

Projecting Strength in a Time of Uncertainty: China's Military in 2020

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Key Points

- The Chinese Communist Party has long considered 2020 a milestone for the completion of important military modernization and reform goals. Chinese officials and media projected confidence that these goals would be completed despite the impact of COVID-19. Achievements over the past year included new hardware and operational "firsts."
- Chinese media and officials note that there is much 'unfinished business' left for the PLA to accomplish. Major challenges include delayed reforms, outdated weapons and equipment, corruption in the officer corps and defense industry, human capital weaknesses, and the lack of updated operational doctrine. The PLA aspires to continue progress on these and other areas through 2035 and mid-century.
- Chinese military operations in Asia in 2020 continued a careful balancing act of developing friendly relations with neighbors while pressing China's territorial claims. However, notable departures from past practice included use of lethal force against Indian troops and escalating tensions with several rivals at the same time. This indicates an increasing propensity for risk-taking in China's decision calculus, though Beijing ultimately de-escalated tensions with most of its regional rivals.
- The PLA's response to increased U.S. military operations in Asia includes deterrence signaling and steps to weaken U.S. alliances and partnerships. China's coercive actions against a number of regional countries in 2020, however, undercut the latter approach. China committed a strategic blunder in antagonizing Japan and India, two states critical to the success of U.S. strategy.
- PLA disaster relief operations in 2020 showcased a "reformed PLA" and marked the operational debut of the Joint Logistic Support Force and the Air Force's Y-20s. These operations indicated progress in correcting weaknesses in the logistics and other support systems but were far less demanding than what would be required in wartime.

- Congress and the USCC can promote more effective U.S. strategy towards China and the region in several ways: (1) commissioning new research on PLA weaknesses, (2) contributing to a better understanding of recent U.S. ally and partner perceptions of China, (3) mandating a new review of U.S.-China military relations, and (4) promoting increased access to open source materials on China.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this testimony are only those of Dr. Wuthnow and not National Defense University, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. government.

Progress on 2020 Goals and Lingering Weaknesses

Commission Questions: How do CCP leaders view their prospects for achieving the military modernization goals, including for the PLA reorganizations beginning in 2015, set for 2020? What are the most significant developments in China's military capabilities in 2020?

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership has long regarded 2020 as a seminal date for military modernization and reform. Beginning in 1997, successive “three-step” (三步走) development strategies identified 2020 as a key modernization target.¹ The most recent, announced by Xi Jinping in his 19th Party Congress Work Report in October 2017, stated that, by 2020, the armed forces should “basically achieve mechanization, make major progress in informationization, and greatly improve its strategic capabilities.”² The two remaining steps were to “basically realize the modernization of national defense and the military by 2035” and “fully build a world-class military by mid-century.” In addition, at the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in November 2013, the CCP Central Committee agreed to pursue a wide-ranging program of military reorganization and other institutional and policy changes. Two years later, the Central Military Commission (CMC) promulgated a detailed plan by which the reform would be undertaken, with the conclusion scheduled for 2020.³ Further, both of these programs—military modernization and reform—were integrated into the CMC’s outline of military development for the 13th Five Year Plan (covering 2016 through 2020).⁴

Chinese media projected confidence that the military’s 2020 milestones would be reached on schedule. On New Year’s Day 2020, a *Jiefangjun Bao* editorial declared that the “Chinese military will basically achieve mechanization by 2020, with major progress in information construction and a major improvement in strategic capabilities,” and that “a series of reform measures will be launched for the first time” during the year.⁵ Similarly, a *Jiefangjun Bao* editorial on August 1, 2020—the PLA’s 93rd birthday—stated that the military would not only achieve its current “goals and tasks,” but would also seize recent momentum to “embark on a new journey of basically realizing national defense and army modernization, and then building our army into a world-class army in an all-round way.”⁶ Other articles celebrated the

¹ See appendix.

² “Full Text of Xi Jinping’s 19th Party Congress Work Report” (习近平十九大报告全文), Xinhua, October 18, 2017, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2017-10-18/doc-ifymvuyt4098830.shtml>.

³ For a detailed overview, see Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications*, China Strategic Perspectives 10, National Defense University, March 2017.

⁴ “Central Military Commission Promulgates Outline on Military Construction and Development for the 13th Five Year Plan” (中央军委颁发《军队建设发展“十三五”规划纲要》), Xinhua, May 12, 2016, http://www.xinhuanet.com/mil/2016-05/12/c_1118855988.htm.

⁵ “Decisive Battle, Decisive Victory, A New Chapter of the Strong Army—Written on New Year’s Day 2020” (决战决胜, 谱强军新篇——写在2020年元旦), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), January 1, 2020, http://m.xinhuanet.com/mil/2020-01/01/c_1210420584.htm.

⁶ JFJB Commentator (本报评论员), “A Strong Country Must Have a Strong Army, and a Strong Army Can Lead to National Security—Earnestly Study and Implement Chairman Xi’s Important Speech During the 22nd Collective Study of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee” (强国必须强军 军强才能国安—认真学习贯彻习主席在中央政治局第二十二次集体学习时的重要讲话), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), August 1, 2020, pg. 3.

achievements of Xi's reform agenda to date, including one that stated that the reforms' goals to update the command system, alter the military's size and structure, improve policies and institutions, and better align military and civilian activities "[have] been basically achieved."⁷

Providing a more concrete demonstration of progress, the PLA revealed a series of capabilities in late 2019 and 2020. During the October 1, 2019, military parade marking the 70th anniversary of the People's Republic, the PLA showcased a number of new systems, including the DF-17 conventional medium-range ballistic missile, fitted with a hypersonic glide vehicle that reportedly can evade theater missile defense systems through unpredictable flight trajectories and speeds up to Mach 10;⁸ the DF-41 nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile, equipped with multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicles; the first public display of the ground force's Z-20 medium-lift utility helicopter, which has been compared to the Black Hawk; the Type-15 light tank, which can be transported and para-dropped across long distances; new anti-ship cruise missile variants (YJ-12B, YJ-18, and CJ-100); and new unmanned systems (WZ-8 and GJ-11 unmanned aerial vehicles and HSU-001 unmanned underwater vehicle).⁹ These displays suggested for domestic and foreign viewers that the PLA was achieving steady modernization across all the warfighting domains, improving capabilities to deter U.S. intervention in regional conflicts, and emerging as a world leader in select areas.

Other demonstrations and operational "firsts" soon followed. In December 2019, Xi commissioned the navy's second aircraft carrier, the *Shandong*; this is China's first domestically-produced carrier, with some advancements over its predecessor, the foreign-bought *Liaoning*, including space for additional J-15 fighters.¹⁰ The navy's new Type-075 amphibious assault ship was launched in September 2019 and began sea trials in August 2020, ahead of commissioning

⁷ Li Yun, "Reform is the Key to the Development and Grandness of the PLA," China Military Online, August 1, 2020, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-08/01/content_9871841.htm. Li is a research scholar in the Institute of Foreign Military Research at the PLA Academy of Military Sciences. See also: "Graphics: China's Military Reforms in Past 5 Years," China Military Online, August 1, 2010, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-08/01/content_9871847.htm.

⁸ For background, see Lora Saalman, "China's Calculus on Hypersonic Glide," SIPRI, August 15, 2017, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2017/chinas-calculus-hypersonic-glide>; and "Hypersonic Weapons: Background and Issues for Congress, Congressional Research Service, March 17, 2020, 12-15.

⁹ For discussion, see e.g. Joseph Trevithick, "Four of the Biggest Revelations from China's Massive 70th Anniversary Military Parade," *The Drive*, October 1, 2019, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/30119/four-of-the-biggest-revelations-from-chinas-massive-70th-anniversary-military-parade>; Andrew Tate, "China Displays New Platforms, Weapon Systems in Large Military Parade," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, October 1, 2019; Mike Yeo, "China Unveils Drones, Missiles and Hypersonic Glide Vehicle at Military Parade," *Defense News*, October 1, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2019/10/01/china-unveils-drones-missiles-and-hypersonic-glide-vehicle-at-military-parade/>; and Ian Williams and Masao Dahlgren, "More Than Missiles: China Previews Its New Way of War," *CSIS Brief*, October 16, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/more-missiles-china-previews-its-new-way-war>.

¹⁰ Andrew Tate, "Chinese Navy Commissions Its Second Aircraft Carrier," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, December 17, 2019, https://customer.janes.com/Janes/Display/FG_2632426-JDW. The *Shandong* conducted its first sea trials since commissioning in June 2020. Gabriel Dominguez, "PLAN's *Shandong* Aircraft Carrier Conducts First Sea Trials Since Commissioning," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, June 2, 2020, https://customer.janes.com/Janes/Display/FG_3073142-JDW.

in the next few years.¹¹ James E. Fannell, a former intelligence director for U.S. Pacific Fleet, assesses that the 35-40,000-ton ship, which can carry up to 30 helicopters, will be a “critical element for the PLA to be able to project boots on the ground to targeted islands throughout the western Pacific and pose a credible threat to military targets globally.”¹² Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis provided an opportunity for the PLA Air Force to employ its new Y-20 strategic cargo plane for the first time domestically and internationally;¹³ and put the Joint Logistic Support Force (JLSF), created as part of Xi’s reforms in 2016, into practice (discussed below). The 6.6% defense spending increase approved in May 2020 signaled the Party’s continued commitment to military modernization despite the economic effects of the pandemic.¹⁴

Commission Questions: What are the PLA’s most important capability limitations? Please address the quality of PLA personnel, doctrine, and China’s defense industry.

