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Key Points

- Expanded Chinese economic interests and the higher priority given to maritime interests are driving People's Liberation Army (PLA) efforts to develop power projection capabilities.
- The reorganization of the Chinese military in late 2015 explicitly sought to give the Central Military Commission (CMC) and the theater commands responsibility for conducting operations and to relegate the services to force-building. However, the services are trying to maintain operational responsibilities, including for overseas operations.
- The precise division of responsibilities and coordination mechanisms between the CMC, which controls nuclear weapons and likely other strategic capabilities, and the theater commands, which control ground, naval, air, and conventional missile forces, remains unclear, especially for large, high-intensity combat operations.
- Existing command and control mechanisms are workable for now, but are likely to prove inadequate if PLA overseas operations become larger, require joint forces, last for extended periods of time, or occur in nonpermissive environments where deployed forces face significant threats from hostile state or nonstate actors.

Beyond Borders: PLA Command and Control of Overseas Operations

By Phillip C. Saunders

China's latest round of military reforms is driven primarily by Xi Jinping's ambition to reshape the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to improve its ability to win informationized [*xinxihua*, 信息化] wars and to ensure that it remains loyal to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The reforms are unprecedented in their ambition and in the scale and scope of the organizational changes. Virtually every part of the PLA now reports to different leaders, has had its mission and responsibilities changed, has lost or gained subordinate units, or has undergone a major internal reorganization. The relationships between and among the Central Military Commission (CMC) departments, offices, and commissions, the services, and the theater commands (TCs) have all changed.[1] The reforms established new joint command and control mechanisms and thus have important implications for how the PLA conducts operations within and beyond China's borders.

This paper first discusses the strategic drivers of PLA efforts to improve the Chinese military's ability to operate beyond China's borders. Deploying and supporting troops beyond China's land borders require different types of weapons and troops, new logistics capabilities, longer range command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) support, and appropriate training and doctrine to support power projection missions. Efforts are under way to build these capabilities. The next section provides a framework of the different types of operations the PLA may be required to conduct in the coming years.

The paper then explores which parts of the reorganized PLA have responsibility for command and control of different types of operations. The post-reform PLA organizational structure is intended to give the TCs primary responsibility for operations and to focus the services on force-building. However, a number

of gaps and areas of overlapping responsibility exist that muddy this picture and raise questions about how the PLA will plan and execute different types of operations. The paper concludes that the post-reform command and control mechanisms are workable for now but are likely to prove inadequate if PLA overseas operations become larger, require joint forces, last for extended periods of time, or occur in nonpermissive environments where deployed forces face significant threats. The final section considers how the PLA might create new joint command and control arrangements to better support expeditionary operations, identifying five potential models. Some of those options would require significant additional reforms to command and control structures, especially if the PLA envisions conducting joint warfare in the far seas.

Drivers of PLA Power Projection

A broad trend in the PLA that predated the latest round of reforms is an increasing interest in power projection well beyond China's borders and the First Island Chain. David Finkelstein has described the resulting developments as contributing to an "incipient expeditionary PLA."[2] A number of drivers are supporting this effort.

First, economic interests outside China's borders have increased as a result of China's opening up and expanding trade and investment ties around the world. This situation has produced new dependencies on foreign markets and foreign sources of raw materials and energy, as well as a significant overseas presence for Chinese companies and People's Republic of China (PRC) nationals, some in unstable places. This led Hu Jintao to articulate the "New Historic Missions" for the PLA in 2004, which gave the military responsibility for protecting China's economic development.[3] In practical terms, this translates into the need for the military to be able to protect China's sea lines of communication (SLOCs) against threats by state and nonstate actors, rescue PRC citizens at risk in unstable environments, protect China's overseas investments, and ensure stability in countries and regions important to China's economic and security interests.[4]

Second, China's leadership has given heightened attention to China's unresolved territorial claims, including Taiwan, the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, and the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. The substance of these claims has not changed significantly, but previous reform-era Chinese leaders were prepared to downplay them in pursuit of a stable regional environment that supported economic development. A richer China, and one where CCP leaders rely more heavily on nationalist credentials as a source of legitimacy, has resulted in a higher priority on defending Chinese claims—with Xi Jinping telling the U.S. Secretary of Defense that China cannot lose "even one inch of territory"—and in expanding China's effective control of disputed maritime territory.[5]

