

PHL-03 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems attached to army brigade with People's Liberation Army Eastern Theater Command fire salvo of 300mm surface-to-surface rockets at simulated ground targets during live-fire training exercise in Gobi Desert of Northwest China, August 8, 2017 (Courtesy China Military Online/Jiang Xiaoliang)



Reverse Engineering Goldwater-Nichols

China's Joint Force Reforms

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It is no secret to observers of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) that it closely observes the Department of Defense (DOD). While many focus on the PLA's incorporation of U.S.-like tactics, techniques, and procedures to

blunt or defeat American efforts in the western Pacific, the PLA's incorporation of organizational changes likely influenced by studies of U.S. efforts under the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of

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1986 are as important. In late 2015, the PLA instituted wide-ranging reforms, arguably the most far-reaching in its modern history. This agenda carried an ambitious completion date of 2020. Even though scholars have examined the reorganization, some even referring to it as “China's Goldwater-Nichols,” none have yet examined the modifications as indicators of China's analysis of 30 years of U.S. joint force reform.¹

Using the objectives of Goldwater-Nichols as a lens, this article examines the progress of PLA developments toward a more modern, joint military capable of significant operations within the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as more in the direction of an expeditionary force. It demonstrates, too, that the PRC has already taken significant steps, particularly in the creation of new joint warfighting commands, reorganization of its department system, and creation of new military services. It also reveals, however,

limitations such as a continued internal focus, entrenched bureaucratic interests, and the necessity for President Xi Jinping to use his positional power to enforce top-down reform without the benefit of lessons learned in combat operations or a senior military champion. Understanding this PLA effort is crucial for U.S. military and civilian leaders going forward both to provide a fresh look at our own joint developments and to see how they alter the threat picture for our planning development.

Goldwater-Nichols

In 1984, Samuel Huntington called “Servicism,” or Service parochialism, “the central malady of the American military establishment.”² To combat this, Goldwater-Nichols was born. Far from the first attempt at reform, the act sought to update a system with its origins in the makeshift actions of World War II.³ The National Security Act of 1947 intended to repair many of the pre-World War II defects and incorporate lessons learned during that conflict but left most Service-centered inefficiencies in place.⁴ Not unlike the situation during the war, the new order functioned as a system where the Joint Chiefs of Staff were essentially a committee of equals with the Chairman cast in the role of a consensus seeker. Unanimity was the watchword, not decisive decisionmaking focused on enhancing joint mission execution. Thus, Service interests dominated, resulting in diluted planning and advice to the National Command Authorities.⁵

Building on his experiences in World War II and seeking to overcome the compromises contained in the 1947 law, President Dwight D. Eisenhower secured passage of the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958. His stated goals to Congress included a desire to unify strategic and tactical planning, create an efficient weapons acquisition process under the oversight of the Secretary of Defense, and organize forces into unified commands that fought as one unit, irrespective of Service. In this vein, the act removed the military Services from the operational chain of

command, placing that authority in the hands of combatant commanders. The Services were to focus on organize, train, and equip functions. The Secretary received greater administrative control over DOD, while the Joint Chiefs were designated as that position’s military staff. The staff of the Joint Chiefs was also enlarged, and the Chairman could now formally vote on matters.⁶

Even President Eisenhower later recognized that the 1958 act was only an interim step. Members of Congress had fought him vigorously over his attempt to unify the appropriations process. Additionally, Service interests continued to dominate joint considerations, which saw minimal real change.⁷ As James Locher highlighted, the provisions of the 1958 legislation “were not effectively implemented. The military departments retained a de facto role in the operational chain of command and never complied with the provision strengthening the unified commanders.”⁸ This set the stage for future reform efforts.

General David Jones, USAF, was the first seated Chairman to speak out for reform. Testifying before the House Armed Services Committee on February 3, 1982, he stated, “The system is broken. I have tried to reform it from inside, but I cannot. Congress is going to have to mandate necessary reforms.”⁹ Almost 5 years of debate followed. Many issues led to this point in time. Subpar military advice, an inability to effectively operate together, and chain of command issues were cited as the core issues for negative events as far-reaching as the outcome of the Vietnam War, the Beirut barracks bombing, Operation *Eagle Claw* in Iran, problems during the invasion of Grenada, and the seizures of two U.S. ships by North Korea and Cambodia in 1968 and 1975, respectively.¹⁰

