

Briefing Memo

Direction of the National Defense Policy of China Under the Second Xi Jinping Administration

Yasuyuki Sugiura

Senior Fellow

China Division, Regional Studies Department

1. Introduction

On October 18, 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (hereinafter referred to as the “19th Party Congress”) was held. On the first day of the congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping (President of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission) gave a political report entitled “Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” in which he touted the achievements of the past five years and presented policy directions for the next five years in a wide range of areas including domestic affairs, foreign affairs, the economy, society, military affairs, etc. Furthermore, at the congress General Secretary Xi was reappointed General Secretary and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Moreover, under the new Constitution of the Communist Party of China announced after the end of the 19th National Congress, the “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” was incorporated in the action guidelines of the party with a status equal to Marxism–Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development.

In the 1st Plenary Session of the 13th National People’s Congress, (hereinafter referred to as the “National People’s Congress”) which commenced on March 5, 2018, General Secretary Xi was reappointed President of China and Chairman of the State Central Military Commission. In this Plenary Session the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China was amended for the first time in 14 years, the term limit of the President which had previously been set at two terms over ten years was abolished, and in addition large-scale organizational reforms of the State Council were announced. Moreover, Mr. Wang Qishan, who is regarded as an ally of General Secretary Xi, was elected Vice-President despite his status as a non-voting party member. Therefore, it is reasonable that the second Xi Jinping administration has made a strong start.

What kind of national defense policy will China develop under this second Xi Jinping administration? The objective of this paper is to examine the direction of the national defense policy of China through analyses of (1) the political report and appointment in the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) top brass at the 19th Party Congress, (2) the promotion of national defense and military reform in the 1st Plenary Session of the 13th National People’s Congress, and (3) strengthening of the training structure and implementation of the full range of exercises, etc.

2. Advocacy of Xi Jinping's vision for a strong military and appointment of the PLA top brass in the 19th Party Congress

In the political report in the 19th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi gave instructions to “establish the party’s vision of a strong military for a new era within the leading position of building national defense and the military, and strictly adhere to the approaches of a politically-constructed military, reformed strong military, science and technology promoted military, and law-dependent military (building the military politically, carrying out reforms for a strong military, developing the military with science and technology, and governing the military under the law; hereinafter referred to as the “‘sixteen-character’ guideline”).” The general provisions of the amended Party Constitution stipulated the expression “Xi Jinping’s thinking on strengthening the military” and the firm adherence to the “‘sixteen-character’ guideline.” Furthermore, with the goal of modernization of the military, General Secretary Xi presented a roadmap based on a strategic policy in “three stages,” namely (i) by the year 2020, mechanization is basically achieved, IT application has come a long way, and strategic capabilities have seen a big improvement, (ii) by 2035, the modernization of our national defense and our forces is basically completed, and (iii) by the mid-21st century our people's armed forces have been fully transformed into world-class forces. Comparing this with the fact that in December 2010 (then) Defense Minister Liang Guanglie stated that “by 2050, the modernization of our national defense and our forces is basically completed” as the third stage of the strategic policy in “three stages,” it could be said that against the background of the military modernization in the last seven years, the Chinese leadership perceived that it was possible to shorten the initial plan by as much as 15 years, and is thinking that they can maintain a military equal to the military of the United States in 2050. Furthermore, the expression “strategic capabilities have seen a big improvement” was newly added, and this phrase may include the qualitative and quantitative improvement of the nuclear forces, precision strike capability using conventional weapons and operations in space, cyber and the electromagnetic spectrum. Moreover, General Secretary Xi placed importance on “comprehensively adjusting and promoting combat readiness in both traditional and new security fields,” and gave instructions to improve “capabilities for joint operations based on the network information system” and “all-regions operations capabilities.”

The Central Military Commission Chairman responsibility system was clearly stated in the Party Constitution amended at the Party Congress. The Central Military Commission Chairman responsibility system itself has been consistently sustained since it was clearly stated in the 1982 Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, but it is said that in the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras it lost substance to such an extent that it was mocked as the “Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman responsibility system.” In response to this, when General Secretary Xi was appointed Chairman of the Central Military Commission, the *PLA Daily* repeatedly insisted on the strengthening of the Chairman responsibility system. It is thought that the fact that the Central Military Commission Chairman responsibility system was clearly stated in the Party Constitution this time suggests that General Secretary Xi’s control of the PLA has been further strengthened.

