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Not Ready for a Fight

Chinese Military Insecurities for Overseas Bases in Wartime

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is brokering international access agreements to expand its security footprint abroad, create avenues for overseas military activities, and extend the reach of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and associated paramilitary elements, such as the People's Armed Police (PAP). Reports of Chinese efforts to secure military access or basing agreements have mentioned Cambodia, Equatorial Guinea, Namibia, the Solomon Islands, the United Arab Emirates, and Vanuatu, among others.¹ The PRC's successful agreements, such as those with Cambodia, would add to its military facilities abroad, which include a military logistics base in Djibouti and a small paramilitary outpost in Tajikistan.²

Overseas military bases have obvious utility for Chinese armed forces in peacetime; for example, the bases host specialized facilities that can sustain and maintain PLA forces conducting nontraditional security operations in distant theaters. The bases' utility in wartime, however, is less clear. This report seeks to enhance public understanding and discussion of Chinese overseas basing by exploring Chinese

military thinking on the wartime missions that these facilities could serve.

This analysis is based on a review of open-source Chinese-language primary source articles by Chinese military-affiliated researchers. The researchers include professional PLA scholars, such as those employed by the Academy of Military Science (AMS) or the PLA's service academies. These scholars' research output does not comprise authoritative PLA doctrine, but their work represents many of the contemporary perspectives and debates that inform doctrine, and it can reflect PLA planning and thus provide insight into potential PLA intent. After a wide-ranging survey of the publicly available academic literature produced by PLA researchers, we identified more than 40 articles addressing wartime missions from overseas bases; here, we discuss insights drawn from this literature.

This report begins with a review of existing foreign research on PLA overseas bases. Second, we discuss Chinese military strategy and the PLA's overseas missions in general. Third, we explore PLA thinking about how to use overseas bases in a war, including key missions that the PLA would expect to conduct from overseas bases in a conflict. This section also discusses how PLA researchers assess their progress toward developing needed capabilities to execute those prospective missions and the practical challenges they will face. Because the PLA's capabilities for overseas operations are covered elsewhere, we focus here on PLA intent based on information from publicly available sources. Fourth, we consider how the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and broader analytic community can monitor the threat of Chinese overseas basing moving forward. We conclude with a brief discussion of the potential risks

that PLA overseas bases might pose to U.S. military interests through 2030.

The following key findings arise from this review:

- Chinese military writings suggest the PLA has neither the intent nor capability to use overseas Chinese military bases to launch preemptive attacks or other offensive operations on U.S. forces or interests during a future U.S.-China conflict through at least 2030. PLA overseas bases may be able to support such operations as noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs) or sea lane patrols, as well as nonkinetic missions, such as intelligence-gathering on U.S. forces and activities in the region.
- PLA researchers appear to consider sea line of communication (SLOC) protection to be the PLA's primary kinetic mission for overseas bases through 2030. Despite the PLA's myriad self-assessed vulnerabilities at its prospective overseas bases, PLA academic discourse repeatedly emphasizes these bases' roles in securing overseas sea lanes, including with kinetic operations. If the United States implements a distant blockade against China during a future U.S.-China conflict, then Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders may consider ordering overseas PLA forces to contest this blockade. Thus, the United States should not assume that it can implement a distant blockade unopposed.
- The PLA's wartime mission set involving overseas bases remains poorly specified in public PLA research. Existing PLA literature focuses heavily on prepositioning resources for an array of potential missions and building resilience to ensure that those resources can be mobilized in a conflict.

While these prepositioned resources may be used by forward-deployed forces already at these bases, the PLA is also in the process of building an expeditionary force that could be deployed in conflict, although its capability and capacity to sustain overseas operations are likely to be limited through at least 2030.

- While PLA overseas basing remains an important issue to monitor, PLA academic discourse includes significant concerns about the viability of overseas bases for conducting higher-end combat operations against the United States. These perceptions suggest that PLA overseas bases are unlikely to manifest into a significant wartime threat to U.S. forces and interests through at least 2030.
- PLA researchers appear to support a comprehensive military-civilian logistics system that makes mobilized civilian assets active participants in a future war enabled by overseas bases. This system entails the mobilization of civilian information networks and resources—as well as the vessels and manpower to transport them—in crisis or conflict. Notably, PLA researchers appear to distinguish between civilian facilities and mobilized civilian assets. PLA researchers repeatedly describe the role of mobilized civilians for supporting overseas bases, but the reviewed literature does not discuss waging a war from civilian ports.
- Key indications and warning of a PLA shift toward conducting offensive operations from overseas bases would likely include both political developments, such as decreased military tension in the Taiwan Strait, and military developments, such as larger or

longer overseas deployments of such combat platforms as the Type 055 *Renhai* cruiser. Other indicators may include deployments that mitigate the PLA's self-identified vulnerabilities. For example, deploying air and missile defense systems would cover a key wartime vulnerability for PLA overseas facilities.

Literature Review

Foreign analysis of PLA plans for overseas bases and how they might be used in wartime is limited. Much of the existing foreign research focuses on the PLA base at Djibouti, PLA access to commercial facilities for power projection, or some combination of the two.³ The dominant view is that the PLA employs a dual-use logistics facility model of overseas basing that emphasizes repair and resupply services to support nontraditional security operations,

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such as escorting and peacekeeping.⁴ Additional research focuses on PRC commercial investments in foreign ports to advance PLA power projection in peacetime.⁵ A third line of research looks forward to the evolution of PLA expeditionary capabilities and the countries that PLA researchers might consider most promising for hosting an overseas base given potential host country benefits and risk factors.⁶ Foreign experts largely agree on the sharp limits of commercial facilities in wartime, which house commercial interests that constitute an exploitable wartime vulnerability while providing at best limited support for combat operations.⁷ All of this foreign research, however, lacks a comprehensive review of what the Chinese military itself is thinking about potential wartime missions for these overseas bases.

DoD publicly describes the PRC government as actively working to expand its overseas basing network, which poses unspecified challenges to U.S. military operations. In 2023, DoD's annual report to Congress on PRC military power stated that "a global PLA military logistics network could disrupt U.S. military operations as the PRC's global military objectives evolve."⁸ In 2020, then–Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China Chad Sbragia assessed that "it is not a matter of whether the PLA intends to establish another military base overseas, but when and how they plan to do it" as part of "a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and . . . global preeminence in the future."⁹ Successive commanders of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) have similarly testified to Congress that the PRC is actively seeking a PLA base in Africa.¹⁰ In March 2022, the AFRICOM Commander testified that

By 2030, Chinese military facilities and technical collection sites in Africa will allow Beijing to project

power eastward into the Middle East and Indo-Pacific Theaters and west into the Atlantic. A permanent Chinese naval presence in West Africa would almost certainly require the Department to consider shifts to U.S. naval force posture and pose increased risk to freedom of navigation and U.S. ability to act.¹¹

PRC officials and documents do not discuss plans for wartime operations from overseas bases but instead claim that the PRC is pursuing a broader network of what they call "overseas logistical facilities" for peacetime missions. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper notes that the PRC will "develop far seas forces, build overseas logistical facilities, and enhance capabilities to carry out a diversity of military missions"¹² to address existing deficiencies in PLA expeditionary capabilities.¹³ As will be discussed in more detail in the following sections, these missions include peacetime operations, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR); crisis operations, such as NEOs; and wartime operations, such as securing maritime trade routes or protecting garrisons on disputed territory; for example, islands in the South China Sea.¹⁴

The 2019 defense white paper also makes clear that as the PRC seeks overseas bases, it is attempting to portray itself as a more powerful—but benign or even benevolent—overseas actor. It argues that its military development meets the PRC's "rightful security needs" while "contributing to the growth of the world's peaceful forces."¹⁵ PRC Ministry of National Defense spokespeople generally avoid associating overseas PLA bases with warfighting scenarios. In December 2019, Senior Colonel Wu Qian asserted that the PLA base in Djibouti serves only to enable escort and humanitarian assistance missions.¹⁶ In April 2022, Senior Colonel Tan Kefei listed improvements in PLA warfighting

capabilities and operations involving Djibouti as separate accomplishments, although he characterized the latter as achieving “leapfrog development” and comprising a “comprehensive support link” for the PLA to conduct unspecified operations further from China’s shores.¹⁷ PRC state media articles go further, commonly describing overseas bases as critical for extending PLA Navy logistics support capabilities that enable combat operations in distant maritime theaters.¹⁸ Beijing has steadfastly avoided officially calling these locations military bases for ideological and diplomatic reasons.

The Role of Overseas Bases in Chinese Military Strategy

Overseas bases offer a wide variety of potential benefits to militaries with expeditionary forces, but they are the most useful for supporting persistent presence in a theater, rapid reactions to emerging crises, and large-scale combat operations.¹⁹ PRC economic interests around the globe have driven the PLA to develop more expeditionary capabilities to secure these interests, such as overseas investments and imports, energy trade, and commercial partnerships.²⁰ The PLA’s development of expeditionary capabilities also has other drivers, including Beijing’s ambitions to shape the global security environment in favor of PRC interests and growing Chinese domestic expectations for the PLA to be a global military that is able to protect Chinese citizens when they are overseas.²¹

Although no public, official, and comprehensive list of the PLA overseas mission set exists, open-source PLA discussions of its overseas missions focus primarily on peacetime. The 2020 edition of the PLA National Defense

University’s (NDU) *Science of Military Strategy* textbook lists the PLA’s primary overseas activities as international peacekeeping, international rescue, maritime escort, overseas NEO, international joint exercises, strategic cruising (presence operations), blue-water exercises, military assistance, port calls, and counterterrorism.²² Other PRC documents, such as prior defense white papers and discussions of the PLA’s New Historic Missions, describe a need to secure Chinese overseas interests, particularly in the space, cyber, and maritime domains, and to ensure world peace by developing the capability to deter, contain, and win wars, including in distant theaters.²³

The 2019 defense white paper describes a fuller—though still high-level—mission set. The following list

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shows how the defense white paper describes the PLA's missions and operations that either primarily involve overseas activities or can be conducted as either a regional or overseas operations:²⁴

1. safeguarding national territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests
 - a. secure maritime rights in the waters, islands, and reefs in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and Yellow Sea by conducting law enforcement operations and responding to security threats²⁵
 - b. maintain maritime domain awareness in adjacent waters
2. safeguarding interests in major security fields
 - a. ensure security in the nuclear, outer space, and cyberspace domains
3. countering terrorism and maintaining stability
 - a. PAP forces: counterterrorism, HA/DR, maritime rights protection, and law enforcement
 - b. PLA forces: counterterrorism; nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons detection; HA/DR; and transportation support
4. protecting China's overseas interests
 - a. maritime escort, SLOC protection, overseas NEOs, and overseas maritime rights protection.

