

# The PLA's Domestic and Foreign Activities and Orientation

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Chairman Bartholomew, Vice Chairman Wortzel, Commissioners of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, I'd like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to appear before you and discuss China's military activities abroad. As this commission requested, I will offer some context for today's hearing. In particular I will address the Chinese People's Liberation Army's (PLA) new military missions, and describe the impact these missions are having on current and future PLA operations.

In December 2008, China made a dramatic announcement that it would send three naval vessels to participate in United Nation's sanctioned anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. This announcement is noteworthy because it is the first time since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that the Chinese navy, officially called the People's Liberation Army Navy (or PLAN), has participated in combat operations outside of China's claimed territory. The roots of this significant policy shift go back more than four years to a set of missions given to the Chinese military, officially called the *Historic Missions of the PLA in the New Period of the New Century*—or *Historic Missions* for short. These missions have opened the door to the PLAN's participation in these anti-piracy operations, and likely to other PLA military activities abroad in the future.

## The PLA's *Historic Missions*

On December 24, 2004, Chinese leader Hu Jintao gave a speech to China's supreme military body, the Central Military Commission. In that speech, Hu provided the PLA with a new set of missions to fulfill. The essence of these new missions can be summarized in four separate subtasks:

- To ensure military support for continued Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in Beijing
- To defend China's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security
- To protect China's expanding national interests
- To help ensure a peaceful global environment and promote mutual development.

I will briefly describe each of these tasks in turn.

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed within are solely the author's, and not of any organization with which he is affiliated.

### *Task 1: Ensure PLA Support for CCP Rule*

The first task seeks to ensure that the Chinese military supports continued CCP rule in China. In his original speech, Hu Jintao stated that, “So long as our Party firmly controls the military, there will be no large disturbances in China, and we will be able to face with confidence any dangers that might arise.”<sup>2</sup> The dangers discussed are primarily from external sources coupled with potential internal discontent. They include pressures to democratize, or depoliticize the military, and the fear that some in China—and possibly within the PLA—will take up these cries. According to the writings on the *Historic Missions*, these pressures are nothing less than foreign attempts to overthrow the CCP. By ensuring the military’s unwavering support, the CCP hopes to avoid the sometimes brutal fate of East European Communist Parties which relinquished control over their militaries at the end of the 1980s.

### *Task 2: Defend China from Traditional and Non-Traditional Threats*

The second task of the *Historic Missions* aims to ensure that the PLA defends China from traditional and non-traditional threats. In particular, this task calls on the PLA to guarantee China’s sovereignty, its territorial integrity, and its internal social stability. Sovereignty issues predominantly refer to unresolved land and maritime border disputes with neighboring nations, such as the land border dispute with India or the Senkaku/Diaoyutai Islands dispute with Japan. Territorial integrity mainly calls on the PLA to counter the separatist movements in Taiwan, and in the Chinese provinces of Xinjiang and Tibet. Finally, the reference to social stability problems refers to problems that China’s rapid economic and social development since China’s opening up to the outside world in the 1980s has caused or exacerbated. The writings on the *Historic Missions* make repeated reference to such issues as rising income inequality, unemployment, pollution, and corruption; to name a few.<sup>3</sup> Finally, interlaced among all of these domestic concerns is need for the PLA to assist in handling domestic non-traditional security issues, such as terrorism and disaster relief.

Because this hearing focuses on China’s military and security activities abroad, I’d like to discuss the remaining two tasks in more detail.

### *Task 3: Defend China’s Expanding National Interests*

The third task of the *Historic Missions* addresses the need for the PLA to defend China’s expanding national interests. The core of this task is Beijing’s recognition that its national interests have evolved as a result of more than two decades of economic development. Chinese sources frequently state that China’s national interests can no longer be confined to solely within

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<sup>2</sup> Hu Jintao, “*Renqing Xinshiji Xinjieduan Wojun Lishi Shiming*” (See Clearly Our Armed Forces’ Historic Missions in the New Period of the New Century), (Dec 24, 2004), available on the official National Defense Education website of Jiangxi province, <http://gfjy.jiangxi.gov.cn/yil.asp?id=11349.htm>. Hereafter cited as “Hu’s Speech.”

