

CHAIRMAN XI REMAKES THE PLA

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Integral to Xi Jinping’s vision of restoring China to greatness—what he defines as the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” [*zhonghua minzu weida fuxing*, 中华民族伟大复兴]—is building a more modern, capable, and disciplined military. China’s economic development, territorial integrity, and even the survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) itself cannot be guaranteed without an army that can fight and prevail in modern warfare. Articulating the need for a stronger military, Xi and his colleagues have reflected on periods of Chinese weakness, such as the era of imperial decline in the late 19th century and the Japanese occupation in the 1930s and 1940s. In Xi’s words, a “nation’s backwardness in military affairs has a profound influence on a nation’s security. I often peruse the annals of modern Chinese history and feel heartbroken at the tragic scenes of us being beaten because of our ineptitude.”¹ Such humiliations, in his view, should never be repeated.

Xi’s ambition to reshape and modernize the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has been apparent from his early days as CCP general secretary and Central Military Commission (CMC) chairman. At the third plenum of the 18th Party Congress, held in October 2013, Xi and other Party elites declared

their intention to overhaul the military's command structure, update its training and logistics systems, adjust the size and composition of the services, unveil new rules and regulations governing military personnel, and strengthen civil-military cooperation in technological development and other areas.² In early 2014, Xi assumed leadership of a leading group on military reform, symbolizing his central role in the process. At the group's first meeting, Xi declared that "national defense and military reform are an important part and an important symbol of China's overall reform," noting that the overriding goal was to produce a military that can "fight and win battles."³

Following an interval of study and assessment, Xi announced a series of major organizational changes in late 2015 and early 2016.⁴ Some of the key reforms included a reorganization of the bureaucratic structure under the CMC, creation of a system of five joint theater commands (TCs), and establishment of two new quasi-services that will support joint operations: the Strategic Support Force (SSF) and Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF). This initial tranche of reforms was followed by a series of additional changes, such as the execution of a 300,000-person force reduction, elimination of a number of group armies and conversion of army (and some air force) divisions to brigades, and an overhaul of the PLA's professional military education system (more specifics on the reforms are provided later).

These changes help support the longer term vision for military transformation articulated by Xi at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017:

- by 2020, the PLA should basically achieve mechanization and make strides in applying information technology and developing strategic capabilities
- by 2035, national defense modernization should be basically completed
- by mid-century, the people's armed forces (including the PLA, People's Armed Police, and militia) should become "world-class forces" [*shijie yiliu jun*, 世界一流军].⁵

The Xi-era reforms represent the latest stage in a decades-long process of organizational realignment and modernization. According to Chinese

sources, the PLA underwent 10 major restructurings between 1949 and 2013, most of which attempted to reduce end strength, professionalize the officer and noncommissioned officer corps, and adapt military force structure to meet new operational challenges.⁶ Many of the focus areas of the current (11th) round of reforms, such as strengthening the PLA's ability to conduct joint operations and rebalancing the military's composition from the ground forces to the naval, air, and missile forces, were conceived in the 1980s and 1990s.⁷ This agenda followed changes to Chinese military strategy to focus less on preparing for a general war with the Soviet Union or the United States—which had driven China's defense planning during the Cold War—and more on a smaller scale conflict around China's borders.⁸ Key events signaling the need for reform included the 1990–1991 Gulf War, which showcased the U.S. military's advantages in doctrine and technology, and the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait crisis, which exposed the PLA's inability to deter Taiwan independence forces or counter U.S. intervention on Taipei's behalf.⁹

However, fundamental reforms eluded Xi's two predecessors, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. The PLA's service composition remained heavily skewed toward the ground force, for instance, and the outmoded command structure was not geared toward rapid crisis response or joint operations. The problem likely resulted from a combination of Jiang and Hu's weak political influence over the military, bureaucratic inertia, and opposition from corrupt senior officers who profited, quite literally, from a continuation of the status quo. What is unique about Xi's reforms is not the agenda itself, but his ability to overcome bureaucratic resistance.¹⁰ He has done this through his own personal charisma as well as savvy political tactics, such as leveraging anti-corruption investigations over opponents and handpicking loyalists for key positions. The result has been a more extensive organizational transformation than what Jiang and Hu were able to achieve, and perhaps the most important set of reforms in the PLA's 90-year history.

The implications of the Xi-era reforms for China's neighbors and potential adversaries are significant. A better trained, organized, and equipped PLA will be in a stronger position to accomplish its three primary

functions: winning modern wars, especially what the U.S. Department of Defense terms *short-duration, high-intensity regional conflicts*; deterring both larger and smaller competitors; and protecting Chinese interests within and beyond Asia.¹¹ Rival territorial claimants, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan, and India, will face a more confident and capable adversary in the South and East China seas and across the Sino-Indian border. Taiwan will have to contend with a PLA that can more credibly plan and execute joint operations, such as amphibious landings, blockades, and joint firepower strikes.¹² U.S. forces operating throughout the Indo-Pacific region will need to anticipate a PLA that can respond more quickly to regional crises and conduct counter-intervention operations more effectively.

