innovation as a return to the earlier system of “interlocking” directorates in which the Party maintained several distinct channels of control.<sup>52</sup> In this respect, the Audit Office, Discipline Inspection Commission, and Political and Legal Affairs Commission will reinforce the political commissar and Party committee systems (which reside in the Political Work Department, successor to the GPD). Taken together, this could result in a greater ability to identify, investigate, prevent, and punish corruption at higher levels of the PLA, especially in the former general departments. However, a key limitation is the continued lack of significant external checks on PLA activities (such as a free press or independent legislative oversight). To the extent that there is corruption within the auditing, discipline inspection, and military judicial systems themselves, structural changes will have little impact.

A related area of change was the announcement of new regulations designed to strengthen the rule of law within the PLA and encourage a stronger professional ethos among servicemembers. One important development was new restrictions on the PLA’s ability to engage in commercial activities, such as accepting civilian patients in PLA hospitals, leasing warehouses, and contracting out military construction units.<sup>53</sup> This helped to close loopholes that allowed the PLA to stay in business despite the 1998 divestiture. In addition, rules were promulgated to prevent garish displays of power by PLA officers, such as use of military license plates to avoid traffic laws, use of luxury cars, opulent banquets, and excessive foreign travel.<sup>54</sup> Still other regulations targeted the personnel system by mandating dismissal of officers on the basis of incompetence and clarifying retirement ages.<sup>55</sup> This was meant to pave the way for a younger, more capable and professional officer corps. Nevertheless, concerns remained about the efficacy of such laws. CMC Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang noted that “We need to correct the phenomenon of having law but not enforcing it, not enforcing



the law strictly, and not pursuing those who break the law.”<sup>56</sup>

### Improving Ideological Commitment

A third area of efforts to increase Party control is in the ideological arena. A key feature of the PLA’s political work in recent years has been a renewed emphasis on the principle that the “Party commands the gun.” As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in November 2012, the CMC reiterated that the PLA must “unswervingly uphold the absolute leadership of the Party over the army,” guarantee “absolute loyalty and reliability,” and support the new generation of Party officials under Xi.<sup>57</sup> Xi himself stressed the same themes at the November 2014 Gutian political work conference and elsewhere.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, the CMC highlighted the need for “reliable” Party cadres in the army, defined in one document as those who have “resolute” political views, carry out military and political orders “without hesitation,” and are able to resist “incorrect ideological trends.”<sup>59</sup> Senior PLA officers were also required to *biaotai*, or publicly pledge their dedication to the Party and its leadership.<sup>60</sup>

There is nothing inherently unique about the recent emphasis on Party loyalty in the PLA. The fact that this theme reappeared after the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress does not imply specific concerns about disloyalty to the Party or to Xi personally within the army (although it is impossible to rule out such concerns). Rather, it is consistent with a pattern established in the immediate post-Tiananmen era of periodic political campaigns deemed necessary to ensure that Party control does not waver—or what David Finkelstein calls the “re-redding” of the PLA.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, a CMC instruction on political work released in January 2015 reaffirmed the need to “forge the soul” of the army to follow Party commands, requiring continued ideological education at all levels, but “especially in the upper echelons.”<sup>62</sup> Hence, even as officer training and promotion criteria increasingly stress operational capabilities, the need for Party education and bona fides will remain central to the PLA’s personnel system. Indeed, one PLA officer suggested in a 2017 conversation that political loyalty has become the most important factor in promotions.

A secondary emphasis of PLA political work has been on reinvigorating support for Marxist principles. Overall, the CMC requires that the army be educated with the “important theories of communism and socialism with Chinese characteristics,” in addition to the specific principles exhorted by Xi.<sup>63</sup> This has led to an emphasis on socialist norms such as austerity, intra-Party democracy, service to the people, criticism and self-criticism, and upright actions.<sup>64</sup> The goal is to instill values that counteract more self-interested impulses that give rise to materialism and ultimately to corruption and lack of discipline. However, as already noted, the appeal of Marxism in Chinese society has waned considerably since the 1980s. This is no less true in the PLA, as illustrated in the extreme in cases of self-aggrandizement such as those of Xu Caihou and Gu Junshan. PLA members might thus vocalize support for Marxism, but it is unclear that those values are being re-internalized to any significant degree.

