
NATIONAL STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES SUBARENA

According to one very knowledgeable observer, the fundamental purposes of China's national strategy (*guojia zhanlue*) are (1) to safeguard China's national territory and sovereignty, (2) to guide national construction and social development, (3) to strengthen national power, and (4) to ensure continued national prosperity.¹ From this definition, one can see that China's national strategic objectives (*guojia zhanlue mubiao*) constitute those fundamental strategic principles, concepts, and priorities guiding not only foreign and defense policy but also critical domestic realms concerned with national construction and internal order. These objectives include the attainment of great power status in the economic, technological, social, and military realms (with concomitant levels of international prestige and influence), and the development or maintenance of capabilities to defend against any internal or external threats to China's political stability, social order, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

These broad strategic purposes and objectives are more explicitly spelled out in the general lines (*zong luxian*) on Chinese domestic policy and external relations established by the senior party leadership. In the domestic realm, China's current general line reflects the contents and priorities of the Four Modernizations, the guiding principle of the reform effort inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s. This concept envisions the attainment, by the year 2049

¹Pan Shiyong, *Reflections on Modern Strategy: Post Cold War Strategic Theory*, Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 1993, pp. 125–126.

(the 100th anniversary of the communist takeover of China), of development levels in Chinese agriculture, industry, science and technology, and national defense equivalent to major powers such as Great Britain, Germany, and Japan. Such development is to occur largely through a sustained program of incremental, market-led economic restructuring and administrative reform, combined with limited amounts of political and social liberalization. It is keyed to a notion of comprehensive national power (*zonghe guoli*), viewed as “the foundation upon which a nation depends for subsistence and development, . . . and upon which the powerful nations of the world establish their international status and exercise their international role and influence.”² According to at least one Chinese source, comprehensive national power is composed of a nation’s natural resources, economic capabilities, external trade and investment capabilities, science and technology capabilities, level of social development, military capabilities, level of governmental efficacy, and diplomatic capabilities.³ Under the Four Modernizations, however, improvements in military capabilities must in most cases depend on the prior establishment of strong economic, technological, political, and social capabilities. Moreover, economic and technological components of national power are viewed as critical instruments of foreign and defense policy, and not solely as prerequisites for domestic growth and stability.⁴

In the external realm, China’s general line defines the major features of China’s political and security environment, including macro-level geopolitical and strategic trends, the resulting balance of forces among the major powers, critical bilateral relationships, major external threats to the above national objectives, the likelihood of war or peace, and the types of conflict or confrontation characteristic of

²“An Analysis of Change in China’s International Status: Preliminary Discussion of Comprehensive National Power in the Last Twenty Years” (Zhongguo Guoji Diwei De Bianhua Fenxi—Zui Jin Ershinian Zonghe Guoli De Chubu Tanta), Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of World Economics and Politics Research Group on Comparative Research on the Comprehensive National Power of Primary States, *Pacific Journal (Taipingyang Xuebao)*, No. 1, April 1995, p. 135. The author is grateful to Alastair I. Johnston for bringing this source to his attention.

³Ibid.

⁴This prioritization is spelled out more fully in Swaine (1995), and Michael D. Swaine, “Strategic Appraisal: China,” in Zalmay Khalilzad (ed.), *Strategic Appraisal 1996*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, MR-543-AF, 1996, pp. 185–222.

the current historical period. At present, China's general line in external policy assumes a turbulent international environment associated with the transition from the Cold War bipolar confrontation to a more complex, multipolar configuration; the reduced likelihood of large-scale global or regional conflict; a growing number of limited regional threats and concerns demanding new types of conventional and unconventional military capabilities, including possible conflicts over disputed territories such as Taiwan; and the increasing importance of economic and technological factors to international security calculations. Hence, China's primary strategic objectives in the international arena are (1) to maintain an external environment conducive to the pursuit of economic reform, opening to the outside world, and economic construction, (2) to preserve or expand China's strategic independence and leverage in a complex multipolar environment, (3) to further China's efforts to reunify the nation, and (4) to strengthen China's ability to defend against external pressures or attacks emerging from a highly complex and uncertain yet arguably less immediately threatening security environment.⁵