Foreign analysts have only begun to explore the contents, drivers, and possible implications of Xi's campaign to restructure the PLA.¹³ Many issues remain shrouded in uncertainty and warrant further examination. These include:

- what impacts the reforms are having on PLA operations, training, and logistics
- the prospects for the ground forces as the reforms' nominal biggest loser, as well as the other services
- challenges the PLA is facing in cultivating operational commanders
- the structure, roles, and missions of the SSF and JLSF
- how the downsizing is being carried out, and what impact it might have on social stability
- the implications of reform for Party control over, and Xi's influence within, the PLA
- whether and how the reforms will improve coordination between the PLA and the civilian science and technology sector
- what the implications might be for the defense acquisition process.

This volume explores these and other dimensions of China's military reforms as they were planned and implemented between 2013 and 2018. The chapters are based on papers presented at the 2016 and 2017 PLA conferences

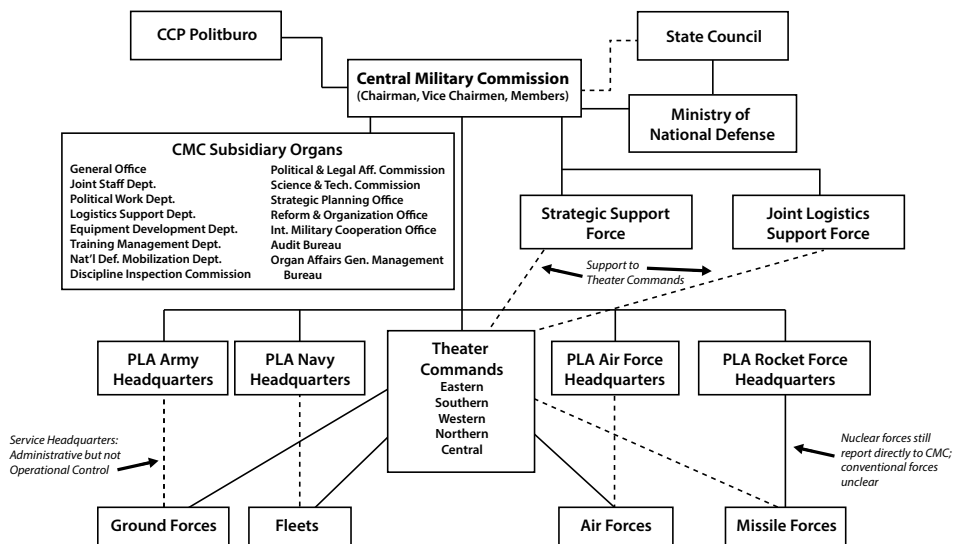
co-organized by the U.S. National Defense University, RAND, and Taiwan's Council of Advanced Policy Studies, updated to account for more recent developments.¹⁴ The goal is to assess the motivations of Xi and his associates, chronicle key successes and outstanding problems, and consider what the net effect of the reforms will be as the PLA strives to become a “world-class” military by mid-century, if not much sooner. This introduction provides an overview of the major elements and goals of the reforms and summarizes the 17 substantive chapters. A brief conclusion at the end of the book assesses the progress of the reforms to date and sketches the way ahead.

Major Elements

On New Year's Day 2016, the CMC issued a blueprint for reform that explained how the PLA would develop into a “modern military with Chinese characteristics that can win information-age wars” by 2020.¹⁵ The initial phase of the reforms involved “above the neck” [*bozi yishang*, 脖子以上] changes to the PLA's three major organizational pillars—the services, CMC, and theaters—and was introduced by Xi in a series of announcements in the winter of 2015–2016. The new PLA structure is depicted in figure 1. First, on December 31, 2015, Xi announced three service-related changes:

- The Second Artillery Force, responsible for the country's land-based nuclear and conventional missiles, was renamed the Rocket Force and upgraded to full-service [*junzhong*, 军种] status, equal to the army, navy, and air force.¹⁶ As David Logan argues in this volume, this was mainly a symbolic change, though some anticipated that it could imply greater resources and expanded missions for the Rocket Force.
- The Strategic Support Force was created with the status of an independent branch [*budui*, 部队], though with a bureaucratic grade equivalent to a service.¹⁷ This new organization consolidated a variety of functions related to the information domain, including space and cyber operations, electronic warfare, and even some psychological warfare capabilities.¹⁸ (Another new force, the Joint Logistics Support Force, was established in September 2016 to provide strategic and operational logistics support to the new joint theater commands.)¹⁹

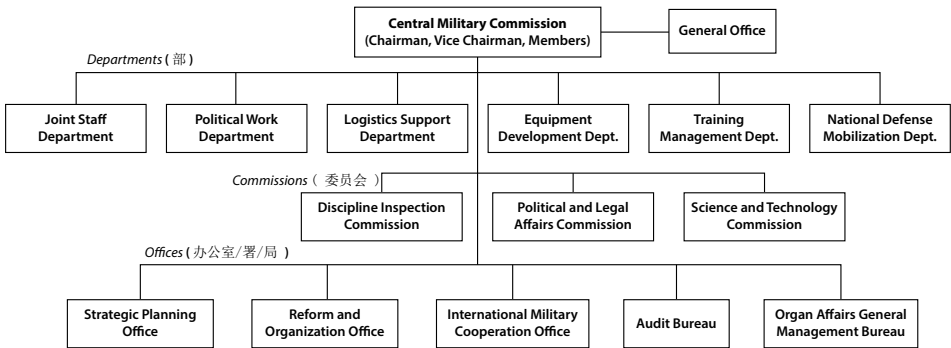
Figure 1. New PLA Structure



- Headquarters for the PLA ground forces, which had previously been commanded and administered by the general departments, were established at the national and theater levels. This reduced the army's importance by placing it on the same bureaucratic level as the navy, air force, and Rocket Force.

