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**FIRST EDITION
(OPFOR1)**

**Strategic
Environment**

PLA Fundamentals

Force Structure

**Tactical System
Warfare**

**Information
Operations**

**Reconnaissance &
Security Actions**

Offensive Actions

Defensive Actions

**Antiterrorism &
Stability Actions**

**Equipment
& Capabilities**



Chinese Military

Forces, Operations & Tactics



The Lightning Press
Norman M Wade



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(OPFOR1) Notes to Reader

For over two thousand years, China has been surrounded by enemies, adversaries, and other competitors. Invasion, occupation, raids, and other incursions into Chinese territory were commonplace. The PLA views protecting Chinese sovereignty and security as a sacred duty. China traditionally viewed military resistance as an affair for the entire population: mass resistance, guerrilla warfare, and winning a war of attrition.

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has approximately 975,000 active-duty personnel in combat units. The PLAN is the largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 355 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, aircraft carriers, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, and fleet auxiliaries. The Air Force (PLAAF) and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation forces in the region and the third largest in the world, with over 2,800 total aircraft (not including trainer variants or UAVs) of which approximately 2,250 are combat aircraft (including fighters, strategic bombers, tactical bombers, multi-mission tactical, and attack aircraft). The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) is the largest missile force in the world, operating well over 1,000 short-range, medium-range, and inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and over 300 long-range cruise missiles.

With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains so that as a joint force it can conduct the range of land, air, and maritime operations as well as space, counterspace, electronic warfare (EW), and cyber operations. Recognizing that joint operations, information flows, and rapid decision-making are vital in modern warfare, the PRC continues to place a high priority on modernizing the PLA's capability to command complex joint operations in near and distant battlefields.

The People's Republic of China's (PRC's) military strategy is based on what it describes as "active defense," a concept that adopts the principles of strategic defense in combination with offensive action at the operational and tactical levels. Active defense is neither a purely defensive strategy nor limited to territorial defense. Active defense encompasses offensive and preemptive aspects.



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The OPFOR SMARTbook Series (Overview)

In today's complicated and uncertain world, it is impossible to predict the exact nature of future conflict that might involve the U.S. Army. So the Army must be ready to meet the challenges of any type of conflict, in all kinds of places, and against all kinds of threats.

In the coming years, the United States and its allies will face an increasingly complex and interconnected global security environment marked by the growing specter of great power competition and conflict, while collective, transnational threats to all nations and actors compete for our attention and finite resources.

Competition and potential conflict between nation-states remains a critical national security threat. Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, and Pyongyang have demonstrated the capability and intent to advance their interests at the expense of the United States and its allies. China increasingly is a near-peer competitor, challenging the United States in multiple arenas—especially economically, militarily, and technologically—and is pushing to change global norms and potentially threatening its neighbors. Russia is pushing back against Washington where it can—locally and globally—employing techniques up to and including the use of force. In Ukraine, we can see the results of Russia's increased willingness to use military threats and force to impose its will on neighbors. Iran will remain a regional menace with broader malign influence activities, and North Korea will expand its WMD capabilities while being a disruptive player on the regional and world stages.

Contemporary Operating Environment

Today's operational environment presents threats to the Army and joint force that are significantly more dangerous in terms of capability and magnitude than those we faced in Iraq and Afghanistan. Major regional powers like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are actively seeking to gain strategic positional advantage. The interrelationship of the air, land, maritime, space, and the information environment (including cyberspace) requires a cross-domain understanding of an operational environment.

Opposing Force (OPFOR)

An Opposing Force (OPFOR) is a training tool that should allow the U.S. Army to train against a challenging and plausible sparring partner that represents the wide range of possible opponents the Army could face in actual conflict. It enables training of all arms of the Army and prepares the Army for potential combat operations.

During the road to war leading up to events in a training scenario, the OPFOR may play the role of a "threat" (potential enemy) that is on the verge of becoming an enemy. However, the actual training event usually deals with a state of hostilities. Thus, once hostilities begin in the training event, the OPFOR acts as the "enemy" of the U.S. force in the training environment.



For more than two thousand years, China has been surrounded by enemies, adversaries, and other competitors. With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA views protecting Chinese sovereignty and security as a sacred duty. OPFOR1 topics and chapters include the strategic environment (defense & military strategy, strategic & operational environments, territorial disputes), force structure (PLA: Army, Navy, Marine, Air Force, Rocket Force, Strategic Support Force), system warfare, information operations, reconnaissance and security, offensive and defensive actions, antiterrorism and stability actions, and capabilities (maneuver, fire support, air defense, aviation, engineer and chemical defense, network and communications, and special operations forces).



North Korea is one of the most militarized countries in the world and remains a critical security challenge for the United States, our Northeast Asian allies, and the international community. The Kim regime has seen itself as free to take destabilizing actions to advance its political goals, including attacks on South Korea, development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, proliferation of weapons, and worldwide cyberattacks. OPFOR2 topics and chapters include the strategic environment, force structure (KPA: Ground Forces, Navy, Air & Air Defense Force, Strategic Force, Special Operations, Reserve and Paramilitary forces, Internal Security & Intel Services), functional tactics, recon & security, offensive and defensive actions, counterstability actions, electronic intelligence warfare, equipment and capabilities.



It has been nearly thirty years since a holistic explanation of the Soviet-based Opposing Force (OPFOR) was examined in the U.S. Army Field Manual 100-2 series. Recognizing this, OPFOR SMARTbook 3: Red Team Army (Second Edition) re-examines and outlines the doctrinal operational construct and historical foundations of Soviet-era military forces from the FM 100-2 series, which is now out-of-print and largely unavailable. OPFOR3 topics and chapters include RTA overview, offensive and defensive operations, specialized warfare, tactical enabling tasks, small unit drill, urban & regional environments, rear area operations and logistics. *Future editions will be revised and updated to focus centrally on modern Russian forces, operations, tactics and lessons learned in the Ukraine.*



Throughout its 40-year history, the Islamic Republic of Iran has remained implacably opposed to the United States, our presence in the Middle East, and our support to Israel. While attempting to strengthen its deterrence against foreign attack and influence, Tehran has committed itself to becoming the dominant power in the turbulent and strategic Middle East. To achieve its goals, Iran continues to rely on its unconventional warfare elements and asymmetric capabilities—intended to exploit the perceived weaknesses of a superior adversary—to provide deterrence and project power. This combination of lethal conventional capabilities and proxy forces poses a persistent threat. *OPFOR4 SMARTbook is in the early stages of development and will be published at a later date.*



A hybrid threat is the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects. Irregular forces are armed individuals or groups who are not members of the regular armed forces, police, or other internal security forces. Irregular forces are unregulated and as a result act with no restrictions on violence or targets for violence. OPFOR5 topics and chapters include irregular and hybrid threat (components, organizations, strategy, operations, tactics), insurgents and guerillas forces, terrorists (motivations, behaviors, organizations, operations and tactics), criminals (characteristics, organizations, activities), noncombatants (armed & unarmed), foreign security forces (FSF) threats, and functional tactics.



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The following primary references were used to compile *OPFOR SMARTbook 1: Chinese Military (Forces, Operations & Tactics)*. All references are open-source, public domain, available to the general public, and/or designated as “approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.” *OPFOR SMARTbook 1: Chinese Military* does not contain classified or sensitive material restricted from public release.

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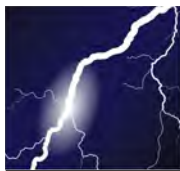
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This publication presents PLA military theory largely as written and prescribed by the PLAA. In most cases this represents a best practice as determined by PLA leadership. Real-world practices of PLA units are largely opaque to outsiders, and they were generally not included as part of the analysis underpinning this document. Moreover, the PLA has not participated in an active conflict in nearly half a century, so real-world applications are minimal. Available information on Chinese military training exercises and the few recent examples of conflict seem to indicate that PLA practices—including those of the PLAA—conform closely to its military theory.



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I. Understanding China's Strategy

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 1 to 9.

Understanding the tenets of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) national strategy is essential to understanding the future course of China's security and military strategy. This in turn offers insights on the current and future course of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) reform and modernization in terms of its strength, technological advances, organization, and operational concepts.

I. China's National Strategy

The PRC's strategy aims to realize "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." This objective, which General Secretary Xi Jinping (also referred to as Chairman or President, given the context of his responsibilities) calls "the Chinese Dream," is a national aspiration to restore the PRC to a position of strength, prosperity, and leadership on the world stage.

Key Takeaways

- ▶ The PRC's strategy aims to achieve "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049 to match or surpass U.S. global influence and power, displace U.S. alliances and security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, and revise the international order to be more advantageous to Beijing's authoritarian system and national interests. This strategy can be characterized as a determined pursuit of far-ranging efforts to expand the PRC's national power.
- ▶ Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing continued its efforts to advance its overall development including steadying its economic growth, strengthening its armed forces, and taking a more assertive role in global affairs. In response to both long and short-term economic trends, the CCP unveiled a new economic strategic task, or a new "development pattern," called "dual circulation."
- ▶ The PRC has characterized China's view of strategic competition in terms of a rivalry among powerful nation states, as well as a clash of opposing ideological systems. Beijing views the United States as increasingly determined to contain the PRC, creating potential obstacles to its strategy. Additionally, the PRC's leaders are increasingly willing to confront the United States and other countries in areas where interest diverge.

PRC leaders characterize their strategy to achieve political, social, and economic modernity— as defined by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)—as a grand national endeavor that is sweeping in scope and far-reaching in how it will transform the PRC and, in turn, the world. The Party defines national rejuvenation as a state in which China is "prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious." Beijing's strategy entails deliberate and determined efforts to amass, improve, and harness the internal and external elements of national power that will place the PRC in a "leading position." CCP leaders frequently refer to building the PRC's "comprehensive" national power in this manner. The PRC's strategy entails a long-term planning process to attain national rejuvenation that sets objectives, priorities, and milestones across virtually every aspect of governance and policy including

economics, political affairs, the rule of law, public order, national security, diplomacy, defense, social affairs, education, science and technology, culture, the environment, and other matters.

The PRC pursues its efforts to generate greater national power from the basis of defending and advancing its sovereignty, security, and development interests. Consequently, Beijing's national ambitions and statecraft rest on the foundation of the CCP-dominated political system underpinned by the Party's theory of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics." The objective of this Party-led strategy is perhaps best stated in what the Party calls its "basic line," a single sentence in the CCP's constitution that serves as the mission of the Party and as the cornerstone for its policymaking. Last amended at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, it states:

"The basic line of the Communist Party of China in the primary stage of socialism is to lead all the people of China together in a self-reliant and pioneering effort, making economic development the central task, upholding the Four Cardinal Principles, and remaining committed to reform and opening up, so as to see China becomes a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful."

The 19th Party Congress also adopted "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for New Era" into the CCP's constitution. Unanimously agreed by Party delegates, "Xi Jinping Thought" was hailed as a "guide to action for the entire Party and all the Chinese people to strive for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," placing General Secretary Xi Jinping as the driver of the CCP's policy objectives to come.

II. External Ambitions

Among the external elements of the PRC's national strategy are its deliberate efforts to create a "favorable" international environment that is conducive to the PRC's continued rise and eventual national rejuvenation, according to State Councilor Yang Jiechi, a member of the Politburo and a leading Party official on foreign policy. The PRC's ambition to be seen as a responsible major power was hindered in 2020 as it encountered increased distrust from other states, partially due to the PRC's early mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic and PRC diplomats embracing an aggressive style of "wolf warrior" diplomacy. Despite these frustrations, PRC leaders continue to believe that global trends, especially perceived U.S. decline, are generally conducive to their long-term interests.

As PRC leadership view a divided China as a weak China, they argue that "full reunification"—completing Hong Kong and Macau's integration by the end of 2049—is a fundamental condition of national rejuvenation. Beijing views as an imperative that China field a "world-class" military that can "fight and win" and "resolutely safeguard" the country's sovereignty, security, and development interests. In support of this goal, on December 26, 2020, the National People's Congress passed revisions to the PRC's National Defense Law which broadened the legal justification for PLA mobilization to include defense of China's economic "development interests." The codification of this language in PRC law is intended to add legitimacy to the use of military force to defend the PRC's economic interests abroad.

China's leaders claim national rejuvenation requires the PRC to "take an active part in leading the reform of the global governance system" as many rules and norms were established, in Beijing's view, without the PRC's consultation and input. The Party views aspects of the prevailing rules-based order as constraining the PRC's strategic ambitions and incompatible with its sovereignty, security, and development interests. To the PRC's leaders, revisions are necessary to accommodate the PRC's development and should reflect the CCP's preferred transformation in the distribution of power to forge an external environment more favorable to the PRC's authoritarian system and national interests.

III. Key Objectives & Milestones

For decades, the PRC's leaders have framed their pursuit of modernity and power as advancing China along a specific trajectory, with the PRC's centenary in 2049 serving as the target for achieving national rejuvenation and becoming a "great modern socialist country." From Beijing's perspective, the PRC is a developing nation that must transition into a "fully developed and highly advanced" socialist society, and this trajectory involves the Party leadership shepherding the PRC through different stages of gradual but systematic modernization and development. The Party demarcates the stages of the PRC's strategy with milestones accompanied by objectives and priorities determined by the Party's long-term planning processes.

Reflecting on the PRC's progress at the 19th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping declared that China had assumed "...a leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defense capabilities, and comprehensive national strength" and therefore "crossed the threshold into a new era." Xi's declaration that the PRC had entered a "New Era" was not a change in strategic objectives, but an important signal of confidence that the PRC's progress was sufficient to tackle the next set of challenges in its development. For the PRC's strategy in the "New Era," Xi laid out a broad plan to achieve national rejuvenation with a timeline linked to two symbolically important centenary milestones reached in 2021 (the CCP's centenary) and 2049 (the PRC's centenary). To bridge the lengthy gap between the two anniversaries, Xi added interim objectives for 2035 and laid out a broad two-stage modernization plan to reach 2049. Further demonstrating the Party's confidence in the PRC's progress, Xi's objectives for 2035 moved up certain mid-century targets set by the Party going back to 1987.

Beijing aimed to complete building a "moderately prosperous society in all respects" by the CCP centenary in 2021. Beyond 2021, the PRC will use the "moderately prosperous society" as the basis for Xi's "two-stage" plan to achieve national rejuvenation by the PRC's centenary in 2049. In the first stage from 2021 to 2035, the Party aims for the PRC to "basically" meet its initial thresholds for becoming a "great modern socialist country." In this stage, the PRC will likely continue to prioritize economic development as "the central task," but rather than rapid economic growth, it will seek to address its uneven economic development and inequalities that Beijing recognized as the new "principal contradiction" in PRC society in the "New Era." By 2035, the PRC will also seek to increase its economic and technological strength to become a "global leader in innovation" and aim to "basically" complete its military modernization. The PRC will also seek to significantly strengthen its cultural "soft power" and improve its domestic rule of law and governance systems.

In the second stage from 2035 to 2049, the PRC aims to complete its development and attain national rejuvenation, realizing an international status that Xi describes as a "global leader in terms of comprehensive national strength and international influence." A renewed PRC will have attained—among the Party's many goals—its objectives to field a "world-class" military and assume a leading position within an international order revised in line with Beijing's overall foreign policy goal to establish what it refers to as a "community of common destiny," or the PRC's preferred official English translation "community with a shared future for mankind."

IV. Historic Continuity

Understanding the origins of the PRC's national rejuvenation is crucial to understanding how the PRC will likely shape and pursue this strategic objective. China's leaders have consistently framed their efforts as seeking to "restore" China to a preeminent place in the world after enduring what the Party characterizes as China's "century of humiliation" beginning in the 19th century as the Qing Dynasty began to disintegrate and lasting until the founding of the PRC in 1949. While the Party's exact articulation of this goal as "the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" first

II. Defense Policy & Military Strategy

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 29 to 39.

Key Takeaways

- The PRC has stated its defense policy aims to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and development interests. The PRC's military strategy remains based on the concept of "active defense."
- The PRC's leaders stress the imperative of strengthening the PLA into a "world-class" military by the end of 2049 as an essential element of its strategy to rejuvenate the PRC into a "great modern socialist country." In 2020, the PLA added a new milestone for modernization in 2027, to accelerate the integrated development of mechanization, informatization, and intelligentization of the PRC's armed forces, which if realized would provide Beijing with more credible military options in a Taiwan contingency.
- In November 2020, the CMC issued the "Chinese People's Liberation Army Joint Operations Outline (trial)" described as the "top-level law" of the PLA's combat doctrine system in the "new era" that would strengthen the requirements and procedures for joint operations, combat support, national defense mobilization, and political work, among others.
- In 2020, the PLA remained primarily oriented toward "safeguarding" its perceived "sovereignty and security" interests in the region, while emphasizing a greater global role for itself, such as through delivering COVID-19 aid abroad and the pursuit of overseas military facilities, in accordance with the PRC's defense policy and military strategy.

The PRC has stated its defense policy aims to safeguard its national sovereignty, security, and development interests. China's leaders view these interests as foundational to their national strategy. In 2020, the PRC's defense policy and military strategy primarily oriented the PLA towards "safeguarding" its perceived "sovereignty and security" interests in the region counter the United States. At the same time, China's leaders increasingly cast the armed forces as a practical instrument to defend Beijing's expanding global interests and to advance its foreign policy goals within the framework of "Major Power Diplomacy with Chinese Characteristics." The PRC's military strategy is based on "active defense," a concept that adopts the principles of strategic defense in combination with offensive action at the operational and tactical levels. To adapt the PRC's armed forces to long-term trends in global military affairs and meet the country's evolving national security needs, China's leaders stress the imperative of meeting key military transformation targets set in 2020 and 2035. These milestones seek to align the PLA's transformation with the PRC's overall national modernization so that by the end of 2049, the PRC will field a "world-class" military. Throughout 2020, the PLA continued to pursue these ambitious modernization efforts, probably completing or finalizing most reforms announced in 2015.

I. Strategic Assessment

A key driver of the PRC's defense policy is how China's leaders perceive the relative threats and opportunities facing the country's comprehensive development. In 2019, the PRC published a new defense white paper, China's National Defense in the New

Era, which outlined the PRC's views of the international and "Asia-Pacific" security landscape and offered insights into its defense policy and military strategy. According to the paper, Beijing views the international environment as undergoing "profound changes unseen in a century." The PRC presents the assessment that, "... the configuration of strategic power is becoming more balanced. The pursuit of peace, stability and development has become a universal aspiration of the international community with forces for peace predominating over elements of war."

The PRC also concludes that "international strategic competition is on the rise" and expresses deep concerns at what it sees as growing sources of instability in the near-term. Offering no introspection on Beijing's own role in stirring geopolitical tensions through its economic practices, military activities and modernization, excessive maritime territorial claims, "wolf warrior" diplomacy, or efforts to revise aspects of global governance, the PRC describes the international system as being "...undermined by growing hegemonism, power politics, unilateralism and constant regional conflicts and wars." Similarly, the PRC contends that global military competition is intensifying and that "major countries" are adjusting their security and military strategies, reorganizing their militaries, and are developing new types of combat forces to "seize the strategic commanding heights in military competition."

II. Defense Policy

The PRC's stated defense policy is to "resolutely safeguard" its sovereignty, security, and development interests, according to its 2019 defense white paper—offering continuity with past statements by PRC senior leaders and other official documents. In practice, the PRC's military power is increasingly a central feature of its regional and global ambitions. The 2019 defense white paper also identifies the PRC's national defense aims that support these interests, likely offered in order of importance:

- to deter and resist aggression;
- to safeguard national political security, the people's security and social stability;
- to oppose and contain "Taiwan independence";
- to crack down on proponents of separatist movements such as "Tibet independence" and the creation of "East Turkistan";
- to safeguard national sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security;
- to safeguard the PRC's maritime rights and interests;
- to safeguard the PRC's security interests in outer space, the electromagnetic spectrum and cyberspace;
- to safeguard the PRC's overseas interests; and,
- to support the sustainable development of the country.

Key changes in the "New Era" include efforts to improve coordination across the party-state to leverage all organs of national power in a unified approach to support the CCP's ambitions of a global military capability. Unlike previous defense white papers, China's National Defense in the New Era explicitly stresses the PRC's armed forces' alignment and support to the Party's broader societal, and foreign policy objectives. The paper specifically aligns the PRC's armed forces with the national objectives set by General Secretary Xi at the 19th Party Congress in 2017. For example, the white paper states that the PRC's armed forces must be ready to "provide strong strategic support for the realization of the Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation, and to make new and greater contributions to the building of a shared future for mankind." Also notable is the growing explicit alignment between the PRC's defense and foreign policies, particularly in the armed forces' role in protecting the PRC's overseas interests and furthering the CCP's concept of "strategic partnerships" with other countries.

III. Military Strategic Guidelines

The Chairman of the CMC issues military strategic guidelines to the PLA that provide the foundation of the PRC's military strategy. The military strategic guidelines set the general principles and concepts for the use of force in support of the CCP's strategic objectives, provide guidance on the threats and conditions the armed forces should be prepared to face, and set priorities for planning, modernization, force structure, and readiness. The CCP leadership issues new military strategic guidelines, or adjusts existing guidelines, whenever they perceive it necessary to shift the PLA's priorities based on the Party's perceptions of China's security environment or changes in the character of warfare.

Recent trends suggest the PRC may have recently reviewed and adjusted its military strategic guidelines. In early 2019, PRC state media indicated that Beijing held senior-level meetings to "establish the military strategy of the 'New Era.'" The PRC's 2019 defense white paper states that the PLA is implementing guidelines for the "New Era" that "...actively adapt to the new landscape of strategic competition, the new demands of national security, and new developments in modern warfare..." PRC official media in the latter half of 2019 echoed these themes and described the guidelines as constituting a notable change. The PRC's defense white paper may reflect changes in the guidelines given the white paper's emphasis on the intensification of global military competition, the increase in the pace of technological change, and the military modernization themes introduced by General Secretary Xi at the 19th Party Congress. Documents released following the Fifth Plenum of the 19th Central Committee in October 2020 hailed progress in the "comprehensive and in-depth" implementation of the "New Era military strategic guidelines."

See following pages (pp. 1-10 to 1-11) for an overview of the PRC's military strategy.

IV. Modernization Objectives & Targets

Within the context of the Party's strategy, the modernization of the PRC's armed forces is not merely a policy preference or a momentary endeavor that may fade over time in importance. Rather, modernization of the armed forces is an indispensable element of the Party's national strategy to modernize the country. As the CCP declared at the Fifth Plenum in October 2020, the PRC's ambitions for becoming a rich country are closely integrated with its ambitions to develop a powerful military. Throughout 2020, the PLA continued to pursue ambitious modernization objectives, implement major organizational reforms, and improve its combat readiness in line with the goals and timelines announced by General Secretary Xi Jinping at the 19th Party Congress in 2017.

As stated in the 2019 defense white paper, and updated in a 2020 communique following the 5th Plenum of the 19th Central Committee, the PRC's goals for modernizing its armed forces in the "New Era" are:

- **By 2020:** "To generally achieve mechanization...with significantly enhanced informationization and greatly improved strategic capabilities;"
- **By 2027:** "Accelerate the integrated development of mechanization, informatization, and intelligentization, while boosting the speed of modernization in military theories, organizations, personnel and weapons and equipment;"
- **By 2035:** "To comprehensively advance the modernization of military theory, organizational structure, military personnel, and weaponry and equipment in step with the modernization of the country and basically complete the modernization of national defense and the military ..."; and,
- **In 2049:** "To fully transform the people's armed forces into world-class forces."

III. Strategic & Operational Environment

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), chap 1.

I. The Strategic Environment

China's view of the strategic environment mirrors that of the United States in many ways. There are, however, key differences in both analysis of the strategic environment and the application of this analysis that underpin important differences in perspective between the two countries. Both the People's Republic of China—commonly referred to as China—and the United States assess the key elements of the strategic environment below:

U.S. obligations to allies and partners in the Western Pacific will continue in perpetuity. Key U.S. allies include Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. The United States will likewise maintain a strong strategic interest in the Western Pacific.

The United States will maintain strong, though unofficial, support to the Republic of China— also known as Taiwan. The former will employ a policy of deliberate ambiguity to deter potential Chinese aggression against the island while maintaining a position respectful of Chinese policy toward the same.