These definitions of China's internal and external general lines suggest a clear linkage between domestic and foreign security interests and concerns. For example, key issues such as domestic economic modernization, social stability, and national reunification are seen by the Chinese as strongly influenced by external factors (e.g., the major powers and various international economic activities), and vice versa. Hence, in the Chinese view, the division between domestic and external strategic objectives is not as clear and distinct as it is in the West;⁶ moreover, both realms are critical to the interests of the Chinese military. However, this report primarily analyzes the policy process associated with the latter set of concerns and related objectives, which inform both foreign and defense policy. External strategic objectives constitute the core of what the Chinese refer to as their national defense strategy (*guofang zhanlue*). This realm in turn ac-

⁵For details on all these features, see Swaine (1995, 1996).

⁶It should be noted, however, that even in the West, the line between internal social and economic development issues and concerns and external national security concerns is becoming increasingly unclear.

cords most closely with what is usually understood in the West as the national security policy arena.⁷

The national strategic objectives subarena is composed of those individuals who wield supreme power over the party, state, and military apparatus. During the Deng Xiaoping period of the 1980s and early 1990s, three different types of leaders were included in this group: (1) the paramount leader and his personal advisors, (2) the paramount leader's senior associates on the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) or Secretariat, and (3) the most influential retired and semi-retired elder cadres of the revolutionary generation

Under Deng's direction, these individuals, usually numbering some twenty in total,⁸ determined China's fundamental national strategic objectives and/or ensured that those objectives were being followed throughout the policy apparatus. They also solved basic policy conflicts that emerged, and responded to external crises. They did not, however, supervise and/or implement the detailed aspects of national security policy.⁹ As shown below, this responsibility was (and remains) left largely to the civilian and military bureaucracies, which often enjoyed considerable autonomy in carrying out components of foreign and defense policy.

The mode of interaction in this subarena has been (and remains) largely, albeit not entirely, personalistic and informal. During the

⁷Hence, the term "national security policy" is used throughout this report primarily as a synonym for the Chinese term "national defense strategy," referring to the externally oriented dimension of China's broader national strategy.

⁸Shambaugh (1992), p. 104. This number did not include the personal assistants to the senior leadership, comprising both personal secretaries (*mishu*) and personal guards. Such individuals often exerted a decisive influence over the policy perceptions and views of senior leaders, as advisors, ghost writers, personal representatives, etc. They reportedly continue to perform these roles today. For details, see Wei Li and Lucian W. Pye, "The Ubiquitous Role of the *Mishu* in Chinese Politics," *China Quarterly*, No. 132, December 1992, pp. 913-936.

⁹Lieberthal (1995), pp. 187-188. As suggested above, the paramount leader exercised a unique role within this senior policy group, largely having the final word on core strategic issues while also determining the internal makeup and division of authority among the senior party leadership in the PBSC. For further details, also see Shambaugh (1992), pp. 108-109; and Hamrin (1992), pp. 99-100. Hamrin distinguishes between the "top tier" of the leadership, consisting solely of the paramount leader and a "second tier" of PBSC members and key elders. As we shall see below, this distinction has become less significant, if not entirely irrelevant.

Deng period, members met in unstructured groupings convened by the paramount leader as well as in more formal meetings of the PBSC, which gathered on an irregular basis.¹⁰ They also communicated in writing. In addition, members of this subarena below the paramount leader quite frequently interacted with senior bureaucratic officials responsible for foreign and defense policies, both informally and through leadership small groups (LSGs), discussed below.

It is extremely difficult to determine the specific level of influence exerted within the national strategic objectives subarena by the PLA as an institution, much less by individual military leaders. Given the centrality of the military to defense policy, the military's overall concern with national security issues, and the high prestige and party status of the top PLA elite, one can safely assume that senior military views on fundamental national strategic goals and objectives were solicited and offered on a fairly regular basis under Deng. As the above suggests, such PLA influence was exerted through individual leaders, including military elders and senior PLA officers holding high party posts.