### **Personnel Assignment Changes**

A fourth aspect of efforts to tighten Party control over the PLA involves rotating senior officers to reduce the risk of collusion between commanders and political commissars and to break up existing patronage networks that might facilitate corruption. Rotation is a traditional means of preventing senior officers from developing their own local political networks that might challenge civilian control. In the case of the PLA reforms, the assignment pattern of commanders and political commissars varied at different levels of the ground forces. At the theater command (TC) level, four of the five inaugural commanders were previously assigned to other military regions, while all five of the political commissars were local. At the (newly established) TC army level, four of the five commanders were local, while all of the political commissars rotated from other military regions. At the group army level, almost all of the commanders of the group armies were transferred from other military regions, while most of the political commissars were from the local area.<sup>65</sup>

This pattern of personnel assignments balanced the benefits of famil-

ilarity with the operating area and subordinate officers with the enhanced political control provided by transferring officers to new locations and breaking up existing patronage networks. These rotations meant that in most cases the commander and political commissar did not have an existing personal relationship and were therefore less likely to trust each other and engage in corrupt behavior. They also meant that if a theater commander contemplated ordering subordinate ground units to engage in unauthorized activity, the operational chain of command included a TC army commander and group army commanders that he did not know well. Taken as a whole, this pattern of senior officer assignments enhanced Party control and the supervision provided by the political commissar system, but likely at some cost to operational effectiveness because the theater commander, political commissar, and subordinate commanders were all unfamiliar with each other.

### **Xi's Political Strategy for Implementing Reforms**

PLA reformers have advocated structural reforms since the early 1990s, but previous reform efforts (including some backed by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao) were stymied by bureaucratic opposition within the PLA. How has Xi Jinping succeeded where his predecessors failed? Xi has employed a number of tools and tactics to pursue the reform goals of building a PLA that can fight and win informationized wars by improving its joint operations capability and strengthening CCP control over the PLA. This section describes the elements of Xi's political strategy and the political tools available to pursue his military reform agenda.

#### **Embed Military Reforms in a Broader Reform Agenda**

Key elements of the military reforms were unveiled in the Third Plenum decision document approved by the Central Committee in November 2013.<sup>66</sup> The plenum not only identified key areas of military reform, but also sent a powerful message that fundamental organizational changes to the PLA were an important part of China's overall national reforms and

were widely supported by the top CCP leadership. By embedding the PLA reforms in a broader reform agenda, and elevating the decision mechanism to the Central Committee level (where the power of PLA senior leaders was diffused), Xi made it harder for potential opponents to resist the reforms. As one PLA officer noted, incorporating military reforms into the national reform agenda elevated military reform “to the will of the Party and act of state.”<sup>67</sup> The plenum decision document outlined key aspects of the reforms, sometimes in vague terms that indicated the desired direction of change without providing specific details. This is an effective device for building consensus on the reform agenda while deferring divisive internal debates (for example, over which services would gain or lose personnel in the PLA restructuring).

#### **Emphasize Xi’s Personal Involvement**

Xi has used his personal involvement in the reform process to demonstrate his commitment to making the reforms succeed. Widely considered the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng Xiaoping, Xi has invested his time and attention to military matters in ways that his predecessors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao did not.<sup>68</sup> For example, in his first 3 years as CMC chairman (November 2012–December 2015), Xi made 53 publicized appearances at military events. During the equivalent period of time from 2004–2007, Hu made only 36 appearances.<sup>69</sup> One nonauthoritative Chinese media report claims that Xi spends a half-day every week at his CMC office, in contrast to Hu, who rarely used his office.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, as Nan Li argues, Xi’s more assertive leadership style has allowed him to exert greater influence within the PLA than either Jiang or Hu.<sup>71</sup> Xi has also highlighted the “CMC chairmanship responsibility system,” which emphasizes that he bears ultimate responsibility over all military matters.