Developments over the past five years have addressed a number of key PLA weaknesses, including the lack of a joint command structure, ground force dominance, and hardware gaps such as limited strategic air- and sealift.¹⁵ Nevertheless, despite the celebratory aura of recent PLA media reports, there was also a theme that more work needs to be done. The national defense white paper released in July 2019 argued that the PLA “has yet to complete the task of mechanization, and is in urgent need of improving its informationization,” and “still lags far behind the world’s leading militaries,”¹⁶ pointing to the CCP’s 2035 and mid-century development targets. A *Jiefangjun Bao* commentary published halfway through 2020 cautioned service members to avoid complacency: “the more critical the period, the more it is necessary to work hard and take advantage of the momentum. If you relax a little bit, you may lose all your

¹¹ Thomas Newdick, “China’s Big New Amphibious Assault Ship Just Went to Sea For the First Time,” *The Drive*, August 5, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/35413/chinas-big-new-amphibious-assault-ship-just-went-to-sea-for-the-first-time>.

¹² James E. Fannell, “Asia Rising: China’s Global Naval Strategy and Expanding Force Structure,” *Naval War College Review* 72:1 (2019), 20-1.

¹³ Joseph Trevithick, “China’s Y-20 Airlifters Make Crisis Debut Bringing Medics and Cargo to Virus Plagued Wuhan,” *The Drive*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/32200/chinas-y-20-airlifters-make-crisis-debut-bringing-medics-and-cargo-to-virus-plagued-wuhan>; “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on Apr. 30,” China Ministry of National Defense, May 4, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-05/04/content_4864650.htm.

¹⁴ Despite the modest increase, defense spending stayed roughly the same percentage of central government spending, signaling consistent party priorities. Mike Yeo, “China Announces \$178.2 Billion Military Budget,” *Defense News*, May 22, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2020/05/22/china-announces-1782-billion-military-budget/>; Bonnie S. Glaser, Matthew P. Funaiolo, and Brian Hart, “Breaking Down China’s 2020 Defense Budget,” CSIS China Power Project, May 22, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/breaking-down-chinas-2020-defense-budget>.

¹⁵ For a detailed assessment of PLA weaknesses prior to the reforms, see Michael S. Chase et al., *China’s Incomplete Military Transformation* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015).

¹⁶ “Full Text: China’s National Defense in the New Era,” Xinhua, July 24, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-07/24/c_138253389.htm.

previous efforts and lose your success.”¹⁷ Xi stated that “extraordinary measures” were needed to ensure that progress could be sustained during the global pandemic.¹⁸

These admonitions highlight the PLA’s ‘unfinished business’ as it strives to achieve its 2035 and mid-century goals. Some of the key challenges include the following:

- *Delayed and incomplete reforms.* The CCP often articulates ambiguous goals to avoid being held accountable for failures; this has been the case with force modernization (e.g., there is no clear definition of what it means to “basically achieve mechanization”) and other policies such as the Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁹ Yet the recent reforms are an exception to the rule: in 2015, the CMC published a timeline according to which specific aspects of the reforms would be completed.²⁰ According to this timeline, the PLA has been consistently behind schedule over the last five years. For instance, the planned adjustment of the leadership of the logistics system was expected in 2015 but not executed until the establishment of the JLSF in September 2016. A 300,000-person downsizing that was to be finished by the end of 2016 was not declared “basically achieved” until March 2018.²¹ Reforms to the military educational system, the People’s Armed Police, and the reserves were all to have taken place in 2016, but major changes in those areas did not happen until June 2017,²² 2017-8,²³ and 2020,²⁴ respectively. In August 2019, PLA interlocutors acknowledged that the last phase of the reforms,²⁵ focusing on policies, would likely require three years to complete, meaning that the reforms would not end until 2022—two years behind schedule. No specific reason was given, but this phase was termed a “complex systems reform” that would be hard to quickly achieve. One might even speculate that some changes envisioned by reformers,

¹⁷ “Strengthen Confidence and Face Difficulties-Resolutely Achieve the 2020 National Defense and Army Building Target Tasks Series Talks” (坚定信心 迎难而上——坚决实现国防和军队建设 2020 年目标任务系列谈), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), June 10, 2020, pg. 6.

¹⁸ “Xi Focus: Xi Emphasizes Strengthening National Defense, Armed Forces,” Xinhua, May 26, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-05/26/c_139089760.htm.

¹⁹ For a discussion of deliberative ambiguity in the context of the BRI, see Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Belt and Road: One Initiative, Three Strategies,” in Ashley Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia 2019: China’s Expanding Strategic Ambitions* (Seattle: NBR, 2019), 211-45.

²⁰ Wuthnow and Saunders, *Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping*, 50.

²¹ “Premier Li: China Has Reduced, Army Size by 300,000,” China Military Online, March 5, 2018, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-03/05/content_7959842.htm.

²² For an overview of changes to China’s military education system, see Kenneth Allen and Mingzhi Chen, *The People’s Liberation Army’s 37 Academic Institutions* (Washington, DC: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2020).

²³ Joel Wuthnow, *China’s Other Army: The People’s Armed Police in an Era of Reform*, China Strategic Perspectives 14, National Defense University, April 2019.

²⁴ “China To Optimize Reserve Forces Structure For Future Combat Need: Spokesperson,” Xinhua, July 1, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-07/01/c_139181267.htm.

²⁵ This has been termed the “third big campaign”; the first two focused on above-the-neck and below-the-neck changes to the PLA’s organizations. David M. Finkelstein, “The Chinese View of Strategic Competition with the United States,” Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, June 24, 2020, 11; “Winning the Tough Battle to Reform and Strengthen the Army: Military Representatives Hotly Discuss the Deepening of National Defense and Military Reform” (打赢改革强军的攻坚战——军队代表委员热议将深化国防和军队改革进行到底), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), May 18, 2020, pg. 3

such as revising the personnel system or eliminating certain ranks, will be shelved because they are too politically sensitive or difficult to implement.²⁶

- *Outdated equipment.* Military parades and selective revelations of new capabilities promote the sense that the PLA inventory is quickly evolving—this view is not wrong, but overlooks the continued presence of old equipment throughout the force. For instance, the air force still operates more than 600 J-7 and J-8 variants, based on 1960s technology, while a large proportion of the navy’s surface fleet consists of coastal patrol vessels of late Cold War vintage.²⁷ However, nowhere is outdated equipment more prevalent than the ground forces. In the early 2000s, the CMC decided not to prioritize army modernization, but to divide budgetary resources more equitably among the services; this suited China’s evolving military strategy, which focused on high-tech “local wars” that would be led primarily by navy, air force, and conventional missile forces.²⁸ A consequence was that army equipment became increasingly obsolescent. One example concerns the main battle tank force: as of 2020, 40% of this force dated from the 1960s to the 1980s and less than 4% were produced within the last decade.²⁹ Incredibly, on the eve of the latest reforms, about half of the PLA’s infantry brigades were deemed “motorized,” a development stage *prior* to “mechanized.”³⁰ Lagging modernization in these areas implies that the 2019 defense white paper’s declaration that “mechanization” (机械化) had not yet been fully achieved may have been more than a throwaway line.³¹
- *Corruption.* A signature part of Xi’s agenda has been cleaning up corruption in the officer corps and defense industry, a goal pursued in part through a major anti-corruption campaign.³² Nevertheless, recent revelations indicate that this campaign remains a work in progress. In late 2019, two senior commanders were removed from their positions as

²⁶ In December 2016, the Ministry of National Defense announced that a “rank-centered” military officer system would be established, but this has apparently yet to be implemented. For an analysis, see Kenneth Allen, “China Announces Reforms of Military Ranks,” *China Brief*, January 30, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/china-announces-reform-military-ranks/>.

²⁷ International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2020*.

²⁸ Phillip C. Saunders and John Chen, “Is the Chinese Army the Real Winner in PLA Reforms,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 83 (2016), 46.

²⁹ Specifically, in 2020 the ground forces possessed only 200 Type-15 tanks, out of a total main battle tank force of 5850. Some tanks, such as the Type-59s, are based on 1950s technology. International Institute of Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2020*, 260.

³⁰ Dennis J. Blasko, “What Is Known and Unknown About Changes to the PLA’s Ground Combat Units,” *China Brief*, May 11, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/known-unknown-changes-plas-ground-combat-units/>. The 2010 defense white paper had urged the ground forces to “accelerate the transformation of motorized units into mechanized units.” *China’s National Defense in 2010* (2010 国防白皮书), State Council Information Office, March 31, 2011, http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2011-03/31/content_2618567.htm.

³¹ For a discussion of the history of PLA “mechanization,” see Chen Hui, “The Chinese Military Has a Clear Timetable for Mechanization, Which Will be Basically Achieved in Seven Years” (中国军队明确实现机械化时间表 七年后基本实现), *Liaowang* (瞭望), January 28, 2013, http://military.china.com.cn/2013-01/28/content_27813503_3.htm.