Guiding Principle: Expand the Battle Space

Contemporary PLA research on overseas bases is informed by a foundational drive to build strategic depth and push the theater of a potential conflict further from China. Textbooks for PLA officers published by the AMS, the PLA's top research institution reporting directly to the CCP Central Military Commission, repeatedly emphasize strategic depth

as a foundation for securing the Chinese mainland, including when establishing a war's primary direction and objectives.²⁶ The 2013 AMS *Science of Military Strategy* further develops this concept by specifying two functional uses for strategic depth: establishing "forward defense" and securing "strategic space."²⁷ *Forward defense* in this context refers to extending a potential battle space by developing the capabilities for long-range strike and joint operations in distant theaters, which the AMS authors argue is needed to manage perceived risks from the United States' power projection capabilities.²⁸ The 2013 textbook specifically describes forward deployments as needed to "cope with the strategic opponent's threat of AirSea Battle," a direct reference to a popular U.S. operational concept at the time.²⁹ *Strategic space* refers to the buffer zone, secured by a distant front line, in which the PRC can secure its borders and regional interests.³⁰ The AMS authors describe creating strategic space by radiating power from continental China throughout the Indo-Pacific region.³¹

Recent PLA research on overseas bases describes the ability to project power and win potentially protracted wars in distant theaters as a vital but likely still-distant capability. PLA researchers note the "leading premise" of military construction in general is ensuring victory in war by providing strong supports that enable PLA combat effectiveness.³² Some PLA researchers describe the need to geographically extend such capabilities, arguing that building overseas support bases from which to radiate military force into key maritime areas is necessary to safeguard the rights and interests of the PRC, its enterprises, and its overseas citizens.³³ Overseas bases might support defensive missions that secure China's overseas interests during conflict; for example, by enabling HA/DR missions, NEOs, or sea lane

patrols.³⁴ These discussions are not limited to short, sharp wars. Other PLA researchers assert that projecting power abroad is necessary but insufficient without the capability to sustain a secure position for an extended period in these distant theaters, suggesting a protracted conflict.³⁵ This aligns with the 2013 AMS *Science of Military Strategy* that suggests that Beijing favors a quick war but must prepare for a protracted conflict.³⁶

Types of PLA Overseas Facilities

PLA media and researchers generally refer to their military basing outside China in one of three ways: (1) logistics support bases [保障基地], (2) strategic strongpoints [战略支点 or 战略支撑点], and (3) paramilitary compounds used by the PAP.³⁷ Although the three appear aligned to varying requirements for different operations in a crisis or conflict, PLA writers use these terms inconsistently. Moreover, each of these references is a disingenuous label that softens the rhetorical edge of the CCP's global military ambitions. Logistics support bases are the PLA's rhetorical spin on military bases because China officially rejected that it would ever have military bases abroad right up until it established its base in Djibouti.³⁸ Much of the foreign analysis on PLA overseas basing confuses the term strategic strongpoints—which generally refers to the dual-use overseas basing model—for the broader universe of PLA overseas basing options.

As of early 2024, the PRC's only official logistics support base is the PLA facility in Djibouti, which enables PLA persistent intelligence collection and a variety of operations, including counterpiracy, counterterrorism, NEO, and international peacekeeping.³⁹ Despite its name, staff at

the PLA base in Djibouti appear to be constructing facilities needed for a naval base rather than for a logistics support facility, notably by building a pier that is likely able to accommodate the PLA Navy's large surface combatants, submarines, and aircraft carriers that are not well suited to counterpiracy operations.⁴⁰ The base reportedly has storage facilities for fuel, weapons, and equipment as well.⁴¹ The PLA's continued reference to Djibouti and its prospective future overseas bases as logistic support facilities and support bases instead of as a military base is likely euphemistic and intended to continue portraying the PLA as a benign power.⁴² This is also reflected in the PRC narrative that the PLA's presence in Djibouti supports international peace and stability through participation in nontraditional secu-

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rity operations.⁴³ However, PLA researchers themselves make plain in internally focused writings that these facilities can be, in practice, military bases.⁴⁴

PLA researchers also refer to *strategic strongpoints*, which the 2013 AMS *Science of Military Strategy* describes as nodes in the Indo-Pacific region from which to provide support for overseas military activities or, alternatively, as forward bases for deploying forces overseas.⁴⁵ The term *strategic strongpoints* generally refers to potential dual-use overseas facilities, including foreign commercial ports over which the PRC expects to exert some degree of control.⁴⁶ A network of strategic strongpoints in the Indo-Pacific region is primarily useful for peacetime operations, enabling PLA Navy port calls, joint exercises, and antipiracy operations in distant theaters. In a great power war, however, a location's utility will depend primarily on the assets there and the host country's willingness to support PLA operations. The PLA will not be able to count on host country access to foreign commercial ports, which have limited capabilities to perform the repair and resupply missions needed to conduct

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combat operations, regardless of their Chinese designation as strategic strongpoints. Notably, the PLA has not demonstrated any capability to use PRC-controlled commercial ports to perform sophisticated maintenance or repairs. Even PLA Navy visits to these ports, characterized as “technical stops” in Chinese state media, demonstrate only resupply and shore visit functions, not sophisticated repairs.⁴⁷

The PRC has also established a PAP presence in Tajikistan, including guard outposts and a training facility.⁴⁸ Although Chinese and Tajik officials deny the presence of any PRC facilities in Tajikistan, the PAP has reportedly maintained a presence patrolling Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor since approximately 2016.⁴⁹ The base has enabled persistent PAP presence and unilateral PAP patrols along the China-Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, improving the ability of Chinese forces to monitor the border areas and facilitating the building of regional security partnerships.⁵⁰ This represents a fundamentally different motivation and purpose for PRC security forces abroad—specifically, border security for domestic stability—so this report does not discuss this further.

Ultimately, the PRC taxonomy—how the PLA talks about and views its various overseas locations—is much less important than understanding the potential role and capability of each location, based on where it is and what is deployed there. The evolving nature of PLA and broader Chinese thinking about overseas basing makes it challenging to always simplify into this neat taxonomy. The operational purpose of a PLA facility in Cambodia is likely to be different than a future base in Equatorial Guinea, even if both might be officially called logistics support bases.⁵¹ Furthermore, some PLA researchers appear to use different terms with various connotations, suggesting that there is no

explicit, finalized PLA military theory for overseas basing and that internal consensus on what types of presence are desirable and where they should be is still evolving.

The PLA's Emerging Expeditionary Mission Set

PLA researchers have written extensively on the necessity of overseas bases for future operations, including for fighting a future war.⁵² While no individual journal article is an authoritative description of PLA policy, trends in open-source PLA research indicate key points of interest. A review of the broader PLA literature on overseas basing reveals (1) an emerging mission set that these bases would enable and (2) the existing challenges to developing the basing network and expeditionary force that PLA leaders aspire to field.

Although the PLA does not publish an official list of missions that it intends to conduct from future overseas bases, PLA research articles from the past few years describe overseas bases as sites for prepositioning resources and supporting at-sea replenishment operations, which, in turn, enable combat missions, such as contesting control over key SLOCs.⁵³ Existing publications likely reflect early-stage research into how overseas bases might be used in wartime, and PLA considerations for potential wartime missions might evolve as it gains access to facilities beyond Djibouti.

Prepositioning Resources, At-Sea Replenishment, and Power Projection

PLA researchers frequently write about the utility of overseas bases for prepositioning fuel, ammunition, and other

resources that a military might want forward-deployed in a war. The articles reflect a broader interest in transitioning from a peacetime focus to wartime preparations. Researchers describe challenges with stockpiling ammunition, fuel, and equipment consumed in high volumes during war, for example, and further describe the necessity of supporting large naval strike formations and establishing a broad logistics network with forward bases to accelerate PLA response in wartime.⁵⁴ Prepositioning would also mitigate long lead times for deliveries of military equipment from China; these deliveries reportedly have production cycles of

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two to six months even before the additional, often significant transit times over great distances.⁵⁵

One particularly sensitive issue for some PLA researchers is the need to preposition oil stocks at overseas bases. PLA expeditionary operations depend on commercial oil sources, which PLA researchers assess are functional in peacetime but expose PRC forces to significant risk in a war, given perceived U.S. capabilities to financially interfere with PRC energy trade.⁵⁶ Researchers also note that without prepositioned oil stocks at a base, a crisis or war threatening the CCP's overseas interests could force CCP officials to issue a temporary wartime mobilization order—which has steep economic costs—to access commercial oil supplies and conduct operations in the region.⁵⁷

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emphasize the need for long-range delivery (power projection), including airlift and sealift, and at-sea replenishment capabilities to sustain combat operations away from such bases.⁵⁸ Similarly, some PLA researchers have supported constructing base-level overseas maritime support facilities and at-sea replenishment fleets to operate from such bases.⁵⁹

Protection of Sea Lines of Communication

Overseas bases with prepositioned resources and underway replenishment capabilities would enable PLA Navy forces to seize or contest control over key SLOCs in wartime. Given the PLA's limited expeditionary combat and sustainment forces, SLOC protection will likely be the primary kinetic mission for PLA overseas bases through at least 2030. To accomplish this, the PLA would need to be able to station significant naval forces at locations near key choke-points, which would require a substantial increase in larger naval and air expeditionary force capability, logistics capabilities, and places from which to deploy. While at least one PLA researcher in 2013 identified such a large expeditionary force as vital to secure China's overseas interests, this view is sparsely represented—or rarely addressed—in PLA academic literature, including more recent publications reviewed for this report.⁶⁰