In the early and mid 1980s, several very senior PLA leaders likely performed key roles in influencing the formulation and implementation of national strategic objectives. These included Ye Jianying, Xu Xiangqian, Nie Rongzhen, Yang Shangkun, Zhang Aiping, Yang Dezhi, Yu Qiuli, and Hong Xuezhai. Ye, Xu, Nie, and Yang Shangkun were all deputy heads of the party Central Military Commission (CMC), the supreme executive body in charge of the PLA. Yang concurrently served as CMC secretary general and executive vice chairman. Zhang, Yu, Hong, and Yang Dezhi were all CMC deputy general secretaries.¹¹ Wang Zhen, a senior party elder with very close ties to the PLA, and Qin Jiwei, a strong supporter of Deng Xiaoping and Minister of Defense in the late 1980s, were also likely part of this group.

¹⁰Important policy interactions in this subarena also occurred (and continue to occur) during larger, regularly scheduled high-level policy meetings centered on an annual summer conference held at the coastal resort of Beidaihe, and a subsequent fall party plenum, both attended by senior leaders and bureaucrats.

¹¹Barnett (1985), pp. 99–100.

These individuals, perhaps supported by other PLA elders, undoubtedly played important roles as advisors and confidants to Deng Xiaoping in shaping and overseeing major strategic policy decisions and guidelines.¹² In fact, their views were probably more critical than those of formal civilian party leaders such as Zhao Ziyang, Hu Yaobang, and other erstwhile successors of the pre-Tiananmen reform period.¹³ Moreover, PLA elders played at least an equally significant role in this policy arena as their civilian counterparts, e.g., Chen Yun, Peng Zhen, Bo Yibo, and Li Xiannian.¹⁴ Within this entire group, however, Yang Shangkun almost certainly wielded a preponderance of influence over national strategic policy objectives, second only to Deng Xiaoping. It is very likely that, from the mid 1980s until Yang's dismissal at the 14th Party Congress of October 1992, final decisions involving these policy objectives were made by Deng and Yang alone.¹⁵

Hong Kong press reports suggest that retired PLA elders, along with senior active duty PLA officers at the central and regional levels, have behaved as an extremely aggressive interest group in core areas of external policy since at least the early 1990s, and perhaps during much of the latter 1980s as well. Both small and large groups of officers reportedly have held meetings, written letters to the senior

¹²This parallels the role performed by senior PLA leaders such as Ye Jianying and Nie Rongzhen in the late 1960s and early 1970s in advising Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai on international strategy. The author is indebted to Jonathan Pollack for pointing this out to him.

¹³Several Chinese interlocutors have insisted to the author that Zhao and Hu were not privy to deliberations between Deng and senior military leaders during the 1980s, despite their high positions.

¹⁴Many such civilian party elders had extensive military backgrounds, of course. Indeed, their status as policy advocates and senior advisors to Deng derived in part from their links with the PLA.

¹⁵A "quasi-military" figure with significant ties to the PLA, Yang had been placed in charge of the military reform effort in the 1980s by Deng and had served as a critical conduit between the civilian party and professional military leaderships, and between the civilian and military sides of the national security bureaucracy. However, although such responsibilities and experience provided Yang with critical influence over the national strategic objectives subarena as Deng's aide and ally, his overall level of political power was significantly less than that of senior elders such as Chen Yun and Li Xiannian. To a significant extent, Yang's power and authority derived from Deng Xiaoping. For a summary of Yang Shangkun's background and duties, see Michael D. Swaine, *The Military and Political Succession in China*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, R-4254-AF, 1992, pp. 33–35.

party leadership, sent petitions, and passed resolutions as part of a general effort to influence (or dictate) critical aspects of national security policy.¹⁶ These efforts allegedly placed enormous pressure on Deng Xiaoping and, most recently, Jiang Zemin and other successor party leaders. Particular areas of concern to the PLA leadership reportedly included basic policy toward the United States and Taiwan, relations with Russia, and sensitive territorial disputes over areas such as the Spratly Islands.¹⁷

It is virtually impossible to determine the accuracy of such claims, given the limits on information regarding interactions at the most senior levels of the Chinese leadership. However, interviews with well-placed military officers and knowledgeable foreign observers suggest that the above characterization of the decisionmaking structure is essentially inaccurate. According to interviewees, senior PLA officers—both retired and active—did not serve as a unified and forceful lobbying group on broad national strategic (and national defense) policy objectives during the 1980s and early 1990s. This domain remained firmly under the control of Deng Xiaoping, with support from Yang Shangkun and advice from the PBSC and a small group of elders, as suggested above. A small number of senior military officers also served as advisors and consultants. According to interviewees, senior active and retired PLA officers have intervened directly in nonmilitary areas of national security policy arena on only a

