

The Joint Operation Structure of the Chinese People's Liberation Army with Focus on the Reorganization of the Chain of Command and Control under the Xi Jinping Administration*

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Abstract

In November 2013, at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, announced the implementation of national defense and military reform. Drawing special attention among the series of reforms was the question of what kind of organizational reform China would be doing to strengthen the joint operation structure.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) reforms, announced in waves between the autumn of 2015 and February 2016, exceeded the expectations of many observers by beginning with the abolition of the four general departments structure and the seven military regions system. This change has been called the "greatest reform since the birth of the nation," with some even calling it the Chinese version of the Goldwater–Nichols Act.

The main interest of this study lies in revealing the present situations of the joint operation structure of the PLA with a focus on the reorganization of the chain of command and control through the series of reforms. Specifically, the main purpose of this study is to shed light on the following points:

- 1) Overview: How did the reform unfold, and what changed?
 - 2) The features and the aims: What are the features of the reform, and what are the aims?
 - 3) Political background: Why did they launch the reform, and were they able to achieve what was intended?
 - 4) Challenges: What are the potential obstacles to the reform, and what are the issues to be undertaken going forward?
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Introduction

In November 2013, at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), announced the launch of national defense and military reform.¹ On March 15 of the following year, the Leading Small Group for National Defense and Military Reform, established by the Central Military Commission, met for the first time. Xi Jinping headed the group as its leader while the two CMC vice-chairmen served as deputy leaders. However, it was Xu Qiliang, who had been the

* Originally published in Japanese in *Boei Kenkyusho Kiyo* [NIDS Security Studies], vol.19, no.1, March 2017.

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¹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 13, 2013.

first Air Force officer to be appointed a CMC vice-chairman, not Fan Changlong of the Ground Force, who was appointed the executive deputy leader.²

According to reports in the Chinese state media, the national defense and military reform under Xi Jinping consists of three elements: (a) adjustment and reform concerning the composition of the military structure, (b) adjustment and reform concerning the military policy system, and (c) deepening of the integration between the military and civilian sectors. Element (a) consists of the rationalization of the CMC and the four general departments structure (General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department, and General Armaments Department), strengthening the joint operation structure, adjusting the relative troop strength among the Ground Force, Navy, Air Force, and the Second Artillery Corps, and reducing the non-combat organizations and members of the PLA. Element (b) refers to progress in the professionalization of the officer corps, improving the draft, officers, and veterans' reemployment systems, and eliminating waste within the military. Element (c) focuses on promoting military-civilian sector cooperation in equipment development, reforming national defense education, and adjusting and rationalizing the sea and air border patrol management structure.³ The media, both domestic and international, focused their attention on "adjustment and reform concerning the composition of the military structure," particularly regarding what China would do by way of the organizational reform with the aim of strengthening the joint operation structure.⁴

China's PLA reforms, announced in waves between the autumn of 2015 and February 2016, created changes that exceeded the expectations of many observers, beginning with the abolition of the four general departments structure and the seven military regions system. Yang Yi, former director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, states that this national defense and military reform is the largest in scale and most thoroughgoing since the birth of the nation.⁵ Some have also compared the organizational reform of the PLA to the introduction of the Goldwater–Nichols Act, which was enacted in the United States in 1986 to bolster joint operations capabilities.⁶

The main interest of this study is to reveal the present situations of the joint operation structure with a focus on the national defense and military reform of the PLA by the Xi Jinping administration, particularly the reorganization of the chain of command and control. Specifically, the main purpose of this study is to shed light on the following points:

- 1) Overview: How did the reform unfold, and what changed?
- 2) The features and the aims: What are the features of the reform, and what are the aims?

² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], March 16, 2014.

³ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 16, 2013; 人民日報 [*People's Daily*], November 21, 2013.

⁴ 香港“文匯報 [Wen Wei Po],” November 16, 2013; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 1, 2014; 水石 [Shui Shi], “[中國軍隊改革將有實質動作] [China Will Steadily Turn Domestic Military Reform into Action],” 香港“鏡報 [The Mirror],” May 2014, pp.68-71.

⁵ 香港“文匯報 [Wen Wei Po],” November 27, 2015.

⁶ James Mulvenon, “China's “Goldwater-Nichols”?” —The Long-Awaited PLA Reorganization Has Finally Arrived”, *China Leadership Monitor*, no.49, March 1, 2016; Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “China's Goldwater-Nichols? —Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms”, *Strategic Forum*, No.294, April 2016. For impact of the Goldwater-Nichols Act on U.S. forces, see Shigeo Kikuchi, “*Beikoku ni okeru Toukou no Kyouka—1986 Goldwater-Nichols Kokuboushou Saihen Hou to Genzai no Minaoshi Giron* [Strengthening Consolidation in United States: The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act and Current Debate on Its Review],” *Briefing Memo*, ed. National Institute for Defense Studies, July 2005.

- 3) Political background: Why did they launch the reform, and were they able to achieve what was intended?
- 4) Challenges: What are the potential obstacles to the reform, and what are the issues to be undertaken going forward?

As for preceding studies on this subject, there is much less work that analyzes China's joint operation structure from the organizational structure perspective compared to research focusing on doctrine and training,⁷ given the constraints on the material available among other factors. Roger Cliff's study does present excellent analysis. Unfortunately, his work only addresses the period before the organizational reform and does not take up the changes rendered by reform.⁸ A number of studies on the organizational reform of the military by the Xi Jinping administration have been published,⁹ given the high level of interest in the subject, and this study draws significantly on the results of their research. However, much of this research, given the constraints on the material available, focus mainly on in-the-moment analysis. In particular, there has been little by way of work that reflects the debate concerning organizational reform that had taken place within the military before the reform proposal was made public.

In view of this situation, this study will provide its own analysis by making broad use of primary material in the form of publicly available information such as PLA textbooks, monographs, regular publications, and newspapers published in China. It goes without saying that there remain

⁷ For representative work in recent years in this area, see Deam Cheng, "The PLA and Joint Operations: Moving from Theory Toward Practice", Michael D. Swain, Andrew N.D. Yang and Evan S. Mederios with Oriana Skylar Mastro, *Assessing The Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan's Security* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2007), pp.55-83; Richard D. Fisher, *China's Military Modernization: Building for Regional and Global Reach* (Stanford University Press 2010), pp.66-79. Carnegie Endowment Ayuso and Lonnie Henley, "Aspiring to Jointness: PLA Training, Exercises, and Doctrine, 2008-2012", Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, Travis Tanner ed., *Assessing The People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Department of the Army, 2014), pp.171-205 et al.

⁸ Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge University Press 2015), pp.37-59.

⁹ For representative research in Japanese, see *Chuugoku Anzen Hoshou Report 2016* [NIDS China Security Report 2016], National Institute for Defense Studies (March 2016), pp.50-52; Michihiko Suzuki, "Seikou suruka, ShuuKinhei no Gunkaikaku [Will it Succeed? Xi Jinping's Military Reform];" Mitsui Global Strategic Studies Institute, *MGSSI Report*, April 1, 2016; Junichi Takeda, "Gun ga Subetewo Shikiru Go Gunshu Taisei Shuu Kinhei no 'Kyougun' Senryaku [The Five Military Branches Structure Where the Military Chairman Rules All: Xi Jinping's Strong Military Reform Strategy]", *Gunji Kenkyuu* [Military Studies], May 2016, pp.55-60; Saburo Tanaka, "Daini Houhei 'Gunshu' ni Shoukaku, 'Senryaku Shien Butai' Shinsetsu, 'Chuugoku Rikugun' Kuiki Bouei-gata kara Zeniki Bouei-gata ni [Second Artillery Corps Elevated to 'Military Branch,' 'Strategic Support Corps Newly Established, 'Chinese Army' from Regional defense to All Regions Defense]," *Gunji Kenkyuu* [Military Studies], May 2016, pp.66-77, etc. For representative research in English, see Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr., "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1)", *China Brief*, Volume XVI • Issue 3, February 8, 2016, pp.6-20; Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr., "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 2)", *China Brief*, Volume XVI • Issue 4, February 24, 2016, pp.3-10; James Mulvenon, "China's 'Goldwater-Nichols'?" —The Long-Awaited PLA Reorganization Has Finally Arrived," *China Leadership Monitor*, no.49, March 1, 2016; Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "China's Goldwater-Nichols? —Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms," *Strategic Forum*, No.294, April 2016; Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, "What Do China's Military Reform Mean for Taiwan?," *The NBR Commentary*, May 19 2016, etc. Among these, the study by Saunders and Wethnow is the closest to this study in its analytical perspective. For research in Taiwan, see 中共研究雜誌社 [Zhonggong Yanjiu Chubanshe], 軍改後共軍重要領導人事評析專輯 [Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co. ed., Feature: Evaluation of Senior Leaders among Communist Party Military Officers after Military Reform], (Taipei: 中共研究雜誌社 [Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co.], June 2016), etc.

many limitations to primary material concerning the PLA. The analysis in this study will rely as much as possible on currently available primary material as well as some internal documents.

1. Overview of the Institutional Reform of the People's Liberation Army under the Xi Jinping Administration

This section offers an overview of the ongoing organizational reform of the PLA, which is being carried out with the aim of strengthening the *joint operation structure* under the Xi Jinping administration. Given that this reform had been under consideration prior to the start of the Xi Jinping administration, we will first look at organizational reform under the Hu Jintao administration for comparison.