PLA textbooks have long expressed anxiety over the PRC's relative dearth of capabilities with which to control key SLOCs and deep concern about a potential U.S. blockade. In 2003, former leader Hu Jintao reportedly warned about the Malacca Dilemma; specifically, China's reliance on imported oil flowing through the Strait of Malacca, which was at risk of closure by a U.S. military blockade in

the event of a U.S.-China conflict.⁶¹ The 2013 AMS *Science of Military Strategy* addresses this risk:

the United States and other major powers control the world's primary strategic lines of communication, posing great security risks to China's overseas transit. [. . . These SLOCs] have become the "lifelines" of our socioeconomic development, and although in overall terms they are kept unimpeded they are nonetheless not owned by us, nor are they controlled by us. Once a crisis or war at sea occurs, our sea transport has the possibility to be cut off.⁶²

The 2020 NDU *Science of Military Strategy* goes further, claiming "hegemonic countries are exercising control over important SLOCs that are vital to China for the strategic purpose of encircling and containing China."⁶³ Leading Chinese maritime experts, such as Hu Bo, argue that, in addition to having the capability to interdict Chinese seaborne imports, the U.S. Navy already demonstrated the inclination to do so during the 1993 *Yinhe* incident,⁶⁴ thus constituting an acute threat to PRC security.⁶⁵ Despite two decades of PRC efforts to reduce this strategic risk, the proportion of China's imported oil passing through the Malacca Strait has fallen only moderately and, as of 2023, is at 62 percent.⁶⁶

Several PLA researchers highlight the ability to secure shipping lanes as a leading mission enabled by overseas bases.⁶⁷ One group of PLA researchers explicitly links the logistics network underpinning SLOC protection operations as conducive for "effectively shaping the situation and for managing and controlling crisis."⁶⁸ This phrase mirrors language inserted in the 2020 edition of the PLA NDU's *Science of Military Strategy* as part of a broader trend of

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greater confidence, higher risk tolerance, and a more proactive approach in conducting operations.⁶⁹

In the immediate term, PLA planners almost certainly focus on potential operations to secure Chinese shipping from the Middle East. In 2014, PLA Naval Research Institute researchers called the SLOC that runs south from China's coast through the Malacca Strait and west to the Middle East China's "distant ocean lifeline" [远洋生命线].⁷⁰ The distant ocean lifeline is just one of many SLOCs that the PLA Navy aspires to control in the future, however, and these researchers additionally recommended establishing "strategic infrastructure" [战略基础架构] that would be able to assert sea power in oceans around the world.⁷¹ The PLA Navy is developing low-end, largely constabulary SLOC protection capabilities through ongoing counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden; this is a near-term opportunity for the PLA Navy to develop expeditionary capabilities and additionally serves to establish China as a security partner to countries in Africa.⁷²

The PLA's focus on overseas SLOC protection missions very likely includes higher-end conflicts. In the event that the United States imposes a distant blockade on China, CCP leaders may order overseas PLA forces to contest that blockade. The United States should not assume that it can implement a distant blockade unopposed. Overseas PLA forces could either attempt to lift a U.S. blockade by disputing or denying control of the sea or, alternatively, by breaking through the blockading line in a more targeted manner. Lifting a U.S. blockade typically requires substantial counter-containment operations that impose significant losses on the blockading force. At minimum, this effort would require extending and maintaining a sea denial envelope over the blockaded SLOCs, for example, with shore-based antiship

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missiles. Higher-end operations could include disputing sea control through confrontations with the blockading fleet with naval and air sorties.⁷³ These operations are complex and would very likely remain a challenge for PLA forces through at least 2030. Running the blockade would instead merely require the overseas PLA forces to escort Chinese shipping and deter—or counter, if necessary—U.S. attacks, on a case-by-case basis while Chinese shipping convoys attempt to pass through the U.S. blockade. More likely, the PLA would use only small pockets of concentrated force to run a blockade. Through at least 2030, the PLA will likely still be constrained by hard limits in overseas forces and overseas locations from which to operate, as well as by a lack of a robust overseas logistics system to sustain operations to contest a blockade. Moreover, the practical challenges for the United States in actually implementing a full blockade means that the United States might opt for a partial or administrative blockade anyway.⁷⁴

This potential use of force for SLOC protection fits with publicly available PLA writings on the use of force abroad, but it also suggests a cautious PLA approach. A 2019 *China Military Science* article about the use of force abroad in Xi Jinping's "new era" specifically says that for "protecting transportation and escorting" [保交护航], China should "focus on expulsion, use force with caution, and use arrest with caution."⁷⁵ The authors recommend that the "proper use of weapons is mainly for warning shots. When it is absolutely necessary to use weapons, non-lethal weapons should be used first."⁷⁶ While the article is nominally focused on counterpiracy, its reference to "complex situations" suggest they may also be implicitly considering wartime. This aligns with the 2020 edition of PLA NDU's *Science of Military Strategy*, which states that "the use of

force must be strictly limited to avoid the outbreak of serious conflicts.” While neither of these texts deal specifically with the role of overseas bases in wartime, they suggest the PLA is not yet looking for opportunities to use its presence abroad for high-intensity offensive military operations.

Missing Missions

It is important to note what potential PLA missions were not discussed in our review of open-source PLA writings. We did not find any specific, explicit writings about conducting offensive, kinetic operations from the bases themselves—for example, deploying PLA Rocket Force ballistic missiles to Djibouti to conduct launches. This gap in the literature may arise from the PLA’s recognition of the political challenge of gaining host country support for basing offensive fires abroad, though as we detail later, PLA recognition on this point appears limited. Another explanation could be that the CCP and PLA leadership have concerns about basing “strategic” conventional capabilities outside China and thus further away from CCP control.

There are other potential PLA missions that we did not find mentioned in our review of PLA literature. First, we found no reference to using overseas bases for conducting offensive cyber attacks, likely because the PLA has sufficient cyber capabilities and access at home in China, although close access cyber operations could benefit from overseas bases. Second, we did not find any references to leveraging the bases for enabling combat search and rescue, which would support saving troops operating abroad. This may be due to a lack of care for troops’ general welfare or because the PLA has not yet grappled with the second-order requirements for kinetic operations abroad. We

also did not see any references to leveraging unmanned systems, especially unmanned combat aerial vehicles, for operations from overseas bases, despite the fact that China has at least considered deploying them to kill a wanted Burmese warlord hiding inside Myanmar in 2012.⁷⁷

A key point is that the absence of evidence of PLA planning to use its bases to support offensive operations in wartime does not definitely provide evidence of an absence of PRC intent. The closest we could find were three PLA articles that suggest that the authors hope PLA overseas basing will provide some amount of deterrence against attacks or challenges to Chinese interests, although the arguments are not well explained.⁷⁸ One article authored by several AMS researchers argues that constructing and conducting regular operations from overseas bases serves

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the functions of “demonstrating presence, strategic deterrence, and strategic support.”⁷⁹ Another article written by two graduate students at the PLA Navy Engineering University in 2020 is more explicit, stating,

A powerful overseas joint combat force can not only greatly deter opponents, but also strike those who would potentially destroy our national interests, thereby obtaining necessary strategic advantages and security guarantees.⁸⁰

According to the authors, these guarantees are secured by aligning overseas bases to a military’s main strategic direction, enabling the rapid deployment of joint forces to secure strategic key points across great distances.⁸¹ The article appears at odds with NDU’s 2020 *Science of Military Strategy*, which introduces the concept of “strategically important areas” [战略重点地区]—where the PLA Navy is likely to focus its far-seas operations—as a distinct concept from the PLA’s main strategic direction, which indicates the greatest potential threat of war.⁸² Contrary to the quoted article’s argument, the 2020 *Science of Military Strategy* appears to cleanly break PLA overseas or far-seas opera-

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tions from solely supporting an imperative of local (limited) war, such as over Taiwan.⁸³ It is possible, but far from clear that there was some amount of debate within the PLA at that time about whether a tension exists between pursuing overseas basing and preparing for forceful unification with Taiwan. How the PLA discusses the alignment between overseas basing and its main strategic direction will remain something to monitor in the future, but thus far no consensus within the PLA is apparent.

While we did not find explicit discussions of intelligence-collection as a mission for PLA overseas basing in wartime in the literature, Chinese military scholarship has noted U.S. overseas bases’ utility for intelligence collection.⁸⁴ DoD also has highlighted concerns that overseas PLA facilities could enable intelligence-monitoring of U.S. military activities.⁸⁵ Intelligence-collection would be a passive, nonpublic activity that PLA bases could conduct in support of PLA broader situational awareness for understanding U.S. force flows in a conflict. The utility of bases for this mission would again be highly dependent on such bases’ locations, and, to some extent, the capabilities located there. The PLA might develop some overseas facilities expressly for this purpose, as it arguably has already done in Argentina and elsewhere for space situational awareness.⁸⁶

PLA Acknowledged Challenges to Establishing a Combat-Credible Overseas Basing Network

PLA researchers are keenly aware of important shortcomings in the PLA’s efforts to establish a foreign basing network. The shortcomings cover a wide variety of functional

areas—including command structure, civilian engagement, and host country reliability—that the PLA remains unlikely to resolve in the near term.

Lack of Overseas Command Structures

Among the most prominent deficiencies that PLA researchers identify is the need for overseas command structures. This includes two major components: a centralized logistics command to coordinate operations supplying overseas bases and an overseas joint command system to direct overseas operations. Chen Rongdi, head of the AMS Institute of War Studies and the expert who briefed the CCP Politburo at its 22nd group study session in 2020, has published on the PLA's need to “make up for weaknesses in joint command of overseas rights protection.”⁸⁷ PLA researchers describe current overseas command structures as piecemeal and uncoordinated.⁸⁸ As of this writing, overseas operations, such as the PLA Navy's antipiracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, appear to be under the command of individual service headquarters, not a joint command structure.⁸⁹

Risk of Adversary Attacks and Weak Defenses

AMS researchers have identified three general categories of threats to overseas bases: terrorist attacks; damage inflicted by an enemy during war; and damage from the host country's natural environment, including natural disasters.⁹⁰ Between 2018 and 2022, AMS researchers published repeatedly on overseas base hardening and resilience, suggesting that the PLA has sustained, high-level interest in operating from overseas bases despite damage from natural disasters

or enemy attacks.⁹¹ While none of the PLA research we reviewed specifically listed the United States as a threat, the most likely nonterrorist kinetic threat against Chinese overseas basing about which the PLA would be worried is a U.S. military attack during a potential future U.S.-China conflict. However, it is unclear whether this PLA concern is that the United States would initiate preemptive attacks on Chinese overseas bases or that it would retaliate against Chinese first strikes.