Second, on January 11, 2016, Xi announced that the four general departments—the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department, General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Armament Department (GAD)—had been disbanded.²⁰ Built on the Soviet model, these departments had developed into sprawling, semi-independent fiefdoms with limited external oversight. This autonomy meant that corruption had festered during the Jiang and Hu eras, especially in areas such as the promotions and logistics systems.²¹ The general departments were replaced by 15 smaller functional CMC departments, commissions, and offices that would report directly to the CMC (via the CMC General Office, which was ranked first among these organizations).²² These are depicted in figure 2, and described in detail in the appendix to this chapter.

Figure 2. New CMC Organization



The CMC reshuffle impacted the former general departments in different ways. Most affected was the GSD, whose diverse portfolio was distributed among new and existing organizations. Core operations and intelligence analysis functions were transferred to a smaller CMC Joint Staff Department (JSD), while signals intelligence and electronic warfare went to the SSF and army aviation was sent to the new army headquarters. The GSD's training, strategic planning, and mobilization departments were all removed from the successor JSD and placed under direct CMC control, indicating both their significance and the need for more top-level oversight over these functions. The other general departments were less affected, though as discussed later, several changes were made to the former GPD to encourage greater Party control and discipline in the PLA. In addition, the GAD's Science and Technology Commission was placed under direct CMC oversight, signaling Xi's intent to improve management of military innovation.

Third, the previous system of seven military regions was replaced by five joint theater commands. The military regions were largely administrative constructs that had no operational control over air, naval, and missile forces in peacetime. By contrast, theater commanders would be able to draw on conventional forces within their respective areas of responsibility to plan and execute operations (theater-based nuclear forces remained under the tight control of the CMC). Each of the theaters has a specific set of missions that

it is primarily responsible for: the Eastern Theater is responsible for Taiwan and the East China Sea, the Southern Theater handles the South China Sea and land borders with Southeast Asian states, the Western Theater covers the land borders with India and Central Asian states (as well as the restive regions of Xinjiang and Tibet), the Northern Theater would deal with a Korea contingency, and the Central Theater focuses on the defense of Beijing and can provide support to other theaters as needed. A map of the new theater boundaries appears in figure 3.

In planning and executing these major organizational changes, the PLA clearly drew inspiration from the U.S. military. Assigning service chiefs a force building function and investing operational authority in joint theater commands paralleled similar changes made in the U.S. system after World War II and solidified in the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act. The similarities, however, should not be overstated. For instance, the PLA's new regional command structure was geographically confined to China and its immediate environs, unlike the globe-spanning U.S. combatant command system. The PLA also retained a number of Leninist features that have no

Figure 3. TC Boundaries



parallel in the U.S. or other militaries in democratic countries, such as political commissars and Party committees. Indeed the reforms, as discussed below, strengthened those features in important ways.

Following a CMC work conference on military reform in December 2016, the PLA embarked on a second phase of reforms. Several notable changes were carried out in 2017 and 2018 that affected the PLA's size, composition, and personnel. First was a reduction of the PLA by 300,000 personnel, a goal that Xi had announced at a military parade in September 2015.²³ The focus was on reducing the ground forces, which had constituted nearly 70 percent of PLA personnel on the eve of reform. Following the reduction, Chinese sources claim that the army's share declined to less than 50 percent.²⁴ If true, this would represent a major step toward the longstanding goal of rebalancing the force toward the other services. The reduction also targeted noncombat personnel, such as headquarters staff, allowing more resources to be devoted to combat troops and equipment that would give the PLA a "stronger battle capability."²⁵ Overall, more than 30 percent of commissioned officers were reportedly cut.²⁶ Some personnel transitioned to jobs in local governments, state-owned enterprises, or the private sector, while others became PLA civilians.²⁷ The reduction was declared "basically complete" in March 2018 (though interviewees note that the downsizing might not be fully complete until 2020).²⁸

Second were a series of below-the-neck [*bozi yixia*, 脖子以下] force structure changes. In April 2017, Xi announced that 84 "corps-level units" had been established or adjusted, forming what he called an "indestructible combat force."²⁹ Few details were provided, though the announcement signaled that the reforms were beginning to address organizational problems at lower levels of the PLA.³⁰ Some of the changes included:

- The army continued its transformation from a group army-division-regiment structure to a standardized group army-brigade-battalion structure, which had begun in the early 2000s. The lineup of group armies was cut from 18 to 13, 15 former army divisions were converted into two brigades apiece, and combat brigades were transformed

into combined arms brigades. Revisions were also made at the level of combined arms battalions, which the ground forces had earlier announced as the “basic combat unit” [*jiben zuozhan danwei*, 基本作战单位] capable of independent maneuver.³¹ There has also been an increase in the number of more rapidly deployable army units, such as army aviation and special operations forces.³²