<sup>3</sup> Sun Kejia, Liu Feng, Liu Yang, Lin Peixiong, eds., *Zhongshi Luxing Xinshiji Xinjieduan Wojun Lishi Shiming* (Faithfully Carry Out Our Military’s Historic Missions in the New Period of the New Century), (Beijing: Haichao Publishing 2006), p. 61; and General Political Department, “*Di Er Jiang: Wei Dang Gonggu Zhizheng Diwei Tigong Zhongyao de Liliang Baozheng*” (Lesson Two: Provide a Powerful Guarantee for the Party to Consolidate its Ruling Position), 21 Aug 2006, available at: [http://www.ycgfy.com/article\\_show.asp?articleID=2281](http://www.ycgfy.com/article_show.asp?articleID=2281).

its territorial space. Rather, they have expanded into new areas, in particular into the maritime environment, into space, and into the electromagnetic (EM) spectrum.<sup>4</sup>

The maritime environment is seen as necessary for China's continued economic growth due to Beijing's reliance upon sea-borne trade, overseas oil imports, and maritime resources, such as fishing, minerals, and hydrocarbons. Complicating this issue is the belief in Beijing that China cannot properly safeguard against the encroachment of more powerful nations on these interests. One is reminded of Hu Jintao's now famous "Malacca Dilemma" speech in 2003, where he pointed out that more than 70% of China's imported oil traverses the Strait of Malacca, but China can do little to ensure that this artery remains open in the event of a crisis.

The Chinese leadership is also keenly aware of the growing civil and military importance of space. China maintains that its economy, military, and society are increasingly dependent upon space-based assets, such as satellite telecommunications. In Beijing's view, an ongoing "space race" among dozens of countries, as well as a few nation's attempts to militarize space—the United States and Russia in particular—are complicating such benefits.

Finally, China also views the EM spectrum as critical to continued economic and military development. Here I would like to point out that the Chinese term EM spectrum is more expansive than the US term, which is generally limited to EM radiation, used for radio, microwave, and infrared communications. In Chinese writings—including Hu Jintao's original speech—the term also includes information technology and the internet. Beijing believes that by developing and using these information assets it can acquire certain economic and military advantages. Conversely, failure to develop its information capabilities would place China at a disadvantage vis-à-vis more powerful nations, especially during a military conflict.

Therefore, because China's national interests have expanded into these new areas, China's security interests have followed. Two methods are singled out for safeguarding China's expanded security interests. The first is to change the PLA's *weltanschauung* on security and military strategy. PLA thinking needs to reflect that China's interests have expanded into new areas, and incorporate them into its operational planning, training, and force modernization. As Hu Jintao stated, not only should the PLA pay attention to and defend China's territorial land, sea, and air security; but it should "also pay attention to and defend China's maritime, space, and EM spectrum security."<sup>5</sup>

A second method mentioned in the *Historic Missions* is for the PLA to strengthen its strategic capabilities in these three areas. For maritime security, the PLA should develop a powerful navy that is suited to defending China's maritime interests. The PLA should also develop its space capabilities, in particular its defensive means, its space technology, and its capabilities to conduct space missions. Finally, the PLA should pay attention to the issue of EM spectrum threats, implement policies to improve defensive measures, keep abreast with international advances in

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<sup>4</sup> General Political Department, "Di Si Jiang: Wei Weihe Guojia Liyi Tigong Youli de Zhanlie Zhicheng" (Lesson Four: Provide a Powerful Strategic Support for Safeguarding National Interests), 21 Aug 2006, available at: [http://www.ycgfy.com/article\\_show.asp?articleID=2283](http://www.ycgfy.com/article_show.asp?articleID=2283).

<sup>5</sup> "Hu's speech."

information technology, establish legal frameworks for guidance, and improve the troops' knowledge about EM spectrum activities.<sup>6</sup>

#### *Task Four: Safeguard World Peace and Promote Mutual Development*

The final task of the *Historic Missions* requires the Chinese military to play a larger role in ensuring world peace and promoting mutual development. This task is based upon Beijing's belief that the Chinese economy is deeply integrated with the global economy. To quote from China's defense white paper published in January of this year, because China's economy is already tightly intertwined with the global economy, "China cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world, nor can global prosperity and stability do without China."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, there is a direct relationship between China's economy and the global economy; a positive change in one results in a positive change in the other. Conversely, a problem in one negatively affects the other as well. In order to help prevent such problems, Beijing feels that it needs a powerful military. As Hu stated in his speech, in order for China to do this, "it must have a strong military force as a backup."<sup>8</sup>

Writings on the *Historic Missions* point to three goals in particular that the PLA needs in order to fulfill this fourth task. The first is to construct a military that is capable of handling overseas non-traditional security issues, such as terrorism, transnational crime, and natural disasters. In other words, Beijing desires a military that is capable of conducting military operations other than war (MOOTW). In addition to being able to conduct MOOTW, the PLA should also actively participate in these types of operations, both domestic and abroad. PLAN participation in the ongoing counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa [discussed in more detail below] is a clear example of PLA efforts to fulfill this goal.