¹⁶In addition, one Hong Kong source states that Deng Xiaoping issued orders in 1992 mandating an increased role for the PLA in governmental affairs and various policy organs. As a result, ten generals were allegedly allowed to attend meetings of the Politburo (PB) and PBSC as non-voting members. See *Hsin Pao*, December 11, 1992, p. 26, in *FBIS-CHI-92-240*, 12-14-92, pp. 28–29.

¹⁷For major examples, see *Hsin Pao*, October 15, 1992, p. 22, in *FBIS-CHI-92-202*, 10-19-92, pp. 4–6; *Cheng Ming*, June 1, 1993, pp. 14–16, in *FBIS-CHI-93-104*, 6-2-93, pp. 33–36; *Cheng Ming*, September 1, 1993, pp. 12–13, in *FBIS-CHI-93-171*, 9-7-93, pp. 46–48; *Ching Pao*, October 5, 1993, p. 54, in *FBIS-CHI-93-196*, 10-13-93, pp. 41–42; *Cheng Ming*, January 1, 1994, pp. 16–18, in *FBIS-CHI-94-016*, 1-25-94, pp. 4–6; *Ching Pao*, January 5, 1994, pp. 38–39, in *FBIS-CHI-003*, 1-5-94, p. 3; *South China Morning Post*, June 25, 1994, in *FBIS-CHI-94-123*, 6-27-94, pp. 40–41; *Hsin Pao*, July 8, 1994, p. 23, in *FBIS-CHI-94-134*, pp. 1–2; *Cheng Ming*, July 1, 1994, pp. 6–8, in *FBIS-CHI-94-143*, pp. 33–36; and *Cheng Ming*, September 1, 1994, pp. 22–23, in *FBIS-CHI-94-172*, 9-6-94, pp. 37–38. Many of these articles are summarized in John Garver, “The PLA as an Interest Group in Chinese Foreign Policy,” paper prepared for the Sixth Annual Conference on the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, Coolfont, West Virginia, June 1995. They are also cited extensively by Allen S. Whiting in “Chinese Nationalism and Foreign Policy After Deng,” *China Quarterly*, No. 142, June 1995, especially pp. 309–316.

few occasions. Moreover, such interventions were usually over specific policy decisions or incidents, such as the Yinhe incident of 1993,¹⁸ not over fundamental issues or principles of national strategy or critical bilateral relations.¹⁹

The above pattern of leadership interactions has changed significantly in some, but not all, respects during the past several years, as a result of the retirement, death, or general inactivity of many civilian and military elder leaders (including, most recently, Deng Xiaoping), the removal of Yang Shangkun from power at the 14th Party Congress, and the ascension to high formal positions of power of a small handful of senior party leaders of the successor generation, led by Party Secretary General Jiang Zemin, the putative “core” of the post-Deng Xiaoping leadership. As a result of these changes, ultimate leadership over the entire national security policy agenda has become more diffuse. Although the leadership still adheres to the general national strategic objectives enunciated under Deng Xiaoping, it is probably safe to say that no single individual wields predominant influence over this (or any other) policy subarena.

Ultimate authority over fundamental national strategic objectives does not reside in the PBSC as a body, but rather in an informal national security directorate made up of the most senior civilian and military leaders involved in national security affairs. Until fall 1997, this body consisted of four individuals: Jiang Zemin (as senior PBSC member, party general secretary and head of the CMC), Premier Li Peng (as PBSC member responsible for state affairs and head of the foreign policy system, discussed below), and two powerful PLA elders, Liu Huaqing (as the only PLA member of the PBSC and the senior officer responsible for force modernization) and Zhang Zhen (as the top PLA leader responsible for senior officer staffing and promotion, PLA reorganization, and the PLA’s defense strategy and opera-

¹⁸In 1993, the United States demanded a search of the Chinese ship, *Yinhe*, which was suspected of transporting precursors of chemical weapons to Iran. The Chinese government, at the urging of the Foreign Ministry, eventually agreed to permit the search, but no chemicals were discovered. Senior military officers were reportedly enraged by the Foreign Ministry’s supposedly obsequious behavior in permitting the search, and openly criticized the Ministry in internal leadership meetings.