- The navy has expanded its marine corps, which stood at around 12,000 personnel prior to the reforms. With the conversion of one army motorized infantry brigade and up to three coastal defense units to marine brigades, the marine corps may have tripled in strength to roughly 36,000 personnel distributed among the North, East, and South Sea fleets.³³
- The air force continued its attempts to move from a division-regiment structure to a base-brigade structure for fighters and ground attack aircraft units under the theater command air forces. (Bombers, as well as transport and specialized aircraft, remain organized in divisions).³⁴
- In December 2017, the People’s Armed Police, previously under the dual command of the State Council and CMC, was placed solely under CMC leadership. Its internal organization was also significantly revised; changes included losing its responsibilities for protecting China’s gold, forestry, and hydropower resources and gaining oversight of the coast guard, which previously reported to the State Oceanic Administration.³⁵

Third were changes designed to improve the competence and quality of PLA personnel. Bonuses and other incentives were adopted to increase the share of college graduates among active-duty officers, while the reserve officer program was altered to accept only college graduates.³⁶ To retain qualified officers, the PLA reportedly offered a modest pay increase drawn from defense budgets that continued to grow by more than 8 percent a year.³⁷ The professional military educational system was restructured, with 77 institutes reduced to 43 (many were merged into the National Defense University (NDU) and National University of Defense Technology).³⁸ Curricular changes were adopted to focus on practical skills in areas such as computer science, information technology, and aerospace studies.³⁹ NDU created a new training course in joint operations for mid-level officers and

inaugurated a specialized joint operations track for its senior commanders' course.⁴⁰ Reforms to the grade and rank system were also initiated, though the results of this effort had not been announced as of mid-2018.⁴¹

Another step in the reforms came at the 19th Party Congress, when Xi announced an overhaul of the CMC membership. The congress provided Xi an opportunity to hand pick leaders that he could trust to implement the remainder of his agenda and remove those either too old, unreliable, or corrupt to serve, all of whom had been selected by his predecessors. (Two former CMC members, Fang Fenghui and Zhang Yang, were targeted by anti-corruption investigators; Zhang later committed suicide.)⁴² As detailed in the chapter in this volume by Joel McFadden, Kim Fassler, and Justin Godby, the new CMC was also reduced in size from 11 to 7 members, which notably did not include the service chiefs or heads of the successor organizations to the GLD or GAD. This suggested Xi's desire to rein in those organizations. Added was the secretary of the Discipline Inspection Commission, which is responsible for anti-corruption investigations in the PLA. Figure 4 lists the old and new CMC members.

Table. Old and New CMCs			
18th Central Committee CMC (2012–2017)		19th Central Committee CMC (2017–2022)	
Xi Jinping	Chairman	Xi Jinping	Chairman
Fan Changlong	Vice Chairman	Xu Qiliang	Vice Chairman
Xu Qiliang	Vice Chairman	Zhang Youxia	Vice Chairman
Chang Wanquan	Defense Minister	Wei Fenghe	Defense Minister
Fang Fenghui	GSD Director	Li Zuocheng	Joint Staff Department Director
Zhang Yang	GPD Director	Miao Hua	Political Work Department Director
Zhao Keshi	GLD Director	Zhang Shengmin	Discipline Inspection Commission Secretary
Zhang Youxia	GAD Director		
Wu Shengli	Navy Commander		
Ma Xiaotian	Air Force Commander		
Wei Fenghe	Second Artillery Commander		

Key: GAD: General Armament Department; GLD: General Logistics Department; GPD: General Political Department; GSD: General Staff Department.

What the Reforms Sought to Achieve

While broadly focused on building a military that can, in Xi's words, "fight and win battles," reformers also pursued three more specific objectives. First was strengthening the PLA's ability to plan and conduct joint operations. This was not a new goal: by the late 1990s, Chinese military strategists understood that success on the modern battlefield would require the PLA to better integrate the activities and capabilities of units from the different services and do so with the support of advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems and logistics systems. Part of this judgment resulted from observations of the changing character of war, especially lessons derived from U.S. operations during the Gulf War and in the Balkans, while part resulted from the specific requirements of preparing for conflict with Taiwan (including denying U.S. forces the ability to intervene on Taiwan's behalf, as they had done during the 1995–1996 crisis).⁴³ As Mark Cozad explains in his chapter, PLA doctrine and training exercises increasingly focused on joint operations in the 1990s and 2000s.

Previous reforms had failed to address several persistent weaknesses. The most significant challenge was an organizational culture that prioritized the interests of the ground forces over the other services. As noted, the army represented a large majority of all PLA personnel, while ground forces officers occupied most key command and staff billets. This was out of sync with the growing importance of developing capabilities and expertise in the maritime, air, and space domains. A related problem was the lack of a joint command structure. In peacetime, air and naval forces were under the operational control of their respective service headquarters, while the military regions took charge of army units. Prosecuting a joint campaign would have required temporary "war zones" [战区] to be established, a process that, while useful to signal strategic intent and non-kinetic escalation, would have slowed the PLA's ability to respond to an emerging crisis and denied it the element of surprise in a campaign against Taiwan. Yet another shortcoming was the failure of the military's training and education systems to produce qualified joint commanders.⁴⁴

The impetus for further reform was not only a result of these limitations but also changes in China's security environment. In his chapter in this volume, David Finkelstein notes that Chinese security assessments became increasingly dire under Xi, with a particular emphasis on challenges posed by the United States (especially the Barack Obama administration's pivot to Asia, which many in China interpreted as strategic encirclement), Japan and other regional territorial rivals, and separatist forces on Taiwan. Xi and his colleagues also closely followed the global revolution in military affairs, in which other major powers were making strides in new technologies. All this meant that the PLA would have to be prepared to win what Chinese military strategy termed *informationized local wars* [*xinxihua jubu zhanzheng*, 信息化局部战争], the cornerstone of which is an ability to conduct joint operations.⁴⁵