³² The campaign has also been a tool through which Xi has increased his personal authority within the PLA.

National People's Congress deputies due to "serious violations of discipline."³³ This was followed by reports that Hu Wenming, the former China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation chairman who oversaw the aircraft carrier program, was under investigation; he was only the latest shipbuilding official to be investigated.³⁴ More importantly, the CMC decided that *all* senior officers would be subjected to financial audits upon leaving military service, and that the rules applied retroactively to retired officials such as former PLA navy chief Wu Shengli.³⁵ The need to create such a rule, which along with the anti-corruption campaign itself seems to act as a deterrent, betrays a lack of confidence between the party and those entrusted with positions of responsibility within the military.

- *Human capital weaknesses.* Inability to compete effectively in what U.S. military parlance calls the "cognitive domain" has long been a self-assessed PLA weakness.³⁶ Recent reforms, including improvements to the joint training supervision system, increases in salaries and benefits to improve recruitment and retention of qualified personnel, and upgrades to the professional military education system, have attempted to bridge those gaps.³⁷ Several initiatives in late 2019 and 2020 indicate that the PLA has been less than satisfied with progress in this area to date. Those include new regulations governing the management of military educational institutes,³⁸ a "double first" initiative whereby some civilian college graduates would be exempt from military exams during the onboarding process into the PLA,³⁹ and a training session for heads of Chinese defense universities.⁴⁰ Moreover, throughout 2019, *Jiefangjun Bao* once again repeated slogans referring to deficiencies of leadership and judgement in the officer corps such as the "two inabilities" (两个能力不够) and the "five incapables" (五个不会), signifying that Chinese leaders consider this an ongoing problem.⁴¹

³³ These were LTG Rao Kaixun, former deputy commander of the Strategic Support Force, and MG Xu Xianghua, former deputy commander of the Western TC Army. "Two Generals Resigned from the National People's Congress Due to Serious Violations of Discipline" (军方打虎再获官宣 两将领因严重违纪去职全国人大代表), *Caixin* (财新), October 27, 2019, <http://china.caixin.com/2019-10-27/101475809.html>.

³⁴ Teddy Ng, "Former Boss of China Aircraft Carrier Programme in Corruption Probe," *South China Morning Post*, May 13, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3084131/former-boss-china-aircraft-carrier-programme-corruption-probe>.

For an analysis, see Zi Yang, "The Invisible Threat to China's Navy: Corruption," *The Diplomat*, May 19, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/the-invisible-threat-to-chinas-navy-corruption/>.

³⁵ Guo Rui, "China's Former Navy Chief Wu Shengli to Face Audit," *South China Morning Post*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3091098/chinas-former-navy-chief-wu-shengli-face-audit>.

³⁶ Chase et al., *China's Incomplete Military Transformation*, 43-60.

³⁷ Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, "A Modern Major General: Building Joint Commanders in the PLA," in Phillip C. Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms* (Washington, DC: NDU Press, 2019), 293-323.

³⁸ Liu Jianwei and Wu Xu, "China Launched Revised Regulations on Education in Military Academies," *China Military Online*, June 17, 2020, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-06/17/content_9836856.htm.

³⁹ "Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on July 30," *China Ministry of National Defense*, July 30, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-08/01/content_4869055.htm.

⁴⁰ "Defense Ministry's Regular Press Conference on Dec. 26," *China Ministry of National Defense*, December 27, 2019, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/focus/2019-12/27/content_4857655.htm.

⁴¹ Dennis J. Blasko, "PLA Weaknesses and Xi's Concerns about PLA Capabilities," Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 7, 2019. In 2019, JFJB contained the following

- *Outdated doctrine.* Promulgation of new doctrine is another area where the PLA may have fallen behind its goals. In 2015, the CMC approved a revised military strategy based on the need to prepare for “informationized local wars” (信息化的局部战争),⁴² while PLA futurists have explored the idea that the introduction of new technology such as artificial intelligence and quantum computing will fundamentally alter the character of war from informationization to “intelligentization” (智能化), giving China an edge if it can excel in these areas.⁴³ Nevertheless, it is not clear that the doctrine underpinning PLA campaign planning, training, and force development has kept pace. While there have been updates to the military training guidelines placing greater stress on joint operations and realistic training, there have been no new revisions to the doctrinal regulations for more than a decade.⁴⁴ In addition, recent PLA textbooks contain few references to technological breakthroughs, suggesting that rising commanders might not be receiving adequate instruction on how these systems will be employed in future wars.⁴⁵ One sign that the PLA was trying to correct this problem was the recent restructuring of the Academy of Military Science, whose mandate includes developing new operational concepts. The reform brought technologists closer together with military theorists, apparently in the hope that the two communities would collaborate to produce more up-to-date doctrine, but tangible results have not yet materialized.⁴⁶

Use of Force and Responses to U.S. Strategy in the Indo-Pacific

Commission Question: How has China’s active use of military and paramilitary force in the Indo-Pacific in 2020 compared with that in previous years?

Since the latter part of the Hu Jintao era, Beijing has carried out a carefully calibrated balancing act in its use of force across the Indo-Pacific. In Chinese parlance, “stability maintenance” (维稳) has to be weighed against “rights enforcement” (维权).⁴⁷ On one hand, China has used

number of references to the human capital problems identified by Blasko: “five incapables”—58; “2 inabilities”—30; “3 whethers”—6.

⁴² M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s New Military Strategy: ‘Winning Informationized Local Wars’” *China Brief*, July 2, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-military-strategy-winning-informationized-local-wars/>.

⁴³ Elsa B. Kania, *Battlefield Singularity: Artificial Intelligence, Military Revolution, and China’s Future Military Power* (Washington, DC: CNAS, 2017); Elsa Kania and John Costello, “Quantum Hegemony (Part Two): The Strategic Implications of Quantum Technology,” *China Brief*, December 21, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/quantum-leap-part-2-strategic-implications-quantum-technologies/>.

⁴⁴ Elsa B. Kania, “When Will the PLA Finally Update Its Doctrine?” *China Brief*, June 6, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/when-will-the-pla-finally-update-its-doctrine/>.

⁴⁵ For instance, the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* has only single references to AI and quantum technology. *Science of Military Strategy* (战略学) (Beijing: Military Sciences Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ Discussions with AMS personnel in late 2018 indicated that actual cooperation between theorists and S&T personnel remained quite limited. For a discussion, see Joel Wuthnow, “China’s ‘New’ Academy of Military Science: A Revolution in Theoretical Affairs?” *China Brief*, January 18, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-new-academy-of-military-science-a-revolution-in-theoretical-affairs/>.

⁴⁷ For previous discussion, see Phillip C. Saunders, “China’s Role in Asia,” in David Shambaugh and Michael Yahuda, eds., *International Relations of Asia* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 147-172; and M. Taylor

military diplomacy, including high-level visits, exercises, participation in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations, port calls, and other activities to strengthen China's diplomatic relations with neighboring countries, weaken U.S. influence in the region, and preserve a stable periphery security environment conducive to China's economic growth.⁴⁸ On the other hand, CCP leaders have been more confident in allowing coercive tactics to enforce China's territorial claims, create new "facts on the ground" through military or dual-use infrastructure, and challenge U.S. operations along China's periphery. Chinese operations have generally been conducted in the "gray zone" below lethal violence in order to reduce the risks to China's first set of diplomatic priorities.

In late 2019 and 2020, the PLA struggled to maintain this balance. In the fall of 2019 into the current year, China continued normal military diplomacy and seized opportunities to use the COVID-19 crisis to expand China's "soft power." Bilaterally, the PLA worked on many fronts to deepen China's partnerships. In September 2019, for instance, the PLA sent troops to a major Russian theater exercise for the second time (Center-2019). This signaled a closer Sino-Russian strategic alignment while offering the PLA a chance to hone its skills in areas such as trans-border operations, overseas command and control, and joint logistics.⁴⁹ The next month, Beijing signed a new defense agreement with Singapore that included a "Visiting Forces Agreement" for PLA units participating in exercises, a logistics support agreement, and institutionalized dialogues.⁵⁰ China also held high-level exchanges with other Southeast Asian military leaders, including the Filipino and Vietnamese defense ministers in October.⁵¹ In December, the PLA continued its outreach to two major rivals, Japan and India: Japan's defense minister visited China for the first time in a decade and the PLA held an annual counter-terrorism exercise with the Indian armed forces.⁵²

Multilaterally, the PLA increased its role in dialogues and exercises. In October 2019, China staged the ninth Beijing Xiangshan Forum, hosting a record 1300 participants, 76 official delegations, 23 defense ministers, and six chiefs of defense. China's Defense Minister, Wei

Fravel, "Xi Jinping's Overlooked Revelation on China's Maritime Disputes," *The Diplomat*, August 15, 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/08/xi-jinpings-overlooked-revelation-on-chinas-maritime-disputes/>.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Allen, Phillip C. Saunders, and John Chen, *Chinese Military Diplomacy 2003-2016*, China Strategic Perspectives 11, July 2017.

⁴⁹ "Defense Ministry's Regular Press Conference on Sept. 26," China Ministry of National Defense, September 26, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-09/27/content_9637911.htm.

