



Chinese President Xi Jinping meets with delegates to First Party Congress of People's Liberation Army Joint Logistic Support Force in Wuhan, Hubei Province, October 18, 2019 (Xinhua/Alamy Live News/Li Gang)

# Understanding the Vulnerabilities in China's New Joint Force

By David Bickers

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Over the past 5 years, China has undertaken radical reform of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). This modification is sweeping in its scope (encompassing changes to strategy, force structure, and technology) and clear in its purpose to create, in the words of Xi Jinping, a

joint force that can “fight and win.”<sup>1</sup> If this reform succeeds, China's regional neighbors and the United States could find that the People's Republic, whose leadership is already demonstrating an increased assertiveness, will be emboldened further still. Successful reform is not assured—indeed, many of China's previous attempts at military transformation have failed—but Xi does wield near-unprecedented power to force change. It is therefore prudent to assume this reform will succeed and understand both its consequences and how best to respond.

This article analyzes PLA reforms and identifies vulnerabilities in China's new joint force. The first section analyzes the changes to the Central Military Commission (CMC), the highest level of the PLA, set in the context of China's model of national decisionmaking and civil-military relations. The second section considers the restructuring of the PLA, focusing particularly on its new

Strategic Support Force (SSF) and revised theater-level organization. The third section explores the measures that could disrupt and defeat this new joint force via targeting the vulnerabilities identified in sections one and two.

The article anticipates that four key vulnerabilities will exist within the reformed PLA. First, the joint force will embrace a model of highly centralized decisionmaking, which could prove ill-suited to the demands of major combat operations. Second, the reformed PLA force will struggle to integrate multidomain operations at the joint theater level. Third, the reformed PLA will lack the capabilities to project, sustain, or command its forces across the spread of China's global interests. And last, the PLA is currently hindered by a lack of meaningful operational experience.

### **CMC Reform and the Nature of Decisionmaking in China**

Xi demonstrates a highly centralized style of decisionmaking, even by Chinese authoritarian standards. During routine national management, a mix of negotiation, bargaining, and consensus-building were traditionally required to fully mobilize the Chinese polity. But in times of crisis, this fragmented and somewhat lethargic system would typically transform into a more centralized, autocratic system demonstrating greater ideological decisionmaking, a pronounced monopoly of decisionmaking by senior party leaders, and a severe constraining of any latitude previously granted to subordinates.<sup>2</sup> Such a style of crisis command was observed in China's response to severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003, the Sichuan province earthquake in 2008, and, most recently, the coronavirus pandemic. The typical characteristics of crisis command are strict prioritization by the highest echelons of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), mobilization of state media, and significant pressure placed on lower levels of the party for successful implementation. In the Xi era, however, even routine national

management has taken on these crisis command characteristics. As CCP general secretary, Xi has amassed an unusually high concentration of decisionmaking authority across a broad range of policy areas. The result is that the machinery of state government has become inured to almost a decade of highly centralized command.

The relationship between the PLA and the CCP is a close one. Under China's National Defense Law, the PLA's loyalty is to the CCP rather than to China's constitution or central government. PLA officers are invariably party members, and a cadre of uniformed commissars exists to defend the CCP's interests. While not directly responsible for internal security, the PLA has taken on such roles when crises arise. Both the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square protests, for instance, required PLA intervention to restore party control. The PLA prefers not to perform such tasks (due to potential reputational damage) but ultimately remains the CCP's last line of defense against instability and chaos.

Despite this closeness, the CCP-PLA relationship is more one of shared interests than of symbiosis. Over time, clearer institutional boundaries have led to functional differentiation and bifurcation of civilian and military elites.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, a former CMC vice chairman, speaking in 2013, warned that the PLA must "resolutely refute and reject the erroneous political viewpoints of disassociating the military from the party, depoliticizing the armed forces, and putting the armed forces under the state."<sup>4</sup>