Reforms undertaken between 2015 and 2018 advanced this agenda in several ways. In brief, these included:

- rebalancing service composition to put more weight on naval, air, and missile forces
- creating the SSF and JLSF, which provided critical operational support to joint commanders
- removing the service chiefs from operational chain of command, while granting theater commanders operational oversight over all conventional forces within their respective regions
- establishing an independent training department under the CMC to formulate and enforce joint training standards
- revising professional military educational curricula to put more emphasis on joint operations
- increasing specialized forces, such as amphibious and helicopter units, that would be essential to a joint campaign.

These adjustments coincided with personnel changes that placed more navy and air force officers in key positions, including as commanders of two of the five theaters.⁴⁶

Second was a desire to revitalize Party control and discipline within the PLA. The PLA has always been a "Party-army," which must follow the

CCP's instructions and defend its interests. Nevertheless, Xi and his colleagues worried that Party control may have been atrophying to dangerous levels. One problem was the possibility that some in the military could prioritize the interests of the people, or the nation as a whole, over the Party. This was an issue during the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown, in which some local PLA units refused to obey the Party's orders to use force against the student protesters.⁴⁷ Along these lines, Xi revived concerns that some—usually unnamed—officers were lobbying for the PLA to be transformed from the armed wing of the CCP into a “national army” [*jundui guojiahua*, 军队国家化], which if true could represent a serious threat to Party survival.⁴⁸ Moreover, the example of the 1991 Soviet military coup (which Chinese analyses suggested was partially the result of the Soviet Communist Party's loosening grip over the military) is never far out of mind.⁴⁹

Another problem is PLA officers placing their own personal interests ahead of the Party's. Xi recognized that corruption in the officer corps—a problem that had been festering on a large scale since the 1980s—could blemish the Party's image among the public, impede readiness and morale, and limit the willingness of senior officers to tolerate major reforms. Combating this challenge was thus a major theme of his leadership. At a 2014 speech in Gutian, site of the 1929 Party Congress that established the principle of Party control over the PLA, Xi commented on problems in cadres' “ideology, politics, and work style,” castigating the “lax” supervision of PLA personnel and pointing to Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou, CMC vice chairmen under Hu who were targeted in Xi's anti-corruption campaigns, as cautionary examples.⁵⁰ He instead urged the PLA to develop officers both loyal to the Party and capable of “leading soldiers to fight and win battles.”⁵¹

Central to restoring Party control was elevating Xi's own status and authority within the PLA. This is critical to arresting the trend of too much power being delegated to corrupt military elites and helped ensure that his vision for military transformation was being implemented. (It was also part of Xi's broader consolidation of power within the Party-state as a whole.) Thus, Xi emphasized what the 1982 PRC Constitution termed the “CMC Chairman

Responsibility System” [*zhongyang junwei zerenzhi*, 中央军委责任制], which stated that ultimate authority over military affairs rested with that individual (who usually serves concurrently as Party general-secretary). Other steps he took to assert control over the PLA included attending military events at a greater rate than Hu, personally leading reform efforts, weighing in on senior officer promotions, and publishing military treatises that became “required reading” for soldiers.⁵²

Xi also oversaw a series of structural and personnel changes designed to combat graft and ensure political orthodoxy among the officer corps. One part was adjusting the PLA’s supervisory mechanisms. Prior to the reforms, supervision was centralized in the general departments, which, as noted, were notoriously corrupt. Xi changed this situation by disbanding the general departments, elevating the Discipline Inspection Commission to independent status, and placing its secretary on the CMC—and likewise placing the audit bureau and military court system under direct CMC oversight. The Political Work Department continued to oversee personnel files, political indoctrination, and the political commissar and Party committee systems. This meant that the PLA now had several independent, but mutually reinforcing channels to monitor and fight ideological laxity and corruption. This adjustment was complemented by continuing anti-corruption investigations and a rotation of senior officers intended, in part, to break up patronage networks.⁵³

Third was the need for improvements in the area of “civil-military integration” (CMI) [*junmin ronghe*, 军民融合]. The term refers primarily to the process whereby the military could leverage breakthroughs in the civilian science and technology sector, though it also encompasses other types of cooperation between the military and civilian realms. Examples include expanding reliance on civilian contractors in the military supply chain, which is cheaper and more efficient than relying on traditional suppliers, and the incorporation of military specifications into the design of civilian transport ships, which could be appropriated during wartime (especially during an amphibious invasion of Taiwan). As Brian Lafferty discusses in

this volume, strengthening CMI has been part of the PLA's reform agenda since the 1990s, but its implementation was hindered by ineffectual top-level management, bureaucratic stovepiping, and other obstacles.