Officers viewed a joint assignment as career threatening. Service leaders tended to retain those viewed as their top talent for Service staffs. Promotion rates of Joint Staff officers trailed their counterparts on the Service side. Commentators also observed that the Joint Chiefs simply proved inadequate in the realm of strategic planning. Status quo-seeking

behaviors became dominant in order to protect each Service’s interests, and innovation suffered as a result. Budget plans were uncoupled from joint capability warfighting needs and the realistic level of pairing to resources available. Huntington observed that campaign planning efforts often appeared like the Services were preparing to fight different conflicts. Overall readiness suffered. Furthermore, the system undermined the combatant commanders’ ability to lead with Service component commanders maintaining an inordinate amount of control through their Service chiefs, who maneuvered to ensure a “piece of the pie” for their organization. All in all, Service interests trumped strategic considerations.¹¹ As General Jones put it in a 1982 article, “We need more time on our warfighting capabilities and less on an intramural scramble for resources.”¹²

Commencing in 1982 and 1985, respectively, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees advocated a pro-reform stance. After extensive resistance by the Services and Reagan administration, legislation named after its champions, Senator Barry Goldwater (R-AZ) and Representative William Nichols (D-AL), passed into law on October 1, 1986.¹³ Public Law 99-433 explicitly identified eight objectives for building the joint force:

In enacting this Act, it is the intent of Congress, consistent with the congressional declaration of policy in section 2 of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 401)—

- (1) to reorganize the Department of Defense and strengthen civilian authority in the Department;*
- (2) to improve the military advice provided to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense;*
- (3) to place clear responsibility on the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands for the accomplishment of missions assigned to those commands;*
- (4) to ensure that the authority of the commanders of the unified and specified*

combatant commands is fully commensurate with the responsibility of those commanders for the accomplishment of missions assigned to their commands;

(5) to increase attention to the formulation of strategy and to contingency planning;

(6) to provide for more efficient use of defense resources;

(7) to improve joint officer management policies; and

(8) otherwise to enhance the effectiveness of military operations and improve the management and administration of the Department of Defense.¹⁴

Importantly, Goldwater-Nichols strengthened both the Secretary and Chairman. No actor in DOD possessed authority outside the control of the Secretary. The act further recognized the Chairman as the senior military officer and military advisor to the President, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Council. Consensus with other Joint Chiefs was no longer a necessity. Goldwater-Nichols subordinated the Joint Staff to only the Chairman. The authorities of the combatant commanders over forces assigned them was emphasized, and the direct chain of command relationship between these commanders and the Secretary and President was codified, excluding Service chiefs from operational roles. Perceived deficiencies in planning were addressed. The act required the President to submit a National Security Strategy upon which DOD would base budgeting decisions and campaign plan preparations. The Chairman was made the independent voice on the budget previously missing from military counsel. Finally, officer management was greatly altered with a new joint officer management system—a very controversial part of the legislation.¹⁵

In relation to this issue, Huntington cogently observed that “capable people are important, but it is also a mistake to downgrade the significance of formal organizational structure. Organizational structure both reflects and shapes an entity’s priorities.”¹⁶ Goldwater-Nichols provided that organizational structure

upon which DOD was to build its future. The PRC was watching and would eventually follow suit.

Through revisiting categories prescribed in Goldwater-Nichols legislation, we can evaluate China’s progress. We first examine the PRC’s approach to strengthening civilian authority. Second, we look at the organizational changes being implemented to enhance the military advice provided to senior party decisionmakers. Third, we scrutinize how the authority and responsibility of joint commanders to accomplish their tasked missions is being reinforced, with a particular focus on the new theater command structure. Fourth, we describe further organizational changes intended to improve the formulation of strategy and contingency planning. Fifth, new personnel management policies, seeking a more efficient use of defense resources and improvements in joint officer management, are explored. Sixth, a description of the PRC’s steps toward enhancing the effectiveness of PLA military operations is reviewed. Finally, as we survey how the PRC is approaching its joint force future, this article investigates China’s creation of new military services and its collaboration with industry.