China will continue to seek improved relations with Russia and India, with Russia likely proving a more amenable partner. China views improving these two relationships—particularly with Russia—as very important both politically and economically. Border tensions with India complicate bilateral relations and are often perceived by India as aggressive, requiring strong responses and adjustments to its defense posture.

Increasing competition for limited resources and the effects of global climate change will fuel conflict among both state and non-state actors. As populations increase, providing adequate quantities of basic necessities such as water, energy, food, and medical care becomes increasingly difficult. In addition, competition for human capital and raw materials for industry will increase as the international economy expands. Conditions such as natural disasters, extreme weather events, and their second- and third-order effects will have considerable impacts across the globe and will significantly influence political and military strategies worldwide. The global commons—the earth's unowned natural resources, such as the oceans, the atmosphere, and space—will be increasingly important to the global economy and will thus likely become contested. The PLA characterizes many tasks related to these conditions under the heading of nontraditional security measures or military operations other than war.

As the global economy and disparate societies become increasingly interconnected, friction points continue to emerge. State and non-state actors are already using widely proliferated but immature technologies—such as social networking—worldwide to influence populations, politics, and policy. Actors will continue to leverage emerging connections to manipulate public opinion and influence leaders; the digital world will become an increasingly important front to contest. As national economies continue to intertwine themselves, competition for jobs, natural and man-made resources, and new or emerging markets will continue to intensify.

Technological advances will continue to enhance the lethality of capabilities across all domains. Soldiers at all echelons on the future battlefield will face unprecedented dangers as both new and proven technologies are integrated into

warfighting. For example, precision munitions will continue to proliferate and become increasingly affordable as technology costs drop. At the same time, limited defense budgets coupled with the high expense and relative rarity of modern weapons systems—particularly aircraft, surface ships, and missiles of all types—will heavily influence future major combat scenarios.

China faces both nontraditional and hybrid threats. Such threats include criminal organizations, terrorist organizations, and fringe or rogue states. These threats effectively exploit complex terrain, such as dense urban and cyber environments, and are not necessarily constrained by international law or protocols regulating conflict.

Note. The chapters and appendixes of this publication address topics from the Chinese perspective. As such, the terms friendly refers to Chinese units or the units of Chinese allies. Enemy refers to units opposing China or its military. This may be a belligerent force or element within China, or an external actor. Parties are neutral regarding China. Threat uses the standard dictionary definition as opposed to that of U.S. doctrine. An opponent may be against either the U.S. or China, with context determining the correct interpretation.

Four strategic trends will influence future Chinese operations. These trends are population growth, urbanization, population growth along major bodies of water, and human connectedness and interrelations.

Note. Chinese concepts and doctrinal phrases contained in this document are used in accordance with PLA definitions as provided by the translation of Army Combined Tactics under Conditions of Informationization and Infantry Unit Tactics. Some of these concepts and phrases may mirror the names of U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) and U.S. Army terms. In such cases, the U.S. term is being referenced only if the name appears in italics.

II. Chinese Political Objectives

A useful analysis of the tactics of the PLA must be underpinned by an understanding of Chinese political and strategic priorities and an understanding of the complex relationship between the PLA and the Communist Party of China (CPC). China's history is deeply intertwined with its military—more so than any Western nation and possibly more so than any other country, except North Korea. The PLA was the vanguard of the Chinese Communist Revolution; its history, from the Chinese perspective, is one of glorious struggle over imperialist and capitalist oppressors. In contrast to Western militaries, the PLA is deeply politicized. It retains significant ties to Maoist and Marxist-Leninist political thought and has generations-deep connections with the CPC. While Western militaries are generally apolitical and are divorced from political parties, the PLA is officially the armed wing of the CPC.

Despite China's gradual economic liberalization and movement toward a capitalist, free-market economy, the PLA ostensibly remains generally steadfast in its support of Marxist-Leninist and Maoist philosophy. Though the PLA long ago abandoned more extreme Maoist experiments such as “rankless” force structures and eliminating rank insignia, the idea of People's War—an armed struggle of a population against a militarily superior adversary—still colors PLA thinking. This concept eventually took the form of People's War under Modern Conditions, an adaptation of Chinese Communist populist warfare that accounts for modern military capabilities. This in turn evolved to People's War in Conditions of Informationization in 2015. This evolution suggests that the PLA now sees itself as having acquired sufficient information capabilities to successfully employ them in a limited or regional military capacity. Marxist-Leninist and Maoist thinking still influence PLA operations all the way down to the tactical level, where a mix of autocratic statism and communal leadership are practiced even within small organizations.

Chinese national political objectives can be broken into two basic categories: security and development. Security objectives include the protection of the CPC as China's rul-

Regional / Global Objectives & Activities

Ref: Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community (Feb 22), pp. 6 to 7.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will continue efforts to achieve President's Xi Jinping's vision of making China the preeminent power in East Asia and a major power on the world stage. The CCP will work to press Taiwan on unification, undercut U.S. influence, drive wedges between Washington and its partners, and foster some norms that favor its authoritarian system. China's leaders probably will, however, seek opportunities to reduce tensions with Washington when it suits their interests. China will maintain its statist economic policies because China's leaders see state direction as necessary to reduce dependence on foreign technologies, enable military modernization, and sustain growth—ensuring CCP rule and the realization of its vision for national rejuvenation.

- Beijing sees increasingly competitive U.S.–China relations as part of an epochal geopolitical shift and views Washington's diplomatic, economic, and military measures against Beijing as part of a broader U.S. effort to prevent China's rise and undermine CCP rule.
- The CCP is increasing its criticism of perceived U.S. failures and hypocrisy, including the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and racial tensions in the United States.
- Beijing is increasingly combining growing military power with its economic, technological, and diplomatic clout to strengthen CCP rule, secure what it views as its sovereign territory and regional preeminence, and pursue global influence.
- However, China faces myriad—and in some cases growing—domestic and international challenges that probably will hinder CCP leaders' ambitions. These include an aging population, high levels of corporate debt, economic inequality, and growing resistance to China's heavy-handed tactics in Taiwan and other countries.

China uses coordinated, whole-of-government tools to demonstrate strength and compel neighbors to acquiesce to Beijing's preferences, including its territorial and maritime claims and assertions of sovereignty over Taiwan.

- Beijing will press Taiwan to move toward unification and will react to what it views as increased U.S.–Taiwan engagement. We expect that friction will grow as China continues to increase military activity around the island, and Taiwan's leaders resist Beijing's pressure for progress toward unification. China's control over Taiwan probably would disrupt global supply chains for semiconductor chips because Taiwan dominates production.
- In the South China Sea, Beijing will continue to use growing numbers of air, naval, and maritime law enforcement platforms to intimidate rival claimants and signal that China has effective control over contested areas. China is similarly pressuring Japan over contested areas in the East China Sea.

Beijing will continue to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand China's economic, political, and military presence abroad. Beijing will adjust its approach to BRI in response to publicity and sustainability challenges, and diversify project selection in an attempt to improve the initiative's brand and minimize international criticism. China also will promote new international norms for technology and human rights, emphasizing state sovereignty and political stability over individual rights. It will continue to erode the vestiges of freedom in Hong Kong.

China will remain the top threat to U.S. technological competitiveness as Beijing targets key sectors and proprietary commercial and military technology from U.S. and allied companies and institutions. Beijing uses a variety of tools, from public investment to espionage to advance its technological capabilities. Beijing's willingness to use espionage, subsidies, and trade policy to give its firms a competitive advantage represents not just an ongoing challenge for the U.S. economy and its workers, but also advances Beijing's ability to assume leadership of the world's technological advancement and standards.

China will continue deepening diplomatic, defense, and technology cooperation with Russia to challenge the United States.

IV. China's Territorial Disputes

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 15 to 16.

The PRC's use of force in territorial disputes has varied widely since 1949. Some disputes led to war, as in border conflicts with India in 1962 and Vietnam in 1979. The PRC's contested border with the Soviet Union during the 1960s raised the possibility of nuclear war. In recent cases involving land border disputes, the PRC has sometimes been willing to compromise with and even offer concessions to its neighbors. Since 1998, the PRC has settled 11 land-based territorial disputes with six of its neighbors. In recent years, Beijing has employed a more coercive approach to deal with several disputes over maritime features and ownership of potentially rich offshore oil and gas deposits.

The PRC and Japan have overlapping claims to both the continental shelves and the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the **East China Sea**. The East China Sea contains natural gas and oil, though hydrocarbon reserves are difficult to estimate. Japan maintains that an equidistant line from each country involved should separate the EEZs, while the PRC claims an extended continental shelf beyond the equidistant line to the Okinawa Trench. Beijing continues to assert sovereignty over the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands and reiterate the importance of abiding by the four-point consensus signed in 2014, which states both sides will acknowledge divergent positions over the East China Sea dispute but will prevent escalation through dialogue, consultation, and crisis management mechanisms. Japan expressed serious concern over the PRC's Coast Guard Law due to its vague language on use of force and jurisdiction. Japan remains concerned with the persistent presence of PRC coast guard ships and fishing vessels in disputed East China Sea waters and rejects the PRC's claim of sovereignty.

The **South China Sea** plays an important role in security considerations across East Asia. The PRC claims sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel Islands and other land features within its ambiguous self-proclaimed "nine-dash line" – claims disputed in whole or part by Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Taiwan, which occupies Itu Aba Island in the Spratly Islands, makes the same territorial assertions as the PRC. Attempting to further assert its sovereignty claims, in April 2020, the PRC created two new administrative districts to cover the Paracels and Spratlys and named 80 geographical features it claims in the region. The PRC continued to employ the PLA Navy, China Coast Guard, and maritime militia to patrol the region and continued harassment of oil and gas exploration operations by rival claimants throughout 2020. In response to the PRC's continued assertive actions and beligerence against foreign fishing vessels, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam publicly rejected Beijing's nine-dash line claims and invoked international law in support of their maritime sovereign rights.

Tensions with **India** along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) sparked an ongoing standoff between PRC and Indian troops in mid-May 2020, which lasted through the winter. The standoff escalated on June 15 2020 after a skirmish ensued in the Galwan Valley between Indian Army and PLA troops that resulted in casualties on both sides, which led to the deaths of 20 Indian soldiers. In February 2021, the PRC asserted through its state-owned outlets that four PLA soldiers had also died during the June 2020 skirmish. Despite agreements to disengage in the spring of 2021, both sides maintain troops along the LAC as Corps Commander-level negotiations progress slowly.

Theater Commands (TCS)



Ref: China's Military: The People's Liberation Army (PLA), Congressional Research Service. Map of China and PLA Theater Commands. (Map generated by CRS Visual Information Specialist Amber Wilhelm.)

The PRC continues to implement reforms associated with the establishment of five theater commands in early 2016. The Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern and Central Theater Commands replaced seven army-based military regions and are now the highest-ranking “joint operations command” organizations within their respective geographical areas. Each theater command receives direction from the CMC and has operational authority over the PLA forces within its theater. The Theater Command is also responsible for all conventional combat and non-combat operations within its area of responsibility. Theater commands are responsible for developing theater-specific command strategies aimed at preparing to fight and win against an adversary, developing joint operational plans and military capabilities, responding to crises, and safeguarding the sovereignty and stability of territories. The strategic directions of the theater commands are based on PRC perceptions of peripheral threats:

Eastern Theater Command – Taiwan, East China Sea

Southern Theater Command – South China Sea; Southeast Asia border security; territorial disputes

Western Theater Command – India, Central Asia, “counterterrorism” in Xinjiang and Tibet

Northern Theater Command – Korean Peninsula, Russia border security

Central Theater Command – Capital defense; surge support to other theaters

See pp. 1-27 to 1-58 for further discussion. See also pp. 2-8 to 2-9.

IV(a). Eastern Theater Command

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 98-101 and 115-123.

The **Eastern Theater Command** is oriented toward Taiwan and the East China Sea.

The Eastern Theater Command has responsibility for the East China Sea and likely executes operational control over national defense matters related to Taiwan and Japan, including contingencies in and around the Taiwan Strait and the Senkaku Islands. In 2020, the Eastern Theater Command focused on a series of training and exercises to improve joint operations and combat readiness, organizing exercises and drills consisting of long-distance training and mobilization, aerial combat, and live-fire training. PLA units located within the Eastern Theater Command include three group armies, a naval fleet, a naval aviation division, two marine brigades, two Air Force divisions, two operational Air Force bases, and one Rocket Force base. The Eastern Theater Command also likely commands all China Coast Guard (CCG) and maritime militia ships while they are conducting Senkakus-related operations. During a contingency, the Eastern Theater Command likely also exercises command over some Strategic Support Force (SSF) units in theater and receives strategic intelligence support from the SSF to improve battlefield awareness and facilitate joint operations within the theater.

In August and September 2020, the Eastern Theater Command conducted a series of military exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan that featured large-scale naval and air maneuvers, amphibious operations, and multiple instances of PLA aircraft crossing the median line of the Taiwan Strait. An Eastern Theater Command spokesperson stated that these drills were meant to further test and improve multi-service joint operations capabilities, as well as to deter "Taiwan independence" forces and foreign actors from threatening the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait region.

I. The Taiwan Strait

Key Takeaways

- PRC diplomatic, political, and military pressure against Taiwan intensified in 2020.
- Throughout 2020, the PLA increased provocative and destabilizing actions in and around the Taiwan Strait, to include repeated flights into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone and conducting combat drills such as island seizure operations.

Tensions between the PRC and Taiwan heightened in 2020, as the PRC intensified political and military pressure aimed at Taiwan. In January 2020, despite the PRC's election interference, President Tsai Ing-wen won reelection for a second term. The PRC continues its suspension of formal communication with Taiwan, which it did in 2016, and remains steadfast that Taiwan must accept Beijing's view of the "1992 Consensus" to restart formal engagement. China's leaders have directly equated the "1992 Consensus" to Beijing's "one China Principle" which was reaffirmed by General Secretary Xi in a January 2019 address to "compatriots" in Taiwan. President Tsai has continually pledged to maintain the status quo in cross-Strait relations and

called for the PRC to respect Taiwan's democracy and agree to negotiations without preconditions. In her May 2020 inauguration speech, Tsai reiterated that her China policy would be based on the Republic of China's constitution and the law governing cross-strait relations, with a willingness to engage in dialogue on the principles of "peace, parity, democracy, and dialogue" to the PRC's displeasure.

The PRC also maintained its diplomatic pressure on Taiwan, thwarting Taiwan's efforts to participate in international organizations such as the World Health Organization, International Civil Aviation Organization, and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). Despite the stalled consultations with the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to engage with Taiwan's Kuomintang (KMT) party, and the PRC continues to hold lower-level cross-strait exchanges such as the municipal Shanghai-Taipei Twin City Forum, held virtually in August 2020, due to the pandemic.

The PLA continues to prepare for contingencies in the Taiwan Strait to deter, and if necessary, compel Taiwan to abandon moves toward independence. The PLA also is likely preparing for a contingency to unify Taiwan with the PRC by force, while simultaneously deterring, delaying, or denying any third-party intervention, such as the United States and/or other like-minded partners, on Taiwan's behalf. As part of a comprehensive campaign to pressure Taiwan and the Tsai administration, and signal its displeasure at warming Washington-Taipei ties, China has persistently conducted military operations near Taiwan and military training for a Taiwan contingency. Throughout 2020, China's military increased provocative actions in and around the Taiwan Strait, to include repeated flights into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone and conducting combat drills such as island seizure operations. In 2020, Beijing also publicly refuted the existence of the Taiwan Strait "median line," a decades-long tacit agreement between the two sides intended to reduce miscalculation and avoid sparking accidental crises.

A. The PRC's Strategy & Capabilities Development in the Taiwan Strait

Key Takeaways

- Although the PRC publicly advocates for peaceful unification with Taiwan, the PRC has never renounced the use of military force; the circumstances under which the PRC has historically indicated it would consider using force remain ambiguous and have evolved over time.
- The PRC has a range of options for military campaigns against Taiwan, from an air and maritime blockade to a full-scale amphibious invasion to seize and occupy some or all of Taiwan or its offshore islands.

The PRC appears willing to defer the use of military force as long as it considers that unification with Taiwan could be negotiated over the long-term and the costs of conflict outweigh the benefits. The PRC argues that the credible threat of force is essential to maintaining the conditions for political progress on its terms and preventing Taiwan from making moves toward independence. In January 2019, General Secretary Xi Jinping publicly reiterated the PRC's long-standing refusal to renounce the use of force to resolve the Taiwan issue, and staked the PRC's position for peaceful unification under the model of "one country, two systems." Based on the 2019 speech, "once country, two systems" entails the "protection" of Taiwan's social system, way of life, private property, religious beliefs, and "lawful rights and interests," provided the PRC's "sovereignty, security, and development interests," are ensured. In 2020, senior PRC leaders and government spokespersons continued to call for cross-strait discussions on the foundation of adhering to Beijing's interpretation of the "1992 Consensus" and opposing Taiwan independence, and reiterated contents of Xi's 2019 speech.

The Eastern Theater

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, p. 101.

Major Military Units



Eastern Theater Command, headquartered in Nanjing, with responsibility for central eastern China and the East China Sea, including the Strait of Taiwan. The Eastern TC likely has operational responsibility for matters involving Taiwan, Japan, and anything related to the East China Sea.

D. Taiwan's Defensive Capabilities

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 122-123.

Taiwan is taking important steps to compensate for the growing disparities it has compared to the PLA, including building its war reserve stocks, growing its defense-industrial base, improving joint operations and crisis response capabilities, and strengthening its officer and noncommissioned officer corps. However, these improvements only partially address Taiwan's defense challenges. Taiwan's 2021 Quadrennial Defense Review reaffirms recent adjustments to the military's strategy for defending the island, placing emphasis on protecting its littorals and near-shore coastal areas in a multi-layered defense in depth. The modified strategy stresses enhanced asymmetric and joint capabilities, as well as suggesting greater reliance on Taiwan's Air Force and Navy through multi-domain deterrence measures.

Taiwan's armed forces are authorized to fill approximately 215,000 billets, including 188,000 active duty billets. Reservists and civil defense volunteers support the active duty forces. As of the end of 2020, the Ministry of National Defense accomplished its goal of filling 90 percent of the active duty billets, totaling approximately 169,000 personnel, with volunteers. Taiwan's military modernization program envisions a continued decrease in Taiwan's active duty force to approximately 175,000 personnel as part of a transition to an all-volunteer force. This transition has slowed due to severe difficulties recruiting volunteers. The cost savings from manpower reductions provides some margin to improve individual pay and benefits, housing, and incentive pay; however, these savings have been insufficient to cover the full increase in manpower-related costs needed to attract and retain personnel under the new system. The unanticipated magnitude of transition costs has led Taiwan to divert funds from foreign and indigenous defense acquisition programs, as well as near-term training and readiness. Taiwan also faces considerable equipment and readiness challenges.

Taiwan continues to increase its defense budget in order to support defense acquisition and reforms. In August 2019, Taiwan said it would increase the island's defense budget by 5.2 percent to NT \$358 billion (\$11.6 billion). In August 2020, the Tsai administration announced an additional 10% increase to the defense budget, increasing overall defense spending to more than 2% of gross domestic product and the highest level since the 1990's. Meanwhile, the PRC's official defense budget continues to grow, with much of it focused on developing the military joint operations capability that could be used to unify Taiwan with the PRC by force. Recognizing the growing disparity between their respective defense expenditures, Taiwan has stated that it is working to develop new concepts and capabilities for asymmetric warfare. Some specific areas of emphasis include Electronic Warfare, cyber and information operations, fast attack maritime vessels, coastal defense missiles, rapid naval mining, unmanned aerial systems, and critical infrastructure protection.

The United States maintains its one-China policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), the three Joint Communiques, and the Six Assurances. The United States is committed to deepening ties with Taiwan, which is a leading democracy and a critical economic and security partner. The United States will continue to support a peaceful resolution of cross-Straits issues, consistent with the wishes and best interests of the people on Taiwan.

Consistent with the TRA, the United States contributes to peace, security, and stability in the Taiwan Strait by providing defense articles and services to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability. In October 2019, Taiwan announced the purchase of F-16V fighter aircraft for \$8 billion. In 2020, the frequency of arms sales to Taiwan increased with authorizations totaling more than \$5 billion. Authorized weapons sales included advanced unmanned aerial systems, long range missiles and artillery, and the

Harpoon Coastal Defense System. Since 2010, the United States has announced more than \$23 billion in arms sales to Taiwan. In support of these efforts, the U.S. continues to maintain the capacity to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people of Taiwan.

Taiwan Strait Military Balance, Ground Forces

	China		Taiwan
	Total	Taiwan Strait Area	Total
Total Ground Force Personnel	1,040,000	416,000	88,000
Group Armies/Army Corps	13	5	3
Tanks	6,300	.	800
Artillery Pieces	7,000	.	1,100

Taiwan Strait Military Balance, Naval Forces

	China		Taiwan
	Total	Eastern and Southern Theater Navies	Total
Aircraft Carriers	2	1	0
Cruisers	1	0	0
Destroyers	32	21	4
Frigates	48	41	22
Corvettes	51	34	0
Tank / Medium Landing Ships Amphibious Transport Dock	57	49	14
Diesel Attack Submarines	56	33	2
Nuclear Attack Submarines	9	2	0
Ballistic Missile Submarines	6	4	0
Coastal Patrol (Missile)	86	68	44
Coast Guard Ships	223	N / A	23

Taiwan Strait Military Balance, Air Forces

	China		Taiwan
	Total	Eastern and Southern Theater	Total
Fighters	1,600 (2,800*)	700 (800*)	400 (500*)
Bombers/Attack	450	250	0
Transport	400	20	30
Special Mission Aircraft	150	100	30

IV(b). Southern Theater Command

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 102 to 106.

The **Southern Theater Command** is oriented toward the South China Sea, Southeast Asia border security, and territorial and maritime disputes.

The area of responsibility of the Southern Theater Command covers mainland and maritime Southeast Asia, including the South China Sea. This geographic area implies that the Southern Theater Command is responsible for securing the South China Sea, supporting the Eastern Theater Command in any operation against Taiwan, and assuring the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) Beijing sees as vital to China's global ambitions. PLA units located within the Southern Theater Command include two group armies, a naval fleet, three marine brigades, two air force bases, and two rocket force bases. The Southern Theater Command is responsible for responding to U.S. freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, and can assume command as needed over all CCG and maritime militia ships conducting operations within the PRC's claimed "nine-dash line."

The Southern Theater Command is responsible for training, force disposition, and operations in the South China Sea. In 2019 and 2020, Southern Theater Command units conducted multiple live-fire drills and amphibious training events near PRC-occupied features in the South China Sea. The Southern Theater Command also plays a significant role in the PLA's bilateral and multilateral exercises with countries in Southeast Asia, participating in a counterterrorism exercise with Cambodia, a U.S. co-led multilateral exercise in Thailand, and a coast guard exercise with the Philippines in 2020.

The Southern Theater Command commands the PLA Hong Kong and Macao garrisons. In August 2020, the PLA Hong Kong and Macao garrisons conducted an annual rotation of forces. In 2019, PLA and probable People's Armed Police (PAP) forces deployed into Hong Kong by land, air, and sea from Shenzhen at night, nominally as part of the usual annual rotation, however, no forces were observed rotating out of Hong Kong in 2020. In 2020, PAP and PLA units continued to publicly highlight their anti-riot, counterterrorism, and disaster prevention training.

All the PLA's 24 Su-35s purchased from Russia are assigned to the Southern Theater Command Air Force, and have flown patrols in the South China Sea and into the Western Pacific. The Southern Theater Command was also the first command to receive the PLAN's H-6J maritime strike bombers. In December 2019, the PRC commissioned its first-domestically produced aircraft carrier, Shandong into service at Yulin Naval Base in the Southern Theater Command. Shortly after, the carrier returned to its shipyard in the Northern Theater to complete testing and flight certifications with J-15 fighter aircraft before returning to its homeport on Hainan Island sometime in 2020.