Third, the PLA's services are in increasing competition to develop long-range weapons and expeditionary capabilities. The New Historic Missions, originally drafted by the CMC General Office's research arm, give the services political justification to develop new capabilities and the doctrine to support them.[6] For the navy, this includes development of aircraft carriers and an expansion of the marines while adding "far seas protection" to its "near seas defense" mission.[7] For the air force, this includes development of long-range strike capabilities and a new strategic bomber, and a shift to offensive operations and training over water.[8] For the army, this includes greater emphasis on mobility and the ability to deploy and sustain forces outside normal operating areas.[9] For the Rocket Force, this includes developing long-range conventional missile systems and weapons such as the DF-21D anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM).[10] Such capabilities not only are necessary for the PLA to project power beyond China's land borders but also reflect the modernization goals of the individual military services as well as guidance from CCP leaders.

Fourth, China's civilian and military leaders have sought to expand the PLA's ability to contribute global public goods, such as regional stability and humanitarian assistance, and to support positive relations with other countries and regions. Chinese leaders have highlighted

the PLA's positive contributions to regional stability such as participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, counterpiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, and participation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) efforts. This represents an effort to portray expanding Chinese defense budgets and PLA capabilities in a less threatening manner and to make the case for power projection capabilities as necessary for the PLA to contribute to regional and global stability.[11] China has also significantly expanded its efforts to use military diplomacy to engage other militaries and support broader Chinese foreign policy goals.[12]

These four drivers, and the resulting modernization of Chinese military capabilities that they have supported, are producing a PLA that is increasingly active outside China's land borders.[13] Chinese naval activity has increased in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Indian Ocean, including training deployments of the aircraft carrier *Liaoning*.[14] The PLA Navy has also maintained counterpiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008. The PLA Air Force has increased its training over water in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, including stepped up operations of H-6 bombers and maritime surveillance aircraft in the Western Pacific, South China Sea, and Sea of Japan.[15] The PLA has established its first overseas base in Djibouti, participates in nine United Nations peacekeeping operations, and is conducting active military diplomacy efforts that include port calls and a range of bilateral and multilateral military exercises with countries in the Indo-Pacific and in other regions of the world.

This increasing volume of military activity beyond China's borders is placing new demands on PLA command and control mechanisms. The 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* called for using both cooperative and confrontational military activities to expand China's strategic space overseas; it also noted the need to establish a new joint command system to provide effective support for these activities.[16] The military reforms adopted in 2016 established new national- and theater-level joint command mechanisms and nominally removed the services from an operational command role.

Types of Overseas Operations

Before discussing the reforms in detail, it is useful to outline potential PLA overseas operations. These can be grouped conceptually into four broad categories: border contingencies, near seas operations and contingencies, "theater plus" contingencies, and far seas operations and contingencies. *Border contingencies* involve potential conflicts with countries sharing land borders with China; each theater command conducts planning and training for those contingencies within its area of responsibility. Border contingencies may involve interventions or major combat operations in neighboring countries; the term does not connote only skirmishes over disputed borders. *Near seas operations and contingencies* take place in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Yellow Sea. The Southern, Eastern, and Northern TCs conduct near seas operations within their respective areas of responsibility. *Theater plus contingencies* lie primarily within one theater command's geographic area of responsibility, but either require significant assets not under the theater commander's control or supporting operations that take place outside that area of responsibility. The latter case may involve multitheater operations, such as would be needed in a Taiwan contingency. *Far seas operations and contingencies* take place beyond the First Island Chain and thus appear to lie beyond the areas of responsibility of the TCs.[17] These include traditional blue water navy missions such as protection of SLOCs as well as a range of smaller nontraditional security missions. In addition to these larger operations and contingencies, the PLA conducts military operations other than war that involve regularly deploying smaller quantities of military forces outside China's borders, both within and beyond the Indo-Pacific region. These include conducting military diplomacy, peacekeeping operations, HA/DR, and noncombatant evacuations. The table summarizes command and control responsibilities for each type of overseas operation.