⁵⁰ Aqil Haziq Mahmud, "Singapore, China Sign Defence Agreement to Scale Up Army, Navy Exercises, Establish Regular Dialogue," Channel News Asia, October 20, 2019, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-china-sign-ng-eng-hen--defence-agreement-scale-up-army-12018308>.

⁵¹ Both meetings featured CMC Vice Chairman Xu Qiliang and were held on the margins of the Beijing Xiangshan Forum. "Senior Chinese Military Official Meets with Vietnamese Defense Minister," Xinhua, October 22, 2019, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-10/22/c_138493224.htm; "Senior Chinese Military Official Meets with Vietnamese Defense Minister," Xinhua, October 22, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-10/22/content_9658424.htm.

⁵² "Japan Defense Chief Visits China For First Time in a Decade," *Nikkei Asian Review*, Decembner 19, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-defense-chief-visits-China-for-first-time-in-a-decade>; "India-China Military Ties 'Improving' Thanks to Modi-Xi Efforts: PLA," *Economic Times*, December 27, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-china-military-ties-improving-thanks-to-modi-xi-efforts-pla/articleshow/72989575.cms>.

Fenghe, used the occasion to draw a stark contrast with the United States by claiming that China would never “seek hegemony, expansion, or spheres of influence.”⁵³ Competing for influence in international military education, China in November 2019 hosted the first Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) Heads of Defense Universities forum, attracting representatives from 14 countries.⁵⁴ At the “minilateral” level, Beijing developed a “China-Russia-plus” exercise model: Beijing and Moscow held naval drills with South Africa in November 2019⁵⁵ and Iran the following month.⁵⁶ Despite the COVID-19 outbreak, the PLA continued to participate in regional multilateral exercises such as Cobra-Gold (Thailand) and Golden Dragon (Cambodia).⁵⁷

The pandemic provided the PLA an opportunity to strengthen China’s regional and global reputation through “mask diplomacy.” Chinese aid, though small in scale, targeted a number of close diplomatic partners. The first recipients, in March, included Iran, which received a shipment of personal protective equipment, and Cambodia, which hosted a Chinese military medical team.⁵⁸ In April, the recipients expanded to include Pakistan (where the PLA’s Y-20 made its international debut delivering military medical aid), Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Lebanon.⁵⁹ During the summer, as the pandemic subsided in China, aid and personnel were sent to 15 African countries and seven in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶⁰

However, Chinese military and paramilitary participation in a spate of incidents at home and abroad gradually overshadowed those more benevolent activities, increasing disputes with several neighbors and threatening China’s “soft power.” The stage was set in the summer and fall of 2019 with intimidating tactics focused on Hong Kong. Beginning in August, Chinese troops conducted a number of drills in Shenzhen that simulated operations against civilian Hong Kong protesters.⁶¹ Following a reported doubling of the number of Chinese troops assigned to the

⁵³ Zhang Zhihao, “Defense Minister Emphasizes National Interests in Address,” *China Daily*, October 21, 2019, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201910/21/WS5dad5f12a310cf3e35571b58.html>.

⁵⁴ “Defense Ministry’s Regular Press Conference on Nov. 28,” China Ministry of National Defense, November 28, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-11/29/content_9685792.htm.

⁵⁵ “China-Russia-South Africa Conduct Live-Fire Fleet Exercise,” China Military Online, November 29, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-11/29/content_9686187.htm.

⁵⁶ Wu Ping and Li Yinchuan, “Destroyer Xining Completes China-Russia-Iran Naval Exercise,” China Military Online, January 2, 2020, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-01/02/content_9708537.htm.

⁵⁷ “PLA Participates in Cobra Gold-2020 Military Exercise in Thailand,” China Military Online, February 24, 2020, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-02/24/content_9750887.htm; “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on Mar. 26,” China Ministry of National Defense, March 27, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-03/27/content_4862777.htm.

⁵⁸ “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on Mar. 26,” China Ministry of National Defense, March 27, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-03/27/content_4862777.htm.

⁵⁹ “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on Apr. 30,” China Ministry of National Defense, May 4, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-05/04/content_4864650.htm.

⁶⁰ “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on June 24,” China Ministry of National Defense, June 24, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-06/24/content_4867200.htm; “Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on July 30,” China Ministry of National Defense, July 30, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-08/01/content_4869055.htm.

⁶¹ “In ‘Clear Warning,’ Chinese Paramilitary Forces Exercise Near Hong Kong,” Reuters, August 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-pap/in-clear-warning-chinese-paramilitary-forces-exercise-near-hong-kong-idUSKCN1V50LV>.

Hong Kong Garrison, a group of PLA troops wearing clothing identifying them with elite Special Forces units left their barracks and participated in roadblock-clearing operations.⁶² These activities underlined China's ability to quickly intervene on behalf of Hong Kong's police force and foreshadowed the new Hong Kong National Security Law enacted in 2020.

Coercive Chinese actions proliferated across the region even as Beijing was grappling with the effects of COVID-19 (see Figure 1 below). Key developments included:

- *Taiwan.* Following Tsai Ing-wen's January re-election, the PLA conducted a number of operations designed to intimidate the DPP leadership and "pro-independence" forces on the island. On February 9 and 10, PLA air force bombers and fighters crossed the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait, long considered an informal boundary between the two sides. In mid-March, fighters again crossed the mid-line during nighttime training.⁶³ Coinciding with U.S. Health and Human Service Secretary Alex Azar's visit to Taiwan in August, PLA fighters once again crossed the midline; this was followed by PLA joint exercises on the northern and southern ends of the strait, which a PLA spokesman described as a "necessary move responding to the current security situation."⁶⁴ Further "concentrated" drills were announced in late August.⁶⁵ These exercises corresponded with the normal PLA training cycle, which often includes more complex exercises in the summer, but the publicity marked an attempt to raise the stakes for Taiwan and Washington.
- *India.* In the late spring, Chinese and Indian troops clashed in a remote section of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. The immediate trigger can be traced to the April 2020 incursion of some 5,000 Chinese troops beyond the LAC into areas where Chinese military presence had previously been limited, apparently in a show of resisting Indian military construction that had been ongoing since 2019. The height of the tensions occurred on June 15 in the Galwan Valley. Hand-to-hand combat between Chinese and Indian troops, including the use of "stones and clubs, some wrapped with barbed wire," led to the deaths of 20 Indians and an unknown number of Chinese personnel.⁶⁶ These constituted the first casualties since the 1962 border war although there have been a

⁶² "PLA Soldiers Sent Onto Streets of Hong Kong For First Time Since Protests Began," *South China Morning Post*, November 16, 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/politics/article/3038049/pla-soldiers-sent-streets-hong-kong-first-time-protests>.

⁶³ John Dotson, "Military Activity and Political Signaling in the Taiwan Strait in Early 2020," *China Brief*, April 1, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/military-activity-and-political-signaling-in-the-taiwan-strait-in-early-2020/>.

⁶⁴ Yimou Lee and Ben Blanchard, "China Sends Fighter Jets As U.S. Health Chief Visits Taiwan," Reuters, August 9, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-usa-president/china-sends-fighter-jets-as-us-health-chief-visits-taiwan-idUSKCN25605V>; "PLA's Eastern Theater Command Conducts Exercises in Taiwan Straits," China Military Online, August 13, 2020, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-08/13/content_9881191.htm.

⁶⁵ Liu Xuanzun, "PLA Holds Concentrated Military Drills to Deter Taiwan Secessionists, U.S.," *Global Times*, August 23, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1198593.shtml>.

⁶⁶ M. Taylor Fravel, "China's Sovereignty Obsession," *Foreign Affairs*, June 26, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2020-06-26/chinas-sovereignty-obsession>.

number of minor clashes in recent years. Anti- China protests spread across India, but the two sides convened a number of talks in an attempt to de-escalate the situation.⁶⁷

- *Japan.* During the COVID-19 crisis, Beijing increased the duration of China Coast Guard patrols near the Senkakus. As of June 2020, Chinese vessels were present in the region for 65 continuous days, which was the longest stretch since the Japanese government purchased some of the islands from a private Japanese owner in September 2012. Chinese government ships attempted to evict Japanese fishing boats but were unsuccessful due to the Japanese coast guard's intervention.⁶⁸
- *South China Sea.* Chinese Coast Guard, maritime militia, and navy vessels were involved in a number of controversial activities in the South China Sea. Beginning in December, Chinese ships engaged in a round of intimidation targeted at drilling operations by Malaysian state-owned firm Petronas as well as Shell, leading Malaysia, as well as the United States, and Australia, to contribute ships to protect those commercial operations.⁶⁹ In February, the Philippines claimed that a PLA navy corvette locked its fire control radar on a Filipino anti-submarine corvette, instigating a diplomatic complaint.⁷⁰ Separately, in early April, a Chinese government vessel sunk a Vietnamese fishing trawler, leading to a diplomatic protest.⁷¹ These actions coincided with China's announcement of new "administrative districts" covering the Parcel and Spratly archipelagoes, a decision that was quickly denounced by both Hanoi and Manila.⁷²

Figure 1: Chinese Acts of Coercion, February-August 2020

⁶⁷ "UP: Anti-China Protests Across Garakhpur-Basti Zone, Chinese President's Effigy Burnt," *India Today*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/anti-china-protest-uttar-pradesh-china-president-xi-jinping-effigy-burnt-chinese-flag-on-fire-boycott-chinese-products-1690127-2020-06-18>.