I. South China Sea

Key Takeaways

- In 2020, the PRC did not resume land reclamation or major military infrastructure construction at its seven Spratly Islands outposts.
- The PRC's Spratly outposts are capable of supporting military operations, include advanced weapon systems, and have supported non-combat aircraft; however, no large-scale presence of combat aircraft has been yet observed there.
- In 2020, the PRC continued to deploy PLAN, CCG, and civilian ships in response to Vietnamese and Malaysian drilling operations within the PRC's claimed "nine-dash-line" and Philippines' construction at Thitu Island.

A. Developments in the Security Situation

In July 2016, pursuant to provisions in the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an arbitral tribunal convened at the Philippines' behest ruled that the PRC's claims to "historic rights" in the SCS, within the area depicted by the "nine-dash line," were not compatible with UNCLOS. Since December 2019, four SCS claimants (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam) have explicitly referenced the arbitral ruling in notes verbales to the UN denying the validity of the PRC's "historic rights" and nine-dash line claims. Beijing, however, categorically rejects the tribunal decision, and the PRC continues to use coercive tactics, including the employment of PLA naval, coast guard, and paramilitary vessels, to enforce its claims and advance its interests. The PRC does so in ways calculated to remain below the threshold of provoking conflict.

The PRC states that international military presence within the SCS is a challenge to its sovereignty. The PRC continues to employ coercive tactics to enforce its claims. Throughout 2020, the PRC deployed PLAN, CCG, and civilian ships to maintain a presence in disputed areas, such as near Scarborough Reef and Thitu Island, as well as in response to oil and gas exploration operations by rival claimants within the PRC's claimed "nine-dash line." Separately, the CCG rammed and sank two Vietnamese fishing boats in separate incidents near the Paracel Islands over the course of the year. In both incidents, all the Vietnamese sailors were rescued without loss of life.

In April 2020, Beijing announced the creation of two new administrative districts in the SCS, one covering the Paracels and other encompassing the Spratly Islands. This action likely intends to further solidify Chinese claims on these areas—especially in terms of domestic law—and justify its actions in the region.

In July 2019, China and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members completed the first reading of the China-ASEAN Code of Conduct (CoC), with a second and third reading remaining before China and ASEAN members finalize the agreement. The PRC and ASEAN member states had sought to complete CoC negotiations by 2021; however, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the cancellation of scheduled joint working group meetings in 2020. When negotiations resume, they are unlikely to produce substantive outcomes because the PRC and some SCS claimants are probably sensitive to language in the CoC that limits their activities. Given the delay, the complexity of the issues, and a mandate for ASEAN consensus—on an issue that members disagree on—it is extremely unlikely that there will be a CoC signed in 2021.

The Southern Theater

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, p. 106.

Major Military Units



Southern Theater Command, headquartered in Guangzhou, has responsibility for south-central China, including the border with Vietnam and the South China Sea. The Southern TC's primary missions are maintaining security in the South China Sea and supporting the Eastern TC in any major amphibious operation.

IV(c). Western Theater Command

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 107-109 and 159-160.

The **Western Theater Command** is oriented toward India and counterterrorism missions along China's Central Asia borders.

The Western Theater Command is geographically the largest theater command within the PRC and is responsible for responding to conflict with India and terrorist and insurgent threats in western China. PLA units located within the Western Theater Command include two group armies, two military districts, three air force bases, and one rocket force base. PAP units responsible for Xinjiang operations are also likely under the control of the Western Theater Command.

Within China, the Western Theater Command focuses on Xinjiang and Tibet Autonomous Regions where the CCP perceives a high threat of separatism and terrorism, particularly among Uyghur populations in Xinjiang. According to the U.S. Department of State's 2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, in the PRC, "genocide and crimes against humanity occurred during the year against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang." Authorities were reported to have arbitrarily detained more than one million Uyghurs, ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other Muslims in extrajudicial internment camps designed to erase religious and ethnic identities. PRC government officials justified the camps under the pretense of combatting terrorism, separatism, and extremism."

Beginning in early May 2020, tensions along the India-China border dominated the Western Theater Command's attention. Differing perceptions of border demarcations along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) joined with recent infrastructure construction, led to multiple unarmed clashes, an ongoing standoff, and military buildups on both sides of the India-China border. In response to an unarmed skirmish in June 2020 between PRC and Indian patrols in Galwan Valley—the most violent clash between the two countries in 45 years—the Western Theater Command led a large-scale mobilization and deployment of PLA forces along the LAC.

I. China-India Border

Key Takeaways

- The current standoff between the two nations resulted in the first deaths in the last 45 years.
- Diplomatic efforts are making slow progress as both sides resist losing perceived advantages on the border.

Beginning in early May 2020, PRC and Indian forces faced off in unarmed clashes at multiple locations along the LAC. The resulting standoff triggered the buildup of forces on both sides of the disputed border. Each country demanded the withdrawal of the other's forces and a return to pre-standoff conditions, though neither the PRC nor India agreed on those conditions. The PRC blamed the standoff on Indian infra-

China Primer: Uyghurs

China Primer: Uyghurs, Congressional Research Service (Jan '22).



Sources: CRS, using U.S. Department of State Boundaries; Esri; Global Administrative Areas; DeLorme; NSA.

Uyghurs speak a Turkic language and practice a moderate form of Sunni Islam. The XUAR, often referred to simply as Xinjiang (pronounced "SHIN-jyahng"), is a provincial-level administrative region that comprises about one-sixth of China's total land area and borders eight countries. The region is rich in minerals, produces over 80% of China's cotton, and has China's largest coal and natural gas reserves and a fifth of its oil reserves. Xinjiang is a strategic region for the PRC's Belt and Road Initiative, which involves Chinese-backed infrastructure projects and energy development in neighboring Central and South Asia.

All or parts of the area comprising Xinjiang have been under the political control or influence of Chinese, Mongols, and Russians for long spans of the region's documented history, along with periods of Turkic or Uyghur rule. Uyghurs played a role in the establishment of two short-lived, semi-autonomous East Turkestan Republics in the 1930s and 1940s. The PRC asserted control over Xinjiang in 1949 and established the XUAR in 1955. Uyghurs once were the predominant ethnic group in the XUAR; they now make up roughly half of the region's population of 24.8 million, according to official sources. The government long has provided economic incentives for Han Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China, to migrate to the region; Hans now constitute up to 40% of the XUAR population and the majority in Urumqi, the capital.

Since an outbreak of Uyghur demonstrations and ethnic unrest in 2009, and sporadic clashes involving Uyghurs and Xinjiang security personnel that spiked between 2013 and 2015, PRC leaders have carried out large scale criminal arrests and intensive security measures in the XUAR, aimed at combatting "terrorism, separatism and religious extremism." Three violent incidents in China in 2014 purportedly carried out by Uyghurs against Han civilians were described by some outside observers as acts of terrorism, and some experts argue that the PRC government has used counterterrorism as a pretext for carrying out forced assimilation policies and mass detentions.

IV(d). Northern Theater Command

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 110 to 112.

The **Northern Theater Command** is oriented toward the Korean Peninsula and Russian border security

The Northern Theater Command's area of responsibility includes the majority of the PRC's borders with Mongolia and Russia, North Korea, and the Yellow Sea. The Northern Theater is responsible for operations along China's northern periphery and conducting border stability operations associated with North Korean contingency and northern border contingencies involving Mongolia or Russia. PLA units located within the Northern Theater Command include three group armies, a naval fleet, two marine brigades, one special mission aircraft division, two operational air bases, and one PLARF base.

During a contingency, the Northern Theater Command likely also exercises command over some Strategic Support Force (SSF) units in theater and receives strategic intelligence support from the SSF to improve battlefield awareness and facilitate joint operations within the theater. The Northern Theater Navy would be responsible primarily for protecting the sea approaches to northern China, but it could provide mission-critical assets to support other fleets. In 2020, Northern Theater Command forces conducted various training activities, including integration training among a submarine, surface ships and aircraft, as well as long-range navigation and ground attack training by fighter-bomber aircraft.

Relations with North Korea

Key Takeaways

- The PRC's warming relationship with North Korea in 2019 appeared to stagnate in 2020 following Pyongyang's self-isolation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The PLA conducts military exercises in preparation for a contingency on the Korean Peninsula.

Following a period of tensions in 2017, Beijing and Pyongyang began to resume high-level political and military diplomacy in 2019, but that was abruptly stalled by the COVID-19 pandemic. North Korea's forced self-isolation ceased almost all trade and people-to-people exchanges across the border, and the North Korean regime's paranoia about the risks of COVID-19 has prevented China-North Korea diplomatic exchanges. The PRC does not fully implement the UN Security Council's sanctions imposed on North Korea in 2017. Additionally, Beijing did not regularly act against illicit ship-to-ship transfers in the PRC's territorial seas and China-based North Korean banking and weapons trade representatives and their activities. The PRC also continued to import coal—albeit at lower volumes—via Chinese barges from North Korea's Nampo Port and ship-to-ship transfers.

The PRC's objectives for the Korean Peninsula include stability, denuclearization, and the absence of U.S. forces near China's border. The PRC's focus on maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula involves preventing North Korea's collapse and military conflict on the Peninsula. Toward these ends, the PRC continues to advo-

cate for an approach towards North Korea that prioritizes dialogue, to include the resumption of U.S.-North Korea talks. Beijing has urged Washington to acknowledge Pyongyang's "legitimate concerns" and argues that Pyongyang has taken denuclearization measures that merit a commensurate U.S. response, such as sanctions relief.

The PLA conducts military exercises in preparation for a contingency on the Korean Peninsula including air, land, sea, and chemical defense training events. China's leaders could order the Northern Theater Command to engage in a range of operations in the event of a crisis. These could include securing the China-North Korea border to control the flow of refugees, or a military intervention into North Korea to secure weapons of mass destruction or preserve a North Korean buffer state.

II. China-Russia Relations

Ref: China-Russia Relations, Congressional Research Service (May '22).

The People's Republic of China (PRC or China) and the Russian Federation (Russia) maintain a strategic and multifaceted relationship with extensive military, diplomatic, and economic connections. Although the contemporary China-Russia relationship dates back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the two countries also share a long, tumultuous history that has included periods of security and diplomatic cooperation, fluctuations in ideological alignment, diplomatic crises, and a border war in the 1960s. Many experts trace the current dynamism of the relationship to 2014, when the reaction of some countries to Russia's first invasion of Ukraine, including sanctions, led Moscow to seek to strengthen its ties to China and other countries.

The two countries' apparent mutual affinity has led some U.S. policymakers and Members of Congress to express concern that Beijing and Moscow constitute a *de facto* alliance, and to seek ways to counter their global influence. The PRC and Russia's bilateral relationship falls short of a mutual defense pact, more closely resembling a non-binding alignment based on shared opposition to what they describe as the U.S.-led international order. This common opposition has spurred cooperation between the two countries, but has not fully overcome their historical strategic mistrust.

A. Key Features of the Relationship

Building on the foundation of the 1991 Sino-Soviet Border Agreement, the 2001 Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, among other things, noted Beijing and Moscow's satisfaction on border issues and set broad areas of cooperation ranging from economics and trade to counterterrorism. The renewal of the treaty in 2021 reflects the overall positive trajectory of relations.

The direction of the bilateral relationship appears to reflect personal ties between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, both of whom project the image of a close relationship. Since 2013, Xi and Putin have met numerous times and established regular dialogue mechanisms at lower levels. In 2019, PRC and Russian leaders announced their intention to develop a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era," professing a "high degree of political trust" and "all-around cooperation."

Military cooperation between the PRC and Russia is significant, encompassing exchanges and joint exercises, as well as intelligence sharing and joint development of weapons systems. In November 2021, the two sides signed a Road Map for Military Co-operation for 2021-2025 to guide collaboration in this sphere. The PRC and Russia are founding members of the Eurasia-based Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), an intergovernmental group mainly focused on security affairs.

The PRC and Russia also enjoy strong commercial and financial ties and are partners in their attempts to "de-dollarize" the global economy, which they see as

I. China's Armed Forces (The PLA)

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, chap. 2 and ATP 7-100.3, Chinese Tactics, (Aug '21), chap 1.

Key Takeaways

- With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains so that as a joint force it can conduct the range of land, air, and maritime operations as well as space, counterspace, electronic warfare (EW), and cyber operations.
- The PLA's evolving capabilities and concepts continue to strengthen the PRC's ability to "fight and win wars" against a "strong enemy" [a likely euphemism for the United States], coerce Taiwan and rival claimants in territorial disputes, counter an intervention by a third party in a conflict along the PRC's periphery, and project power globally.
- In 2020, the PLA continued to make progress implementing major structural reforms, fielding modern indigenous systems, building readiness, and strengthening its competency to conduct joint operations.

The PRC's strategy of national rejuvenation entails strengthening and adapting its armed forces to the long-term trends in global military affairs and meeting the country's evolving national security needs. During the last two decades, the PRC has invested in and improved the PLA's capabilities to address a range of security objectives beyond its continued emphasis on Taiwan contingencies. The PLA's evolving capabilities and concepts continue to strengthen the PRC's ability to counter an intervention by a third party in a conflict along China's periphery, coerce resolution to boundary disputes, project power regionally and globally, and deter nuclear attack.

With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains so that as a joint force it can conduct the range of land, air, and maritime operations as well as space, counterspace, electronic warfare (EW), and cyber operations. Recognizing that joint operations, information flows, and rapid decision-making are vital in modern warfare, the PRC continues to place a high priority on modernizing the PLA's capability to command complex joint operations in near and distant battlefields. The PRC is seeking to enhance the PLA's joint command and control systems; joint logistics systems; and command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. The PRC is also modernizing, diversifying, and expanding its nuclear forces, as well as deepening the PLA's interoperability and integration with the PRC's paramilitary and militia forces.

In recent years, the CCP's efforts to strengthen its armed forces have also included undertaking the most comprehensive restructuring of the PLA's command and control arrangements, forces structure, and administrative organs in its history. These reforms have sought to reinforce the CCP's control of the military, improve the PLA's ability to conduct joint operations, increase its combat effectiveness, and address longstanding issues such as corruption and the institutional primacy of the army over the other services.

II. PLA Fundamentals

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, chap. 2 and ATP 7-100.3, Chinese Tactics, (Aug '21), chap 1.

I. The People's Liberation Army (Overview)

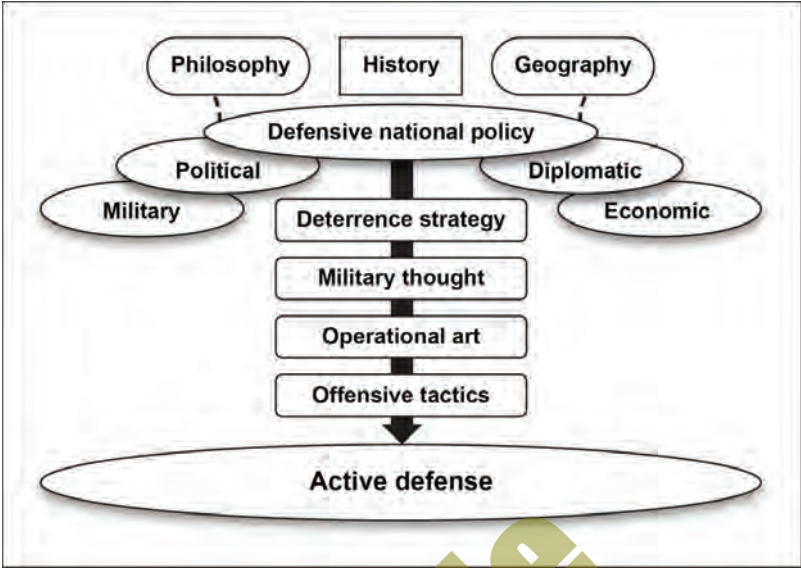
The People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues more than two millennia of Chinese military tradition. China lays cultural claim to many of the world's most famous works of military strategy and philosophy—most prominently, *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu—and these works are still highly influential throughout the PLA. The Chinese take military philosophy, politics, and theory very seriously: the PLA is considered the vanguard of the Chinese Communist Revolution, and its philosophical underpinnings are important to both its culture and its approach to warfighting at all levels. The PLA also has a deep commitment to Communist and Maoist philosophy.

Note. This is an explanation of naming and acronym conventions. The proper name for China's military is the People's Liberation Army, or PLA. This organizational structure is comparable to the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD); it does not refer exclusively to ground forces, as does the U.S. Army.

The PLA's land-based service is the People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA), the naval branch is the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), and the aerial branch is called the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF). The PLA's strategic conventional and nuclear ballistic and cruise missile service is the People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF). The People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (PLASSF) is a new service-level organization that incorporates national-level cyber warfare, electronic warfare (EW), space, and other operational support elements under a single headquarters, and the People's Liberation Army Joint Logistics Support Force (PLAJLSF) is a new service-level sustainment organization.

The PLA's basic warfighting philosophy is that of active defense: a fundamentally defensive political and strategic stance, enabled—when required—by operational and tactical offense.

For over two thousand years, China has been surrounded by enemies, adversaries, and other competitors. Invasion, occupation, raids, and other incursions into Chinese territory were commonplace. The PLA views protecting Chinese sovereignty and security as a sacred duty. China traditionally viewed military resistance as an affair for the entire population: mass resistance, guerrilla warfare, and winning a war of attrition. This understanding has evolved in the modern age to where a PLA enabled by technology, well-trained personnel, and a whole-of- government, defense-in-depth approach deters conflict before it ever happens and protects China and the CPC from foreign aggression and internal tumult. The basic concept of active defense informs every level of PLA operations and acquisitions. Figure 1-1 (following page) provides a graphic depiction of the policy and theoretical underpinnings of the active defense philosophy.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 1-1. Active defense.

Presently, the PLA is in the midst of a period of comprehensive reform. Central to this is the evolution of the “big army”—the dominance of the PLAA at the expense of other services—not only throughout the PLA, but also throughout Chinese politics and society. Reducing manpower and equipment levels and employing a quality-over-quantity approach is central to this effort, as is the expansion of joint integration and an expanded emphasis on domains other than just the ground. In addition, PLAA units are now nationally deployable—able to operate anywhere within Chinese borders—rather than being strongly tied to a specific region. This is intended to reduce manpower requirements and the influence of the PLA in local politics, but it requires a top-to-bottom reorganization of PLA training, doctrine, and acquisition.

Two historical figures feature prominently in the philosophy and strategy of the PLA: Sun Tzu and Mao Zedong. The PLA views these two strategists as equally important, with People’s War being viewed as a modern addendum to The Art of War. Sun Tzu and Mao together created the framework from which the PLA’s modern-day strategy and tactics are derived.

Influenced largely by The Art of War, the PLA—and China as a whole—look to create advantages along a vast competition continuum, ranging from diplomacy and covert operations in peacetime to major combat operations. The PLA views all available government means as a kind of defense in depth. Defense of China begins with skilled diplomacy and prudent political measures at home and abroad. State actors and agencies set conditions for military success if and when military action becomes necessary. The PLA decisively defeats opponents militarily if peaceful measures fail. The ideal outcome in every scenario is to “win without fighting”—as a philosophy taken directly from Sun Tzu. Military-Civil Fusion is an important method of incorporating civilian support to achieve military objectives in both peacetime and war. 1-32. PLA doctrine describes three basic ways to use military power: warfighting, military deterrence, and military operations other than war. Developing warfighting capabilities is the PLA’s core task; prevention of conflict is the PLA’s most important mission. The PLA’s deterrence mission creates numerous subordinate objectives designed to demonstrate Chinese capabilities and will, all viewed as critical to preventing conflict both domestically and abroad. Though China states unequivocally that it will not initi-

C. Three Warfares

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), p. 1-14.

China's strategic approach to conflict employs Three Warfares designed to support and reinforce the PLA's traditional military operations. Though these approaches are called warfares, these strategies—in Western thinking—fall somewhere between modern concepts such as information operations and historical concepts such as military operations other than war or effects-based operations. Despite the names, they are universally nonlethal: they do not involve direct combat operations. Instead, they are designed to pursue what Sun Tzu considered generalship in its highest form—victory without battle. If a battle must be fought, the Three Warfares are designed to unbalance, deceive, and coerce opponents in order to influence their perceptions. In a major change from the past, when political officers were mainly involved in rear area personnel functions, the Three Warfares make political officers and soldiers into nonlethal warfighters who provide essential support to combat units.

See chap. 4, *Information Operations*, for further discussion.

These Three Warfares are—

Public Opinion Warfare

Public Opinion Warfare is referred to as *huayuquan*, which translates roughly as “the right to speak and be heard.” To the Western mind this implies something along the lines of freedom of speech. Its meaning to the Chinese, however, is substantially different: it refers to the power to set the terms of a debate, discussion, or negotiation. In other words, it is China's high-level information campaign designed to set the terms of political discussion. China views this effort as influential not only on PLA operations, but also in support of Chinese economic interests worldwide. China views Public Opinion Warfare as capable of seizing the initiative in a conflict before any shots are fired by shaping public discourse, influencing political positions, and building international sympathy. Public Opinion Warfare operations are seen every day in the PLA's vast media system of newspapers, magazines, television, and internet sources that target both domestic and foreign audiences. Public Opinion Warfare supports the PLA's Psychological Warfare and Legal Warfare activities in peacetime and war.

Psychological Warfare

Psychological Warfare is broadly similar to U.S. military information support operations in that it is intended to influence the behavior of a given audience. PLA Psychological Warfare seeks to integrate with conventional warfare and includes both offensive and defensive measures. The PLA views Psychological Warfare through the lens of Sun Tzu, emphasizing its multiplicative effect when coupled with comprehensive deception operations. Deception operations are critical to the PLA's entire warfighting approach, and Psychological Warfare represents the major information operations element of deception operations.

Legal Warfare

Legal Warfare refers to setting the legal conditions for victory—both domestically and internationally. The U.S. does not have an equivalent concept, although State Department diplomatic and legal operations have roughly equivalent objectives. Legal Warfare seeks to unbalance potential opponents by using international or domestic laws to undermine their military operations, to seek legal validity for PLA operations worldwide, and to support Chinese interests through a valid legal framework. Legal Warfare has emerged with a particularly prominent role via the various Chinese political maneuverings in the Western Pacific, particularly those areas surrounding international waterways, disputed land masses, and economic rights of way. Legal Warfare is present at the tactical and operational levels of war. It guides how the PLA trains to treat prisoners of war, detainees, and civilians, and how it abides by international legal conventions, codes, and laws.

A. Peoples Liberation Army Army (PLAA)

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 45-47.

The People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA) has approximately 975,000 active-duty personnel in combat units. The PLAA is the primary ground fighting force in the PLA. The most-recent 2019 PRC defense white paper described the PLAA's tasks as transition from "regional defense" to trans-theater operations, with an emphasis on improving its capabilities to conduct multi-domain, trans-theater, and sustained operations "so as to build a new type of strong and modernized land force."

Despite COVID-19, border clashes with India, extensive flooding in southern China, and other major events in 2020, the PLAA accelerated its training and fielding of equipment from the already fast pace of recent years. PLAA units conducted robust combined-arms training and extensive joint training exercises with other PLA services. In 2020, the PLAA highlighted training for on potential contingencies in high-elevation regions (suggesting a possible focus on India given border clashes in 2020) and projecting forces across the Taiwan Strait.

I. Force Structure and Organization

In 2020, the PLAA fielded a large amount of new platforms and updated equipment. The major force restructuring required by the 2016 PLA reforms is complete, but significant additional equipment fielding is necessary to complete the transformation of the PLAA into a fully modern force.

The PLAA is organized into five Theater Army Commands, the Xinjiang military district, and the Tibet military district. The PLAA has 13 group armies, which are comprised of multiple combined-arms brigades. In total, these 78 combined-arms brigades serve as the PLAA's primary maneuver force. The brigades vary in size and composition. The PLAA delineates its combined-arms brigades into three types: heavy (tracked armored vehicles), medium (wheeled armored vehicles), and light (high-mobility, mountain, air assault and motorized) and can contain up to 5,000 troops each. Each group army controls six additional brigades responsible for operational element functions: an artillery brigade, an air defense brigade, an army aviation (or air assault) brigade, a special operations forces (SOF) brigade, an engineer and chemical defense brigade, and a sustainment brigade. Although the PLAA has standardized its group armies, it does retain a number of nonstandard independent divisions and brigades that exist outside of the group armies. These units are typically located in areas the CCP considers sensitive including Xinjiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Beijing.