(1) The Hu Jintao Years: Incremental Reform by Expanding General Staff Department Functions
Organizational reform of the PLA with an aim of strengthening the *joint operation structure* had already been under consideration during the Hu Jintao administration, which spanned the 10-year period between 2002 and 2012. In March 2006, in his lecture to the Plenary Session of the Representatives of the PLA at the 4th Plenary Session of the 10th National People's Congress, Hu Jintao pointed out that there existed contradictions and problems in the existing structure of the state of affairs, wherein the form of warfare was rapidly changing from mechanization to informatization. He went on to state that a healthy joint operation command structure, joint operation training structure, and joint operation security structure should be constructed in order to respond to the demand for unified joint operation under informationized conditions.¹⁰

Indeed, reform of personnel assignments and institutional elements did take place during the Hu Jintao years. Regarding assignments, in September 2004, the commanders of the Navy, Air Force, and the Second Artillery Corps were newly elected as members of the CMC. Moreover, it was decided to appoint the officers of the Navy and Air Force as deputy chiefs of staff of the General Staff Department in 2004 and the officer of the Second Artillery Corps was appointed as the same position in 2010.¹¹ Later, Air Force Commander Xu Qiliang, Navy Commander Wu Shengli, Air Force Commander Ma Xiaotian, and Second Artillery Corps Commander Wei Fenghe all became members of the CMC after their assignment as deputy chiefs of staff of the General Staff Department and subsequent promotion to commander of their military services.¹² These changes in personnel assignments were very significant given the fact that almost all the members of the CMC had been Army generals until then.

On the institutional side, a major change was the reorganization and establishment of the following three organizations. First, in June 2011, the Communications Division of the PLA General Staff Department was reorganized as the Informatization Division. When he attended the establishment conference for the Informatization Division, Chief of General Staff Chen Bingde pointed out that the establishment of the Informatization Division was an important measure that strengthened the concentrated and unified control of the informatization building

¹⁰ 史偉光 [Shi Weiguang], 作戰指揮體制改革問題研究(修訂版) [Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue (revised)], (Beijing: 軍事科學出版社 [Military Science Publishing House], 2014), p.3.

¹¹ Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), p.54.

¹² 香港“大公報 [Ta Kung Net],” October 30, 2012.

process.¹³ Based on these words from Chen Bingde, the Informatization Division conducted all-encompassing adjustment activities under the slogan “study the ordinances, control strictly, and maintain safety” to rectify the situation where informatization has been scattered across the troops in proliferating formats.¹⁴

Second was the December 2012 establishment of the Military Training Division in the General Staff Department.¹⁵ This Military Training Division was a consequence of the reorganization of the Military Services and Training Division that had previously existed under the General Staff Department. The purpose of the reorganization was to expand the training and guidance by the General Staff Department, which had overly favored the Ground Force before, to involve other military services, i.e. the Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery Corps.¹⁶ In addition, the Joint Training Agency was established under the Military Training Division as the organization to be solely responsible for joint operations training.¹⁷ In this manner, the establishment of the Military Training Division was an attempt to construct an education and training structure concerning joint operations with the General Staff Department at their core.

Third was the Strategic Planning Division, newly established in the General Staff Department in November 2011. The main tasks assigned to the Strategic Planning Division were “research on major strategic questions,” “organization and enactment of development plans and reform proposals for building the military,” “submission of recommendations on strategic military resources for their comprehensive deployment and the adjustment and control from a macro perspective,” and “adjustment and resolution of problems that cut across general departments and areas,” among others.¹⁸ It can be discerned from the fact that the *Zhangguo Guofang Bao* (China National Defense Newspaper) pointed to the “need for the establishment of a department to be in charge of independent, cross-military, and collective and integrated strategic planning”¹⁹ that strategic planning concerning joint operations were being conducted in the Strategic Planning Division.

Despite these changes, the existing four general departments structure was not altered during the Hu Jintao years. Instead, efforts were made to strengthen the joint operation structure by actually expanding the functions of the General Staff Department. Although it was reported that reorganization of the seven military regions system was being considered, no changes were ultimately made.²⁰ In that sense, we could say that major organizational reform was not seen under the Hu Jintao administration; although meaningful changes were made in personnel assignments, only incremental reform took place regarding institutional arrangements. The preexisting structure for the chain of command and control in the joint operation structure also remained mostly unchanged.

¹³ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], July 1, 2011.

¹⁴ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], October 16, 2011.

¹⁵ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], December 22, 2011; 人民日報 [People's Daily], December 22, 2011.

¹⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], December 22, 2011.

¹⁷ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], August 7, 2012.

¹⁸ 新華每日電訊 [Daily Xinhua Online], November 23, 2011.

¹⁹ 中國國防報 [China National Defense Newspaper], November 29, 2011.

²⁰ For draft military region reorganization plan during the Hu Jintao years, see Eiichi Shiozawa, “*Shikikeitou no Togo to Kai/Kugun Jushi – Chugoku ga Susumeru Gunji Kaikaku* [Consolidation of Chain of Command and Priority on Navy and Air Force: Military Reform that China Is Promoting],” *Toa* [East Asia], No.563, pp.36-37.

(2) The Xi Jinping Era: Driving Drastic Reform with the Central Military Committee at Its Core a) The History

In November 2013, at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping, Chairman of the Central Military Commission, announced the launch of national defense and military reform. The following year, in March, he summoned the first meeting of the CMC Leading Small Group for National Defense and Military Reform, with himself as its leader.

Before this, at the expanded meeting of the CMC in December 2013, Xi Jinping had suggested strengthening the joint operation structure and adjusting the military branch structure.²¹ At a November 2013 meeting in the Jinan Military Region, Xi Jinping stated that “the ‘big army principle’ shall be abandoned and the position of the army in the joint operations structure shall be sought” and that “the CMC will strengthen its study of the guidance and control structure reform and properly undertake the overall planning and guidance for the model change of the army.”²²

Perhaps in response to these statements by Xi Jinping, the reorganization of the seven military regions into five Theater Commands, the establishment of a Ground Force general department, and the possibility of a major reduction in the number of troops was reported around this time by the media in Hong Kong, Japan, and elsewhere.²³ The Canadian military magazine *Kanwa Defense Review* reported that a CMC joint operations command center was established in the General Staff Department based on the intent of Xi Jinping.²⁴ The magazine also reported that the East China Sea Joint Operations Command Center was established under the CMC for cross-military region command of the Navy and Air Force to accompany the establishment of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone.²⁵ However, the Chinese Ministry of Defense did not give clear answers to these reports.²⁶

Movement around national defense and military reform surfaced on September 3, 2013 at a military parade celebrating the 70th anniversary of the victory in the resistance war against Japan when Xi Jinping announced that the number of PLA troops would be reduced by 300,000.²⁷ This announcement called for the first large-scale reduction of PLA troops since September 2003, when

²¹ 習近平 [Xi Jinping], 堅定不移深化國防和軍隊改革 [Conduct National Defense and Military Reform Unwaveringly], ed. People’s Liberation Army, General Political Department, 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People’s Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.223.

²² 習近平 [Xi Jinping], “深入貫徹黨在新形勢下的強軍目標努力建設全面過硬戰略預備力量 [Make the Military Stronger and Adhere to a Hardline, Prepared Strategy on All Fronts under the New Communist Party Structure],” ed. People’s Liberation Army, General Political Department, 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People’s Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.207.

²³ 香港“文匯報 [Wen Wei Po],” November 16, 2013; Yomiuri Shimbun, January 1, 2014; 水石 [Shui Shi], “中國軍隊改革將有實質動作 [China Will Steadily Turn Domestic Military Reform into Action],” 香港“鏡報 [The Mirror], May 2014, pp.68-71.

²⁴ “中國設立『中央軍事委員會聯合作戰指揮中心』 [China Establishes Central Military Committee Joint Operations Command Center],” 漢和防務評論 [Kanwa Information Center], September 2014, pp.22-24.

²⁵ “中國設立東海聯合作戰指揮中心 [China Establishes Central Military Committee Joint Operations Command Center],” 漢和防務評論 [Kanwa Defense Review], August 2014, p.22.

²⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], August 1, 2014.

²⁷ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], September 4, 2015.

Jiang Zemin, who was CMC Chairman at the time, announced a 200,000 member reduction.²⁸ Hu Jintao, who followed Jiang Zemin as CMC Chairman, also attempted to reduce the number of troops, but this plan was believed to have failed.²⁹ The fact that the implementation of the reduction of the number of troops was announced at this point in time appears to be a reflection of the reinforcement of Xi Jinping's control over the PLA following Guo Boxiong's arrest in July 2015 and Xu Caihou's arrest in July 2014. The General Political Department sent out a notice to all military services as well as the People's Armed Police Force to ensure thorough awareness of the content of Xi Jinping's speech at the military parade.³⁰

Around the time of the military parade, multiple overseas media reported on the possibility of reorganization of the PLA's military regions. The series of reports stated that the existing seven military regions would be reorganized into four or five military regions or Theater Commands. It was also pointed out that the reorganization would correct defects in the PLA, dominated by the Ground force and specializing in regional defense, and enhance its joint operations and emergency response capabilities.³¹

In November 2015, the CMC Reform Work Conference was held in Beijing. At the conference, Xi Jinping expressed the intent to resolutely implement national defense and military reform. He specifically referred to several reform proposals, including (a) establishment of a Ground Force Leading Organization, (b) strengthening of the functions of the CMC by absorbing the functions of the four general departments, (c) construction of the CMC—Theater Commands—military command structure and the CMC—military services—troops military administration structure, and (d) newly establishing the CMC Discipline Inspection Commission and the CMC Politics and Law Commission. He also expressed the intent to complete the series of reforms by 2020.³²

b) The Specifics of the Reform

The specific content of the PLA's organizational reform was announced in consecutive monthly segments between the end of 2015 and February 2016. On December 31, 2015, the Chinese PLA announced (a) the rollout of the Ground Force Leading Organization, (b) the change of the name for the Second Artillery Corps to Rocket Force and its upgrade to a military branch, and (c) the creation of the Strategic Support Force. Xi Jinping conferred the military flag for each of the forces. Li Zuocheng, Commander of the Chengdu Military Region, was appointed Commander of the Ground Force and Liu Lei, Political Commissar of the Lanzhou Military Region, was appointed Political Commissar. Wei Fenghe and Wang Jiasheng, Commander and Political Commissar of the Second Artillery Corps respectively, assumed the same positions in the Rocket Force. Gao Jin, the Director of the Academy of Military Science and formerly of the Second Artillery Corps, assumed the post of the Commander of the Strategic Support Force while Liu Fulian, Political Commissar of the Beijing Military Region, assumed the position of Political Commissar.³³

²⁸ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], September 2, 2003.

²⁹ National Institute for Defense Studies, *East Asian Strategic Review 2012*, (Japan Times, 2012) p.109.