Xi has used his positions as chairman of the CMC and chairman of the CMC Leading Small Group on military reform established in January 2014 to lead efforts to flesh out the details of military restructuring, including chairing meetings to study the feasibility of various options.<sup>72</sup> More than 20

working groups were established under the CMC to research and consider various aspects of the reforms, with extensive consultations with military and civilian units at various levels and more than 150 revisions of the reform plan.<sup>73</sup> Xi personally announced the first details on the reforms at a military parade in Beijing in September 2015, stating that the PLA's size would be reduced by 300,000 by the end of 2017, bringing total personnel down from 2.3 to 2 million.<sup>74</sup> In November 2015, he chaired the CMC meeting that adopted the detailed reform plan.<sup>75</sup>

Since the reforms were announced, Xi has been personally involved in pushing them forward. One means involved making formal speeches to military audiences to launch key elements of the reforms, including a December 27, 2015, speech at the PLA newspaper *Jiefangjun Bao* and a major address on the reforms to CMC and senior PLA leaders at a December 31, 2015, ceremony to establish the army as a separate service, rename the Second Artillery as the Rocket Force and elevate it to full service status, and stand up the Strategic Support Force.<sup>76</sup> Xi met with the leaders of the new services and personally awarded them banners to serve as symbols of their services.<sup>77</sup> He made a similar appearance and speech at a January 11, 2016, ceremony to establish the reorganized CMC with its new departments, commissions, and offices.<sup>78</sup> Xi used these appearances and a photo opportunity at the CMC joint operations command center to highlight the missions and importance of the new services and the reorganized CMC and to reinforce his authority as CMC chairman and his personal commitment to the reforms. He also led a 2-day conference on military reform in December 2016 that reaffirmed the need for a smaller, more agile military.<sup>79</sup>

Since Xi himself cannot be personally involved at all times and in all aspects of the reforms, he has installed trusted agents within the PLA who can ensure that his instructions are being followed. One such individual is Lieutenant General Qin Shengxiang, director of the CMC General Office from December 2012 until September 2017, who was also dual-hatted as director of the new CMC Reform and Organization Office, which has a leading role in formulating reform plans and ensuring implementation.<sup>80</sup> Another key figure

is Major General Zhong Shaojun, who has been a senior civilian aide to Xi since Xi's time as Zhejiang Party secretary. When Xi became CMC chairman, Zhong was given a military rank of senior colonel and designated as CMC General Office deputy director and director of Xi's personal office within the CMC. His close association to Xi and responsibilities in the General Office likely gave him significant influence despite his relatively low formal rank and grade.<sup>81</sup> Major General Zhong was subsequently promoted to replace Lieutenant General Qin as director of the CMC General Office.

### **Protect Senior Officers**

The PLA organizational restructuring is a major transformation that saw the end of the general departments, the transition from seven military regions to five theater commands, and the establishment or change in status of three services. Some senior PLA officers stayed in essentially the same jobs under a new organization structure; others changed to new positions, sometimes in different geographic areas. One tacit principle is clear, however: all senior (MR-grade and above) PLA officers were given jobs at their current grades and kept their current ranks. This proved to be a transitional arrangement that only lasted through the personnel shifts prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in October 2017, which also named a new Central Military Commission and removed the service chiefs and directors of the CMC Equipment Development and Logistics Support departments from their ex officio seats on the CMC. Protecting the personal career interests of senior PLA officers (as opposed to forcing officers whose organizations were disestablished to retire early) is an important means of defusing opposition to the reforms from leaders whose organizations would lose personnel, authority, or budget in the reorganization.

### **Compensate Reform Losers**

Despite its traditional dominance in numbers and the PLA leadership ranks, the army has lost status, budget share, and end strength relative to the other services in recent years. Since 2004, Chinese defense white papers

have emphasized the need for increased funding for the navy, air force, and Second Artillery. “Optimizing the composition of the services and arms of the PLA” has meant reductions in “technologically backward” army units and personnel increases for the other services.<sup>82</sup> Most of the 300,000 troops that will be cut from the PLA will come from army ranks, and the army is widely perceived as the likely loser in current PLA organizational reforms.<sup>83</sup> Elimination of the general departments and establishment of a new army commander and headquarters reduced the army to bureaucratic equality with the other services. The army also lost direct control of space and cyber units, which were transferred to the new Strategic Support Force.