Table. PLA Overseas Operations

Type of Operation	Command and Control	Operational Forces	Examples
Border Contingencies	TCs; CMC retains control over PLARF nuclear and strategic capabilities; service HQs for strategic capabilities (for example, aircraft carriers, bombers, paratroopers, ASBMs)	TC armies; TC navies; TC air forces; PLARF conventional forces	The four TCs with land borders plan and train for specific contingencies within their geographic areas of responsibility
Near Seas Operations and Contingencies	TCs; coast guard HQ; PLAAF HQ for bomber operations?	TC navies; TC air forces; coast guard; maritime militia	Southern TC controls South China Sea operations; Eastern TC controls East China Sea operations; Northern TC controls Yellow Sea operations
"Theater Plus" Contingencies	TCs for main effort; CMC and/or Service HQs for "plus" part of large-scale operations? CMC for commanding multitheater operations	TC armies; TC navies; TC air forces; PLARF conventional forces; service strategic capabilities (aircraft carriers, bombers, paratroopers, ASBMs)	Western Pacific and Far Seas aspects of a Taiwan contingency (Eastern TC has lead for main effort); naval aspects of an India contingency (Western TC has lead for main effort)
Far Seas Operations and Contingencies	Navy HQ; CMC JSD	Navy; other services and SSF in supporting roles	Counterintervention operations; SLOC protection; counterpiracy deployments and port calls; Djibouti base
Military Diplomacy	CMC Training and Administration Department (joint exercises); service HQs (single-service exercises); CMC Office of International Military Cooperation (liaison)	Army; navy; air force	Chinese participation in Russian Vostok 2018 joint exercise; PLAN and Russian Navy Joint Sea combined naval exercises
PKOs; HA/DR; NEOs	CMC/JSD Overseas Operations Office (current PKOs, HA/DR, and NEOs); Chinese Ministry of National Defense Peacekeeping Affairs Office (PKOs); air force HQ (2011 NEO); navy HQ (2015 NEO)	Army; navy; air force	PLA engineer, medical, and infantry units and observers have deployed to UN PKOs in Africa and the Middle East; China delivered supplies and provided assistance to Indonesia after a September 2018 earthquake and tsunami; PLA evacuated 35,000 PRC nationals from Libya in 2011; PLAN evacuated 600 PRC citizens from Yemen in 2015

Key: ASBM = anti-ship ballistic missile; CMC = Central Military Commission; HA/DR = humanitarian assistance/disaster relief; HQ = headquarters; JSD = Joint Staff Department; NEO = noncombat evacuation operation; PKO = peacekeeping operation; PLA = People's Liberation Army; PLAAF = People's Liberation Army Air Force; PLAN = People's Liberation Army Navy; PLARF = People's Liberation Army Rocket Force; SLOC = sea lines of communication; TC = theater command; UN = United Nations.

Division of Labor in a Reorganized PLA

In order to improve the PLA's ability to conduct joint operations, the reforms revised the division of labor within the PLA, with the CMC providing "general management" [*junwei guan zong*, 军委管总], the TCs focusing on operations [*zhanqu zhu zhan*, 战区主战], and the services managing force-building [*junzhong zhu jian*, 军种主建].[18] In principle, operations should be conducted either using the new national-level joint command and control mechanism under the CMC's Joint Staff Department (JSD) or using theater-level joint command and control mechanisms.

In practice, however, there appears to be more diversity in which organizations command PLA operations, with different organizations taking the lead for different types of operations. The CMC retains control over nuclear and some nonnuclear strategic capabilities, likely exercising this authority through the JSD and its Joint Operations Command Center in the Western Hills. Some overseas operations, such as Chinese units participating in United Nations peacekeeping operations, appear to be under the supervision of the JSD Overseas Operations Office [*haiwai xingdong chu*, 海外行动处]. Other operations, such as Chinese anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, appear to remain under the control of the relevant service headquarters—in this case, navy headquarters. The services likely also retain responsibility for planning and executing exercises with foreign militaries under the supervision of the CMC Office of International Military Cooperation. Unlike the other services, the PLA Rocket Force and the Strategic Support Force (SSF) combine both operational and force-building responsibilities in a single organization.[19]

TCs: Playing Well with Others?