³⁰ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], September 4, 2015.

³¹ *South China Morning Post*, September 2, 2015; *Bloomberg News*, September 1, 2015; *Jiji.com*, September 7, 2015, <http://www.jiji.com/jc/zc?k=201509/2015090700666>.

³² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 27, 2015.

³³ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 2, 2016.

On January 1, 2016, after approval by Xi Jinping, the CMC promulgated the “Opinion concerning the Deepening of the National Defense and Military Reform” (herein referred to as the “Opinion”) to the entire military.³⁴ On January 11, the new structure of the CMC after the reorganization of the four general departments was announced. The preexisting four general departments were dismantled, and the CMC multi-department system with seven departments – the General Office, the Joint Staff Department, the Political Work Department, the Logistic Support Department, the Equipment Development Department, the Training and Management Department, and the National Defense Mobilization Department – was launched. This multi-department system also included a commission consisting of the Discipline Inspection Commission, the Politics and Law Affairs Commission, and the Science and Technology Commission, as well as five directly-administered organizations consisting of Strategic Planning Office, Reform and Organization Office, International Military Cooperation Office, the Audit Bureau, and the Organ Affairs General Management Bureau. Together, this reform resulted in the launch of a total of 15 departments all attached directly to the CMC (see Figure 1).³⁵

On February 1, 2016, it was announced that the preexisting seven military regions would be abolished and replaced by five newly-created Theater Commands. The new Theater Commands consisted of Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern, and Central Theaters, for each of which a

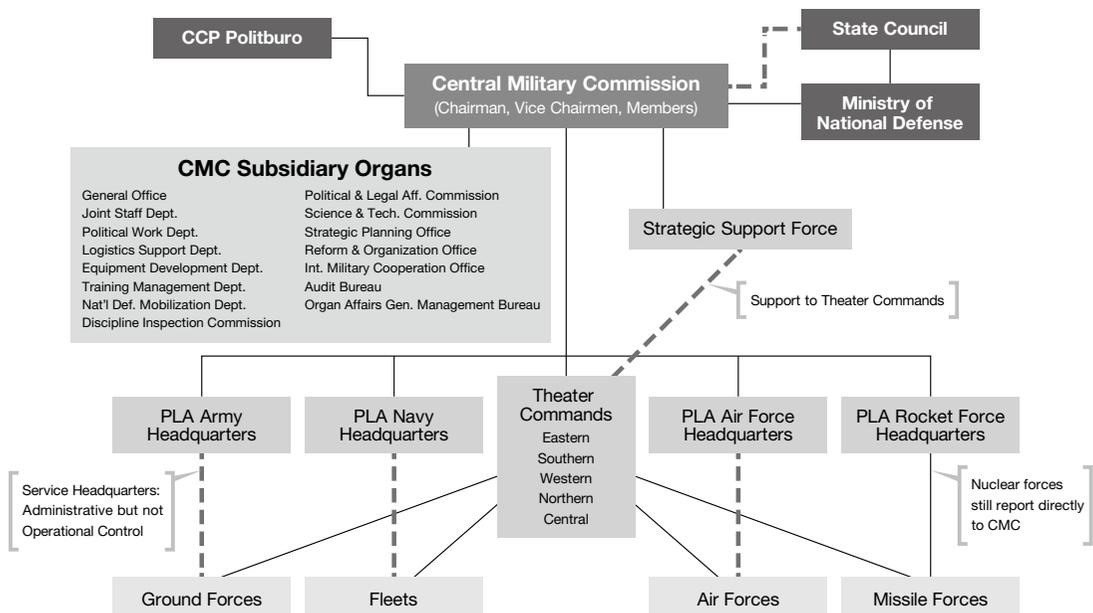


Figure 1 PLA Structure after Reforms

Source: Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Goldwater-Nicholas? — Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms”, *Strategic Forum*, No.294, April 2016, p. 3

³⁴ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 2, 2016.

³⁵ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 12, 2016.

theater joint operations command organization was formed. All the commanders of the Theater Commands came from the Ground Force, as did all the political commissars except for Zhu Fuxi from the Air Force (Western Theater).³⁶ Each Theater Command has deputy commanders and deputy political commissars from each of the three Ground Force, Navy, and Air Force branches. For theater chief of staff, Wei Gang from the Navy and Li Fengbiao from the Air Force were selected from the deputy commanders to assume the position for the Southern and Central Theaters, respectively³⁷ (see Table 1 on the following page regarding the main assignments to the headquarters of the respective Theater Commands).

Table 1 Main Assignments in the Respective Theater Commands

Theater	Post	Name	Rank		Note
Eastern Theater	Commander	劉粵軍 [Liu Aojun]	General	Ground Force	
	Political Commissar	鄭衛平 [Zheng Weiping]	General	Ground Force	
	Deputy Commander	楊暉 [Yang Hui]	Lieutenant general	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater chief of staff
		顧祥兵 [Gu Xiangbing]	Rear admiral	Navy	
		孫和榮 [Sun Herong]	General	Air Force	
		秦衛江 [Qin Weijiang]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force commander
		蘇支前 [Su Zhiqian]	Vice admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater Navy commander
		黃國顯 [Huang Guoxian]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force commander
	Deputy Political Commissar	王平 [Wang Ping]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater political work department head
		廖可鐸 [Liao Keduo]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force political commissar
王華勇 [Wang Huayong]		Admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force political commissar	
劉德偉 [Liu Dewei]		General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force political commissar	
Southern Theater	Commander	王教成 [Wang Jiaocheng]	General	Ground Force	
	Political Commissar	魏亮 [Wei Liang]	General	Ground Force	
	Deputy Commander	魏鋼 [Wei Gang]	Rear admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater chief of staff
		陳照海 [Chen Zhaohai]	General	Ground Force	

³⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], February 2, 2016.

³⁷ 大公網 [Ta Kung Net], February 23, 2016, <http://news.takungpao.com/mainland/focus/2016-02/3283259.html>.

Theater	Post	Name	Rank		Note
Southern Theater	Deputy Commander	常丁求 [Chang Dingqiu]	General	Air Force	
		劉小午 [Liu Xiaowu]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force commander
		沈金龍 [Shen Jinlong]	Rear admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater Navy commander
		徐安祥 [Xu Anxiang]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force commander
	Deputy Political Commissar	楊玉文 [Ynag Yuwen]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater political work department head
		白呂 [Bai Lu]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force political commissar
		劉明利 [Liu Mingli]	Rear admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater Navy political commissar
		安兆慶 [An Zhaoqing]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force political commissar
Western Theater	Commander	趙宗岐 [Zhao Zongqi]	General	Ground Force	
	Political Commissar	朱福熙 [Zhu Fuxi]	General	Air Force	
	Deputy Commander	戎貴卿 [Jie Guiqing]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater chief of staff
		許林平 [Xu Linping]	General	Ground Force	
		韓勝延 [Han Shengyan]	General	Air Force	
		何清成 [He Qingcheng]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force commander
		戰厚順 [Zhan Houshun]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force commander
	Deputy Political Commissar	何平 [He Ping]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater political work department head
		徐忠波 [Xu Zhongbo]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force political commissar
舒清友 [Shu Qingyou]		General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force political commissar	
Northern Theater	Commander	宋普選 [Song Puxuan]	General	Ground Force	
	Political Commissar	褚益民 [Chu Yimin]	General	Ground Force	
	Deputy Commander	王西欣 [Wang Xixin]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater chief of staff
		王長江 [Wang Changjiang]	Rear admiral	Navy	
		王偉 [Wang Wei]	General	Air Force	
		李橋銘 [Li Qiaoming]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force commander

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Theater	Post	Name	Rank		Note
Northern Theater	Deputy Commander	袁誉柏 [Yuan Yubai]	Admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater Navy commander
		丁来杭 [Ding Laihang]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force commander
	Deputy Political Commissar	劉建 [Liu Jian]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater political work department head
		徐遠林 [Xu Yuanlin]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force political commissar
		康非 [Kang Fei]	Rear admiral	Navy	Serving concurrently as theater Navy political commissar
		白文奇 [Bai Wenqi]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force political commissar
Central Theater	Commander	韓衛國 [Han Weiguo]	General	Ground Force	
	Political Commissar	殷方龍 [Yin Fanglong]	General	Ground Force	
	Deputy Commander	李鳳彪 [Li Fengbiao]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater chief of staff
		王軍 [Wang Jun]	General	Ground Force	
		張義湖 [Zhang Yihu]	General	Air Force	
		史呂澤 [Shi Luze]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force commander
		莊可柱 [Zhuang Kezhu]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force commander
	Deputy Political Commissar	侯賀華 [Hou Hehua]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater political work department head
		吳杜洲 [Wu Duzhou]	General	Ground Force	Serving concurrently as theater Ground Force political commissar
		劉紹亮 [Liu Shaoliang]	General	Air Force	Serving concurrently as theater Air Force political commissar

* Created from 中共研究雜誌社編『軍改後共軍重要領導人事評析專輯』[Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co. ed., Feature: Evaluation of Senior Leaders among Communist Party Military Officers after Military Reform], pp.69-101.

2. Features of the Reform and the Objectives

As our overview has shown, the organizational reform under the Xi Jinping administration has been a highly drastic one that went so far as to abolish the four general departments structure and the seven military regions system. The scale of these changes is in stark contrast to the less extensive organizational reform under the Hu Jintao administration. With an analysis from the perspective of the chain of command and control in the joint operation structure, the following features of the reform and their objectives can be identified.

