

Recent Trends in PLA Navy Training and Education

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**Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission
“The Implications of China’s Naval Modernization for the United States”**

June 11, 2009

My testimony will address three factors the PLA assesses as crucial for transforming modern hardware into an effective naval force: first, the PLA Navy’s ability to conduct standardized training focused on the requirements of naval warfare; second, the PLA Navy’s ability to attract and train an educated and capable officer corps; and finally, its ability to perform an expanded array of nontraditional security missions.

Drivers of PLA Navy Training Reforms

There are two major drivers to recent and ongoing reforms to the way the PLA Navy conducts training. The first involves the changing nature of modern warfare. The second involves the creation of a critical mass of new Chinese maritime security interests.

The changing nature of modern warfare first became an issue for the PLA in the mid-1990s. At that time, PLA assessments of the U.S. military’s OPERATION DESERT STORM initiated a paradigm shift in Beijing as PLA planners became convinced of the importance of high-tech forces. As a result, the PLA endeavored to transform itself from a force composed of large numbers of outdated weapons systems and poorly educated personnel to one composed of fewer numbers of advanced weapon systems and staffed with highly-trained personnel well versed in the latest advancements in science and technology. Throughout the late 1990s and into the present decade, the PLA has continued to revise its definition of what it means to be a “modern” military. In the late 1990s, the ability to conduct combined-arms and joint operations were added as vital capabilities. By 2002, increasingly lethal long-range operations utilizing information technology were seen as vital for providing strategic depth for the Chinese homeland.

The second and more recent driver of Chinese Navy training reforms involves the creation of a critical mass of new maritime security interests as a result of China’s dependence on the world’s oceans for transportation, resources, and access to markets. These newly expanded maritime rights and interests were an important justification for a 2004 reassessment of China’s national military strategy that gave increased prominence to creating a Navy capable of undertaking a more diverse array of missions at greater distances from Chinese territorial waters.

Standardized Training: The PLA Navy places a premium on standardized training to accomplish a range of increasingly diverse and complicated missions.

To understand the PLA Navy’s ongoing efforts to simultaneously reform and standardize the way it conducts training and its impact on PLA naval modernization, it is important to note that

¹ The views expressed are solely the author, and not those of any organization with which he is affiliated.

all militaries are tasked to train for the type of operations they will potentially be assigned to conduct. In other words, they must train the way they expect to fight. The problem from a PLA Navy trainer's perspective is that between 1993 and the present, the PLA's definition of the capabilities required for "modern warfare" has been repeatedly revised and updated.

The PLA issued revised training guidance to reflect these changes in the early 2000s. Two critical documents that the PLA used to disseminate that new guidance included the Outline for Military Training and Evaluation, which was revised and reissued in 2001-2002 and then again in 2009, and the PLA's Training Regulations, which were revised in 2002. These two documents are outside the public domain so there are limits to what we can say about their substance. Through a careful reading of Chinese materials we *can* glean basic information about their contents. The important takeaway here is to note that the PLA has been busy during the past 8 years trying to codify and standardize the way it conducts training and develop the capabilities it perceives as required for fighting modern wars.

The Outline for Military Training and Evaluation is likely a compendium of documents which serve as the most basic guide to PLA training. They provide guidance on training goals, content, timing, as well as methods of quality control and assessment. As far as the PLAN was concerned, some of the key reforms to navy training in the 2002 Navy OMTE included a new emphasis on training for officers and NCOs; for example, the 2002 PLA Navy OMTE called for command-track officers to focus on strategy, tactics, and innovation. To provide officers with the opportunity to focus on these issues, NCOs were assigned greater responsibilities for some tasks formerly performed by officers including overseeing training for new personnel; it also directed the navy to increase its use of simulators for training on new equipment and training combat methods, and to move away from scripted training events.

Shortly after Beijing issued the new PLAN OMTE the PLA released updated Training Regulations. The 2002 regulations replaced outdated training regulations that had been in force since April 1990. According to former Chief of the General Staff Fu Quanyou, new training guidance within the Regulations represented the CMC's strategy for building a powerful military that relies on advanced science and technology. Fu stated that this strategy was a policy response to rapid advancements in military technology in the 21st century.