The structure of the PLA top brass (the Central Military Commission, each Theater Commander, the Political Commissars, each military branch Commander and Political Commissars), which takes into account the personnel reshuffle at the time of the 19th Party Congress, is as in tables 1 to 3. The series of personnel appointments were made in accordance with part of the “‘sixteen-character’ guideline:” “politically-constructed military, reformed strong

military, and law-dependent military,” but excluding “science and technology promoted military.” When electing the members of the new Central Military Commission in a meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee in April 2017, General Secretary Xi stipulated the four policies of (i) firm adherence to political standards, (ii) concentration of preparation for war and victory in battle, (iii) optimization of the balance between each military branch, and (iv) consideration for each age group, and it can be said that of these (i) is related to the “politically-constructed military” and (ii) to (iv) are related to the “reformed strong military.”

The characteristics of the current personnel reshuffle can be summarized in the following three points. First, this time the “politics,” in other words the strength of loyalty to the Communist Party of China and General Secretary Xi, was given top priority. The relationships between General Secretary Xi and the generals in the PLA could be classified into the following three types. The first type are the people who have a close personal relationship with General Secretary Xi based on the background of family relationships, etc. General Zhang Youxia, who was appointed Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman this time, is considered a typical example of this type because his father General Zhang Zongxun was a comrade-in-arms of Xi Zhongxun, the father of General Secretary Xi. The second type are the people who have experience of working with General Secretary Xi in some form during the period when he worked in regions such as Fujian province, Zhejiang province, Shanghai, etc., before he was appointed a member of the Central Politburo Standing Committee. General Xu Qiliang, who has been retained as Central Military Commission Vice-Chairman and became the first person from the Air Force to rise to the top of a uniformed organization, Director of the Political Work Department Miao Hua, Ground Force Commander Han Weigu, Air Force Commander Ding Laihang, etc. are considered typical examples of this type. The third type are the people who were promoted to general or selected for major posts after General Secretary Xi was appointed Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Defense Minister Wei Fenghe, Chief of the Joint Staff Dept. Li Zuocheng, and Zhang Shengmin are considered typical examples of this type. Especially, Zhang Shengmin, who was the Secretary of the Central Military Commission Discipline Inspection Commission, was also appointed a member of the Central Military Commission though he was a Lieutenant General and was immediately promoted to general.

The second point is that while top priority was given to the political nature, General Secretary Xi respected military expertise in accordance with the “reformed strong military” in the series of personnel appointments, and personnel deployments were carried out in order to contribute to the strengthening of the joint operation structure. The present members of the Central Military Commission have been appointed from each of the Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force, although General Miao Hua from the Ground Force is treated as a member of the Navy. Furthermore, regarding the theater commanders, who were previously always from the Ground Force, in January 2017 Lieutenant General Yuan Yubai became the first officer from the Navy to be appointed Southern Theater Commander, and in addition General Yi Xiaoguang became the first officer from the Air Force to be appointed Central Theater Commander.

The third point is that the status of the Central Military Commission Discipline Inspection Commission, the central institution for the anti-corruption movement in the military in accordance with the “law-dependent military,” is improving, as is clear from Zhang Shengmin becoming a member of the Central Military Commission. As a result of the military reform, the Central Military Commission Discipline Inspection Commission, which had been no more

than one division of the General Political Department under the four general departments structure, was elevated to an independent institution under the direct jurisdiction of the Central Military Commission. It should be said that the fact that its top leader, Zhang Shengmin, became a member of the Central Military Commission further consolidated the position of the Discipline Inspection Commission.