PRC Reforms

We do not argue that the PLA is just learning lessons in jointness and military operations from the United States. Nonetheless, we do maintain that U.S. joint force reforms and experiences in its conflicts were both a catalyst and a focus for the PLA. As multiple authors highlight, the Gulf War in 1991 was an eye-opening episode for Chinese civilian and military leaders. Additionally, Russian experiences in both of the post-Soviet Chechen wars, as well as reforms after the Russia-Georgia conflict, provided insights for PLA efforts. The PLA studied the Falklands War between Argentina and the United Kingdom, given the situation’s similarity to the Taiwan issue. Joel Wuthnow and Phillip Saunders highlight that besides the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia, the PLA focused on reform experiences in Japan, India, France,

and Germany. The PLA analyzes its own history and filters its examinations of others through this lens; however, since the PRC has not fought an actual war since the Sino-Vietnamese conflict of 1979, it must look outside its own experience for how warfare in the information age has evolved.

Many of the ills previously described in the pre-Goldwater-Nichols system are applicable to the PLA. As such, China’s joint reforms “hope both to tighten central political control over a force that was seen as increasingly corrupt and to build the PLA into a credible joint warfighting entity.”¹⁷ Almost three decades after Goldwater-Nichols passage, the PLA’s organizational reforms commenced in late 2015 and early 2016. Perhaps heeding an observation by General Jones, “after nearly 2 years of studies, committee reports, and presidential interventions, the National Security Act of 1947 emerged as a compromise between those who favored full Service integration and those who feared centralization of military authority.”¹⁸ It remains to be seen, however, if the PLA reform process proves to be an aggressive Goldwater-Nichols legislation effort, or a weakened compromise like the National Security Act of 1947.

While much of the reform has been public, the PLA’s opaqueness makes in-depth analysis somewhat challenging. However, enough is already understood to facilitate some assessment. Either independently or at President Xi’s direction, it appears that the PLA arrived at many of the same conclusions as the Goldwater-Nichols framers. Although similar, each has characteristics specifically applicable to the PRC political system, current strategic context, and complicated cultural military history. The article now turns to the previously identified objectives of Goldwater-Nichols to evaluate their actions.

Strengthen Civilian Authority.

As Wuthnow and Saunders state, “The main political driver of the reform was the desire to tighten political control and supervision of the PLA.”¹⁹ While Goldwater-Nichols attempted to strengthen civilian authority *in* DOD, recent PLA reforms appear to strengthen



Soldiers from People's Liberation Army listen to briefing in preparation for search and extraction exchange during 13th annual U.S.-China Disaster Management Exchange at Camp Rilea Armed Forces Training Center, Warrenton, Oregon, November 16, 2017 (U.S. Army/April Davis)

President Xi's authority *over* the PLA. In this vein and unlike the U.S. desire for an unpolitical military, the goal is a PLA that is a direct defender of the Chinese Communist Party that embodies enduring "revolutionary ideals." As head of the party, state, and Central Military Commission (CMC), Xi's civilian control of the PLA and its reforms is further solidified. Organizational changes like transforming the previous General Staff Department (GSD) into 15 offices working directly for the CMC, in addition to implementing Xi's "chairman responsibility system"—which raises day-to-day national defense decisionmaking to his level—help ensure that all major military-related decisions rest in his hands, and he possesses a number of levers to ensure compliance. For instance, PLA reforms

take place in parallel to Xi's overall anti-corruption campaign, a tool he has used to consolidate power over and within the PLA, relieving two CMC vice chairmen and over 200 other officers.²⁰

One alarm bell Richard Weitz sounded regarding enhanced civilian control in the Chinese system is that few senior civilian leaders have served in the military and that there is a dearth of opportunities to develop civilian strategic thinkers either inside or outside the government. The reforms likewise do not alter the civilian-military balance in the PLA; it remains a military-led organization without the types of civilian political appointees or senior civil servants who are seen across DOD. All CMC members except Xi are military officers. This is a weakness, as it highlights the continued

lack of a real interagency perspective, while potentially providing more latitude for military leaders to formulate plans outside civilian interference. In effect, an organizational personnel mix that previously enabled periodic unresponsiveness to civilian direction was left in place. This leads some to conclude that achieving the goal of strengthening civilian authority and political control over the PLA will depend on Xi's personally assertive leadership style and his continued ability to dedicate significant time to military issues, along with the appointment of trusted officers to implement his initiatives.²¹

Improve Military Advice. The expansion of organizations directly subordinate to the CMC deepens the pool of advisors who can directly provide



PLA soldier participates in attack exercise observed by General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., and General Song Puxuan, commander, Northern Theater Command, at base in Shenyang, China, August 16, 2017 (DOD/Dominique A. Pineiro)

counsel to party decisionmakers.²² For example, interactions with foreign militaries, even during tensions such as the 2009 *Impeccable* incident, were managed by the Ministry of National Defense's Foreign Affairs Office (MND-FAO).²³ Reform efforts removed MND-FAO from the Ministry of National Defense, an organization largely devoid of real purpose, and moved it into the CMC as the Office of International Military Cooperation (OIMC). Even though OIMC still performs the same duties as MND-FAO, as a body directly subordinate to the CMC, it can provide advice more directly.