Xi attempted to make progress in the CMI arena through various changes. One was upgrading the PLA's Science and Technology Commission, previously housed within the GAD, to direct CMC supervision. This commission is responsible for the military's coordination with outside civilian experts in critical technological areas. Another was reforms to the military research system. For instance, several technical institutes were merged into the PLA's Academy of Military Science, helping to more closely integrate technical advances with innovations in China's military doctrine.⁵⁴ To improve management and supervision of the process, the government created a new Central Commission for Integrated Military and Civilian Development in January 2017, with Xi as chairman.⁵⁵ In sum, these motives—operational, political, and technological—were not new, but taken together shaped an agenda that Xi and his fellow reformers acted on to create a “world-class” force by mid-century.

Outline of the Book

The following chapters explore the reforms from a variety of angles and are divided into five thematic sections. Part I analyzes the strategic and bureaucratic context in which the reforms are occurring. In chapter 2, David Finkelstein considers how domestic politics, operational requirements, and changing external security assessments provided the impetus for reform and shaped its contents. He also asks who (other than Xi) played a critical role in the process. Chapter 3, by Andrew Scobell and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, discusses how the reforms are occurring alongside the creation of a more “global” PLA that is being tasked with protecting China's overseas interests. On the bureaucratic front, chapter 4 by John Chen explains why the ground forces—which had the most to lose from restructuring—reluctantly opted to endorse the changes. In chapter 5, Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew Erickson examine the impact of reform on

the navy's modernization plans and document the emerging rivalries as the services position themselves to be *the* critical part of the joint force.

Part II considers several features of the PLA's attempts to forge a stronger joint operations capability. Chapter 6, written by Mark Cozad, traces the PLA's progress in the areas of joint training, doctrine, and personnel education since the 1990s, showing why previous reforms failed and how more recent changes aim to rectify the situation. In chapter 7, Edmund Burke and Arthur Chan explain the role of the new joint theater commands and identify several challenges to the effectiveness of the new system, including resistance by the services (which have continued to lead some types of operations).⁵⁶ Chapter 8, by LeighAnn Luce and Erin Richter, examines the trajectory and key features of the PLA's logistics reforms, one component of which is creating a "precision" system that provides "comprehensive, timely, and accurate logistics support to PLA joint operations." In chapter 9, Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders assess the challenges facing the PLA in cultivating highly qualified joint commanders, and how Xi and his colleagues are seeking improvements in this arena.

Part III digs deeper into how the reforms are affecting the PLA's services. Chapter 10, by Daniel Gearin, places the recent downsizing in the context of previous force reductions and assesses the implications for the ground forces. In chapter 11, Dennis J. Blasko discusses the army's new structure, recent training and deployments, and changes to its logistics, doctrine, and educational systems, concluding that despite new equipment, the army's modernization process has been slower and perhaps less effective than the more technical services. Even as it remains the largest single service, Blasko concludes that the army is the "biggest loser" in the current reforms. Chapter 12, by David Logan, addresses the status of the Rocket Force, which he asserts is "arguably the biggest winner in the reforms" because it retained control over nuclear forces, increased its status, and strengthened its ability to compete for resources. In chapter 13, John Costello and Joe McReynolds provide a comprehensive overview of the SSF, detailing this new force's background, structure, and missions. The authors

also raise important questions about whether the rise of the SSF was more about organizational innovation or the desire by top leaders to centralize control over China's strategic resources.

Part IV assesses the implications of the reforms for defense acquisition and the relationship between the PLA and civilian sector writ large. Tai Ming Cheung, in chapter 14, shows how the reforms complement the defense industry's transformation "from a follower to an original innovation leader" and outlines continuing weaknesses in that sector. In chapter 15, Brian Lafferty explores the CMI dimensions of the reforms. He concludes that despite important structural changes, the historical "track record suggests that even positive returns will involve a longer and more difficult process than the Party currently acknowledges." Chapter 16, by Ma Chengkun and John Chen, explores the impact of the downsizing on military-locality relations and documents the range of policies and tactics the government has used to try to compensate the reforms' losers and mitigate discontent among demobilized soldiers.

Part V turns to the political elite dimensions of the reforms, focusing on Xi's role and status as CMC chairman. Chapter 17, by Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, examines the political and ideological challenges Xi sought to rectify through the reforms as well as his political strategy for bringing the process to a successful outcome. Chapter 18, by Joel McFadden, Kim Fassler, and Justin Godby, looks at the new CMC lineup that was announced at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017. They conclude that "there is little doubt that Xi and his generals emerged in a stronger position to steer the PLA toward fulfilling its part in the 'great rejuvenation' of the Chinese nation."

Taken together, the chapters suggest that the PLA has been able to make major strides, within a short period of time, toward completing the unfinished business of organizational transformation left over from the Jiang and Hu eras. This is both a testament to Xi's ability to push structural changes through a bureaucracy that has historically resisted them and an indication that the PLA is on track to field a more professional and capable joint force by 2020. However, the chapters also reveal persistent weaknesses,

such as encouraging operational flexibility in a system that prizes top-down political control; cultivating proficient joint commanders in the absence of real combat experience (China has not fought a war since 1979); reducing interservice rivalry and the influence of the ground forces, which remains by far the largest service and continues to hold most senior command billets; and forging stronger connections between the PLA and civilian technological innovators. Resolving these deeper problems will require that Xi and his successor—whenever one is named—remain focused on the agenda even after 2020 and be prepared to counter resistance if and when it resurfaces.

Notes

¹ Li Xuanliang and Wang Jingguo, “Focus the Building of Elite Forces on Winning in War” [聚焦打赢砺雄师], Xinhua, September 21, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-09/21/c_1121704641.htm>.