On a side note, it is worth pointing out to this commission that not every international operation qualifies for PLA participation. According to the General Political Department, there are certain prerequisites that should be met first. These are: the operation should be United Nations-led, it should be multilateral in nature, it should involve an issue that affects the global good, and it should be non-traditional in nature (such as outbreaks of violence due to nationalism or religion, terrorism, transnational crime, or WMD proliferation).<sup>9</sup>

A second goal is to improve the PLA's deterrent capabilities in order to prevent wars from occurring in the first place. Beijing hopes that through an improved deterrent capability, China can halt wars from occurring, prevent wars from escalating, or minimize the destructiveness should a war break out. We can see this goal echoed in China's 2006 defense white paper, which pointed out improving the following areas in particular: improving the navy's strategic maritime

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<sup>6</sup> General Political Department, "Lesson 4."

<sup>7</sup> Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2008*, January, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> "Hu's speech."

<sup>9</sup> General Political Department, "*Di Wu Jiang: Wei Weihuo Guojia Fazhan de Zhongyao Zhanlue Jiyu Qi Tigong Jianqiang de Anquan Baozhang*" (Lesson Five: Play an Important Role in Upholding World Peace and Promoting Mutual Development), 21 Aug 2006, available at: [http://www.ycgfy.com/article\\_show.asp?articleID=2284](http://www.ycgfy.com/article_show.asp?articleID=2284).

depth, increasing the air force's strategic air projection capabilities, and strengthening the military's nuclear deterrence capabilities.<sup>10</sup>

The third and final goal for achieving this task is to improve the PLA's ability to win a war should it be forced to fight one. A key factor here is to have the PLA fight and win a *modern war*, similar to the modern warfare style of the Persian Gulf War or the Iraq War. According to Chinese writings, this requires two things in particular. First, it requires properly understanding modern warfare, and creating a doctrine that is suitable to conducting modern military operations. Second, it also requires the PLA to have the proper type of forces, weapons, equipment, and skill sets in order to conduct these modern operations.

### **Reflections of the Historic Missions in PLA Activities**

The *Historic Missions* are more than just a politician's political speech. Reflections of them can be seen in several areas of PLA activities. These aspects include PLA training, doctrine, increasing operational range, and even actual combat operations.

#### *Military Training*

One reflection of the *Historic Missions* within PLA activities is the increased emphasis on training for MOOTW. In 2006, the PLA's premier military research institute, the Academy of Military Science, published an authoritative series of books on military training. According to this series, MOOTW "*already* are an important component of military operations."<sup>11</sup> Actual PLA training events echo this view. Both domestic military exercises and several multilateral exercises have MOOTW themes. Recent multilateral examples include the joint exercise between China and Russia in 2007 (Joint 2007), the Shanghai Cooperative Organization's 2007 anti-terror exercise "Peace Mission 2007", and several naval search and rescue exercises conducted variously along with Pakistan (2005), India (2005), Thailand (2005), the United States (2006), and New Zealand and Australia (2007).

Besides training for non-combat operations, the PLA also appears to be trying to increase its operational range, a goal that would be necessary in order for the PLA to safeguard China's expanding interests. This goal is present in China's 2006 and 2008 defense white paper, which state that both the PLA Navy and Air Force are attempting to extend their operational range.<sup>12</sup> RADM Yao Wenhui, Deputy Director of the PLAN Political Department, similarly wrote in 2007 that, "The PLAN must gradually transform to an 'open ocean defense' navy and improve its distant ocean mobile operation capabilities."<sup>13</sup> The PLA appears to be The PLAN appears to have taken these exhortations to heart in recent years. The US Department of Defense seconds

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<sup>10</sup> Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense in 2006*, December 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Zhang Baoshu, ed., *Lujun Junshi Xunlian Xue* (The Science of Army Military Training), (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2006), p. 222; and Zhang Yongyi, ed., *Haijun Junshi Xunlian Xue* (The Science of Naval Military Training), (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2006), p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> *China's National Defense in 2006*.

