Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

China’s rise as a major power constitutes one of the most significant strategic events of the post-Cold War period. Many policymakers, strategists, and scholars express significant concern over the implications of China’s growing military and economic capabilities for the future security environment in Asia and beyond. Such concern derives in part from an anticipation of the systemic security problems that have historically accompanied the emergence of a new power. In the Chinese case, however, these anxieties are greatly compounded by the rapidity of internal change under way in China, our general lack of knowledge about Chinese strategic ambitions, the existence of many unresolved Chinese territorial claims, the intense suspicion and even hostility toward the West harbored by China’s leadership, and China’s internal political and social instabilities.

Each of the above factors influencing China’s external behavior impinges on the interests or resources of the Chinese military. Indeed, the future role of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in shaping the pace and content of China’s economic and defense modernization, strategic posture, territorial claims, relations with the West, and overall leadership composition and outlook could increase markedly in the months and years ahead, as China confronts an array of critical

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1 Many observers assume that China is a frustrated power obsessed with past grievances and in search of regional preeminence. For example, see David Shambaugh, “Accommodating a Frustrated Power: The Domestic Sources of China’s External Posture,” paper prepared for the 24th Sino-American Conference on Contemporary China, 15–17 June 1995a, Washington, D.C.
developmental issues and problems. Among these areas, perhaps of greatest concern to many political leaders around the world is the PLA's role in shaping Chinese national security policy. This report examines the leadership, structures, and processes governing PLA involvement in this critical policy arena. It emphasizes the specific mechanisms, both personal and bureaucratic, formal and informal, by which the PLA currently participates in national security policymaking, as well as the kinds of views and interests that the military seeks to advance.

The information and analysis presented in this report build on a growing literature on China's external policy process. Although

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2 For a systematic discussion of these factors, see Michael D. Swaine, China: Domestic Change and Foreign Policy, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-604-OSD, 1995.  
largely of very high quality, most of these studies are concerned with the civilian dimensions of China’s external behavior, and center on key party and government actors, i.e., they focus primarily on what the Chinese usually refer to as foreign affairs (waishi). The PLA’s role is often either downplayed greatly or ignored altogether in these works, usually because of severe data limitations or because the Chinese traditionally viewed foreign affairs as differing, both conceptually and structurally, from military affairs (junshi). Indeed, foreign affairs has been largely equated, in Chinese thinking, with the nonmilitary realm of diplomatic state relations. Hence, those few studies that focus on the role of the military in external policy limit their analysis mainly to basic features of the defense policy realm, a subset of the larger military affairs arena. Such studies rarely, if ever, include analysis of the PLA’s policy interactions with civilian foreign affairs officials or organizations.

This report draws together the often disparate and fragmentary information on the PLA presented in the above literature and combines it with recent, additional information obtained by the author through interviews conducted in Beijing in November–December 1994, July 1995, and February 1996 to present a more complete and updated picture of PLA involvement in the formulation and implementation of national security policy at all levels and across both military and civilian dimensions. Such a comprehensive, integrated analysis is especially needed because the military’s role in the national security policy process has been experiencing major change and redefinition in recent years. This ongoing shift has occurred largely in response to a rapid proliferation in the number and type of external policy-related issues and concerns that impinge upon the military’s expanding interests in many areas, resulting in a greater blurring of the line between foreign affairs and defense policy.

In presenting this comprehensive picture, the “macro” national security policy arena is divided by the author into four distinct “micro” subarenas:

The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking

- National strategic objectives
- Foreign policy
- Defense policy
- Strategic research, analysis, and intelligence

Each subarena encompasses a distinct set of national security policy functions. The first focuses on the broad strategic principles and goals guiding the entire national security policy arena. The second centers on civilian foreign affairs and diplomatic relations. The third includes military defense and security-related activities. The fourth comprises short-, medium-, and long-range strategic research, analysis, and intelligence gathering and related strategic or security assessments provided to the responsible organs and leaders of the other three subarenas.4

The basic organizational structure of these four policy subarenas is depicted in Figure 1.5 As the figure suggests, each subarena generally reflects a different level or sphere of leadership authority or policy input within the Chinese policy apparatus. The national strategic objectives subarena corresponds to the supreme political and military leadership. The foreign and defense policy subarenas correspond primarily to the leaderships of the major civilian and military organizations responsible for foreign and defense policy. The strategic research, analysis, and intelligence subarena corresponds to...

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4 It should be noted that Chinese leaders and strategists do not always employ the terms national strategic objectives, foreign policy, defense policy, and strategic research, analysis, and intelligence to describe these national security policy functions. In many cases, other terms are employed to describe these functions, as discussed in greater detail below. The terms in this report are used because they are easily recognizable to Western readers, and because they roughly correspond to identifiable functional areas in the Chinese system.

5 This figure does not present all the actors within each subarena. These are found in the more detailed figures below. Moreover, the figures in this report are intended to depict actual authority relationships or reporting channels among key individuals or organizations within or between each of the national security policy subarenas, not formal staff-line relationships among leading actors within the party, government, or military systems as a whole. However, some organizations are simply grouped within a box to show their common function or level of importance within a particular policy subarena. Details on the specific relationships among such organs are provided in the text, to the extent possible.
Figure 1—China's National Security Policy Arena
working-level researchers, strategists, and intelligence gatherers, both civilian and military. It thus performs a support (and not a leadership) function for the other subarenas, but it nonetheless plays a critical role in the policy process.

Analysis of each subarena begins with a summary of its general functional elements and corresponding present-day policy features. This is followed by a discussion of the subarena’s major institutional and individual actors, their likely interests and responsibilities, their modes of interaction, and their general relationship to the other three subarenas. For each policy subarena, the emphasis is placed on the activities and interests of military actors, although some discussion of civilian actors is also necessary. A concluding chapter summarizes the major features of the national security policy process and presents several implications of the preceding analysis for future PLA involvement.