² “CCP Central Committee Decision on Deepening of Reforms for Major Issues” [中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定], Xinhua, November 15, 2013, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2013-11/15/c_118164235.htm>.

³ “Xi Leads China’s Military Reform, Stresses Strong Army,” Xinhua, March 15, 2014, available at <<http://english.cntv.cn/20140315/102892.shtml>>

⁴ For a summary, see Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, China Strategic Perspectives 10 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2017), 6–22.

⁵ “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s Report at the 19th CPC National Congress,” Xinhua, November 3, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm>.

⁶ “Previous PLA Reorganizations Since the Founding of the Republic” [建国以来解放军历次体制编制调整改革], *Caixin Online* [财新网], November 27, 2015, available at <<http://china.caixin.com/2015-11-27/100878949.html>>.

⁷ For a discussion of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) reforms during the Jiang era, see Kenneth W. Allen et al., *Institutional Reforms of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Overview and Challenges* (Alexandria, VA: CNA Corporation, 2002).

⁸ See, for example, Taylor Fravel, “Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China’s Changes in Military Strategy,” *International Security* 42, no. 3 (Winter

2017/2018), 37–83; and David M. Finkelstein, “China’s National Military Strategy,” in *Right Sizing the People’s Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China’s Military*, ed. Andrew Scobell and Roy Kamphausen (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 99–145.

⁹ Dean Cheng, “Chinese Lessons from the Gulf Wars,” in *Chinese Lessons from Other Peoples’ Wars*, ed. Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 153–200.

¹⁰ See Arthur S. Ding, “The PLA and Taiwan Policy under Xi Jinping: One Joint Actor Without Its Own Agenda,” *Issues & Studies* 53, no. 2 (June 2017), 1–24; and the chapter by Saunders and Wuthnow in this volume.

¹¹ *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2016* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2016), i; “China’s Military Strategy (Full Text),” Xinhua, May 27, 2015, available at <http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm>.

¹² Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “What Do China’s Military Reforms Mean for Taiwan?” *NBR Commentary*, May 19, 2016, available at <<http://nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=692>>.

¹³ See, for example, Wuthnow and Saunders, *Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping*; David M. Finkelstein, *Initial Thoughts on the Reorganization and Reform of the PLA* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2016); David M. Finkelstein, *Get Ready for the Second Phase of Chinese Military Reform* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2017); and the special section on Chinese military reform in *Joint Force Quarterly* 83 (4th Quarter, 2016).

¹⁴ The Taiwan Ministry of National Defense Center for Strategic Studies was also a co-sponsor of the 2017 conference.

¹⁵ “China Releases Guidelines on Military Reform,” Xinhua, January 1, 2016, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/01/c_134970353.htm>.

¹⁶ “Xi Inaugurates PLA Rocket Force as Military Reform Deepens,” Xinhua, January 1, 2016, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/01/c_134970564.htm>. Previously, the Second Artillery was a branch of the ground forces.

¹⁷ Like the service headquarters, the Strategic Support Force headquarters is a theater command commander [正战区级] grade organization.

¹⁸ See chapter by John Costello and Joe McReynolds in this volume.

¹⁹ “China Establishes Joint Logistic Support Force,” *China Military Online*, September 13, 2016, available at <<http://eng.mod.gov.cn/TopNews/2016-09/13/>>

content_4730336.htm>. See also chapter by LeighAnn Luce and Erin Richter in this volume.

²⁰ “China Reshuffles Military Headquarters,” Xinhua, January 11, 2016, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-01/11/c_134998692.htm>.

²¹ As Tai Ming Cheung notes in this volume, the PLA has been less transparent about corruption in the weapons research and development system since those programs are mostly classified.

²² For a discussion, see Joel Wuthnow, “The CMC General Office: Recentralizing Power in the PLA,” *China Brief* 17, no. 7 (May 2017), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/cmc-general-office-recentralizing-power-pla/>>.

²³ “China to Cut Troops by 300,000: Xi,” Xinhua, September 3, 2015, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-09/03/c_134583730.htm>.

²⁴ However, it is unclear if this figure accounts for army officers serving in “joint” positions within the Central Military Commission departments and theaters. See “Facts and Figures on China’s Military Reform,” Xinhua, December 19, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/19/c_136837189.htm>.

²⁵ “PLA Non-Battle Personnel Downized as Part of Military Reform: Report,” *Global Times* (Beijing), March 5, 2018, available at <http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-03/05/content_7959328.htm>.

²⁶ “Facts and Figures on China’s Military Reform.”

²⁷ Authors’ interviews with PLA officers, 2017–2018.

²⁸ “Premier Li: China Has Reduced Army Size by 300,000,” *ChinaMil.com*, March 5, 2018, available at <http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-03/05/content_7959842.htm>; authors’ interviews, 2017–2018.

²⁹ “China Reshuffles 84 Corps-Level Military Units,” Xinhua, April 18, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-04/18/c_136218258.htm>.

³⁰ Chinese media did reveal that the newly realigned group armies were included in the 84 corps. See “PLA Reveals New Designation for First Time,” *China Daily* (Beijing), April 25, 2017, available at <www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2017-04/25/content_29076824.htm>. A Hong Kong newspaper published a purported list of the 84 units, which included major commands in all the services and Strategic Support Force. See “What Are the 84 Corps-Grade Units?” [84个军级单位是什么?], *Ming Pao* [明报], April 20, 2017, available at <www.mingpao.com/tor/html/News/20170420/tcab1_r.htm>.