Facing these natural and manmade threats, PLA researchers argue that existing physical protections are insufficient. These researchers assessed that existing Chinese base-building and hardening techniques, which developed from constructing domestic bases in China, are overly dependent on China's geological features; locally plentiful resources, such as concrete and steel; and sweeping government permissions to harden structures by building deeper underground.⁹² According to the AMS researchers, the PLA cannot rely on any of these factors for building overseas bases and must find other means to secure those bases. The researchers focus on means, such as additional base hardening and redundancies, to ensure the continuation of operations, and they recommend experimenting with new approaches, such as a defense-in-depth policy to secure bases.⁹³ Notably, AMS researchers discussing overseas bases' vulnerability do not discuss potentially mitigating identified weaknesses through political agreements from host countries that might be able to facilitate access to resources or underground construction.

The PLA also lacks standardization policies, such as those for inspecting overseas base security or equipment maintenance. PLA researchers appear to consider this challenge significant enough to require the support of still-

emerging new protective materials and structures and a wholly new approach to equipment maintenance support operations that entails new policies for military-civil integration, communications processes, and technical specifications for equipment use and maintenance.⁹⁴

Inadequate Military-Civil Fusion

A third major shortcoming that PLA researchers identify involves the inefficient use of civilian assets in place of military assets and the lack of civilian capabilities in supporting roles. Recent articles on establishing foreign, especially overseas, bases describe a need for more civil air transport capacity to reach distant theaters, better policies for civilian cooperation on equipment maintenance, and standard procedures to facilitate easier military access to local civilian resources.⁹⁵ Regardless, civilian assets likely will continue to play a significant role as the PLA's expeditionary force evolves.

PLA researchers writing on wartime operations from overseas bases collectively appear to envision a well-functioning national defense mobilization system characterized by designated and centrally coordinated civilian assets that support wartime operations, led by military forces.⁹⁶ While these discussions are limited in the literature, how the PLA uses civilian assets to support its regional facilities in the South China Sea likely will inform the policy and processes for doing the same at overseas bases. For example, literature published in the past decade discusses the need for maritime militia and other civilian vessels to preposition assets in the East China Sea and the South China Sea.⁹⁷ Similarly, some PLA researchers appear to converge on an integrated base-and-locality [军地一体]

model to provide comprehensive support for overseas logistics in a time of war.⁹⁸ These researchers broadly consider this an aspirational vision because of inadequate military-civil fusion.⁹⁹

Some PLA researchers, however, note the limits of relying on civilian support during wartime. For example, some PLA researchers have been critical of the PLA's reliance on commercial ports or local merchant vessels for prepositioning oil stocks or conducting underway replenishment; according to the researchers, civilian supplies and services have limited capacity to support expeditionary operations and cannot sustain crisis response.¹⁰⁰ Instead, these researchers argue that these functions are better secured in contested environments using formal overseas bases and naval replenishment ships.

Political Stability of Host Country Governments

A fourth significant obstacle that PLA researchers highlight is the uncertain political reliability of countries that would host prospective overseas PLA bases. Researchers highlight complex political environments, such as in Djibouti, and the potential for sudden changes in political leadership as major risks to base development and access in the event of a war.¹⁰¹ This is likely to be a particularly germane problem for the PLA; recent RAND Corporation research found heightened indicators of instability in all of the countries likely to be both desirable and feasible as hosts for overseas PLA bases.¹⁰² Overseas bases in unstable countries carry elevated risks that the host country could entrap a foreign military in local conflicts or risk losing base access.¹⁰³

Host Country Reliability for Chinese Military Access and Operations

While PLA researchers do not directly criticize the PRC's partnerships with foreign countries as inadequate for overseas basing, some researchers have emphasized the political challenges of these basing agreements. One group of researchers note, for example, that any use of overseas bases will have "strong political overtones and require robust political sensitivity," requiring robust interdepartmental coordination to resolve what is certain to be many extremely complicated incidents.¹⁰⁴ Some of these concerns might regard diplomatic pressure on the host country from third countries; other PLA researchers recommend the use of the integrated military-civil logistics model to obfuscate PLA expeditionary intentions, noting that ostensibly civilian activities will "reduce the international political impact of military forces going global" and "reduce attention from major strategic adversaries."¹⁰⁵ Other PLA researchers have also noted the need for more research on bilateral and multilateral agreements relevant to overseas military operations to establish approval authorities and procedures for the use of force.¹⁰⁶ Other recent analyses of PLA research on overseas basing have similarly found either limited recognition that host countries can limit PLA access in wartime or only initial research into securing host country permission for wartime access to overseas PLA bases.¹⁰⁷

Prior RAND analysis has found that U.S. military access to its overseas bases was easier for noncontroversial operations, such as HA/DR, but became particularly fraught when access was requested to conduct combat operations.¹⁰⁸ There is no reason to expect that China will not face similar challenges, and at least two *China Military*

Science articles have cited this RAND research to address some of these issues.¹⁰⁹

Uncertain Operating Environments, Medical Care, and Personnel Quality

PLA researchers and broader PLA media appear concerned about PLA troops' ability to operate effectively overseas, particularly in the face of emergency or conflict. Several researchers from the PLA Army Military Transportation University highlighted the "uncertainty and randomness" of overseas operating environments, which may present challenges of oppressive temperatures, high humidity, infectious diseases, and piracy.¹¹⁰ Others noted the "extremely complex external environment with unforeseen difficulties far greater than those at home."¹¹¹ These

PLA researchers and broader PLA media appear concerned about PLA troops' ability to operate effectively overseas, particularly in the face of emergency or conflict.

researchers highlight the need for adaptability and the ability to respond to emergency situations when operating overseas, recommending that the PLA calls on more-experienced personnel for conducting overseas logistics operations.¹¹² Yet discussions in PLA media regularly describe PLA troops as paralyzed by indecision, including in the face of uncertainty.¹¹³ In a rare real-world test, PLA troops on a United Nations peacekeeping mission in South Sudan came under attack in July 2016 and reportedly suffered from a fear of combat.¹¹⁴

PLA researchers almost certainly weigh the potential of combat as part of the uncertain overseas operating environment. Likely anticipating these challenges, the PLA has sent its medical noncommissioned officer teams to conduct an overseas medical service exercise.¹¹⁵ Another set

Without the ability to protect its bases from U.S. counteroffensives, a PLA overseas basing network would offer little utility for significant offensive operations at enormous cost during a war.

of researchers in an Eastern Theater Command PLA Navy hospital specifically addressed PLA medical challenges in wartime.¹¹⁶ They similarly highlighted fragile medical supply chains overseas, particularly for emergency materials, such as blood, and that these supply chains will be further strained or cut in wartime.¹¹⁷

Indications and Warnings for Potential Changing Threat

The PLA is unlikely to resolve these self-assessed limitations and pose a meaningful threat to U.S. interests from its overseas forces in the immediate term. Threat must have both intent and capability. Regarding intent, we assume, for this analysis, that the CCP and PLA's top planning and force deployment priority, known as the *main strategic direction*, remains unification with Taiwan.¹¹⁸ As long as Taiwan is still not unified, the PLA is highly likely to prioritize these missions and capabilities over those in Africa, Europe, or elsewhere, limiting its willingness and ability to deploy larger-scale forces further afield.¹¹⁹ Regarding capability, a recent RAND report assessed that the PLA is unlikely to develop the power projection capabilities needed to sustain and protect its overseas bases—prerequisites to realizing its potential in combat—within the next two decades.¹²⁰

There will always be the possibility that the Chinese leadership will order available overseas PLA forces, regardless of how ill-prepared, to conduct preemptive operations against U.S. forces or interests. Under the PLA's concept of *active defense*, PLA planning for countering U.S. intervention in a Taiwan scenario includes what foreign defense planners would describe as preemptive attacks, including

on U.S. bases in Asia.¹²¹ However, without the ability to protect its bases from U.S. counteroffensives, a PLA overseas basing network would offer little utility for significant offensive operations at enormous cost during a war.¹²²

While the PLA discourse that we review does not suggest that PRC overseas basing will pose a substantial kinetic threat to U.S. forces or interests within the next ten years, there are several indications and warnings from PRC overseas deployments and PLA writings that DoD could monitor for potential insights into changing Chinese threat profiles to U.S. forces and interests. One of the most visible categories of indicators will be PLA overseas deployments of troops and equipment. PLA permanent or long-term rotational deployments of expeditionary capabilities with self-defense capabilities, such as the PLA Navy's Type 055 *Renhai* cruiser or Type 052D *Luyang III* destroyer would suggest a desire for at least the option of wartime operations; these deployments would be especially notable if the deployments were sizable enough to potentially defend against adversary reprisals. Another indicator would be deploying more PLA Navy Marine Corps brigades, which could support expeditionary operations and offer the PLA more threat vectors from which to target U.S. bases or other interests.¹²³ Similarly, deploying Chinese air and missile defense assets to foreign bases would increase a base's ability to support wartime missions.