Nevertheless, the reforms provided compensation that may actually have increased the army’s power, at least in the short term.<sup>84</sup> The new joint C2 structure gives theater commanders both wartime and peacetime operational control over all army, navy, air force, and conventional rocket force units within their areas of responsibility. This significantly expands the authority of theater commanders relative to commanders of the former military regions. All five of the initial theater commanders and four of the five initial theater political commissars were ground force officers (and the other political commissar has spent most of his career in the army). Giving all the theater commander positions to army officers provided a degree of assurance to the army, although subsequent personnel reshuffles named navy Admiral Yuan Yubai as commander of the Southern TC and air force General Yi Xiaoguang as commander of the Central TC.<sup>85</sup>

Another effort to defuse potential opposition involves ensuring that those officers and NCOs who will lose their positions as part of the 300,000-person downsizing of the PLA will receive pensions, civilian jobs, and compensation to which they are entitled. Two PLA National Defense University researchers published an article in the *PLA Daily* warning that salary and pension issues needed to be addressed properly to ensure that military downsizing did not destabilize the military and society.<sup>86</sup> The PLA has learned important lessons from previous force reductions and has codified the benefits that conscripts, NCOs, and officers should receive,

which vary based on status, years of service, and how they separate from the PLA.<sup>87</sup> Challenges include allocating sufficient resources to pay earned benefits, ensuring that local officials fulfill their responsibilities to provide benefits to PLA veterans, and pressuring state-owned enterprises and local government offices to fulfill their responsibility to provide civilian jobs to PLA veterans who are entitled to them.

One aspect of the reforms gives responsibility for veterans affairs to the new CMC Organ Affairs General Management Bureau.<sup>88</sup> Senior leaders, including Xi, have repeatedly stressed the importance of local officials fulfilling their obligations to veterans.<sup>89</sup> These measures, and the establishment of a new Ministry for Veterans Affairs in March 2018, are efforts to demonstrate the Party's commitment to take better care of downsized soldiers than in the past.<sup>90</sup> The October 11, 2017, protest by disgruntled PLA veterans in front of the Ba Yi building serves as a vivid reminder of the potential for veterans to engage in embarrassing and politically sensitive protests.<sup>91</sup> (See the chapter by Ma and Chen in this volume for more details on the force reduction process.)

### **Enlist Support from Reform Winners**

Generally speaking, the navy, air force, and rocket force are likely to be the organizational winners from PLA reforms. They have already benefited from an increased share of the PLA budget since 2004 and are likely to be protected from significant force cuts in the 300,000-person downsizing and may even increase their size. Although the army dominated the initial theater command senior leadership and the senior CMC staff, the emphasis on jointness in the reforms created opportunities for the other services to increase their policy influence and their share of senior officer positions. One early indicator was the number of air force and navy officers in theater deputy commander positions. In the pre-reform system, air force and navy officers held only 10 of the 32 MR deputy commander positions, the minimum possible given air force and navy responsibility for commanding seven MR air forces and three fleets.<sup>92</sup> After the reforms, officers from those services occupied 16 of 31 deputy commander positions in the five theaters.<sup>93</sup>



As noted above, a navy officer subsequently became commander of the Southern TC and an air force officer was named as Central TC commander.

### **Use Threat of Corruption Investigations to Intimidate and Punish Opponents**

Investigations into former CMC vice chairmen Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou not only revealed their complicity in corruption on a massive scale but also confirmed the widespread practice of PLA officers paying large bribes for promotion to senior positions. This suggests that most senior PLA officers are vulnerable to corruption investigations that would reveal their complicity in the pay-to-play promotion system. However, in the initial phases of the reform, anti-corruption investigations focused primarily on the logistics and political systems (which, along with military district commands, offer the most opportunities for corruption). Senior PLA operational commanders were largely spared (with the potential exception of some officers with close ties to Guo, Xu, and the network run by Bo Xilai and Zhou Yongkang). Nevertheless, the threat of investigation is a potent tool to intimidate or remove any officers who might obstruct reform efforts or show insufficient loyalty to Xi Jinping.<sup>94</sup> Once the organizational reforms were implemented, Xi demonstrated his willingness to use this tool by launching corruption investigations into then CMC Joint Staff director Fang Fenghui and then CMC Political Work director Zhang Yang.<sup>95</sup>