Against this backdrop, Xi's reform of the CMC has sought to strengthen political control of the PLA beyond the already high levels typically seen in a Leninist military. An integrated party and state institution, the CMC sets defense policy and provides the highest level of military command in peace and war. As chairman, Xi reduced the CMC from 11 to 7 members, removing service chiefs, reorganizing its general departments, and delegating some functions to a new Joint Staff Department.<sup>5</sup> Released of the responsibility to act as an army

headquarters (the army becomes a ground force component on par with the air force and navy), the CMC can focus on Xi's priority of building a joint force and supervising both military readiness and operations. Not all CCP general secretaries have exerted such absolute control over the CMC. Indeed, the CMC has previously seen the chairman role divorced from that of CCP general secretary (for 2 years during the Hu Jintao era) or authority delegated to its uniformed CMC vice chairmen.<sup>6</sup> Xi, however, leads through a "CMC chairman responsibility system" in which even day-to-day defense matters elevate to him as CMC chairman.<sup>7</sup>

Overall, the nature of CCP decisionmaking and its relationship to the PLA represent vulnerabilities. First, this centralized system could fail under the highest levels of strategic complexity. Most management theory would argue that decentralized decisionmaking best suits complexity, but Xi's normalization of centralized decisionmaking is depriving his machinery of government experience with decentralization and delegation. Natural and health disasters have revealed weaknesses within his regime, and war could do the same. Any conflict with China should seek to maximize the number and variety of strategic challenges it faces to disrupt the CCP's efficient management of war. Enacting measures that promote internal disorder and force the PLA to focus attention and resources on internal security would be one approach. Second, the complicated relationship between the CCP and the PLA could be targeted. The two should be treated as separate entities; careful targeting (exacerbating what Joel Wuthnow describes as a latent distrust between Xi and his military advisors) may help divide the CCP and the PLA and diminish the overall unity of Chinese command.<sup>8</sup>

### **Theater Level: Structural and Operational Weaknesses**

The PLA has made significant changes to its force structure. The army is the main loser, being relegated to a national-level ground force on a par with the navy and air force rather



Formation of People's Liberation Army Rocket Force takes part in grand military parade celebrating 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of founding of People's Republic of China in Beijing, October 1, 2019 (Xinhua/Alamy Live News/Xing Guangli)





F/A-18E Super Hornet assigned to “Tomcatters” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 31 takes off from flight deck of USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, South China Sea, February 14, 2021 (U.S. Navy/Dylan Lavin)

than being administered directly by general departments of the CMC. Also elevated to the status of a service is the Second Artillery Force (renamed the PLA Rocket Force), which remains responsible for China’s land-based nuclear and conventional missiles. The final element of structural change is the creation of a new Strategic Support Force, which assumes responsibility for the information domain (which in Chinese conception encompasses cyber; electronic warfare; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance [ISR]; and space).

The SSF offers important insights into how China expects to conduct future warfare. Observing the U.S. military’s prosecution of the first Gulf War, the PLA pinpointed the critical importance of information technology and its integration into a joint force.<sup>9</sup> This concept took root in China’s 2014

military strategy as “informationized local wars,” with a 2015 white paper then elevating information to a “leading role” rather than just an “important condition” of warfare.<sup>10</sup> Under this concept, the PLA expects to conduct operations principally in the maritime and air domains but with actions also in cyberspace, outer space, and across the electromagnetic spectrum. This conceptual development and its strategic articulation were precursors to and justification for the subsequent radical structural change. The ability to integrate information technology into its operations should be the West’s measure of success for the PLA joint force; the SSF plays a critical role in this integration, and its development will be the leading indicator of China’s ability to turn a vision of information warfare into a reality.

The SSF delivers this role by collocating capabilities previously

distributed across various parts of the PLA, including the General Staff Department. It has grouped cyber espionage and technical reconnaissance from the Third Department, cyber targeting and attack from the Fourth Department, and information system defense from the Informatization Department. This combination allows the SSF to undertake a span of cyber operations that the Chinese term *integrated reconnaissance, attack, and defense*. The SSF is the lynchpin in enabling Chinese antiaccess/area denial. Although many ground-based conventional strike assets fall under the PLA Rocket Force, all intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, and missile guidance rely on the SSF. The SSF also supports PLA power projection in the East and South China seas, with all space-based surveillance, satellite relay and communications, telemetry, tracking,

and navigation required for maritime and strategic air deployments controlled by the SSF.<sup>11</sup>