¹⁹Such irregular and infrequent PLA policy interventions thus relate more to the subarena of foreign policy formulation and implementation, discussed below.

tional doctrine).²⁰ Other PBSC members no doubt express their views on national strategic issues and objectives in PBSC meetings. However, according to most knowledgeable observers, the role of these civilian leaders is largely limited to that of advisors and/or occasional advocates of various views, not key decisionmakers exercising ultimate power in this subarena.²¹

The makeup of the national security directorate changed in late 1997 when Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen relinquished their party posts at the 15th Party Congress of September 1997. In their place, two younger generals, Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian, both in their sixties, were promoted to the PB (but not the PBSC), and Zhang Wannian was placed on the party secretariat. Zhang and Chi had served as deputy CMC heads since the Fifth Plenum of the 14th Central Committee in October 1995²² and had long been expected to replace Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen as the PLA's most senior serving officers. Indeed, prior to fall 1997, they had almost certainly served as senior advisors to the national security directorate, perhaps along with one or two other military figures such as Wang Ruilin and Fu Quanyou, discussed below.²³

It should be noted that, despite their formal retirement, Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen almost certainly retain considerable influence over national security policy objectives on an informal basis. As discussed in Chapter Four below, both officers, in consultation with Jiang Zemin, for many years made all major decisions on defense policy as leading figures within an informal CMC executive committee.

²⁰Both Admiral Liu Huaqing and General Zhang Zhen were brought out of semi-retirement and placed by Deng in senior leadership positions at the 14th Party Congress in 1992.

²¹The views various PBSC members express in this and other national security policy subarenas in large part reflect their broad responsibilities within the party-state system. Aside from Jiang Zemin and Li Peng, only Zhu Rongji (finance and economic reform) and Li Lanqing (foreign trade) have obvious links to external policy issues.

²²Zhang was previously chief of the PLA general staff and Chi remains as Minister of Defense.

²³Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian will likely be joined, as replacements for Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen, by the CMC Secretary General, when that office is reactivated (it has been inactive since the removal of its last occupant, Yang Baibing, in 1992). This reactivation could occur at a critical meeting of the CMC to be held in December 1997. The post will probably go to General Staff Department (GSD) Director Fu Quanyou, a strong supporter of Jiang Zemin.

Hence, they almost certainly also served as the leading PLA actors influencing national strategic objectives and national security policy in general. This past role and their continuing overall senior status as leading PLA elders suggest that Liu and Zhang will continue to play a major role in the deliberations of the national security directorate.

The current national strategic objectives subarena is depicted in Figure 2.

Many other PLA elders remain relatively healthy and active at present, including Xiao Ke, Zhang Aiping, Hong Xuezhi, Yu Qiuli, Liao Hansheng, Chen Xilian, Yang Chengwu, and possibly Li Desheng. However, by most accounts, the overall policy influence of these formally retired officers has waned considerably in recent years.