Another notable category of leading indicators might be emerging trends in PLA academic discourse. In the same way that trends in Chinese academic discourse reveal PLA thinking on the challenges associated with operating from overseas bases in war, new trends could reveal leading issues that the PLA believes it needs to resolve to improve the security of overseas bases. For example, the PLA's polit-

ical work system may explore the nuances of host country political access—would countries let China fight from their territory?¹²⁴ Second, the PLA legal community may explore the justifications for international or foreign host country law to conduct self-defense against enemy attacks, or more-permissive status of forces agreements.¹²⁵ Third, the PLA medical community might explore how to cope with battlefield casualties in distant conflicts, which could suggest that the PLA is planning for kinetic engagements with adversaries abroad.¹²⁶

Conclusion

This preliminary survey of PLA research on overseas bases finds a lack of PLA consensus on wartime missions. The literature suggests that the PLA envisions overseas bases as useful for conducting overseas SLOC protection, but PLA researchers appear skeptical of such bases' utility for higher-end combat operations against the United States. The identified research efforts and focus on hardened military bases suggest that PLA planners are preparing for distant conflicts or distant operations, potentially against the United States, that cannot be sustained by commercial investments in foreign ports and dual-use logistics facilities. We find no explicit evidence of PLA planning to use overseas basing to launch preemptive attacks or other offensive operations.

While the PLA's interest in developing overseas bases remains an issue to monitor in the near term, it is unlikely to manifest into a significant wartime threat to U.S. operations through at least 2030. Still, a network of overseas bases could pose indirect security challenges to the United States by complicating U.S. defense planning in the highly insecure and conflict-prone countries that are most likely

to grant the PRC access to or permission to build large-scale permanent bases.¹²⁷

Despite the PLA's apparent ambitions to sustain expeditionary operations from overseas bases, its self-assessed capabilities remain far from being able to realize these operations. Significant work in policy-setting, military-civil integration, and actual establishment of overseas bases remains before the PLA will be able to sustain significant wartime operations from its overseas bases.

Notes

¹ Phillips, "China Seeks First Military Base on Africa's Atlantic Coast, U.S. Intelligence Finds"; Miller and Vinall, "China Signs Security Deal with Solomon Islands, Alarming Neighbors"; Nakashima and Cadell, "China Secretly Building Naval Facility in Cambodia, Western Officials Say"; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2023, p. 155.

² Blanchard, "China Formally Opens First Overseas Military Base in Djibouti"; Shih, "In Central Asia's Forbidding Highlands, a Quiet Newcomer: Chinese Troops."

³ Downs, Becker, and deGategno, *China's Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China's First Overseas Base*; Dutton, Kardon, and Kennedy, *Djibouti: China's First Overseas Strategic Strongpoint*; Kardon and Leturt, "Pier Competitor: China's Power Position in Global Ports."

⁴ Yung et al., "Not an Idea We Have to Shun": *Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century*, p. 14; Peltier, Nurkin, and O'Connor, *China's Logistics Capabilities for Expeditionary Operations*, p. 22.

⁵ Kardon and Leturt, "Pier Competitor: China's Power Position in Global Ports."

⁶ Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "Where to Next?: PLA Considerations for Overseas Base Site Selection"; Gunness, "The PLA's Expeditionary Force: Capabilities and Trends"; Garafola et al., *The People's Liberation Army's Search for Overseas Basing and Access: A Framework to Assess Potential Host Nations*.

⁷ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Annual Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, p. 62; Yung et al., "Not an Idea We Have to Shun": *Chinese Overseas Basing Requirements in the 21st Century*, p. 33; Kardon and Leturt, "Pier Competitor: China's Power Position in Global Ports," pp. 14–15; White, *China's Indian Ocean Ambitions: Investment, Influence, and Military Advantage*, p. 11.

⁸ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2023, p. 154.

⁹ Sbragia, "China's Military Power Projection and U.S. National Interests," pp. 3–4.

¹⁰ U.S. Africa Command, "Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser at HASC Hearing on National Security Challenges and U.S. Military Activities in Africa"; McKenzie and Townsend, "Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on the Posture of United States Central Command and United States Africa Command," p. 11.

¹¹ McKenzie and Townsend, "Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on the Posture of United States Central Command and United States Africa Command," p. 11.

¹² *Defense white papers* are official, regularly published documents that describe PRC defense strategy and policy for public consumption. As an externally facing document, all defense white papers serve a propaganda function of advancing favorable narratives of the PLA and its activities. As official documents accessible to the Chinese public and lower echelons of the PLA and PRC Ministry of National Defense, however, they likely offer sufficiently accurate descriptions to guide bureaucratic implementation of PRC defense policy.

¹³ State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Gunness, "The PLA's Expeditionary Force: Capabilities and Trends," pp. 33–37.

¹⁵ State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*, p. 8.

¹⁶ State Council Information Office, "Ministry of Defense Regular Press Conference for December" ["国防部12月例行记者会"].

¹⁷ Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, "The Ministry of National Defense Introduces the State of Construction and Development of the People's Navy Since the 18th Party Congress" ["国防部介绍党的十八大以来人民海军建设发展情况"].

¹⁸ Sun Fei [孙飞] and Qian Xiaohu [钱晓虎], "The PLA Navy Actively Advances Training to Improve Comprehensive Far Seas Combat Capabilities" ["海军积极推进练兵备战提升远海综合作战能力"]; Li Yun [黎云] and Hou Rong [侯融], "The People's Navy Extends its Maritime Supports Toward the Open Ocean" ["人民海军海上保障向远海大洋延伸"].

¹⁹ Watts et al., *Implications of a Global People's Liberation Army: Historical Lessons for Responding to China's Long-Term Global Basing Ambitions*, pp. 67–69. For a look at the United States, see Lostumbo et al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces: An Assessment of Relative Costs and Strategic Benefits*.

²⁰ Garafola et al., *The People's Liberation Army's Search for Overseas Basing and Access: A Framework to Assess Potential Host Nations*, p. viiii; Wuthnow et al., eds., *The PLA Beyond Borders: Chinese Military Operations in Regional and Global Context*.

²¹ Gunness, "The PLA's Expeditionary Force: Capabilities and Trends," pp. 26–29.

²² Xiao Tianliang, ed., *Science of Military Strategy*, p. 312.

²³ Hartnett, "The 'New Historic Missions': Reflections on Hu Jintao's Military Legacy," pp. 47–57; State Council Information Office, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*.

²⁴ State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in the New Era*. These are largely mirrored in a 2018 nonauthoritative internal article written by PLA researchers who focus on PLA expeditionary operations. See Wang Jingtao [王景涛], Hai Jun [海军], and Chang Gang [常刚], "Mission and Capability Demand for Aviation Strategic Projection in New Era" ["新时代航空战略投送任务与能力需求"].

²⁵ PRC descriptions of maritime rights and interests are flexibly defined in official Chinese sources but generally refer to either administrative control over waters or the unaccountable freedom to act at sea. Closer to China's shores, maritime rights and interests may refer to control over military activities in the South China Sea, secure SLOCs for maritime trade, and the exclusive rights to extract marine resources within waters that China claims. PRC officials have described the need to secure the country's maritime rights and interests beyond China's territorial seas and as far as the polar regions ("Authoritative Interview: State Oceanic Administration Director Sun Zhihui Discusses China's Maritime Development Strategy" ["权威访谈: 海洋局局长孙志辉谈中国海洋发展战略"], Xinhua.

²⁶ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], p. 102; Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy Lesson Plans* [战略学教程], Academy of Military Science Press, 2013b, p. 167.

²⁷ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], pp. 104, 241.

²⁸ Fravel, "China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy: The Science of Military Strategy from 2001 and 2013," pp. 55–58.

²⁹ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], p. 254.

³⁰ Fravel, "China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy: The Science of Military Strategy from 2001 and 2013," pp. 58–59.

³¹ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], p. 426. PLA force employment over time has reflected the drive for strategic depth through coercing U.S. forces in an expanding perimeter around China's borders. For example, during an incident in 2001 (dubbed the *EP-3 incident*), a PLA Air Force pilot challenged a U.S. crew in airspace close enough to China for the U.S. crew to complete an emer-

gency landing on Hainan. In 2009 and 2013, PLA Navy forces harassed the USNS *Impeccable* and USS *Cowpens*, respectively, as they operated in the South China Sea. In 2018, the PLA repeatedly lased U.S. aircraft operating in Djibouti. By 2020, the PLA also lased U.S. aircraft over international waters 380 miles west of Guam (Kan, *China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident of April 2001: Assessments and Policy Implications*; Harper, “Chinese Warship Nearly Collided with USS *Cowpens*”; Garomone, “U.S. Protests Chinese Interference with U.S. Planes in Djibouti”; U.S. Pacific Fleet Public Affairs, “People’s Liberation Army Navy Lased a U.S. Navy P-8A in Unsafe, Unprofessional Manner.”

³² Deng Anzhong [邓安仲], Le Guan [乐观], and Li Shengbo [李胜波], “Research on Post Evaluation Index System of Military Construction Projects” [“军队建设项目后评价指标体系研究”].

³³ Sheng Yongzhe [盛永哲], Wu Xiaodong [吴晓东], and Zhao Haixiang [赵海祥], “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”].

³⁴ Wang Tianze [王天泽], Qi Wenzhe [齐文哲], and Hai Jun [海军], “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad,” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”].

³⁵ Chen Xiangbin [陈祥斌] et al., “On Equipment Maintenance Support Construction of Overseas Support Base” [“海外保障基地装备维修保障建设思考”], pp. 35–40.

³⁶ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], p. 133.

³⁷ We were unable to identify how the PAP describes its presence abroad. PLA researchers have used a variety of other terms, but often these reflect similar thinking. One recent RAND report summarized a 2017 article by PLA researchers:

At least one PLA study categorized levels of potential basing and access as *strategic strongpoint* [战略支点], *normal base* [普通基地], or *reserve base* [备用基地], implying that strategic strongpoints can be full-fledged PLA bases (i.e., they can provide even greater levels of support and military value than a regular base) but also that lesser forms of access are an option. This study also described different levels of a host country’s ability to build and maintain the base depending on the cooperation level of the host nation and foreign country: If “the establishing country fully enjoys jurisdiction over the base,” it is high; if countries “share jurisdiction,” it is medium; and low is when “the establishing country provides support for the construction of the military base . . . [and] during peacetime the host nation has jurisdic-

tion, and after the eruption of a crisis use it is requisitioned” by the establishing country. This also implies a model in which not all locations are fully operated by the PLA. (Garafola et al., *The People’s Liberation Army’s Search for Overseas Basing and Access: A Framework to Assess Potential Host Nations*, p. 44.)