³¹ For an overview, see Dennis J. Blasko, “What Is Known and Unknown about Changes to the PLA’s Ground Combat Units,” *China Brief* 17, no. 7 (May

2017), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/known-unknown-changes-plus-ground-combat-units/>>.

³² See the chapter by Blasko in this volume, as well as Dennis J. Blasko, “Recent Developments in the Chinese Army’s Helicopter Force,” *China Brief* 17, no. 8 (June 2017), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/recent-developments-chinese-armys-helicopter-force/>>.

³³ Thanks to Dennis Blasko for these observations.

³⁴ Lawrence Trevethan, “*Brigadization*” of the PLA Air Force (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2018).

³⁵ Kristin Huang, “China Brings People’s Armed Police under Control of Top Military Chiefs,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), December 27, 2017, available at <www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2125880/china-brings-peoples-armed-police-under-control-top>; Lyle Morris, “China Welcomes Its Newest Armed Force: The Coast Guard,” *War on the Rocks*, April 4, 2018, available at <<https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/china-welcomes-its-newest-armed-force-the-coast-guard/>>. In addition, changes were made to the People’s Armed Police (PAP) internal security [*neiwei*, 内卫] forces, with 14 mobile divisions disbanded and replaced by a mix of mobile *zongdui* and *zhidui* distributed among provincial PAP commands. Thanks to Dennis J. Blasko for this observation.

³⁶ “College Students Account for Large Majority of New Military Recruits,” *ChinaMil.com*, September 10, 2017, available at <http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2017-09/10/content_7750599.htm>; “China Changes Student Enrollment Policies for Army,” Xinhua, May 26, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/26/c_136317920.htm>.

³⁷ Minnie Chan, “China Raises Pay, Pensions for Trimmed Down Military, Announces Plans for Veterans’ Ministry,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), March 13, 2017, available at <www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2137008/china-raises-pay-pensions-trimmed-down-military>.

³⁸ “Xi Calls for World-Class Military Research, Educational Institutions,” Xinhua, July 7, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-07/19/c_136456748.htm>.

³⁹ “PLA Schools to Expand Recruitment, Help China Win Information War,” *Global Times* (Beijing), June 12, 2017, available at <<http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0612/c90000-9227234.html>>.

⁴⁰ Luo Jimnu, “Building a World-Class Joint Operations University” [建设世界一流综合性联合指挥大学], *Enlightenment Daily* [光明日报], October 19,

2017, available at <http://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2017-10/19/nw.D110000gmrb_20171019_1-13.htm>; Huang Panyue, "PLA Aims to Cultivate Commanding Talents for Joint Operations," *ChinaMil.com*, September 7, 2017, available at <http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2017-09/07/content_7747234.htm>.

⁴¹ Kenneth W. Allen, "China Announces Reform of Military Ranks," *China Brief* 17, no. 2 (January 2017), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/china-announces-reform-military-ranks/>>.

⁴² "PLA Backs Investigation of Senior Military Official," Xinhua, January 10, 2018, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/10/c_136885601.htm>.

⁴³ Joel Wuthnow, "A Brave New World for Chinese Joint Operations," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40, nos. 1–2 (February 2017), 169–195.

⁴⁴ See the chapter by Wuthnow and Saunders in this volume.

⁴⁵ M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Military Strategy: 'Winning Informationized Local Wars,'" *China Brief* 15, no. 13 (July 2015), available at <<https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-military-strategy-winning-informationized-local-wars/>>.

⁴⁶ Those were Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai, who was named Southern Theater commander, and General Yi Xiaoguang, who was named Central Theater commander.

⁴⁷ See Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001).

⁴⁸ For a discussion, see Andrew Scobell, "China's Evolving Civil-Military Relations: Creeping Guojiahua," *Armed Forces & Society* 31, no. 2 (January 2005), 227–244; a forthcoming volume by Chen Yali (Princeton University Press); and chapter by Saunders and Wuthnow in this volume.

⁴⁹ William Wan, "In China, Soviet Union's Failure Drives Decisions on Reform," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2013, available at <www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-china-soviet-unions-failure-drives-decisions-on-reform/2013/03/23/9c090012-92ef-11e2-ba5b-550c7abf6384_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b9e61cff20ac>.

⁵⁰ James C. Mulvenon, "Hotel Gutian: We Haven't Had That Spirit Here Since 1929," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 46 (Winter 2015), available at <www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm46jm.pdf>

⁵¹ "Xi Stresses CPC's Absolute Leadership Over Army," Xinhua, November 2, 2014, available at <www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-11/02/content_18843109.htm>.

⁵² See chapter by Saunders and Wuthnow in this volume.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Authors' interviews with PLA Academy of Military Science personnel, 2017.

⁵⁵ “Xi to Head Central Commission for Integrated Military, Civilian Development,” Xinhua, January 22, 2017, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/22/c_136004750.htm>.

⁵⁶ For instance, the PLA Navy headquarters continues to lead anti-piracy task forces (authors’ interviews, 2017), while David C. Logan’s chapter in this volume clarifies that the Rocket Force retained control over land-based nuclear weapons.