Another key objective of Xi's reforms is to transform the PLA into a fully joint force. A Chinese joint force sees the army's domination of the PLA reduced by placing it on a par with the navy and air force. A joint operational command system is established at two levels: a Joint Staff Department (JSD) reporting to the CMC, and a theater level formed through the reorganization of seven administrative military regions into five joint theater commands. Whereas previously command authority remained vested in each service, it now rests with these theater commands, with services maintaining responsibility only for administrative tasks (such as equipment and workforce issues).<sup>12</sup> The PLA has further signaled its intent to become a more joint force by giving two of the five theater commands to nonground force officers.<sup>13</sup>

The new joint theater command system, in theory, will make China more combat ready. Previous military regions did not serve as wartime headquarters (instead, the CMC would activate an ad hoc theater command); however, the new theater headquarters maintains command across both peace and war, meaning the transition from one to another should prove relatively seamless.<sup>14</sup> Each theater also has set an assigned primary mission (the Eastern Theater maintains responsibility for Taiwan and the East China Sea; the Southern Theater, the South China Sea and borders with Southeast Asian countries; the Western Theater, borders with India and Central Asian neighbors; the Northern Theater, Korea; and the Central Theater, the defense of Beijing).<sup>15</sup> Theater commands assume responsibility for aligning training with potential combat operations.<sup>16</sup> This means that intelligence collection against Eastern and Southern theater exercises could provide insights into PLA operational contingencies against Taiwan and in the East and South China seas.

On paper, these reforms should transform the PLA into a joint force, increase its readiness for war, and

prioritize operations in space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains; in reality, the reform will face significant impediments. The first is that classic Chinese fragmented authoritarianism could prove to frustrate reform. An analysis of previous attempts to transform China's military strategy, however, suggests that the two factors needed to best ensure success—a significant change in the character of conflict and a united CCP—are in place (through the heightened importance of information technology and Xi's centralized command, respectively).<sup>17</sup> The second is the organizational frictions typical in any large structural change. These tensions could cause reform to take years to deliver higher operational performance (one commentator considers 2030 a realistic target).<sup>18</sup> It could also prove that the PLA has a reduced appetite to engage in offensive operations until reform is complete and it has full confidence in its new joint force.

Even if these organizational impediments are overcome, structural vulnerabilities within the reformed PLA will still exist. The first is the army's ability to conduct multidomain operations at theater level. Theater commands have been allocated only for ground, naval, and air forces. Rocket Force command and control remains highly centralized, with the CMC potentially directly handling those Rocket Force brigades located within theaters.<sup>19</sup> The SSF's capabilities also report directly to the CMC (most likely through the JSD).<sup>20</sup> The result is a significant difference between the commands of the traditional domains (land, marine, air), nontraditional domains (space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum), and missile forces (both conventional and nuclear). These differences have the potential to hinder the integration of effects across all domains at the theater level during both joint training and war. The Eastern Theater commander, for instance, in executing operations against Taiwan, would plan and deliver land, maritime, and air effects but would need to coordinate effects in space, cyber, and the electromagnetic spectrum with the

SSF, and coordinate missile operations with the Rocket Force. This arrangement may work for a relatively short operation, but it is difficult to imagine that anything but a more delegated and decentralized command construct would bring the PLA success in a sustained, high-intensity campaign against a peer.

The second structural vulnerability is that the reformed PLA will remain unable to project, sustain, or command forces across the global spread of its national interests. The number and geographic range of these interests have increased significantly since Xi launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. The PLA, however, does not possess the power projection capabilities needed to secure these forces beyond East Asia, and the PLA Navy, although deploying outside Asia more often than it did before, is incapable of protecting the sea lines of communication across the One Belt One Road infrastructure. It could take decades for the PLA to grow offensive carrier strike capability on a par with that of the U.S. Navy.<sup>21</sup>

