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## 7. CHINA'S NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY

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### I. INTRODUCTION

It is an excellent time to reassess China's national military strategy. The next wave of significant reforms for the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is already beginning to unfold. The results of the 15th Party Congress (September 1997) and the 9th National People's Congress (NPC) (March 1998) indicate that after many years of study and debate firm decisions have been made to move forward with structural, organizational and other adjustments to China's armed forces. At the Party Congress Jiang Zemin announced a 500,000-man reduction in force size over the next three years. In the wake of the 9th NPC, a fourth General Department was created—the General Armaments Department—and the Commission for Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND) was elevated to ministry status with a civilian in charge. We should expect to see more changes, although Beijing's timetable is unknown. Some change may be dramatic and public. Most will be quiet and not easily discernable, given the opaque nature of the Chinese defense establishment.

While the recent party congress and NPC serve as significant benchmarks, we must remember that they are points on a continuum of change that the PLA has been undergoing for almost two decades. *What does the PLA hope to achieve and why? How does it plan to achieve its ends?* These very basic questions, which on the surface seem so simple, are probably the most critical questions one can ask in evaluating the Chinese armed forces. They are critical questions because if one does not address these overarching issues it is difficult to make sense of all other developments: command and doctrinal issues, organization and force structure, or hardware development and acquisition, to name a few.

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To answer these basic questions we must have a framework and a context. This paper attempts to provide such a context. It will offer a notional national military strategy for China.<sup>2</sup>

There are five major assumptions implicit in this paper. The first is that China does in fact have a national military strategy. That is, there is a rationale behind the ongoing PLA reforms. A second assumption is that outside observers can adduce that rationale, even if imperfectly, from public domain information. The third assumption is that the PLA remains subservient to the party and the state and therefore China's national military strategy is derived from and mutually supportive of Beijing's overarching national security strategy. A fourth assumption is that while there is much that is unique about China's armed forces, there is also a good deal of universality in how defense establishments go about the business of planning at the national level. A fifth assumption is that Western models can sometimes help structure a discussion of Chinese phenomena even to the point of using Chinese terminology comfortably within those constructs.

The U.S. Army War College (AWC) model of military strategy as developed by Colonel Arthur Lykke, USA (Ret.) serves as the superstructure of the following analysis of the PLA.<sup>3</sup> While the PLA would certainly *not* use an American construct to articulate its national military strategy, this model is nevertheless a useful tool for the descriptive and analytic purposes of this paper. I have also borrowed useful frames of reference from the planners on the Joint Staff who produce the Pentagon's national military strategy (which in turn is based upon a derivative of the Army War College model),<sup>4</sup> as well as several universal military concepts such as "center of gravity" and others. Into these "frames" we shall place Chinese "lenses" to articulate a vision of the bigger picture.

## II. WHAT IS A NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY? (AND OTHER DEFINITIONAL BURDENS)

Before proceeding there are three terms which should be addressed: strategy, national security strategy, and national military strategy.

**Strategy.** Strategy is an easy word to use but is difficult to define. Most standard dictionaries are more confusing than enlightening on that particular entry because a strategy refers to a holistic system and process. Our interest in the word strategy will focus on its component parts because of their utility in analyzing the whole. The U.S. Army War College utilizes a simple but powerful formula to express what a strategy is and what its critical component parts consist of: *Strategy = Ends + Ways + Means*. In

<sup>2</sup>It is notional, obviously, because the PRC has not published a detailed national military strategy.

<sup>3</sup>Colonel Arthur F. Lykke, Jr., USA (ret.) (ed.), *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, 1993.

<sup>4</sup>See especially the approach taken in Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America: A Strategy of Flexible and Selective Engagement*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995; and Joint Chiefs of Staff, *National Military Strategy of the United States of America: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now—A Military Strategy for a New Era*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997.

this equation “ends” are our objectives or goals, “ways” are the courses of action we choose to achieve those goals, and “means” are the resources either at hand or which must be developed to enable the courses of action.<sup>5</sup>

There are three important aspects of this model to keep in mind. The first is that the three components of a strategy—ends, ways and means—are interdependent. All of the components must be appropriate to the whole and in proper balance with the others if the strategy is to be successful. The second point to keep in mind is that when we attempt to study someone else’s strategy, such as the PLA’s, focusing on only one component of the strategy without an understanding of the other two may lead to incorrect or incomplete conclusions. The third point is the utility of this model as an analytic tool. It is almost universal in its applicability and is not limited to military affairs. One can easily use this equation to craft, describe or analyze political or economic strategies. Also, in the realm of military planning it is applicable across the three levels of warfare—the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

**National Security Strategy.** American analysts often use the term “national security strategy” or “security strategy” in the context of a nation’s military concerns or military-related issues. This paper adopts a variant of the much broader definition used by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. A National Security Strategy (NSS) will refer to the development, application and coordination of all the elements of national power (political/diplomatic, economic, informational, military, sociological/cultural) to achieve a nation’s objectives in domestic and international affairs in peace as well as in war.<sup>6</sup> In pursuing the national objectives set forth in a NSS, multiple strategies co-exist: an economic strategy, a political strategy, a diplomatic strategy, a social strategy, and a military strategy, at the very least. There are two points to make about this definition. First, Lykke’s equation is still a valid construct. A national security strategy will have to articulate ends (objectives), ways (courses of action), and means (resources). Also, it should be noted that the military element of national power is a subset within the broader national security strategy. This brings us to a description of a national military strategy.

**National Military Strategy.** A National Military Strategy (NMS) is the military component of a nation’s overall National Security Strategy. Its objectives are derived from those within the overarching NSS. It is the role of the national military leadership to ensure that the military element of national power will be available to contribute to the NSS in both peace and war, in the here and now and in the future. The NMS is the vehicle through which the national military leadership articulates,

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<sup>5</sup>For a fuller discussion of Colonel Lykke’s model of strategy and its component parts, see his lead article, “Toward an Understanding of Military Strategy,” in *Military Strategy: Theory and Application*, pp. 3–8.

<sup>6</sup>Definitions have changed over the years even within the Joint Staff. For example, in Joint Pub 1-02 (as amended through January 12, 1998), *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, “National Security Strategy” is defined as “the art and science of developing, applying and coordinating the instruments of national power (diplomatic, economic, military, informational) to achieve objectives that contribute to national security.” The 1987 Joint Pub 1-02 defined it as “the art and science of developing and using the political, economic, and psychological powers of a nation, together with its armed forces, during peace and war, to secure national objectives.”

revalidates, and adjusts the ends, ways, and means of the armed forces to comport with changing NSS objectives, a changing security environment, or changes in the availability of national resources to be applied to the armed forces. A national military strategy is usually influenced by civil political and economic decisions. Consequently, national military strategies are dynamic and require constant review, revision and updating. At the national level of military planning—the level at which a NMS is generated—direction, guidance and policies are articulated in broad terms to steer the armed forces in the correct direction. Specific decisions, programs and detailed planning follow in due course.<sup>7</sup>

Once again, the equation is still valid. A NMS must articulate ends, ways and means. In the case of a NMS, the equation is rewritten to reflect the national level of military strategy: *National Military Strategy = National Military Objectives + National Military Strategic Concepts + National Military Resources*. National Military Objectives (NMOs) will be derived from the NSS. The National Military Strategic Concepts (NMSC) will articulate the courses of action that will be undertaken to achieve the ends. The National Military Resources (NMRs) describe the types of capabilities that will be required to be on hand or be developed to enable the NMSCs.

The starting point for crafting a NMS is the articulation of NMOs. From these are developed NMSCs and NMRs. But before articulating NMSCs strategic planners first must use a critical “strategic filter” that identifies the imperatives of conflict and the possible constraints planners may have to consider. At minimum, the strategic filter: (1) considers political decisions handed down to military planners or brokered between military and civilian leaders; (2) assesses the current and projected security environments (conflict with whom? when?); and (3) performs an analysis of the operational environment (what kinds of conflicts?).<sup>8</sup>

The synergistic relationship between the three elements of a NMS is readily apparent. If the resources are not available to enable the NMSCs, then weighty political-military decisions are in order: either adjust the NMOs and NMSCs or commit the resources (usually funding) to develop the NMRs. But such a zero-sum set of decisions is usually unacceptable for political reasons and impractical for reasons of national security. Consequently, at the national level of military planning, the NMS often encompasses multiple substrategies for different time frames. At a minimum, one strategy must be focused on current capabilities and near-term contingencies. Another should consider the requirements of coping with future potential security problems.<sup>9</sup> Crafting military strategies for the here and now while

<sup>7</sup>These concepts are more or less a direct adaptation of the U.S. view of a NMS. For more discussion about the nature of the NSS and the NMS and the relationship between them see Joint Pub 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, February 1, 1995, pp. I-4, I-5; and Joint Pub 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces*, February 24, 1995, pp. I-2, I-3. See also definitions in Joint Pub 1-02.

<sup>8</sup>The “strategic filter” is not part of the Army War College model, but a modification to it added by the author.

<sup>9</sup>Military strategies can either be capabilities-based or force developmental-based. The former is driven by near-term contingencies and is the basis for operational planning. If one has to go to war today one can only go with what is currently available in terms of resources. Therefore, the “ways” will be driven by the “means.” In the case of the latter, an assessment of future threats will dictate the development of

accounting for over-the-horizon problems is a conundrum that is encountered almost exclusively at the national level of military planning and, save success in war, is probably the ultimate test of a nation's generalship.

With the preceding discussion behind us we can now move on to consider the case of China. To do so we will take the iterative and dynamic process that is used to *craft* an NMS, which is a cyclical process, and artificially stretch it out in linear fashion in order to be *descriptive* of its components. (See Figure 1)

### III. CHINA'S NATIONAL SECURITY OBJECTIVES

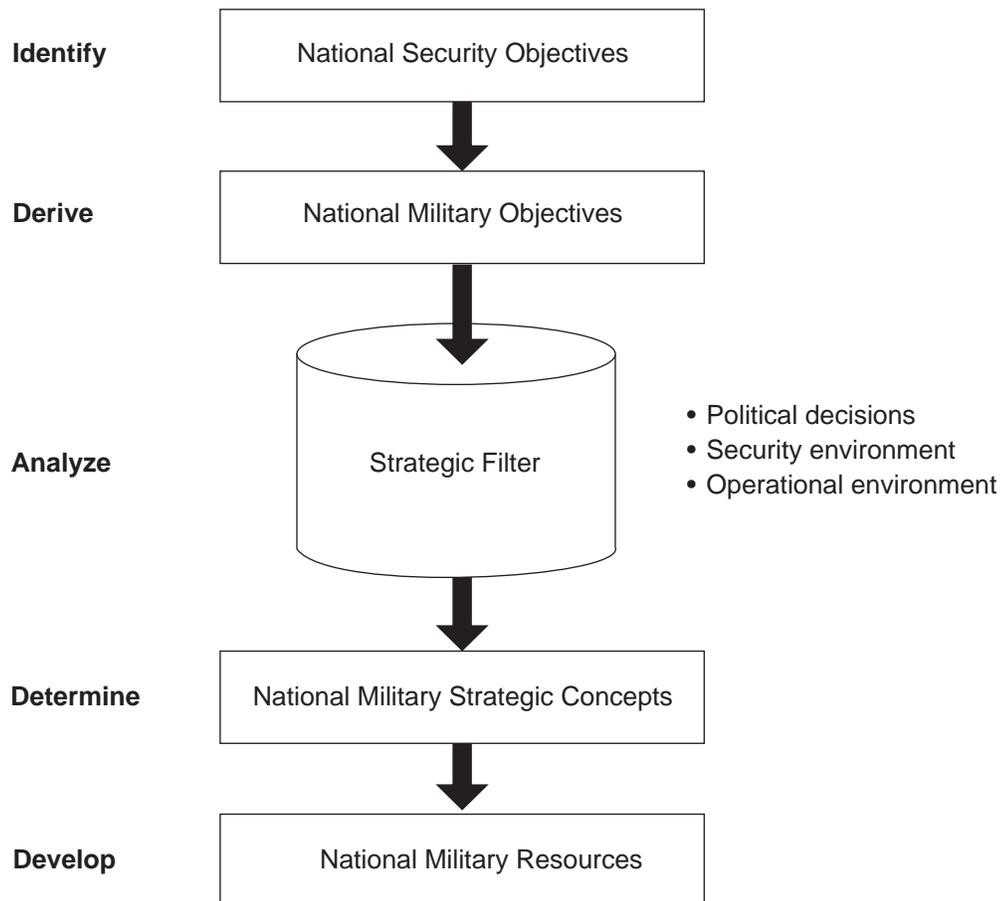
China's national security strategy has been apparent and quite public for over two decades and there is no need to detail it here. The political reports from the 13th, 14th and 15th Party Congresses, the work reports associated with meetings of the National People's Congress (NPC), and a good number of key decisions and policies emanating from Central Committee plenums and NPC Standing Committee meetings have all become increasingly public over the years. From the time Deng Xiaoping consolidated his power in the late 1970s, observing and analyzing the ends, ways, and means of that strategy has defined the essence of China-watching. The "Four Modernizations," "Reform and Opening Up," "Economic Construction as the Central Task," and other phrases coined by the Chinese to describe *aspects* of their strategy are all quite familiar even to the casual student of Chinese affairs. But because we are slowly working toward developing a national *military* strategy for China, we must posit and articulate Beijing's national security objectives since they will drive the PLA's national military objectives.

If one were to distill all of the statements of China's national security objectives, both explicit and implicit, that have been publicly declared or adduced over the last few years they could be distilled to three simple words: **sovereignty**, **modernity**, and **stability**. These words encompass the totality of everything the Chinese nation is determined to achieve. Moreover, these objectives are not only those of the People's Republic of China (PRC), but capture the essence of the Chinese Revolution.

That revolution has been in motion since the last decades of the Ch'ing (Qing) Dynasty. The Chinese proudly proclaim over five thousand years of continuous civilization, and rightly so. But China is new to the business of developing a nation-state—less than one hundred years, less experience than the United States. The history of the Chinese Revolution has been, and continues to be, the story of the difficult transformation of an ancient traditional civilization into a modern nation-state. Every stage of the revolution has more or less sought the same three objectives: sovereignty, modernity, and stability. From K'ang Yu-wei to Dr. Sun Yat-sen to Republican China under Chiang Kai-Shek, to Deng Xiaoping and now Jiang Zemin—all have attempted to achieve these goals. Where there has been divergence has been in the "ways" to achieve those "ends." The great exception was, of course, Mao. While he embraced sovereignty and modernity as legitimate national security

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resources probably not available at the moment to enable strategic concepts of a very different nature than currently employed. See Lykke, pp. 4-5.



**Figure 1—Thinking Through the Elements of a National Military Strategy**

objectives, he rejected stability as a goal in his later years. By substituting “perpetual revolution” for stability and by making “class struggle the key link,” Mao set back China’s progress immeasurably. Consequently, the history of China under Deng Xiaoping is in great measure the story of Deng’s efforts to reverse the damage and find a new path to progress.<sup>10</sup> And there is little doubt that China under Jiang Zemin embraces these three national security objectives as well. Let us explore each a bit further.

<sup>10</sup>While Deng will rightly be remembered for his pragmatism in economic matters and his quest for China’s modernity, his other great achievement often goes unrecognized. Deng brought stability back to elite politics. He dragged both the left and right toward the center and by ceasing to make political infighting a live-or-die, winner-take-all struggle was able to achieve the consensus necessary to move forward with a bold and coherent national strategy for reform.