Table 1: Members of the 19th Central Military Commission

Title	Name	Post (s), rank, and home military branch
Chairman	Xi Jinping	Party General Secretary, President
Vice-Chairman	Xu Qiliang	Member of the Party Central Politburo. General. Air Force.
Vice-Chairman	Zhang Youxia	Member of the Party Central Politburo. General. Ground Force.
Member	Wei Fenghe	Defense Minister. Member of the Party Central Committee. General. Rocket Force.
Member	Li Zuocheng	Chief of the Joint Staff Dept. (appointed August 2017), Member of the Party Central Committee. General. Ground Force.
Member	Miao Hua	Director of the Political Work Department (appointed September 2017), member of the Party Central Committee. General. Transferred from the Ground Force to the Navy.
Member	Zhang Shengmin	Secretary of the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission, Deputy Secretary of the Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection. Member of the Party Central Committee. General (promoted November 2017). Rocket Force.

Table 2: Commander and Political Commissars in each Theater

Name of theater	Commander (rank and home military branch)	Political Commissars (rank and home military branch)
Eastern Theater	Liu Aojun (General, Ground Force), member of the Party Central Committee	He Ping (Lieutenant General, Ground Force). Appointed September 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.
Southern Theater	Yuan Yubai (Lieutenant General, Navy), member of the Party Central Committee	Wei Liang (General, Ground Force).
Western Theater	Zhao Zongqi (General, Ground Force), member of the Party Central Committee	Wu Duzhou (Lieutenant General, Ground Force), member of the Party Central Committee.
Northern Theater	Li Qiaoming (Lieutenant General, Ground Force). Appointed September 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.	Fan Xiaojun (Lieutenant General, Air Force), member of the Party Central Committee.
Central Theater	Yi Xiaoguang (General, Air Force). Appointed October 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.	Yin Fanglong (General, Ground Force).

Table 3: Commander and Political Commissars in each Military Branch

Military branch	Commander (rank)	Political Commissars (rank)
Ground Force	Han Weiguo (General). Promoted July 2017. Appointed August 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.	Liu Lei (General). Promoted July 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.
Navy	Shen Jinlong (Lieutenant General). Member of the Party Central Committee.	Qin Shengxiang (Lieutenant General). Appointed September 2017. Transferred from the Ground Force. Member of the Party Central Committee.

Air Force	Ding Laihang (Lieutenant General). Appointed August 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.	Yu Zhongfu (General). Promoted July 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.
Rocket Force	Zhou Yaning (Lieutenant General). Appointed September 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.	Wang Jiasheng (General). Promoted July 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.
Strategic Support Force	Gao Jin (General). Promoted July 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.	Zheng Weiping (General). Appointed November 2017. Member of the Party Central Committee.

* Time of the appointments is based on the timing of the confirmation of the appointments in media reports.

3. Progress of military reform in the 1st Plenary Session of the 13th National People's Congress

The Report on the Work of the Government by the Premier of the State Council Li Keqiang in the 1st Plenary Session of the 13th National People's Congress indicated that the PLA succeeded in deepening the promotion of the "sixteen-character" guideline" and basically completing the task of reducing the PLA by 300,000 troops in the past five years. Moreover, the report raised the objectives of fully enforcing the Central Military Commission Chairman responsibility system and continuing military reform. The following three points should be focused on in particular within the present military reform in the National People's Congress.

The first point is that this report emphasized once again that China should implement the strategy for military-civilian integration and deepen reform of defense-related science, technology, and industry. The strengthening of military-civilian integration and the industrial reforms for national defense have been mentioned since the time that the military reform was initiated in November 2013, and were also indicated in the political report of General Secretary Xi at the 19th Party Congress. On March 2, before the National People's Congress, the 1st Plenary Session of the 19th Central Commission for Integrated Military and Civilian Development headed by General Secretary Xi was held and the "Outline of the Strategy for Military-Civilian Integration" and other documents were adopted. Furthermore, when General Secretary Xi participated in the Plenary Session of the Representatives of the PLA at the National People's Congress, he emphasized the necessity of accelerating the construction of an innovative structure for military-civilian integration to greatly improve the independent innovation capabilities of national defense science and technology. The military representatives at the National People's Congress also repeatedly mentioned the importance of these instructions from General Secretary Xi. It is expected that China will develop cooperative relationships between the national defense industries and civilian industries with the concept of dual-use in the new operational force, such as AI, robotics, laser weapons, cyber operations, the electromagnetic spectrum, etc. Furthermore, it is thought that due to these kinds of policies the lack of transparency in China's national defense costs will become more serious.