<sup>13</sup> Yao Wenhui, "Jianshe Qiangda Haijun, Weihu Woguo Haiyang Zhanlue Liyi" (Build a Powerful Navy, Defend China's Maritime Strategic Interests), *Guofang*, no. 7 (2007), pp 1-2.

these statements, maintaining that “China continues to invest in military programs designed to improve extended-range power projection.”<sup>14</sup>

### *Electromagnetic Spectrum*

Another area of PLA activity that reflects the *Historic Missions* is the PLA fixation with being able to improve its capabilities to operate in the EM spectrum. Any casual perusal of a PLA military newspaper is replete with stories of Chinese military units from all services successfully conducting operations where opposition forces are intensely trying to jam communications. In addition, improving the PLA’s knowledge of EM threats, strengthening EM countermeasures, and increasing the number of personnel with these skill sets are frequently touted as key goals. In addition, noting that the Chinese definition of the EM spectrum also includes the information realm, there are numerous stories of the PLA attempting to make their soldiers computer literate. Periodic reports in Western press of the PLA-sponsored computer espionage and intrusion against US government computer sites provide additional evidence of PLA attempts to improve its ability to operate in this new combat environment.

### *Space Operations*

The possible connection between the *Historic Missions* and the Chinese anti-satellite (ASAT) test two years ago is hard to miss. As this committee’s members are all well aware, on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2007, China launched a variant of its *Dongfeng 21* medium-range ballistic missile at one of its own weather satellites, successfully destroying it upon impact. It is interesting to note that prior to this successful ASAT test, the PLA conducted two unsuccessful tests on July 7, 2005 and Feb. 6, 2006—both after the release of the *Historic Missions*. This trend aligns with China’s 2006 defense white paper, which stated that improving space defense technology was a key goal for the national defense industrial complex.<sup>15</sup> The successful test demonstrated that the PLA could potentially denigrate US military capabilities should it ever choose to do so, since US military reconnaissance satellites—which provide key intelligence to combat units—are located at roughly the same height as the Chinese weather satellite. This possibly provides Beijing with what it believes is another tool in its deterrence toolkit.

### *PLAN Participation in Anti-Piracy Operations off the Horn of Africa*

Possibly the most obvious manifestation of the *Historic Missions* in PLA activities, and most applicable to this hearing’s focus, is the PLAN’s on-going participation in anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. As you are all aware, on Dec 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008, China announced that it would send PLAN vessels to support United Nations sanctioned anti-piracy operations against Somali pirates operating in the Gulf of Aden. Eight days later, three Chinese naval vessels, two destroyers and a supply ship, left the southern Chinese island of Hainan for the Gulf. They arrived on January 6<sup>th</sup> for what is supposed to be a three month deployment, with option to renew for another stint. In addition to these vessels, 70 Chinese Special Operations Forces are also participating in this operation. While on this deployment, the PLAN’s mission is primarily to

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<sup>14</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008*, (Washington, D.C., Dept. of Defense, 2008), p. 29.

<sup>15</sup> *China’s National Defense in 2006*, chapter VIII.

escort Chinese owned ships—including those of Hong Kong and Taiwan—transiting this region. Should the PLAN vessels receive a distress call from other non-Chinese ships in the area, they are then expected to go to their aid.

This mission could not be a better fit with PLA attempts to fulfill the requirements of the *Historic Missions*. First, the issue at hand, combating maritime piracy, falls squarely within the parameters of task 4, ensuring world peace and promoting mutual development. In addition, the United Nations has sanctioned this multilateral operation—necessary prerequisites for PLA participation. Furthermore, the problem of piracy in this region is a problem that affects the global commons, since Somali pirates have indiscriminately attacked international shipping in this region. Finally, this issue also directly affects China's maritime security interests (and therefore, task 3), since Somali pirates have attacked seven Chinese ships in 2008 alone, thus killing two birds with one stone.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Historic Missions are a new set of military missions presented to the PLA in late 2004. These missions have provided the necessary political capital to the PLA for it to begin to evolve into a more outward looking military. The influence of the Historic Missions on the entire PLA is already detectable in several areas, to include training and operations. Two events that stand out the most include China's 2007 ASAT test and the ongoing PLAN participation in the anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. It is likely that we can expect the PLA to continue to move towards a more globally-involved military in the future as it seeks to fulfill its *Historic Missions*.

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