See p. 2-27 for a map and overview of PLAA major ground units.

II. Capabilities and Modernization

Although the PLAA fielded an extensive amount of new equipment in 2020, the PLAA remains a relative laggard within the PLA in terms of modernization. Reports indicate that in 2020 approximately 40% of the PLAA's main battle tank (MBT) force is 20-40 years old and significant numbers of infantry brigades employ outdated equipment.

The PLAA fielded a number of new systems in 2020. The 72nd Group Army used the PCL-171, a self-propelled 122mm howitzer system on an assault vehicle chassis, to conduct live-fire exercises. Artillery units in most of the five joint theater commands

received the PCL-181, a self-propelled 155mm howitzer system. Extensive field-testing began on the Z-8L—a 15-ton class transport helicopter that will permit the movement of heavier vehicles in air assault units.

III. Readiness

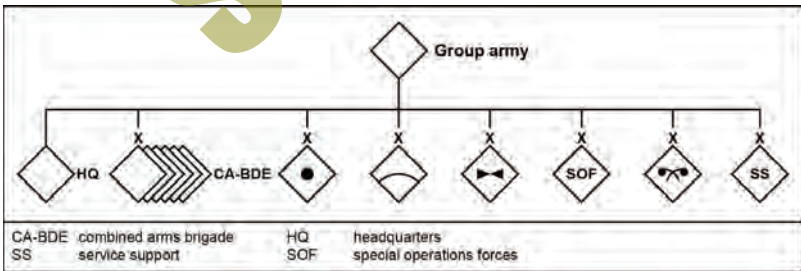
PLAA training in 2020 followed the trend from 2019 of focusing on combined-arms and joint training. PLAA units conducted multiple iterations of the STRIDE 2020 combined areas exercises in Inner Mongolia. PLAA units stressed realistic training, emphasized the professionalization of OPFOR formations, and conducted numerous force-on-force “confrontation drills.” PRC media reported that the commander of the “blue-force” OPFOR brigade at the Zhurihe training site (a major PLA training facility for large-scale unit training similar to the U.S. Army’s National Training Center) was 32-1 against PLAA “red force” units since 2015.

In addition to conventional ground force training, PLAA units conducted extensive specialty exercises in 2020. Units conducted coastal defense, multiple sea crossings and landings, and high-elevation plateau operations. Joint training included PLAA aviation helicopters landing on PLAN ships, ground-air coordination with the PLAAF, and a large-scale exercise in Russia where PLAA units trained on Russian military equipment. PLAA aviation units also trained landing on civilian ships. PLAA units likely increased their overall readiness in 2020 due to their extensive combined arms and joint training.

IV. PLAA Operational-Level Organizations

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug ‘21), pp. 2-6 to 2-18.

The group army is the PLAA’s basic operational-level organization. The group army structure is an evolution of the PLA’s corps-based structure that comprised most of its history; it appears the group army is an attempt to retain most of the capabilities of the traditional corps, but with greater flexibility and ability to task-organize. Group armies are assigned to TCs; TC command authority is passed through TC PLAA headquarters to the group army headquarters. Group armies use the same dual-command structure as most other PLA units, employing both a military commander and a political commissar. Compared to geographic headquarters (MDs and LCs), it is likely that a group army’s leadership is more heavily influenced by operational requirements, rather than local political relationships and responsibilities.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug ‘21), fig. 2-3. Group army structure (doctrinal).

Following a complete overhaul and reorganization in 2017, each group army now directly commands 12 brigade-size organizations: six combined-arms brigades and six support brigades of various types. Except for six legacy divisions, divisional headquarters have been eliminated, notionalized, or made strictly administrative. This overhaul seeks to eliminate excess command structure, reduce the number of general officers and associated staffs, and increase capabilities at tactical-level formations. The group army reorganization coincided with a massive drawdown in manpower across the PLA. This transition seeks to increase combined arms capability.

PLA Army (PLAA)

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, p. 47.

Major Ground Units



Note. The PLA understands rank in the same way that the U.S. military does, but it takes a fundamentally different view of grade. In the PLA, grade refers to one's duty position: platoon leader, brigade deputy leader, and so on. Hierarchy of grade is extremely important to the PLA—more so than rank. There are 15 different grades, and they are recognized across all of the PLA's different services. As such, a PLAA officer's grade can be directly compared with that of a PLAN officer, and seniority established between the two. In the U.S. military, grade refers to military pay, and duty position is clearly subordinate to rank when it comes to determining seniority.

ity across the PLA through the application of improved technology and training, while simultaneously reducing PLA manpower and reducing quantities of obsolete equipment. A more standardized group army is a centerpiece of this effort.

The group army is likely not intended to be employed as an operational unit. Rather, it is the force pool from which operational systems are built as part of the wider system-warfare construct. Group army commanders facilitate the assembly of purpose-built operational systems, using their available force structure to create the command, maneuver, and support systems that execute operations in the group army's combat area. As such, concerns about the group army's large number of subordinate units—and the ability, or lack thereof, to control them—are not reflective of the PLAA's approach to building forces.

The main combat power of the notional group army consists of its six combined arms brigades (CA-BDEs). These brigades are supported by one artillery brigade; one air defense brigade; an aviation brigade; an SOF brigade; an engineer and chemical defense brigade; and a service support brigade, consisting of logistics, transportation, medical, repair, ammunition, communications, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), and EW units. The 2017 reorganization placed a greater emphasis on system warfare capabilities at the group army level, providing a much more extensive suite of EW and cyber capabilities, long-range reconnaissance, and long-range fires under the direct control of group army commanders. Group army commanders can now support their assigned CA-BDEs with a significant suite of capabilities able to influence operations across all domains.

Group-army joint capabilities are limited, but they are expected to expand with ongoing reforms. TCs provide air, naval, and some SOF support, though group armies do typically contain an SOF brigade. The group army also appears to be largely dependent on higher commands—either the TC or PLA JLSF—for most of its logistics support. This emphasizes the lack of expeditionary capability throughout the PLA: sustainment within China's borders may be sufficient to support high-intensity operations, but current sustainment capabilities likely cannot support major combat operations overseas.

V. PLAA Tactical-Level Organizations

The PLAA has completed a substantial period of reorganization with regard to its tactical unit structure. Traditionally, the PLAA was built around the division. Divisions were designed around the Soviet model. They were somewhat smaller and more homogenous than their U.S. counterparts, without the same combined arms and sustainment capabilities. In a transition similar to that undertaken by the U.S. Army, Ground Forces of the Russian Federation, and numerous other armies, the PLAA is in the process of “brigade-ization”—moving capabilities that used to reside at the division echelon to the brigade, with the goal of creating a more flexible force with a streamlined command structure, from group to army to brigade to battalion. This reorganization corresponds with the substantial drawdown in manpower ongoing throughout the PLA. PLAA divisions are now largely an administrative echelon—only six divisions remain operational, with none residing in group armies. Otherwise, frontline PLA units have moved entirely to a brigade-oriented structure.

Unit descriptions in this section are notional, as described by the PLAA and supported by further intelligence analysis. Real-world units may vary widely in composition, organization, and equipment, though the PLAA is moving in the direction of force-wide standardization. It is important to note that PLAA units at battalion and below are designed to fight as structured, without the need for significant task organization.

A. Combined Arms Brigades (CA-BDE)

The CA-BDE is the PLAA's basic operational unit. It is similar in size, capability, and organization to the U.S. Army's brigade combat team (BCT); it is entirely possible that the PLAA was influenced by BCT organization when designing the CA-BDE.

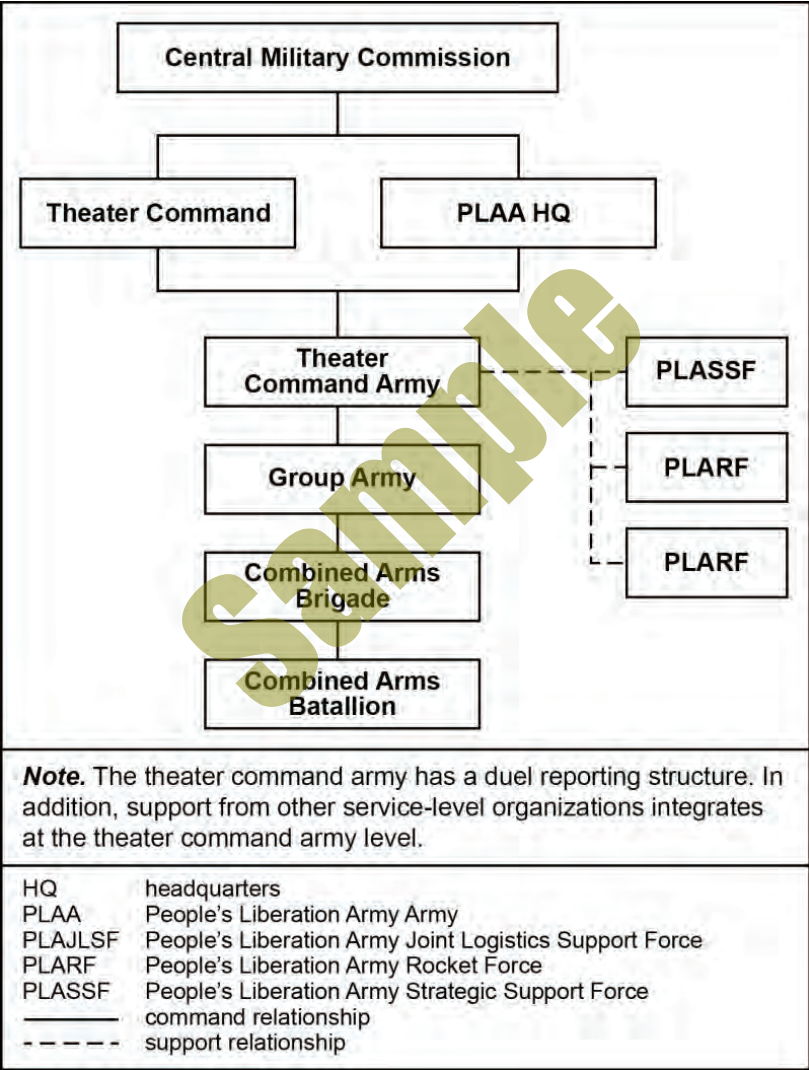
See following pages (pp. 2-30 to 2-31) for further discussion.

Theater Commands (TCS)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 2-5 to 2-6.

CMC command authority is exercised operationally through theater commands (TCs). TCs are joint commands that exercise extensive—though not exclusive—command authority in their given region.

See pp. 2-8 to 2-9 for further discussion of the theater commands.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 2-2. PLAA chain of command, isolated.

Combined Arms Brigades (CA-BDE)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 2-7 to 2-9.

The CA-BDE mixes different capabilities under a single headquarters: maneuver, fires, logistics, communications, engineer, and EW subordinate units are organically assigned to CA-BDE headquarters. CA-BDEs do not appear to have any organic joint capability, but they are developing joint capabilities to be able to control units from other services during training and operations.

	PLAA Combined Arms Brigade	U.S. Brigade Combat Team (BCT)
Maneuver	4-6 battalions	3 battalions
Artillery	1 howitzer battalion 1 rocket battalion	1 howitzer battalion
Air defense	3 batteries, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Self-propelled guns.Man-portable air defense systems.Short-range missile systems.	None
Reconnaissance	Comparable to U.S. BCT	
Engineer and protection	Comparable to U.S. BCT	
Logistics and sustainment	Newly established Likely less capable than U.S. BCT	

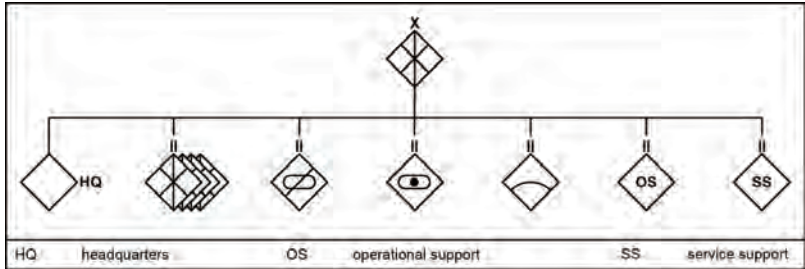
Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), table 2-1. Comparison of PLAA combined arms brigade to U.S. brigade combat team.

There are three distinct types of CA-BDEs: light (motorized), medium (mechanized), and heavy (armored). The PLAA describes the differences between motorized and mechanized infantry in how supporting vehicles are employed: motorized units are only transported by their assigned vehicles, while mechanized forces employ their vehicles as combat platforms that support the infantry.

Light CA-BDEs

Airborne, mountain, and amphibious CA-BDEs are described as light. The light CA-BDE contains these units—

- Four motorized combined arms battalions (CA-BNs).
- One reconnaissance battalion.
- One artillery battalion.
- One air defense battalion.
- One headquarters unit.
- One operational support battalion.
- One service support battalion.

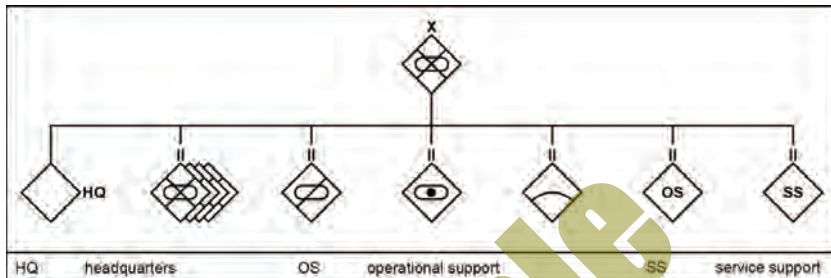


Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 2-4. Light combined arms brigade (doctrinal).

Medium CA-BDE

The medium CA-BDE contains these units—

- Four mechanized CA-BNs.
- One reconnaissance battalion.
- One artillery battalion.
- One air defense battalion.
- One headquarters unit.
- One operational support battalion.
- One service support battalion.

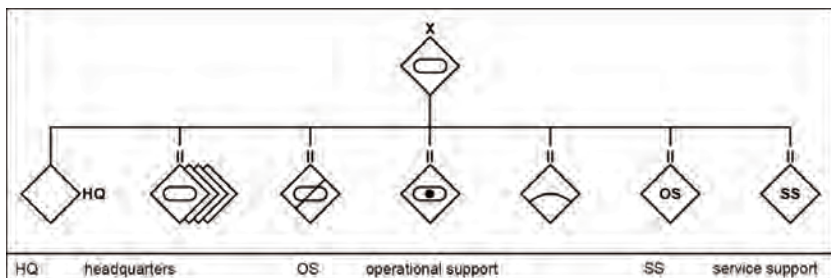


Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 2-5. Medium combined arms brigade (doctrinal).

Heavy CA-BDE

The heavy CA-BDE contains these units—

- Four armored CA-BNs.
- One reconnaissance battalion.
- One artillery battalion.
- One air defense battalion.
- One headquarters unit.
- One operational support battalion.
- One service support battalion.

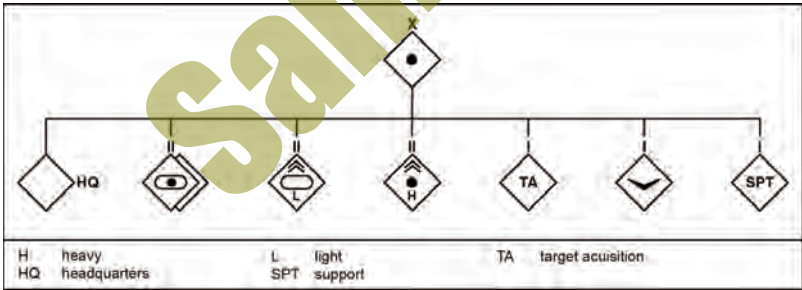


Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 2-6. Heavy combined arms brigade (doctrinal).

B. Artillery Brigade

The artillery brigade in the group army employs a variety of towed guns, self-propelled guns (SPGs), light (122-mm) and heavy (300-mm) rocket artillery systems, and antitank and assault vehicles. These systems are employed to mass fires on critical targets, reinforce fires at lower echelons (chiefly the CA-BDE), deter or deny enemy actions, and offset enemy advantages in close combat. Artillery brigade assets may be employed in direct or general support of CA-BDEs. Artillery battalions include organic surveillance and target acquisition assets, including UAS, electronic intelligence (ELINT) systems, and traditional long-range visual forward-observation platforms. It is not clear how effectively the PLAA can task-organize fires; it traditionally preferred to centralize fires in order to maximize the effects of mass, but the movement toward smaller tactical formations and modularization requires that lower echelons be capable of employing effective fire support. In addition to its indirect fire capability, each artillery battalion includes an antitank guided missile (ATGM) company, employing light armored vehicles mounted with ATGMs. Artillery brigade composition varies significantly based on operational requirements and system availability. A notional artillery brigade contains—

- Two self-propelled 122-mm, 152-mm, or 155-mm towed or self-propelled howitzer battalions (three batteries with four to six guns each, from 24 to 36 guns total).
- One light (122-mm) rocket battalion (three batteries with nine launchers each, 27 launchers total).
- One heavy (300-mm) rocket battalion (12 launchers total).
- One target acquisition battery.
- One UAS company.
- One command battery.
- One support company.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 2-7. Artillery brigade (doctrinal).

C. Air Defense Brigade

The group army's air defense brigade provides the middle tier in the PLA's tiered and layered approach to ground-based air defense. The PLAA historically relied heavily on anti-aircraft guns, both towed and self-propelled (SPAAGs). These systems are still heavily represented in both the air defense brigade and in the air defense battalions of the CA-BDEs. The air defense brigade also employs a mixture of medium-range radar missile systems, short-range missile systems, and sensors designed to support engagement of aerial targets. It is not known to what extent these tactical air defense systems integrate with the much-larger theater-wide air defense networks employed by TCs, but it is likely that at least the medium-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) battalion has some sort of digital integration with a higher air defense echelon. As with artillery systems, air defense units may be employed in mass to defend

B. Peoples Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, Chinese Tactics, (Aug '21), pp. 3-3 to 3-5 and Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 48-52.

The PLAN is the largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 355 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, aircraft carriers, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, and fleet auxiliaries. This figure does not include 85 patrol combatants and craft that carry anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs). The PLAN's overall battle force is expected to grow to 420 ships by 2025 and 460 ships by 2030. Much of this growth will be in major surface combatants. The PLAN's force structure consists of three fleets with subordinate submarine flotillas, surface ship flotillas, aviation brigades, and naval bases. The PLAN's Northern Theater Navy is subordinate to the Northern Theater Command, the Eastern Theater Navy is subordinate to the Eastern Theater Command, and the Southern Theater Navy is subordinate to the Southern Theater Command.

China traditionally relegated its naval forces to a subordinate role behind its ground and strategic rocket forces. Much like the rest of the PLA, however, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) adapted and evolved along with the country throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. This evolution took the PLAN from being a littoral and riverine force to being a viable ocean-going force by 2009. The near-term goal for the PLAN is to evolve into a true "blue water" force by 2035. In practical terms, this means operating aircraft carriers, large surface combatants, a submarine force, a naval air wing, an amphibious assault force, and a logistics force across the Western Pacific and possibly into the Indian Ocean. The initial geographic limitation for this capability is out to the second island chain in the Western Pacific, which includes the Yellow Sea, the South and East China Seas, the Philippine Sea, and possibly the Sea of Japan. The PLAN has also expressed intent to develop a limited global capability, though this requires significant development of overseas basing support, long-range air and sea lift, and a global command and communication network that does not currently exist.

The PLAN is the world's second-largest navy by tonnage and the third-largest by number of major surface combatants. It also employs the world's second-largest submarine force, though the quality and modernity of its submarines varies significantly. The PLAN consists of five branches: the Surface Force, the Submarine Force, the Naval Air Force, the Coastal Defense Force, and the Marine Corps. These forces are deployed in three command navies, each with a specific geographic area of interest. The North Command Navy is responsible for the Yellow Sea, the East Command Navy is responsible for the East China Sea, and the South Command Navy is responsible for the South China Sea.

Surface Force

The Surface Force comprises the PLAN's surface combatant capability. This includes two aircraft carriers, around 20 modern, highly capable guided-missile destroyers, numerous lighter frigates and corvettes, missile boats, amphibious assault ships, and logistics vessels. The PLAN's aircraft carrier capability is still in its infancy, currently consisting of a single operational second-hand Soviet aircraft carrier, but an indig-

PLA Navy (PLAN)

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, p. 54.

Major Naval Units



Key Takeaways

- The PRC has numerically the largest navy in the world with an overall battle force of approximately 355 ships and submarines, including approximately 145 major surface combatants. As of 2020, the PLAN is largely composed of modern multi-role platforms.
- The PRC commissioned its first domestically built aircraft carrier in late 2019 and its first Renhai class cruiser in early 2020. The PRC expects its second domestically built aircraft carrier to enter service by 2024.
- In 2020, the PRC launched its second Yushen class amphibious assault ship (Type 075 LHA) after launching its first in 2019, its first class of large deck amphibious warship. A third hull is also under construction.

I. Submarines

The PLAN has placed a high priority on modernizing its submarine force, but its force structure continues to grow modestly as it works to mature its force, integrate new technologies, and expand its shipyards. The PLAN currently operates six nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs), and 46 diesel-powered attack submarines (SSs). The PLAN will likely maintain between 65 and 70 submarines through the 2020s, replacing older units with more capable units on a near one-to-one basis.

The PRC continues to increase its inventory of conventional submarines capable of firing advanced anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs). Between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, the PLAN purchased 12 Russian-built Kilo class SS units, eight of which are capable of launching ASCMs. China's shipyards have delivered 13 Song class SS (Type 039) and 17 Yuan class diesel-electric (SSPs) (Type 039A/B). The PRC is expected to produce a total of 25 or more Yuan class submarines by 2025.

Over the past 15 years, the PLAN has constructed twelve nuclear submarines – two Shang I class SSNs (Type 093), four Shang II class SSNs (Type 093A), and six Jin class SSBNs (Type 094). Equipped with the CSS-N-14 (JL-2) submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM), the PLAN's six operational Jin class SSBNs represent the PRC's first credible sea-based nuclear deterrent. Each Jin class SSBN can carry up to 12 JL-2 SLBMs. In 2019, Beijing displayed these missiles at the PRC's 70th anniversary parade, revealing that at least a full complement of 12 JL-2s are complete and operational. The PRC's next-generation Type 096 SSBN, which likely began construction in the early 2020s, will reportedly carry a new type of SLBM. The PLAN is expected to operate the Type 094 and Type 096 SSBNs concurrently and could have up to eight SSBNs by 2030. This would align with Chairman Xi Jinping's 2018 directive for the SSBN force to achieve "stronger growth."

By the mid-2020s, the PRC will likely build the Type 093B guided-missile nuclear attack submarine. This new Shang class variant will enhance the PLAN's anti-surface warfare capability and could provide a clandestine land-attack option if equipped with land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs). The PLAN is also improving its anti-submarine warfare capabilities through the development of its surface combatants and special mission aircraft, but it continues to lack a robust deep-water anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability. The PRC is enhancing its ASW inventory and training to better protect the PLAN's aircraft carriers and ballistic missile submarines. The PLA increasingly has emphasized the importance of ASW in achieving China's broader maritime capability goals, to include open seas protection and preserving access to the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean.

II. Surface Combatants

The PLAN remains engaged in a robust shipbuilding program for surface combatants, producing new guided-missile cruisers (CGs), guided-missile destroyers (DDGs) and corvettes (FFLs). These assets will significantly upgrade the PLAN's air defense, anti-ship, and anti-submarine capabilities and will be critical as the PLAN expands its operations beyond the range of the PLA's shore-based air defense systems. By the end of 2019, the PLAN had commissioned its 30th Jiangkai II class guided-missile frigate (FFG), completing the production run while it finalizes a follow-on class with additional units under construction. The PLAN is augmenting its littoral warfare capabilities, especially for operations in the East and South China Seas, with high-rate production of the Jiangdao class FFLs (Type 056). The PLAN commissioned its ninth Jiangdao over the year by mid-2020 with over 50 Jiangdao class FFLs in service out of an expected production run of at least 70 ships. The latest FFLs are anti-submarine warfare (ASW) variants with a towed-array sonar. The PRC has also built 60 Houbei class wave-piercing catamaran guided-missile patrol boats (Type 022) for operations in China's "near seas."