The second point is that the Ministry of Veterans Affairs was newly established as a part of the draft of the State Council organizational reforms. The Ministry of Veterans Affairs has integrated each of the responsibilities for the reemployment of veterans under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the job transfers of the officer corps under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the related works in the Political Work Dept. and Logistics Support Dept. of the Central Military Commission. Improvement of the treatment of veterans had already been mentioned at the time of the announcement of the military reform in November 2013. In addition, partly because the number of troops had been reduced by 300,000 in the military reform the Xi Jinping's

leadership of the Communist Party of China is placing importance on this problem. Vice Premier of the State Council Sun Chunlan and the Director of Political Work Department Miao Hua also attended the inauguration ceremony of the Ministry of Veterans Affairs held on April 16, 2018.

The third point is that a new maritime border security management structure was built by the Central Military Commission — People's Armed Police Force (PAP) — China Coast Guard. In January 2018 the chain of command and control in the PAP, which had previously been under the double command of the Central Military Commission and the State Council, was centralized as an organization under the direct control of the Central Military Commission. Moreover, as a part of the administrative and law enforcement agency reforms announced after the commencement of the National People's Congress, the China Coast Guard was placed under the command of the PAP. These moves are in accordance with the policy of adjustment and rationalization of the sea and air border security management structure mechanism that was advocated at the time of the announcement of the military reform in November 2013. The meeting of the Party Central Politburo presided by General Secretary Xi on April 23, 2018 deliberated on “opinions regarding the party, government, military, police, and civilians working together to strengthen the border and solidify defense in the new era.” These moves by China to build a new maritime border security structure will probably have an effect on the South China Sea issue, the Senkaku Islands issue, etc.

4. Strengthening of the training structure and implementation of the full range of exercises

After the appointment of Chairman of the Central Military Commission in November 2012, General Secretary Xi repeatedly raised the importance of a “military that is ready to fight and win wars” and continued to instruct the PLA to carry out practical combat training. In the series of military reforms as well, a variety of initiatives to strengthen the training structure in the PLA have been implemented, but these moves have gained more momentum after the 19th Party Congress.

At the end of December 2017 General Secretary Xi signed the “China People's Liberation Army Regulations on the Military Training (Trial)” (hereinafter referred to as the “Regulations on the Military Training”) and these regulations were enforced from January 1, 2018. It was the first amendment of the Regulations on the Military Training for 17 years since the last amendment in 2002, and the new regulations are comprised of 11 chapters and 77 articles. Their content has not been made public, but it is considered that the military training management model will be built based on the principles of “Overall Control by the CMC, Taking the Theater Commands for the Main Fighting, Building Based on the Service Branches (the CMC would provide general management, the Theater Commands would focus on operation, and the military services would focus on the management for force building),” which are the organizational reform policies in the military reform. A senior officer in the Training and Management Department in the Central Military Commission mentioned in an interview with the *PLA Daily*, the official journal of the PLA, that these regulations thoroughly implement Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military, and stated that their goal is to build world-class forces as instructed in the political report of the 19th Party Congress.

On January 3, 2018 the Central Military Commission held the “2018 Mobilization Meeting for the Commencement of Training for the Whole Armed Forces.” General Secretary Xi participated in the meeting and issued a command for the whole armed forces to thoroughly implement the spirit of the 19th Party Congress and the Party's vision of a

strong military, strengthen all aspects of practical combat military training, and improve all capabilities for victories. At this time General Secretary Xi indicated the importance of joint operation training, and exercises by each force such as the Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force, and Strategic Support Force were implemented.

On January 25 the Central Military Commission promulgated new Military Training Guidelines. The details of these Military Training Guidelines have not been made public, but the *PLA Daily* has reported that the guidelines mainly focus on building training systems and related institutional mechanisms for practical combat, joint operation, scientization and normalization, in order to actively adapt to the deepening of military reform. Furthermore, the *PLA Daily* has indicated that promulgation of the guidelines improves the level of the practical combat of the PLA and strongly helps enhance the “joint operations based on the network information system” and “all-regions operations capabilities.” The senior officer in the Training and Management Department in the Central Military Commission, in the interview with the *PLA Daily*, also stated that the guidelines firmly adhered to the strengthening of joint operation training and that not only respective training by each military branch but also joint operation training at the theater level would be implemented.