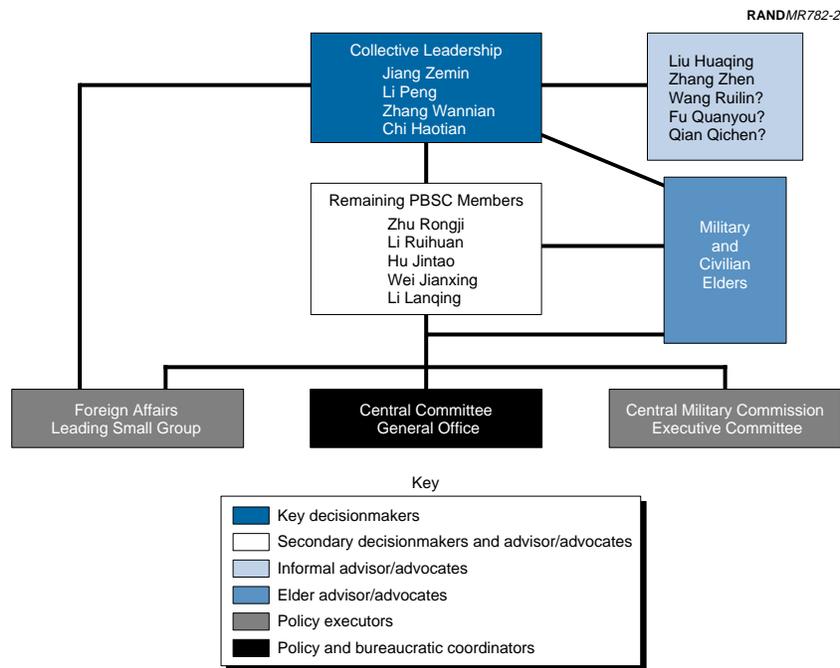


Figure 2—National Strategic Objectives Subarena

All elders (both civilian and military) have reportedly been taken off the key routing lists for senior policy documents, and none attends PB or CMC meetings. Moreover, it is very unlikely that military (or civilian) elders exercise the power to organize investigation teams, draft reports and proposals on policy issues, and participate in policy meetings, as claimed by media reports appearing in early 1994.²⁴ This suggests a very different image from the highly interventionist picture of military involvement in foreign affairs depicted in the Hong Kong media. It does not, however, preclude the possibility that individual elders still make their views concerning broad national strategic objectives and national security policy issues known to members of the national security directorate, and perhaps to various PBSC members.²⁵

While it is relatively easy to identify the most senior PLA members of this policy subarena, it is far more difficult to determine whether these individuals play a more assertive decisionmaking role in shaping national strategic policy objectives than did either Yang Shangkun or other PLA elders under Deng Xiaoping; it is equally difficult to determine what views they espouse on more specific national defense issues. Any answer to these questions must remain speculative.²⁶

Nonetheless, it is likely that no senior PLA officer seeks to alter China's national security policy agenda in fundamental ways, and that such officers probably consult with, rather than dictate to, Jiang Zemin in this subarena, for two basic reasons. First, many of the basic strategic principles, formulations and priorities guiding China's foreign and defense policies almost certainly remain unaltered from

²⁴Garver, "The PLA as an Interest Group in Chinese Foreign Policy," p. 5. However, some key military elders reportedly retain offices, provided by the CMC or GSD.

²⁵The absence of Deng Xiaoping and the reduced role played by elder leaders in national security policy suggest that, although *ultimate* power in this subarena is now shared by several individuals and not controlled by a single paramount leader, the total number of top party and military figures exercising power formally and informally has probably shrunk below the twenty or so mentioned above.

²⁶In addition, as of October 1997, it is unclear whether the same division of responsibilities over military affairs exists between Generals Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian as existed between Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen. Some observers believe that Zhang Wannian, the senior officer of the two, has probably taken over many of the formal duties of Zhang Zhen.

the Deng Xiaoping era, given their continued appropriateness to China's internal and external environments, and the leadership's political need to maintain a strong continuity with the Deng reform period.²⁷ As a result, no PLA officer has a strong argument for pressing basic changes in national strategic objectives. Second, by all accounts, no current PLA leader is extremely ambitious or interventionist regarding fundamental issues of political power and policy, as were past senior PLA figures such as Peng Dehuai, Luo Ruiqing or even Yang Shangkun. Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen were partly appointed to provide a stable foundation of PLA support to the Jiang Zemin-led successor leadership, not to control their policy deliberations. Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian reportedly have even less political ambition and personal clout than their two elder predecessors on the national security directorate. Moreover, their presence on the PB, but not in the inner leadership core of the PBSC, marks a continuation of Deng Xiaoping's effort to distance the PLA from involvement in elite politics while preserving its participation in critical policy arenas relevant to its professional interests.²⁸ Thus, although the PLA's ability to influence elite power politics has arguably declined as a result of the 15th Party Congress, it almost certainly retains influence over national security issues, including the setting of national security objectives.

²⁷Both of these factors are discussed in Swaine, 1995.

²⁸From this perspective, the 1992 placement of Liu Huaqing on the PBSC was an exception to this general trend.