### **Use Control over Promotions to Reward Allies and Supporters of Reforms**

Guo and Xu were evidently able to extract such large bribes for positions because Hu Jintao was not actively involved in the promotion and selection process, essentially rubber-stamping decisions made by the CMC vice chairmen. Conversely, Xi Jinping appears to be significantly more engaged in the promotion and assignment process, and reportedly conducts interviews with candidates for senior military positions.<sup>96</sup> Xi's personal engagement in the selection process provides opportunities to place supporters of reforms in key positions and to reward officers with whom

he has close ties or who display personal loyalty to his leadership.<sup>97</sup> This approach would be consistent with his broader approach to civilian personnel appointments within the Party and government. The reshuffle of senior PLA officers in the runup to the 19<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2017 provides additional evidence of Xi's involvement in PLA personnel decisions (see the chapter by McFadden, Fassler, and Godby in this volume for an analysis).

## **Conclusion**

The previous section indicates that Xi has an extensive range of tools to influence the PLA and suggests that he employed a reasonably coherent and phased political strategy to push the reforms through. How effective will he be in pursuing the long-term goals of building a PLA with a stronger joint operations capability that can fight and win informationized wars and strengthening CCP control over the PLA?

One starting point is to ask whether Xi's objectives are compatible with the interests and goals of senior PLA leaders.<sup>98</sup> Despite the potential negative impact on some organizational and individual interests, there is likely considerable support within the PLA leadership for reforms that will improve PLA combat capability. The organizational reforms draw upon insights from the PLA's study of foreign military operations and on theoretical study of the nature of modern war.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, senior PLA leaders were involved in drawing up the details of the military reforms, which appear to incorporate some compromises to protect the interests of individual leaders, major organizations, and those soldiers who will be let go as part of the military restructuring.

Conversely, Xi's efforts to strengthen Party control will reduce the autonomy of the PLA as an institution and potentially have some negative effects on both operational effectiveness and on the organizational and personal interests of PLA leaders. Will the increased emphasis on political work interfere with efforts to build a more operationally effective PLA? Every hour spent on political education is 1 hour less spent on training, so some tradeoffs are inevitable. Will the emphasis on regularization and

stronger supervisory mechanisms lead to paralysis or disruption in major parts of the PLA, especially if the anti-corruption campaign continues indefinitely as an instrument of Xi's personal control?

At a more fundamental level, can efforts to use political work to rekindle the ideological flame of belief in Marxism-Leninism succeed? Senior PLA officers have been willing to say the correct slogans and swear their loyalty to the Party and to Xi as the core leader of the Party. But formal compliance is not the same as genuine belief, and may not produce better behavior over the long term or loyalty to the Party in a political crisis. Moreover, the hypocrisy of CCP leaders pursuing an anti-corruption campaign when their own family members have amassed fortunes by trading on their political connections will likely undermine efforts to produce cleaner governance.<sup>100</sup>

The CCP's insistence on reiterating the principle of absolute loyalty to the Party suggests that CCP leaders themselves are not fully confident about PLA loyalty. If the means of ensuring objective control over the PLA require a high degree of subjective control (in the form of ideological belief by those officers doing the supervision) to be effective, then Xi's efforts to improve supervisory mechanisms may not succeed.<sup>101</sup> Even if these measures are effective in the short term, they will require continued high-level attention from Xi himself. This could become a problem in the future if Xi's attention gets drawn away to deal with other pressing challenges. A permanent anti-corruption campaign, like the permanent revolution Mao called for during the Cultural Revolution, is likely to be highly disruptive.