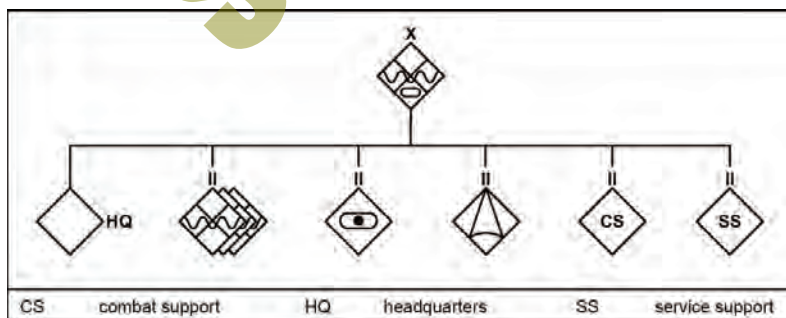
C. Peoples Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 3-4 to 3-5 and Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021*, pp. 52-53.

The People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC) is the PLA's expeditionary amphibious warfare capability. Like the U.S. Marine Corps, it falls under administrative control of the navy, but it is equipped and organized in a manner similar to that of the army. Unlike the U.S. Marine Corps, however, the PLANMC does not have the PLA's heavy amphibious warfare mission—this belongs to the People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA). Instead, the PLANMC should be viewed as a light and strategically mobile force built to conduct expeditionary warfare missions away from Chinese shores.

The PLANMC consists of six maneuver brigades and associated command and support structure, totaling approximately 60,000-80,000 personnel. The PLANMC consists of a mix of mechanized and light forces organized specifically to support amphibious and littoral operations. PLANMC brigades are either assigned to the South Command Navy and focus their operations and training on the South China Sea, or they are held as national-level assets. A PLANMC brigade includes—

- Three combined arms battalions (CA-BNs).
- One self-propelled gun artillery battalion.
- One missile battalion (with man-portable air defense systems [MANPADS] and antitank guided missiles).
- One headquarters unit.
- One combat support battalion.
- One service support battalion.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 3-2. PLANMC brigade (doctrinal).

In addition to the PLAN, China operates both the China Coast Guard (CCG)—which falls under the control of the People's Armed Police (PAP)—and the Maritime Militia under the China Militia. The CCG operates a large number of smaller surface vessels and has responsibility for coastal security, patrol, antipiracy, antismuggling, search and rescue, and maritime police operations. The Maritime Militia operates an exceedingly large number of small surface vessels, most of which are converted or co-opted

D. Peoples Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, Chinese Tactics, (Aug '21), pp. 3-1 to 3-3 and Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 55-57.

The PLAAF and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation forces in the region and the third largest in the world, with over 2,800 total aircraft (not including trainer variants or UAVs) of which approximately 2,250 are combat aircraft (including fighters, strategic bombers, tactical bombers, multi-mission tactical, and attack aircraft). The PLAAF's role is to serve as a comprehensive strategic air force capable of long-range airpower projection. The PRC's 2019 defense white paper described the PLAAF's missions and tasks as transitioning from territorial air defense to "offensive and defensive operations." In 2017, Lieutenant General Ding Laihang assumed the post of PLAAF commander and exhorted the service to build a truly "strategic" air force capable of projecting airpower at a long range. The PLAAF is rapidly catching up to Western air forces. This trend is gradually eroding longstanding and significant U.S. military technical advantages vis-à-vis the PRC in the air domain.

The CMC's intent is to transform the PLAAF into a more effective and capable force that is proficient at conducting joint operations. The PLAAF is comprised of aviation, airborne, air defense, radar, electronic countermeasure, and communications forces. Amid the wide-ranging reorganization of the PLA, the PLAAF has reorganized into five Theater Command Air Forces, established at least six new air bases, and restructured previously subordinate regiments into brigades under the new bases by disbanding its fighter and fighter-bomber divisions.

The People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) is one of the world's largest air forces. Much like the rest of the PLA, the PLAAF is in the midst of a significant reorganization and modernization campaign, moving from employing massive numbers of 1960s-era aircraft with very limited capabilities to employing much smaller numbers of modern 4th-, 4.5th-, and 5th-generation multirole and fighter aircraft. The PLAAF enjoys a suite of capabilities largely comparable to modern Western air forces, including airborne early warning, aerial refueling, heavy and medium transport, and electronic warfare (EW), though relatively few airframes are available for these noncombat missions as compared to the United States Air Force (USAF). The PLAAF also operates a large and advanced ground-based air defense network employing medium- and long-range radar-guided missiles in an integrated, tiered, and layered deployment strategy.

For most of the PLAAF's history, its role has been defending Chinese airspace, with secondary importance given to strike and attack missions and little emphasis on close air support (CAS). This made sense for the period, considering the perceived threats to Chinese territory and the lack of available air-ground communications. As the PLAAF has modernized, greater emphasis has been placed on ground support, but these capabilities are developing and are likely limited in both availability and effectiveness. Although many PLAAF airframes are nominally multirole—meaning they are capable of conducting both air-to-air and air-to-ground missions—few air-to-ground-capable airframes are regularly employed in this mission type.

Most PLAAF combat aircraft date from the Cold War era. This status is changing rapidly, however, as newer and far more-capable types are being both purchased and indigenously produced. This creates a wide spectrum of capabilities within the PLAAF. Older aircraft are not capable of all-weather, around-the-clock operations, especially in ground-attack roles, and they employ mostly non-precision munitions with minimal targeting support. Newer aircraft employ precision-guided munitions, some with standoff capability, with targeting enabled by sophisticated onboard sensor suites. In general, more-capable aircraft are assigned to theaters with higher priority assets, while older aircraft are assigned to less important theaters. Nearly all PLAAF aircraft are either Russian-built, Russian-designed, or evolved from Russian designs. However, unique indigenous designs are starting to reach operational status. PLAAF combat aircraft capabilities are largely similar to those of their Russian equivalents, though the capabilities of the newest 5th-generation low-observable aircraft are not well known in the West.

PLAAF maintenance and logistics capabilities are immature and under-resourced, but they are likely to improve rapidly in the near future. As part of the PLAAF's modernization efforts, maintenance and logistics were relegated to a secondary role behind acquisitions; this in turn had negative impacts on pilot training and aircraft readiness. In addition, the PLAAF had to modernize the relationship between its maintenance and logistics backbone and China's state-run industry. Historically, repair and maintenance was largely outsourced to industry, but this relationship has become increasingly unwieldy in the modern age. The PLA's new expeditionary requirements place further strain on limited maintenance and logistics resources. Solutions to these capability gaps are currently in the conceptual and testing phase, but have yet to be widely implemented.

PLAAF units are organized into brigades, comparable to USAF groups. Brigades are assigned to PLAAF bases, which are the grade equivalent of the U.S. Army's corps and are generally at the disposal of the theater commander. Some high-value PLAAF assets, however, are controlled by national-level headquarters, including some of the newest fighter divisions and the airborne corps.

PLAAF doctrine employs a tiered and layered approach to defending Chinese airspace. Ground-based air defenses in the form of medium- and long-range radar-guided missiles combine with manned aircraft to deny use of airspace to enemy platforms of all types. The PLAAF in general is far less concerned with seizing or maintaining air superiority or air dominance than U.S. forces—it views simply denying the enemy use of airspace to be adequate. PLAAF forces do not have significant capabilities outside of Chinese airspace: excepting a few island airbases off the Chinese coast, neither basing nor aerial refueling capabilities are adequate to project power any significant distance past the Chinese coastline and territorial waters. Expanding power projection across wider areas is a focus of PLAAF training and acquisition. It is likely that the PLAAF can successfully deny use of airspace to any opponent wishing to operate over Chinese territory or ocean areas covered by its surface-to-air missile umbrella.

PLAAF ground-attack capabilities are immature but improving. Around two decades ago, PLAAF attack aircraft were limited to daytime visual attacks using only unguided munitions. Today, the PLAAF operates hundreds of advanced 4th-generation attack aircraft capable of all-weather operations using precision munitions. The primary ground-attack missions of the PLAAF are strike and interdiction. Both of these missions attack targets some distance away from friendly troops, and both generally support the strategic and operational levels of war. PLAAF CAS capabilities are limited due to a lack of training and integration, but they are seen as critical to developing the combined arms brigade (CA-BDE) as a true combined arms force. Efforts are currently underway to advance CAS capabilities. Gaps in CAS operations include a lack of trained forward air controllers, a lack of air-ground communications, and a lack of developed tactics and guidelines for CAS employment.

PLA Air Force (PLAAF)

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, p. 59.

Major Aviation Units (w/ PLAN Aviation)



Key Takeaways

- The PLAAF and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation force in the Indo-Pacific region.
- The PLAAF is rapidly catching up to Western air forces. The PLAAF continues to modernize with the delivery of domestically built aircraft and a wide range of UAVs.
- In October 2019, the PRC signaled the return of the airborne leg of its nuclear triad after the PLAAF publicly revealed the H-6N as its first nuclear-capable air-to-air refuelable bomber.

I. Fighters

The PLAAF and PLAN Aviation continue to field greater numbers of fourth-generation aircraft (now more than 800 of 1,800 total fighters, not including trainers) and probably will become a majority fourth-generation force within the next several years. For fifth-generation fighters, the PLAAF has operationally fielded limited numbers of its new J-20, while development continues on the smaller FC-31/J-31 for export or as a future naval fighter for the PLAN's next class of aircraft carriers. During the PRC's 70th anniversary parade in October 2019, the PLAAF conducted high-profile flyovers of its J-20, and J-16 and J-10C advanced fourth-generation fighters armed with the latest air-to-air missiles (AAMs). In addition, the PRC has received delivery of all 24 Su-35 advanced fourth-generation fighters it purchased from Russia in 2016. Finally, the PLAAF is preparing upgrades for the J-20, which may include increasing the number of AAMs the fighter can carry in its low-observable configuration, installing thrust-vectoring engine nozzles, and adding super cruise capability by installing higher-thrust indigenous WS-15 engines.

II. Bombers

The PRC's bomber force is currently composed of H-6 Badger variants, which are domestically produced versions of the Soviet Tupolev Tu-16 (Badger) bomber. Despite the relative age of its bomber force, the PLAAF has worked to maintain and enhance the operational effectiveness of these aircraft. In recent years, the PRC has fielded greater numbers of the H-6K, a modernized H-6 variant that integrates standoff weapons and features more-efficient turbofan engines for extended-range. The H-6K can carry six LACMs, giving the PLA a long-range standoff precision strike capability that can range targets in the Second Island Chain from home airfields in mainland China. PLAN Aviation has traditionally fielded the H-6G to support maritime missions. More recently, PLAN Aviation has begun operating the H-6J, a maritime strike version of the H-6K with six weapons pylons for ASCMs. This aircraft carries six supersonic long-range YJ-12 ASCMs and can attack warships out to the Second Island Chain – significantly extending PLAN Aviation's reach.

During the PRC's 70th anniversary parade in 2019, the PLAAF publicly revealed the H-6N, a derivative of the H-6K optimized for long-range strikes. The H-6N features a modified fuselage that allows it to carry externally an air-launched ballistic missile (ALBM) that may be nuclear capable. In October 2020, an H-6N was observed carrying an air-launched ballistic missile. The H-6N's air-to-air refueling capability also provides it greater reach over other H-6 variants that are not refuelable in air. As of 2020, the PLAAF has operationally fielded the H-6N bomber, providing a platform for the air component of the PRC's nascent nuclear triad. In 2021, the H-6N-equipped unit very likely will be developing tactics and procedures to conduct the PLAAF nuclear mission. In addition, the PLAAF is seeking to extend its power projection capability with the development of a new stealth strategic bomber, with official PRC state media stating that this new stealth bomber will have a nuclear mission in addition to filling conventional roles. The PLAAF is also developing new medium- and long-range stealth bombers to strike regional and global targets. PLAAF leaders publicly announced the program in 2016, however it may take more than a decade to develop this type of advanced bomber.

III. Special Mission Aircraft

In 2019, the PLAAF publicly debuted its new Y-9 communications jamming/electronic countermeasures aircraft (known as the GX-11). This aircraft is designed to disrupt an adversary's battlespace awareness at long ranges. The PLA can conduct air-to-air refueling operations to extend the ranges of its fighter and bomber aircraft equipped with refueling probes using the H-6U, a modified tanker variant of the H-6 bomber, as well as a small number of larger IL-78 Midas. In addition, the PRC

E. Peoples Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, Chinese Tactics, (Aug '21), pp. 3-5 to 3-6 and Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 60-63.

The People's Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) is the branch responsible for operating China's strategic missile and rocket forces and a substantial portion of the country's long-range tactical missiles. It is the largest missile force in the world, operating well over 1,000 short-range, medium-range, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and over 300 long-range cruise missiles. There is not a U.S. equivalent to the PLARF. U.S. ICBMs are operated by the USAF, a very limited quantity of short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) are operated by the U.S. Army, and both the U.S. Navy and USAF operate cruise missiles.

The PLARF is descended from the Second Artillery Corps, China's original nuclear missile unit. It is a discrete military branch similar to PLAAF or PLAN. The PLARF operates using the same base-brigade-battalion structure as the PLAAF. PLARF bases are corps-grade, and each base operates multiple PLARF brigades. It is unclear exactly how the PLARF command interacts with theater commands (TCs), but it is known that each TC houses a PLARF contingent designed to integrate ballistic missile fires into its operations. PLARF missiles are considered strategic assets, and authority for their use is likely retained at the national level. It is also likely that high-value strategic missile assets, such as ICBMs and long-range ballistic missiles, are to be employed only by national authorities, while SRBM brigades may be attached to TCs in support of their operations.

Key Takeaways

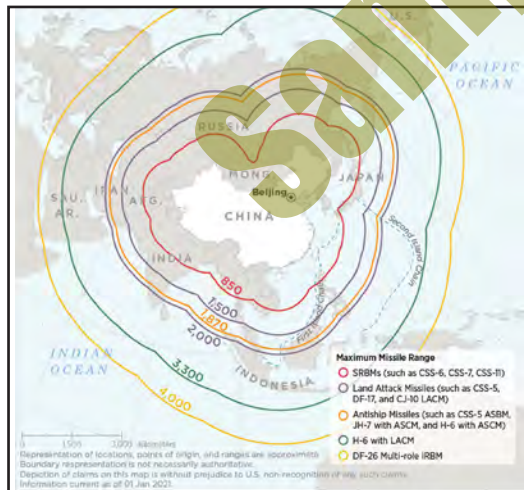
- In 2020, the PLARF advanced its long-term modernization plans to enhance its "strategic deterrence" capabilities.
- In 2020, the PLARF launched more than 250 ballistic missiles for testing and training. This was more than the rest of the world combined.
- In 2020, the PLARF began to field its first operational hypersonic weapons system, the DF-17 hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV) capable medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM).
- The PLARF continues to grow its inventory of DF-26 intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs), which are capable of conducting both conventional and nuclear precision strikes against ground targets as well as conventional strikes against naval targets.
- The PRC is developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that will significantly improve its nuclear-capable missile forces and will require increased nuclear warhead production, partially due to the introduction of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) capabilities. China has commenced building three solid-fueled ICBM silo fields, which will cumulatively contain hundreds of new ICBM silos.
- The number of warheads on the PRC's land-based ICBMs capable of threatening the United States is expected to grow to roughly 200 in the next five years.

PLARF Missile Capabilities

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 60-63.

Conventional

The PLARF fields a variety of conventional mobile ground-launched short-, medium-, and intermediate-range ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles. The PLARF's ground-based missile forces complement the air and sea-based precision strike capabilities of the PLAAF and PLAN. The PLARF's conventional missile forces include the CSS-6 (DF-15) short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) (range 725-850 km); the CSS-7 (DF-11) SRBM (600 km); the CSS-11 (DF-16) SRBM (more than 700 km); land-attack and anti-ship variants of the CSS-5 (DF-21) medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) (approximately 1,500 km); the hypersonic glide vehicle capable DF-17 MRBM; the DF-26 IRBM (approximately 3,000 km); the CJ-10 (DH-10) ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) (approximately 1,500 km); and the CJ-100 (DF-100) GLCM (approximately 2,000 km). The PLARF's conventionally armed CSS-5 Mod 5 (DF-21D) ASBM variant gives the PLA the capability to conduct long-range precision strikes against ships, including aircraft carriers, out to the Western Pacific from mainland China. The DF-21D has a range exceeding 1,500 km, is fitted with a maneuverable reentry vehicle (MaRV), and is reportedly capable of rapidly reloading in the field. The PLARF continues to grow its inventory of DF-26 IRBMs, which it first revealed in 2015 and fielded in 2016. The multi-role DF-26 is designed to rapidly swap conventional and nuclear warheads and is capable of conducting precision land-attack and anti-ship strikes in the Western Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea from mainland China. In 2020, the PRC fired anti-ship ballistic missiles against a moving target in the South China Sea, but has not acknowledged doing so. In 2020, the PRC had begun operational fielding of the DF-17 hypersonic glide vehicle capable MRBM, with fielding possibly intended to replace some older SRBM units, according to PRC media.

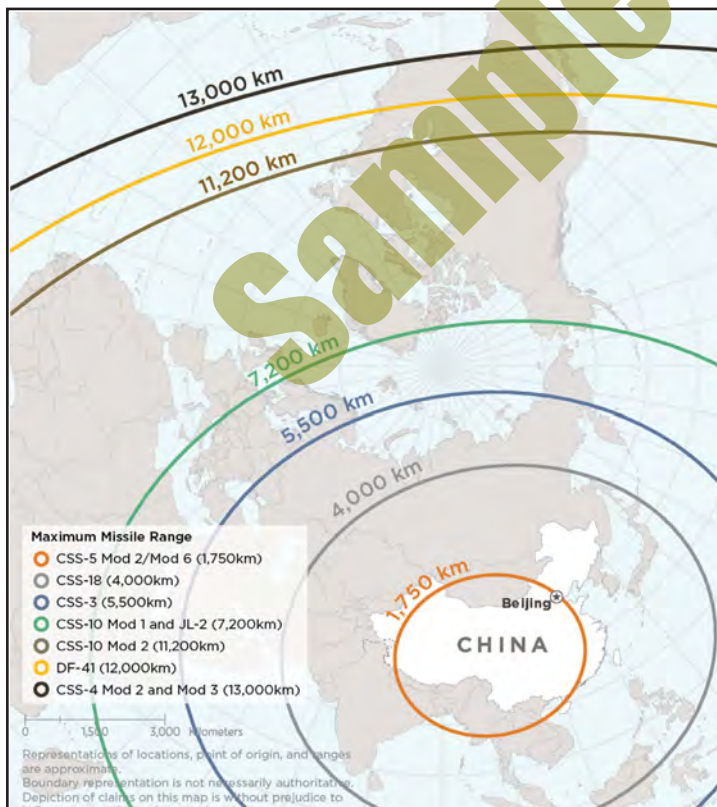


Conventional strike ranges
(Annual Report to Congress:
Military and Security
Developments Involving the
People's Republic of China
2021, p. 62.)

The PLARF is developing and testing several new variants of theater-range missiles and developing capabilities and methods to counter adversary BMD systems. This was more than the rest of the world combined excluding ballistic missile employment in conflict zones. The DF-17 passed several tests successfully and is deployed operationally. While the DF-17 is primarily a conventional platform, it may be equipped with nuclear warheads. In 2020, a PRC-based military expert described the primary purpose of the DF-17 as striking foreign military bases and fleets in the Western Pacific.

Nuclear

The PLARF is developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that will significantly improve its nuclear-capable missile forces with more survivable delivery systems and will require increased nuclear warhead production, partially due to the introduction of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) capabilities. Already, the PRC appears to be doubling the numbers of launchers in some ICBM units. The PRC's ICBM arsenal consists of approximately 100 ICBMs, including fixed and mobile launchers capable of launching unitary and multiple reentry vehicles. China's fixed ICBMs consist of the shorter range CSS-3 (DF-4), as well as the silo-based CSS-4 Mod 2 (DF-5A) and MIRV-equipped Mod 3 (DF-5B), which is capable of carrying up to five MIRVs. PRC media indicates a follow-on DF-5C may be in development. The solid-fueled, road-mobile CSS-10 class and CSS-20 (DF-41) ICBMs complement this force. The CSS-10 Mod 2 (DF-31A), with a range in excess of 11,000 km, can reach most locations within the continental United States. PRC media reports suggest a DF-31B might also be in development. The DF-41 ICBM has been operationally deployed with commentary during the 2019 parade noting that two brigades existed for the system. The PRC appears to be considering additional DF-41 launch options, including rail-mobile and silo basing. The PRC is building multiple ICBM silos intended to support the land-based component of the PRC's nuclear triad. Additionally, sources indicate a "long-range" DF-27 ballistic missile is in development. Official PRC military writings indicate this range-class spans 5,000-8,000km, which means the DF-27 could be a new IRBM or ICBM.



Nuclear ballistic missile ranges (Annual Report to Congress, 2021, p. 63.)

F. Peoples Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (SSF)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 3-6 to 3-7 and Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021*, pp. 64-68.

In 2016, the PLA established the People's Liberation Army Strategic Support Force (PLASSF). The PLASSF is a unified command with responsibility for national-level space, cyber, and EW missions, along with national-level intelligence support to military operations and information operations. There is not a U.S. equivalent to the PLASSF. It mixes capabilities taken from numerous military and nonmilitary government agencies under a single command, much of which is controlled directly by the Central Military Commission (CMC).

The PLASSF represents the evolution of several basic Chinese warfighting principles into a unified command structure. It combines numerous capabilities along the competition continuum and seeks to employ them in a more structured and coherent way than the largely piecemeal approach previously used by the PLA. The PLASSF emphasizes system warfare as its underlying operational principle, seeking to find asymmetric approaches to neutralizing or otherwise offsetting highly capable enemy systems.

Key Takeaways

- The PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF) is a theater command-level organization established to centralize the PLA's strategic space, cyber, electronic, information, communications, and psychological warfare missions and capabilities.
- The SSF's Network Systems Department is responsible for information warfare with a mission set that includes cyberwarfare, technical reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare.
- PRC continues to develop counterspace capabilities—including direct ascent, co-orbital, electronic warfare, and directed energy capabilities—that can contest or deny an adversary's access to and operations in the space domain during a crisis or conflict.
- The PRC's space enterprise continues to mature rapidly and Beijing has devoted significant resources to growing all aspects of its space program, from military space applications to civil applications such as profit-generating launches, scientific endeavors, and space exploration.

The PLASSF was likely developed to help reduce the PLA's acknowledged shortcomings in joint operations, particularly joint intelligence collection and distribution. It echoes the general PLA trend to centralize capabilities that are deemed insufficient or immature, with the intent of managing them more effectively at a national level. The PLASSF also supports the PLA's initiative toward Military-Civil Fusion. The intent is to enhance cooperation between the PLA, nonmilitary organizations, and industry. This initiative is most clear when it comes to space capabilities: the PLASSF will likely work very closely with the China National Space Administration and the country's space industry partners to develop dual-use space capabilities. The advantage to this approach is that it allows military space development while being minimally provocative internationally, as all initiatives have a legitimate civilian purpose.

Tactical System Warfare

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), chap 4.

This chapter provides an overview of system warfare as it is applied at tactical echelons. System warfare is the basic theoretical construct the People's Liberation Army (PLA) uses to build capabilities at all echelons. People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA) units historically did not often task-organize, especially at tactical echelons; as such, the system warfare concept is relatively immature at these levels. System warfare requires a modular approach and substantial task organization in order to be successful. It also requires enhanced cooperation between sister and adjacent units, a skill that is similarly underdeveloped in PLAA formations. Nonetheless, it appears that the PLAA is deeply committed to the system warfare methodology, and it will likely govern PLAA tactical operations for the foreseeable future.