**Sovereignty.** One would think that sovereignty, “freedom from external control” to cite *Webster’s*, is so fundamental to nationhood that it need not be articulated as a national security objective. For China, this is not the case. Beijing’s right to assert and defend its sovereign prerogatives as a nation-state is an enduring preoccupation that even today’s leadership brings with them to office. It is not surprising that in the first section of his political report to the 15th Party Congress in September 1997 Jiang Zemin made explicit references to the Opium War (1840), the Eight Power Intervention (during the Boxer uprising, 1900), the war against Japan (1937–1945), and China’s “Hundred Years of Humiliation.”<sup>11</sup> The prominent position of these references is not mere rhetoric. It underscores that sovereignty is one of the enduring national objectives of the PRC under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) just as it was for Republican China under the Kuomintang (KMT). This is the result of more than a century of foreign military, political, and economic intervention from without, warlordism and regionalism from within, and the difficulties all Chinese regimes since the fall of the Ch’ing have experienced in just defining and securing the geographical scope of the Chinese nation-state. Consequently, as portrayed by Beijing, Hong Kong’s retrocession to China in July 1997 was as much an emotional event for the people of China as it was a political event.

In the context of 1998, how Beijing defines sovereignty is now much broader than merely being the master of its own nation. Today, issues related to sovereignty encompass at least six categories of issues. First, of course, is concern over the return of territories Beijing considers part of the PRC, but over which it exercises no jurisdiction—Taiwan and Macao, for example. Second are issues related to border disputes China still has with some of its neighbors and the problems of demarcation and control. This encompasses a series of bilateral problems. Issue number three concerns areas of China over which Beijing does exert control but whose indigenous non-Han population oppose China’s rule, such as in Xinjiang and Tibet. A fourth category is one of multiple competing claims such as in the South China Sea, not just for atolls, reefs and islets but for maritime resources. A fifth issue involves what Beijing views as unwanted and unwarranted foreign concern over, or meddling in, Chinese domestic social and political issues. A sixth category relates to international pressure for China to accede to multilateral instruments and protocols which might constrain Beijing’s freedom of action whether or not the instrument in question is or is not problematical.

The constant lectures on China’s sovereignty to which foreigners, official and private, friends and adversaries, are subjected are tedious, formulaic and almost archaic. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the seriousness of the message because of the medium.

**Modernity.** During the last two decades China’s quest for modernity has probably been the most studied, analyzed and scrutinized of Beijing’s three national security objectives. This is especially the case in economic matters. Modernity, of course,

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<sup>11</sup>“Jiang Zemin’s Political Report” (hereafter Political Report), Beijing Central Television, September 12, 1997, in FBIS-CHI-97-255, September 12, 1997. See Section I: Issues and Prospects at a Time When the New Century Is to Begin.

encompasses much more than economics. It includes social change, political reform, cultural adaptations, intellectual change, and technological and scientific innovation, to name just a few of the aspects of the modernization process.<sup>12</sup> The leadership in Beijing understands this and in fact does have separate objectives and strategies for each of these areas.<sup>13</sup> But for the purposes of this short discussion, we must condense this vast subject to its essential elements.

In the final analysis, the objective of modernity as defined by today's PRC leadership means increasing the economic strength of the nation, enhancing the technological and scientific capabilities of the state, and raising the standard of living of the population. China's leaders have come to believe that its sovereignty and its place among the leading nations of the world in the future will be secured by, and a function of, its economic and technological strength. Hence the centrality of this objective and the emphasis it receives in China's national security strategy.

The 15th Party Congress and the 9th National People's Congress were devoted in the main to articulating the latest adjustments to China's modernization strategy. The Party Congress provided broad statements of "ends" and "means." The NPC, in turn, announced specific plans and policies to enable them. It is worthwhile to quote Jiang Zemin at the NPC in his role as State President for he offers an excellent example of a broad statement of a national security objective in general and a specific "end" or objective for the national security objective of modernity.

The goals we have set are as follows: When the People's Republic celebrates its centenary, the modernization program will have been basically accomplished and China will have become a prosperous, strong, democratic and culturally advanced socialist country. At that time, our country will rank among the moderately developed countries of the world, the Chinese people will have achieved common prosperity on the basis of modernization and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will have been realized.<sup>14</sup>

**Stability.** This last of China's three national security objectives is as sacred as the other two. A large dimension of the history of Chinese civilization through the millennia is the history of periods of peace alternating with periods of unfathomable social chaos and violence. Moreover, during the last two centuries stability has been the exception, not the norm. It has been a period of *nei luan wai huan* [domestic disorder and foreign calamities]. The legacies of the White Lotus, Taipings, Nien, Miao Tungan, I-ho ch'uan, warlords, civil war, Red Guards, right through to Tiananmen in 1989 represent what every Chinese regime has feared the most, including the current inhabitants of *Zhongnanhai*. They do not take internal stability for granted.

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<sup>12</sup>Although now seventeen years since being published, one of the best overviews of modernization as a phenomenon and its course and impact in China since the early modern period remains Gilbert Rozman (ed.), *The Modernization of China*, New York: The Free Press, 1981.

<sup>13</sup>Achieving "socialist democracy" and developing "spiritual civilization" would come under this larger rubric of modernization.

<sup>14</sup>"Text of Jiang Zemin's Speech at NPC Closing Session," *Xinhua*, March 19, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-077, March 18, 1998.

Today the greatest challenge for Beijing's leaders is undoubtedly the need to balance their bold plans for modernization with the risk of instability, for it is clear that economic modernization has been accompanied by tremendous social dislocations. Over the past year and a half, one is struck with the frequency of press reports citing labor unrest, worker protests, and acts of civil disobedience. The Chinese leadership is acutely aware of the *maodun* (contradiction) which they have set in motion. Again, we quote Jiang Zemin at the 15th Party Congress:

... it is of the utmost importance to correctly handle the relations between reform and development on one hand and stability on the other so as to maintain a stable political and social environment. *Without stability, nothing can be achieved.*<sup>15</sup>

But the objective "stability" does not just refer to maintaining the internal peace. A second aspect of stability means regime maintenance; that is, maintaining undiluted the authority and monopoly on power held by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The third aspect of "stability" has an outward dimension. It is the firm belief of the Chinese leadership that only a peaceful and stable international environment will permit China to successfully pursue its national objectives. Or, as Jiang Zemin put it, "We need a long-term international environment of peace for carrying out socialist modernization, especially a favorable peripheral environment."<sup>16</sup> And it is precisely because of Deng Xiaoping's great "strategic decision" shortly after the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in 1978 that the world security situation had relaxed and a world war was a remote possibility that he decided the time was right to launch China on its grand experiment in modernization. It is clear that how Beijing chooses to pursue its objective of sovereignty while seeking to preserve a peaceful international environment will also pose a challenge in the future.

These, then, are the three key national security objectives posited as the driving forces behind China's current national security strategy. By striving to achieve these objectives the PRC hopes not only to enhance the state of its domestic conditions but also to be able to strengthen its desired role as the preeminent nation in Asia and as one of five key actors in the future multipolar world order that Chinese theorists argue will revolve around the PRC, the US, Russia, Japan, and Western Europe.

We now turn to the question of how the military element of national power is developed to support these security objectives.

#### **IV. CHINA'S NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY**

The national military strategy that will now be discussed finds its roots in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Deng Xiaoping reassessed the international security environment and made the decision to make economic modernization the central task for the coming decades. Deng's decisions not only sent the Chinese nation down a new and different path, but sent the PLA down a new road as well. It stands to

<sup>15</sup>"Political Report," op. cit., emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

reason that a modernizing, outward-looking China seeking a leading role in the mainstream of the international order would require a new type of defense establishment and a new military strategic direction than that of a previously autarkic China seeking to lead the “Third World.” What follows then is a description of what Chinese strategic planners might term the general thrust of the national military strategy “during the new historical period” and into “the cross-century period.” It is current to the extent that the latest policy decisions coming out of the 15th Party Congress and 9th National People’s Congress are incorporated as adjustments. But we should bear in mind that the general direction of China’s NMS has been evolving for more than a decade. Consequently, there is both continuity and change to report.

## V. NATIONAL MILITARY OBJECTIVES

China’s national military strategy seeks to achieve three sets of national military objectives: ***Protect the Party and Safeguard Stability, Defend Sovereignty and Defeat Aggression***, and ***Modernize the Military and Build the Nation***.

These three objectives not only define what it is the PLA must achieve as a military force, but highlights the unique role it plays in the political economy of the PRC. Significantly, these three national military objectives are derived from and are mutually supportive of China’s three national security objectives.

The formulation of these three national military objectives are strictly those of the author’s and not authoritative PRC formulations. However, they should be familiar to students of the PLA because China’s top military leaders often allude to them or aspects of them in public statements.

For example, in the April 1998 issue of *International Strategic Studies*, Deputy Chief of the General Staff Lieutenant General Xiong Guangkai states that the “basic objectives” of China’s armed forces are to “consolidate national defense, resist aggression, defend the nation’s sovereignty over its territorial land, sea, airspace as well as its maritime interests, and safeguard national unity and security.”<sup>17</sup> In May 1998 Chief of the General Staff Department (GSD) General Fu Quanyou provided this iteration: “the PLA’s mission is to strengthen the national defense, fend off aggression, safeguard territorial sovereignty and the rights and interests of territorial waters, and maintain national integrity and safety.”<sup>18</sup> As yet another example, in 1996 Defense Minister Chi Haotian offered that the “basic objectives” of China’s national defense are to “solidify the defensive capacity, resist foreign invasion, and safeguard the unification and security of the country.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Xiong Guangkai, “Gearing Towards the International Security Situation and the Building of the Chinese Armed Forces in the 21st Century,” *International Strategic Studies*, No. 2., April 1998, pp. 1–8.

<sup>18</sup>Fu Quanyou Stresses PRC’s Defensive Policy,” *Xinhua*, May 6, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-126, May 6, 1998.

<sup>19</sup>Chi Haotian, “Taking the Road of National Defense Modernization Which Conforms to China’s National Conditions and Reflects the Characteristics of the Times—My Understanding Acquired From the Study of Comrade Jiang Zemin’s Expositions on the Relationship Between Building the National Defense and Economic Development,” *Qiushi*, No. 8, April 16, 1996, pp. 8–14, in FBIS-CHI-96-1201, April 16, 1996. Hereafter, “Taking the Road.”

Although the three national military objectives that this paper posits are seemingly self-explanatory, it is worthwhile to briefly discuss each because through them we achieve a greater appreciation of just what it is the PLA is attempting to achieve, the challenges it faces, and a flavor for the organizational culture of this massive defense establishment.

***Protect the Party and Safeguard Stability.*** The first and foremost mission entrusted to the PLA, and a national military objective, is to be the guardian of the CCP. The past two decades of professionalization and modernization have not altered the fundamental fact that the institutional loyalty of China's armed forces and the personal commitment of its top leaders is to the maintenance of the regime and the primacy of the CCP. The PLA remains the party's army.<sup>20</sup> China's "national command authorities" are the leaders of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which is a party organization under the Central Committee.<sup>21</sup> It is worth remembering that it has only been 71 years since the "Red Army" was founded. The revolutionary heritage of that army and its roots as a communist insurgent force that saved the fledgling CCP from annihilation in the 1920s and 1930s is not too distant a memory for some of the current PLA leaders. Minister of Defense and CMC Vice Chairman General Chi Haotian (66 years old) joined the PLA as a young man in the early 1940s during the "twin struggles" against the Nationalists and the Japanese and he spent a good part of his later career as a senior political commissar. The constant self-propagandizing within the PLA to remind the troops that the party is the focus of their loyalty has not abated as the Chinese armed forces have attempted to become a more proficient military force. Indeed, the first among the "Five General Requirements" issued by Jiang Zemin for all PLA soldiers is to be "politically qualified."<sup>22</sup>

It is often argued that today the party and ideology mean less and less in China. For the general populace and even some civil cadre that may be truer than not. However, the party and ideology still count for quite a lot in the PLA. The "new nationalism" that has been ascribed to the PLA is not necessarily at the expense of the Party and it may just be that in today's China the PLA is the only institution over which the CCP "center" in Beijing still has near total control from one end of the nation to the other. The constant public affirmations of the PLA's top leaders of the primacy of the Party is no more empty rhetoric than the statements of the top U.S.

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<sup>20</sup>From late 1987 to early 1989 there were unconfirmed rumors in the Hong Kong press that the role of the PLA as a "state" or "national" army was going to be emphasized and analysts were watching to see if the personnel of the state and party military commissions would be "split out" to reflect this change. If there were in fact any plans to do this, they were quashed in the tense political atmosphere beginning with the September 1988 challenges to political and economic reform mounted by the left which were fueled by exceptional inflation and fears of instability, challenges to the party mounted by intellectuals (exemplified by the television series "*He Shang*," or "*River Elegy*"), and ultimately the student demonstrations that began in April 1989 and led to the showdown at Tiananmen in June. Since that time the PLA has reaffirmed its subordination to the party and continues to do so.

<sup>21</sup>The State Military Commission (MC) is identical in leadership to that CCP's CMC and its authority is invoked only in state or constitutional matters.

<sup>22</sup>The Five General Requirements are constantly cited in the PRC and PLA media. They call for the troops of the PLA to be politically qualified, militarily proficient, have a good "work style," practice strict discipline, and provide strong logistic support.

military leadership affirming the primacy of the Constitution and the principle of civilian control over the military.

In August 1997, PLA Academy of Military Sciences Commandant General Xu Huizi encapsulated many of the above thoughts in an article in *China Military Science*.

After entering the new historical period, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly stressed that our military situation is that of the party commanding the gun, instead of the gun commanding the party; the military must follow the party's instructions, and must not at any time wave its own flag. . . . Comrade Jiang Zemin referred to the principle of the party commanding the gun as our military 'soul.'<sup>23</sup>

For these reasons, the PLA must be prepared to defend the CCP with military force against domestic challenges as well as external threats. Over the past few years much of the internal security mission of the PLA has passed to the People's Armed Police (PAP). However, the PAP is ultimately under the control of the CMC and the "regular" PLA has not been absolved from its requirement to provide for the defense of the party. One of the many reasons the PLA was called upon to converge on Beijing in the Spring of 1989 was because the PAP was incapable of handling a situation that was viewed by the CCP leadership to be burgeoning into a direct threat to the rule of the regime and the CCP.<sup>24</sup>

The PLA also pursues the related military objective of safeguarding internal stability. Some domestic challenges and threats may be aimed at the state, not the party per se. Examples would be acts of violence by separatist factions in non-Han China such as in Tibet or Xinjiang. Still other threats to stability with which the PLA must deal are natural disasters and manmade disasters. In these situations the PLA is often called upon to provide disaster relief, internal humanitarian assistance, as well as fight back the forces of nature such as floods or large-scale fires.

At the risk of being guilty of unsubstantiated generalization, I would offer that the top leadership of the PLA remains a very conservative group, which is virulently opposed to any domestic circumstance that could lead to instability (*luan*). The up-and-coming generation of leaders (colonel and above) are probably no less so. The chaos of the Cultural Revolution touched many of this latter generation personally and tragically and they fully understand the cost China paid in terms of development and modernization. And if in their hearts some dismiss as irrelevant Communist ideology, they may still see the CCP as the only political force in China that can successfully keep the nation together and lead it into the future.

***Defend Sovereignty and Defeat Aggression.*** This national military objective brings us to the classical warfighting mission of the Chinese armed forces. Militaries exist to fight and so does the PLA.

<sup>23</sup> Xu Huizi, "Some Facts Concerning Our Historical Experiences in Building Quality in the PLA," *Zhongguo junshi kexue*, No. 3, August 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Once the student protests were labeled "counter-revolutionary" (meaning anti-CCP), the PLA was given the ideological justification for the use of force.