The original PLA source is Jiang Deliang [姜德良], Zhang Ren [张韧], and Ge Shanshan [葛珊珊], “Natural Risk Scenario Simulation Assessment of Overseas Support Bases Based on Uncertain Knowledge” [“知识不确定条件下的海外保障基地自然风险情景模拟评估”], pp. 504–511, 537.

³⁸ Li Zhenyu, “China Denies Overseas Military Base Rumors”; Blanchard, “China Military Declines to Confirm Djibouti Base Plan.” For the acknowledgement in 2016, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang’s Regular Press Conference on February 5, 2016.”

³⁹ Downs, Becker, and deGategno, *China’s Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China’s First Overseas Base*, p. vi; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2023.

⁴⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2021, p. 131.

⁴¹ Downs, Becker, and deGategno, *China’s Military Support Facility in Djibouti: The Economic and Security Dimensions of China’s First Overseas Base*, p. 25.

⁴² Li Wei, “First Commander of PLA Support Base in Djibouti Awarded Independence Day Medal.” For some PLA articles displaying this rhetorical balancing act to justify a Chinese overseas military presence while decrying American hegemonic foreign basing, see Li Dong [李冬], “A Preliminary Probe into the Guiding Ideology and Strategic Principles of Our Overseas Military Presence Under the New Situation” [“新形势下我海外军事存在指导思想和战略原则初探”]. This article was funded in 2014 by PLA research funds (2014JY633) for a project called “Research on the Strategic Problems of China’s Overseas Military Presence” for the author, who was a Ph.D. student at PLA AMS. Also see Chen Liwang [谏力汪] and Li Weizhen [丽韦政], “Influence and Enlightenment of the Transformation and Remodeling of Overseas Bases from the Perspective of the New Security Concept” [“新安全观视域下海外基地转型重塑的影响及启示”]. For an earlier article on overseas basing by a non-PLA researcher, which was published in a PLA journal, see Liu Xinhua [刘新

华], “Geographical Distance, Law of Distance Attenuation and Overseas Military Bases” [“地理距离、距离衰减规律与海外军事基地”]. This article was funded by China’s National Social Science Fund in 2007 under the grant titled “Research on China’s Development of Sea Power Strategy” (07CGJ004). For an earlier (2012) article in *China Military Science* that was still critical of the idea of overseas basing, see Luo Yan [洛岩], “Application of International Laws for U.S. Deployment of Military Forces Overseas After World War II” [“美国战后海外用兵对国际法的运用”].

⁴³ For example, see Chen Zhuo, “Chinese Military’s First Overseas Support Base.”

⁴⁴ See, for example, Wang Tianze [王天泽], Qi Wenzhe [齐文哲], and Hai Jun [海军], “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad,” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”]; Luo Zhaohui [罗朝晖], Wan Jie [万捷] and Li Hongyang [李弘扬], “Research on Factors in Site Selection of Overseas Military Base of Chinese Navy” [“我国海军海外基地选址因素研究”].

⁴⁵ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学].

⁴⁶ Kennedy, “Strategic Strong Points and Chinese Naval Strategy.” Some PLA researchers also discuss “points” (节点) that might be geopolitically or militarily advantageous locations. One 2015 article offered a detailed accounting of 14 ports: Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam; Subic Bay, Philippines; Singapore; Darwin, Australia; Sihanoukville, Cambodia; Laem Chabang, Thailand; Sittwe, Myanmar; Colombo, Sri Lanka; Gwadar, Pakistan; Chattogram, Bangladesh; Male, Maldives; Mombasa, Kenya; Bagamoyo, Tanzania; and Djibouti. See Zheng Chongwei [郑崇伟] et al., “Strategy of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: On the Important Routes, Crucial Nodes and Characteristics of Ports” [“经略21世纪海上丝路:重要航线,节点及港口特征”]. Elsewhere, the same author has added Hambantota, Sri Lanka; Walvis Bay, Namibia; and Piraeus, Greece. See Zheng Chongwei [郑崇伟] et al., “A Series of Studies on Marine Environmental Characteristics of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” [“经略21世纪海上丝路之海洋环境特征系列研究”].

⁴⁷ Logan et al., “Correspondence: China’s Use of Overseas Ports,” p. 174. Some Chinese civilian research suggests that there is the potential of using overseas commercial port facilities as covert bases, but these ideas do not appear to have been adopted in PLA discourse, policy, or practice. PLA leaders may not consider commercial ports or other dual-use facilities to be viable for staging high-end combat operations. See Fan Jinlin [范金林], *A Study on International Law of Overseas Military Bases* [“海外军事基地国际法研究”].

⁴⁸ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2020, p. 128; Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2021, p. 74.

⁴⁹ Clover, “Mystery Deepens over Chinese Forces in Afghanistan”; Shih, “In Central Asia’s Forbidding Highlands, a Quiet Newcomer: Chinese Troops.”

⁵⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2020, p. 127; Pantucci, “China’s Current Security Approaches and Interests in Afghanistan,” p. 3.

⁵¹ One 2017 PLA article identifies several distinct types of overseas military bases based on function: bases for operational combat forces, operational command, military training, logistics supply, and equipment support. See Cao Zhi [曹智], “A Brief Discussion on the Maritime Direction Strategic Layout” [“海上方向战略布局问题略探”].

⁵² Wang Tianze [王天泽], Qi Wenzhe [齐文哲], and Hai Jun [海军], “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad,” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”]; Wu Biao [吴彪] et al., “Research on Safety and Protection of Overseas Support Bases” [“海外保障基地安全与防护问题研究”]; Liang Feng [梁峰] et al., “Construction of Maritime Preposition Capability of Our Army” [“关于我军海上预置能力建设的思考”]; Chen Rongdi [陈荣弟], “Providing Strong Strategic Support for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation” [“为实现中华民族伟大复兴提供坚强战略支撑”]; Fan Jiang [樊江] et al., “Research on the Content and Method of Military Facilities Assessment and Enlightenment in the U.S. Military Forces” [“美军军事设施评估内容方法研究及启示”]; Deng Anzhong [邓安仲], Le Guan [乐观], and Li Shengbo [李胜波], “Research on Post Evaluation Index System of Military Construction Projects” [“军队建设项目后评价指标体系研究”]; Li Hongxin [李洪鑫] et al., “Brief Analysis of the Development of Modular Protective Technology and Facilities Abroad” [“国外模块化防护技术与设施发展浅析”]; Wei Zhenkun [魏振堃] et al., “Offshore POL Raising Measures for Ocean-Going Operations of Naval Formation Based on PEST-SWOT Model” [“基于PEST-SWOT模型的舰艇编队远洋作战境外油料筹措对策”]; Chen Xiangbin et al., “On Equipment Maintenance Support Construction of Overseas Support Base” [“海外保障基地装备维修保障建设思考”]; Sheng Yongzhe [盛永哲], Wu Xiaodong [吴晓东] and Zhao Haixiang [赵海祥], “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”]; Chuai Xingqian

[啜向前] and Hong Yuxiang [洪宇翔], “Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures” [“海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策”]; Feng Aihong [冯爱宏] et al., “Difficulties and Reflections on the Supply Management of Medicinal Materials in a Certain Overseas Support Base Hospital” [“某海外保障基地医院药材供应管理面临的困难及思考”].

⁵³ One article published in *Traffic Engineering and Technology for National Defense*, a technical journal published by Shijiazhuang Tiedao University [石家庄铁道大学] (previously the PLA Railway Engineering College [中国人民解放军铁道兵工程学院]), lists five operations involving overseas PLA bases: (1) supply PLA Navy escort missions, (2) support PLA participation in peacekeeping and HA/DR activities, (3) support security cooperation activities, such as joint exercises with other countries, (4) protect SLOCs and energy supply lines, and (5) ensure the security of the base itself. See Wang Tianze [王天泽], Qi Wenzhe [齐文哲], and Hai Jun [海军], “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”]. Another article written by a researcher with the PLA Army Military Transportation University suggests that overseas maritime projection missions will include (1) strategic deterrence, (2) strategic deployment and maneuver, (3) coastal island operations, (4) materiel supply, (5) military operations other than war, and (6) expansion of overseas interests. See Liu Ming [刘铭], “Maritime Strategic Projection Requirement and Force Construction of Our Armed Forces” [“我军海上战略投送需求与力量建设”].

⁵⁴ For some PLA articles on the topic of overseas prepositioning, see Liang Feng [梁峰], Gan Ming [甘明], and Wang Feng [王丰], “Overseas War Readiness Materials Reserve Mode in US Army and Enlightenment” [“美军海外战备物资储备模式及启示”]; Wang Feng [王丰] et al., “The Development Direction of Military Logistics in the New Period” [“新时期军事物流的发展方向”]; Liang Feng [梁峰] et al., “Construction of Maritime Preposition Capability of Our Army” [“关于我军海上预置能力建设的思考”]; Li Shougeng [李守耕], Chen Tieqi [陈铁祺], and Wang Feng [王丰], “On Preset Reserve Mode for Combat Readiness Material” [“战备物资预置储备模式研究”]; Wang Yao [王耀], Li Bin [李斌], and Zhou Jixiao [周济晓], “Preset Storage of Logistical War Readiness Materials for Army All Domain Operations” [“陆军全域作战后勤战备物资预置储备”]; Duan Zhiyun [段志云], Peng Jia [彭嘉], and Chen Jinhua [陈锦华], “Some Reflections on Enhancing Military Logistics Support Capabilities in the New Era” [“新时代提升军队后勤保障能力的几点思考”]; Chuai Xingqian [啜向前] and Hong Yuxiang [洪宇翔], “Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials

Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures” [“海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策”].

For one example of PLA considerations of legal considerations for overseas prepositioning, see Xiong Zhenwei [熊振伟] and Wang Feng [王丰], “Construction of Foreign War Preparation Material Reserve Regulations and the Enlightenment to Our Army Legislation” [“国外战储法规建设及启示”].

⁵⁵ Chen Xiangbin et al., “On Equipment Maintenance Support Construction of Overseas Support Base” [“海外保障基地装备维修保障建设思考”].