The PLA reforms are still a work in progress, and the PLA is engaged in figuring out how to make its new joint C2 system work. Knowledgeable observers differ in their assessments of whether the reforms are likely to make a significant difference in operational effectiveness.<sup>102</sup> Observing the PLA's progress in building an effective joint operations capability that can, as Xi Jinping says, "fight and win wars," will be challenging, especially in the absence of actual combat, but at least there will be some exercises and operations to observe and some tangible indicators of progress.<sup>103</sup>

Assessing Xi's efforts to reassert Party control over the PLA will be much more difficult. Senior PLA officers are likely to say the right things; any officers who refuse to profess loyalty to the Party and to Xi will not last long. But the real test would only come in a major political crisis or if the CCP's efforts to maintain economic growth and to achieve nationalist goals falter. Until then, our assessment that the reforms are more likely to succeed in improving PLA operational performance than in reasserting CCP control over the military must remain a tentative judgment.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For an overview, see *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2015* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015), available at <[www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015\\_China\\_Military\\_Power\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf)>.

<sup>2</sup> See James C. Mulvenon and David M. Finkelstein, eds., *China's Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent analysis, see Adam P. Liff and Andrew S. Erickson, "Demystifying China's Defence Spending: Less Mysterious in the Aggregate," *China Quarterly*, no. 216 (December 2013), 805–830.

<sup>4</sup> *Annual Report to Congress*, i.

<sup>5</sup> Michael S. Chase et al., *China's Incomplete Military Transformation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Brian Lafferty, Aaron Shraberg, and Morgan Clemens, *China's Civil-Military Integration*, SITC Research Brief 2013-10 (San Diego, CA: Study of Innovation and Technology in China, January 2013).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of China's global interests, see Phillip C. Saunders, *China's Global Activism: Strategy, Drivers, and Tools* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2006); and David Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Chase et al., *China's Incomplete Military Transformation*, 48–49.

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent overview, see Kenneth W. Allen et al., *Institutional Changes of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: Overview and Challenges* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Minnie Chan, "Hu Jintao's Weak Grip on China's Army

Inspired Xi Jinping's Military Shake-Up: Sources," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), March 11, 2015, available at <[www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1734663/hu-jintaos-weak-grip-chinas-army-inspired-president-xi-jinpings-military](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1734663/hu-jintaos-weak-grip-chinas-army-inspired-president-xi-jinpings-military)>.

<sup>11</sup> "Xi Stresses Joint Battle Command for Military Reform," Xinhua, April 21, 2016, available at <[www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-04/21/content\\_24709910.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-04/21/content_24709910.htm)>.

<sup>12</sup> See Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, *China's Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms*, INSS Strategic Forum 294 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, April 2016), available at <<http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-294.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> See Alice Miller, "The PLA in the Party Leadership Decisionmaking System," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, ed. Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 58–83.

<sup>14</sup> Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5–7.

<sup>15</sup> Richard H. Kohn, "How Democracies Control the Military," *Journal of Democracy* 8, no. 4 (1997), 140–153.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, "Reforming Civil-Military Relations," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 4 (1995), 9–17.

<sup>17</sup> Jaehwan Lim, *The Emergence and Demise of Military Governance in China: From Cultural Revolution to Deng Xiaoping* (Nagoya, Japan: Nagoya University Press, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> On the concept of "subjective" and "objective" control, see Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957). For a review of the literature on civil-military relations in China, see Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, *Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA's Role in Elite Politics*, China Strategic Perspectives 2 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2010), available at <<http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/china/ChinaPerspectives-2.pdf>>.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview, see James C. Mulvenon, *Soldiers of Fortune: The Rise and Fall of the Chinese Military-Business Complex, 1978–1998* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> James C. Mulvenon, "PLA Divestiture 2.0: We Mean It This Time," *China Leadership Monitor*, vol. 50 (Summer 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, "Introduction," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> For a summary of the Chinese government's view of the security environment, see *China's Military Strategy* (Beijing: State Council of the People's Republic

of China, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> For two recent analyses employing a “principal-agent” framework to assess civil-military relations in China, see Jaehwan Lim, “Drawing a Fine Line Between Society and Military: A Political Logic of Military Reform in China,” paper prepared for the Japan Association of International Relations Conference, Tokyo, October 14, 2016; and Shinji Yamaguchi, “Xi Jinping’s Military Reform and Party-Military Relations in China,” paper prepared for the Japan Association of International Relations Conference, Tokyo, October 14, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that the Central Military Commission (CMC) vice chairmen hold ex officio seats on the Politburo and several senior PLA officers are represented on the Party Central Committee, though there is little evidence that these Party organs have played a significant role in military affairs.