Neither could the PLA sustain overseas operations. In 2017, the PLA established China's first overseas military base in Djibouti to support its maritime operations in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>22</sup> The commander of the PLA General Logistic Department has written in support of creating further overseas footholds, but there is no evidence of such efforts being carried out.<sup>23</sup> In addition, the PLA has known deficiencies in its strategic airlift capabilities, constraining its ability not only to deploy forces out of area but also to redeploy forces the long internal distances between China's theater commands.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of command of overseas operations, the responsibilities of the theater commands are limited to China's interior and near abroad, with command of global operations retained by the CMC through the JSD.<sup>25</sup> This arrangement would mean, for instance, that although the Eastern Theater commander would control maritime operations during war with Taiwan, the JSD would command the PLA Navy's associated deep operations in the Western Pacific.



Marine Corps UH-1Y Huey from 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit departs USS *New Orleans* flight deck in preparation for Maritime Raid Force training evolution with USS *America* and USS *Germantown*, East China Sea, June 14, 2021 (U.S. Navy/Desmond Parks)

The similarity of Xi's PLA reforms with the command structure changes enacted by the U.S. military under the Goldwater Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 is clear. It could be the case, however, that the PLA is adopting a similar structure just as the U.S. military is identifying the shortcomings of its own system—particularly its ability to integrate global operations. The U.S. military global campaign and contingency plans coordinate global responses across all geographic and functional combatant commands through a nominated global integrator (typically one of the geographic combatant commanders). It has been suggested, however, that the coordinating authorities granted to these global integrators are insufficient to successfully execute these plans.<sup>26</sup> The U.S. military should take all necessary steps to improve its ability to integrate global operations; its ability to hold China's global liabilities

at risk via horizontal escalation of any regional conflict is a competitive advantage it must maintain.

The number of responsibilities centralized and retained by the CMC presents another vulnerability. The post-reform command arrangements are such that in war the CMC is responsible for commanding and coordinating across multiple theaters, retaining direct command of the Rocket Force (conventional and nuclear strike), retaining direct command of SSF capabilities, coordinating Rocket Force and SSF actions with theater commands, and commanding directly any overseas operations beyond China's near abroad. The impact of not delegating more responsibilities to theater commands is that the CMC could find itself significantly overmatched in a conflict that escalates both vertically and horizontally.

The vulnerabilities of the reformed PLA are further compounded by the lack of any meaningful joint operational experience. The PLA last fought a major conflict in 1979, during which an inferior Vietnamese military defeated a larger Chinese force.<sup>27</sup> One must look further back to 1955 to see its first and last joint operation (its attack and conquest of the Yijiangshan Islands).<sup>28</sup> The PLA has two ways to build its experience base short of actual combat. The first is through demanding and realistic joint training. The scale, complexity, and number of PLA exercises have increased over the past 10 years. It is not clear, however, the extent to which this growth represents meaningful joint training. An exercise in 2015, for instance, saw components fighting one another rather than alongside one another.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, observation of the scope of the PLA's training could prove a useful indicator of the army's development as a joint force.

The second way the PLA is seeking to build experience is through a relatively modest set of overseas operational tasks (for example, disaster relief and international peacekeeping). United Nations deployments and China's establishment of a Military Operations Other Than War Research Centre in 2011 testify to this effort, as do several disaster relief training exercises conducted with other countries (including the United States).<sup>30</sup> The U.S. military and its allies should be cautious of passing competence to the PLA, even in what may appear to be benign areas; such training may simply be its entry point for developing a better joint force.

### **Disrupting and Defeating the PLA Joint Force**

The United States and other countries troubled by the authoritarian nature of China should be wary of a stronger and more effective PLA. To defeat this army in a future confrontation, the U.S. military must consider that it is currently in the shaping phase of that altercation. A future defeat of the PLA comes by taking measures now to better understand and disrupt reforms—and then targeting its vulnerabilities across multiple points in its system.

To better understand the PLA, intelligence collection should observe the nature of crisis decisionmaking at the state level. Natural and human disasters could offer insights as much as security crises. Areas of divergence between the CCP and PLA should be identified for future exploitation. Better understanding is required of the PLA force structure evolution and, in particular, the command relationships among the JSD, theater commands, SSF, and PLA Rocket Force. Finally, training exercises should be monitored to track the PLA's expansion as a joint force and to spot operational contingencies for Taiwan and the China seas.