⁵⁶ Wei et al., “Offshore POL Raising Measures for Ocean-Going Operations of Naval Formation Based on PEST-SWOT Model” [“基于PEST-SWOT模型的舰艇编队远洋作战境外油料筹措对策”].

⁵⁷ Wei et al., “Offshore POL Raising Measures for Ocean-Going Operations of Naval Formation Based on PEST-SWOT Model” [“基于PEST-SWOT模型的舰艇编队远洋作战境外油料筹措对策”]. The PLA’s energy requirements for conducting overseas operations is a significant topic of the organization’s research. While much of the literature discussed here and in the following sections refer to ensuring access to oil stocks, another approach—advocated by vocal PLA researcher Zheng Chongwei—is for the PLA to transition to electric-powered assets and leverage renewable energy for at least some of its overseas energy needs (Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “Powering the PLA Abroad: How the Chinese Military Might Fuel Its Overseas Presence”).

⁵⁸ Wang et al., “The Development Direction of Military Logistics in the New Period” [“新时期军事物流的发展方向”]; Liang et al., “Construction of Maritime Preposition Capability of Our Army” [“关于我军海上预置能力建设的思考”]; Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”]; Chuai and Hong, “Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures” [“海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策”].

⁵⁹ Xing Daoqi [邢道奇], “Integrated Logistic Support of Ship Replenishment Equipment” [“舰船海上补给装备综合保障研究”]; Xiao Hua [肖骅] et al., “The Developing Situation and Enlightenment of the American Military Overseas Pre-Positioned Reserves Development” [“美军海外预置储备发展现状及启示”].

- ⁶⁰ Feng Jinbo [冯金波], “An Analysis of Military Ways to Safeguard China’s Overseas Interests” [“维护中国海外利益的军事途径探析”], p. 83.
- ⁶¹ Storey, “China’s ‘Malacca Dilemma.’” For one pro-blockade argument, see: Hammes, “Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict”. For analysis of the challenge of a blockade, see Priebe et al., *The Limits of Restraint: The Military Implications of a Restrained U.S. Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*.
- ⁶² Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., , *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], pp. 81, 210.
- ⁶³ Shou Xiaosong [寿晓松], ed., *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], p. 295.
- ⁶⁴ During the *Yinhe* (lit. Milky Way) Incident, the United States claimed that the Chinese container ship *Yinhe* may have been transporting materials for producing chemical weapons to Iran. U.S. Navy vessels shadowed the ship while U.S. diplomats persuaded Persian Gulf countries to deny the *Yinhe* docking permissions for one month until the Chinese crew submitted to a cargo inspection (He, *China’s Crisis Behavior: Political Survival and Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, pp. 49–50.)
- ⁶⁵ Hu Bo [胡波], “The Global Maritime Multipolar Pattern and Rise of China’s Navy” [“全球海上多极格局与中国海军的崛起”].
- ⁶⁶ Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China*, 2023.
- ⁶⁷ Wang, Qi, and Hai, “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”]; Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”].
- ⁶⁸ Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”].
- ⁶⁹ Analysts Marcus Clay and Roderick Lee note that language changes between the 2017 and 2020 editions of the NDU *Science of Military Strategy* include dropping instruction to “cope with various security threats” and instead “effectively shape the situation” and “manage and control crisis.” The analysts also note that the 2017 edition describes “controlling crisis” [控制危机], while the 2020 edition describes “managing and controlling crisis” [管控危机] (Clay and Lee, “Unmasking the Devil in the Chinese Details: A Study Note on the Science of Military Strategy 2020,” p. 9; Xiao, ed., *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], p. 111.
- ⁷⁰ Li Jian [李剑], Chen Wenwen [陈文文], and Jin Jing [晶晶], “The Sea Power Structure of Indian Ocean and Expansion of China’s Sea Power to Indian Ocean” [“印度洋海权格局与中国海权的印度洋拓展”]. For another PLA perspective on key SLOCs and locations, see Zheng Chongwei et al., “Strategy of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road: On the Important Routes, Crucial Nodes and Characteristics of Ports” [“经略21世纪海上丝路:重要航线,节点及港口特征”].
- ⁷¹ Li, Chen, and Jin, “The Sea Power Structure of Indian Ocean and Expansion of China’s Sea Power to Indian Ocean” [“印度洋海权格局与中国海权的印度洋拓展”].
- ⁷² Colley, “China’s Activities and Influence in South and Central Asia,” p. 4; U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2020 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*, p. 170; Erickson and Strange, *Six Years at Sea . . . and Counting: Gulf of Aden Anti-Piracy and China’s Maritime Commons Presence*, pp. 85–105.
- ⁷³ Vego, *Maritime Strategy and Sea Denial: Theory and Practice*, pp. 190–191.
- ⁷⁴ Priebe et al., *The Limits of Restraint: The Military Implications of a Restrained U.S. Grand Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*.
- ⁷⁵ Wang Xiangshan [王祥山] et al., “A Study of Legal Issues Concerning the Overseas Employment of the Armed Forces in the New Era” [“新时代武装力量海外运用法律问题研究”].
- ⁷⁶ Wang Xiangshan et al., “A Study of Legal Issues Concerning the Overseas Employment of the Armed Forces in the New Era” [“新时代武装力量海外运用法律问题研究”].
- ⁷⁷ Kao, “China Considered Drone Strike on Foreign Soil in Hunt for Drug Lord.”
- ⁷⁸ Xu Qili [徐启利] and Gong Yun [龚耘], “Role of American Overseas Bases in Joint Operations” [“美国海外基地在联合作战中的作用探析”]; Zhang Ruifeng [张睿峰], Li Li [李莉], and Liu Quan [刘权], “Thoughts on Improving Far Seas Logistics Support Capability Under New Situation” [“新形势下提升远海物流保障能力的思考”].
- ⁷⁹ Wang et al., “A Study of Legal Issues Concerning the Overseas Employment of the Armed Forces in the New Era” [“新时代武装力量海外运用法律问题研究”], p. 33.

- 80 Xu and Gong, "Role of American Overseas Bases in Joint Operations" ["美国海外基地在联合作战中的作用探析"], p. 32.
- 81 Xu and Gong, "Role of American Overseas Bases in Joint Operations" ["美国海外基地在联合作战中的作用探析"], p. 32.
- 82 Xiao Tianliang, ed., *Science of Military Strategy*, p. 59; Clay and Lee, "Unmasking the Devil in the Chinese Details: A Study Note on the Science of Military Strategy 2020," p. 6.
- 83 Clay and Lee, "Unmasking the Devil in the Chinese Details: A Study Note on the Science of Military Strategy 2020," p. 6.
- 84 Xu and Gong, "Role of American Overseas Bases in Joint Operations" ["美国海外基地在联合作战中的作用探析"], p. 31.
- 85 Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 2022, p. 144.
- 86 Garrison, "China's Military-Run Space Station in Argentina Is a 'Black Box.'"
- 87 This language of rights protection evokes a focus on Chinese territorial disputes within the first island chain, but if senior PLA experts believe that these are challenges so close to the mainland, it is likely even more of a challenge further abroad. See Chen, "Providing Strong Strategic Support for the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation" ["为实现中华民族伟大复兴提供坚强战略支撑"], pp. 13–15; "Xi Jinping Emphasizes Having a Common Purpose, Resolute Confidence and Giving Our All in Firmly Grasping Our Work, Sparing No Efforts to Advance National Defense and Military Construction at the 22nd Politburo Group Study Session" ["习近平在中央政治局第二十二次集体学习时强调 统一思想坚定信心鼓足干劲抓紧工作 奋力推进国防和军队现代化建设"], Xinhua.
- 88 Wang, Qi, and Hai, "An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad" ["海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨"]; Chen et al., "On Equipment Maintenance Support Construction of Overseas Support Base" ["海外保障基地装备维修保障建设思考"]; Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, "Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration" ["军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合"].
- 89 Phillip C. Saunders, "PLA Command and Control of Overseas Operations," p. 114.

- 90 Wu et al., "Research on Safety and Protection of Overseas Support Bases" ["海外保障基地安全与防护问题研究"]. See also Bai Chengzu [白成祖], *Risk Analysis and Decision Aid for Building Overseas Strategic Base Under Incomplete and Sparse Information Environment* [信息不完备与知识不确定条件下风险评估与决策支持研究及其海上战略支点应用示范].

For lessons learned from the United States, see Fan et al., "Research on the Content and Method of Military Facilities Assessment and Enlightenment in the U.S. Military Forces" ["美军军事设施评估内容方法研究及启示"]; Deng Anzhong [邓安仲] and Xie Ya [解亚], "Research on the Damage Assessment and Protection Optimization of U.S. Forward Operating Bases" ["美军前沿作战基地毁伤评估与防护优化研究"].

- 91 Ouyang Kefeng [欧阳科峰] et al., "Research on Modular Engineering Protection System for Overseas Bases" ["海外基地模块化工程防护体系研究"]; Li et al., "Brief Analysis of the Development of Modular Protective Technology and Facilities Abroad" ["国外模块化防护技术与设施发展浅析"]; Fan et al., "Research on the Content and Method of Military Facilities Assessment and Enlightenment in the U.S. Military Forces" ["美军军事设施评估内容方法研究及启示"]; Wu et al., "Research on Safety and Protection of Overseas Support Bases" ["海外保障基地安全与防护问题研究"].
- 92 Wu et al., "Research on Safety and Protection of Overseas Support Bases" ["海外保障基地安全与防护问题研究"].
- 93 Wu et al., "Research on Safety and Protection of Overseas Support Bases" ["海外保障基地安全与防护问题研究"].
- 94 Wu et al., "Research on Safety and Protection of Overseas Support Bases" ["海外保障基地安全与防护问题研究"]; Chen et al., "On Equipment Maintenance Support Construction of Overseas Support Base" ["海外保障基地装备维修保障建设思考"].
- 95 Liang et al., "Construction of Maritime Preposition Capability of Our Army" ["关于我军海上预置能力建设的思考"]; Chuai and Hong, "Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures" ["海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策"]; Chen et al., "On Equipment Maintenance Support Construction of Overseas Support Base" ["海外保障基地装备维修保障建设思考"]; Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, "Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration" ["军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合"].