In another move, a GSD sub-department for training was elevated to a separate entity, the Training and Administration Department, directly reporting to the CMC. Its portfolio includes working with theater commands

and services to develop joint training standards and to monitor the implementation of those standards via its inspection function, measuring the effectiveness of exercises and training programs at the theater, service, and unit levels. The department also inherited a number of PLA academies previously supervised by GSD organizations, as well as oversight of the professional military education system, with a charge to improve joint education and to begin it earlier in careers. This move gives CMC leaders better visibility on the progress of joint training across the PLA and more opportunities to directly influence what is happening in the training realm.

Additionally, the Joint Staff Department, akin to a hybridization of U.S. J3 (Operations) and J5 (Strategic Plans and Policy) staff functions, was created on the basis of the former General

Staff Department. In addition to focusing on joint training, operational planning, capability assessments, 24/7 situational awareness, and overall force readiness, its portfolio includes acting as a conduit between the CMC and theater commands. Moreover, the Joint Staff Department serves as the planning arm and command and control hub for global actions outside the established theaters, which will be described later. This organization and the 14 others formed were designed to improve training, political indoctrination, weapons system acquisition, mobilization of forces, and strategic planning. The staffs are to be manned in a joint fashion and are designed to provide joint military counsel to senior CMC leaders considered missing by many under the old system.²⁴

Clarify Combatant Command Responsibilities. In a nod to U.S. unified

combatant command structure, the PLA departed from its previous seven military region construct (Beijing, Shenyang, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Lanzhou) to a five-theater command structure (Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, and Central). Under this new paradigm, theater commanders are now joint force commanders. Breaking down a situation similar to that which existed previously in U.S. history where the Services maintained an operational role, these commands are now the main warfighting arm of the PRC. The theater commander will operationally control the forces of services assigned to his region. This directly stems from China's interpretation of its threat environment and the nature of modern war. They diligently observed U.S. joint warfighting and the evolution of information-dominant, precision-oriented combat since the Gulf War. The former system was peacetime oriented and put the PRC at a distinct disadvantage in case of unforeseen or rapidly developing events. The new structure seeks to remedy that shortfall by making the transition from peace to conflict faster and smoother. A cadre of joint officers will staff each theater headquarters. The individual services now carry out the man, train, and equip functions, providing the forces and systems the theater commanders will fight with. A major challenge in this area is the historic dominance of army interests in the PLA. All initial theater commanders were from that branch. However, the assignment of PLA Navy Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai as the Southern theater commander and PLA Air Force Lieutenant General Yi Xiaoguang as the Central theater commander may indicate a new joint approach to theater command leadership.²⁵

Increase Attention to Strategy and Contingency Planning. A newly created office, the Strategic Planning Office, is directly subordinate to the CMC. It was formerly a component within the GSD known as the Strategic Planning Department, which had responsibilities for "long-term strategic analysis, resource allocation analysis, and organizational reform analysis."²⁶ A portion of these roles was spun off into other organizations,

with the Strategic Planning Office retaining the responsibility to conduct long-range strategic analysis. This analysis is particularly focused on developing approaches to multidomain, information-dominant warfare, integrating China's ground, sea, air, space, and cyber forces in a truly joint fashion to address threats seen on the horizon. The combination of the Joint Staff Department, the theater-specific contingency planning conducted by the theater commands, and the Strategic Planning Office demonstrates a focus on current and future strategy formulation and operational planning in keeping with Goldwater-Nichols.²⁷

Use Defense Resources More Efficiently. The PRC started the process of reform at a low-efficiency baseline with a number of opportunities to address. The most obvious was in manpower; much of the PLA structure has served as a "jobs program" historically. While previous downsizing simply trimmed overall numbers, this effort concentrates on a more efficient and effective use of resources. Against this backdrop, the PLA announced a reduction of 300,000 personnel. Most observers predict cuts will focus mainly on noncombat and low-skilled positions in the army, as well as those working with out-of-date weapon systems overall. Potentially demonstrating the rebalancing effect of these cuts, officially unverified reporting in March 2017 indicated that the PLA Navy may increase the force structure of the PLAN Marine Corps to support likely expeditionary deployments abroad, along with an increase in navy technical personnel. Additional winners in the move include rocket force, air force, cyber, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) mission sets. Military accessions at PRC academies demonstrate this with a one-quarter cut in ground-focused students and commensurate increases in those other prioritized areas.²⁸