On April 12, 2018 in the presence of General Secretary Xi the Central Military Commission held a fleet review ceremony in the South China Sea. Forty-eight ships, including China’s first aircraft carrier the *Liaoning*, 76 combat aircraft, including the 4.5 generation jet fighter Su35 purchased from Russia, and approximately 10,000 soldiers participated in this exercise, and it has been called the largest fleet review ceremony in the history of the PRC. At this time General Secretary Xi gave instructions to thoroughly implement the Party’s vision of a strong military for a new era, firmly adhere to the “sixteen-character’ guideline,” and endeavor to build a world-class navy.

In addition to this, from early in 2018 the PLA has been actively implementing training. In February the South Sea Fleet implemented open sea joint air defense training. In March the Chinese Air Force carried out training involving the H-6K, Su30, Y-8, etc. in the seas surrounding Japan and at the same time implemented open sea training in the South China Sea in which the H-6K, Su30, Su35, etc. participated. In April as well, the Chinese Air Force implemented similar training in the seas surrounding Japan. On the other hand, at the theater-level, large-scale joint operation training like the “Joint Teaching” exercises, which were formerly implemented in the Military Region system, have not yet been implemented after military reform in the PLA. However, the Regulations on the Military Training and the Military Guidelines place importance on improving joint operation capabilities, and taking into account the statements of PLA officials, it should be said that there is a possibility that this kind of training will be implemented in the near future.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of this paper is summarized into three points as below.

First, considering the fact that General Secretary Xi has bolstered his control of the PLA by establishing Xi Jinping’s thinking on strengthening the military of the PLA, which recognizes the “sixteen-character’ guideline” as its core, if General Secretary Xi aims to further strengthen his power base within the Party, the PLA will become an even more powerful source of support. At the 19th Party Congress the Central Military Commission Chairman responsibility system was enshrined in the Party Constitution, and the influence of Xi Jinping became stronger regarding the

appointment of the military top brass as well. Furthermore, workshops regarding Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military are being held repeatedly within the military, and Xi Jinping's thinking on strengthening the military is becoming established steadily within the military. It is thought that if General Secretary Xi, who abolished term limits for the President, aims for a third term, including the restoration of the party chairman system, the PLA will provide him with strong backing.

Second, military reform will probably further accelerate with the aim of completion of the reform by 2020. In particular, there will be greater momentum toward military-civilian integration in the field of science and technology for national defense and the building of a maritime border security structure, a field in which the progress of reforms is not clear when compared to the organizational reforms of the military, despite the fact that the importance of reforms in this field has been indicated. Furthermore, initiatives regarding improving the treatment of veterans, who will be forced to face the repercussions of military reform, will probably also be advanced.

Third, the training of the PLA, which focused on cultivating "joint operations based on the network information system" and "all-regions operations capabilities" with the aim of creating world-class forces, will probably become more active. In response to the fact that military organizational reforms have completed the first stage, the PLA commenced serious efforts to strengthen its training structure. Based on this new training structure, the PLA is already actively rolling out training in the South China Sea and the seas surrounding Japan, but there is a growing possibility that the military will carry out large-scale joint operation training at the theater-level, which has not yet been implemented after the military reform.

(Completed on April 26, 2018)

Major Referenced Sources

Shinji Yamaguchi, *Basic Analysis of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China: (2) Xi Jinping's Vision of a Strong Military*, NIDS Commentary (November 2017)

Yasuyuki Sugiura, *Control of the Military by Xi Jinping in the 19th Party Congress and the Direction of the People's Liberation Army*, East Asia No.606 (December 2017)

The views expressed in this column are solely those of authors and do not represent the official views of NIDS.

We do not permit any unauthorized reproduction or unauthorized copying of the article.

Please contact us at the following regarding any questions, comments or requests you may have.

Planning and Management Division, Planning and Administration Department, NIDS

Telephone: 03-3260-3011 ext.: 8-6-29171

FAX: 03-3260-3034 *NIDS Website: <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/>