It is worth pointing out that the PLA considers itself a defensive force. Its leaders often declare that China since 1949 has never fought a war of aggression and has gone to war only when other nations have attacked China first or threatened its territory. Officially, Chinese will argue that their intervention in Korea (1950), the war against India (1962), the Sino-Soviet clashes of the late 1960s, and the incursion against Vietnam (1979) were all conflicts foisted upon China in defense of its sovereignty. Hence, they would couch their warfighting objective in terms of defense against aggression and the preservation of the nation's sovereignty.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the PLA rejects the notion of fighting as part of a formal alliance, proudly claiming that no Chinese combat troops are stationed on foreign soil, nor does Beijing desire to do so.

However, as mentioned earlier, China's definition of "sovereignty" is much broader than just the sanctity of its borders. The PLA defense of China's sovereignty also includes being capable and prepared to employ force to achieve national unification and assert Beijing's maritime rights. Chi Haotian has commented directly on these points in the past. In a May 1996 interview he was reported to comment that China's national defense policy "is aimed at protecting China's territorial land, waters, and air space as well as China's maritime rights and interests against foreign aggression. It is also aimed at safeguarding China's unity. . . ."<sup>26</sup> In the last decade, Beijing's use of the PLA to assert its claims to resources in the South China Sea has raised a great deal of concern within the region and beyond. As far as China's unification goes, only the issue of Taiwan remains unresolved. Although Beijing claims it prefers to settle this issue in a peaceful manner, China's leaders will not renounce the use of force.<sup>27</sup> This puts a tremendous amount of pressure on the PLA for obvious reasons. As we review China's analysis of its security environment later in this chapter, it will become clear just how much the PLA must accomplish as a professional military force.

***Modernize the Military and Build the Nation.*** The modernization of the military deserves its own place among the PLA's national military objectives. The top civilian and uniformed leadership of the PRC consider China's overall modernization and the modernization of the military (often referred to as "army building") to be mutually dependent and supporting national objectives. "Strengthening national defense and army building," declared Jiang Zemin at the 15th Party Congress, "is the basic guarantee for national security and the modernization drive."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup>In March 1998, the president of a very prestigious Chinese think-tank commented to the author that China goes to war only over issues of sovereignty. He added that, "even when the correlation of military forces is obviously not in our favor China will still go to war over the issue of sovereignty."

<sup>26</sup>"Orientation of Chinese Army's Future Development—Exclusive Interview With Chinese Defense Minister General Chi Haotian," *Kuang chiao ching*, No. 284, May 16, 1996, in FBIS-CHI-96-106, May 16, 1996. Hereafter, "Orientation."

<sup>27</sup>In conversations on this point Chinese military officers and security analysts argue that if Beijing renounced the use of force "splittist elements" on Taiwan would attempt to declare independence and China would be forced to intervene militarily. Hence, according to their logic, a renunciation of the use of force by China would be destabilizing.

<sup>28</sup>"Political Report," *op. cit.*

The Chinese believe that without a modernizing and capable military the nation will not be able to enjoy the security from external threats it requires to continue to concentrate on economic reform. Without a capable military China cannot secure the internal stability it requires to modernize in the civil sector. Without a capable and modernizing military China cannot hope to secure any of its national security objectives in the realms of sovereignty or unification. Finally, without a modern PLA whose capabilities ultimately comport with China's (anticipated) economic, technological, and political strength, the PRC will not be able to take its seat at the table of world leaders in Beijing's much hoped for multipolar international order.

While both civil and military leaders subscribe to these views, the tension in the system revolves around the fact that military modernization is not proceeding at the same pace as economic modernization. Moreover, by long-standing political fiat going back to the beginning of the Dengist period, the decision *not* to invest state treasure in military modernization at the expense of economic reform still stands. Jiang Zemin reaffirmed this tenet at the 9th NPC in March 1998. Speaking to a full session of the PLA's delegation to the NPC, Jiang lectured that:

It is also very important to correctly handle the relationship between economic development and the building of national defense. Building a modernized army and national defense is a guarantee for the country's safety and modernization drive. This is something the whole party and the whole nation always care very much about. The level of China's productive forces is still not high, and our economy is not that strong. Therefore, we must concentrate our energies on economic development. *Without a highly developed economy, it is also impossible to promote the modernization of national defense and the army. We must always insist on taking economic development as the central task while paying adequate attention to modernizing national defense. . .*<sup>29</sup>

Outwardly, at least, the top PLA leadership supports this basic line and does not question its validity. A serious challenge to the party leadership on this account should not be anticipated. Yet, as the men who are responsible for modernizing the military in a world (as we will later see) which they view as basically hostile, they do evince concern about how far behind economic development military modernization can lag. For example, General Xu Huizi has cautioned that "we must also understand that national wealth does not equate to military strength; there are many examples both past and present, in China and overseas, where a nation has been wealthy while its military was weak. We must try to keep our military quality development level at a level compatible with national defense security; keeping it at a level appropriate to China's international status as a great nation is a choice on which we must insist."<sup>30</sup> Defense Minister Chi Haotian made a more direct commentary on this point in 1996 in a lengthy article in *Qiushi*. "The building of

<sup>29</sup>"Chairman Jiang Zemin Stresses at PLA Delegation Meeting: Army Must Adapt Itself to the New Situation of Reform and Development and Subject Itself to and Serve the Country's Overall Situation with Enhanced Awareness," *Xinhua*, March 11, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-070, March 11, 1998. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup>Xu Huizi, "Some Facts Concerning Our Historical Experiences in Building Quality in the PLA," op. cit.

national defense,” stated Chi, “cannot exceed the limitation of tolerance of economic construction, *nor can it be laid aside until the economy has totally prospered.*”<sup>31</sup>

As a result of this contradiction, the leadership of the PLA is going to have to be very focused in how it approaches the modernization of the military. The decisions they make (and are making) in this regard will to a large extent drive some of the major national military strategic concepts in their overall NMS.

The corollary to “modernizing the military” is “building the nation.” Not only is the PLA’s modernization expected not to be a drain on the state’s coffers, but military modernization is also expected to enhance the economic, scientific and technological level of the state. The military, says Chi Haotian, is expected to do so by leading and participating in “key state projects,” by bringing science and technology to the rural areas of China, by transferring superior military technologies to the civilian sector, by providing the nation with a pool of PLA veterans who are technically advanced relative to their civilian counterparts (the PLA as a “big school”), and providing infrastructure to the hinterlands.<sup>32</sup>

These, then, are the broad national military objectives the PLA seeks to achieve. To achieve these goals China’s military planners need to articulate strategic concepts, or courses of action. Before they can do that, however, they must think through the environment in which they must operate, now and in the future. They must employ a “filter” that highlights both challenges and opportunities.

## VI. THE STRATEGIC FILTER

At a minimum, the “strategic filter” for military planners at the national level must address three issues. First, they must account for political decisions that have been handed down to them or that have been brokered with civilian counterparts. These decisions usually encompass fiscal decisions and affect allocation of resources. Political decisions can also dictate or constrain military courses of action. Second, military planners must survey the security environment and assess what threats, current and future, must be addressed. Third, the nature of warfare must be examined to determine what kinds of engagements on the spectrum of military conflicts are most likely to occur. We attempt to use a “strategic filter” to look through Chinese eyes and attempt to see their strategic planning environment as they do. In some cases, we have definitive Chinese statements on these issues. In others, we can only try to transform ourselves into a PLA staff officer (*canmouguan*) sitting in the General Staff Department and speculate in an informed manner.

***Political Decisions.*** Three key political decisions made by the top Chinese leadership affect what strategic military concepts are acceptable or possible for the PLA’s

<sup>31</sup>Chi Haotian, “Taking The Road,” op. cit. Emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup>Chi Haotian, “Orientation,” op. cit. This is certainly not unique to China. In many parts of the developing world the military has often been on the leading edge of technology and built the national infrastructure. This was true of the United States in its early years after independence when the Army provided the nation with its engineers, its leaders of technology, and its captains of industry.

national planners. These political decisions are not recent developments but long-standing policies.

The first is that China does not participate in formal military alliances. This means the PLA must plan on being a “go-it-alone force” when it does go to war or when the military element of national power is employed. It also means that PLA planners do not have to concern themselves with questions of interoperability with potential allies or even temporary coalition partners. This goes for doctrinal issues as well as hardware and combat systems which, in any case, the Chinese would prefer to produce indigenously. It explains as well the deep reluctance of the PLA to accept invitations from foreign militaries to participate in combined training exercises even when these events are couched in terms of serving as confidence-building measures.

A second political decision in effect is that the PLA will not station combat forces abroad (trans., stationed on foreign soil). The reasons for this are a combination of geopolitical reality (who would invite the PLA to permanently station combat troops on its soil?) and budgetary considerations (it is expensive to station troops abroad).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, since China does not engage in formal military alliances, such an eventuality is difficult to imagine. Of greater significance, this policy also dictates that the defense of China must take place close in, on, or near China’s actual land borders or off the Chinese littoral. These decisions make “forward presence” for the Chinese a relative concept. It also dictates that the PLA must maintain a certain scale or size, especially in its ground forces, to compensate for vast borders and the need to fight close to them.

The third political decision with which PLA planners must grapple has already been mentioned—that the funding the PLA requires to operate, train, maintain and especially to modernize the armed forces will be subordinated to other national priorities. We will not enter the great PLA budget debate here. The jury is still out on the real value of investments China makes in national defense, especially given the opaque nature of their system, the multifurcated streams of funding that find their way to the armed forces, the obviously low official figures, and the issues surrounding the “hidden budget” that is the result of PLA domestic and global enterprises. The numerical spread in foreign estimates of the real value of the Chinese defense budget continues to inspire an awe of its own. For 1994, the range of estimates ran from about \$10 billion U.S. to \$149 billion U.S.<sup>34</sup> For our purposes the trend is what matters. The recent “official” defense budget increase the PLA received during the 9th NPC (12.8 percent, for an official budget of 90.9 billion Yuan) indicates that while defense spending is going up yearly, no fundamental political decision has been made to reverse national priorities and provide the armed forces

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<sup>33</sup>Even after the Korean War, the PLA pulled out of North Korea. Probably the last time China had forces stationed “abroad” when it was not at war itself was during the Second Indochina War when PLA air defense troops assisted in the defense of North Vietnam, especially Hanoi, against American air strikes. India has recently accused China of stationing elements of the PLA in Burma. This remains to be verified. But even if it turns out to be true, it is not on the scale of forward presence to which we are alluding.

<sup>34</sup>See Richard A. Bitzinger, “Military Spending and Foreign Military Acquisitions by the PRC and Taiwan,” in James R. Lilley and Chuck Downs (eds.), *Crisis in the Taiwan Strait*, Ft. McNair, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1997.

with a massive infusion of state funds. The PLA leadership undoubtedly does not receive the funding it would like (in this regard they have much in common with their brothers-in-arms across the globe). The question that we still have difficulty answering is: Are they getting what they need to fund their key current programs and underwrite their future requirements?

***The PLA Analysis of the Security Environment.*** The basic and oft-repeated Chinese articulation of the nature of the world security environment is well known. Beijing sees the next two or three decades as a period in which the possibility of world war is negligible. The basic trend is toward “peace and development.” China faces no immediate major direct military threats and the world is generally at peace. It is this assessment, originally made by Deng Xiaoping, that has impelled China to concentrate on economic reform as its primary national security objective. China continues to have, and continues to need, a window of relative peace to experiment and move forward in this endeavor. Jiang Zemin revalidated this assessment at the 15th Party Congress:

The international situation at present as a whole continues to move toward relaxation, and peace and development are the main themes of the present era. . . . For a fairly long period of time to come, it is possible to avert a new world war and secure a favorable, peaceful international environment and maintain good relations with the surrounding countries.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, Jiang also pointed out that there are serious security problems that require China’s attention:

However, the Cold War mentality still exists, and hegemonism and power politics continue to be the main source of threat to world peace and stability. Strengthening military alliance between various military blocs is not conducive to safeguarding peace and ensuring security. The unjust and irrational old international economic order is still infringing upon the interests of the developing countries, and the gap in wealth is widening. It is still serious that human rights and other issues are used to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. Local conflicts due to ethnic, religious and territorial factors crop up from time to time. The world is not yet tranquil.<sup>36</sup>

Jiang’s “caveat” is a relatively subdued echo of PLA concerns. For their part, Chinese military strategists seem to view the world as a place basically hostile to Beijing’s national interests, especially China’s sovereignty. It is a world where dangers to national security lurk everywhere. The strategists view competition between nations for advantage as the norm and as a zero-sum equation (*ni si wo huo*). Change in the global and regional security environment is viewed as constant and usually dangerous. The absence of war does not mean the absence of hostility toward China. And, over the horizon, today’s much-needed trade partners can slowly transform into serious economic, political, and military rivals.

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<sup>35</sup>Jiang Zemin, “Political Report,” op. cit.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

China's Defense Minister General Chi Haotian is Beijing's top military spokesman on these issues and he continues to be quite straightforward and frank in publicly highlighting the dangers that PLA planners see bubbling beneath the surface of a relatively peaceful world. As recently as March 1998, he underscored that pockets of antipathy toward China continue to require military vigilance:

Hostile international forces have never abandoned their strategic plot to westernize and split China, and the great cause of the motherland's ultimate reunification has yet to be accomplished. Under the long, peaceful environment and the situation centering on economic construction, we must be prepared for danger in times of peace and enhance our awareness of hardship. We must not become intoxicated by songs and dances in celebration of peace.<sup>37</sup>

Fair enough. It is the job of defense ministers around the world to remind the troops that preparedness is why they are paid. What is interesting is that in this particular talk to PLA delegates at the 9th NPC Chi couches the need for preparedness not just as a matter of general professional responsibility but as a result of clearly identified security challenges.<sup>38</sup>

In April 1996, General Chi spoke of the competitive nature of world relations when he wrote that "Major countries successively take contending for economic and technological superiority and enhancing comprehensive national strength as their development strategies and try by every possible means to gain the strategic initiative in the 21st century."<sup>39</sup> These types of official statements set the analytic tone for PLA strategic planners. But what are the specific concerns these planners see that might affect the formulation of national military strategic concepts, especially those that must be incorporated into their national military strategy? We will now survey them briefly. What we will find is that if one were a Chinese military planner contemplating the various possible contingencies for which military force might be required now or in the future, there would be very little reason to feel complacent. What does the PLA planner see when he looks around the map? What are the major near-term, mid-term, and long-term concerns and shaping factors?

**Geography.** Geography continues to be a critical factor for Chinese military planners. China shares land borders with fourteen other nations. All told, the Chinese claim more than 20,000 kilometers of land boundaries and 18,000 kilometers

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<sup>37</sup>"Chi Haotian Warns Against Hostile International Forces," *Zhongguo tongxun she*, March 8, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-067, March 8, 1998.

<sup>38</sup>When one encounters these types of statements there are always the questions of how much is rhetoric, how much is deep-seated belief, how much is aimed at the PLA, how much is aimed at civilian leaders, and how much is intended for foreign consumption. I certainly have no definitive answer to offer on this count. But I do believe, and this is admittedly quite subjective, that this quote by General Chi is representative of the general feeling of apprehension and insecurity PLA military officials have when they survey their own security environment. The combination of their own historical baggage as "victims," their acknowledgment of their relative backwardness as a military force relative to the rest of the developed world and compared to some sectors within China itself, and what they believe is the heavy burden of defending China all combine somehow to make their top leaders prone to making statements positing extreme danger.