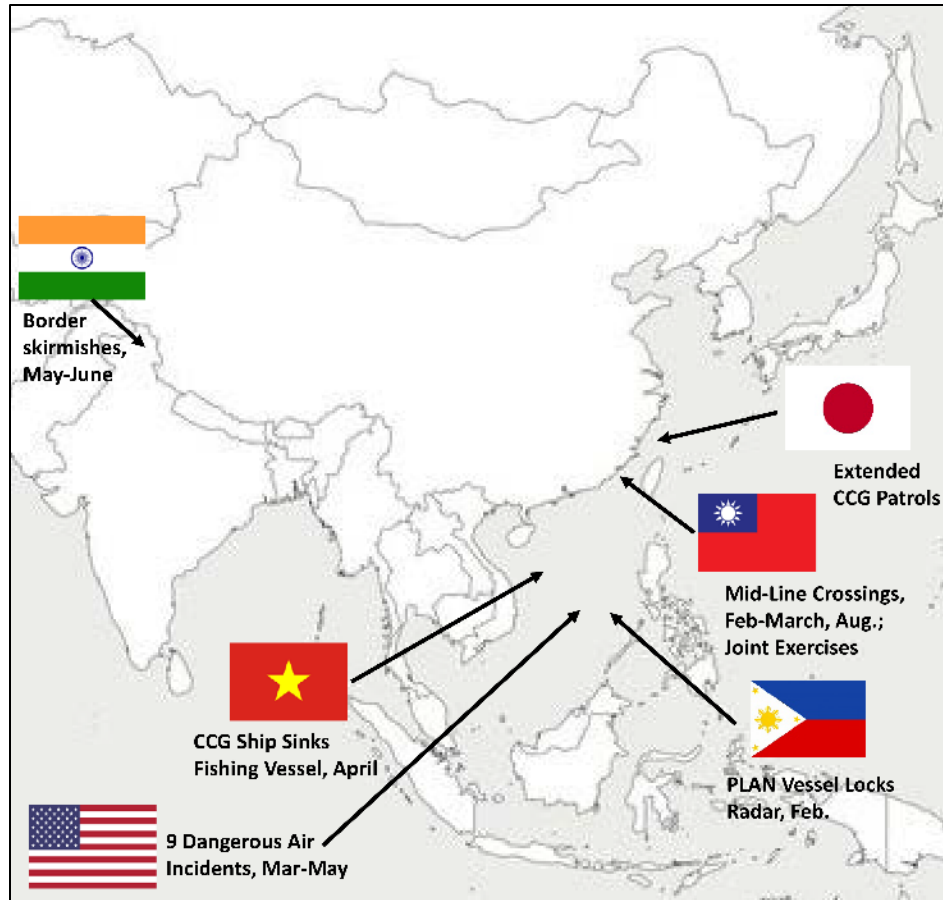
⁶⁸ "Chinese Government Vessels Seen Near Disputed Senkakus for 65 Days In a Row," *Japan Times*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/17/national/chinese-ships-near-senkakus-65-days/>.

⁶⁹ "Malaysia Picks a Three-Way Fight In the South China Sea," CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, February 21, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/malaysia-picks-a-three-way-fight-in-the-south-china-sea/>

⁷⁰ Renato Cruz De Castro, "Implications of the Recent Philippines-China Naval Standoff," AMTI Update, May 7, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/implications-of-the-recent-philippines-china-naval-stand-off/>.

⁷¹ Khahn Vu, "Vietnam Protests Beijing's Sinking of South China Sea Boat," Reuters, April 4, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-vietnam-china-southchinasea/vietnam-protests-beijings-sinking-of-south-china-sea-boat-idUSKBN21M072>.

⁷² Huong Le Thu, "Fishing While the Water Is Muddy: China's Newly Announced Administrative Districts in the South China Sea," CSIS Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 6, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/fishing-while-the-water-is-muddy-chinas-newly-announced-administrative-districts-in-the-south-china-sea/>.



U.S. forces in the region were not immune from aggressive Chinese tactics. In February, U.S. Pacific Fleet reported that a P-8A Poseidon patrol aircraft had been targeted with a high-powered laser from a Chinese destroyer west of Guam.⁷³ This was the latest in a series of “lasing” incidents suffered by U.S. forces over the last few years.⁷⁴ In May, a U.S. Department of Defense official revealed that there had been “at least nine” troubling incidents involving U.S. and Chinese forces over the past two months, including “unsafe and unprofessional” encounters with Chinese naval ships in the South China Sea,⁷⁵ although unofficial reports claimed that Xi Jinping later ordered the PLA not to “fire the first shot” with U.S. forces.⁷⁶

⁷³ Courtney Mabeus, “Pacific Fleet: Chinese Destroyer’s Laster Targeted U.S. Plane,” *Navy Times*, February 27, 2020, <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2020/02/28/pacific-fleet-chinese-destroyers-laser-targeted-us-plane/>.

⁷⁴ Aaron Mehta, “Two U.S. Airmen Injured by Chinese Lasers in Djibouti, DoD Says,” *Defense News*, May 3, 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2018/05/03/two-us-airmen-injured-by-chinese-lasers-in-djibouti/>; Jesse Johnson, “U.S. Military Pilots in East China Sea Targeted in Laser Attacks,” *Japan Times*, June 22, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/06/22/asia-pacific/u-s-military-pilots-east-china-sea-targeted-laser-attacks/>.

⁷⁵ Ryan Pickrell, “Pentagon Says China’s Military Is Challenging the U.S. With ‘Risky’ Run-Ins in the South China Sea During the Pandemic,” *Business Insider*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-chinese-militaries-tension-south-china-sea-during-pandemic-2020-5>.

⁷⁶ Wendy Wu and Minnie Chan, “South China Sea: Chinese Military Told Not to Fire the First Shot in Stand-off With U.S. Forces,” *South China Morning Post*, August 11, 2020.

Most of these developments were not qualitatively different from previous episodes. For instance, PLA fighters have crossed the mid-line of the Taiwan Straits on occasion, China Coast Guard vessels have sunk foreign vessels operating in the South China Sea, and PLA and “white hull” ships have had dangerous encounters with U.S. navy ships.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, there were two differences in 2020. First, in the India standoff, the PLA used deadly violence against an adversary for the first time since the Johnson South Reef skirmish in 1988. The clash demonstrated that Beijing would not necessarily stay within the “gray zone” despite the negative repercussions for China’s diplomatic interests. In the Indian case, this threshold may have been crossed due to the rapidly unfolding situation or as a response to Indian actions. Another explanation is that Chinese leaders may have been confident that they could control the pace and scope of escalation, and thus authorized relatively liberal rules of engagement.⁷⁸

Second was the use of coercive tactics against many antagonists at the same time. In the past, Beijing avoided escalating disputes with multiple opponents in order to focus its limited capabilities and reduce the diplomatic costs. Recent coercive actions, which may be described as a kind of “omni-directional bullying” against opponents at home, in the region, and the United States, created a new precedent. It appears that multiple causes worked in tandem to produce increased Chinese risk-taking: ending an embarrassing domestic situation for Xi (in Hong Kong), external irritants that required CCP leaders to respond (such as Tsai’s re-election, U.S. passage of the TAIPEI Act, or Malaysian drilling in a contested area), a perceived need to warn rival claimants not to exploit China once COVID-19 began to spread in the mainland, and strategic opportunism focused on expanding influence in parts of the region, especially the South China Sea, once smaller Southeast Asian countries were affected.⁷⁹

Chinese leaders appear to have realized that this “omni-directional bullying” was seriously endangering other priorities, including comity with key neighbors, and increasing the risk of a wider conflagration. Except for Taiwan, which continued to be subjected to coercive acts throughout the summer, Beijing worked to mend fences with its other neighbors. This suggests that, despite an apparent increase in its willingness to take diplomatic risks during the pandemic, Beijing continues to try to balance competing imperatives.

Commission Questions: How has China responded to the recent increase in U.S. military operations in the region? How do China’s military and paramilitary coercive actions challenge

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3096978/south-china-sea-chinese-military-told-not-fire-first-shot>.

⁷⁷ Abraham Denmark, Charles Edel, and Siddharth Mohandas, “Same As It Ever Was: China’s Pandemic Opportunism on Its Periphery,” *War on the Rocks*, April 16, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/same-as-it-ever-was-chinas-pandemic-opportunism-on-its-periphery/>.

⁷⁸ Neither Chinese nor Indian forces on the LAC carry high-powered weapons under an existing agreement. The notion that China can carefully control the pace and scale of a conflict is consistent with Chinese doctrinal writings. For a discussion, see Alison A. Kaufman and Daniel M. Hartnett, *Managing Conflict: Examining Recent PLA Writings on Escalation Control* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2016).