- ⁹⁶ Wang et al., “The Development Direction of Military Logistics in the New Period” [“新时期军事物流的发展方向”]; Chuai and Hong, “Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures” [“海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策”]. See also Shi Hongxia [石红霞] et al., “Use and Enlightenment of US Merchant Ships in Wartime” [“美军商船战时运用及启示”].
- ⁹⁷ Liang et al., “Construction of Maritime Preposition Capability of Our Army” [“关于我军海上预置能力建设的思考”].
- ⁹⁸ Chuai and Hong, “Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures” [“海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策”]; Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”].
- ⁹⁹ Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”].
- ¹⁰⁰ Wei et al., “Offshore POL Raising Measures for Ocean-Going Operations of Naval Formation Based on PEST-SWOT Model” [“基于PEST-SWOT模型的舰艇编队远洋作战境外油料筹措对策”]; Sheng, Wu, and Zhao, “Integration of Overseas Logistics Resources Under Background of Civil-Military Integration” [“军民融合背景下的海外物流资源整合”].
- ¹⁰¹ Deng, Le, and Li, “Research on Post Evaluation Index System of Military Construction Projects” [“军队建设项目后评价指标体系研究”]; Wei et al., “Offshore POL Raising Measures for Ocean-Going Operations of Naval Formation Based on PEST-SWOT Model” [“基于PEST-SWOT模型的舰艇编队远洋作战境外油料筹措对策”].
- ¹⁰² Watts et al., *Implications of a Global People’s Liberation Army: Historical Lessons for Responding to China’s Long-Term Global Basing Ambitions*, pp. 66–68; Garafola, Watts, and Leuschner, *China’s Global Basing Ambitions: Defense Implications for the United States*, pp. 9–12.
- ¹⁰³ Garafola, Watts, and Leuschner, *China’s Global Basing Ambitions: Defense Implications for the United States*, p. 19.
- ¹⁰⁴ Wu Xiaodong [吴晓东] and Sun Datong [孙大同], “Safety Management of Material Transportation in Overseas Support Base” [“海外保障基地装备物资运输安全管理研究”].
- ¹⁰⁵ Chuai and Hong, “Situation Requirements Faced by Equipment Maintenance Materials Delivery in Overseas Military Operations and Countermeasures” [“海外军事行动装备维修器材投送面临的形势要求与对策”]. For another PLA article that advocates that China should pursue the dual-use strategic strongpoint model instead of formal basing in light of external opposition to the sensitive military nature of bases, see Zhang, Li, and Quan, 2022, pp. 27–32. Similarly, another group of PLA researchers claims that overseas logistics bases [海外军事后勤保障基地] give the PLA additional degrees of freedom for overseas operations but do not pose military threats to the host country or surrounding areas, unlike traditional military bases. See Dong Zhigao [董智高] and Zhou Lei [周磊], “The Understanding and Reflections on Overseas Military Logistics Support Force Construction” [“关于海外军事后勤保障力量建设的认识与思考”], p. 84.
- ¹⁰⁶ Xue Guifang [薛桂芳] and Zheng Jie [郑洁], “China’s Overseas Basing: Necessities and Risk Response in the Twenty-First Century” [“中国21世纪海外基地建设的现实需求与风险应对”], p. 120.
- ¹⁰⁷ Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “Where to Next? PLA Considerations for Overseas Base Site Selection”; Toshi Yoshihara, “Trouble Finding Partners: Barriers to China’s Overseas Basing.”
- ¹⁰⁸ Pettyjohn and Kavanagh, *Access Granted: Political Challenges to the U.S. Overseas Military Presence, 1945–2014*.
- ¹⁰⁹ Wang Wenjuan [王文娟], “Conflict and Resolution of Criminal Jurisdiction of Overseas Military Bases: A Case Study of Major Country Practices” [“海外军事基地刑事管辖权的冲突及解决: 一以大国实践为例”]; Wang Wenjuan [王文娟], “Application of International Law by the U.S., Russia and Other Major Countries in Their Overseas Military Bases” [“美俄等因海外军事基地的国际法运用”].
- ¹¹⁰ Wang, Qi, and Hai, “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”], p. 34.
- ¹¹¹ Dong and Zhou, “The Understanding and Reflections on Overseas Military Logistics Support Force Construction” [“关于海外军事后勤保障力量建设的认识与思考”], p. 85.
- ¹¹² Dong and Zhou, “The Understanding and Reflections on Overseas Military Logistics Support Force Construction” [“关于海外军事后勤保障力量建设的认识与思考”]; Wang, Qi, and Hai, “An Exploration into the Support of Transportation and Projection for Military Bases Abroad” [“海外军事基地运输投送保障探讨”], p. 34. Garafola et al., *The People’s Liberation Army’s Search for Overseas Basing and Access: A Framework to Assess Potential Host Nations*, p. 53.

¹¹³ See, for example, Qian Xiaohu [钱晓虎] and Wang Lujia [王路加], “With My Organization Backing Me, I Will Be Responsible for My Career” [“组织给我当靠山 我为事业尽责任”]; Zhao Bolin [赵博林], “Practice ‘Antifragility’ in Uncertainty” [“在不确定性中练就”反脆弱能力”].

¹¹⁴ Page and Stevis, “China Discovers the Price of Global Power: Soldiers Returning in Caskets.”

¹¹⁵ Song Xin [宋歆] and Wang Jingguo [王经国], “At the Overseas Training Field, Arrived a Group of Chinese Health NCOs” [“海外演训场, 走来一群中国卫生士官”].

¹¹⁶ Although the researchers specify the PLA’s medical challenges in wartime, they do not specify whether the PLA’s focus is on meeting the medical needs of PLA soldiers injured by adversary attacks or whether the challenges are to medical supply chains, given secondary effects of a war in which the PLA is not a combatant.

¹¹⁷ Feng et al., “Difficulties and Reflections on the Supply Management of Medicinal Materials in a Certain Overseas Support Base Hospital” [“某海外保障基地医院药材供应管理面临的困难及思考”], p. 28. Another likely relevant article to which we did not have access is Hu Jiaqing [胡家庆] et al., “Modern Five-Level Medical Evacuation System at Sea” [“现代海上医疗后送五级救治体系”].

¹¹⁸ Wuthnow et al., eds., *Crossing the Strait: China’s Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*.

¹¹⁹ Wuthnow et al., eds., *Crossing the Strait: China’s Military Prepares for War with Taiwan*.

¹²⁰ Watts et al., *Implications of a Global People’s Liberation Army: Historical Lessons for Responding to China’s Long-Term Global Basing Ambitions*, p. vi.

¹²¹ See, for example, Mulvenon et al., *Chinese Responses to U.S. Military Transformation and Implications for the Department of Defense*.

¹²² Watts et al., *Implications of a Global People’s Liberation Army: Historical Lessons for Responding to China’s Long-Term Global Basing Ambitions*, p. 49.

¹²³ For a recent review of the PLA Navy Marine Corps, see Kennedy, *The New Chinese Marine Corps: A “Strategic Dagger” in a Cross-Strait Invasion*.

¹²⁴ For some PLA research on legal considerations of using overseas basing, see Yan Xuekun [闫雪昆], Duan Tingzhi [段廷志], and Li

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¹²⁵ For PLA research on the legal status of overseas forces, see Xue Hong [薛洪], “Analysis on Characteristics of Criminal Jurisdiction to Serviceman Crime Overseas” [“军人域外犯罪刑事管辖特点探析”]; Xue Ru [薛茹], “International Legal Issues Regarding Peacetime Overseas Deployment of Forces” [“国际上和平时海外驻军的法律问题”]; and Li Bojun [李伯军], “Formation, Characteristics and Influence of the US’s SOFA System” [“美国海外驻军地位协定体系的形成、特点及影响”]. Li’s article is funded by a 2020 Chinese government research grant (number 20BGJ012) on “Research on International Legal Issues of Overseas Military Operations Other than War”; Wang Xiangshan [王祥山] et al., “A Study of Legal Issues Concerning the Overseas Employment of the Armed Forces in the New Era” [“新时代武装力量海外运用法律问题研究”]; Shang Shimin [商世民] and Wang Yisi [王一私], “Legal Guarantees for U. S. Military Operations Overseas” [“美国海外军事行动的法律保障”]; Wang Wenjuan [王文娟], “Conflict and Resolution of Criminal Jurisdiction of Overseas Military Bases: A Case Study of Major Country Practices” [“海外军事基地刑事管辖权的冲突及解决: 一大国实践为列”]; Gu Juan [古娟] and Wang Fengcai [王凤才], “Russia’s Application of International Laws for Overseas Military Operations” [“俄罗斯境外军事行动国际法运用”]; Luo Heng [罗恒], “The Issue on the Conflict Resolution Mode of U.S. Military Overseas Military Bases and Personnel Legal Jurisdiction” [“论美军海外军事基地及人员法律管辖冲突解决模式”]; He Yan [何众], Ma Jiahui [马嘉辉], and Xue Ru [薛茹], “Issues Concerning International Humanitarian Law in U.S. Military’s Overseas Counter-Terrorism Operations” [“美军境外反恐作战国际人道法问题”]; Wang Wenjuan [王文娟], “Application of International Law by the U.S., Russia and Other Major Countries in Their Overseas Military Bases” [“美俄等因海外军事基地的国际法运用”].

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Abbreviations

AFRICOM	U.S. Africa Command
AMS	Academy of Military Science
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
HA/DR	humanitarian assistance and disaster relief
NDU	National Defense University (China)
PAP	People’s Armed Police
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SLOC	sea line of communication

About This Report

This report documents research and analysis conducted as part of the project entitled “Global China and the Future of USAREUR-AF,” sponsored by U.S. Army Europe and Africa. This research was conducted within RAND Arroyo Center’s Strategy, Doctrine, and Resources Program. RAND Arroyo Center, part of the RAND Corporation, is a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) sponsored by the United States Army. The purpose of this project was to explore the operational implications for USAREUR-AF of the intensifying strategic competition between the United States and China.

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