<sup>39</sup>Chi Haotian, "Taking the Road," *op. cit.*

of coastline that must be defended.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, these borders encompass almost every major type of climate and terrain known in the habitable world. Just being able to secure its land borders is an almost staggering proposition for the PLA. It should be pointed out that since 1949 all of China's wars or military campaigns (Korea, India, Indochina-Vietnam, Soviet Union) have been fought either to secure control over disputed portions of those borders (India, Soviet Union) or to preempt a potential threat to those borders (Korea, Indochina-Vietnam). But the new international security environment and proactive diplomacy by Beijing have guaranteed that threats to China's land borders remain minimal. Rapprochement with Russia has alleviated a tremendous pressure on the PLA. Moreover, the dissolution of the USSR broke up what was previously the longest land border in the world. Cautious but steadily improving relations with Hanoi continue to keep the Sino-Vietnamese border pacific. The 1996 five-nation agreement between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan is addressing problems in the northwest. If China still has a major potential border security problem it is with North Korea, which we shall come to shortly. But for the most part, China's land borders have never been more secure than they are today.

***Defense of the Economic Center of Gravity and the New Maritime Imperative.*** The same cannot be said of China's coast. In the last twenty years there have been two significant changes in China's security environment. The first is rapprochement with Russia. The second, ironically, is the result of two decades of successful Chinese economic modernization. China's economic center of gravity has shifted from deep in the interior, where strategic industries were sequestered in the 1960s to protect them from a possible Soviet invasion, to its current location on China's eastern coast, where Beijing's new market economy is strongest. This "gold coast," from Dalian in the north to Hainan in the south, defines the current economic *schwerpunkt* of China and its likely future location as well. And, arguably, Beijing's ongoing and future potential success in developing this coastal economy will be a major factor in defining China's importance in the future international order.

This shift has resulted in a profound change in the PLA's security calculus. Previously a large land force was required to protect the Chinese interior and its industries against a protracted land war with invading Soviets. Today, however, this pronounced shift in the economic center of gravity presents China with a littoral and maritime defense requirement that it probably has not had since the mid-Ch'ing Dynasty. For the PLA today (and more than likely tomorrow) *the essence of defending China will be defined by the PLA's ability to defend seaward from the coast in the surface, subsurface and aerospace battle-space dimensions.* This is precisely the type of warfare that the PLA is currently least well postured to conduct. Hence, the emphasis in military modernization over the past few years has been on naval forces, air forces, and missile forces—the three services whose force projection capabilities are required for and best suited to defend the new economic center of gravity. Because of this shift it could be argued that even if the PLA did not have a Taiwan

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<sup>40</sup>Chi Haotian on Defense Policy, Taiwan." Speech at U.S. National Defense University, December 10, 1996.

“problem” to consider, it would still emphasize force projection capabilities with a maritime (and maritime airspace) control and denial focus.

***Defense of Maritime Sovereignty.*** In line with China’s new coastal defense requirements, it is clear that the PLA has other maritime issues to contend with. Besides their 18,000 km of coast, the Chinese claim to have “more than 6,000 islands, and three million square km of territorial waters . . .” to defend.<sup>41</sup> The PLA must develop the capability to enforce Beijing’s claims over disputed areas in the South China Sea and other maritime claims. While the waters have been relatively calm since the “Mischief Reef” incident, China could decide to employ the military element of national power once again if, from its perspective, it feels provoked by the other claimants in the region. Besides the Spratly Islands, China has competing claims with Vietnam over the demarcation of the Gulf of Tonkin and with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. The issue of the South China Sea also highlights the importance China places on maritime resources (oil, fishing, and minerals) as it proceeds with economic modernization. And it is worth highlighting again that in his articulation of China’s national military objectives earlier in this paper Defense Minister Chi Haotian specifically cites the need of the PLA to safeguard China’s “waters and maritime rights and interests.” These two requirements—defending China’s maritime territorial claims and defending its maritime resources—are specifically included in the articulation of the objectives of the PLA Navy by its commander, Lieutenant General Shi Yunsheng.<sup>42</sup>

***Close to Home: The Prospect of Instability.*** PLA and PAP military planners cannot discount the possibility that their classic internal defense mission will become more important in the next decade. As mentioned earlier, the social dislocations attendant to China’s economic modernization are becoming greater and greater. Over the past few years worker protests, sit-ins, and physical attacks on local party officials and headquarters have been reported in the press with increasing frequency. As the social safety net continues to erode, by political mandate or by virtue of poor management, the possibility of increasing social instability cannot be discounted. China already has a “floating population” of some several millions which the state security apparati blame for increasing crime. If Jiang Zemin and Zhu Rongji actually implement the reforms of the state-owned enterprises as they have promised at the 15<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and 9<sup>th</sup> NPC, then over the next three years some three to five million additional Chinese could become unemployed and be without any social benefits at all. The “Great Amway Riots” of April 1998, as I like to call them, could be a harbinger of worse situations to come.<sup>43</sup> And should the Asian financial crisis eventually hit China hard, the social chaos could be totally unmanageable.

<sup>41</sup>“The Chinese Navy Moves From ‘Coastal Defense’ To ‘Ocean Defense,’” *Zhongguo tongxun she*, March 20, 1997, in FBIS-CHI-97-080, March 21, 1997.

<sup>42</sup>“Shouldering the Important Task of a Century—Straddling Voyage—Interviewing Newly Appointed Navy Commander Lieutenant General Shi Yunsheng,” *Liaowang*, February 24, 1997, in FBIS-CHI-97-054, February 24, 1997. The “strategic mission of the Navy in the new period: Contain and resist foreign aggression from the seas, defend China’s territory and sovereignty, and safeguard the motherland’s unification and marine rights.”

<sup>43</sup>I refer, of course, to the disturbances that reportedly occurred when Beijing unilaterally outlawed direct marketing in China.

But beyond the social unrest that could take place, China has other internal problems that must certainly keep PLA planners alert. In Xinjiang, the Uighur separatist movement has not been crushed. It is difficult to determine just how large or minuscule the problem is in fact. Last year several “terrorist” attacks in Beijing and other parts of Han China were reportedly tied to the East Turkistan freedom movement. We do not know if that linkage is true. But for the first time that one can remember (or that has been reported outside of the mainland) China now has a terrorist problem and the Chinese certainly believe the Pan-Turkic problem is potentially serious. This means that the PLA will need to have contingency plans on file if the PAP and other state security forces cannot handle future unrest in Xinjiang Province.

And always there is Tibet. The on-again, off-again unrest in that region is certainly a part of the PLA planning calculus. The issues of Xinjiang and Tibet directly attack Beijing’s national security objectives of sovereignty and stability. Consequently, there is no reason to think that Beijing would not employ the PLA in either combat or military operations other than war (MOOTW) in either of these locations if its capabilities were needed to quell serious unrest.

**Taiwan.** Taiwan represents both a near-term contingency and a long-term readiness problem for PLA planners. Beijing will not renounce the right to use military force against Taiwan. Consequently, the PLA must develop a serious conventional deterrent capability vis-à-vis Taipei. The problem, of course, is that the only credible military deterrent is real conventional capabilities (we assume the political will is there). The next question must be, capability to do what? Whether the March-April 1996 mini-crisis in the Strait was a success or failure for Beijing is still being debated abroad. But one thing is certain; if one were a Chinese military planner, it should be painfully obvious that the PLA needs to develop a more diversified set of conventional military capabilities to employ as flexible deterrent options (FDOs). Relying heavily on missiles as a FDO runs the risk of being too provocative (witness the U.S. reaction). This is true whether the PLA must act against Taiwan or in defense of its claims in the South China Sea. In the 1996 affair, the PLA quickly escalated from “forward presence” (large military exercises on the coast) to “demonstration of force” (missile launches). It appears that either the PLA did not have many other options in between with which to *slowly* escalate or they totally miscalculated the external response. My own inclination is that it was both.

**Russia.** Russia should probably be viewed as a long-term potential problem for the PLA. In spite of increasingly friendly relations and their new “cooperative strategic partnership,” there is no dearth of mutual distrust between Russia and China, especially in Siberia and the Russian Far East. China is still viewed by the Russians as a threat and these views have their political champions on the far right in Moscow. Beijing’s economic strength at a time when Moscow is relatively supine is felt most sharply in Russian Asia, and the Maritime Provinces recoil at what they see as Moscow’s kowtowing to Beijing at their expense. For their part, Chinese military planners likely view Russia as a possible “over the horizon” problem. They may worry about the day when the Russians recover their national strength and the imperatives of geography and the legacies of historical animosity act to unleash

rivalries anew, not just on their common border but perhaps in Central Asia. These rivalries will probably be driven by competition for natural resources: lumber, oil, minerals, and food from the sea.

**Korea.** Chinese military planners discount the possibility of an all-out war in Korea á la 1950. Nevertheless, they should be worried about the security problems China could face if the economic and political situation in North Korea deteriorates to the point of a total meltdown. An implosion in the north has the potential to send tens of thousands of North Korean refugees streaming over the border into China's ethnically Korean provinces. This type of chaos on China's border is precisely the type of situation for which the PLA is historically deployed. But in this sort of scenario the PLA would not be fighting a classic war. China's armed forces would be engaged in MOOTW. They would have to secure their borders, deal with thousands of refugees, and possibly keep the Korean People's Army at bay simultaneously. The scenarios are endless. The point is, the PLA must be prepared to intervene unilaterally to secure China's own interests in the event of total chaos on its border with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

**Japan.** The Chinese view Japan as the only Asian nation that has the political, economic, technological, and (potential) military strength to challenge Beijing for regional dominance in the next century. Japan is likely viewed by the PLA as the primary mid-term strategic concern. While it may seem irrational from an American perspective, Beijing believes that under the veneer of a generally pacifist Japan lurks an undercurrent of unrepentant Japanese militarism and a strong desire on the part of the Japan Self-Defense Forces to overturn constitutional limits on their roles and missions. Tokyo's reluctance to directly confront its role in World War II and Japanese military participation in United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations (PKOs) in Africa and the Middle East fuel these Chinese suspicions. However, *the* most worrisome development from the perspective of the PLA is the recent promulgation of the revised U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation. This instrument is viewed as a codicil under which the Japanese armed forces, especially the navy, will justify operating even further out from Japan proper while still claiming to be a force purely for the defense of the Japanese home islands. Even more damning, China considers Tokyo the "other black hand" behind Taiwan's drift toward independence. This is because of a variety of reasons that go back to Taiwan's status as an Imperial Colony (1895–1945)<sup>44</sup> and Lee Teng-hui's ties to Japan. These two factors (Chinese suspicions of Japanese military expansion and the Taiwan factor), when combined with maritime territorial disputes, makes for an imposing set of military planning requirements for PLA staff officers.

**India.** Up until the May 1998 nuclear detonations by India and their accompanying barrage of anti-China rhetoric, relations between Beijing and New Delhi seemed to be on the road to mending. The fact that the nuclear detonations occurred shortly

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<sup>44</sup>For an overview of Taiwan's experience as a Japanese colony and the historical antecedents of the Taiwan independence movement (the "Formosan Home Rule Movement") during the colonial period see Chapter 2 in David M. Finkelstein, *Washington's Taiwan Dilemma, 1949–1950: From Abandonment to Salvation*, Virginia: George Mason University Press, 1993.

after the visit to India of GSD Chief General Fu Quanyou was a double slap in the face. It is still too early to say what impact these events will have on overall Sino-Indian relations or what impact the Indian detonations will have on China's nuclear policies. These questions notwithstanding, the Indians have handed PLA planners a set of potential problems that encompass both a readiness issue on land in the disputed border areas and possibly a mid- to long-term maritime-aerospace planning problem in the Indian Ocean. At a minimum, India will continue to be viewed as an enduring security concern.

**The United States.** The United States poses a special conundrum for the PLA. China needs good relations with the U.S. to achieve its overarching national security objective of modernization. But this should not be confused with a shared vision of how the post-Cold War security regime in Asia should unfold. For one thing, the Chinese do not subscribe to the U.S. argument that Washington's bilateral military alliances in the region are necessarily stabilizing.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, from the viewpoint of PLA planners, the forward presence of the American armed forces throughout the Pacific and Asia on land, sea and air cannot be a happy fact of life. The Pacific Ocean is still an American lake and the looming shadow of the U.S. Navy casts a pall over all others. It is in the interests of China and the PLA to see the U.S. military presence in Asia reduced at some point in the future. There is probably little debate in Beijing on this basic point. Where there may be significant debate is on the timing of a U.S. force withdrawal.

Some Chinese security analysts could argue that the American military presence has some utility for China by acting as a guarantor of the regional stability Beijing must have. They might argue that a quick drawdown by the U.S. would result in Tokyo filling the military vacuum quicker than the PLA could be prepared to credibly face down the Japanese. Others might see utility in the continued U.S. military presence in Korea as a check on instability close to home, although that argument will disappear after Korean unification or reconciliation.

Yet, there is a residual distrust and apprehension in some circles in the PLA about the true intentions of the United States in Asia and the role of its armed forces in the Pacific. The United States, through its forward military presence, has the *potential* to act as the great spoiler to two of Beijing's *core* security concerns: Taiwan and Japan. Because the United States underwrites the security of Taiwan, some Chinese security analysts argue that Taipei can continue to be recalcitrant in negotiating cross-Strait political issues and reckless to the point of provocation in its foreign and domestic policies. Moreover, it is the United States, some PLA planners would argue, that is goading the Japanese to rearm and pressuring Tokyo to expand its military role in the region under the false flag of increased host-nation burden sharing. Moreover, the "China Threat" theory that was in vogue in the U.S. a couple of years ago had its

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<sup>45</sup>During his visit to Australia in February 1998, General Chi Haotian gave a significant speech at the Australian College of Defense and Strategic Studies in which he offered a Chinese vision of what the future Asia-Pacific security regime should be. The talk, which *Xinhua* hailed as a "New Security Concept," implicitly criticized the U.S. Asian security system of bilateral alliances (i.e., with Japan, Korea, Australia) and even the expansion of NATO as destabilizing. See "Chi Haotian Calls for 'New Security Concept'." *Xinhua*, February 17, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-048, February 17, 1998.

Chinese analogue. Some PLA analysts seriously believe that the U.S. is attempting to contain China militarily using Japan as the “northern anchor” and Australia as the “southern anchor.” And Chinese opposition to NATO expansion is borne of a fear that the Partnership for Peace might spread to Central Asia and exponentially enhance U.S. influence on China’s western doorstep.<sup>46</sup>

Consequently, PLA views of the U.S. are highly dichotomous. On the benign side, the U.S. is probably viewed by PLA strategists not so much as a *direct* military threat to Beijing, but as a lumbering but lethal giant that can wreak havoc on China’s various national security interests because of (as viewed through Chinese lenses) vacillating American domestic political tacts and ignorance of the greater strategic implications of Washington’s ever-changing policies. On the more cynical side, the U.S. is seen as capable of undermining core interests concerning Japan and especially Taiwan. More than likely, the PLA must constantly factor the potential reaction of the U.S. into almost every military contingency plan it may have. Assuming there are a variety of PLA contingency plans targeted against Taiwan, the “U.S. factor” is a significant unknown variable for the PLA. Beijing’s suspicions about Tokyo’s future path and the vagueness of the phrase “areas surrounding Japan” in the U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation have probably only heightened concern about the U.S. role.

***Nuclear Threats.*** Beijing’s decision to develop nuclear weapons decades ago was in part a function of the desired status that capability conferred upon the PRC in the world order. However, Chinese security analysts are also quick to point out that China had no choice but to possess atomic weapons because China had been subjected to “nuclear blackmail” in the past—first by the United States during the Korean War and later on by the Soviets. For the past thirty years, Beijing has adhered to a nuclear strategy of minimum deterrence<sup>47</sup> and has publicly declared a no-first-use policy. It would appear that China’s leadership has been satisfied with this approach. But whether this will remain the case indefinitely may be open to debate, certainly within China. One reason is the recent nuclear detonations by India. Second, over the past few years there has been growing concern among China’s nuclear scientists and Beijing’s security policy establishment over the possibility that the U.S. might in fact develop a national ballistic missile defense system and concerns about what China views as U.S. pressure on Russia to amend the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to allow high-capability Theater Ballistic Missile Defense systems. The prospect of India having offensive nuclear capabilities, and the U.S. possessing highly capable high-altitude ballistic missile defenses cannot be a

<sup>46</sup>It was not surprising that the Chinese press attacked the U.S. Atlantic Command’s combined U.S.-Russian-Kazakh exercise, CENTRAZBAT-97, in September 1997. The implications of U.S. 82nd Airborne Division troops jumping into Kazakhstan after what was hailed as the longest flight to a jump zone in the history of airborne operations was probably read much differently by the PLA than USACOM staff planners.