The new theater commands play a central role in the PLA's new joint command and control arrangements, but uncertainties about how much authority the theater commanders will exercise may limit their effectiveness for some geographically dispersed and higher end contingencies. Each TC has responsibility for a specific set of contingencies, which includes planning and joint training in peacetime and commanding operations in wartime. The new theater joint command and control structure, with the TCs exercising control of ground, naval, and air forces through service-specific theater component headquarters, rectifies a major problem with the pre-reform command and control structure, where the military region headquarters did not have peacetime command of naval, air, and missile units within its area of responsibility.[20] The new construct should be much better suited to joint planning, training, and operations. There have been significant growing pains as the TCs and their components adjust to new command relationships and learn how to work together, but the basic joint command structure appears to be workable.

The shift from seven military regions to five TCs has helped clarify responsibilities for border contingencies and near seas operations. For example, in the pre-reform system, the Jinan and Shenyang Military Regions both had responsibilities in a Korea contingency, and the Guangzhou and Chengdu Military Regions had responsibility for different parts of Southeast Asia. In the post-reform PLA, each theater command has responsibility for specific contingencies based on geography. The Eastern TC has responsibility for Taiwan, Japan, and the East China Sea; the Northern TC has responsibility for Korea and the Yellow Sea; the Western TC has responsibility for India and Central Asia; and the Southern TC has responsibility for Southeast Asia and the South China Sea. The Central TC, now commanded by an air force officer, would have responsibility for defending the capital in a conflict and would serve as a source of reserve forces to support other theater commands.[21]

For most border or near seas contingencies, the relevant TC would have command of PLA forces operating inside and across China's borders in executing the war plan. However, it is not clear how far each theater command's area of responsibility extends beyond the border or whether the theater commander would have

command of geographically dispersed support operations. The Southern TC's responsibility for the South China Sea already requires conducting near seas air and naval operations that extend far away from mainland China. However, in the event of a Taiwan contingency, the PLA Navy may be tasked to operate even farther into the Western Pacific (what this paper calls a theater plus contingency). It is not clear whether the Eastern TC, PLA Navy headquarters, or the CMC JSD would have operational control over naval forces operating far out in the Western Pacific. Similarly, if China was concerned about U.S. military intervention in a Korea conflict, Beijing might deploy naval and air forces into the Yellow Sea and Sea of Japan to deter and defend against U.S. naval and air forces. A Chinese conflict with India would likely entail naval operations in the Indian Ocean, but the Western TC has no naval component to take charge of the naval fight.[22] Presumably, navy headquarters or the CMC JSD would take on those responsibilities, challenging the principle of unity of command and raising the issue of how the PLA would coordinate land and naval operations in different theaters.

The reforms established joint command and control structures at both the national level under the CMC JSD and at the theater level for assigned ground, naval, and air force units. However, important questions remain about the relationships between the CMC JSD and the TCs and about how theater commanders will tap nuclear and nonnuclear strategic capabilities that remain under CMC control. The precise division of labor and the willingness of the CMC to delegate assets and decision authority to the theater commander in wartime remains unclear. The Rocket Force reportedly has at least 100 officers assigned to the five TCs, and theater commanders will have operational control over conventional Rocket Force units in their theaters in wartime.[23] However, the CMC will retain decision authority over nuclear weapons and will likely also exercise tight control over longer range systems with strategic impact, such as ASBM.[24] The SSF will provide strategic space, cyber, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare support to TCs, but the planning mechanisms and operational command relationships through which this support will be delivered are unclear.[25] One hint is a reference to an SSF eastern theater base, which suggests that the SSF might establish support bases in each theater,[26] similar to the Joint Logistic Support Force (JLSF) model.[27]

Will the JSD, acting on behalf of the CMC, view its role primarily as providing supporting strategic capabilities—such as ASBMs, intelligence derived from space and cyber systems, counterspace and offensive cyber capabilities, and long-range precision strike—to help a theater commander execute the war plan?[28] Or will the JSD, run by a CMC-member grade officer senior to the theater commanders, attempt to micromanage the theater's operations? The prevailing PLA organizational culture emphasizes caution and deference to authority rather than taking responsibility for actions not fully vetted with more senior leaders.[29] The notion of empowering military officers to exercise initiative to carry out the intent of their commanders (known in U.S. parlance as mission command), which is integral to some Western militaries, is not culturally accepted in the PLA at present.[30] Integrated communications systems and a common operational picture provide both opportunities for timely support with national-level strategic capabilities and temptations to intervene in the decisions of subordinate commanders. The need to control escalation in a conflict—what the PLA calls war control—and the need to integrate operations in other theaters to support the primary theater may provide incentives for the JSD to assert its authority over the theater commander leading the conflict.[31]

Service Headquarters: Keeping a Hand in Operations?