I. Tactical System Warfare Principles

Land warfare traditionally involves imposing one's will upon an uncooperative opponent by the use of direct lethal attack or threat of attack. Maneuver is the process by which one puts oneself in an advantageous position to conduct an attack. Thus, ground combat components traditionally maneuver with the objective of physically isolating their opponents, then defeating them in detail; creating numerical or firepower advantages at key positions on the battlefield; or deceiving opponents into believing their position to be hopeless or otherwise indefensible. The PLAA still views land warfare through this lens, but it sees attacks that do not directly target one's opponent with the threat of physical danger as equal to or more important than direct lethal attacks on the modern battlefield. For example, an opponent may be isolated by disabling network or communications connectivity, rather than by being physically surrounded and cut off. An opponent may believe its position untenable by having vulnerable nodes of its systems rendered ineffective, rather than having the entire system destroyed. An opponent may view continued resistance as futile—not because of the direct threat of physical force—but because it has been deceived into thinking its situation is hopeless. In other words, system warfare takes the basic principles outlined by Sun Tzu and Mao and applies them to conflict utilizing modern, high-technology weapons systems that are manned and operated by professional soldiers.

The PLA describes system warfare using several different official names, including system destruction warfare and system confrontation. All of these terms refer to the same basic concept: a type of conflict wherein systems clash with one another in an attempt to neutralize, destroy, or offset key capabilities and thus grant one side a decisive advantage. System warfare differs from traditional Western military thinking in that it does not necessarily consider the human doing the fighting as the most important element of a combat system. Humans are viewed as subcomponents of a system of systems, to be assessed and targeted much as any other subcomponent. System warfare represents Military Thought supporting the Defense Theory and Defense Doctrine concepts within People's War in Conditions of Informationization. (See chapter 1 for more information on Defense Theory and Defense Doctrine.) The backbone of the system of systems is the network; the importance of this backbone in-turn gave rise to the concept of network-centric warfare.

The system warfare concept consists of two basic ideas: creating purpose-built operational systems that combine key capabilities under a single command, and the

use of these operational systems to asymmetrically target and exploit vulnerable components of an opponent's system. If done effectively, this method will render the opponent's key systems ineffective or otherwise unable to function. The PLA believes that by effectively destroying, isolating, neutralizing, or offsetting key capabilities, the enemy's will or ability to resist will degrade and victory will be achieved. Building operational systems is similar to creating task forces, but broader in scope, attempting to create a comprehensive suite of capabilities under a single command. An operational system consists of a number of groups—subordinate entities that are custom-built for a specific mission, task, or purpose. Virtually every battlefield function is represented by one or more groups; this publication discusses only the most significant groups as employed by tactical-level units.

At the tactical level, operational groups are also referred to as combat teams or combat groups. While the PLAA stresses a modular approach to building operational systems, it also recognizes that the less radical the reorganization, the more cohesive a unit will be. The combined arms battalion (CA-BN) structure is designed to reflect this. It is the basic building block of the tactical operational system, and it is intended to be employed in something close to its organic or peacetime configuration. Conversely, the combined arms brigade (CA-BDE) is intended to be easily augmented or task-organized as conditions dictate, flexibly employing a variety of subordinate CA-BNs, supporting battalions, or other nonorganic capabilities.

II. Planning and Organizing PLAA Operations

The PLAA places great emphasis on planning. A meticulous approach to operations underpins the PLAA throughout its history, and this tradition remains in place today. Though the PLAA seeks to gradually move to an increasingly decentralized leadership philosophy, careful planning at all echelons will remain a basic principle.

Movement toward greater decentralization, modular combined arms units, widespread downsizing, and the creation of new headquarters at the national and theater command levels have significantly complicated the PLAA's employment of command and support relationships. The PLAA was traditionally a strongly centralized and hierarchical force, relying on a mixture of discipline and obedience to overcome shortages in combat technology and firepower. The evolved PLAA recognizes that greater decentralization requires a more sophisticated understanding of command and support relationships; improved professional military education for commanders, staffs, and noncommissioned officers; continued PLAA doctrinal adjustments as new equipment and technologies enter the force; and a task-oriented approach that underpins the challenging requirement of building operational systems.

A. PLAA Planning Process

The PLAA planning process is broadly similar to the U.S. Army's military decision-making process. The primary outputs of the planning process are the objectives and scheme of maneuver, along with the structure of the operational system being used to conduct the operation.

See following pages (pp 3-4 to 3-5) for an overview and further discussion.

B. PLAA Control Measures

The PLAA employs zones to define the combat area—a designated area assigned to a military, paramilitary, or security force in which combat or security operations occur—for both offensive and defensive actions. These are made up of several secondary zones or areas; each has specific characteristics and is designed to be occupied by one or more groups. Control measures are established for each echelon and are typically nested within the combat area for the higher echelon unit.

See pp 3-6 to 3-7 for an overview and further discussion.

I. China's Influence Operations

Ref: Office of the Secretary of Defense Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2021, pp. 132 to 135.

Key Takeaways

- The PRC conducts influence operations, which target cultural institutions, media organizations, business, academic, and policy communities in the United States, other countries, and international institutions, to achieve outcomes favorable to its strategic objectives.
- The CCP seeks to condition domestic, foreign, and multilateral political establishments and public opinion to accept Beijing's narratives and remove obstacles preventing attainment of goals.

CCP leaders probably consider open democracies, including the United States, as more susceptible to influence operations than other types of governments.

- The PLA has emphasized the development of its "Three Warfares" concept— comprised of psychological warfare, public opinion warfare, and legal warfare—in its operational planning since at least 2003. The PLA will likely continue to develop its digital influence capabilities by incorporating advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the quality and deniability of its messaging.

Since at least 2003, the PLA has been developing the "Three Warfares" concept to demoralize adversaries and influence foreign and domestic public opinion during conflicts. Psychological warfare uses propaganda, deception, threats, and coercion to affect the adversary's decision-making, while also countering adversary psychological operations. Public opinion warfare disseminates information for public consumption to guide and influence public opinion and gain support from domestic and international audiences. Legal warfare uses international and domestic laws to gain international support, manage political repercussions, and sway target audiences. The PRC views the cyber domain as an emerging and ideal platform providing opportunities for influence operations, and the PLA likely seeks to use digital influence activities to support its overall "Three Warfares" concept and to undermine an adversary's resolve in a contingency or conflict.

Consistent with this strategy, the PRC conducts influence operations to achieve outcomes favorable to its security and military strategy objectives by targeting cultural institutions, media organizations, business, academic, and policy communities of the United States, other countries, and international institutions. The CCP seeks to condition domestic, foreign, and multilateral political establishments and public opinion to accept the PRC's narrative surrounding its priorities such as promulgation of Beijing's "one China principle," OBOR, the CCP's political control over Hong Kong, and South China Sea territorial and maritime claims. PRC influence operations are coordinated at a high level and executed by a range of actors, such as the United Front Work Department, the Propaganda Department, and the Ministry of State Security (MSS).

A cornerstone of the PRC's strategy includes appealing to overseas PRC citizens or ethnic Chinese citizens of other countries to advance the Party's objectives through soft power engagements. The PRC also sometimes uses coercion or blackmail to manipulate overseas PRC citizens to conduct influence operations on behalf of the

PRC, such as threatening ethnic Uyghurs living in the United States with imprisonment of their family members. PRC intelligence services often facilitate these operations. Additionally, the PRC targets ethnic Chinese citizens of other countries to support its foreign technology acquisition strategy; it's "Thousand Talents Program" targets people of ethnic Chinese descent or recent PRC emigrants whose recruitment the PRC government views as necessary to the PRC's scientific and technical modernization, especially with regard to defense technology. Furthermore, the PRC harnesses academia and educational institutions, think tanks, and state-run media to advance its soft power campaign in support of Beijing's security interests.

The PRC's foreign influence activities are predominately focused on establishing and maintaining influence with power brokers within foreign governments to promote policies that the PRC's views will facilitate its rise, despite Beijing's stated position of not interfering in foreign countries' internal affairs. The PRC's diplomatic outreach stresses building personal rapport with influential people, providing assistance, and emphasizing "win-win cooperation" through trade and diplomacy. This approach allows the PRC to offer expedited, small-scale accomplishments for partners abroad, often in exchange for seemingly symbolic gestures that support the PRC's long-term strategic goals. Some countries have begun to implement policy responses to the PRC's influence activities, including within the European Union, Australia, and New Zealand.

The PRC uses multilateral forums and organizations to generate new opportunities to pursue bilateral engagements with countries to expand its defense influence and security cooperation, strengthen its political influence, and limit outside interference in its initiatives. The PRC promotes strategic messaging portraying the PRC as a responsible global actor through organizations such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as forums such as the Forum on China Africa Cooperation, China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, and the Belt and Road Forum.

The PLA seeks to employ digital influence operations—overt and covert influence activities conducted through the Internet and social media platforms—during peacetime and wartime. During a conflict, the PRC could use digital influence activities to undermine enemy morale and confuse or deceive adversary decision makers. In wartime or peacetime, PLA goals for social media influence activities fall into three broad categories: promote a narrative favorable to the PRC, undermine adversary resolve, and shape foreign governments' policies in favor of Beijing's interests.

Since at least 2009, the PLA has expressed concern about the United States' perceived use of the Internet and social media to undermine CCP power in China. In response, the PLA has been conducting research into conducting digital influence operations and learning best practices from other countries, sending delegations to Russia, Israel, Belarus, and Germany to study how to use social media for military influence operations.

The PLA has a variety of public-facing social media accounts that it uses for overt messaging. These accounts are exclusively on PRC social media platforms, however, and have little to no international reach. Recently, PLA officials have discussed creating an official PLA account on Twitter, and other Western social media accounts. Although, due to rising popularity of PRC social media applications with Western audiences, the need for a PLA presence on traditional Western platforms may decline.

The PLA likely also conducts covert digital influence activities on social media to support public opinion warfare objectives. PLA analysts are studying how to use covert social media accounts to target users for political influence, and PLA SSF personnel may have conducted a covert social media campaign to support pro-PRC candidates and try to sway the outcome of the 2018 Taiwan election.

The PLA will likely continue to develop its digital influence capabilities by incorporating advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the quality and deniability of its messaging. The PLA has expressed interest in researching the technological requirements for the creation of deepfakes. In 2019, PLA personnel also suggested training AI algorithms to autonomously create content and coordinate influence activity between different fake accounts.

II. Tactical Information Operations (IO)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), chap 5.

This chapter outlines the characteristics and principles that govern People's Liberation Army (PLA) and People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA) information operations at tactical echelons. In keeping with the teachings of Sun Tzu, the PLA considers information operations to be at least as important—if not more important—than maneuver or firepower. Deception, trickery, and concealment are to be employed extensively throughout the information operations campaign in order to manipulate the enemy commander's state of mind, the morale of enemy troops, and the enemy's understanding of the battlefield to the PLAA's advantage.

*Note. The concept of information operations will be used in this document consistent with the Chinese expression *xinxi zuozhan*. This is similar to the U.S. DOD term information operations, though it is not as inclusive. Chinese information operations include information warfare, concealment, deception (general efforts to mislead an opponent), and trickery (specific plans targeted at a particular opponent). The Chinese expression for information warfare, *xinxi zhan*, refers to direct, specific offensive and defensive actions, such as EW and cyber warfare, and is not analogous to the U.S. concept of information warfare that pertains to an opposing force.*

I. Overview of PLA Information Operations

Information operations (IO) are comprised of the wide variety of lethal and nonlethal capabilities with the intent to influence the information environment. This includes information attack and defense, psychological warfare, and deception, trickery, and concealment efforts. The PLA considers IO to be a constant and ongoing effort before, during, and after conflict. Information warfare (IW)—also known as information confrontation—is a subcomponent of IO, and it consists of specific offensive and defensive information actions that are in direct support of military operations. Along with maneuver, firepower, special operations, and psychological warfare, IW is conducted as part of a campaign, usually referred to as campaign information warfare. This is defined by the Chinese as a series of integrated operational battlefield activities that target enemy sensors, information channels, information processing, and decision making. The PLA views IO as a zero-sum activity: they involve both attack and defense, and any information advantages gained in one area may be lost in another. As such, both information attack and defense are considered critical.



Refer to INFO1: *The Information Operations & Capabilities SMARTBOOK (Guide to Information Operations & the IRCs)*. INFO1 chapters and topics include information operations (IO defined and described), information in joint operations (joint IO), information-related capabilities (PA, CA, MILDEC, MISO, OPSEC, CO, EW, Space, STO), information planning (information environment analysis, IPB, MDMP, JPP), information preparation, information execution (IO working group, IO weighted efforts and enabling activities, intel support), fires & targeting, and information assessment.

II. Principles & Characteristics of IO

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 5-3 to 5-4.

Principles

Four principles describe the PLA's concept of IO: actively attack, target nodes, achieve synthesis, and protect tightly.

A. Actively Attack

Attack is the primary method by which initiative is gained in an IO campaign. The PLA stresses aggressive and integrated attack methods early in the conflict as the best way to ensure information superiority. Further, in an information war it is harder to steal or regain the initiative once it is lost, so greater emphasis is placed on seizing information superiority early in the campaign. Three specific characteristics of IO contribute to the focus on early action: its clandestine nature and ease of concealment; the low requirements on manpower and material resources, making operational sustainment relatively easy; and the inherent vulnerabilities of information systems due to their reliance on the electromagnetic spectrum. A strong initial attack takes advantage of these characteristics, but it requires the conditions to be set long before active hostilities commence.

B. Target Nodes

The Chinese define a node as a critical component of an information system that either provides a capability or links other nodes. In this context it refers primarily to sensors, information processing centers, and the network backbone that enables them. Nodal attack attempts to identify, isolate, and target these objects, and it is the centerpiece of the IO campaign. Destroying or neutralizing nodes has the highest efficiency of any IW operation: if a critical node is destroyed or neutralized, then all systems reliant on it become either degraded or disabled. Nodal attack embodies the basic principle of targeting points of weakness rather than strength and, if applied appropriately, it can concurrently weaken strong points of the enemy system through isolation and confusion. It is best employed in an integrated manner along with psychological attack in order to maximize confusion and extend the effects of nodal destruction.

C. Achieve Synthesis

Synthesis in the context of an IO campaign implies a variety of different measures all intended to carefully align, synchronize, and coordinate different IW efforts. This includes coordinating information attack and defense to maximize the efficiency of both; assuring deconfliction between different efforts so that one effort does not interfere with another; ensuring that all efforts are unified in their movement towards a clear objective; and focusing on building mutually supportive efforts that in turn create a combined arms effect.

Adjustment is an analogue to synthesis: it refers to the act of assessing and changing operations quickly and without the need for extensive planning. IO are inherently fluid; changes are rapid and often unpredictable. Agility in operations is vital to ensuring IW efforts are targeting the right objects and achieving desired effects. The primary focus of adjustment is to evaluate different friendly systems and their respective targets, then deconflict actions between them.

D. Protect Tightly

Attack is viewed as the most important basic requirement in campaign IW. The corollary to this axiom is that one must blunt the enemy's attacks in order to effectively gain information superiority. The PLA views information defense as fundamentally more difficult than information attack due to the broad reliance upon—and disparity in—information systems. Because of the wide variety of different points of vulnerability, comprehensive information defense is a practical impossibility—so building systems with resiliency and

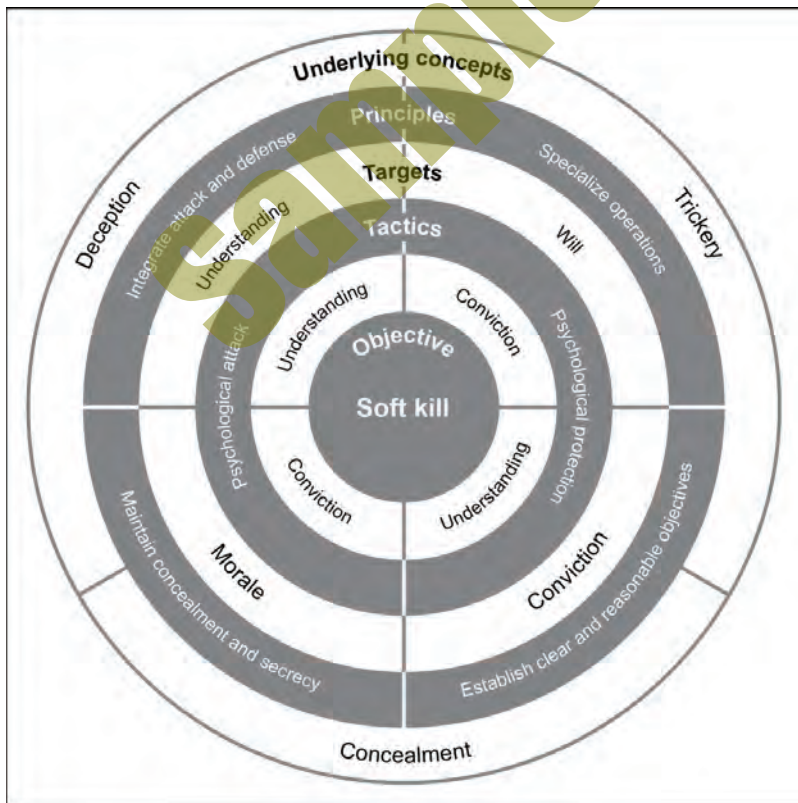
III. PLA Psychological Warfare

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), chap 5.

I. Overview of PLA Psychological Warfare

Chinese psychological warfare encompasses those IO activities wherein a combatant employs information and media in order to target human thought, emotion, and spirit. At tactical echelons, the objective of psychological warfare is to create a psychological condition favorable to friendly forces and unfavorable to the enemy, reducing enemy morale, and consequently, the enemy's will to resist. The PLA views psychological warfare as the operational element of the fundamental reason for conflict: a contest of wills. As such, the PLA notably prioritizes psychological operations. Psychological warfare is considered a fourth operational mode, in addition to land, air, and sea warfare. An effective psychological warfare campaign is considered to be the best possible trade-off, paying a small price in lives and material for as big a victory as possible.

Note. The PLA appears to categorize domains in much the same way as does the United States, but its categorization of psychological warfare as an operational mode is unique. It is unclear how operational modes differ from domains.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 5-2. *Chinese psychological warfare*.

I. Reconnaissance Actions

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 6-1 to 6-12.

The People's Liberation Army (PLAA) places a high priority on its reconnaissance and security operations. These are integral to creating and sustaining situational awareness, and they are seen as essential to developing an advantage over one's opponent. System warfare and the application of combat systems are underpinned at all levels by extensive reconnaissance. PLAA maneuver units place a high priority on mounted and dismounted reconnaissance: these units are seen as prestigious, and their soldiers and leaders are highly regarded. Ground reconnaissance remains the chief method by which tactical units gain intelligence on their enemies, but air, space, and electronic reconnaissance are all integrated to varying degrees, even at tactical echelons.

PLAA security operations are linked to ground reconnaissance. Their primary intent is to protect main-body formations, give commanders information and decision space, and enable effective risk assessment. The People's Armed Police (PAP) also conduct combat and area security operations, both domestically and in support of PLAA operations. In combat, the PLAA and PAP likely cooperate and coordinate to ensure security throughout the combat area.

I. Reconnaissance Fundamentals

Recognizing the changes brought by the informationized battlefield, the PLAA invested substantial time and resources in developing its reconnaissance capabilities. Throughout the Cold War, PLAA units had only light mounted scouts and unreliable manned aircraft to conduct reconnaissance. Despite experiences in the Korean War and the basic tenets of People's War that underpinned the need for effective reconnaissance operations, the PLAA approach during this era was generally to conduct a massive reconnaissance effort using primitive methods and obsolete equipment. The post-reform PLAA, however, places heavy emphasis on advanced reconnaissance methods: more-advanced surveillance platforms, advanced techniques and better training, mechanization and motorization, and intelligence integration. Modern PLAA reconnaissance doctrine is designed to support a sophisticated mechanized force and the system warfare approach.

PLAA reconnaissance operations obtain information, develop situational understanding, support decision making and actions, and protect key elements of combat power. Reconnaissance and security operations are seen as continuous. Their most important role is providing early and accurate warning of adversary or enemy actions and intent, information about enemy dispositions and mindset, and decision space for commanders at all echelons. The PLAA puts a high priority on reconnaissance operations of all types, considering a commander's situational awareness to be a key factor in being able to detect and exploit enemy weaknesses. Reconnaissance and security missions are typically interwoven with combined arms mission tasks. Reconnaissance is considered an ongoing task that is conducted before, during, and after operations. PLAA leaders match reconnaissance capabilities with missions, seeking to ensure that reconnaissance efforts support coordinated intelligence collection efforts.

The PLAA recognizes four key fundamental principles when conducting reconnaissance at all echelons: continuous, command-directed, performed through action, and agile. See p. 6-3.

IV. Reconnaissance Capabilities

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 6-3 to 6-5.

The PLAA considers reconnaissance an all-arms occupation, and basic training in reconnaissance, patrolling, reporting, and assessing is provided for all PLAA soldiers. Specialized reconnaissance units, along with SOF, reconnaissance systems, and national-level assets, provide a comprehensive suite of sensors intended to give the intelligence officer a wide-ranging menu of options with which to fulfill intelligence requirements.

Soldiers and units are the most basic reconnaissance assets. All soldiers are trained on the basics of observation, recording, patrolling, and assessing enemy formations. Collecting information of this type has not historically been a strength of the PLAA. Soldiers were often unable to report developments to their commander due to poor upward communication, a lack of literacy, and poor communications infrastructure. PLAA reforms seek to offset this historic weakness through enhanced training, better-quality recruits, a more decentralized command approach, and an emphasis on bottom-up messaging.

Observer teams are the most basic dedicated reconnaissance element. They may be trained scout troops or they may be soldiers tasked to perform observation. The observer team functions as a stationary element typically assigned to observe a particular target, most often a piece of key terrain. The observer team then informs its higher echelon command if and when an enemy unit occupies or traverses this terrain. Observer teams are usually not charged with conducting direct action, though they may be given a security mission in addition to their reconnaissance task. Placing and managing observer teams is a basic competency for lower-level PLAA leaders. Observer teams often form the first security line for a deployed unit, screening the unit's main body and giving the unit's commander decision time and space in the event that enemy contact is made. Observer teams may be augmented by unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) or other advanced surveillance systems; simple unmanned aircraft (UA) may be operated by the observer team without additional support.

The **scout team** is one of the oldest and most important reconnaissance capabilities in the PLAA. Previous generations relied heavily on the simple two-man dismounted team to provide most ground intelligence—probes to determine enemy disposition, weak points, and avenues of approach were virtually all performed by two-man scout teams. The basic mission of the scout team is the patrol: a movement designed to surveil one or more reconnaissance objectives over a specified geographic area. The scout team remains a key element of reconnaissance; trained scouts are present in all units down to the company level. Scouts today are often mounted, allowing them to conduct patrols over wider areas. They also often have direct communications back to their headquarters element, allowing for real-time updates to commanders. Scout teams may also be augmented by UAS or electronic surveillance capabilities, and many scout teams can operate small UASs without additional support.

The **CA-BDE's reconnaissance platoons**, housed within the reconnaissance battalion, provide the bulk of the brigade's long-range reconnaissance patrol capability. The reconnaissance platoon is capable of conducting independent patrols over several days, deploying numerous scout teams over a wide area to perform reconnaissance and security tasks. These platoons operate small organic UA to enhance ground surveillance operations. The reconnaissance platoon may have a direct communications link to the CA-BDE's artillery battalion in order to facilitate rapid artillery fire on time-sensitive targets or to facilitate reconnaissance-by-fire operations. Reconnaissance units also conduct raids, a form of hit-and-run direct action aimed at forcing a confrontation with enemy formations. Raids may be used to reveal enemy positions, to seize enemy prisoners, or to disrupt enemy maneuver. Reconnaissance platoons are likely fully motorized, with heavy CA-BDE reconnaissance platoons operating armored vehicles, such as eight-by-eight light armored vehicles or infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), in a cavalry-type role. Special-

ized cavalry fighting vehicles equipped with radars and other sophisticated sensors are being fielded, but there are still of relatively few of them. Reconnaissance platoons work in concert with SOF units, particularly those SOF units assigned to the SOF brigade of the group army. In most cases, the reconnaissance battalion comprises the core of the CA-BDE's reconnaissance intelligence system.