There are several ways to disrupt PLA reform. One is to prevent the army from achieving its planned technological aims. The development of advanced technology is critically important to delivering PLA reform. Xi has acknowledged this fact

by including at the core of his plan a civil-military integration (CMI) strategy to significantly increase civilian-military synergy across technology development. CMI seeks to merge previously separate civilian and military research and development initiatives for a more synergistic effort, which would deliver “leapfrog” development.<sup>31</sup> This means that military requirements are introduced at the highest level of state planning.

As an example, the Chinese Next-Generation AI Development Plan named CMI as one of its “six main duties.”<sup>32</sup> Dual-use technology already plays an important role in army operations, such as the Gaofen-4 satellite supporting the PLA long-range precision strike kill-chain.<sup>33</sup> The SSF in particular needs CMI to drive the Chinese commercial sector to improve its military command, control, communications, computers, ISR systems; it has signed cooperation agreements with nine research institutions and created informal ties with private enterprises as a result.<sup>34</sup> The West can expect the SSF to exploit emerging technologies (artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and space-based ISR) for this purpose. Successful development would allow the PLA to extend the range and lethality of its kill-chain, potentially as far as the Second Island Chain, thus allowing China to further boost the assertiveness of its foreign policy.

Policymakers and private enterprise across the West should understand that the civilian and military sectors in China are fused and that, when dealing with Chinese private enterprise, they are, in effect, dealing with the PLA by proxy. Chinese investments in Western technology firms dealing in sensitive national security areas need to be screened and restricted when necessary. Those governments that lack the legislation to carry out such actions should write and pass it expeditiously.

Forming and maintaining regional allegiances and partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region, together with sharing antiaccess/area-denial capabilities where appropriate, will complicate Chinese escalation, reducing

China's ability to mitigate the PLA's lack of combat experience through a consequence-free operational rehearsal. A combination of dynamic force employment, troop rotations, forward presence, and the expansion of access, basing, and overflight agreements would further this end. In addition, the U.S. military should ensure that it does not inadvertently assist in developing the PLA's joint force expertise, even via seemingly benign matters such as disaster relief or evacuation operations, lest such learning is repurposed to more aggressive ends.

Once in a confrontation, the PLA, with its highly centralized nature of state decisionmaking, will struggle to cope with a complex, sustained, and high-tempo security crisis. The CMC should be stressed to the breaking point. Multiple diplomatic, economic, and security crises, including domestic insecurity, should therefore be provoked to draw the PLA into internal policing. Horizontal escalation, through operations that threaten multiple points around the Chinese periphery, will stress the CMC's ability to coordinate across multiple theaters and the PLA's logistical deficiencies in redeploying forces between them. Deep operations will strain the PLA's ability to both integrate global operations and secure global interests, forcing a yet greater decisionmaking load on the CMC. Operations also must maximize all-domain threats, compounding this overload by exploiting the CMC's lack of delegation across cyber, electronic warfare, and space capabilities. Divisions in the CCP-PLA relationship could also be exacerbated through targeted information operations to reduce Chinese unity of command. All these effects could be compounded by multiple precision strikes across the Chinese system, prioritizing the destruction of communication nodes between the CMC and the joint force, and SSF capability (representing as it does a center of gravity for China's concept of operations).

A successfully reformed PLA backed by an increasingly powerful state will be a potent fighting force, but like any



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or “left of bang,” is a political problem that requires a coordinated regional approach by the Baltic southern shore states—Poland, Germany, and Denmark—in conjunction with their North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) allies. Despite common membership in NATO and the EU, the southern shore states hold differing strategic perspectives that reflect the challenges of a coordinated approach. These states should prioritize Baltic maritime security, regional mobility, and unconventional warfare capabilities in coordination with regional allies and partners. They should also leverage or enhance EU capabilities in cyber, information, and strategic communications to better deter and defend against Russian hostile measures.