Moreover, an examination of the multiple academies per service, duplicative bureaucracies constructed for the previous military region construct, reserve force structure, and overall militia numbers will be reviewed for cuts or reorganization. As part of overall budgetary

reform, acquisition methods are under review to weed out the high degree of waste and to ensure that the PLA's rapid increase in systems translates to a true increase in overall joint combat capability. A further step toward efficiency, as well as to deal with corruption issues, includes a push to standardize what the U.S. system refers to as regulations and operating instructions.²⁹

Improve Joint Officer Management.

A significant impact in the joint officer management arena was the previously mentioned assignment of former North Sea Fleet commander, Vice Admiral Yuan Yubai, as the commander of the Southern theater command, a first for the PLA. While a data point of one, this was previously considered unthinkable and points in an overall positive direction for the creation of truly joint staffs at the CMC and theater command levels. As senior leaders like Yuan rise, they can be expected to bring co-service representatives with them.³⁰ Another indicator of joint intentions for the officer corps is the creation of "a new 'operational command track' in PLA National Defense University courses that train PLA officers for promotion to senior positions. Attendance in command track courses will likely become a requirement for future joint command assignments."³¹ One measure of progress will be how many attendees originate from non-army services. Others include examining if joint courses become available for lower ranking officers, as well as how joint the staffs actually become and how assignments to the staffs translate into promotion opportunities. Challenges to this effort are not insignificant. Part of the need for reform is to curb rampant corruption in the ranks. As Saunders and Wuthnow point out, this even extends to the promotion system itself.³²

Enhance Effectiveness of Military Operations. China's former military region structure did not effectively merge service forces into geographic or regional commands, with many operational controls maintained at service headquarters. Additionally, a regional commander would not have automatically served as the operational commander if conflict erupted. That was determined as the



USS *Bunker Hill* participates in maneuvering exercise with People's Liberation Army Navy frigates *Daqing* (FFG 576) and *Yancheng* (FFG 546) off coast of Southern California following routine port visit to San Diego, December 9, 2016 (U.S. Navy/Craig Z. Rodarte)

situation developed, causing a time lag in response. The previously described move to a theater command structure was an intended remedy for this and many operational concerns, streamlining command and control arrangements by cutting the services out and preordaining that the theater commander is the operational commander for whatever situation arises in the zone.³³

As with joint officer management, challenges remain to effective implementation. While the United States promotes initiative by commanders, the PRC system continues to heavily centralize decisions, restricting freedom of action. In the vein of Vice Admiral Yuan's and Lieutenant General Yi's assignments, commanders will need to be selected from the service most appropriate for the mission to be executed in that theater, lessening army dominance. It also remains to be seen how the connection between theaters and services, as relating to weapons system acquisition, personnel

training, and career field composition, will be formed at the CMC level in order to match requirements with actual budgetary decisions. Likewise, the PLA will need to move away from its single-service-oriented exercise regime to one that builds joint interoperability. Even beyond all these, the PLA simply does not have a historic joint operational culture to build on. This will have to be inculcated if reform is to lead to operational success.³⁴

The Joint Force Future

Following 30 years of Goldwater-Nichols, the U.S. military continues to work at refining joint force capabilities and processes. Similarly, the PLA will continue to examine areas to improve due to institutional maturation, the changing threat environment, and developments to the methods of warfare. As General Martin Dempsey points out, "the diffusion of power in an era of hyper-connectivity is allowing destructive technologies to proliferate more

quickly."³⁵ Dempsey argues that these technologies, particularly cyber capabilities, are expanding at a rapid rate, with a commensurate impact on the joint warfare environment. He further argues that the future U.S. joint force must operate across geographical boundaries, Service affiliations, and all domains. Dempsey calls for globally integrated operations that "assemble quickly and apply decisive force anywhere in the world with a wide array of partners."³⁶ The PLA appears to possess similar views and is taking steps accordingly.