Each CA-BDE houses numerous **UASs**, with some in the reconnaissance battalion and some in the artillery battalion. These units operate group two and possibly group three UA, enabling aerial surveillance with a sophisticated suite of sensors in a maximum combat radius of roughly 80 km to 100 km. Sensor options available include simple visual sensors, advanced electro-optical telescopic sensors, infrared sensors, radars, and passive SIGINT sensors. Many PLAA UA are reconfigurable based on mission requirements, allowing commanders to tailor sensor suites to support the collection plan. The reconnaissance battalion's UASs support the ground reconnaissance efforts of the battalion, and they may be task-organized to support reconnaissance platoon operations, particularly long-range or long-endurance patrols.

Each group army operates an **aviation brigade**, which in turn operates a significant number of scout helicopters. Basic aerial reconnaissance has been a key capability of the PLAA for decades, but dedicated scout helicopters are a relatively new addition. It is likely that aviation brigade assets will be task-organized to subordinate CA-BDEs based on mission priority. In many cases, a CA-BDE may be assigned a section of scout helicopters in order to support its collection plans. Scout helicopters are typically light utility helicopters equipped with advanced sensors and limited weaponry, and they can provide direct air-ground communications to CA-BDE leaders as they conduct reconnaissance patrols over wide geographic areas. Scout helicopters may also communicate directly to attack aviation or artillery units, providing elevated forward observation in support of firepower operations.

The CA-BDE employs limited **technical reconnaissance** capabilities. These include electronic intelligence (ELINT) and SIGINT systems that support collection efforts through surveillance of the electromagnetic spectrum. PLAA systems of this type were traditionally limited to simple radio direction-finding equipment; ELINT and SIGINT operations were clearly less important than ground patrols. PLAA reforms place much greater emphasis on ELINT and SIGINT, particularly in support of reconnaissance and counterfire operations. PLAA tactical-level ELINT and SIGINT capabilities include radio direction finding, network surveillance, radar detection, and fire finding. These capabilities are rare, and the doctrine and training surrounding their deployment is immature. The systems fielded may vary widely in capability. PLAA commanders also employ decoy systems, designed to spoof, jam, or deceive enemy collection systems, as part of their intelligence operations. CA-BDEs will likely receive significant ELINT and SIGINT intelligence support from group army collection efforts and regional military capabilities such as dedicated ELINT and SIGINT surveillance aircraft.

SOF at the group army provide an enhanced long-range ground patrol capability that can be employed either alongside or in addition to the operations of the reconnaissance battalion. Long-range patrolling is considered a key competence for PLA SOF. Small SOF units are capable of conducting days-long patrols both in direct support of CA-BDEs and in deep reconnaissance areas.

Joint and national assets may provide information to CA-BDE commanders and intelligence officers. These assets include rare and highly capable ELINT and SIGINT platforms, satellite surveillance, cyber intelligence, and political intelligence. The degree to which these collection assets are available to the CA-BDE vary significantly. A CA-BDE, for instance, may receive direct support from a space-based asset for a high-priority mission, but it may only passively access national-level intelligence data at other times. National-level assets also contribute heavily to deception campaigns, providing disinformation and decoy efforts that support tactical operations. Wide-area deception operations are considered a very high-priority mission, but it is unclear how effectively they are coordinated with activities at tactical echelons.

V. Forms of Tactical Reconnaissance

The PLAA frames tactical reconnaissance in much the same way as the U.S. Army. Ground reconnaissance efforts are tailored to meet specific intelligence collection requirements using one or more forms of reconnaissance. Information superiority at tactical levels begins with a comprehensive and well-executed reconnaissance plan. Tactical reconnaissance efforts are integrated with operational and strategic intelligence efforts to provide the commander with a holistic picture of the battlefield, inform rapid and effective decision making, and deny or deceive enemy collection efforts.

The PLAA recognizes two primary forms of tactical reconnaissance: combat reconnaissance and search.

A. Combat Reconnaissance

Combat reconnaissance consists of those reconnaissance activities that involve direct action against the enemy. These are implemented before or during a larger operation to inform the commander's decision making as the battle unfolds. Combat reconnaissance is the centerpiece of most PLAA reconnaissance activities, and great emphasis is placed on winning the information battle during aggressive reconnaissance activities. All combat reconnaissance techniques are designed to force the enemy to make a decision—usually related to whether or not to engage—and in doing so, revealing its disposition, strength, or other capabilities.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 6-1. Combat reconnaissance (example).

III. The Security Operation Process

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, Chinese Tactics, (Aug '21), pp. 6-13 to 6-14.

PLAA security missions broadly follow four steps: assignment, position selection and occupation, security conduction, and retreat.

Step 1 - Assign the Mission

This step is essentially identical to most PLAA operational planning. It involves assessing friendly and enemy forces, the higher echelon mission, coordination measures, and available time. Security missions place a high premium on assessing the enemy's courses of action—specifically the possible directions of attack.

Step 2 - Choose and Occupy Positions

Security forces often have some latitude in choosing their positions, and orders may not include specific battle positions for subordinate units. As such, lower echelon commanders may be charged with choosing their own positions based on their best judgment. Positions should be selected based on the expected actions of the enemy, the strength of the position and its ability to blunt or disrupt enemy activity, and how favorable the terrain is to retrograde movement. Positions should be occupied secretly if at all possible, and subordinate units should have a clear concept of when to engage and when to retreat.

Step 3 - Conduct Security Operations

There are three primary substeps to any security mission: defend against firepower assaults, defend against direct attacks, and guard against flanking maneuvers. Defending against firepower assaults involves making use of cover and concealment to blunt the enemy's firepower attack, defense against direct attack involves the use of direct and indirect fire to disrupt or destroy enemy offensive actions against the security position, and guarding against flanking maneuvers entails using maneuverable forces to counterattack enemy attempts to target vulnerable flanks of the security position.

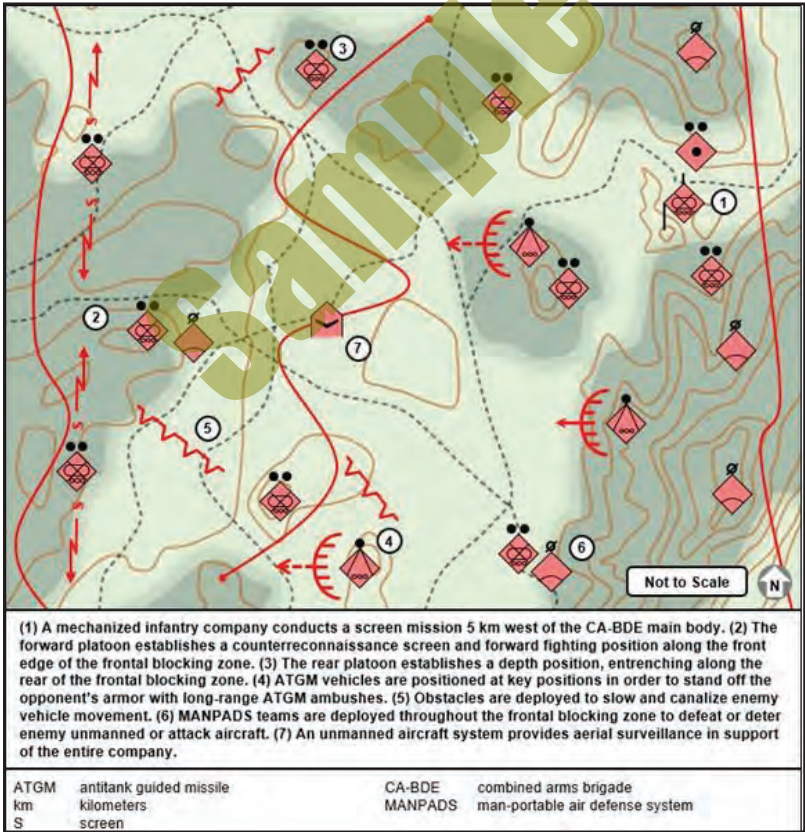
Step 4 - Retreat

After meeting their prescribed requirements for delaying the enemy, inflicting casualties, or disrupting enemy attacks, or when their position becomes untenable, security forces should retreat from their security positions. Retreat should be orderly and should include both rear guard actions and concealment actions to protect the main body. If possible, the retreating unit should sabotage any terrain features that may be of use to the enemy. After retreat, the security unit should consolidate and rejoin the combat action alongside the main body. If retreat is not possible, the security unit should conceal itself and then conduct sabotage operations in the enemy's rear areas.

scout units or nonspecialized units. Screens may operate independently at long ranges from their parent unit, or they may operate in close proximity. Screening units should be capable of conducting independent operations.

Screens may consist of observation posts; mounted, dismounted, or aerial patrols; or both. The distance from the screen to the main body varies based on unit size, terrain, and the commander's intent. A screen further away from the main body gives greater decision time and a longer period in which to assess the nature of the threat, but it is more difficult to communicate with and sustain. At the CA-BDE, the prescribed distance for a screen is between 5 km and 15 km, though this can vary significantly based on the aforementioned factors. Screening forces typically enjoy a high priority of indirect fire assets, and reconnaissance and surveillance sensors may have direct linkages to shooters to conduct rapid targeting. Indirect fire is considered a critical enabler of retrograde operations, disrupting enemy actions and preventing the screening force from being decisively engaged.

A screen is typically assigned to the flanks or rear of a main body. Screens can also be placed forward, but this is not employed when the main body is maneuvering; instead, security is provided by forward reconnaissance units as they conduct reconnaissance operations. Screen missions may be employed to close gaps between units, to influence or deceive enemy commanders, or to support wide area security operations. There are two primary types of screen mission: static and mobile. Figure 6-4 depicts a screen operation.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 6-4. Screen (example).

I. PLAA Offensive Actions (Overview)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 7-1 to 7-4.

Chinese forces consider tactical offensive actions to be the decisive form of land operations. The active defense strategy relies on effective and credible tactical offensive actions as the basic contribution of ground forces. Tactical offensive actions destroy an opponent's will to fight through a combination of firepower, maneuver, deception, and information warfare. This chapter outlines the People's Liberation Army's (PLAA's) methodology for planning, preparing, and executing tactical offensive actions.

I. Overview of PLAA Offensive Operations

Throughout its history, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has emphasized offensive operations. The idea that war can only be won by attacking is fundamental to People's War theory, and it has been tested time and again throughout the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War. PLA leaders historically emphasized the spirit of the attack—what Westerners would call *élan* or *esprit de corps*—as the only way their military forces could overcome the technological, firepower, and training superiority of their opponents. Developing this spirit in their formations was a fundamental skill of PLA leaders. Indeed, the role of political officers and commissars was in large part to help develop a unity of purpose underpinning the spirit of the offensive.

The PLAA today takes a similar view toward offensive operations, though with a greater focus on firepower, joint integration, and maneuver instead of the more traditional approach of infiltration followed by close combat. In keeping with Mao's principles, PLAA operations focus on destroying enemy formations rather than taking ground. As such, objectives are often described as enemy formations. PLAA forces seek to use a mix of maneuver, deception, and firepower to preclude enemy actions, isolate enemy units, and then fight the isolated enemy to annihilation. PLAA units integrate advanced deception and information warfare capabilities to fix enemy forces and then conduct decisive attacks on enemy weak points. They employ firepower not only as an enabler of maneuver, but also as an offensive tactic in itself: employing massed fires to destroy, neutralize, or fix opponents.

PLAA offensive operations are performed to accomplish one or more of the following objectives:

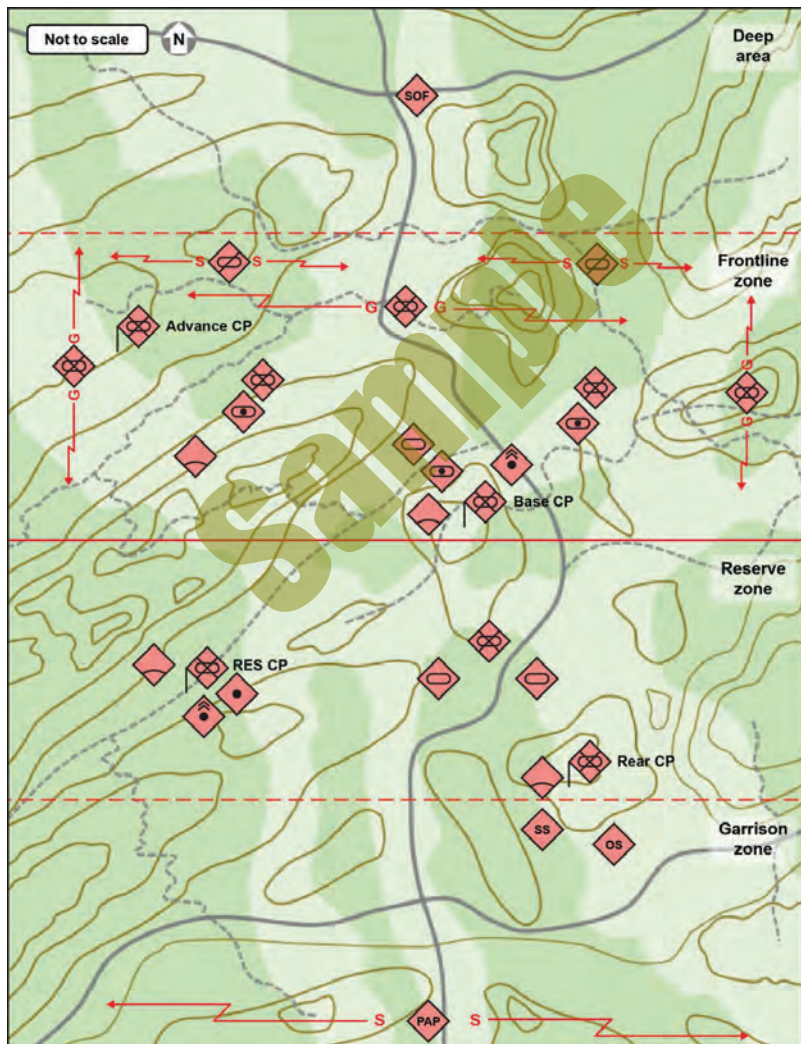
- Destroy, defeat, or neutralize enemy formations, personnel, or equipment.
- Enable friendly freedom of maneuver.
- Restrict enemy freedom of maneuver.
- Gain information.
- Gain control of key terrain.
- Disrupt enemy operations.

PLAA leaders traditionally preferred to operate using a grand battle plan—an extensively planned and prepared operation that demanded adherence to a rigid hierarchy and a complex, often inflexible plan. This approach was well-suited for armies consisting largely of undertrained and underequipped conscripts, and leaders who emphasized party loyalty and political enthusiasm over tactical competence. PLA reforms are attempting to significantly change this approach, employing a decentralized approach to leadership, greater tactical flexibility in planning, and more empowerment and better resourcing of leaders at lower echelons.

Offensive Zone (Notional)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 7-5 to 7-8.

An offensive operation makes use of at least two, and ideally four, command posts. The base command post is the commander's primary location, and it should be located to best facilitate coordination between the frontline, depth, and thrust maneuver groups. The advance command post, if established, is led by the deputy commander, and it is typically located near the main defensive line. The rear command post's primary role is to organize logistics and reinforcements and to create the backup defensive line supporting the offensive action. If possible, a reserve command post is established along a possible route of egress or in a well-defended rear location, ready to take over for the base or advance command post should either of them come under threat.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 7-1. Offensive zone (notional).

At the combined arms battalion (CA-BN) echelon, command post operations may be informal. The command and limited staff at the battalion may fully decentralize and not physically co-locate.

The offensive zone is further subdivided into two or more secondary zones, each with a specific set of objectives and different set of tactics. While the PLAA used to be highly prescriptive about the physical sizes of these zones, it has gradually moved to a more flexible approach. The various zones should account for terrain, friendly and enemy capabilities, and higher echelon missions, and they should enable careful integration of various units and capabilities.

Deep Area

The deep area is the territory past which a unit's organic sensors and weapons can operate. For a CA-BDE, this typically means the area past which its rocket artillery and targeting support can operate. The fight in the deep area usually consists of independent special operations forces (SOF) or scout units supported by manned or unmanned aircraft (UA), possibly augmented by supporting fires from long-range shooters assigned to support the offensive action. Reconnaissance, counterreconnaissance, fire, counterfire, screening, and blocking all take place in deep areas. The purpose of deep-area operations is to provide early reconnaissance, target long-range preparatory fires, and carefully assess enemy strength and disposition in preparation for an offensive action.

Frontline Zone

The frontline zone contains the territory in which the main offensive action is to occur. Early objectives, along with the enemy's main defensive line, are typically located in the frontline zone. The frontline attack group is the primary occupant of this zone, and the depth group may also occupy the area, depending on terrain and enemy disposition. The advance command post, if present, is usually forward in the zone, and the base command post is typically located either rearward in this zone or in the zone immediately behind it. The entire frontline zone should be within the range of the offensive group's organic fire support. The frontline zone typically contains a security zone on its forward edge, where security, reconnaissance, and counterreconnaissance activities take place. The primary battle takes place in the frontline zone, with the intent of breaching the enemy's main defensive line and enabling the depth and thrust maneuver groups to move into enemy rear areas.

Reserve Zone

The reserve zone lies just to the rear of the frontline zone and typically houses the depth attack group, thrust maneuvering group, reserve group, command groups, firepower groups, and forward logistics bases. The reserve zone also usually contains a defensive line intended to resist enemy counterattacks into rear areas, and serves as the anchor for the offensive action. The reserve command post, if present, is typically located in this zone, as is the rear command post.

Garrison Zone

Rear areas not actively occupied by the offensive group make up the garrison zone. Augmentations and reinforcements may reside in this zone, or it may serve as an assembly area for another offensive group preparing to conduct follow-on operations. Supporting capabilities such as logistics, EW, and long-range artillery reside here. Garrison zones typically contain one or more security zones that surround key positions such as bases, supply routes, or command posts. The People's Armed Police (PAP) may take on much of the security load in garrison zones in order to free up PLAA forces for more-intense duties.

II. Phases of the Offense

PLAA offensive operations are divided into phases in much the same way that U.S. Army operations are organized. While an operation may have many phases depending on the breadth and complexity of the mission, in most cases it will involve five primary phases: advance, unfold, initiate, annihilate, and continuing operations.

Phases of the Offense



Advance Phase



Unfold Phase



Initiate Phase



Annihilate Phase



Continuing Operations

A. Advance Phase

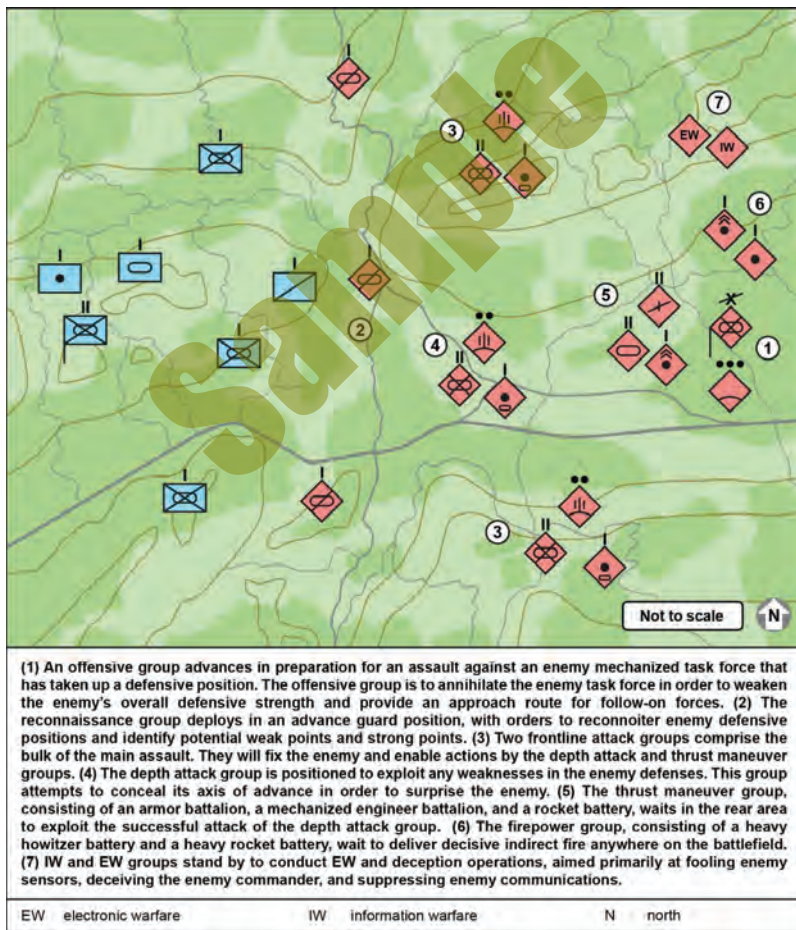
The advance, also called the moving-in, is the initial phase of an offensive operation. This traditionally referred to the movement of a main body from a staging or assembly area to the initial point of attack. For a modern force, this understanding has expanded to include the full breadth of activities that occur between the time the mission is received until initial contact is made. These activities include, but are not limited to—

- Security throughout the combat area, including assembly areas, staging areas, axes of advance, and flank areas.
- Reconnaissance operations focusing primarily on the objective: assessing the enemy force and probing for possible weak points or vulnerabilities.
- Counterreconnaissance operations attempting to deny the enemy key information about PLAA forces' dispositions and objectives.
- Deception operations designed to mislead and confuse the enemy, conceal friendly movements, fix enemy formations, and manipulate the enemy's mindset.
- Artillery groups delivering preparatory fires, reconnaissance by fire, and counterfire.
- Air defense groups seeking to deter air attack against the main body and to deny aerial reconnaissance to the enemy.
- Engineer groups conducting both mobility and countermobility operations along enemy and friendly axes of advance.
- Protection operations seeking to maintain the force, especially during periods of vulnerability to air or artillery attack.
- EW activities seeking to degrade or neutralize enemy sensors and communications, while protecting friendly network systems and emitters.

The advance begins upon receipt of an order. Reconnaissance groups are rapidly deployed in order to determine possible routes of advance, enemy strength and disposition, and key terrain features. The commander develops an initial scheme of maneuver that outlines objectives, establishes a basic concept, and enables subordinate units to establish contact and rapidly close with enemy defenses. Concealment of movement and deception operations are of paramount importance during the advance phase. As the main body moves to the point of contact, supporting capabilities conduct concurrent missions, including preparatory fire support, counterfire, information warfare activities, and mobility and countermobility activities. Commanders continuously assess enemy positions to decide upon a final course of action while attempting to manipulate the enemy's mindset and conceal their own intentions.

Security during the advance is also of the utmost importance. Deception operations can only be successful if enemy reconnaissance operations are neutralized, spoofed, or defeated by friendly counterreconnaissance. Security elements ensure that main-body movement is unhindered by enemy attack, countermobility efforts, or deception activities. Air defense and protection operations ensure that the main body is not attrited by enemy air attack and artillery during staging or movement.

The advance phase ends when the main body makes contact with the enemy and the commander initiates actions on contact.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 7-2. Advance (example).

I. PLAA Defensive Actions (Overview)

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 9-1 to 8-4.

A well-planned and -coordinated defense is a critical component of every combat action. The defense is carried out in order to attrit enemy forces, retain key positions or terrain, buy the commander time and decision space, seize the initiative from the enemy, and transition to offensive operations. The People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA) believes that defense is an inherently stronger form of war, as the defender enjoys advantages of terrain and time unavailable to the attacker. The informationized battlefield, however, has reduced many of these traditional advantages. While it is not possible to destroy an opponent through defensive actions alone, a tenacious and well-executed defense enables decisive follow-on offensive operations.

I. Overview of PLAA Defensive Operations

The PLAA takes the position that defensive actions are ultimately to preserve one or more assets, such as friendly forces, key terrain, or the initiative. In addition, defensive operations can play a key role in a wider operational or strategic sense by attriting the enemy's strength, forcing it to commit greater forces in an attempt to achieve an objective, and reducing or restricting the options available to enemy commanders. Though the PLAA considers the offense to be the decisive form of warfare, centuries of invasion and occupation have led to considerable emphasis on the importance of defensive operations: the People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) most sacred mission is defending Chinese territory from outside aggression.