<sup>47</sup>Iain Johnston has posited that China’s strategy of nuclear deterrence may be more correctly termed “limited deterrence.” For a full reading of his hypothesis and its implications see, Alastair Iain Johnston, “China’s New ‘Old Thinking’: The Concept of Limited Deterrence,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Winter 1995/96, pp. 5–42.

comforting combination for those charged with responsibility for China's nuclear strategy.

***China's Security Environment: A Recapitulation of the View From Beijing.*** In reviewing a PLA planner's view of China's security environment, we can come to the following generalizations:

- The PLA must be prepared to deal with internal unrest every day.
- The PLA must be prepared with military options for China's leaders to consider in dealing with Taiwan should the national leadership decide to employ the military element of national power to achieve its political ends. This is a current requirement and will endure.
- The PLA must develop a credible defense of its economic center of gravity: the coast. It must also be prepared to enforce Beijing's maritime claims.
- Any bilateral security concern that involves China with another country on its land border (India, Korea, Vietnam, Russia, etc.) should be considered an enduring security concern regardless of how pacific the situation is at the moment or promises to remain in the future.
- Russia is a long-term and enduring security concern for Beijing due to proximity, historical mistrust, and its potential to regain its great power status.
- For the foreseeable future, the United States remains an enduring security concern not because it is perceived as a direct military threat to China but because of its unpredictability, its power, the proximity of its military forces, its web of bilateral military alliances, and its potential role as "spoiler" for core Chinese security interests (Taiwan, Japan).
- Japan is probably the one country in the region which in the mid-term Beijing views with the most suspicion as a potential challenger in the military as well as political and economic realms.
- As for force structure and mix of arms, the PLA must enhance its maritime and aerospace capabilities. At the same time, because of the continuing possibility of internal unrest and current (India, Korea) and potential (Russia, Vietnam) security concerns along China's long borders, the PLA cannot totally neglect its ground forces.
- Finally, China must continue to field a credible nuclear deterrent, especially in light of India's recent actions and Chinese concerns about the potential for the U.S. or Russia to acquire credible ballistic missile defense systems. (See Table 1)

***Analysis of the Operational Environment.*** The final element we will consider in the strategic filter is the PLA's assessment of the nature of warfare—what kinds of conflicts or wars PLA planners believe they have to be able to fight. This question is about the "what" of warfare, not necessarily the "who." For PLA planners—indeed, for all military planners around the world—this is a critical question because it

	NEAR-TERM CONTINGENCY	MID- TERM CONCERN	LONG- TERM CONCERN	ENDURING CONCERN	LAND FOCUS	AIR FOCUS	NAVAL FOCUS	NUCLEAR FACTOR
TAIWAN	X			X		X	X	*
INTERNAL UNREST	X			X	X			
DEFENSE OF ECONOMIC COG	X			X		X	X	
JAPAN		X		X		X	X	*
KOREA	X			X	X	X		
RUSSIA			X	X	X	X	X	X
INDIA	X			X	X	X	X	X
MARITIME CLAIMS	X			X		X	X	
VIETNAM				X	X	X	X	
UNITED STATES	**			X		X	X	X

\* Only to the extent that the United States might become involved.

\*\* Only to the extent that the United States might become involved in a Taiwan contingency.

This table is a shorthand way to review what this author posits are the likely military planning requirements confronting PLA staff officers who are tasked to develop what in the U.S. military planning system (JOPES) would be CONPLANS and OPLANS.

The first four columns place security concerns in a timeframe. While the "years" associated with each is purely subjective (see bullets below), the timeframes themselves reflect, I believe, the current PLA analysis. Thinking through the timeframes of potential threats usually shapes both short-term capabilities-based strategies and longer-term force developmental-based strategies. Moreover, thinking through timeframes also assists planners in making decisions about "out year" force structure and systems requirements.

- **Near-Term Contingency:** A military operation the PLA might very well have to perform today.
- **Mid-Term Concern:** A potential security problem 5 to 15 years out from today.
- **Long-Term Concern:** A potential security problem 15 to 20 years out from today.
- **Enduring Concern:** A potential security concern that is so fundamental that it persists over time.

The last four columns reflect which battle-space dimension(s) would likely be present in the case of each security concern. The "informational" dimension is not listed because it is always present in one form or another. The point of limiting the dimensions as I have is to highlight a way to think about which types of conventional forces the PLA must develop for each threat. The "Nuclear" dimension must be listed because of the number of potential scenarios in which China may come up against nations who possess nuclear weapons. This column does not imply China would use nuclear weapons; it means PLA planners have to consider this issue in their planning because it could constrain their freedom of action.

Table 1—PLA Threat Planning Matrix

affects the dedication of scarce resources, force structures, manning levels, equipment priorities and training methods. In most militaries, this is as much an internal and bureaucratic issue as it is a “warfighting” issue.

Among PLA defense intellectuals, the question of what kinds of wars the armed forces will have to fight and when generates a tremendous amount of study, research and publication. This question also generates a modicum of debate. As we know, “contending schools” on military issues is not new to the PLA. Different visions of what kind of wars the PLA must prepare for and how they will be fought have been going on since the days of the Red Army and the Long March, through the “Red versus Expert” debates of the 1950s and 1960s, and even through the 1980s when there was resistance to abandoning Mao’s classic prescriptions for People’s War (hence such politically correct but contradictory doctrines such as “People’s War Under Modern Conditions”). In these previous debates the professional and personal stakes were extremely high, with losers often purged.

These days, however, the internal debates in the PLA about which kind of war(s) to prepare for are no longer live or die issues. Indeed, a benchmark of the level of professionalism that the PLA has achieved is that there are so many voices in the military journals and military press on this subject. Today the debates do not center about the political orthodoxy or heterodoxy of a point of view but around the questions of how much the PLA can accomplish, what it must accomplish, how quickly it can accomplish it, how much the PLA can afford, and whether one possible path should be funded at the expense of another.<sup>48</sup>

Today in the PLA there appears to be two major schools of thought on this question which live side by side. The first school of thought is that the PLA must prepare to fight “local wars under modern, high-tech conditions.” The second school of thought looks out over the horizon and argues that the PLA must prepare to deal with the international “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA) of the 21st Century.<sup>49</sup>

While the PLA’s top leadership is cognizant of both types of warfare and, presumably, would aspire to be able to deal with both, there is a profound difference between them. First, PLA strategists see local wars under modern, high-tech conditions as a form of warfare with which they must grapple now and well into the next century. This is because it is a form of warfare that many highly developed nations can conduct now, albeit with differing degrees of proficiency, while the PLA still cannot. Second, it is a form of warfare that is relatively well defined in both theory and practice. It has been seen in action in its incipient form (the Gulf War), and is intellectually digestible to a large portion of the top warfighting PLA leadership.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>It is worth noting that for foreign analysts of the PLA this question has generated a bit of debate as well, for how one answers the question “what kind of war is the PLA preparing to fight?” seems to lead to other conclusions about the PLA.

<sup>49</sup>For an interesting and provocative essay on how key non-Western nations view the RMA, see Dr. Ahmed S. Hashim (Major, U.S. Army Reserve), my colleague at the Center for Naval Analyses, “The Revolution in Military Affairs Outside the West,” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 2, Spring 1998.

<sup>50</sup>Nanjing Military Region Commander Lieutenant General Chen Bingde specifically refers to the Gulf War as an example of modern local war. See Chen Bingde, “Intensify Study of Military Theory To Ensure Quality Army Building: Learning From Thought and Practice of the Core of the Three Generations of Party

Third, there are discrete and finite measures the PLA can take in incremental steps to achieve some degree of ability to engage in this type of warfare. Put differently, there are metrics that can be used to peg achievable benchmarks of proficiency. And last but not least, Jiang Zemin, in his capacity as Chairman of the Central Military Commission “officially” coined this terminology in 1993 and instructed the PLA to use it as the guiding principle for military reform in the “new historical period.”

This is not to say that the PLA leadership is not interested in the RMA or thinking about it or even experimenting with some of its concepts. The problem for the PLA is that the RMA is still a moving target. The concepts behind it are still evolving. Even in the United States, where it generates a great deal of thought among military futurists, it continues to be a subject hotly debated in various circles. This is precisely why the PLA’s best military scholars and thinkers are paying close attention to the RMA debates in the U.S. and why they are even developing their own concepts of an “RMA with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>51</sup> In some circles of military theorists in China there are even some who argue that it might be possible for the PLA to “leap-frog” the local wars stage of development and exploit technologies to become a mid-to late-21st century military. These are appealing ideas to a military organization such as the PLA that currently is so vast, so unevenly modernized, relatively underfunded, and, from their perspective, so perpetually threatened. Theoretical work on the RMA will continue.

The RMA, however, will not be the fundamental basis of PLA planning, training, professionalization, restructuring, or equipping for the first decades of the next century. Preparing for local wars under modern, high-tech conditions will serve as the foundation and focal point upon which and around which China will build a PLA capable of coping with the challenges of warfare in the first half of the next century. PLA views of local wars under modern, high-tech conditions is a subject too vast to do justice to in this paper. Nevertheless, a brief overview is in order.

As mentioned earlier, the decision to have the PLA focus on “local wars under modern, high-tech conditions” (hereafter LWUMHTC) as the basis for its future operational planning is officially credited to Jiang Zemin in a directive to the CMC in 1993.<sup>52</sup> The fact that this directive is credited to Jiang was but one of many moves he was making at the time to establish his *bona fides* as Chairman of the CMC (no doubt with Deng’s approval). Jiang, as we know, had little to do with the military prior to his remarkable rise to national power in the wake of Tiananmen in June 1989.

The concept of LWUMHTC was the natural outgrowth of a previous major 1985 decision that revised the PLA’s assessment of the kind of warfare they would have to conduct as major changes to the security environment unfolded. This was, of course,

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Leadership in Studying Military Theory,” *Zhongguo junshi kexue*, No. 3., August 1997, pp. 49–56, in FBIS-CHI-98-065, March 6, 1998.

<sup>51</sup>For an excellent sampling of Chinese military thinking on the RMA, see Michael Pillsbury (ed.), *Chinese Views of Future Warfare*.

<sup>52</sup>See Kuan Cha-chia, “Commander Jiang Speeds Up Army Reform, Structure of Three Armed Services to be Adjusted,” *Kuang chiao ching*, No. 305, February 16, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-065, March 6, 1998. Hereafter “Commander Jiang.”

Deng Xiaoping's "strategic decision," which declared that "early, major and nuclear war" (with either of the two superpowers) was unlikely and that the PLA now faced "local, limited war (*youxian jubu zhanzheng*)."<sup>53</sup> By the late 1980s the concept had a qualifier added to it, "under modern conditions" which began to take new technologies into account to a certain degree. But it was Jiang Zemin's iteration in 1993 that added "high-tech (*gao jishu*) conditions" to the formulation. So in fact, the PLA's concept of "local war" has been evolving for over ten years. It will undoubtedly continue to evolve, especially as PLA researchers continue to track and digest the "Military Technological Revolution."

When the PLA speaks of LWUMHTC they are describing two aspects of warfare. The first aspect, "local," means that this kind of war will be limited in geographic scope. It will be confined to one particular theater of operations and not a general war on all fronts. The second qualifier, "under modern, high-tech conditions," means that the weaponry the PLA expects a notional advanced enemy to employ against it will be of the most sophisticated technological types. Over the past five years there has been an explosion of PLA writing on the nature of LWUMHTC, and the list of the operational characteristics that define it gets longer all the time. For the sake of brevity, the list below captures the essence of the new operational environment PLA strategic theorists believe China now faces and will continue to face through the turn of the century.<sup>54</sup>

According to PLA military theorists, Local Wars Under Modern High-Tech Conditions are (will be) characterized by:

- Limited geographic scope
- Limited political objectives
- Short in duration
- High-intensity operational tempo
- High mobility and speed (war of maneuver)
- High lethality weapons and high destruction
- High in resource consumption and intensely dependent upon high speed logistics

<sup>53</sup>For a review of the events that led to this decision and the defining characteristics of local limited war, see Paul H.B. Godwin, "Force Projection and China's National Military Strategy," in C. Dennison Lane, Mark Weisenbloom, and Dimon Liu (eds.), *Chinese Military Modernization*, Washington, D.C.: The AEI Press, 1996, pp. 69-99.

<sup>54</sup>Chen Bingde, op. cit. According to Nanjing Military Region Commander LTG Chen Bingde, "Jiang Zemin formulated the military strategic guideline in the new period at the beginning of 1993 and made the major policy decision to lay the foundation of military preparedness on winning victories in local warfare under the conditions of modern technology, especially high technology." Chen also mentions in his article that in June 1991 Jiang attended a Gulf War symposium hosted by the Academy of Military Sciences. Although tentative, this allows us to speculate that observing cutting-edge U.S. technologies in action against Iraq (and a good amount of Chinese equipment purchased by Iraq) served as a wake-up call to those in the PLA leadership who still argued that the superior human qualities of the Chinese soldier ("will") could prevail, as in days of yore, against much more modern adversaries.

- Highly visible battlefield (near-total battlefield awareness)
- High speed C2 and information intensive
- Nonlinear battlefields
- Multidimensional combat (all battle space dimensions: land, aerospace, surface, subsurface, informational)
- Joint operations.

To prepare the PLA for the next major wave of reforms, GSD Chief General Fu Quanyou went to great lengths in a March 1998 article in *Qiushi* to provide his own view of the nature of future local wars under modern, high-tech conditions, warning that “meeting the challenge of world military developments is an historical responsibility that we cannot avoid.” Going further, he argued:

Along with the development of sophisticated technology, particularly the development of information technology and its widespread application in the military realm, the high-tech content of future wars will become greater and greater. With respect to the new forms of combat, it will primarily be new combat forms such as information warfare, air strike warfare, missile warfare, and electronic warfare. With regard to weapons and equipment, the focus will be on the development of digitized and smart equipment with new and sophisticated technology and long-range, precision-strike capabilities. With respect to structural organization, the trend is toward combined forces that are small and diversified. In the area of command and control, we will see the widespread application of C3I and C4I systems, holding administrative levels to a minimum and improving effectiveness. With regard to combat support, there will be an increased reliance on modern technical means to provide rapid, accurate, quality and complete support.<sup>55</sup>

***Evolving Operational Doctrine: The Active Defense.*** Finally, an important concomitant of the evolving Chinese analysis of the operational environment over the years has been the evolution of the PLA’s operational doctrine—the basic and fundamental principles that guide the employment of military forces. As Paul Godwin reminds us, the PLA has been aware for quite some time that modern military technologies developed abroad have been changing the nature of the operational level of war.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the doctrine of “Active Defense” (*jiji fangyu*) predates the 1985 strategic decision by almost four years.<sup>57</sup> By 1981 it was already apparent to Deng and the PLA leadership that luring the enemy deep and fighting a protracted war of attrition in the Chinese interior was no longer acceptable and that the PLA would have to stop an invading army as far forward as possible. “Active Defense” has been the official operational doctrine of the PLA ever since.<sup>58</sup> But

<sup>55</sup>Fu Quanyou, “Make Active Explorations, Deepen Reform, Advance Military Work in an All-Round Way,” *Qiushi*, No. 6, March 16, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-093, April 3, 1998.