Another question concerns the role of the services. In principle, the reforms removed the service headquarters from operations, but in practice all of them have held onto some operational command responsibilities, including some relevant for overseas operations. Army headquarters retains responsibility for border and coastal defense; navy headquarters supervises the counterpiracy patrols in the

Gulf of Aden; air force headquarters retains centralized control of bomber, transport, and airborne operations; and the Rocket Force has operational control over strategic forces. Moreover, all the services are using service training requirements, including single-service, multitheater exercises, as a means of asserting a continued operational role. The TC army, navy, and air force component commanders report to both the TC headquarters for operations and to their service headquarters for administration and service-specific training requirements. How they will reconcile competing demands remains to be seen.[32]

There is ample evidence of interservice rivalry and competition for missions and resources relevant to overseas operations. Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew Erickson discuss how the higher priority accorded to the maritime domain by Xi Jinping has prompted efforts by the air force, Rocket Force, and even the army to develop and showcase capabilities relevant to near and far seas maritime operations.[33] Similar trends are evident in long-range precision strike, where the navy, air force, and Rocket Force all have systems that perform similar missions.[34] Especially in an environment where military budgets are growing more slowly, interservice competition over missions and resources may impede operational cooperation and complicate efforts to rationalize command and control relationships.[35] This may also be the case in the nuclear domain as the PLA Navy's submarines equipped with nuclear-armed ballistic missiles become operational and if the PLA Air Force develops and deploys nuclear capabilities.[36]

There is a real tension between the desire of the services to maximize their budgets and independent capabilities and the needs of theater commanders for trained forces that can work jointly. Will the removal of the service commanders from the CMC eventually allow that organization to become a genuine joint staff that can override parochial service considerations in order to maximize PLA joint operational capabilities?[37] Or will established service cultures and organizational interests lead the services to resist pressure for greater jointness and impede the development of a joint force that maximizes PLA combat effectiveness?

Command and Control in a Future Expeditionary PLA

One future requirement that the recent PLA reforms did not fully address is the potential need to command and support a broader range of military operations beyond China's borders, including theater plus contingencies and large-scale far seas operations. In the last several decades, PLA overseas operations have been limited to participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations, counter-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden (since December 2008), short-term deployments to participate in international military exercises and conduct HA/DR operations, and a few noncombatant emergency evacuations.

The PLA is devoting considerable effort to developing power projection capabilities, doctrine, and political justifications that would support expeditionary operations well beyond China's land borders and outside the Second Island Chain.[38] The new logistics base in Djibouti improves the PLA's ability to sustain peacetime naval operations in a permissive environment and provides a nascent capability to support other types of operations that may involve a combat role.[39] These operations are justified domestically by the need to protect China's overseas interests and internationally by the claim that the Chinese military can provide public goods and contribute to international stability.[40]

The TCs are better equipped to respond to a range of border and near seas contingencies than was possible under the pre-reform military regions. However, their ability to plan and execute operations has geographic limits depending on their areas of responsibility and the specific contingencies they are assigned.[41] The exact nature of those assigned areas is unknown; the official map of the TC areas of responsibility shows no boundaries outside Chinese land territory.[42] Unlike the U.S. military, which assigns every part of the world to a geographic combatant command responsible for contingency planning and operations within its respective region, the PLA has gaps

where potential operations fall outside the designated areas of responsibility of the five TCs. The PLA does not appear to have established a standing or ad hoc joint task force mechanism to command such operations.

To date, most PLA far seas operations—such as the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in 2011 and Yemen in 2015—have been small, of short duration, and in relatively permissive environments.[43] These types of operations are currently assigned either to the CMC JSD or to one of the service headquarters, depending on the nature of the operation. However, these mechanisms are likely to prove inadequate if PLA far seas operations become larger, require joint forces, last for extended periods of time, or occur in contested environments with threats from hostile state or nonstate actors.[44] Conducting multiple simultaneous overseas operations would further stress the PLA's ability to command overseas operations.[45] If the PLA begins to regularly conduct such operations, new joint command and control mechanisms will likely be necessary.