Creating New Services

As part of the reform agenda, three major new military organizations were created. For the first time, a separate PLA Army ground service was stood up in January 2016. This break with the past serves to lessen army dominance of the entire PLA, while also providing a platform to more effectively concentrate on ground warfighting

tactics and service needs. Rather than function through the old GSD, the army now sits on par (at least in the organizational chart) with other service headquarters. Additionally, a separate PLA Rocket Force was constructed, replacing the Second Artillery Corps. Some, like Richard Weitz and Song Zhongping, conjecture that its ultimate portfolio will include not only conventional and nuclear missiles but also strategic People's Liberation Army Navy submarines and strategic People's Liberation Army Air Force bombers, should reports of the development of a new nuclear-capable platform bear fruit. No evidence currently exists that this will occur. Others, such as David Logan, maintain a more likely option is that a hybrid command and control structure will emerge reminiscent of U.S. Strategic Command with the other services maintaining tactical control of the platforms and the Rocket Force possessing operational control, furthering the PLA's stated objective of more joint approaches. Finally, while the elevation of U.S. Cyber Command to a separate unified command was finally announced in August 2017, the Chinese elevated cyber, electronic warfare, ISR, and space elements into the Strategic Support Force (SSF), which is directly subordinate to the CMC and provides forces to the theater commands, in late 2015. It is a sign of the committee's concerns over information dominance in multi-domain warfighting.³⁷ The SSF design concept

*is the idea of "integrated reconnaissance, attack, and defense," which requires that the intelligence, offensive, and defensive elements are integrated together to enable full-spectrum warfighting in a particular domain. This new organizational construct is also intended to enable previously impossible levels of unified planning, force construction, and operations.*³⁸

It appears the PRC is now potentially ahead in operationalizing command and control in the information domain.

When analyzed in conjunction with the geographic proximity of the most

likely conflicts between the United States and China, the capabilities contained within the Rocket Force and SSF emphasize the systems designed to defeat the American concept of operations. Put in perspective, over 5,100 miles separate Honolulu, Hawaii, from Taiwan, while the Taiwan Strait is only 110 miles wide. In addition to the Taiwan scenario, as a RAND report highlights, the United States has three treaty allies (the Philippines, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) with territorial or maritime claims in conflict with the PRC. From that standpoint, the PRC can prepare for a fight in its "own backyard" with short logistics and supply chains. Its reorganization efforts play to PRC strengths in the antiaccess/area-denial realm. Its numerous, and increasingly more accurate, ballistic and cruise missile systems, along with counterspace, electronic warfare, information operations, and cyber warfare capabilities, already appear to put U.S. bases in the Republic of Korea, Japan, and Guam at risk and will present challenges to effective entry into the region in the event of a conflict.³⁹

Improving Collaboration with Industry

An important development in building industry collaboration in the PRC was the establishment of the Central Commission for Integrated Military and Civilian Development. This organization is charged with civil-military integration in the technology spectrum. Its goal is to bring the military and industry together to collaboratively pursue the integration of dual-use technologies, while cutting costs and promoting the strength of China's defense industrial base.⁴⁰ Defense collaboration with industry like this is key going forward given the rapid advance of technology and its corresponding effects on the battlefield. While former U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter's and House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry's similar efforts at industry collaboration and acquisition reform represent moves in the right direction, the United States lags the PRC in this area. Although it

has significant challenges, the Chinese defense industry appears to have a faster acquisition cycle in recognizing requirements, acquiring information, and integrating technologies than does DOD. Even if one can readily argue that a significant advantage within the authoritarian Chinese system is the incorporation of cyber espionage and cyber theft—efforts likely to get even stronger under the PLA reform initiative—DOD must discover a method to replicate the results needed within its legal framework.

Conclusion

Nearly 30 years after the landmark Goldwater-Nichols legislation, the PRC has ushered in reforms pursuing a more efficient, capable joint force. Although a point of potential debate, it appears that Chinese decisionmakers learned some of the U.S. joint lessons without a similar level of trauma, cost, and frustration, which initially drove Goldwater-Nichols. These significant changes have been affected within a system that has a luxury of largely working toward a single benchmark, the United States.