<sup>56</sup>Godwin, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>57</sup>Hwang Byong-moo, “Changing Military Doctrine of the PRC: The Interaction Between People’s War and Technology,” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. XI, Number 1, Winter/Spring 1997, pp. 221–266.

<sup>58</sup>Two points about the term “active defense.” First, the Chinese refer to “active defense” as their *military strategy*. I have chosen to refer to it and identify it as a *doctrine* to maintain parallelism with U.S. terminology for comparative purposes. Were you to ask a PLA officer to identify China’s “military strategy”

again, the interaction of the current security environment (no threat of a Soviet invasion, but many potential peripheral conflicts) and the new operational environment (highly lethal local wars under modern, high-tech conditions) is changing the fundamentals of how the PLA is thinking about employing force on the battlefield (which is meant to include all the battle space dimensions).

The characteristics of the “Active Defense” doctrine as adapted to LWUMHTC are still evolving and, like the subject of LWUMHTC itself, there is no dearth of Chinese military writing on what the doctrine should actually entail. What has been officially adopted is still an open question. Nevertheless a representative list of common characteristics is warranted and I believe it is useful to also indicate the previous maxims to appreciate the magnitude of the change in operational thinking that is going on inside the PLA:

- From luring deep to fighting forward<sup>59</sup>
- From a war of annihilation to a campaign against key points
- From a war of attrition to a decisive campaign with a decisive first battle
- From waiting for the first blow to deterring the first blow by force
- From a defensive campaign to an “offensive defense” campaign
- From “advance and retreat boldly” to checking the initial enemy advance
- From a “front army campaign” to a “war zone” campaign
- From the principle of mass to the principle of concentration of firepower
- From four single service campaigns to joint campaigns.

These are the attributes of a proactive doctrine much more forward-leaning than in the past.

## VII. NATIONAL STRATEGIC MILITARY CONCEPTS

By way of review, National Military Strategic Concepts are broad, overarching statements which provide the general outline of *how* a military plans to achieve its National Military Objectives.<sup>60</sup> NMSCs, therefore, should be linked to NMOs. They should be articulated at a level of broad generalization to allow military planners a high degree of flexibility in developing the specific plans, programs and capabilities that are required to enable the National Military Strategy. They are building blocks

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he would certainly say “active defense.” Second point, The PLA Navy (PLAN) usually refers to this doctrine as “Active Offshore Defense” (*jjide jinhai fangyu*).

<sup>59</sup>Major General Gao Guozhen and Senior Colonel Ye Zhen, “Gao Guozhen and Ye Zhan View Operational Doctrine Since 1980’s,” *Zhongguo junshi kexue*, November 20, 1996, in FBIS-CHI-97-066, November 20, 1996. These authors, from the Academy of Military Science, provide an informative overview of doctrinal evolution in China. This list is adopted from their article.

<sup>60</sup>I have added the adjective “National” to “National Military Strategic Concept” as a shorthand reminder that we are dealing at the level of grand strategy as opposed to the operational level of war. In the U.S. national military strategy, the Joint Staff simply uses the term “strategic concepts.”

and a useful shorthand that can provide a quick conceptual overview of what the armed forces deem important and how they basically plan to fight, deter, and develop capabilities.

Depending on the priorities of a military organization, NMSCs can be used to describe not only operational (warfighting) matters but critical programs of a more systemic or administrative nature. Moreover, it is the synergistic relationship among NMSCs, doctrine, and security imperatives that drives the decisions for the development of military capabilities (hardware, software, personnel), which in turn generate the myriad of tasks that a military trains for to attain certain levels of professional competency. The process of analysis, conceptualization, program development, and evaluation is iterative. Therefore, while one can capture a “snapshot” of how NMSCs fit into a larger NMS, we keep in mind that the image is in motion and subject to change based on either radical alterations in the security environment or fundamental political decisions.

Having developed the PLA’s National Military Objectives, thinking through the Strategic Filter, and reviewing the PLA’s key doctrinal principles, we can now state what should be the four basic NMSCs that drive practically all the PLA programs we read about. The four NMSCs are: **nuclear deterrence, political work, forward defense, and army building**.<sup>61</sup> Each of these NMSCs is linked to NMOs (see Figure 2) and the combination of the four enable the overall NMS. Moreover, each of the four NMSCs has a component that is directed internally as well as the outward orientation that militaries usually take.

**Nuclear Deterrence.** Nuclear weapons are, and will continue to be, the mainstay of Chinese strategic deterrence. This NMSC directly supports the NMO, “Defend Sovereignty & Defeat Aggression.” It does so by deterring nuclear threats against China proper and, indirectly, injecting a “nuclear factor” into the resolution of outstanding sovereignty issues, such as Taiwan and border problems with other nuclear states. Moreover, China’s nuclear force and the scientific establishment that supports it indirectly support the NMO, “Modernize the Military & Build the Nation,” thanks to the technological crossover effect that nuclear weapons technology and know-how has for the overall scientific development of China. One could also argue that China’s possession of nuclear weapons—its only real *global* power projection capability—serves as the ultimate antidote to a conventional military force whose *sustainable* reach is barely regional.

As Iain Johnston has pointed out, the Chinese view the possession of nuclear weapons not just as a military necessity, but a prerequisite for international stature.<sup>62</sup> As a member of the “Nuclear Club,” Beijing accrues tremendous prestige and some degree of political leverage in the international order. When coupled with

<sup>61</sup>These four NMSCs are not authoritatively listed by the PLA as such. We are using a foreign model to analyze a Chinese system. They do, I believe, capture the essence of what drives the PLA.

<sup>62</sup>Iain Johnston, “Prospects for Chinese Nuclear Force Modernization: Limited Deterrence versus Multilateral Arms Control,” *The China Quarterly*, June 1996, p. 550. “China’s decision-makers have generally accorded a great deal of status and military value to nuclear weapons.”

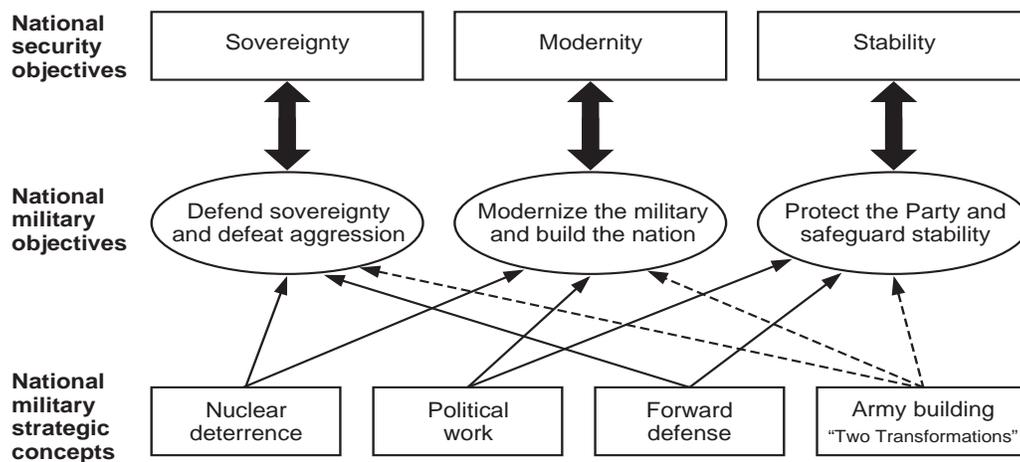


Figure 2a

the PRC's permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council, China is able to claim "major power" status despite its extremely low level of domestic development relative to the other permanent UNSC members. Moreover, China's nuclear status has an internal component: the development and possession of a nuclear arsenal are touted by the regime as a credit to the scientific and technological prowess of the Chinese nation *and the leadership of the CCP in particular*.

Even though the conventional PLA is making great strides toward becoming a more competent military force, the Chinese nuclear arsenal has the potential to become even more important to Beijing. China's nuclear neighborhood changed dramatically when India coupled its recent nuclear detonations with incantations of "China as threat number one."<sup>63</sup> Additionally, the Chinese are carefully watching developments in the U.S. theater missile defense (TMD) program, on-going debates about a future U.S. national missile defense program, and U.S.-Russian negotiations for adjustments to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Insecurity on the part of the PLA about the future credibility of its nuclear deterrent (capabilities and doctrine) should be of great concern; greater, perhaps, than the concern often evinced about enhancements to the Chinese conventional forces.

**Political Work.** Military Political Work (*Junduide zhengzhi gongzuo*) remains an important tool of the PLA leadership. It deserves to be rated as a NMSC by virtue of the fact that it supports the two NMOs, "Protect the Party & Safeguard Stability," and "Modernize the Military & Build the Nation."

Political work is the key link between the PLA and the CCP. As mentioned earlier, the first mission of the PLA is to protect the CCP, and "absolute loyalty to the party" (*dangde juehui lingdao*) is non-negotiable. Although the PLA is becoming more "professional" and less "political" (meaning, less involved in internal political issues

<sup>63</sup>While one could argue that the Chinese always suspected India had a nuclear capability and that therefore nothing has changed, I would argue that from the perspective of a PLA military planner the reality of that nuclear capability coupled with anti-China rhetoric is not to be taken lightly.

outside the realm of security issues), the PLA's linkage to the party through political work will become more important because the "Third Generation" civilian leaders of the CCP (Jiang Zemin, Li Peng, Zhu Rongji, *et al.*, have no background in military affairs or experience in the PLA. The passing of Deng Xiaoping signaled the end of an era when the top party leaders had also been top PLA leaders. With China's civilian leaders coming from purely state, party, or technical backgrounds, and the PLA's new generation of generals coming to primacy in the military with practically no experience as leading party officials, or even having been immersed in Beijing politics, the potential for a widening chasm between the CCP and the PLA is increased. Add to this the general observation that ideology counts for less and less in China and one can easily understand why military political work is not going to go away any time soon.

At the same time, political work is itself being transformed into an asset for the modernization of the PLA. The General Political Department is working to rationalize the PLA personnel system to meet the needs of a more professional and technically competent officer corps. Also, under the rubric of political work comes the adjustment of the PLA's military justice system and working the critical and increasingly problematic issue of civil-military relations (what I refer to as the problems of "host-region support").

Political work is going to become increasingly critical for another reason directly related to modernization and in support of the NMO "Modernize the Military & Build the Nation." The next wave of PLA structural reforms (which will be discussed subsequently) are promising to generate some resistance from the top PLA leadership. Political work will be necessary to explain what these reforms are, why they are necessary, and that the personal and professional sacrifices involved must be endured. It is of no little significance that in March 1998 Chief of the GSD General Fu Quanyou warned that "At present, there is still quite a bit of old thinking and concepts in our army building and military work," and that:

Implementing a new size and structure will inevitably involve immediate interests of numerous units and individual officers and men. Leading organizations must take the lead in unifying our thinking, in paying attention to the overall situation, in implementing the new size and structure, in enforcing various disciplinary items, in *resolutely overcoming selfish departmentalism and overemphasis of local interests*, by no means permitting discussions of prices or bending the rules.<sup>64</sup>

Political work is the vehicle that will be used to smooth the way, overcome resistance, and rally support for the changes coming down the road.

**Forward Defense.** "Forward Defense" is more in line with traditional Western notions of what NMSCs are supposed to describe, e.g., "warfighting" concepts. "Forward Defense" directly supports the NMO "Defend Sovereignty & Defeat Aggression." It also supports "Protect the Party & Safeguard Stability" when placed in the context of internal challenges to the regime. This particular NMSC is an

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<sup>64</sup>Fu Quanyou, *Qiushi*, *op. cit.* Emphasis added.

invention on the author's part, not an authoritative or official PLA articulation.<sup>65</sup> The concept of "Forward Defense" takes into account the previous analyses of how the PLA views its security environment, its operational environment, and the imperatives of the "Active Defense" doctrine. It is also descriptive of what we have been able to read in PLA professional journals and newspapers.

"Forward Defense" means that the PLA prefers to fight a military conflict as far away from China's borders and coastline as is possible. No enemy will consciously be permitted to move onto mainland China, control Chinese airspace, or dominate the Chinese littoral and the adjacent seas if they can be stopped. But this is currently problematic for the PLA due to limited force projection capabilities, weak logistics, an uncertain degree of combat sustainability, and no overseas basing. Therefore, while the "Active Defense" doctrine calls for a new emphasis on offensive operations, the PLA, by virtue of the four factors above, is almost always on the defense and tied to interior lines of communication. In other words, while the offense is being given new emphasis at the operational and tactical levels of war, strategically the PLA is on the defense. Consequently, the next best alternative to "power projection" and "overseas presence" (two U.S. strategic concepts) is "defending" (engaging the enemy) as far forward on land, on sea, and in the air as is possible.

For the ground forces, this means concentrating the best PLA forces in critical Military Regions and being able to rush key units forward to engage an enemy as quickly as possible. Hence, the doctrinal importance of the PLA's "rapid reaction units" (*kuaisu fanying budui*). An example of the former imperative is the emergence over the past few years of the Nanjing Military Region (MR) as critical because of the PLA's requirement to maintain military pressure on Taiwan, a near-term contingency and enduring security problem.

For the PLA Navy this means more green water and blue water training and presence as well as extending the navy's reach as far out to sea as possible. As Paul Godwin informs us, PLAN strategists and planners have been engaged in working out the details of a "forward deployed navy" (my term) since the late 1980s, when they were directed to shift their planning from fighting naval engagements close to the Chinese littoral (coastal defense, *jinhai fangyu*) to fighting further out at sea (offshore defense, *jinyang fangyu*).<sup>66</sup>

The implications for the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLAN Air Forces (PLANAF) are equally clear and require no detailed explanation: get out further and linger in the combat zone longer. But the NMSC of "Forward Defense" also serves to highlight why the Strategic Rocket Force (SRF), also known as the Second Artillery, is an increasingly important service arm for the PLA. It may just be that the PLA missile force is currently the only service arm which can actually enable the NMSC of

<sup>65</sup>I have chosen the word "Defense" because the PLA would probably prefer it as a politically correct term given official Chinese pronouncements that China never initiates hostilities and only uses military force to defend against aggression. The fact that the word "Defense" is used does not mean that the PLA will not consider pre-emptive strikes after the commencement of hostilities. The new characteristics of the "Active Defense," specifically "offensive defense," legitimizes such an action doctrinally.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Godwin, "From Continent To Periphery," op. cit.

“Forward Defense” in any credible manner today. This, of course, creates a different set of problems for the PLA in MOOTW. Using the SRF for a “flexible deterrent option,” such as “demonstration of force” (as was the case in March 1996), could provoke foreign conventional military responses which the rest of the PLA is not yet ready to meet. Nevertheless, the SRF will continue to serve as the point of the spear for “Forward Defense” while the remainder of the PLA continues to enhance its capabilities to enable this NMSC.

There are two other points to make about “Forward Defense” as it pertains to engaging a foreign force. First, this NMSC is consistent with the recent spate of foreign weapon systems purchases made by the PLA (KILO-class submarines, SU-27 fighter aircraft, and *Sovremenny-class* destroyers). These acquisitions are clearly intended to serve as near-term, “quick-fix” capabilities to shore up the currently constrained ability of the PLAN and PLAAF to meet the requirements of “Forward Defense,” which is a *strategic* imperative.<sup>67</sup> A second point to make is that rapprochement with Russia has the potential to free up a good deal of the Chinese armed forces from their previous dispositions close to the northern border. Consequently, analysts should be sensitive to major shifts in basing to other more insecure areas on the Chinese periphery in support of this NMSC.