Important changes to the 2002 training regulations included adopting training assessments as a factor for consideration in officer promotions, establishing procedures for integrating military academic research into operational training, codifying the required use of base training, simulator training, and network training. Finally, the regulations also included new content emphasizing joint training, training for high-level headquarters, and non-combat operations.

In 2004, just two years after the PLA Navy was issued a brand-new, standardized body of guidance for the way it should conduct training, Hu Jintao issued the *Historic Missions of the Armed Forces in the New Period of the New Century*.² Of importance to the Navy, the *New Historic Missions* tasked the PLA to not only be prepared for the usual missions of deterring

² For an excellent overview of the Chinese Armed Force's New Historic Missions, see Daniel M. Hartnett's unpublished paper, "Towards a Globally Focused Chinese Military: The Historic Missions of the Chinese Armed Forces," Summer 2008.

Taiwan independence and protecting China's maritime interests, but also to be prepared for safeguarding China's expanding economic interests including sea lane security and energy security. As a result of these new and expanded PLA missions, in June 2006, the PLA issued a directive to revise the OMTE to ensure that the PLA was capable of fulfilling these new missions.

The new OMTE was released to the entire PLA for study in the second half of 2008 and it became effective on January 1, 2009. New training objectives include focusing training on electromagnetic environments, focusing on training for specific missions and developing problem-solving skills, utilizing military training coordination zones, and training for an expanding array of peacetime non-combat operations. Some of the 2009 OMTE training objectives are not new, which suggests that the CMC is either reiterating their importance or perhaps suggesting that improvements are still required. These include the emphasis on so-called "actual combat" training, training against opposing forces, using training as a tool for evaluation, and using training bases, and simulator training. The fact that the PLA press continues to report these remaining items as areas requiring standardization and improvement suggests they have still not been satisfactorily integrated into PLA training. Based on the 2002 precedent, we may speculate that the PLA will soon revise or reissue its training regulations to reflect the 2009 changes to the OMTE.

A second major PLA Navy modernization initiative concerns revisions to policies for commissioning and training its officer corps. The PLA has concluded that efforts to standardize and perfect training will be ineffective if the PLA doesn't have the right people being trained.

Personnel Reforms: New methods of officer commissioning reflect a paradigm shift in the PLA's conception of modern warfare.

The PLA Navy needed officers who were more knowledgeable of science and technology, officers who possessed a high level of education, and who were politically reliable with diverse practical experience. In terms of this diverse experience, the PLA has assessed that officers should have both operational and managerial experience since such officers are likely to have a high degree of military professionalism, a well-developed ability to think strategically, and the competence to command forces in battle. Commissioning and training of these scientifically and technologically savvy officers is an old objective that has proven elusive for the PLA.

At present, new officers come from three sources: high-school students applying for admission to PLA academies, active-duty enlisted personnel applying to PLA academies, and civilian college graduates. While the total number of officers is unknown, numerous PLA reports suggest the proportion for officer sourcing is changing. Traditionally, and up through the late 1990s, graduating from a military academy was by far the most common method of officer commissioning. Over the last decade this trend has begun to change and the PLA has set a goal that by 2010, sixty percent of the officer corps should be civilian college graduates. Assuming that the PLA is on track to reach its goal by next year as media reports suggest, we may infer that civilian college graduates comprise an increasing percentage of new PLA Navy officers.

The PLA Navy, like the entire PLA, has concluded that relying solely on its own military academies to train its officer corps is inefficient and undermines the quality of training.³ The PLA has decided to rely increasingly on the civilian education system to educate some of its new officers. At present there are two paths into the PLA for civilian college students. The first path is through the National Defense Scholarship program. National Defense Scholarship Students are recruited in high school or during their first year of college to study in a ROTC-like program at one of a select number of Chinese civilian universities. As students, they receive a scholarship plus stipend, and complete some military training concurrent with their studies. Upon graduation they enter the PLA as active-duty officers.⁴

As a relatively new program, the number of National Defense students entering the PLAN is continuing to grow. For example, while 600 National Defense Students were commissioned as PLAN officers in 2006, the average size of the 2007-2010 graduating classes will be more than double the 2006 class, at 1,250 students. In addition to National Defense Students, PLA Navy on-campus recruiting offices also recruit from among the population of graduating seniors. We may speculate that some students view the PLA as an attractive opportunity in the current troubled economy.