(1) Strengthening Xi Jinping's Powers of Command and Control over the Military

The first feature of the reform is the replacement of the four general departments structure with the CMC multidepartment system in order to bolster the power of command and control over

the military by the CMC, with Xi Jinping as its chairman. On this point, these reforms stand in stark contrast to the efforts under the Hu Jintao administration to strengthen the joint operation structure of the PLA by strengthening the functions and powers of the General Staff Department while maintaining the four general departments structure. A report from the Hong Kong-based newspaper that reported on the series of reforms also points out that Xi Jinping's control over the military will be further strengthened.³⁸

The Opinion states that the basic principle of the reform is to implement the CMC chairman responsibility system on all fronts and concentrate the supreme powers of guidance and command in the party leaders and the CMC.³⁹ An editorial carried in the *PLA Daily* with a General Political Department byline also pointed out in its explanation of the CMC Reform Work Conference, held in November 2015, that the guiding principle of this reform was to “strengthen concentrated guidance by the CMC, thoroughly realize the CMC chairman responsibility system on all fronts, and concentrate the powers of supreme guidance and command in the party leaders, CMC, and President Xi Jinping.”⁴⁰ Other *PLA Daily* editorials also emphasize again and again that the main objectives of this reform were to strengthen both the party leaders and the CMC chairman responsibility system.⁴¹

It has been pointed out that strengthening the CMC chairman responsibility system in particular bolsters Xi Jinping's control over the military and leads to the expansion of his powers of command over all aspects of the military.⁴² Researchers within the PLA also position the CMC chairman responsibility system as “the supreme expression of the Party's absolute leadership over the military” and propound its importance.⁴³

On April 20, 2016, after the CMC multidepartment system had been launched, Xi Jinping led Fan Changlong, Xu Qiliang, and other CMC members to visit the CMC Joint Operations Command Center. On that occasion, people's attention was drawn to the fact that Xi had added another title to his name: “Commander-in-Chief of the Joint Operations Command Center.” Xi referred to the need to overcome contradictions and problems in the joint operations command in contemporary China and emphasized the importance of the Center, stating that “fully equipping the Joint Operations Command Center is an important part of deepening national defense and military reform and an important measure in strengthening the strategic command function of the CMC.”⁴⁴ In this manner, he personally demonstrated a posture of actively commanding joint operations.

Of the four general departments that were abolished, the greatest change came to the General Staff Department, whose functions and role had been expanded when the Hu Jintao administration

³⁸ *South China Morning Post*, January 13, 2016.

³⁹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 2, 2016.

⁴⁰ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], December 7, 2016.

⁴¹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 30 and December 1, 2015, January 12 and 29, 2016.

⁴² James Mulvenon, “The Yuan Stops Here: Xi Jinping and the ‘CMC Chairman Responsibility System,’” *China Leadership Monitor*, No.47, July 14, 2015.

⁴³ 胡光正 [Hu Guangzheng] and 許今朝 [Xu Jingzhao], “偉大改革的精髓 論軍委管總、戰區主戰、軍種主建 [The Spirit of the Great Reforms—Discussing Overall Control by the CMC, Taking the Theater Commands for the Main Fighting, Building Based on the Service Branches]” 國防 [National Defense], 國防雜誌社 [National Defense Magazine Co.], March 2016 (Vol.361), p.5.

⁴⁴ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], April 21, 2016. James Mulvenon, “Xi Jinping Has a Cool New Nickname: ‘Commander-in-Chief,’” *China Leadership Monitor*, No.51. August 30, 2016

strengthened the joint operations structure. Xi's reform divided the functions of the General Staff Department among the new Joint Staff Department, the Training and Management Department, the National Defense Mobilization Department, the Strategic Planning Office, and the International Military Cooperation Office, while the command headquarters function of the Ground Force was reassigned to the newly created Ground Force Leading Organization. In addition, given their areas of competence, it is believed that of the intelligence departments subordinated to the General Staff Department, the Technological Surveillance Division (Division 3), the Electronics Division (Division 4), and the Informatization Division (Division 5) have been reassigned to the newly established Strategic Support Force.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, it appears that the Intelligence Division (Division 2), in charge of human intel, has been reassigned to the Joint Staff Department.⁴⁶

The functions of the Joint Staff Department are defined as “executing support for operation planning, command and control, and operation command,” “conducting evaluation of operation capabilities,” and “organizing joint operations training and building preparation for war.”⁴⁷ Judging from this description, it appears that the Joint Staff Department was formed from the Operations Division of the old General Staff Department, to which the Joint Training Agency of the Military Training Department and other departments related to joint operations were added. The Joint Operations Command Center presumably retains the role of the Joint Operations Command Center under the old General Staff Department, although it also appears to have absorbed the operations divisions in the staff departments of the respective military services.⁴⁸ One analyst's assessment of this reform is that the functions of the General Staff Department were clarified and its status and organization were further strengthened.⁴⁹ However, viewed as a whole, it can be said that the functions and authority of the General Staff Department have been significantly reduced. From that perspective, it has been pointed out that the General Staff Department has been the “biggest loser” in this reform.⁵⁰

Meanwhile, the Discipline Inspection Commission and the Politics and Law Commission were detached from the General Political Department, and the Audit Bureau became independent from the General Logistics Department and directly subordinate to the CMC. Dividing the organizations in this manner has been seen as being closely related to Xi Jinping's anticorruption movement within the military.⁵¹ The Science and Technology Commission did become independent

⁴⁵ For role and staffing of strategic support force, see John Costello, The Strategic Support Force: China's Information Warfare Service, *ChinaBrief*, Volume XVI • Issue 3, February 8, 2016, pp.15-20; 中共研究雜誌社編『軍改後共軍重要領導人事評析專輯』[Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co. ed., Feature: Evaluation of Senior Leaders among Communist Party Military Officers after Military Reform], (Taipei: 中共研究雜誌社 [Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co.], June 2016), pp.56-58; et al.

⁴⁶ 中共研究雜誌社編『軍改後共軍重要領導人事評析專輯』[Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co. ed., Feature: Evaluation of Senior Leaders among Communist Party Military Officers after Military Reform], (Taipei: 中共研究雜誌社 [Studies on Chinese Communism Publishing Co.], June 2016), p.27.

⁴⁷ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 12, 2016.

⁴⁸ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], May 17, 2016.

⁴⁹ 馬浩亮 [Ma Haoliang], 中國軍隊大改革 [Major Reform for Chinese Military Units], 中國省級政經生態週報 [Weekly Report on Political Developments at the Provincial Level], Vol.45, <http://news.takungpao.com/special/jundugaige/>.

⁵⁰ Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, John F. Corbett, Jr., “The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1)”, *ChinaBrief*, Volume XVI • Issue 3, February 8, 2016, p.9.

⁵¹ 馬 [Ma], 中國軍隊大改革 [Major Reform for Chinese Military Units] Vol.45. However, the Audit Office had already been subordinated directly to the CMC in November 2014.

from the General Equipment Department, but this was not a major change compared to the changes in other general departments.

The reason for dismantling the traditional four general departments structure that was given in an editorial published in *PLA Daily* is that many adverse effects had come to pass, such as an impact on concentrated and centralized command by the CMC as power concentrated in the four general departments and each of them became independent command organizations, usurping the functions that the CMC was supposed to fulfill in the first place. The editorial further referred to (a) transition from “leading” to “guidance,” (b) strengthening strategic planning and macro control, and (c) delegating specific administrative functions to the respective military services as the difference between the preexisting four general departments structure and the CMC multidepartment system.⁵²

The fact that these views were expressed in *PLA Daily*, the military’s official journal, indicates that the four general departments structure had been the cause of serious problems for the powers of control and command authority of the CMC and its chairman. At the same time, it can be said that this indicates that the CPC and PLA leadership, with Xi Jinping at the center, were strongly determined to overcome these problems. In order to execute the drastic organizational reform with the objective of strengthening the PLA’s joint operations structure, they had believed that it was necessary to abolish the four general departments structure and in particular disperse the General Staff Department, in which so much of the functions and authority had been concentrated, in order to strengthen the powers of control and command of the CMC chairman.

Indeed, the aim of Xi Jinping to strengthen his own control over the military seems to be meeting with some success. At the First Plenary Session of the 11th Navy Party Committee, Navy Commander Wu Shengli and Political Commissar Miao Hua used the term “*he xing* (core)” in referring to Xi Jinping, and they emphasized the need to obey his command.⁵³ In the April teleconference within the Navy conveying important instructions from Xi Jinping concerning the *Liang Xue Yi Zuo* (learn the party constitution and internal party regulations, study to resolutely maintain the spirit of the main speeches by Secretary Xi Jinping, and become qualified as a party member), Navy Commander Wu Shengli and Miao Hua again used the term “*he xing*” and issued strict orders to obey Xi Jinping’s commands for any and all actions.⁵⁴ Considering that the term “*he xing*” was never used for Hu Jintao, this term appears to be evidence that Xi Jinping’s powers of control and command authority over the military have been strengthened.

(2) Clarifying, Simplifying, and Rationalizing the Chain of Command and Control

The second feature is the aim of clarifying, simplifying, and rationalizing the chain of command while keeping in mind “*Ping Zhan Yi Ti* (peace and war as one)” in order to handle joint operations and informationized war with the CMC. The CMC’s powers of control and command authority have been strengthened under the policy that “the CMC would provide general management, the Theater Commands would focus on operation, and the military services would manage force building.” On this point, the establishment of the Ground Force Leading Organization, the

⁵² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 30, 2015 and February 3, 2016.

⁵³ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], March 3, 2016.

⁵⁴ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], April 26, 2016.

reorganization of the seven military regions into five Theater Commands, and the dismantling of the four general departments have great significance.

First, this reform attempted to clarify the separation between the operation and command system (military command) and the construction and control system (military administration). At the CMC Reform Conference held on November 26, 2015, Xi Jinping announced that in the future, the military command system would be implemented by the CMC – Theater Commands - troops and that the military administration system would be implemented by the CMC – Service Headquarters - troops.⁵⁵ The explanation of this policy by PLA researchers is that the Theater Commands are in charge of combat power output such as planning and command for joint operations at the strategy and campaign level, whereas the Service Headquarters are in charge of combat power input such as personnel deployment, equipment procurement, and training.⁵⁶

In this manner, the respective Service Headquarters became departments that mainly took charge of military administration, and their previously held powers of military command were diminished. As for the Chinese Ground Force, since the four general departments structure, the General Staff Department, which had for all practical purposes functioned as its headquarters, was dismantled; it then became necessary for the Chinese Ground Force to establish its own headquarters similar to the other military services. Thus, the Ground Force Leading Organization was established. In establishing the Ground Force Leading Organization, the fact that the four general departments had assumed the role of the Ground Force headquarters was criticized for causing duplication of the Ground Force operation command and control system, and the proliferation of departments that got in the way of one another.⁵⁷

PLA researchers point out that instruction and control by the respective Service Headquarters are to be conducted and under the political discipline and strategic unified plans of the CMC and that the respective Service Headquarters should not construct arbitrarily and independently.⁵⁸ A statement by Yu Zhong, director of the Navy Staff Department Training Agency, at an internal meeting held by the Navy in April 2016 that “our agency has been reduced as an organization”⁵⁹ suggests the possibility that some of the functions, personnel, and budget in the training area, which is considered to be part of the construction area, has been transferred to the Joint Staff Department, the Training and Administration Department, and others. In that sense, it can be said that the independence of the respective Service Headquarters may also be constrained in troops construction such as training.