The internal component of “Forward Defense” also applies to those regions in China where unrest, separatist activities, or porous and unstable border situations exist—primarily in Tibet, Xinjiang, and the border with North Korea. Consequently, the Shenyang, Chengdu, and Lanzhou Military Regions will probably continue to be important commands, but they may not require state-of-the-art military capabilities to deal with internal unrest. Just being there *en masse* to support the PAP if needed will be sufficient.

**Army Building.** The fourth NMSC is “Army Building” (*jundui jianshe*, sometimes translated as “Military Construction”). “Army Building” is a general term, but it is a critical NMSC for the PLA and for foreign students of the PLA. “Army Building” refers to the sum total of the policies, programs, and directives that guide the current reform (*gaige*) as well as the ongoing and future modernization (*xiandaihua*) of the armed forces of the PRC. “Army Building” cuts across all facets of military issues to include:

- Doctrine
- Organization and force structure
- Personnel matters
- Individual, small unit, and large unit training

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<sup>67</sup>One often hears arguments that these purchases were made with the Taiwan problem in mind. That is probably true. But these types of purchases are equally applicable to other potential near-term contingencies, such as in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, trying to explain the purchase or development of military capabilities by looking solely at the tactical or even the operational levels of war can only take one so far. There must be a strategic context as well and it appears that the generic NMSC of “Forward Defense” provides such a context.

- Political work
- Resource allocations
- Weapons (hardware) requirements
- The development of specific military capabilities
- Reserve and militia utilization
- Mobilization and demobilization issues
- Defense industrial policies
- Civil-military relations.

“Army Building” is where the strategic vision for the PLA is articulated. That strategic vision is then translated into concrete programs, directives and policies under the rubric of “Army Building.” Therefore, “Army Building” directly supports all three NMOs. Moreover, “Army Building” has a direct impact on the other three NMSCs. Studying this NMSC is the key to understanding *how* the PLA plans to modernize. It outlines what kinds of **National Military Resources** the PLA must develop to enable the rest of the current National Military Strategy and anticipated changes to it in the future.

To a certain degree, then, “Army Building” represents a “strategy” within China’s National Military Strategy. “Army Building” is often confused with China’s larger National Military Strategy (the focus of this paper), because it cuts across so many facets of PLA and PLA-related issues. It does represent a substrategy, because it deals directly with military modernization (a subject most PLA-watchers focus on), and certainly because it is the most discussed PLA issue in the Chinese military press and journals.

With these general comments as background, we can now be more specific about the current “line” for “Army Building.”

**The “Two Transformations.”** Since late 1995, “Army Building” has been guided by a remarkably ambitious line, “the Two Transformations” (*liang ge zhuan bian*). This guidance is attributed directly to Jiang Zemin in a speech made to an enlarged meeting of the CMC in December 1995. It is currently considered “the military strategic guideline” for “Army Building,” in the “new period” and a “cross-century task.”<sup>68</sup>

The “Two Transformations” call for the PLA to transform itself, (1) from an army preparing to fight local wars under ordinary conditions to an army preparing to fight and win local wars under modern, high-tech conditions, and (2) from an army based on quantity to an army based on quality. A corollary which usually accompanies

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<sup>68</sup>Chen Bingde, op. cit., and Zhang Qinsheng and Li Bingyan, “Complete New Historical Transformations—Understanding Gained From Studying CMC Strategic Thinking on ‘Two Transformations,’” *Jiefangjun bao*, January 14, 1997, in FBIS-CHI-97-025, January 14, 1997. One often sees this term as “the two basic transformations” or the “two basic conversions” (both being given as *liang ge jiben xingzhuanbian*). For the sake of brevity I shall use “two transformations.”

these two imperatives in PLA literature is that the PLA must also transform itself from an army that is *personnel intensive* to one which is *science and technology intensive* (S&T) (emphasis added).<sup>69</sup> It is readily apparent that the specific plans and programs that the PLA develops to enable this “new line” will cut across every facet of military affairs listed above.

While the linkage of the “Two Transformations” to LWUMHTC and the new military technologies emerging abroad is clear and direct, it is not clear how or if the “Two Transformations” are expected to change PLA doctrine (e.g., Active Defense). PLA writings are confusing on this point. Some articles link the “Two Transformations” directly to the Active Defense doctrine for the here and now and see them as enablers. Others talk about the “Two Transformations” as the way the PLA will be able to cope with the Military Technological Revolution in the West in the near to mid term. Still other PLA military theorists invoke the RMA when discussing the long-term durability of this program. In fact, all may be at work. The passage below in *Jiefangjun Bao* (January 1997) is representative of the various planes to which the “Two Transformations” are often linked in theoretical discussions.

The military strategic principle for the new period (i.e., the “Two Transformations”) has epoch-making significance in the history of our army’s development. There have been several strategic transformations in our army’s history; *various strategic principles of active defense with different content were set forth based on the new tasks for military struggles*. Their focuses were mostly a selection of operational guidance and means of conducting comprehensive war under ordinary technical conditions. *The strategic principle for the new period proceeds from the high-tech condition of the information era; it guides the preparations for military struggles in the new period and the employment of military force in future wars, while guiding the building and development of military force*. The former requires converting to a foothold to winning high-tech local wars, while the latter requires proceeding from improving quality and efficiency, and increasing the content of science and technology (emphasis added).<sup>70</sup>

It is also unclear how long the PLA leadership believes it will take to accomplish these “Two Transformations.” The PLA literature is clear that this is a process that will go on for quite a few years. But for how long? In PLA articles discussing the “Two Transformations” one runs across vague terms such as “cross-century task” and “long-term historical process.” My own sense from reading the literature is that the PLA has linked this metamorphosis to Jiang Zemin’s goal of China becoming a “moderately developed country” by 2049, the centenary of the People’s Republic of China.

What we can state with certainty is that the “Two Transformations” principle is now a politically mandated “line” accompanied by the usual rallying support of the senior

<sup>69</sup>This latter point, of course, also parallels Jiang’s recent calls during the 9th NPC for the entire Chinese people to raise their general level of S&T education. It should be pointed out that while Jiang is linked with the formulation of the term “Two Transformations,” the essence of this program may in fact belong to Liu Huaqing, who had called for quality and science and technology since the early 1990s.

<sup>70</sup>Zhang Qinsheng and Li Bingyan, *op. cit.*

PLA leadership (the NMSC, “Political Work”). Once again, Lieutenant General Chen Bingde:

The formulation of the military strategic guideline in the new period and the decision to effect the “two transformations” in army building are explicit characteristics of the times. They reflect the objective need of army building in the new period. They are not only a major strategic choice, but also a theoretical achievement of significant importance. They indicate that our army will enter a brand new period of development.<sup>71</sup>

In theory, then, the “Two Transformations” is the PLA’s shorthand for the multitude of national military reforms, programs, plans and policies that will enable the PLA to accrue the **National Military Resources** required to successfully fight and win on the high-tech battlefield as they have analyzed it. Ultimately, the programs under the “Two Transformations” must turn the *operational requirements* of the high-tech battlefield into *operational capabilities*.<sup>72</sup>

A military force does not have an operational capability until it can actually perform the operational requirement to standard. The process of turning a *requirement* into a *capability* is a complicated process at the strategic and operational (theater and campaign) levels of warfare. It is the result of the synergy that accrues when the critical elements of a military system are *developed* and then *integrated* holistically to focus on a particular warfighting requirement or set of requirements. The possession of weapons systems or “hardware” is necessary but by no means sufficient to develop an operational capability. At a minimum, systems (hardware and software), doctrine, personnel, and force structures must all be developed and then integrated and synthesized through fielding, testing and training before an operational capability results. These four major elements as well as the budgets that enable them are the basic NMRs of any military force (See Figure 3).<sup>73</sup>

At this point, we have arrived at our final destination; articulating the major components of a notional “National Military Strategy” for the PLA and explaining the rationale for them. As a “cross-century” NMS, the PLA will strive to achieve three national military objectives through the implementation of four national military strategic concepts. For comparative purposes, Table 2 and Table 3 juxtapose the

<sup>71</sup>Chen Bingde, op. cit. It is also worth pointing out that the “Two Transformations” is, I believe, another vehicle being used to validate Jiang Zemin’s military *bona fides* by crediting him with the credentials of a military theorist. Because the “Two Transformations” are sometimes juxtaposed next to Deng’s 1985 “strategic decision” as the two most important theoretical analyses in military strategy during the “new period,” we infer that Jiang is being elevated to near-Deng status. But the political utility of this “line” for Jiang should not cloud our thinking about the momentous consequences for the modernization of the PLA if this program, or even parts of it, can actually be implemented over time.

<sup>72</sup>At the national level of military planning, operational requirements are couched in broad terms. Generic examples would be: sea denial, strategic lift, amphibious warfare, special operations, information warfare, joint operations, or long-range air interdiction, to name just a few.

<sup>73</sup>This model is based on the work of Kenneth Kennedy at the Center for Naval Analyses who originally developed the basic structure. I have modified his model by adapting it to the particular circumstances of the PLA and adding the need for “Force Structure.” Additionally, I have added to the general model the linkage to NMSCs (in this case, the “Two Transformations” for the PLA), and a top block underscoring that, for the PLA, “Operational Requirements” are the result of Chinese analysis of LWUMHTC. Finally, I have added “testing” and “fielding” to what was originally a block containing only “Training.”

elements of this notional PLA NMS with stated U.S. national security objectives (1997 and 1994) and elements of the published U.S. NMS for both 1997 and 1995.

As we continue to track the progress of the PLA in attaining its goals, we should focus on the critical elements shown in Figure 3. Some elements will be easier to track and analyze than others. For example, major weapons purchases eventually become known. Major personnel policies are usually publicized thanks to political work. But other critical variables will remain unknown to analysts because of the closed nature of the Chinese defense establishment. For example, we may become cognizant of major training exercises but we cannot easily measure their success in integrating all the elements “to standard.” Nor can we be certain of the efficacy of new command and control policies (“software”) or even command and control systems (“hardware”). Nevertheless, being aware of major policy decisions and their relationship to this process will provide key benchmarks for analysis. This brings us to the most recent military policy decisions emanating from the 15th Party Congress and the 9th NPC.

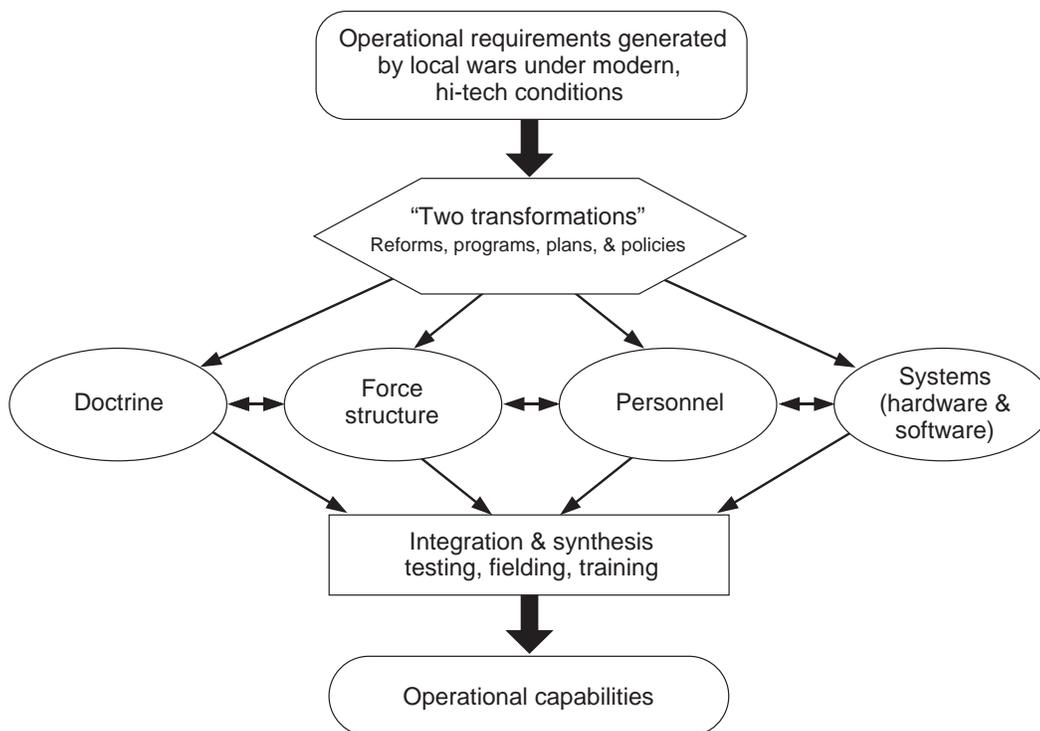
### **VIII. THE 15th PARTY CONGRESS AND THE 9th NPC**

This paper began by asserting that the statements on defense issues emanating from the 15th Party Congress and the 9th NPC may well indicate that the PLA is about to embark on its next great wave of reforms. If the various statements by Jiang Zemin and other PLA leaders at these two events are to be taken at face value, and their exhortations are not mere rhetoric, then over the next few years we may witness significant changes in the Chinese defense establishment, especially in the realm of force structure and organization. In the notional NMS we have constructed, the strategic concept “Army Building” may be given increased emphasis and specific policies and programs under the rubric of the “Two Transformations” may be launched.

The central theme of the 15th Party Congress was the need for dramatic structural reform of the Chinese economy, especially in State Owned Enterprises (SOEs). Yet, for PLA watchers there were three potentially significant outcomes in the relatively small section of Jiang’s political report dealing with defense issues. The first, of course, was the most obvious: the announcement of a half-million-man reduction over three years. The significance of the announcement is as much in the realm of the “potential” as the “actual.” Specifically, the last major reduction of personnel in the PLA (one million men, announced in 1985) was part of a larger package of significant structural changes. These included the reduction of the number of Military Regions from eleven to its current seven (announced in 1985) and the creation of the Group Army system (first announced in 1983 but continuing in implementation through 1985).<sup>74</sup> Consequently, if history is any indicator, all antennae should be on alert for other major structural reforms down the road to accompany the 500,000-man reduction.

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<sup>74</sup>Godwin, *op. cit.*



This diagram depicts in very simplistic form the four basic elements of a military system that are required to translate an operational requirement into an operational capability. The PLA analysis of the operational environment under Local Wars Under Modern, Hi-Tech Conditions identifies the operational requirements that must be developed. The NMSC, the “Two Transformations,” articulates the reform programs that will be instituted to develop the National Military Resources required. The minimum required NMRs are Doctrine, Force Structure, Personnel, & Systems. An operational capability cannot be realized until they are integrated to be able to perform to standard. At the operational level of warfare this process requires inter-service coordination (jointness). At the tactical level of warfare this process must be repeated hundreds of times for a myriad of tasks and skills.

**Figure 3**

**Table 2**  
**U.S. and PRC National Security Objectives**

Notional PRC National Security Strategy	May 1997 U.S. National Security Strategy	July 1994 U.S. National Security Strategy
Sovereignty	Enhance security	Enhance security
Modernity	Promote prosperity	Promote prosperity at home
Stability	Promote democracy	Promote democracy

**Table 3**  
**PRC and U.S. National Military Strategies**

Notional PRC NMS	1997 U.S. NMS	1995 U.S. NMS
National Military Objectives		
Protect the Party and safeguard stability	Promote peace and stability	Promote stability
Defend sovereignty and defeat aggression	Defeat adversaries	Thwart aggression
Modernize the military and build the nation		
National Military Strategic Concepts		
Nuclear deterrence	Power projection	Power projection
Political work	Decisive force	
Forward Defense	Overseas presence	Overseas presence
Army-Building	Strategic agility	

The second potentially significant outcome in Jiang's political report was also relatively stark. After the necessary exhortations to the PLA to "uphold the party's absolute leadership" (the NMSC, "Political Work"), Jiang went through a list of tasks the PLA must implement. The first among them was that the PLA "should implement a military strategy of active defense."<sup>75</sup> As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Active Defense doctrine has been around for some time. Yet, specific mention of the Active Defense was not included in Jiang's political report to the 14th Party Congress in 1992.<sup>76</sup> Usually, political reports refer to army building issues and seldom comment on operational issues. Having the CMC chairman list it as a requirement for the PLA in a Political Report gives it the aura of an uncontested political decision, not merely a necessary military imperative, thereby ending any debate there may have been within the PLA over this doctrine and, by extension, validating the NMSC I have termed "Forward Defense." Moreover, it implies that the PLA will have to become serious in developing the operational capabilities that this doctrine demands under LWUMHTC.