<sup>25</sup> On the antisatellite test, see James C. Mulvenon, “Rogue Warriors? A Puzzled Look at the Chinese ASAT Test,” *China Leadership Monitor*, vol. 20 (Winter 2007). On the J-20 test, see Andrew Scobell, “The J-20 Episode and Civil-Military Relations in China,” Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Washington, DC, March 10, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Scobell, “Is There a Civil-Military Gap in China’s Peaceful Rise?” *Parameters* 39, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 4–22.

<sup>27</sup> Joel Wuthnow, “China’s New ‘Black Box’: Origins, Prospects and Obstacles for the Chinese Central National Security Commission,” *China Quarterly*, no. 232 (December 2017), 886–903.

<sup>28</sup> Chase et al., *China’s Incomplete Military Transformation*, 48–49.

<sup>29</sup> Mulvenon, “PLA Divestiture 2.0.”

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth W. Allen et al., *Institutional Reforms of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Overview and Challenges* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2002), 67–68.

<sup>31</sup> Tom Ginsburg, “Administrative Law and the Judicial Control of Agents in Authoritarian Regimes” in *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes*, ed. Tom Ginsburg and Tamir Moustafa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58–72.

<sup>32</sup> David Shambaugh, “The Soldier and the State in China: The Political Work System in the People’s Liberation Army,” *China Quarterly*, no. 127 (September 1991), 536–550.

<sup>33</sup> One claim made in Chinese media was that former CMC Vice Chairman Xu Caihou had netted \$3.25 million for the sale of a military region command position. Cited in Cheng Li, “Promoting ‘Young Guards’: The Recent High Turnover in the PLA

Leadership (Part 1: Purges and Reshuffles),” *China Leadership Monitor*, vol. 48 (Fall 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Thomas A. Bickford, “Regularization and the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: An Assessment of Change,” *Asian Survey* 40, no. 3 (June 2000), 456–474.

<sup>35</sup> Susan Finder, “Ruling the PLA According to Law: An Oxymoron?” *China Brief* 15, no 21 (November 2, 2015), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/ruling-the-pla-according-to-law-an-oxymoron/>>.

<sup>36</sup> “All Army Political Work Conference Opens in Gutian, Xi Jinping Delivers an Important Speech” [全军政治工作会议在古田召开习近平出席会议并发表重要讲话], *Xinhua*, November 1, 2014, available at <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-11/01/c\\_1113074055.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-11/01/c_1113074055.htm)>.

<sup>37</sup> Zhang Yu and Chang Xuemei [张玉, 常雪梅], eds., “It Is Urgently Required to Settle Apparent Problems in Political Work” [政治工作存在的突出问题亟须解决], *PLA Daily* [解放军报], November 5, 2014, available at <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/pinglun/n/2014/1105/c78779-25978483.html>>.

<sup>38</sup> Yu Guang [禹光], “Looking at Casting the Army’s Soul from the Modern Values of the Gutian Conference” [从古田会议的当代价值看铸牢军魂], *Qiushi* [求是], July 31, 2014, available at <[www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2014-07/31/c\\_1111827487.htm](http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2014-07/31/c_1111827487.htm)>. The author is director of the PLA Press, part of the former General Political Department.

<sup>39</sup> Shambaugh, “The Soldier and the State in China,” 555–557.

<sup>40</sup> “PLA Reiterates Loyalty to CPC Leadership,” *Xinhua*, July 17, 2007, available at <[www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/17/content\\_5438017.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/17/content_5438017.htm)>; “No Nationalization of Military in China,” *China Daily*, June 20, 2011, available at <[www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-06/20/content\\_12739234.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-06/20/content_12739234.htm)>.

<sup>41</sup> It was also unclear who supported nationalization of the PLA during the Jiang and Hu years. See Michael D. Swaine, “Civil-Military Relations and Domestic Power and Policies,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 2, 2005.