The second point that deserves to be noted is the attempt to simplify the chain of command and control by replacing the preexisting “CMC-four general departments-military region/branch-troops” four-layer structure with a CMC-Theater Commands-troops three-layer structure in order to strengthen powers of the five Theater Commands. In addition, a joint operations command organization was established in each Theater Commands to plan and command joint operations.⁶⁰ PLA researchers explain that the powers of command at the specific strategy and campaign levels

⁵⁵ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 27, 2015.

⁵⁶ 胡 [Hu] and 許 [Xu], 偉大改革的精髓 [The Spirit of the Great Reforms], p.4-10.

⁵⁷ 學習時報 [Study Times], December 20, 2015.

⁵⁸ 胡 [Hu] and 許 [Xu], 偉大改革的精髓 [The Spirit of the Great Reforms], p.9.

⁵⁹ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], May 3, 2016.

⁶⁰ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], February 2, 2015.

are concentrated in the Theater Command under the strategic and overall control of the CMC; the Theater Commands are in charge of planning and joint operations concerning the strategy and campaigns along the involved strategic orientation.⁶¹ From these explanations, it can be discerned that the Theater Command headquarters have greater powers concerning the operation activities of the troop compared to the preexisting military region headquarters. Therefore, it can be said that the headquarters have gained in importance.

The third point that deserves to be noted is the attempt to rationalize the chain of command and control based on the principle of *Ping Zhan Yi Ti* (peace and war as one). For example, the Opinion points out that a “peace and war as one” strategy and campaign command structure should be built into the two-level joint operations command structure consisting of the CMC and the Theater Commands.⁶²

The concept “Theater Command” had previously existed within the PLA. Since the 1990s in particular, the concept “Theater Command” came to draw attention by appearing in campaign exercises. While a “military region” was also in charge of administrative control, such as troop construction during peacetime, “Theater Command” was erected during wartime and was considered to be dedicated solely to operation command centered on joint operations.⁶³

However, this difference between peacetime and wartime structures causes problems in the emergency response capability. According to a monograph by the PLA, the joint command organization of a Theater Command in the PLA consists of a basic command post, reserve command post, and a rear command postcenter. The standard composition of the basic command post, which plays a core role, is formed of “one center and six divisions,” i.e. a command and control center, intelligence, military mobilization, political work, logistic support, and equipment support.⁶⁴ Since this joint command organization of a Theater Command is different from the military structure during peacetime, there is a problem with the time needed to switch from one to the other.⁶⁵ The name change from “military region” to “Theater Command” in this reform should be proof that it is the intention of the CPC and PLA leadership to rationalize the chain of command and control by perpetuating the wartime structure, thereby strengthening the emergency response capability.

The fact that the chain of command and control under the preexisting military regions contained many problems can be pointed to as the reason for renewing the military chain of command and control focused on military regions. A *PLA Daily* editorial points out that under the previous military region structure, the military command functions and the military administration functions had not been segregated and had existed in an indivisible state. This resulted in a lack of clarity for the military command functions, creating obstacles for the joint operation structure. The editorial claims that the joint operation structure in the PLA will be strengthened since the

⁶¹ 胡 [Hu] and 許 [Xu], 偉大改革的精髓 [The Spirit of the Great Reforms], p.9.

⁶² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 2, 2016.

⁶³ Junichi Takeda, “*Jinmin Kaihougun: Tou to Kokka senryaku wo Sasaeru 230 Mannin no Jutsuryoku* [People’s Liberation Army: The Capability of 230 Million Members Who Support the Party and the National Strategy],” p.152; Eiichi Shiozawa, “*Shikikeitou no Togo to Kai/Kugun Jushi*,” pp.36-37.

⁶⁴ 魯伝剛 [Lu Chuangang], 战区战略探究 [Study on Theaters Commands Strategy], (Beijing: Military Publishing House, November 2013), p.255.

⁶⁵ 劉偉 [Liu Wei], 聯合作戰指揮 [Joint Operations Command], (Shenyang: 白山出版社 [Baishan Publishing Co.], 2010), pp.47-50.

military command function and the military administration function have been separated by the establishment of the joint command organization of the Theater Command. Moreover, the editorial claims that the Theater Commands will concentrate on their military command functions.⁶⁶

A monograph by the PLA that considered organizational reform points to the following two problems in the PLA chain of command and control that existed before this reform. First, although the idea that a permanent operations command organization should be established did exist, progress in organization reform was slow, the establishment of Theater Command-class operation command organ was incomplete, and the military region framework remained unchanged, with the result being that the structural model in which the Ground Force provided guidance could not be escaped. Second, the relationship between joint operations command and the operations command of the respective military services was unclear, and the issues concerning the power of command and control over the respective military services in the Theater Commands had not been resolved. Due to this, the powers of command and control over the military services remained within the headquarters of the respective military services, and a joint operations command structure in a true sense was not achieved. The study claimed that it was difficult to command joint operations under informationized conditions with this structure.⁶⁷

A PLA monograph on the chain of command and control in joint operations points out that in a drill implemented under the military region structure for peacetime in which headquarters and the political work, logistics, and equipment departments coexist, proportion of commands communication reached only 50% despite using the latest automated means, simplifying the command procedures, and reducing the amount of commands to be conveyed, with the result being that the mission of the operation commands was not fulfilled. At the same time, it presented the criticism that building a chain of command and control that is different from the one for peacetime negatively impacted the emergency response capability.⁶⁸ A PLA monograph that considered organizational reform also claimed that a joint operations command structure that combines peacetime and wartime should be built in order to handle the rapid transition from peacetime to wartime.⁶⁹

In this manner, the CPC and PLA aim to enhance joint operations capability and emergency response capability under CMC control with Theater Commands at the center in order to win informationized wars by clarifying, simplifying, and rationalizing the chain of command and control through this reform.⁷⁰ This introduction of the Theater Command structure is having a major impact on the chain of command and control at the Service Headquarters. At an internal navy meeting held on May 10 by the group training unit regarding Xi Jinping's strategic ideological theory with national defense and military reform, Navy Commissar Miao Hua pointed out that the most urgent issue in the series of reforms was to obey orders of command in the Theaters Commands.⁷¹ At the meeting, it was pointed out that although there were no changes in the military administration matters of the respective navy fleets, there had been major changes in the campaign

⁶⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], February 2, 2016.

⁶⁷ 史 [Shi], 作戰指揮體制改革問題研究(修訂版) [Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue (revised)], pp.23-24.

⁶⁸ 劉偉 [Liu Wei], 聯合作戰指揮 [Joint Operations Command], pp.47-50.

⁶⁹ 史 [Shi], Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue, pp.47-50.

⁷⁰ 香港“文匯報 [Wen Wei Po],” November 27, 2015; 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], February 3, 2016.

⁷¹ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], May 11, 2016.

command relationships, and various officers expressed various opinions.⁷²

As military actions that are expected to be conducted in this Theater Command structure, a PLA monograph points to (a) the ostentation of military presence, (b) the implementation of disaster relief activities and other emergency support, (c) the conduct of a wide range of international military cooperation such as UN PKO activities and joint military exercises with other countries, and (d) the execution of joint operations. Points (a) and (d) are of particular importance. Regarding (a), (1) reconnaissance and surveillance, (2) patrol and warning, (3) support for the activities of maritime law enforcement agencies and local governments, and (4) military exercises that combine deterrence and training are given as the specific means. Regarding (d), (1) intelligence warfare, (2) precision artillery warfare, (3) area seizure and control warfare, (4) special demolition warfare, and (5) comprehensive defense warfare are given as specific operations. As for the joint exercises in (c), it is pointed out as a special means of military diplomacy and an important way to express the political determination of the state.⁷³

(3) Partially Correcting the “Dominance of the Ground Forces”

The third feature is the partial correction, both in terms of organization and staffing, of the “Dominance of the Ground Forces” that had been the tradition of the PLA. China’s Ground Force underwent the greatest change in this reform.

In terms of organization, the dismantling of the four general departments and the establishment of the Ground Force Leading Organization were both measures to correct the “Dominance of the Ground Forces.” By not establishing an independent headquarters and having the four general departments assume that function, the Ground Force had maintained a status superior above the Navy, Air Force, and Second Artillery Corps. With the dismantling of the four general departments and the establishment of the Ground Force Leading Organization to execute the military administration functions that the four general departments had previously performed, the Ground Force now has the same status as the Navy, Air Force, Rocket Force.⁷⁴

There were also some changes in personnel assignments. The structure for the Theater Commands, with the Ground Force at its center, was maintained at the supreme commander level as evident by the fact that the Ground Force assumed all the commander positions in the Theater Commands as well as all the political commissar positions, except for Zhu Fuxi in the Western Theater Command. In that sense, the view that the Ground Force still maintains superiority over the other military services is correct.⁷⁵ However, it is also highly significant that officers from the Navy and Air Force assumed the position of chief of staff, which is selected from among the deputy commanders, in the Southern and Central Theaters Command.

As for the downsizing the troops, the Ground Force also appears to be the main target of the 300,000-member reduction. Indeed, it has been decided that Navy personnel will actually increase in number based on Xi Jinping’s strategic considerations that China’s security threats will come from the sea.⁷⁶

⁷² 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], May 16 and 17, 2016.

⁷³ 魯 [Lu], 戰區戰略探究 [Study on Theaters Command Strategy], p.205-250.