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Andrew Small and Dhruva Jaishankar, “‘For Our Enemies, We Have Shotguns’: Explaining China’s New Assertiveness,” *War on the Rocks*, July 20, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/for-our-enemies-we-have-shotguns-explaining-chinas-new-assertiveness/>; Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Inopportune Pandemic Assertiveness,” *PacNet* #33, June 10, 2020, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/2214536/chinas-inopportune-pandemic-assertiveness/>.

U.S. influence and alliance networks, and what do these actions reveal about Beijing's perceptions of U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific?

Chinese strategists have carefully analyzed the reallocation of U.S. national resources and attention to the Indo-Pacific through the Obama administration's "rebalance to Asia" and the Trump administration's "Indo-Pacific strategy."⁸⁰ Overall, these strategies tend to be viewed as a form of containment; the United States is also frequently accused of fomenting "color revolutions" through support for anti-CCP actors in Hong Kong, Tibet, and Xinjiang. The military dimensions of these strategies are generally perceived as a net negative by complicating China's military operations within the "first island chain" and emboldening territorial rivals. Japan is a case in point. As late as the 1990s, some Chinese scholars thought that the U.S. military alliance with Japan acted as a useful "cork in the bottle" on Tokyo's ambitions. Today, though, most analysts think that the alliance has contributed to a shift from pacifism to "militarization."⁸¹

Beijing's response to the increased U.S. military presence in Asia has followed two trajectories. First is deterrence and what U.S. scholars would call "cost imposition." This includes shadowing, warning, and harassing U.S. naval and air forces operating near China to signal that Beijing is willing to assume a risk to protect its territorial interests, as occurred on multiple occasions in 2019 and 2020. It also includes developing and demonstrating the means to counter U.S. intervention in regional conflicts, such as conducting bomber flights to the "second island chain,"⁸² publicizing tests of the DF-21D and DF-26B anti-ship ballistic missiles,⁸³ and rolling out new ballistic and cruise missile variants at the October 2019 military parade.⁸⁴ At the higher end, the PLA has modernized and diversified its nuclear deterrent by fielding new ICBMs and developing longer-range submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

Recognizing the limits on its military capabilities and the consequences of a wider conflagration with the United States, Beijing has taken some steps to reduce the risks associated with its deterrent strategy. Under the so-called "new type military relationship" with Washington personally championed by Xi, the two sides have regularly discussed risk reduction as a hedge

⁸⁰ This section draws heavily from Joel Wuthnow, "Just Another Paper Tiger? Chinese Perspectives on the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," *INSS Strategic Forum* 305, June 2020. For a study on Chinese views of the rebalance to Asia, see Christopher D. Yung, "A Pivot of Their Own," *Marine Corps University Journal* 8:1 (2017), 39-61.

⁸¹ Adam P. Liff, "China and the U.S. Alliance System," *China Quarterly* 233 (2018), 137-165.

⁸² For background, see Derek Grossman et al., *China's Long-Range Bomber Flights: Drivers and Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018).

⁸³ Joseph Trevithick, "China's Reported Anti-Ship Ballistic Missile Test in the South China Sea Is a Big Deal," *The Drive*, July 2, 2019, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/28810/chinas-reported-anti-ship-ballistic-missile-test-in-the-south-china-sea-is-a-big-deal>; Joseph Trevithick, "China Tests Long-Range Anti-Ship Ballistic Missiles As U.S. Spy Plane Watches It All," *The Drive*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/36004/china-tests-long-range-anti-ship-ballistic-missiles-as-u-s-spy-plane-watches-it-all>.

⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Xi reportedly urged Chinese forces not to "fire the first shot" against U.S. forces in the South China Sea, hedging the risks of an inadvertent conflict. Wendy Wu and Minnie Chan, "South China Sea: Chinese Military Told Not to Fire First Shot in Stand-off With U.S. Forces," *South China Morning Post*, August 11, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3096978/south-china-sea-chinese-military-told-not-fire-first-shot>.

against an escalating conflict.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the fruits of this initiative have been limited as China more confidently pursues deterrence and “cost imposition.” For instance, Chinese ships and aircraft have repeatedly violated the codes for unplanned air and naval encounters that the two sides reached in 2014-5; Beijing canceled the Joint Staff Dialogue Mechanism, which was focused on risk reduction, due to China’s desire to punish the United States for U.S. sanctions on CMC officials;⁸⁶ and China has not agreed to subject its Coast Guard and maritime militia ships, which have been at the forefront of a number of dangerous incidents, to rules of behavior.

Second, China has tried to weaken the linkages between the United States and its regional allies and partners. A key insight of Chinese assessments of the “rebalance to Asia” and the Indo-Pacific strategy is that the prime U.S. competitive advantage lies in those relationships. Many countries look to the United States as a security provider rather than China, which has no formal alliances other than with North Korea; they, in turn, provide critical basing access to U.S. forces, purchase U.S. hardware, and participate in high-end exercises, often on subjects related to a potential conflict with China. The dominant prescription found in these analyses is that China should respond by leveraging its key competitive strength, which is economic largesse in terms of favorable trade balances, side-payments to foreign governments, and financing for infrastructure projects. The PLA is a supporting actor in this program. It contributes primarily by generating “soft power” via military exchanges, exercises, port calls, arms sales, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, and most recently “mask diplomacy.”

Attempts to weaken the U.S. alliance and partnership network, however, have had limited success because of competing incentives in the Chinese system to escalate tensions with neighbors. Use of coercion, as witnessed across the region in early 2020, serves China’s interests in demonstrating commitment to enforcing territorial claims for a nationalistic domestic audience and in strengthening China’s “effective control” over contested regions, but paradoxically strengthens the bonds between the United States and its key allies and partners. Those actions not only strengthen a bipartisan commitment in the United States to maintain a robust military presence as a check on Chinese expansionism, but also increase the regional demand for U.S. military assistance and cooperation. Chinese actions in 2020, for instance, led Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte to suspend a threat to end a Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States.⁸⁷

This aspect of China’s strategy was also hobbled this year because military tensions were allowed to rise with both Japan and India, states that Chinese strategists themselves regard as key to the success of the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. The fact that China allowed tensions with both countries to escalate at the same time as Xi was aiming to mend relations with his counterparts in

⁸⁵ Phillip C. Saunders and Julia G. Bowie, “U.S.-China Military Relations: Competition and Cooperation,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 39:5-6 (2016), 662-684.

⁸⁶ The sanctions were due to violations of the U.S. Countering Adversaries through Sanctions Act, specifically PLA purchases of advanced Russian weaponry. “China Postpones Military Dialogues In Protest Against U.S. ‘Sanctions,’” China Military Online, September 25, 2018, http://english.chinamil.com.cn/view/2018-09/25/content_9296957.htm.

⁸⁷ Jason Gutierrez, “Philippines Backs off Threat to Terminate Military Pact with U.S.,” *New York Times*, June 2, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/02/world/asia/philippines-military-pact-us-duterte.html>.

those countries suggests an additional factor beyond near-term incentives to escalate: China's strategy was so inept that some of the fault might be attributed to a breakdown in China's interagency process. It is far from clear that Chinese military and Coast Guard operations were coordinated with diplomatic and economic moves to curry favor in those countries. Whatever the reason, developments in 2020 suggested that Beijing was far from implementing its own "theory of victory" to weaken U.S. influence by depriving it of its main regional supporters.

Operational Effects of PLA Reorganization during COVID-19

Commission Questions: What has the PLA response to COVID-19 and other noncombat operations revealed about the PLA's post-reorganization capabilities? What does the PLA's performance indicate about the success of its recent reorganization in addressing persistent weaknesses?

The PLA conducted two major domestic operations in 2020. First were the epidemic control operations in Wuhan that began in late January and ended in March.⁸⁸ Those operations featured the mobilization and deployment of more than 4,000 military medics and the transfer of hundreds of thousands of units of medical supplies to the beleaguered city. Chinese military and paramilitary personnel built and staffed makeshift hospitals while handling logistics and maintaining social order. Continuing the theme of confidence exhibited throughout 2020, the PLA claimed that *none* of its personnel were infected despite being in close proximity to patients and in the epicenter of the disease.⁸⁹ Second, the PLA responded to massive floods affecting eastern China in the spring and summer months.⁹⁰ Chinese officials reported that those operations collectively involved 725,000 troops who facilitated the evacuation of 137,000 people and provided critical assistance in strengthening levees.⁹¹

One revelation from these operations concerns the functions of the PLA's updated logistics system. In Wuhan, the JLSF played a decisive role. Compared to the previous system, in which logistics were largely handled by the military regions, the JLSF is more centralized. A headquarters oversees five Joint Logistic Support Centers, which in turn manage a network of supply depots and mobile logistics brigades (see Figure 2).⁹² During the crisis, the JLSF commander and his staff drew on personnel and supplies from across the country and arranged their transportation to Wuhan, without having to secure permission from regional commands. Nevertheless, the flood relief operations indicated that the JLSF would not necessarily be on the

⁸⁸ This section is based in part on Joel Wuthnow, "Responding to Wuhan: Insights into Chinese Joint Logistics and Cross-Theater Mobility," INSS Staff Report, March 25, 2020; and Joel Wuthnow, "Responding to the Epidemic in Wuhan: Insights Into Chinese Military Logistics," *China Brief*, April 13, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/responding-to-the-epidemic-in-wuhan-insights-into-chinese-military-logistics/>.