II. The Informationized Battlefield and Defensive Operations

The PLAA still maintains that defense is a fundamentally stronger form of warfare than offense, but it acknowledges that many elements of the informationized battlefield have changed the traditional dynamics between attack and defense. Most—though not all—of these changes benefit the attacker, making defensive operations more difficult than they have been historically. The PLAA has identified four major trends on the informationized battlefield that influence defensive operations: increasing arduousness, fewer traditional advantages, more dynamic, and increasing importance of offensive actions.

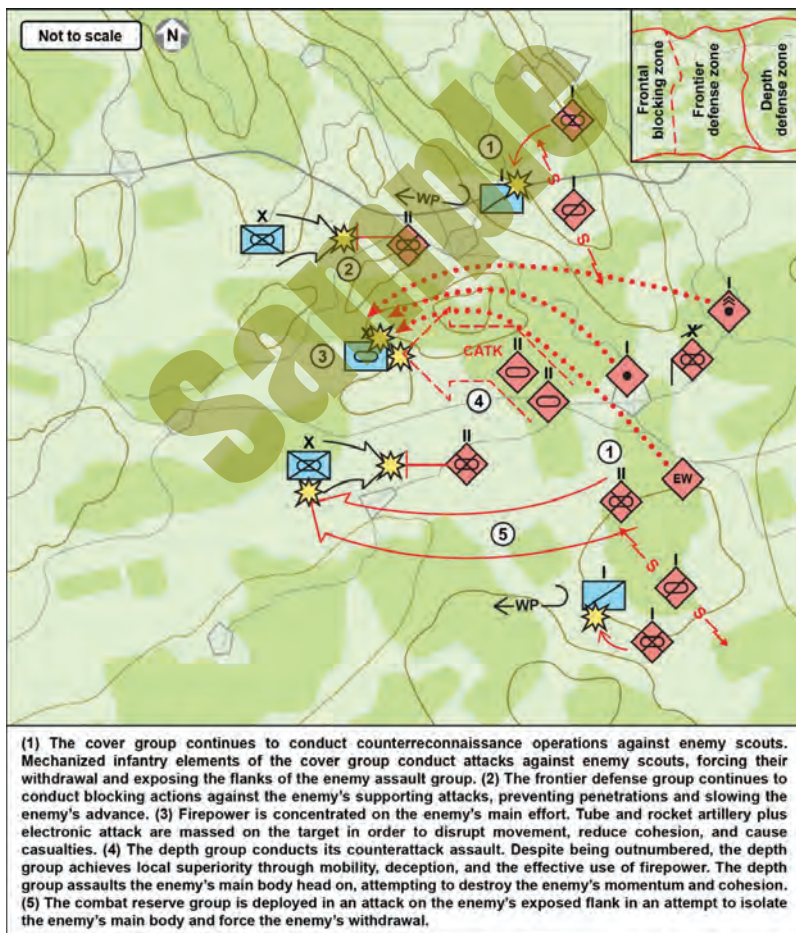
Increasing Arduousness

Multiple factors have combined to make combat for the defender more difficult than in the past. While ground commanders once only had to concern themselves with enemy land forces, enemies can now strike simultaneously or consecutively from multiple domains. This requires, in turn, a comprehensive multi-domain defense that can effectively blunt or check enemy actions, even when coming from unexpected directions. Commanders must also defend their forces not only from physical attack, but also from information, electromagnetic, and psychological attack: a capable opponent will target enemy troops' morale and cohesion through a variety of channels. Finally, the depth and variety of enemy firepower systems have increased substantially in recent years. Long-range artillery and missile strikes, air strikes, attack helicopter operations, direct action by special operations forces (SOF), and electromagnetic and network attack capabilities allow an enemy to target the full

VI. Counterattack

The counterattack, also called the mobile assault, is typically the culmination of a defensive operation. It requires the defensive group to mass combat power and conduct an aggressive, decisive attack against one or more enemy units, with the intent of disintegrating the enemy attack and forcing the enemy to either rapidly retreat or face annihilation. Counterattacks happen throughout a defensive action on smaller scales, but the decisive counterattack at the tactical level likely involves either the depth defense group or the combat reserve group conducting multidimensional penetrations of an enemy assault force. These penetrations target weak or exposed flanks of the enemy formation.

The timing and axis of the counterattack is critical. It should be timed around the moment when the enemy attack has culminated, and enemy forces are possibly overextended, low on supplies, and beyond their supporting or security elements. Resolute defense throughout the frontal blocking zone and the frontier defense zone should create favorable conditions for the attack, magnifying the combat power of the counterattack force. A counterattack should include one or more of four phases, which may be concurrent or in varying order. Figure 8-5 depicts a defensive group counterattacking the enemy.



Ref: ATP 7-100.3 (Aug '21), fig. 8-5. Counterattack (example).

I. Antiterrorism Actions

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 9-1 to 9-9.

Antiterrorism and stability actions are conducted by a wide variety of different organizations within the Chinese government, ranging from both the regular and special operations (SOF) forces of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), to the People's Armed Police (PAP), to national and local law enforcement. These actions include domestic law enforcement, stability operations, maritime security, and international stability operations. The PLA broadly categorizes antiterrorism actions as part of maintaining both domestic and international stability, while PAP stability actions are largely domestic in nature and focus on internal threats and dissent. This chapter discusses national-level antiterrorism and stability operations, focusing predominantly on the mission types undertaken by People's Liberation Army (PLAA) and PAP units under the control and direction of the national government.

I. Overview of PLAA Antiterrorism Operations

Terrorism in the modern sense is a relatively new phenomenon in China, and the Chinese government is still working to establish a clear understanding of what constitutes both domestic and international acts of terror. The PLA defines terrorism as acts of violence that disrupt national unity and societal stability by creating casualties or damaging property. This definition is very broad, far more sweeping and ambiguous—possibly deliberately so—than most Western definitions. This helps to explain why the PLA views antiterrorist actions as supporting national stability. Instead of only acts of violence perpetrated to achieve a political or social objective, the Chinese definition also includes acts that threaten peace and stability within the country. This, in turn, gives Chinese authorities a very broad set of circumstances in which antiterrorism laws and operations can be applied. The growing Chinese interest in antiterrorism operations coincides with rising religious and sectarian tensions in specific regions of China and the rise of global terrorism through the latter half of the 20th century.

II. The Informationized Battlefield and Antiterrorism Operations

The PLA recognizes several characteristics that shape antiterrorism activities: urgency, complexity, significant effects, joint nature, and asymmetry. As with all other military operations, China is acutely aware of the changes the informationized battlefield has brought to its antiterrorism mission. Unlike offensive and defensive actions, however, many of the effects the informationized battlefield has on antiterrorism operations are related to media, public opinion, public policy, and public perception.

Urgency

Antiterrorism missions are urgent in nature. Generally speaking, all of the initiative during a terrorist attack or campaign rests with the terrorist organization. Proactive antiterrorism efforts are possible, but they are limited in scope and effectiveness by the difficulties associated with identifying and neutralizing potential terrorists before they strike. This makes most antiterrorism activities reactionary and highly time sensitive. Constant vigilance is an important consideration for any unit or organization charged with conducting an antiterrorism mission, and rapid response to a terrorist

event is one of the most important elements in preventing casualties, maintaining stability, and suppressing further terrorist acts.

Complexity

Antiterrorism missions are complex. Terrorist activities are often sophisticated and complex, making use of media, religious or political factionalism, civilians, and international actors to manipulate the situation to the terrorists' advantage. By framing an activity as defending religious freedom or democracy, terrorists can gain sympathy from other parts of the world. By coercing local civilians, they can conceal their activities and disrupt efforts to find and suppress them. This requires antiterrorism forces to be equally sophisticated and highly aware of both the effects their actions have on the global political dialogue and how they can push back against attempts to manipulate local civilian populations by building trust and maintaining a strong visible presence.

Significant Effects

The effects of terrorism can be significant. One of the primary features of terrorism is that the psychological and political effects of terrorist acts can often far exceed the actual physical effects. Terrorism is designed to amplify the effects of violence by disrupting lives, bringing anxiety to a society, and pressuring those conducting antiterrorism efforts into overreacting to real or perceived threats. These effects may be realized even when a terrorist operation fails. The simple threat may be enough to achieve the desired effect. Antiterrorism efforts must be valued according to their ability to maintain the long-term peace, prosperity, and stability of a society, not just in terms of their ability to directly root out and defeat terrorist elements.

Joint Nature

Antiterrorism operations must be joint in nature. Antiterrorism missions require cooperation between different elements, perhaps more than for any other security activity. The complexity of terrorist activities, along with the fact that they often cross international borders, causes a high premium to be placed on open and effective cooperation. In this context, joint refers to three different forms of cooperation: between the military, police, and civilian antiterrorism units domestically; between the political and military parts of the government; and between different international actors.

Asymmetry

Terrorist actions are nearly always asymmetric. Terrorists seldom enjoy any significant parity in equipment or training to that of their opponents, and they seek to offset these disadvantages by attacking vulnerable targets from unforeseen directions. Most antiterrorist organizations are also asymmetric in nature. While they may be formally trained and equipped, most are drawn from police or militia organizations, and so they do not habitually employ aggressive military tactics. Operational methods used by both sides are described as irregular. Terrorists employ ambushes, raids, and sabotage, while antiterrorists employ their own ambushes, along with careful counterattacks, search and annihilate, and infiltration methods.

III. Antiterrorism Missions and Tactics

Unlike most other military operations, antiterrorism operations are prescribed to be tightly controlled and commanded by a central authority. This ensures that the antiterrorism operation is tightly integrated and that subordinate groups conduct their own operations in accordance with the principles of antiterrorism operations. Freedom of action by lower echelon groups is viewed as less critical, as the scope of antiterrorism operations is typically much smaller than major military operations, and the consequences for a subordinate's mistake are often more significant.

There are five primary antiterrorism missions; each has numerous subtypes and permutations based on the operational environment and the nature of the threat.

8-2 I. Antiterrorism Actions

III. Principles of Stability & Security Operations

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), pp. 9-10 to 9-11.

Stability and security operations are conducted in accordance with a fixed set of principles, as are all other PLA activities. The principles governing stability and security operations, however, are referred to specifically as guiding thoughts, likely inferring that they are meant to be broader in scope and less restrictive than other Chinese military principles. This is in keeping with the view that stability and security missions are more complex and ambiguous than other operations, and thus they require greater latitude for leaders to act in accordance with their judgment.

Situational Awareness

While situational awareness is required for military units of all types, it is of particular importance for security units operating in concert with PLA units on an active campaign. Security force commanders must be acutely aware of the general objectives and strategy of the military forces they are supporting, and they may be required to operate with little or no direct oversight in securing rear areas, supply and communications lines, and key assets. Security forces may also be required, in dire situations, to face off against much more powerful opponents in order to delay the enemy or buy time for the supported force to reposition or retreat. Security forces must be prepared to make this sacrifice either when called upon or when they recognize the situation requires it.

Key-Point Concentration

Security forces operate with far less density than do regular army units. Contiguous deployments throughout the security zone are likely impossible, considering available forces and the number of different assets that must be defended. Commanders must carefully prioritize what they want to defend and from what type of threat. This enables the security force to properly allocate its subordinate forces to concentrate greater security on key points throughout the security zone. At the same time, security forces must be able to continue operations even when enemy forces are moving through the security zone, provided that they are moving through unimportant or indefensible areas.

Defense Focus

Security forces will most likely be outnumbered when facing conventional opponents, and they may be outnumbered even by irregular opponents. This makes offensive actions difficult, as security forces will seldom be able to concentrate sufficient combat power to attack and destroy an opponent. Instead, they must focus on the defense, building their operations around steadfast protection of key points, enabled by extensive entrenchments and a defense-in-depth approach. The doctrine of active defense still applies; however, when a security unit can achieve local superiority, it must attack and spoil the enemy's preparations. Security units contribute significantly to the victory of the larger military force by delaying enemy forces, attriting enemy formations, and disaggregating enemy capabilities in the security zone, setting the enemy up for decisive defeat by a counterattack.

Equipment & Capabilities

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21).

The PRC is a near-peer competitor to the United States, with significant political and strategic interests worldwide, though the PRC's primary geographic focus is Eastern and South-eastern Asia and the Western Pacific. The PRC has developed significant capabilities in all domains: land, air, maritime, space, and cyberspace. Capabilities in specific operational environments include a number of different unit and system combinations able to challenge the combat power of U.S. and allied forces. The PLA represents a significant competitor to U.S. and allied forces, especially in the Western Pacific.

PLA Capabilities Overview

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Appendix A describes the capabilities and limitations of PLA maneuver forces: infantry, armor, marine, and airborne.

Appendix B describes PLA indirect fire capabilities, including mortars, tube artillery, and rocket artillery in support of group army and tactical operations; this includes an overview of integrated fires systems.

Appendix C describes PLA tactical air defense forces controlled by its land forces, including an overview of integrated air defense systems up to the group army echelon.

Appendix D describes how the PLA aviation assets—primarily rotary-wing manned aircraft and unmanned aircraft—support tactical operations.

Appendix E describes the use of engineers and chemical defense forces in support of tactical operations.

Appendix F describes the PLA's communications and network architecture at the tactical level.

Appendix G describes special operations forces both at tactical and national/strategic echelons.

A. Maneuver Capabilities

Ref: ATP 7-100.3, *Chinese Tactics*, (Aug '21), app. A.

People's Liberation Army (PLA) maneuver forces include the People's Liberation Army's (PLAA's) combined arms brigades (CA-BDEs), special operations forces (SOF), army aviation brigades, and the handful of remaining infantry divisions, along with the airborne brigades of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and the marine brigades of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). The paramilitary formations of the People's Liberation Army Reserve infantry units, People's Armed Police (PAP), and China Militia units may be used for rear area or flank security or economy of force and deception (feint) missions. While the entirety of the PLA is undergoing substantial reform and modernization, significant but decreasing numbers of older systems are expected to be fielded throughout frontline formations through 2035—the scheduled date for PLA equipment modernization to be complete. Unlike Western armies that tend to field very homogenous formations from an equipment perspective, the PLAA employs a very wide variety of vehicles with varying capabilities and readiness levels. CA-BDEs with more-critical missions or in more strategically important areas receive newer and better equipment, with older equipment gradually trickling down to less-important commands. The PAP employs a wide variety of equipment types, generally tending toward light, motorized forces along with inexpensive mortars, recoilless rifles, armored personnel carriers (APCs), and limited numbers of helicopters.

The core of the PLAA's maneuver component consists of around 73 CA-BDEs of three different types: light (motorized), medium (mechanized), and heavy (armored), along with a handful of legacy division structures. In addition, there are approximately 18 divisions in the reserves and militia, though their equipment and readiness levels are much lower than those of the active-duty force. All or nearly all of the active component is either motorized or mechanized. CA-BDEs regularly conduct large-scale training maneuvers against a full-time opposing force brigade. The PLAA brigade structure is described in detail in chapter 2.

I. Maneuver Capabilities Equipment Overview

The PLAA employs a wide variety of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), and APCs, ranging from high-end modern systems to Cold-War relics. Historically, the PLAA has been reticent to throw anything away. As new equipment arrived, older equipment was handed down to lower-readiness units, then to reserves, then militia, and finally to massive storage facilities. The recent set of PLAA reforms, however, moves away from this model, seeking greater homogenization through a force equipped entirely with modern equipment. This necessarily reduces the overall size of the army, and it promises significant cost savings in the maintenance and operation of obsolete equipment. At the present time, however, the PLAA still employs a variety of armored vehicles, with most CA-BDEs still equipped with older or obsolescent vehicles. Due to the vast differences in capability between in-use systems, it is critical that PLAA units' equipment be carefully assessed on an individual basis, rather than generically.

Note. The equipment overview provided in this appendix is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to introduce the most widely employed variants of major equipment types used by the PLA.

A. Tanks

The PLAA fields a massive number of tanks, most of which are main battle tanks (MBTs), with a handful of light and amphibious tanks. The MBT force currently has more than 6,500 vehicles—more than twice the number fielded by any other country. Many of these, however, are early Cold-War vintage and of dubious utility on the modern battlefield. Early Chinese tanks were either direct copies or heavily influenced by Soviet designs, but the more-modern tanks are entirely indigenous and show more design similarities with Western tanks than with Russian ones.

Despite its age, the Type 59 tank is still fielded in limited numbers in active units, and large numbers are maintained in reserve or mothball status. The Type 59 was derived from the ubiquitous Soviet T-54/55 tank and shares most of its design features. Its armor is homogenous steel, and its early 100-mm gun is inadequate against modern MBTs. The PLAA has, however, periodically upgraded its Type 59 fleet, adding modern thermal sights, a larger gun, improved gun stabilizers, explosive-reactive armor (ERA), and improved crew survivability systems. Modernized Type 59 tanks are lightweight, reasonably mobile, possess relatively modern fire control systems, and are simple to operate and maintain. However, their protection—even when upgraded with ERA—is poor by modern standards. Though the tanks employ a copy of the once-ubiquitous L7 105-mm main gun that can fire both tungsten and uranium penetrators, main gun performance is poor compared to modern larger guns.

The Type 80/Type 88 tank was the first Chinese indigenous tank design. The PLAA mixed Western and Soviet design philosophies in the Type 80, using a Soviet-style chassis and turret design with a Western gun and crew configuration. The result was an MBT that was competitive with the T-72, T-80, and early M1 Abrams designs. The first variants entered service in the early 1980s, and they have been continuously upgraded. Those currently in service are essentially comparable to the much-later Type 96. Upgrade versions feature advanced computerized fire control, a mixture of homogenous and applique composite armor, a 125 millimeter (mm) smoothbore gun capable of firing penetrators, high explosives (HE) and missiles, ERA, and a significantly upgraded engine. While an older design, upgraded Type 80/88 tanks are competitive with older Western MBTs, and they can threaten even the most modern designs.

The Type 96 tank is the most widespread modern MBT in the PLAA inventory. A fully indigenous design derived from the Type 80, the Type 96 was the first Chinese tank to feature full composite armor and a Western-style arrow-shaped turret, in contrast to the bowl-shaped turrets of the Type 80/88. The Type 96 is a relatively light modern MBT with excellent mobility, leading the PLAA to deploy most of its Type 96s in hilly regions and other areas of difficult terrain. Composite ERA and laser jammers have been added to the original Type 96, improving its survivability against antitank guided missiles (ATGMs). The Type 96 was originally only an iterative upgrade, and it was not truly competitive with either its Western or Russian counterparts when it was first deployed. It was built in large numbers, however, and upgraded variants—including Types 96A1 and 96B—have improved lethality and protection.

The Type 99 tank is China's newest MBT. It represents the PLAA's new commitment to modernization and investment in technology. Using the same design approach as the Type 96, the Type 99 employs a Russian-style chassis with a Western-style turret. It features a full suite of modern protective systems, including spaced composite armor enhanced with ERA; full chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear protection; crew survivability upgrades; and an active protection system. Its 125-mm main gun can fire sabot, HE, and missiles, and its advanced suspension and powerful engine give it excellent cross-country mobility. An upgraded variant, the Type 99A, enhances the protection scheme with thicker armor and multi-layer ERA, a more powerful engine, and improved electronic warfare and network capabilities. Due to its high cost, it is not anticipated that the Type 99 will fully replace the Type 96, and the Type 99A will only see service in elite "digitized" units.

The Type 62 is an evolution of a Cold-War tank that has been modified and modernized into a light tank platform. Developed specifically to operate in the challenging mountains and jungles of southern China, the Type 62 was essentially a scaled-down Type 59, armed with an 85-mm gun and a lightweight armor package. At around 30 metric tons, the Type 62 filled the gap between heavy MBTs and very light airborne and amphibious tanks. Modernized variants feature upgraded armor and targeting packages, but they are badly undergunned and have virtually no offensive capability against modern MBTs. These tanks are still in limited use in specific geographic areas, but they are being phased out in favor of the Type 15 light tank.

The Type 15 is a brand-new light tank developed to take over the role filled by the Type 62. It features the ubiquitous 105-mm rifled gun and composite armor, along with an advanced remote weapons station and autoloader. The Type 15 is likely not intended to compete directly with modern MBTs, but rather to enhance the firepower of mountain and jungle units. It is also likely tailored for the export market—numerous lower-tier militaries around the world are seeking to replace their Soviet-era equipment, and a modern tank in the 30-metric-ton class meets many of their requirements. The Type 15 was just recently accepted by the PLAA, and it is in only limited use by operational units.

The Type 63 is a widely proliferated amphibious light tank. Early Type 63 models were built primarily to provide PLAA forces with an armored platform capable of crossing rivers and other small bodies of water. These vehicles are still in limited service in lowland regions. The upgraded Type 63A was built specifically for the People's Liberation Army Navy Marine Corps (PLANMC), and it is capable of crossing open-ocean areas. Both types are capable of firing while embarked, though the Type 63A has a greatly enhanced on-the-move capability. Both tanks have only light homogenous armor, and they are not intended to withstand attacks from modern ATGMs or enemy tanks. While still in use by both the PLAA and PLAN, Type 63s are being phased out in favor of more modern amphibious tank systems.

The ZLT-05 amphibious tank is a hybrid IFV, tank, and assault-gun platform with impressive performance across even large bodies of water. A modern 105-mm gun employs sabot, HE, and ATGMs from land or water, using a modern fire control computer and extensive stabilization. While heavier than the Type 63, the ZLT-05 still features only light armor, and it is intended to protect only against fragmentation and light weapons. The ZLT-05 is intended to be the standard amphibious tank throughout the PLANMC and, as such, it is the backbone of the PLA's short-range amphibious capability.

B. Infantry Fighting Vehicles

Despite being one of the early adopters of IFVs, the PLAA employs a lower density of them than do other large militaries, particularly as compared to Russia. There are numerous varieties and configurations of Chinese IFVs, and categorizing them can be complex: weight, configuration, and firepower are not conclusive, as they are with the U.S. military. Instead, one must look at the organization of the unit in question: a mechanized (medium) CA-BDE employs its armored vehicles as both IFVs and APCs, while motorized (light) CA-BDEs employ their vehicles almost exclusively as APCs. Chinese IFV designs have generally mirrored Soviet and Russian designs going back to the BMP-1 of the 1960s, although PLAA preferences now seem to be trending toward favoring wheeled as opposed to tracked vehicles. The PLAA actively fields roughly 4,000 IFVs of all types, plus a large number of older vehicles in reserve status.

The Type 86 IFV is a copy of the ubiquitous BMP-1, and it is still widely fielded by active PLAA formations. The original Type 86 featured a 100-mm gun, while the newer Type 86A was rebuilt with a 30-mm autocannon. Variations include troop transport (with an eight-soldier capacity), scouting, engineering, ATGM carrier, air defense, amphibious, and command vehicles. The Type 86 is tracked, with good



(OPFOR1) Index

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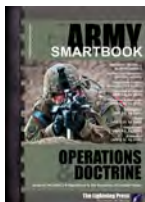


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(OPFOR1) Chinese Military

Forces, Operations & Tactics



For over two thousand years, China has been surrounded by enemies, adversaries, and other competitors. Invasion, occupation, raids, and other incursions into Chinese territory were commonplace. The PLA views protecting Chinese sovereignty and security as a sacred duty. China traditionally viewed military resistance as an affair for the entire population: mass resistance, guerrilla warfare, and winning a war of attrition.



The People's Liberation Army Army (PLAA) has approximately 975,000 active-duty personnel in combat units. The PLAN is the largest navy in the world with a battle force of approximately 355 platforms, including major surface combatants, submarines, aircraft carriers, ocean-going amphibious ships, mine warfare ships, and fleet auxiliaries. The Air Force (PLAAF) and PLAN Aviation together constitute the largest aviation forces in the region and the third largest in the world, with over 2,800 total aircraft. The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) is the largest missile force in the world.



With a force that totals approximately two million personnel in the regular forces, the PLA has sought to modernize its capabilities and improve its proficiencies across all warfare domains so that as a joint force it can conduct the range of land, air, and maritime operations as well as space, counterspace, electronic warfare, and cyber operations.

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