⁷⁴ 馬 [Ma], 中國軍隊大改革 [Major Reform for Chinese Military Units], Vol.45.

⁷⁵ *South China Morning Post*, February 2, 2016.

⁷⁶ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], April 15, 2016.

Correcting the “Dominance of the Ground Forces” was one of the main objectives of going forward with the national defense and military reform for Xi Jinping.⁷⁷ In addition, PLA researchers also believed that “Dominance of the Ground Forces” was an obstacle to the chain of command and control in the joint operation structure.⁷⁸

In light of all this, it was inevitable that the Ground Force would be required to undergo major changes in this reform. It is particularly significant that the Ground Force became an equal among the other military services from an organizational perspective as a result of dismantling the four general departments structure and establishing the Ground Force Leading Organization. The “Dominance of the Ground Forces” was corrected, if partially, through these measures. This trend should become even more evident as the reform progresses and takes root going forward. For example, as the joint operation structure deepens, it may be possible that Navy and Air Force officers will be appointed commanders of Theater Commands or even Chief of the Joint Staff. In that sense, this reform can be seen as the first step in opening up the chain of command and control in the preexisting Ground Force-dominant joint operation structure of the PLA.

3. Political Background of the Reform

These proposals for reform had been under consideration during the Hu Jintao years as well. So why did Xi Jinping launch such an ambitious reform at this point in time? What made it possible for Xi Jinping to execute such a reform? The following points can be identified as the political background behind the reform.

(1) Deterioration of China's International Environment

The first point is that the CPC leadership, and Xi Jinping in particular, felt a strong sense of crisis over the international state of affairs currently faced by China. The spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of National Defense also gave the following as one of the reasons for implementing the series of reforms: “to respond to the serious and complicated changes in the international state of affairs.”⁷⁹

At the time that he assumed the CMC chairmanship in November 2012, Xi Jinping felt the need to launch national defense and military reform in order to respond to the international strategy structure and the national security state of affairs.⁸⁰ On November 16, 2012, at the CMC Expanded Conference held immediately after he assumed the CMC chairmanship, he stated that “the international security environment surrounding China is going in an increasingly complicated direction, and efforts to maintain the safety of a state facing new circumstances and issues deserves high interest and a serious response.” He then instructed the entire military to develop deterrence and combat capabilities under informationized conditions that could respond to these

⁷⁷ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], “深入貫徹黨在新形勢下的強軍目標努力建設全面過硬戰略預備力量 [Make the Military Stronger and Adhere to a Hardline, Prepared Strategy on All Fronts under the New Communist Party Structure],” 中國人民解放軍總政治部編 [People's Liberation Army, General Political Department ed.], 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People's Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.207.

⁷⁸ 史 [Shi], 作戰指揮體制改革問題研究(修訂版) [Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue (revised)], p.24.

⁷⁹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 28, 2015.

⁸⁰ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], December 31, 2015.

circumstances.⁸¹ At the CMC expanded Conference held on December 26, 2012, he stated that the environment surrounding China was not calm and that realistic threats to China's security from the sea were swelling. As specific threats, he referred to the U.S. "rebalancing" strategy, the state of affairs on the Korean Peninsula, and the territorial issues regarding the Senkaku Islands and the South China sea, among others. Xi Jinping instructed the PLA to properly recognize these circumstances,⁸² and he renewed orders to enhance deterrence and combat capabilities under informationized conditions.⁸³ Thereafter, the General Political Department created and distributed study materials so that the entire military would understand the international state of affairs.⁸⁴

An internal monograph of the PLA that analyzed the Theater Command strategy also points to the growing pressure on China's peaceful development as a reason for taking up this theme. As for the international environment in this context, it refers to the U.S. military's creation of an anti-China network in the Asia-Pacific based on its "rebalancing" strategy, rising tensions due to the Japanese nationalization of the Senkaku Islands, the South China Sea issue, and the Korean Peninsula. In particular, it points out that U.S. attitude is the most important element in considering the environment for theater of war strategy and is the most crucial factor influencing China's security environment.⁸⁵

(2) Concerns over the Delay in the PLA Efforts on the Joint Operation Structure

The second point to be made is that there was a shared concern between the CPC and PLA leaderships that the Chinese PLA's efforts to deal with informationized warfare and joint operations were lagging behind those efforts of the U.S. and Russian militaries.

At the expanded meeting of the CMC held on December 13, 2013, just after the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee CPC, where he had proposed national defense and military reform, Xi Jinping expressed his sense of urgency by stating that "once we are

⁸¹ "在中央軍委擴大會議上的講話 [Lecture at Central Military Expanded Conference Venue] (November 16, 2012)," 中國人民解放軍總政治部編 [People's Liberation Army, General Political Department ed.], 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People's Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.15.

⁸² "增強憂患意識、危機意識、使命意識 [Strengthen Intent to Be helpful, Sense of Crisis, and Sense of Mission] (December 26, 2012)," 中國人民解放軍總政治部編 [People's Liberation Army, General Political Department ed.], 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People's Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.49.

⁸³ "提高我軍信息化條件下威和實戰能力 [Our Military Enhances Practical Capability in the Informatized Society] (December 26, 2012)," 中國人民解放軍總政治部編 [People's Liberation Army, General Political Department ed.], 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People's Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.59-62.

⁸⁴ "充分認清國家安全形勢的複雜性和嚴峻性—關於國際戰略形勢和國家安全環境 [Fully Understand the Complexity and Severity of the National Security Situation: On Form of National Strategy and National Security Environment]," 中國人民解放軍總政治部編 [People's Liberation Army, General Political Department ed.], 習主席國防和軍隊建設重要論述讀本 [President Xi's Important Words on National Security and Construction of Military Reader], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People's Liberation Army Publishing House], August 2014), pp.6-16.

⁸⁵ 魯 [Lu], 戰區戰略探究 [Study on Theaters Commands Strategy], pp.7-8.

left behind militarily, the impact on national security will be fatal.”⁸⁶ In a paper published in the *People's Daily* after the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee, Xu Qiliang pointed out that “deepening national defense and military reform responds to the urgent demand from the accelerating development of the new, worldwide military revolution and major changes in the form of warfare and modes of operation.” He went on to refer to the need to implement organizational reform in order to strengthen the joint operation structure.⁸⁷ A PLA monograph that analyzed organizational reform also introduced military reform in the United States and Russia and pointed to the benefits of learning lessons from them.⁸⁸ A *PLA Daily* editorial argued that reform was being implemented because it is difficult to win the informationized warfare under the preexisting structure.⁸⁹

Regarding the progress in informatization as an essential element in constructing the joint operation structure, the PLA during the Hu Jintao years began advocating a “theory of limited war under informationized conditions” and made efforts for progress in the area. However, it has been pointed out that many issues remained.⁹⁰ The PLA itself admitted to these issues. For example, the PLA manual for joint operations highlighted the importance of “unified joint operations” centered around information systems, while candidly admitting that the PLA was far from reaching that stage and sounding an alarm over the dangers of overlooking this point.⁹¹

⁸⁶ 习近平 [Xi Jinping], “堅定不移深化国防和軍隊改革 [Conduct National Defense and Military Reform Unwaveringly],” 中國人民解放軍總政治部編 [People's Liberation Army, General Political Department ed.], 習近平關於國防和軍隊建設重要論述選編 [Importance of National Defense and Military Reform as Related by Xi Jinping], (Beijing: 解放軍出版社 [People's Liberation Army Publishing House], February 2014), p.220.

⁸⁷ 人民日報 [People's Daily], November 21, 2013.

⁸⁸ 史 [Shi], Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue, pp.49-67.

⁸⁹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], February 2, 2016.

⁹⁰ For evaluations of informatization construction in the PLA during the Hu Jintao years, see Joe McReynolds, James Mulvenon, “The Role of Informatization in People's Liberation Army under Hu Jintao”, Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, Travis Tanner ed, *Assessing The People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Department of the Army, 2014), pp. 207-256

⁹¹ 馬平 [Ma Ping] chief ed., 楊功坤 [Yang Gongkun] deputy ed., 聯合作戰研究 [Joint Operations Studies], (國防大學出版社 [The College of Defense Studies Publishing House], 2013), p.20. According to the PLA's definition, a joint operation has the following three stages according to their development: (a) Joint operation: operation conducted jointly by two or more military branches or two or more military forces under the unified command of a joint operations command organization and (b) Joint operation under informationized conditions: Joint operation conducted jointly based on information systems using arms and equipment that meet certain standards of informatization and an operation method that matches them. An operation method that matches localized warfare under informationized conditions. Its main features are as follows; (1) although operation capabilities have reached a certain level, informatized weapons and equipment do not play a leading role, (2) although the operation system is supported by an information system of a certain level, the information system is neither all-encompassing or complete, and (3) although collaborative capabilities adaptable to all circumstances have been noticeably bolstered, cooperative action based on planning still plays the leading role. The evolved version of this is the “unified joint operation. (c) Unified joint operation: Based on a networked information system, this is an operation that uses informatized weapons and equipment and operation methods to match to execute overall linkage across land, sea, air, and space and cyberspace and cognitive space. This is the third stage, a mode of operation matching informatization warfare. 全軍軍事術語管理委員會·軍事科學院編 [ed. All-Military Military Terminology Administration Committee and Academy of Military Sciences], 中國人民解放軍軍語(全本) [Military Terminology in Chinese People's Liberation Army (unabridged version)], (Beijing: 軍事科學出版社 [Military Science Publishing House], 2011), p.68.