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fighting system, it will have weaknesses that can lead to its defeat. In the case of China’s new joint force, an incomplete set of theater-level command delegations and the high level of centralization that remains with the CMC could constitute a significant vulnerability. JFQ

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, “Introduction,” in *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, ed. Phillip C. Saunders et al. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Heilmann, ed., *China’s Political System* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), 158.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, *Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA’s Role in Elite Politics*, China Strategic Perspectives, no. 2 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in David M. Finkelstein, “Breaking the Paradigm: Drivers Behind the PLA’s Current Period of Reform,” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Wuthnow and Saunders, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Scobell, “China’s Evolving Civil-Military Relations: Creeping Guojiahua,” in *Chinese Civil Military Relations: The Transformation of the People’s Liberation Army*, ed. Nan Li (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 82 (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2016), 72.

<sup>8</sup> Joel Wuthnow, *System Overload: Can China’s Military Be Distracted in a War over Taiwan?* China Strategic Perspectives, No. 15 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2020), 27.

<sup>9</sup> Edmund J. Burke and Arthur Chan, “Coming to a (New) Theater Near You: Command, Control, and Forces,” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 229.

<sup>10</sup> M. Taylor Fravel, “Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity: Explaining China’s Changes in Military Strategy,” *International Security* 42, no. 3 (2018), 80–81.

<sup>11</sup> John Costello and Joe McReynolds, “China’s Strategic Support Force: A Force for a New Era,” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 446–455.

<sup>12</sup> Heilmann, *China’s Political System*, 152.

<sup>13</sup> PLA Navy Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai to the Southern Theater and PLA Air Force Lieutenant General Yi Xiaoguang to the Central Theater. See Shane A. Smith, Thomas Henderschedt, and Timothy D. Lueddecking, “Reverse Engineering Goldwater-Nichols: China’s Joint Force Reforms,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 90 (3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter 2018).

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Engstrom, “China Has Big Plans to Win the Next War It Fights,” *The National*

*Interest*, February 9, 2018.

<sup>15</sup> Wuthnow and Saunders, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>16</sup> Mark R. Cozad, “Toward a More Joint, Combat-Ready PLA?” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 215.

<sup>17</sup> Fravel, “Shifts in Warfare,” 83.

<sup>18</sup> Burke and Chan, “Coming to a (New) Theater Near You,” 246.

<sup>19</sup> David C. Logan, “PLA Reforms and China’s Nuclear Forces,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 83 (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2016), 60.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Scobell and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “The Flag Lags but Follows: The PLA and China’s Great Leap Outward,” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 180.

<sup>22</sup> Burke and Chan, “Coming to a (New) Theater Near You,” 279.

<sup>23</sup> Andrea Ghiselli, “Civil-Military Relations and Organisational Preferences Regarding the Use of the Military in Chinese Foreign Policy: Insights from the Debate on MOOTW,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 43, no. 3 (2018).

<sup>24</sup> Michael S. Chase et al., *China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Smith, Henderschedt, and Lueddecking, “Reverse Engineering Goldwater-Nichols.”

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Sukman, “Global Contingency Plans: A New Look at War Planning,” *Military Review* (2019), 115.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy R. Heath, “China’s Untested Military Could Be a Force—or a Flop,” *Foreign Policy*, November 27, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew S. Erickson, “The Impacts of Xi-Era Reforms on the Chinese Navy,” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 138.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>30</sup> Ghiselli, “Civil-Military Relations and Organisational Preferences Regarding the Use of the Military in Chinese Foreign Policy.”

<sup>31</sup> Brian Lafferty, “Civil-Military Integration and PLA Reforms,” in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 632–635.

<sup>32</sup> Lorand Laskai, “Civil-Military Fusion and the PLA’s Pursuit of Dominance in Emerging Technologies,” *China Brief* 18, no. 6 (2018), 13.

<sup>33</sup> James S. Johnson, “China’s Vision of the Future Network-Centric Battlefield: Cyber, Space, and Electromagnetic Asymmetric Challenges to the United States,” *Comparative Strategy* 37, no. 5 (2018), 378.

<sup>34</sup> Laskai, “Civil-Military Fusion and the PLA’s Pursuit of Dominance in Emerging Technologies,” 14.