While the PLA has been increasing its reliance on civilian college graduates, Chinese media report that this program has also experienced several problems. Foremost among these problems have been difficulty integrating these students into the operational force upon graduation. These students receive limited military training prior to unit assignment, and most are assigned to technical or service support career-tracks as opposed to the operational, or warfighting, command track. Additionally, the influx of civilian college graduates may be responsible for some problems with morale and unit cohesion within the PLA. For example, a number of cases in the Chinese press report that some civilian college graduates will resist assignment to isolated posts, or resent the fact that their post-graduation training is usually led by an NCO with a high school education.

Training for Nontraditional Security Missions: Navy training for these new types of missions is a response a newly perceived “critical mass” of maritime interests.

The new military missions issued to the PLA in 2004 included a heightened emphasis on a number of tasks which fall primarily within the PLAN’s purview, including maritime territorial disputes, sea lane security, and defending maritime rights and interests. Significantly, these *New Historic Missions* as the PLA refers to them have also increased the importance of military operations other than war (MOOTW) including fighting terrorism, and conducting peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance operations as key PLA missions.

³ Zhang Yongyi, Ed., *Haijun Junshi Xunlian Xue* (The Science of Naval Training), *Academy of Military Science Press* (Beijing: 2006) p. 231

⁴ As of late 2007, National Defense Students were being educated in 117 civilian colleges and universities. These students were said to be studying 143 different majors including management, philosophy, law, engineering, and medicine, with special emphasis placed on science and engineering including electrical, engineering, mechanical, aviation, and aerospace engineering. As part of the overall program, the PLAN has developed contractual relationships with 14 civilian universities to educate PLA Navy National Defense Students.

As a result of the new domestic and international security environment, China has changed its thinking about the role and uses of military forces and now places a higher priority on non-traditional security operations in PLAN training.⁵ MOOTW have already become an important component of PLAN military operations. The PLAN is currently training for five main types of MOOTW:

- Disaster relief and supporting law enforcement organizations to combat smuggling and drug trafficking
- Demonstrations of force and acts of deterrence
- Participating in maritime security cooperation including peacekeeping and counter-terror operations
- Conducting military diplomacy
- At-sea search and rescue actions⁶

Increasing PLAN training for nontraditional security missions is seen both as a means of protecting China's expanding maritime interests as well as sensitizing regional countries to the PLA Navy's increasing operations at greater distances from Chinese waters.

Conclusion

First, PLA Navy training reforms and officer commissioning policies appear directly tied to the PLA's perception of modern warfare and new PLA missions. Yet at the same time, the PLA's concept of what it means to be a modern force has been continuously evolving. This greatly complicates the PLA Navy's efforts to standardize and improve the quality of its training when Beijing continuously revises what it is that the PLA Navy should be training for.

Second, the standardization of training regulations and new officer commissioning represents a paradigm shift in the PLA's understanding of modern warfare and is indicative of new levels of professionalism. At the same time, PLA Navy writings have concluded that its training and education system has thus far been unable to produce sufficient numbers of high quality officers required for modern warfare. Thus, the PLA Navy's future operational effectiveness depends on integrating civilian college students into the force. The PLA is still experimenting with ways to make this happen while minimizing division to the force. It remains unclear how quickly or successfully they will deal with this issue. I would speculate that a short-term economic downturn could be beneficial for the PLA in that it would neutralize some of the fierce private sector competition for China's best and brightest. It could make a career in the military seem like a more attractive option for a larger number of better qualified college students.

Third, over time, these reforms will likely lead to enhanced operational capabilities, but it is impossible to assess this trend relying on open source materials. We may speculate however, that these increasing PLA Navy operational capabilities are being reflected in the ongoing PLAN operations off the Horn of Africa.

Thank you very much, I look forward to your questions.

⁵ Zhang Yongyi, Ed., *Science of Naval Training*, p. 250

⁶ *Ibid.*

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Title: Recent Trends in PLA Navy Training and Education
Subject:
Author: Fred
Keywords:
Comments:
Creation Date: 6/10/2009 11:48:00 AM
Change Number: 2
Last Saved On: 6/10/2009 11:48:00 AM
Last Saved By: Daniel Hartnett
Total Editing Time: 1 Minute
Last Printed On: 6/11/2009 7:58:00 AM
As of Last Complete Printing
Number of Pages: 5
Number of Words: 2,558 (approx.)
Number of Characters: 14,023 (approx.)