(3) Strengthening Control over the Military through Xi Jinping's Initiative and Anti-Corruption Movement

The third point is the existence of the powerful initiative from Xi Jinping regarding the series of reforms. Although there had been calls during the Hu Jintao years over the need for organizational reform to strengthen the joint operation structure, thoroughgoing reform did not take place. Even if there had been voices within the military seeking reform, leadership from Xi Jinping was essential to overcoming resistance from opposition forces and implementing the reform.⁹²

The leading role of Xi Jinping in the series of reforms was obvious. Establishing the CMC Leading Small Group for National Defense and Military Reform, Xi Jinping assumed the position of its leader, made the arrangements for the main operations in the reform, and personally guided research and the drafting work for reform proposals. He led the reform while holding three meetings of the Leading Small Group in March 2014, January 2015, and July 2015 and taking account of the various opinions within the military.⁹³ In this manner, Xi Jinping actively took the initiative regarding the series of reforms.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that this initiative from Xi Jinping was closely connected to the anti-corruption movement within the party and the military that Xi Jinping had taken the lead in executing. For example, on March 15, 2014, when the CMC Leading Small Group for National Defense and Military Reform held its first meeting, the investigation of Xu Caihou began.⁹⁴ Guo Boxiong was expelled from the CPC on July 30, just after the third meeting of the Leading Small Group.⁹⁵ 47 other generals were arrested by November 2015.⁹⁶ The anti-corruption movement in the military did not end with the execution of the organizational reform. July 2016 saw the arrest of former Air Force Political Commissar General Tian Xiushi⁹⁷

The Discipline Inspection Commission and the Politics and Law Commission play important roles in this anticorruption movement. It is pointed out that the authority of these institutions was enhanced when they were made independent from the General Political Department.⁹⁸ In March 2016, when he attended the first expanded meeting of the CMC Central Discipline Inspection Commission, Xu Qiliang praised Xi Jinping's leadership in the anticorruption movement in the military and ordered thorough execution of the CMC chairman responsibility system.⁹⁹ Likewise, in September of the same year, at the first All-Military Politics and Law Work Conference, Xu issued orders to deeply study and fulfill instructions announced by Xi Jinping as well as to firmly maintain and fulfill the CMC chairman responsibility system¹⁰⁰ It can be deduced from this sequence of events that Xi Jinping intends to continue seeking the thoroughgoing implementation of national defense and military reform, thereby strengthening the powers of command and control over the PLA and further expanding his power base within

⁹² James Mulvenon, China's "Goldwater-Nichols?": The Long-Awaited PLA Reorganization Has Finally Arrived, *China Leadership Monitor*, No.49, p.5.

⁹³ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], December 31, 2015.

⁹⁴ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], March 16, 2014; 人民日報 [People's Daily], July 1, 2014.

⁹⁵ 人民日報 [People's Daily] July 31, 2015.

⁹⁶ 馬 [Ma], 中國軍隊大改革 [Major Reform for Chinese Military Units], Vol.45.

⁹⁷ 中國軍網 [China Military Online], July 9, 2016. http://www.81.cn/kj/2016-07/09/content_7144412.htm.

⁹⁸ 馬 [Ma], 中國軍隊大改革 [Major Reform for Chinese Military Units], Vol.45.

⁹⁹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], March 3, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], September 28, 2016.

the party and the military. The fact that the term “*he xing* (core)” is being used to refer to Xi indicates that these aims are bearing fruit.

4. Issues Remaining after Institutional Reform

The series of reforms brought major changes to the PLA. However, many challenges remain in this organizational reform. Viewed from the perspective of strengthening the joint operation structure, especially the reorganization of the chain of command and control, the following four issues should be of particular importance.

(1) The Party Military “Spell”

The first challenge comes from the spell cast by the role of the PLA as the “Party Military.” The Opinion lists “strengthen the principle and system of ‘the Party’s absolute leadership over the military’ and make it complete” as the first of the basic principles of the national defense and military reform.¹⁰¹ In January 2016, explaining the contents of the organizational reform, Ministry of Defense Spokesman Wu Qian stated in relation to the reorganization of the General Political Department into the Political Work Department that the intra-military party committee system, political commissar system, political organ system and the like would be stringently implemented in order to thoroughly implement guidance of the military by the party.¹⁰² In this manner, the series of national defense and military reform in no way change the preexisting party-military relationship and indeed has one of its main objectives as strengthening it.

A PLA monograph advocating the organizational reform of the military does refer to the desirability of learning many things from the experiences of the U.S. and Russian military reforms. However, it also argues that the series of reforms must not merely copy the experiences of militarily advanced states but must rather be tailored to the national circumstances in China and the current state in the PLA. On this point, the document places special emphasis on firmly adhering to the principle of “the Party’s absolute leadership over the military” and points out that the series of reforms should be conducive to strengthening this principle.¹⁰³

Nevertheless, it has also been pointed out that these PLA systems are not necessarily appropriate for the rational execution of informationized warfare and joint operations.¹⁰⁴ As one of the reasons why the Chinese PLA will be unable to have a chain of command and control similar to that of the United States even after this reform, Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow identify the fact that China has not changed the characteristics of its existing Leninist military, represented by the political officer system and the intra-military party committee system. Saunders and Wuthnow argue that these systems diminish flexibility and autonomy at the operation level.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 2, 2016.

¹⁰² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 12, 2016.

¹⁰³ 史 [Shi], Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue, pp.72-73.

¹⁰⁴ Junichi Takeda, “*Jinmin Kaihougun: Tou to Kokka senryaku wo Sasaeru 230 Mannin no Jutsuryoku* [People’s Liberation Army: The Capability of 230 Million Members Who Support the Party and the National Strategy],” (Business-sha, 2008), p.60. Michael S. Chase, Jeffrey Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, Kristen A. Gunness, Scott Warren Harold, Susan Puska, Samuel K. Berkowitz, *China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA)*, (RAND Corporation 2015), pp.55-56.

¹⁰⁵ Phillip C. Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Goldwater-Nichols? Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms,” *Strategic Forum*, No.294, April 2016, p.5, p.9.

On the other hand, the PLA is aware of the “spell” cast on modern warfare by the PLA as a “Party Military.” Thus, the PLA is also undertaking the implementation of training to enhance the command capability of political officers¹⁰⁶ and nurturing political officers that can perform both “military and political” functions.¹⁰⁷ In addition, research was conducted within the military concerning political work in joint operations.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, the PLA has been exploring ways to handle modern warfare while maintaining preexisting systems during its counterpiracy activities in the Gulf of Aden. Since it is necessary in counterpiracy activities to shorten the response time of the dispatched fleet through swift command, the PLA has conferred sufficient powers concerning decision-making to the extraordinary party committee in the dispatched fleet, thus allowing a measure of discretion at the front lines.¹⁰⁹ Major issues are discussed collectively in a committee consisting of the commander, political commissar, headquarters staff, and the heads of the vessels, helicopters, and special forces. Thus, the party committee system,¹¹⁰ which is characterized by the collective leadership principle, under which arbitrary decisions by individuals are rejected and decisions are made by majority opinion, is firmly upheld in the counterpiracy activities in the Gulf of Aden. However, since immediate response is required on the frontlines, the commander may respond as the occasion requires in an emergency.¹¹¹ For example, when a Chinese vessel was attacked by pirates in November 2010, the seventh dispatched fleet conducted rescue operations led by the command post based on the draft response that the extraordinary committee had prepared beforehand.¹¹²

As we have seen, the Xi Jinping and the rest of the CPC and PLA leadership have no intention of implementing organizational reform that changes the fundamental nature of the PLA as a “Party Military” and in fact actually aim to strengthen it. Their aim is to enable the preexisting party committee system and the political commissar system to handle informationized warfare and joint operations by altering operation methods. Whether or not this attempt will succeed cannot be determined at this point. However, the PLA is expected to continue to explore ways to respond to informatized warfare, joint command, and other aspects of modern warfare.

(2) Deficiency in Human Resources Capable of Joint Operations

The second issue is that despite the joint operation structure being bolstered by the organizational reform, there are still insufficient human resources to take command. Although its education level has been rising in recent years, the PLA still draws much of its personnel from rural communities

¹⁰⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 13 and May 19, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 15 and 19, February 28 and April 12, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ 王德義 [Wang Deyi], 王蘆生 [Wang Lusheng], 趙力兵 [Zhao Libing], 基于信息系統聯合作戰政治工作 [Political Work on Joint Operations Based on Information Systems], (Beijing: 藍天出版社 [Lantian Publishing House], 2013).

¹⁰⁹ 顧禮康 [Gu Likang], “適應護航任務常態化需求發揮政治工作服務保證作用 [Maintaining the Effect of Political Work While Adapting to the Need for Safe Navigation],” *政工學刊* [Publication on the Science of Political Work] Vol.2 (2011), p.5.

¹¹⁰ 齊春元 [Qi Chunyuan], 郭學婆 [Guo Xuebo], 王偉 [Wang Wei], 劉繼海 [Liu Jihai], 軍隊黨委工作規範 [Operation Rules for the Military and the Communist Party], (Beijing: 藍天出版社 [Lantian Publishing House], 2008), pp.20-27.

¹¹¹ 顧 [Gu], “適應護航任務常態化需求發揮政治工作服務保證作用 [Maintaining the Effect of Political Work While Adapting to the Need for Safe Navigation],” p.5.

¹¹² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], December 18, 2010, November 10, 2014.

and is therefore unable to secure high quality human resources capable of handling informationized warfare and joint operations.¹¹³

The PLA admits to this human resource deficiency. For example, Deputy Chief of Staff of the 14th Army Group Zhang Yuansong, who participated in the September 2015 “Joint Action 2015D,” stated that “joint training continues to increase, but the deficiency in staff members who can handle it is also increasing.”¹¹⁴

The development of human resources has been an important issue in all Theater Commands since their establishment. For example, in March 2016, the Western Theater Command Joint Operations Command Center conducted tests on two occasions and conferred “qualification certificates” on the 300 troop members that certified that they were appropriate for assignments capable of handling joint operations.¹¹⁵ In the same month, the Southern Theater Command also conducted a test for developing human resources for joint operations.¹¹⁶ In the Northern Theater Command, the Joint Operation Command Human Resource Building Three-Year Plan has been created and an education course for joint operations education has been organized. The aim is to manage the course strictly,¹¹⁷ as those who do not pass this course will not be approved as staff. On the other hand, a *PLA Daily* report concerning the joint operations command training in the Southern Theater Command points out that there are commanders who still rely too heavily on a single military branch when commanding joint operations.¹¹⁸ Developing human resources has been also stated as a challenge in the Air Force for joint operations training.¹¹⁹ Thus, it appears that developing the human resources for joint operations will still require time.