<sup>42</sup> The full text of the Third Plenum decision (in English) is available at <[www.china.org.cn/china/third\\_plenary\\_session/](http://www.china.org.cn/china/third_plenary_session/)>.

<sup>43</sup> Wu Ming [吴铭], “Remolding Our Military’s Leadership and Command Structure Is a Necessary Step in the PLA’s Rejuvenation” [重塑我军领导指挥体制是强军兴军的必然选择], *PLA Daily* [解放军报], November 30, 2015, available at <[http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/n2014/tp/content\\_6791140.htm](http://jz.chinamil.com.cn/n2014/tp/content_6791140.htm)>.

<sup>44</sup> Wuthnow, “China’s New ‘Black Box.’”

<sup>45</sup> Michael D. Swaine, “The PLA Role in China’s Foreign Policy and Crisis Behavior,” in *PLA Influence on China’s National Security Policymaking*, 146.

<sup>46</sup> Xi served as CMC vice chairman from 2010 to 2013, as did Hu Jintao from

1999 to 2005.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Xiaoyi [王晓易], ed., “Effectively Use the ‘Sharp Sword’ of Auditing to Build a Defense Line of Supervision” [用好审计“利剑” 筑牢监督防线], *PLA Daily* [解放军报], March 7, 2015, available at <<http://news.163.com/15/0307/06/AK363OKJ00014AED.html>>.

<sup>48</sup> Jiang Pingping and Cheng Hongyi [姜萍萍, 程宏毅], eds., “Push Forward the Innovative Development of Army Audit Work from a New Starting Point” [在新起点上推动军队审计工作创新发展], *PLA Daily* [解放军报], January 29, 2015, available at <<http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/0129/c83083-26471805-2.html>>.

<sup>49</sup> Nectar Gan, “PLA’s New Top-Level Anti-Corruption Units Swing into Action,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), May 5, 2016, available at <[www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1941520/plas-new-top-level-anti-corruption-units-swing-action](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/1941520/plas-new-top-level-anti-corruption-units-swing-action)>.

<sup>50</sup> Yao Jianing, ed., “Chinese Military Opens Channels for Reporting Disciplinary Violations,” *China Military Online*, February 16, 2016, available at <[http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-02/16/content\\_6912001.htm](http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-02/16/content_6912001.htm)>.

<sup>51</sup> “Central Military Commission Regulations on Roving Inspection Work” [中央军委巡视工作条例], PRC Ministry of National Defense, January 17, 2018, available at <[www.mod.gov.cn/shouye/2018-01/17/content\\_4802593.htm](http://www.mod.gov.cn/shouye/2018-01/17/content_4802593.htm)>.

<sup>52</sup> Shambaugh, “The Soldier and the State in China,” 527–568.

<sup>53</sup> Mulvenon, “PLA Divestiture 2.0,” 1.

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<sup>93</sup> *Directory of PRC Military Personalities March 2016* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2016).

<sup>94</sup> See Derek Grossman and Michael S. Chase, “Why Xi Is Purging the Chinese Military,” *The National Interest*, April 15, 2016, available at <<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-xi-purging-the-chinese-military-15795?page=show>>.

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<sup>96</sup> Author interviews with two PLA officers, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> See Cheng Li, *Chinese Politics in the Xi Jinping Era: Reassessing Collective Leadership* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2016).

<sup>98</sup> See Isaac B. Kardon and Phillip C. Saunders, “Reconsidering the PLA as an Interest Group,” in *PLA Influence on China’s National Security Policymaking*, 33–57.

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Lessons from Other Peoples’ Wars* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011).

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<sup>101</sup> For a more positive assessment, see Chien-wen Kou, “Xi Jinping in Command: Solving the Principal-Agent Problem in CCP-PLA Relations?” *China Quarterly*, vol. 232 (December 2017), 866–885.

<sup>102</sup> Michael S. Chase and Jeff Engstrom, “PLA Reforms: An Optimistic Take,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 83 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2015), 49–52; and Roger Cliff, “PLA Reforms: A Pessimistic Take,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 83 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2015), 53–56.

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