There are at least five potential solutions: allow the service headquarters to continue commanding far seas operations, extend TC areas of responsibility to fill gaps, establish a new "global command" to handle the rest of the world, strengthen JSD operational command capabilities, or develop new joint command and control mechanisms along the lines of U.S. ad hoc and standing joint task forces. These options are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

◆ Allow service headquarters to command far seas operations. The path of least resistance would be to allow the service headquarters to maintain command responsibilities for far seas operations that lie outside the areas of responsibilities of the TCs. This appears to be the current PLA practice, with navy headquarters in charge of counterpiracy deployments in the Gulf of Aden and China's logistics base in Djibouti. The advantage is that the navy already has some experience and the communications hardware necessary to command these operations.[46] However, this solution runs counter to the logic of the reforms and is not well suited to conducting operations that involve multiple services or that require significant deployments of ground forces far from China's borders.[47] Moreover, the other services are likely to resist navy dominance of an overseas mission set likely to expand in the future.

◆ Extend TC responsibilities. The PLA could follow U.S. practice and assign every country and region in the world to one of its TCs. This would clarify responsibilities and allow the theaters to gradually extend their joint command and control and communications capabilities farther from China's borders.[48] However, the TCs are relatively new entities that appear to have their hands full dealing with their existing responsibilities. Moreover, this arrangement would require duplicating C4ISR capabilities across the TCs and risk creating seams across the expanded theater command areas of responsibility that would complicate global operations.

◆ Establish a new global command. An alternative would be a new global command that would handle far seas contingencies and other overseas operations that lie outside TC areas of responsibility.[49] This could build on lessons learned from the TCs, avoid duplication of costly long-range C4ISR capabilities, and—if based in Beijing—potentially reap synergies and ease coordination challenges with the Foreign Ministry and other government agencies, Chinese intelligence services, and strategic airlift and sealift capabilities controlled by the service headquarters. A global command would require a significant investment in terms of personnel, equipment, and facilities. Unlike the TCs, a global command might not have service component headquarters or permanent forces assigned, which could be an impediment to training and to effective operations.

◆ Strengthen JSD operational capabilities. Another solution would be to strengthen the JSD's ability to command multiple and larger scale far seas operations. This would require a significant expansion of the size and staffing of the Joint Operations Command Center. The advantage is that this capability could expand

incrementally as the pace of PLA overseas operations grows. Disadvantages include potential overload, possible interference with JSD responsibilities to command national-level assets in a major war, and questions about whether the Joint Operations Command Center is well suited to exercise tactical command and control over operations halfway around the world.

◆ Develop new joint task force mechanisms. Another solution would be to follow U.S. practice and develop new ad hoc and standing joint task forces. This is a flexible solution that allows for assigning ongoing responsibilities to a standing task force in order to take the burden off the JSD and its Joint Operations Command Center and for establishing and disestablishing ad hoc joint task forces as necessary. One obvious obstacle is that the PLA officer corps is new to joint operations. It is not clear how many senior PLA officers would be capable of effectively commanding a joint task force or how many midlevel officers could serve as capable staff. This problem may ease over time as the PLA gains more experience planning and conducting joint operations at the theater level.

Conclusion

Xi Jinping's ambitious organizational reforms constitute a "remaking of the PLA" that has changed how the military is organized and how the different parts of the post-reform PLA interact with each other.[50] Although the reorganization is largely complete, the reforms are still a work in progress, with the CMC, TCs, services, and support elements—such as the SSF and the JLSF—working out how they will operate together in practice. Some pre-reform practices, such as the navy's command of Gulf of Aden counterpiracy missions, are continuing even though they are at odds with the organizational logic of the reforms. The current diversity of command and control arrangements may reflect conscious decisions, transitional arrangements that may change in the future, or a struggle between different parts of the PLA over roles and missions. There are a number of gaps and areas of overlapping responsibility that raise questions about the PLA's ability to achieve unity of command.

The pace of PLA modernization continues to accelerate, and past constraints on overseas operations are eroding. At the same time, the political, economic, and strategic demands for the PLA to operate beyond Chinese borders to protect and advance Chinese interests are increasing as projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative are implemented. The next transformation of the PLA will involve integrating power projection capabilities such as carrier battle groups, amphibious and expeditionary forces, long-range transport and strike capabilities, C4ISR, advanced logistics support, and overseas bases into a still-emerging concept of global operations. As the PLA begins conducting larger and more sophisticated joint operations and expands the range and scope of its overseas operations, experience will likely reveal the need for additional adjustments to joint command and control mechanisms to fully support China's growing military ambitions and increasingly global PLA operations.