This concern appears to be shared by both CPC and PLA leaders, including Xi Jinping. Consequently, “developing new military human resources” was raised as one of the main missions of the national defense and military reform in the “Opinion,” and military academy reform was scheduled to be implemented in 2016.¹²⁰

The National Defense University is seen to become the core institution for this joint operations human resource development. In March 2016, Xi Jinping led Fan Changlong and Xu Qiliang on a visit to the National Defense University, where he stated that “developing human resources for joint command operations is a core function of the National Defense University” and referred to the importance of the role that the National Defense University should play in this respect.¹²¹

Developing human resources for joint operations is not easy. In that sense, the military academy reform deserves attention. Particular focus should be on what kind of education structure will be constructed in the National Defense University, which is expected to be the center of this.

¹¹³ Michael S. Chase, Jeffrey Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, Kristen A. Gunness, Scott Warren Harold, Susan Puska, Samuel K. Berkowitz, *China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)* (RAND Corporation 2015), pp.58-59.

¹¹⁴ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], September 29, 2015.

¹¹⁵ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], March 14, 2016.

¹¹⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], March 30, 2016.

¹¹⁷ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], May 5, 2016.

¹¹⁸ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], April 22, 2016.

¹¹⁹ 空軍報 [China Air Force Daily], July 13, 2016.

¹²⁰ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], January 2, 2016.

¹²¹ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], March 24, 2016.

(3) Fine-Tuning the Division of Roles

The third issue is how the roles among the CMC, Theater Commands, and the respective branches in the newly constructed chain of command and control will be divided. There have yet to be clear lines drawn in this regard, and it is believed that the CPC and PLA leaderships are still in the stage of trial and error.

First, regarding the relationship between the CMC and the Theater Commands, the extent to which the CMC delegates its powers of command and control to the Theater Commands in a situation where external crises are growing becomes important.¹²² One of the main objectives of this reform is to enhance emergency response capabilities by delegating the powers of command and control. Of interest in this regard is the fact that after the decision of the International Court of Arbitration to criticize Chinese actions in the South China Sea and completely reject China's claims, CMC members such as the CMC Vice-Chairman Fan Changlong, Air Force Commander Ma Xiaotian, and Rocket Force Commander Wei Fenghe as well as central military leaders such as Navy Political Commissar Miao Hua and Deputy Chief of General Staff Yi Xiaoguang formed a large group to visit the Southern Theater Command. On this occasion, Fan Changlong stated that "You must study the momentous strategic thoughts and important decisions and instructions by President Xi Jinping earnestly and firmly maintain 'the Party's absolute leadership over the military'" and "you should recognize the complicated and harsh state of affairs that China faces."¹²³ From these statements, it can be deduced that as the South China Sea issue becomes more serious, the Southern Theater Command is being urged to strengthen the emergency response capability; however, that warnings are being issued to ensure that the Southern Theater Command does not conduct operation activities in disregard of the command by the party leaders, CMC, and Xi Jinping. In view of these points, the party and military leaders have not had firm confidence about the extent to which Theater Commands should be allowed discretion as China faces external crises.

Second, the distinguishing factor between the lines of military command and the lines of military administration is the relationship between the Theater Commands and the Service Headquarters. Of particular importance are the coordination between the powers of operations command over the troops that the Theater Commands are expected to be responsible for and the training that is conducted by the Service Headquarters, and (b) management of the budget and personnel.

Of particular interest regarding (a) is the relationship between the respective Theater Commands and the Navy. The Navy understands that its role changed under this reform from "construction and operation as one" to "mainly construction." Much has changed in the military command relationship concerning the respective fleets, which are subject to double command from their Theater Commands and the Navy. This raises the necessity to sort out the military administration system and the military command system between the fleets and the Navy and the Theater Commands.¹²⁴ Although high level officers in the Navy have submitted their respective opinions concerning fleet operations, etc. in the Theater Command structure, it appears that the

¹²² Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge University Press 2015), pp.37-59 is highly useful reference concerning this issue of consolidation and devolution of the powers of command in the military.

¹²³ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], July 20, 2016.

¹²⁴ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], May 30, 2016.

opinions have yet to be consolidated.¹²⁵

Indeed, the Navy takes the lead in conducting large-scale training conducted jointly by the three fleets. Although the leadership from the General Staff, Training and Management Department, and Southern Theater Command participated in the war games conducted jointly in July 2016 by the three fleets i.e. West Sea Fleet, South Sea Fleet, and North Sea Fleet, the Navy was responsible for the exercise. The exercise was conducted under the leadership of Navy Commander Wu Shengli and Political Commissar Miao Hua, and virtually all of the senior officers in the Navy Headquarters including the deputy commander, deputy political commissar, and chief of staff participated.¹²⁶ The three-fleet joint exercise held in the South China Sea in August was similarly conducted under the responsibility of the Navy.¹²⁷ Training itself is considered part of military administration, so it is not necessarily problematic that it is under the responsibility of the Navy.¹²⁸ However, the future direction as to how the Theater Commands secure the leading role over the Navy's respective fleets in a situation where their involvement in training is limited requires watching.

Regarding (b), a PLA monograph that analyzed organizational reform points out that it is necessary to strengthen the unity and authority of joint operations command by the Theater Commands. The monograph recommends that the necessary powers of command and control, personnel management, and budget should be conferred on them as specific measures.¹²⁹ However, although the powers of command and control have been delegated to the Theater Commands as a matter that belongs to the military command line, the powers of personnel management and budget are secured by the military services as matters that belong to the military administration line.¹³⁰ Given these circumstances, whether or not the Theater Commands can fully exert their authority over the military services under the control of the CMC bears watching.

(4) Organizational Reform within the Theater Commands

The fourth issue is the implementation of organizational reform within the Theater Commands. The reform carried out to date has included the execution of organization reform within the military central, such as the dismantling of the four general departments structure and the inauguration of the CMC multidepartment system. By contrast, although the transition was made from the seven military regions system to the five Theater Commands system, little has been reported on the organizational reform within the respective Theater Commands.

Of particular interest in this context is the question of the extent to which the command layers at the troop level will be simplified. According to a PLA monograph concerning organizational reform, it has been proposed that the “military commission, general department (supreme command organ)—military region (Theater Command-class joint command)—group army or division (operation group command organization)—brigade or regiment (tactical corps)” four-

¹²⁵ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], May 16, 2016.

¹²⁶ 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], July 9 and 14, 2016. 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], July 11, 2016.

¹²⁷ 人民海軍 [PLA Navy], August 2, 2016.

¹²⁸ 胡 [Hu] and 許 [Xu], 偉大改革的精髓 [The Spirit of the Great Reforms], p.10.

¹²⁹ 史 [Shi], 作戰指揮體制改革問題研究(修訂版) [Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue (revised)], pp.72-83.

¹³⁰ 胡 [Hu] and 許 [Xu], 偉大改革的精髓 [The Spirit of the Great Reforms], p.10.

layer structure be reorganized into a “military commission, general department (supreme command organ)—military region (Theater Command-class joint command)—division or brigade (tactical corps)” three-layer structure in order to aim for the conversion from a hierarchical command structure to a flat command structure. Moreover, the monograph introduces how the PLA is aiming at constructing an ideal command system matching progress in its own informatization through various experiments.¹³¹

According to the “Opinion,” this national defense and military reform is to be completed by 2020.¹³² Thus, it appears that the organizational reform within the Theater Commands is a matter that is to be implemented in the future. A PLA monograph also argues that organizational reform in the military center institution should be executed first and that organizational reform on the Theater Command and troops level should be started after that based on the lessons from military reform in the United States and Russia.¹³³ Given this situation, it is necessary to pay attention going forward regarding to what kind of changes will occur to the top-down reform led by Xi Jinping when it reaches the troop level.

Conclusion

Unlike the incremental reform during the Hu Jintao years, the organizational reform in the national defense and military sectors under the Xi Jinping administration has been quite drastic. Such reforms have abolished both the four-general departments structure and the seven military regions system, earning a reputation as being the “greatest reform since the birth of the nation.”

Importantly, this reform resulted in three major changes in the chain of command and control for the joint operation structure of the PLA: (a) bolstering Xi Jinping’s powers of command and control over the military by strengthening the powers of the CMC and thoroughly implementing the CMC chairman responsibility system, (b) clarifying, simplifying, and rationalizing the chain of command and control within the military, and (c) partially correcting the dominance of the Ground Forces. It would be a fair assessment to say that the joint operation structure of the PLA will be strengthened through these measures.

Although the need to undertake such reforms had been recognized during the Hu Jintao years, it never came to pass. However, China’s deteriorating international environment, concerns over the delay in the PLA’s efforts to strengthen the joint operation structure, and the powerful initiative coming from Xi Jinping collectively served as the political driving force for the execution of reforms this time around. In particular, the leadership by Xi Jinping has been essential; without it, these reforms would surely have failed to occur. Through this reform, which was conducted together with an anti-corruption movement, Xi managed to bolster his own powers of command and control over the military as well as expand his power base within the CPC.

At the same time, it should be pointed out that this national defense and military reform is still incomplete and that many challenges remain. From the perspective of the reorganization of the chain of command and control in the joint operation structure, a slew of major issues remain,

¹³¹ 史 [Shi], 作戰指揮體制改革問題研究(修訂版) [Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue (revised)], pp.39-41, 72, 114-127.

¹³² 解放軍報 [PLA Daily], November 27, 2015 and January 2, 2016.

¹³³ 史 [Shi], 作戰指揮體制改革問題研究(修訂版) [Research on the Operations Command Structure Issue (revised)], pp.39-41, 62-63.

such as the party-military “spell,” developing the human resources capable of commanding joint operations, fine-tuning the division of roles among the CMC, the Theater Commands, and the Service Headquarters. The outcome of the latest reforms will be limited unless these challenges are successfully met.

The manner and speed at which the CPC and PLA leaderships, with Xi Jinping at their center, resolve these issues will be the focus of attention going forward. It is still unclear whether the series of reforms will be successful or not. Ultimately, the success of these reforms, or the lack thereof, will have a major impact on the security environment of East Asia, including Japan. In that sense, we must continue to keep watch over the future direction of China's national defense and military reform.