The ultimate measure of PLA success in joint force reform will be its performance in combat. While Goldwater-Nichols was congressionally driven, previous operations and senior leader observations lent credibility and emphasized the need to reform. Even in the face of Service opposition, there existed pockets of "believers" and leaders who recognized civilian leadership in the American system and who enabled Goldwater-Nichols-based reforms. Unlike the United States in the 1980s, however, the PLA lacks combat experience on which to base its actions. It also lacks an obvious senior leader like General David Jones to champion it. Joint reforms in China appear to be top-down driven by President Xi without that military advocacy. In essence, the PLA is not learning its own lessons and modifying accordingly; rather, it is learning those of DOD. The one simplifying factor in their situation, nonetheless, is an authoritarian political system that can enforce change.⁴¹



Soldiers with People's Liberation Army prepare attack exercise for General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., and General Song Puxuan, commander, Northern Theater Command, at base in Shenyang, China, August 16, 2017 (DOD/Dominique A. Pineiro)

PRC developments move the PLA away from its previous continentalist doctrine toward developing an expeditionary capability. The standup of a separate army service was a step in the right direction to break the army's historic domination of the country's military. The creation of theater commands to handle warfighting responsibilities was also a major positive change. Of note, while now joint, these commands remain insularly focused on China's geographic boundaries with global operations still being led at the CMC level. This is unlike the American combatant command structure. Moreover, PLA reforms do not include a unified command entity to address trans-regional issues like counterproliferation and counter-violent extremist organizations like U.S. Special Operations Command. These are issues worth watching as the PLA continues to evolve.

Also critical, particularly as PLA reforms develop, is a humility to examine PLA reform in the context of what changes, reforms, and adaptations may benefit the U.S. joint force, as well as a need to see how they alter the threat picture for planning, tactics, and acquisition purposes. Xi Jinping initiated the reforms by stating "our military has gone from small to big, from weak to

strong, from victory to victory. On this road, reform and innovation steps have never stopped."⁴² It is prudent, given the resolve demonstrated by Xi, that U.S. civilian and military leaders monitor these developments and evolve to further strengthen the force. This should be recognized as an important and critical undertaking. JFQ

Notes

¹ Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, *China's Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms*, INSS Strategic Forum 294 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, April 2016), 1, 9.

² Samuel P. Huntington, "Defense Organization and Military Strategy," *The Public Interest*, Spring 1982, 24.

³ David C. Jones, "Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (Spring 1982), 140; James R. Locher III, "Has It Worked? The Goldwater-Nichols Reorganization Act," *Naval War College Review* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2001), 96. As Locher notes, President Franklin D. Roosevelt unified command in Europe under General Dwight D. Eisenhower and created the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but he did not overcome Service rivalries in the Pacific theater. It was divided between commands led by General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz.

⁴ *The National Security Act of 1947*, Pub. L. 253, 80th Cong., 1st sess., July 26, 1947;

Peter J. Roman and David W. Tarr, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff: From Service Parochialism to Jointness," *Political Science Quarterly* 113, no. 1 (Spring 1998), 93.

⁵ Roman and Tarr, 92; Locher, 97-98.

⁶ *Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958*, Pub. L. 85-599, 85th Cong., 2nd sess., August 6, 1958; Jones, 140; Huntington, 21-23; Locher, 99; Jason Zaborski et al., *Evolution of Department of Defense Directive 5100.01: Functions of the Department of Defense and Its Major Components* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2014), 14-15; Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Special Message to the Congress on Reorganization of the Defense Establishment," speech, April 3, 1958, available at <www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=11340>; John T. Correll, "Eisenhower and the Eight Warlords," *Air Force Magazine*, July 2017, 58, 61.

⁷ Jones, 140; Huntington, 23; Locher, 99.

⁸ Locher, 99.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁰ Kathleen J. McInnis, *Goldwater-Nichols at 30: Defense Reform and Issues for Congress*, R44474 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), 27, 47-48; Locher, 99-101; Roman and Tarr, 97-98.

¹¹ Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, S. prt., 99-86, 99th Cong., 1st sess., 1985, 4, 8, 639-640; Huntington, 4, 26-28, 32; Jones, 146; Roman and Tarr, 92, 94-96, 98; McInnis, 6, 48.

¹² Jones, 144.

¹³ Peter W. Chiarelli, *Goldwater-Nichols Revisited: A Proposal for Meaningful Defense Reorganization* (Washington, DC: National War College, April 26, 1993), 5; McInnis, 47-48; Locher, 102; James R. Locher III, "Taking Stock of Goldwater-Nichols," *Joint Force Quarterly* 13 (Autumn 1996), 34.

¹⁴ *Goldwater-Nichols*.

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