Notes

[1] For a comprehensive analysis of the reforms, see Phillip C. Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019), available at <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Publications/Books/Chairman-Xi-Remakes-the-PLA/>.

[2] David Finkelstein, *Commentary on China's External Grand Strategy* (Arlington, VA: CNA, January 2011), 6–7.

[3] Daniel Hartnett, *Toward a Globally Focused Chinese Military: The Historic Missions of the Chinese Armed Forces* (Arlington, VA: CNA, June 2008).

[4] Mathieu Duchâtel, Oliver Bräuner, and Zhou Hong, *Protecting China's Overseas Interests: The Slow Shift Away from Non-Interference* (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2014).

[5] Thomas Gibbons-Neff and Steven Lee Myers, "China Won't Yield 'Even One Inch' of South China Sea, Xi Tells Mattis," *New York Times*, June 27, 2018, available at <www.nytimes.com/2018/06/27/world/asia/mattis-xi-china-sea.html>.

[6] Hartnett, *Toward a Globally Focused Chinese Military*.

[7] Christopher H. Sharman, *China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy*, China Strategic Perspectives 9 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2015).

[8] Mark R. Cozad and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, *People's Liberation Army Air Force Operations over Water: Maintaining Relevance in China's Changing Security Environment* (Arlington, VA: RAND, 2017).

[9] See John Chen, "Choosing the 'Least Bad Option': Organizational Interests and Change in the PLA Ground Forces," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 85–124.

[10] See David M. Logan, "Making Sense of China's Missile Forces," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 393–436.

[11] The 2013 defense white paper is an excellent example of Chinese efforts to connect expanded PLA capabilities with a greater ability to contribute to stability. See *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces* (Beijing: State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, April 16, 2013).

[12] Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy, 2003–2016: Trends and Implications*, China Strategic Perspectives 11 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, July 2017).

[13] See Joel Wuthnow et al., eds., *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, forthcoming).

[14] *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2018* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018), 30–32.

[15] Ibid., 118–120.

[16] Academy of Military Science Strategy Research Department, *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学] (Beijing: Military Sciences Press, 2013), 120, 249.

[17] It is not clear whether operations in the Philippine Sea, which lies between the First and Second Island Chains, are the responsibility of Southern Theater Command (TC), PLA Navy headquarters, or the Central Military Commission's Joint Staff Department.

[18] "Central Military Commission Opinion on Deepening National Defense and Armed Force Reforms" [中央军委关于深化国防和军队改革的意见], Xinhua, January 1, 2016, available at <http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2016-01/01/c_1117646695.htm>.

[19] See 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*, 437–518.

[20] See Edward Burke and Arthur Chan, "Coming to a Theater Near You: Command, Control, Forces, Etc.," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 227–256.

[21] 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, March 2017), 17–18.

[22] The Western TC had no naval officers assigned to its staff prior to 2018, but at least one PLA Navy officer was recently assigned to the TC staff. Personal communication from a U.S. Navy officer, May 2019.

[23] Zhang Hui, "PLA Rocket Force Names 100 Officers to Commands," *Global Times* (Beijing), April 12, 2016, available at <www.globaltimes.cn/content/978291.shtml>.

[24] See Phillip C. Saunders and David C. Logan, "China's Regional Nuclear Capability, Non-Nuclear Strategic Systems, and Integration of Concepts and Operations," in James Smith and Paul Bolt, eds., *China as a 21st-Century Strategic Power* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2020).

[25] See Costello and McReynolds, "China's Strategic Support Force," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 437–519.

[26] Ibid.; John Chen, Joe McReynolds, and Kieran Green, "The Strategic Support Force in Organizational Context: How the SSF Fits into China's Overall Plans for Joint Warfare," in Wuthnow, *The PLA Beyond Borders.*

[27] See LeighAnn Luce and Erin Richter, "Handling Logistics in a Reformed PLA: The Long March Toward Joint Logistics," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 257–292.

[28] For a pre-reform discussion of what these capabilities are and how they might be applied in a contingency, see Mark Stokes, "Employment of National-Level PLA Assets in a Contingency: A Cross-Strait Conflict as Case Study," in *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*, ed. Andrew Scobell et al. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2015), 135–158.