⁸⁹ Joel Wuthnow, "China's Military Claims to Be Virus-Free," *Foreign Policy*, March 20, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/20/pla-coronavirus-invasion-chinas-military-claims-to-be-virus-free/>.

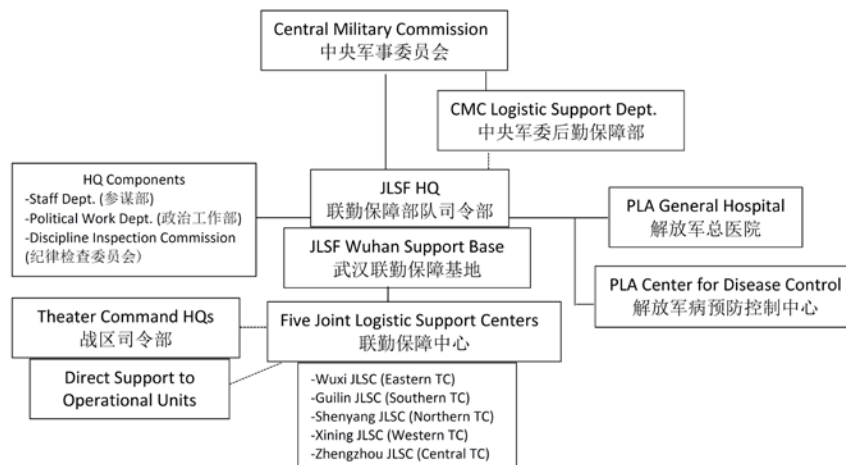
⁹⁰ John Dotson, "The PLA Is Mobilized for Flood Relief in Eastern China," *China Brief*, July 29, 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-pla-is-mobilized-for-flood-relief-in-eastern-china/>.

⁹¹ "Regular Press Conference of the Ministry of National Defense on July 30," China Ministry of National Defense, August 1, 2020, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2020-08/01/content_4869055.htm.

⁹² Kevin McCauley, "Modernization of PLA Logistics: Joint Logistic Support Force," Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, February 18, 2018.

frontlines. In that case, logistics were managed primarily by individual group armies.⁹³ This suggests that the army is able to independently plan and conduct smaller relief operations across long distances without the need to rely on “joint” enablers.⁹⁴

Figure 2: Joint Logistic Support Force Structure



These operations also showcased the fruits of assorted modernization investments in seemingly mundane areas. During operations in Wuhan, PLA media reported that logistics troops used computerized inventories, networks, and bar codes to quickly identify supplies and track deliveries; they also used 5G networks to facilitate tele-medicine.⁹⁵ These reports demonstrate that while “informationization” is often discussed in the context of linking high-tech weapons and sensors into an effective “system of systems,” it also has important connotations in the logistics arena.⁹⁶ Reports on the flood relief operations noted differences with previous operations, which made greater use of “low-tech” tactics such as using ships or trucks to fill breaches. In 2020, Chinese troops used drones to perform “low-altitude infrared detection” of

⁹³ “The People’s Liberation Army and the Armed Police Force are divided into Multi-Channel Cross-Provincial Mobile Rescue and Disaster Relief” (解放军和武警部队 兵分多路跨省机动抢险救灾), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), July 15, 2020, pg. 1. Nevertheless, some of these operations did have “joint” characteristics. For instance, doctors from hospitals subordinate to the JLSF were mobilized. See “Front-Line Flood-Fighting Troops in the Eastern Theater Coordinate Service and Support Work” (东部战区一线抗洪部队 统筹做好服务保障工作), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), July 18, 2020, pg. 3

⁹⁴ It also suggests that the army has benefited from 14 years of trans-theater mobility exercises. For background, see Dennis J. Blasko, “The Biggest Loser in Chinese Military Reforms,” in Saunders et al., eds., *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, 367-9.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., “Be a Good ‘Ferryman’ and Build a ‘Fast Track’ for Distribution” (当好物资‘摆渡人’ 构筑配送‘快车道’), *Xinhua*, February 8, 2020, <https://ishare.ifeng.com/c/s/7tts6gWbrQa>; “A Military Representative Office of the Zhengzhou Logistic Support Center Thoroughly Supports the Distribution of Epidemic Control Supplies to Wuhan” (郑州联勤保障中心某军代室全力保障防疫物资运抵武汉), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), February 5, 2020, http://www.81.cn/lqbz/2020-02/05/content_9733320.htm.

⁹⁶ Informatization of the logistics system has been a longstanding goal for the PLA. For background, see Susan M. Puska, “Taming the Hydra: Trends in China’s Military Logistics Since 2000,” in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell (eds.), *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China’s Military* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College, 2010), 592-4.

the levees, “high-viscosity sandy soil” to reinforce dams, and relied on information supplied by local water monitoring systems to make key decisions.⁹⁷

The Wuhan case demonstrated progress in military-civilian fusion in the logistics arena.⁹⁸ Recognizing the substantial logistics requirements of sustaining troops far from their barracks, PLA authorities have encouraged greater cooperation with civilian authorities and enterprises over the last decade. The products of that emphasis were on display two respects. First was coordinating with civilian transportation agencies to arrange bus and rail transportation for PLA personnel and to prioritize shipments of supplies on the civilian rail network.⁹⁹ Second was provisioning supplies from the local economy. For instance, one Joint Logistic Support Center, facing shortages from its current supplier, used new procurement authorities to solicit bids from other firms in order to maintain adequate stocks of medical gear.¹⁰⁰ The JLSF even procured life insurance for personnel working on the frontlines.¹⁰¹

Assessments of proficiency based on these cases should acknowledge improvements in centralization, informationization, and military-civilian fusion. However, observers should also recognize that the two operations were not a realistic test of how the PLA’s logistics and other combat support capabilities would operate during a war: no enemies were seeking to interdict the PLA’s supply lines or logistics networks, there was no requirement for transporting troops or equipment to overseas locations, and the scale of the effort was smaller than what would likely be required in a major conflict. However, these cases did offer the PLA insight into how parts of its reformed organization could function in a real-world contingency. Chinese authorities will undoubtedly try to derive lessons from these cases and make course corrections that could enable the JLSF and ground forces to operate more effectively in combat.

Policy Recommendations

Commission Questions: The Commission is mandated to make policy recommendations to Congress based on its hearings and other research. What are your recommendations for Congressional action related to the topic of your testimony?

⁹⁷ “What are the New Changes in Fighting Floods?” (抗洪一线新变化折射了什么), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), August 6, 2020, pg. 5.

⁹⁸ For background, see Alex Stone and Peter Wood, *China’s Military-Civil Fusion Strategy* (Washington, DC: China Aerospace Studies Institute, 2020).

⁹⁹ “The PLA and People’s Armed Police Launch a Sniper Battle with the Novel Coronavirus with High Effectiveness” (解放军和武警部队高效率打响新冠肺炎狙击战), *Zijing Online* (紫荆网), March 3, 2020, <http://4g.zijing.org/?app=article&controller=article&action=show&contentid=808282>.

¹⁰⁰ “A Medical Supply Base of the Xining Joint Logistic Support Center Controls the Quality of Epidemic Supplies” (西宁联勤保障中心某基地药材供应站把好防疫物资供应质量关), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), March 10, 2020, http://www.81.cn/lqbz/2020-03/10/content_9764264.htm.

¹⁰¹ “Joint Logistic Support Force Provides Free Life Insurance for Medical Personnel” (联勤保障部队为军队抽组医疗力量免费提供人身保险), *Jiefangjun Bao* (解放军报), February 26, 2020, http://www.81.cn/lqbz/2020-02/26/content_9752645.htm.

Despite the impact of COVID-19, which had at least a minor effect on PLA training and recruitment this year,¹⁰² there was never much doubt that the Party would declare victory in its 2020 agenda and express enthusiasm for the next stage of reform and modernization. The “strong army dream” (强军梦) after all is an indelible part of Xi’s legacy; failure is not an option. Throughout the year, the CCP touted progress in achieving those goals and demonstrated confidence in using the PLA and paramilitary forces to enforce territorial claims, challenge U.S. presence, and conduct domestic disaster relief operations under difficult conditions. Yet below the artifice of strength was evidence of continuing capability gaps, foreign policy dilemmas, and the reality that the reformed PLA, for all its progress, has yet to face the “fog of war.”