The third significant outcome of Jiang's comments on national defense is probably less obvious. When reviewing the rest of his list of PLA tasks, one can see that he is listing the key requirements to enable the "Two Transformations" (the NMSC, "Army Building"), although Jiang does not use the specific term. Since this formulation had not been put forward until late 1995, the 15th Party Congress provided the first opportunity for Jiang to place his imprimatur on the program outside the PLA. Encapsulating the gist of the list, Jiang calls upon the PLA to stress quality over quantity ("take the road to building fewer but better troops"); upgrade defense and "combat capability in a high-technology environment"; adapt defense industries to new market mechanisms; strengthen education and training; "gradually upgrade weapons and equipment"; and improve the reserve and militia system.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Jiang Zemin, "Political Report," *op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup>See, "Jiang Zemin Delivers Political Report," October 12, 1992, in FBIS-CHI-92-198-S.

<sup>77</sup>Jiang Zemin, "Political Report," *op. cit.* The points are paraphrased from Jiang's Political Report to the 15th Party Congress. It is worth pointing out that at the 14th Party Congress in 1992 Jiang was still

The upshot of these three outcomes from the 15th Party Congress was that it was clear that major changes were in the wind. It was not until the 9th NPC in March 1998, however, that one started to get a sense of where Jiang and his generals are headed in the near-term and where their decisions fit into the notional NMS we have generated.

In a major speech to PLA delegates to the 9th NPC, Jiang Zemin provided the rationale for new military reforms. He stated that “global military reform keeps gaining momentum . . .” and that “military powers in the world have one after another readjusted their development strategies for their armies in a bid to speed up army modernization and overtake other countries in army quality.” He stressed that developments in science and technology are having a “profound effect” on warfare. Jiang declared that the Central Committee and the CMC “have set forth new strategic principles for military development . . .” that are aimed at the PLA being able to fight LWUMHTC, “emphasizing army strength with science and technology rather than the quantity of troops, and bringing about a shift from a personnel-intensive to a technology-intensive armed force.” In effect, Jiang reiterated that the “Two Transformations” concept is what the PLA must seek and that by moving forward with these military reforms China will be on the road to “significantly narrowing our differences with the world’s advanced levels and laying a solid foundation for future development.”<sup>78</sup>

What Jiang’s comments do not illuminate is the specific decisions that the Central Committee and CMC have made along these lines. Neither do the comments of senior PLA leaders at the NPC. However, their general comments do give us some insight. The most important theme to come out from statements of senior PLA officers at the 9th NPC, I would argue, is that the PLA must now use the occasion of the 500,000-man reduction to make significant and much-needed organizational and structural changes to the armed forces. Comments along these lines made by Generals Fu Quanyou, Chi Haotian, and Yu Yongbo are worth highlighting because, in the typical sweeping speeches men such as these make at such events, it is often difficult to sort out the “signals” from the “static.” GSD Chief General Fu Quanyou stated: “We should take the favorable chance of reducing 500,000 soldiers to conscientiously implement the policy decisions of the party Central Committee and Central Military Commission; *make a breakthrough in optimizing structures*, balancing relations, and improving work efficiency. . . .”<sup>79</sup> Defense Minister General Chi Haotian declared: “While readjusting and streamlining the army, we should stress not only a smaller army but also an *optimal structure* . . . The PLA structural

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standing in the shadow of Deng Xiaoping, Yang Shangkun, Yang Baibing, Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen. By the 15th Party Congress Deng had died, Liu and Zhang had retired, the two Yangs were not much heard from, and a new generation of general officers was coming into its own with Jiang at the helm. Consequently, one can posit that the 15th Party Congress is the point at which Jiang Zemin finally consolidated his position as titular leader of the PLA (both as State President and Chairman of the CMC) and was in a position to call for bold reform within the PLA.

<sup>78</sup>Wu Hengquan and Luo Yuwen, “Chairman Jiang Zemin Stresses at PLA Delegation Meeting.”

<sup>79</sup>Ma Xiaochun and Zhang Yanzhong, “While Relaying the Guidelines of the First Session of the Ninth National People’s Congress at the General Staff Headquarters, Fu Quanyou Calls for Conscientiously Implementing the Guidelines of the NPC Session and Achieving Military Work in a Down-to-Earth Manner,” *Jiefangjun bao*, March 21, 1998, in FBIS-CHI-98-091, April 1, 1998. Emphasis added.

and establishment readjustment and reform is a project of complex system engineering. . . . Charged with a sacred mission of safeguarding China's national security and social stability, the *PLA is faced with an arduous task of reorganizing itself at present*" (emphasis added).<sup>80</sup> GPD Chief General Yu Yongbo opined: "The CPC Central Committee and the Central Military Commission have decided to *readjust and streamline the army establishment*, this being a major strategic measure intended to further army quality-building and an important step toward cross-century army modernization-building. The army should actively, assuredly, and successfully fulfill this important task . . ." (emphasis added).<sup>81</sup>

What we take from all of this is that in the near-term (the next three to five years) we can expect the PLA to institute significant changes in force structure and organization. All the "indications and warnings" are out on the table. While the specifics are not yet clear, we can probably engage in some informed speculation by carefully studying the PLA literature relating to the current and future operational environment, the Chinese analysis of LWUMHTC, and works of military science dealing with the operational level of warfare.

The independent Hong Kong newspapers and other international news agencies have already picked up on the subject of impending PLA structural reform. Various articles have touted PLA plans to reduce the seven Military Regions to "five major theaters."<sup>82</sup> others have reported rumors of suggestions that the Ministry of National Defense should be civilianized.<sup>83</sup> Still other articles allege that the PLA is studying the U.S. model and considering revamping the CMC along the lines of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff.<sup>84</sup> Even more intriguing, the PRC-affiliated Hong Kong media are heralding impending changes as well. In February 1998 a lengthy and detailed article in *Kuang chiao ching* provided what it claimed were the details of a three-year plan for a major structural readjustment of the PLA.<sup>85</sup> In April 1998 *Ta gong pao* echoed, in abbreviated form, the *Kuang chiao ching* article (without directly citing it) just in case interested observers had missed it the first time around.<sup>86</sup>

Whether or not the particular initiatives in any of these articles come to pass remains to be seen. What is important is that these articles may in fact be indicative of an

<sup>80</sup>Gao Aisu, "Deputy Chi Haotian calls at NPC Panel Discussion for Earnestly Pushing Forward Army Building, Reform, Taking the Road of Building Small But Better Trained Army with Chinese Characteristics," *Jiefangjun bao*, March 7, 1998, pp. 1, 4, in FBIS-CHI-98-090, March 31, 1998.

<sup>81</sup>Tan Jian, "Deputy Yu Yongbo Calls at NPC Panel Discussion for Submitting to Overall Interests; Supporting Reform; Earnestly Pushing Forward Modernization Building," *Jiefangjun bao*, March 31, 1998, pp. 1, 2, in FBIS-CHI-98-090, March 31, 1998.

<sup>82</sup>Hsiao Peng, "Seven Major Military Regions to Be Changed into Five Major Theaters—A Great Change in PLA Commanding System Is Under Deliberation," *Sing tao jih pao*, April 15, 1998, p. A4, in FBIS-CHI-98-105, April 15, 1998.

<sup>83</sup>Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Proposal to Give Civilian Top PLA Jobs," *South China Morning Post*, June 1, 1998, Internet edition.

<sup>84</sup>Fong Tak-ho, "PLA Turns to US Role Model for Modernization Role Model," *Hong Kong Standard*, April 3, 1998, Internet edition.

<sup>85</sup>Kuan Cha-chia, "Commander Jiang Speeds Up Army Reform."

<sup>86</sup>"Special Article" by staff reporter Kung Shuang-yin: "The Curtain Has Been Raised on Army Restructuring," *Ta gong pao*, April 7, 1998, p. A1, in FBIS-CHI-98-097, April 7, 1998.

environment of military reform in Beijing in which truly significant changes to the way the PLA is organized and commanded are being considered.<sup>87</sup> We realize the weighty constraints the PLA faces in making major adjustments, but we must not discount the possibility that a serious series of changes is about to unfold.

## IX. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The purpose of this paper has been to offer a notional “National Military Strategy” for the People’s Liberation Army of China. It remains my argument that it is difficult to make analytic sense out of the myriad of changes going on within the PLA, or past policies for that matter, without a stated conceptual overview of what the PLA intends to achieve as a national military force and how it plans to go about achieving it.

An American template has been used to build this strategy for seven reasons. First, the model has general utility in organizing one’s thinking about national-level military issues. Second, it provides a useful baseline for comparative use by imposing rigor of definitions. Third, it affords ease of cognizance (“recognition value”) for those who carefully follow U.S. military issues. Fourth, working through the model requires analytic justification. Fifth, it forces one to think about linkages. Sixth, once the detailed rationale is ingested the essence of the strategy is captured in a short list of National Military Objectives and National Military Strategic Concepts. Finally, it highlights where PLA strategic issues have a universal quality and where issues unique to the Chinese armed forces stand out.

We should keep in mind that a national military strategy is a template and road map. It is not written in stone. It is dynamic and subject to change. This is true for all armed forces and it is true for the PLA. Significant changes or minor adjustments are driven by changes within the “Strategic Filter.” Testing and challenging the assumptions upon which an NMS is based is an iterative requirement. New political decisions (or altered domestic environment), significant developments in the security environment, or changes in the operational environment determine the mix of continuity and change.

It is important to understand that it is one thing to articulate a national military strategy (in this case by proxy) and quite another to accomplish it. In the realm of “Army Building” especially, Jiang Zemin and the CMC leadership have levied some ambitious requirements on the PLA without necessarily providing all the resources required. The PLA starts from the premise that the funding it requires from the state will not be adequate. The PLA leadership is painfully cognizant that the quality of the personnel it requires is not readily available across the breadth of the armed forces. Neither is the defense industrial base adequate to produce indigenously *all* the

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<sup>87</sup>My own inclination is that the first significant structural reforms will occur at the Military Region and Group Army levels on an experimental basis. This is because the changes can be dictated from above and the whole point of the structural reform program is first and foremost to enhance real combat capabilities. I am also prepared to envision significant near-term and major adjustments within the staffs of the (now) four General Departments and the command relationships between the General Departments and the Military Regions.

weapons systems the PLA would like to have in the near term. The list of impediments and challenges is endless. This is not meant to suggest that the situation is hopeless for the PLA. To the contrary, we may be surprised by what unfolds over the next few years. What this means is that tradeoffs must be made, economies sought, and careful choices made in expending resources to enable the critical components of this NMS.

Given the totality of the resource constraints under which it will continue to labor, the PLA will remain too large and too diversified in its missions to expect that it can reform and enhance the capabilities of the entire force any time soon, even with the impending 500,000-man reduction. Consequently, it would make eminent sense if the PLA leadership focused its army building efforts in particular on a small, well-chosen segment of the PLA.

Well into the first decades of the next century three distinct PLAs will continue to coexist.<sup>88</sup> The vast majority of the PLA will probably remain a low-tech force, ground-oriented, and charged mainly with guarding borders or watching vigilantly over those regions of China where internal unrest is possible or where humanitarian relief operations are required. This PLA will remain, to borrow a PLA phrase, a “millet and muskets” army. This PLA will receive little in resources but will be important for accomplishing the internally directed elements of this notional NMS.

A second PLA will be composed of an extremely small (but very vocal) group within the Chinese armed forces. This PLA will consist of the strategic thinkers at the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) and other security-related think-tanks who deal with doctrine, the theoretical scientists and applied technology specialists at COSTIND’s research institutes, and perhaps even PLA C4I specialists. This PLA will be thinking way over the horizon and experimenting with military technical revolution (MTR) and RMA concepts. We shall call this small group of thinkers, technicians, and potential innovators the “MTR/RMA PLA.” They will be a “blackboard PLA” that will probably be able to accrue some resources for their work through channels beyond the declared defense budget, perhaps by teaming with civilian technology-oriented counterparts. Their impact on the PLA is open to speculation at this point.

The third PLA is the PLA to which the external elements of this notional NMS will apply. We can best term this PLA the “warfighting PLA.” This is the military force that will be required to employ the doctrine of “Active Defense” and enable the NMSC “Forward Defense,” today and into the foreseeable future. It is within this PLA that a subset of the relatively best combat units in the Army, PLAN, PLAAF, and Second Artillery can be found. This subset is where I suspect the CMC will concentrate its efforts in “Army Building” and which will likely undergo the most interesting and potentially significant experiments in reorganization, restructuring,

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<sup>88</sup>The idea of “many PLAs” and what they represent is a result of extended conversations with my colleague Lieutenant Colonel Dennis Blasko (USA, Ret.), formerly Assistant U.S. Army Attaché to China and subsequently Assistant Army Liaison Officer in Hong Kong. For Blasko’s own thinking on this issue, see his later chapter, “A New PLA Force Structure.”

and C2 modernization. It is this PLA which will be the focus of the “Two Transformations” and a sizeable investment of resources over time.

Even within this small subset it is difficult to predict how successful the PLA will be in crafting a smaller but exponentially more capable force. There are a host of factors beyond the control of the PLA that could impel or impede success: a domestic economic meltdown, a radical change in internal politics, domestic unrest, or a radically altered security or operational environment, to name just a few. With a reform program of such complexity as the one we suspect the PLA is about to undergo taking place in the context of a complicated and ever-changing domestic and international environment, linear projections are almost meaningless.<sup>89</sup>

Moreover, the PLA will accrue inevitable advances in *tactical* capabilities through the acquisition or development of highly sophisticated weapons systems on and under the sea, in the air, or on the ground, but these will not necessarily bear any relationship to an enhanced capability to conduct *sustained combat* at the *operational* level of warfare, or the PLA’s ability to achieve key national military objectives. The closed nature of the PLA will ensure we see the “glitz” but little of the “guts” of their armed forces. Consequently, it will be relatively difficult to measure how well the PLA is doing in closing the large gap between its current conventional capabilities and the strategic concepts posited in this NMS (especially the NMSC “Forward Defense”).

As a concluding comment, I would offer that models, by their very nature, are artificial representations of reality. As I mentioned early on, the PLA certainly would not present its NMS as I have using an American template. However, I am confident that the concepts in this NMS, the policies outlined, and the analysis and intentions of this NMS are constructs that would be familiar to Chinese officers serving on the staffs of the major military organs in Beijing and in the field on the headquarters staffs of the MRs.

It is my hope that students of the PLA will leave this study with some new ways to think about where their own particular studies fit into a larger strategic context. As military technologies around the world continue to become more advanced, the traditional lines separating the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare are becoming more blurred. All levels of military analysis must now take the strategic level of analysis as its point of departure.

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<sup>89</sup>The best way to get at this question is probably to utilize scenario-based analysis as developed and applied by the Royal Dutch/Shell Oil Company. This is the soundest way to develop a manageable set of plausible, alternative “PLA futures” as a result of a serious analysis of drivers, trends, predetermined factors, and key uncertainties. For details on this methodology, see Peter Schwartz, *The Art of the Long View: Planning for the Future in an Uncertain World*, New York: Doubleday, 1996.