[29] Roger Cliff, "Chinese Military Reforms: A Pessimistic Take," *Joint Force Quarterly* 83 (4th Quarter 2016), 53–56.

[30] Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[31] Thanks to Michael Coullahan of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command for highlighting this point.

[32] Wang Weixing [王卫星] argues that the power of U.S. geographic combatant commanders to override Service personnel assignments and to appeal directly to the Secretary of Defense for resources and authorities is an important source of U.S. military operational success, implicitly arguing for empowering theater commanders over the services. See "Improving Operating Effectiveness of Joint Command and Control Mechanisms" [联合作战指挥体制如何高效运行], Xinhua Online [新华网], December 3, 2015, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2015-12/03/c_128495581_2.htm>.

[33] See Ian Burns McCaslin and Andrew Erickson, "The Impact of Xi-Era Reforms on the Chinese Navy," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 125–170.

[34] See Phillip C. Saunders and Erik Quam, "Future Force Structure of the Chinese Air Force," in *Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army*, ed. Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007).

[35] See Phillip C. Saunders, "A 'World-Class' Military: Assessing China's Global Military Ambitions," Testimony Before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 20, 2019.

[36] For an analysis of possibilities, see David C. Logan, *China's Future SSBN Command and Control Structure*, INSS Strategic Forum 299 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, November 2016).

[37] See Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "Conclusion: Assessing Chinese Military Capabilities," in Saunders et al., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 711–728.

[38] Kristen Gunness and Oriana Skylar Mastro, "A Global People's Liberation Army: Possibilities, Challenges, and Opportunities," *Asia Policy* 22 (July 2016), 131–155.

[39] See Erica Downs, Jeffrey Becker, and Patrick deGategno, *China's Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China's First Overseas Base* (Arlington, VA: CNA, July 2017); Jeff Becker, "What Does China Want in Djibouti?" *National Interest*, December 27, 2017, available at <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/what-does-china-want-djibouti-23827>.

[40] See *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*.

[41] See Scobell et al., *The People's Liberation Army and Contingency Planning in China*.

[42] See the map available at "Recent Big Moves at Theater Commands: 34 New Personnel within One Month" [战区近来动作不小 1个月内34人履新], *Sohu*, August 21, 2016, available at <http://news.sohu.com/20160821/n465257915.shtml>. Thanks to Joel Wuthnow for this point.

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[44] For a discussion of what these future far seas operations might look like, see Joel Wuthnow, Phillip C. Saunders, and Ian Burns McCaslin, "PLA Joint Operations in the Far Seas," paper presented at the Naval War College, May 6–7, 2019.

[45] See Joel Wuthnow, *System Overload: Can China's Military Be Distracted in a War over Taiwan?* China Strategic Perspectives 15 (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2020), available at <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/2232369/system-overload-can-chinas-military-be-distracted-in-a-war-over-taiwan/>.

[46] For an argument that the Navy is best equipped to develop and operate the advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance necessary for far seas operations, see Zhu Dangming and Tai Daguo [朱党明, 秦大国], "Building a Sea and Space Versatile Battlefield Situation Picture" [海天一体战场通用态势图构建], *Journal of Equipment Academy* [准备学院学报] 28 (April 2017), 46–51.

[47] The discussion of such operations in the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* envisions the other services only playing minor roles in supporting naval operations. See chap. 10, sect. 2, 215–216.

[48] For one article by a Southern TC officer advocating an expanded TC role in far seas operations, see Li Jianwen [李建文], "Making the Leap: From Near Seas to Far Seas" [跨越：从今海到远海], *Jiefangjun Bao* [解放军报], October 13, 2016, available at <www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/1/2016-10/13/04/2016101304_pdf.pdf>.

[49] For a PLA analysis of U.S. and Russian command arrangements and the argument that TCs should be based around China's strategic needs, see Li Meili and Liu Xiaoliang [李美丽, 刘孝良], "Explaining Joint Command Mechanisms in Foreign Militaries" [解码外军联合指挥机构], Xinhua Online [新华网], October 10, 2018, available at <www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2018-10/09/c_129967764.htm>. The article notes that changing strategic needs could require new organizations, citing the U.S. establishment of U.S. Africa Command as an example.

[50] See Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA.*

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