A CCP with stronger military and paramilitary instruments of power and a greater willingness to escalate disputes with neighbors and U.S. forces poses clear challenges that U.S. policymakers will have to address. The Department of Defense faces increasing demand to shore up alliances and partnerships in the face of Chinese overtures to those states, improve regional deterrence and joint warfighting capabilities, and find ways to effectively manage engagements with the PLA. Congress and the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (USCC) can contribute to more effective U.S. strategic decisions with respect to China and the region in the following ways:

- *Commission an updated study on PLA weaknesses.* Public discussions of U.S. military strategy in the Indo-Pacific are replete with observations of Chinese strengths, especially in terms of counter-intervention capabilities. This partly reflects PLA efforts to showcase its military advances to shape regional views of the U.S.-China military balance. An effective strategy would not only seek to minimize the risks posed by those capabilities, but also exploit China’s vulnerabilities; this is most likely to be effective, as the *National Defense Strategy* put it, in areas “where we possess advantages and they lack strength.”¹⁰³ This requires an accurate appraisal of PLA weaknesses, some of which China advertises and others of which it has tried to obscure. In 2015, the USCC contributed to that objective by commissioning a study on that topic, which was conducted by the RAND Corporation, but PLA improvements over the past five years have raised doubts about whether some of that report’s conclusions are still valid.¹⁰⁴ Now is the time for the USCC to commission a follow-up report that asks: which weaknesses remain? Which do not? Are there new vulnerabilities associated with increased PLA dependence on networked joint command and control systems and space-based ISR? As with the first report, an updated version should consider not only hardware, but also “software” such as institutions, human capital, doctrine, and the Chinese defense industry. Such a product (which could be written at a classified or unclassified level) would, at a minimal cost to U.S. taxpayers, help strategists consider how to revise U.S. approaches in peacetime, crisis, and wartime.

¹⁰² “Defense Ministry’s Regular Press Conference on Feb. 28,” China Military Online, March 1, 2020, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-03/01/content_9756363.htm.

¹⁰³ Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Chase et al., *China’s Incomplete Military Transformation*.

- Promote a better understanding of ally/partner views of China.* As Chinese strategists themselves recognize, the key U.S. competitive strength in the Indo-Pacific is the network of U.S. alliances and partnerships. In an era of increased U.S.-China competition, those states are becoming battlegrounds of influence. Washington has tried to strengthen those relations under the Indo-Pacific strategy, while Beijing continues to weaken them. A key question is whether Chinese coercive acts, such as those that transpired in 2020, have shifted the battleground in a way that provides new opportunities for the Department of Defense and interagency to revitalize relations with key states. Are states like Japan and India more likely to demand closer defense ties with the United States? Will they “decouple” from China in technological or defense areas? How should we assess the political or practical limits on their willingness to cooperate with both states? In what ways do they try to play the great powers against each other? Answers to these questions would help in crafting a more effective U.S. strategy. The USCC can contribute to this task by holding a hearing on “Ally/Partner Perceptions of China” and by conducting staff research on this topic.
- Recommend new NDAA requirements on military exchanges with China.* Both countries continue to hold regular military exchanges and dialogues, but increasing friction is reducing both the quality and quantity of the relationship.¹⁰⁵ These exchanges continue to have value in allowing U.S. officials to convey messages directly to their PLA counterparts, understand Chinese strategic perspectives, and provide a window into PLA modernization and reform efforts, especially on “software” issues such as personnel policies. However, key U.S. concerns include Chinese violations of existing risk reduction agreements, the desire not to reward Chinese “bad behavior” with participation in prestigious events such as RIMPAC, lack of reciprocity, and exploitation of visits to improve PLA modernization in select areas. Reflections on whether U.S. interests can continue to be achieved, and indeed *what those interests are and should be* have not kept up with the deterioration of the bilateral relationship. Congressionally-mandated annual reports on China are required to discuss military relations, but the result is typically stock language on U.S. interests that hasn’t varied much over the last decade and a rote list of engagements in the previous year. Congress can play a role in stimulating new thinking on this topic by mandating a Department of Defense “bottom-up review” of the military relationship in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act that includes a prioritized assessment of U.S. interests, perceived threats to those interests, risk mitigation approaches, a discussion of concerns about ally/partner military engagement with China, and a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the defense engagement management system, along with recommendations for improvements. Meanwhile, based on that report

¹⁰⁵ Joel Wuthnow, “Managing U.S.-China Military Relations in an Era of Strategic Competition,” draft manuscript. For recent published assessments, see Saunders and Bowie, “U.S.-China Military Relations”; Roy D. Kamphausen with Jessica Drun, “Sino-U.S. Military-to-Military Relations,” in Travis Tanner and Wang Dong (eds.), *U.S.-China Relations in Strategic Domains* (Washington, DC: NBR, 2016), 103-118; Scott W. Harold, “Optimizing the U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relationship,” *Asia Policy* 14:3 (2019), 145-168; and Andrew S. Erickson, “U.S.-China Military-to-Military Relations: Policy Considerations in a Changing Environment,” *Asia Policy* 14:3 (2019), 123-144.

and other analysis, Congress should consider updating the language on U.S.-China military relations in the 2000 National Defense Authorization Act with an eye to whether the restrictions listed in Section 1201 should be revised.¹⁰⁶

- *Promote open source analysis of China.* Effective U.S. strategy towards China requires a diversity of views and analysis on the PLA. Open source research can be especially useful in detailing PLA organizations, training, military education, personnel, doctrine, defense industry, and many other issues that are covered in Chinese military newspapers, journals, books, and “gray literature.” It can also help shape public debate on the threats posed by the Chinese military and be freely shared with all countries, including those that are not traditional U.S. allies and security partners. Given constraints on the Intelligence Community, much of this literature has historically been produced by a community of academics, think tank and Federally-Funded Research and Development Center analysts, government contractors, and independent scholars. Many of these scholars are Chinese-language capable, have lived in China, and/or previously served as defense attachés or Intelligence Community analysts. A key problem is that many of the open sources that these analysts have traditionally relied on are becoming increasingly difficult to access. Some of that is due to Chinese restrictions, but the U.S. government is also at fault. Notably, Open Source Enterprise, which served as a clearing house for a wide range of Chinese and other foreign publications, has been closed. In its 2019 annual report, the USCC recommended that Congress direct the Office of the Director National Intelligence to restore this service, but no action has been taken¹⁰⁷ USCC commissioners and staff should follow up on this item and explore whether new funding, which would likely be a small amount, would be necessary to rebuild and expand Open Source Enterprise in a way that can be responsibly accessed by uncleared personnel, including funding that might be required to maintain separate classified and unclassified versions. Any funding appropriations should be included in 2021 legislation.

¹⁰⁶ The 2000 NDAA specifies 12 areas where the Secretary of Defense can impose restrictions it “would create a national security risk due to inappropriate exposure...”

¹⁰⁷ U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *2019 Report to Congress*, 541

Appendix: CCP “Three-Step” Development Strategies for the Chinese Armed Forces, 1997-2017

	1997 Jiang Zemin CMC Speech ¹⁰⁸	2006 Defense White Paper ¹⁰⁹	2008 Defense White Paper ¹¹⁰	2012 18 th Party Congress Work Report ¹¹¹	2017 19 th Party Congress Work Report ¹¹²
Step 1	Target: 2010 Over more than ten years, we will strive to realize the requirements of the military strategic guidelines in the new period and lay a solid foundation for the modernization of national defense and the military. Mainly solve the problems of military scale, organization, and policies; reduce the number of military personnel to a moderate size; establish a more scientific system establishment, and form a relatively supporting policy system that is compatible with the development of the socialist market economy; adjust and improve national defense mobilization system; military training must be raised to a new level; we have a batch of advanced main combat weapons and equipment; form a lean and effective basic system of weapons and equipment suitable for combat	Target: 2010 Lay a solid foundation	Target: 2010 Lay a solid foundation	Target: 2020 Building a consolidated national defense and a strong army that is commensurate with my country's international status and commensurate with national security and development interests is a strategic task for my country's modernization drive. We must adhere to the core security needs of the country, coordinate economic construction and national defense construction, and in accordance with the "three-step" strategic concept of national defense and military modernization, step up to complete the dual historical tasks of	Target: 2020 Basically realize mechanization, major progress has been made in information construction, and strategic capabilities have been greatly improved

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.reformdata.org/1997/1207/5729.shtml>

¹⁰⁹ http://www.mod.gov.cn/affair/2011-01/06/content_4249948_2.htm

¹¹⁰ http://eng.mod.gov.cn/publications/2017-04/11/content_4778231.htm

¹¹¹ http://www.xinhuanet.com//18cpcnc/2012-11/17/c_113711665.htm

¹¹² <http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/gncj/2017-10-18/doc-ifymvuyt4098830.shtml>

	under high-tech conditions, and have the deterrence and actual combat to perform military struggle tasks in the new era.			mechanization and informatization, and strive to basically accomplish mechanization and make significant progress in information construction by 2020.	
Step 2	Target: 2020	Target: 2020	Target: 2020	None	Target: 2035
	With the growth of the country's economic strength and the corresponding increase in military expenditures, speed up the pace of our military's quality construction, appropriately increase the development of high-tech weapons and equipment, improve the weapon equipment system, comprehensively improve the quality of the troops, further optimize the system and make big developments in army and national defense modernization.	Have a big development	Basically accomplish mechanization and make major progress in informationization		Consistent with the national modernization process, comprehensively promote the modernization of military theory, the modernization of military organization, the modernization of military personnel, and the modernization of weapons and equipment, and strive to basically realize the modernization of national defense and the military by 2035
Step 3	Target: Mid-Century	Target: Mid-Century	Target: Mid-Century	None	Target: Mid-Century
	After another 30 years of hard work, by the middle of the 21st century, the modernization of national defense and the military will be realized	Basically realize the strategic goal of building an informationized army and winning an informationized war	By and large reach the goal of modernization of national defense and armed forces		By the middle of this century, the People's Army will be fully built into a world-class army.