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Hearing on Hotspots along China’s Maritime Periphery
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Introduction

I would like to thank the U.S.-China Economic and Security Commission (USCC) for the invitation to testify on this timely and important subject. The growing military capabilities of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has long-standing strategic and foreign policy implications both for the United States and for the countries of the Asia-Pacific Region. The most likely scenario in which the United States and China might find themselves in conflict is a Taiwan scenario. It is therefore a privilege to be asked to give my expert opinion on this topic. At the same time, for at least two decades a potential Taiwan conflict has been one of the most examined scenarios by the China watching community. It is therefore one of the best documented contingencies by the defense intelligence, foreign policy and national security communities. That is good news for an unclassified effort meant to highlight an important strategic and national security issue before the public; however, it is incumbent upon this author to sort out amongst the large number of studies, the best of the bunch, for the purposes of providing an accurate assessment of how the PLA would train, organize, equip and prepare to address such a contingency.

The Road to Conflict: A Macro View

Many observers of Chinese defense and foreign policy are of the opinion that for the past decade China’s strategy has involved a slow absorption of Taiwan back into Beijing’s sphere of influence.¹ These assessments have been based on the larger developments of Cross-Straits relations since the KMT under President Ma Ying-jeou returned to power in 2008: these include the successful conclusion of a Free Trade agreement (the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement or ECFA); direct flights between Taipei and cities on the Mainland; increases in tourist and student exchanges on both sides of the Strait; Beijing’s cessation of competition for diplomatic recognition; a successful summit between President Xi Jinping and Ma Ying-jeou in 2015; and relatively stable and positive discussions during Cross-Straits talks. Following the successful election of Taiwan’s previously pro-Independence DPP candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, China analysts within the United States have concluded that China’s strategy, although having experienced a road bump, continues along the same trajectory—that is, to encourage a gradual erosion of political barriers to political integration between the PRC and its “wayward province”.

A decision by the Chinese leadership, then, to move toward overt violence against the island would have to involve a significant political setback of some kind to the Chinese Communist leadership and a disruption to the Chinese long-term political calculus. American China watchers have characterized these setbacks as either: (1) involving a sudden reversal of Taiwan positions on the question of its

¹ For an example of this assessment of China policy toward Taiwan see You Ji and Daniel Alderman, “Changing Civil-Military Relations in China” in Kamphausen, Lai and Scobell, *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China’s Military*, U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA., 2010., pp. 168-70;

political autonomy or independent status; (2) involving a sudden threat to the legitimacy and regime survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP); and/or (3) a rapid downturn in the Chinese economy and an effort on the CCP leadership's part to distract the Chinese population from severe economic problems.²

Of these potential motivators the last of the three is the least likely. The Chinese Communist Party has not had a history of turning to diversion in times of economic and social hardship. In fact, the best counter-example involves the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, when the country was practically falling apart, and the Communist leadership under Mao did not take to adventures abroad. The CCP, then, is more likely to use force in reaction to something significant that Taiwan's political leadership has done leading to a significant political set-back for the CCP and risking regime survival.

With this in mind, the road to conflict would most likely look like the following. First, overall Chinese political objectives would be to coerce Taiwan's political leadership into reversing some political position or policy. This would most likely take the form, first, of subtle political actions designed to turn the heat up on Taiwan such as a resumption of "diplomatic poaching activities", reversal or rescinding of economic and political agreements between the two parties, and other efforts to cut off Taiwan's diplomatic and political maneuver space. Second, if the CCP sees little or no effect of these subtle actions, it will increase the coercive activities, but in such a way as to shield Beijing's direct involvement. Examples include discrete cyberattacks on the Taiwan private sector or Taiwan government agencies, increased political warfare activities through social media, or other lower level forms of espionage and harassment. Third, as the Chinese find their activities are not having the desired political effect, the PRC's coercive efforts will increase in intensity and overtness. These activities include the harassment of Taiwanese shipping by the PLA Navy or the Chinese Coast Guard, the initiation of large scale military exercises in the vicinity of Taiwan and the movement of military forces designed to send a strong signal to both Taiwan and to other interested countries (e.g., the movement of nuclear forces), overt signs of intelligence collection and surveillance by aircraft, seaborne vessels, and UAVs in violation of Taiwan's air and sea space. While these activities are taking place, it should be noted that neither Taiwan, nor the United States and its allies are likely to be watching these developments with calm composure. In fact, the American response to these activities, in addition to expressions of condemnation and alarm, will most likely be to display a stronger degree of support to the island—including enhanced military sales, an increase in U.S. government interactions with Taiwan, overt military training to the ROC military, and open declarations of political support to Taiwan (short of recognition). These actions are likely not to have their intended effect of forcing the Chinese to back down, but instead are likely to erode the CCP's legitimacy further and increase the risk to CCP regime survival.

It is at this point that the CCP is likely to decide upon a course of action which could propel China into a conflict over Taiwan. The Chinese military will have likely had in place contingency plans involving a range of blockade options against Taiwan. These include: (1) a declaration of a Military Exclusion Zone with no intention of actually enforcing it; (2) a light intercept option to harass some of the international shipping going to Taiwan; (3) a modest effort blockade in which the PLAN deploys in the vicinity of the island and harasses shipping; and (4) a mining of the waters adjacent to Taiwan's ports and sealanes;

² "What Do the Experts Think?: Could China Seize and Occupy Taiwan Militarily?", ChinaPower Website, Center for Strategic and International Studies, as found in <http://Chinapower.csis.org/can-china-invade-taiwan/>

and (5) a full fledged blockade sealing the island and involving a full scale effort to intercept both air and seagoing vessels. In such a tense environment, a decision on Beijing's part to "cross the Rubicon" and launch a full-scale attack on Taiwan would most likely result from a combination of the following events: (a) a declaration from the United States that, given these latest developments, its support to Taiwan is going to substantially increase including a sizable arms sale of some of the most sensitive weapons systems (e.g., F-16C/D); (b) Taiwan's movement toward greater autonomy, possibly by seeking again formal recognition by the U.N. of a Taiwan state and possibly even a formal declaration of independence given these coercive actions on China's part; and (c) an even more dramatic reversal to China's political position through actions from the International Community such as a United Nations General Assembly condemnation of Chinese actions.

Campaign Objectives of the PLA

It is unlikely that the PLA will be able to embark upon a full scale assault of Taiwan with minimal damage to China's economy, the world economy and to China's international reputation. Nonetheless, PLA planners will have put in place actions which are designed to do just that—initiate military objectives while mitigating collateral damage to China's economy and its political position. As a consequence, PLA campaign objectives will first attempt to isolate Taiwan physically from its most likely protector the United States. Second, the PLA will have engaged in military actions designed to directly deter U.S. interference in the conflict. Third, failing to deter American involvement, PLA campaign objectives will be designed to keep direct American military interference to a minimum through so-called "counter-intervention" operations. Fourth, anticipating U.S. involvement through air, subsurface and surface combatant interference in PLA operations the PLA will attempt to conduct a rapid assault on Taiwan, establish a beachhead, seize ports and air fields, and land ground forces on Taiwan within a short time period (the PLA planning assumption depending on the Chinese assessment of how long the PLA believes the Taiwan military can hold out). Fifth, in the likelihood that the PLA fails to achieve its military objectives on Taiwan prior to American build up and direct intervention in the conflict, PLA campaign objectives are then likely to involve counter-deterrence operations, pre-emptive strikes on high value operational targets, operations designed to deny the U.S. military access to information and situational awareness, and operations designed to strike at the American logistical system and the U.S. military's ability to operate for a sustained period forward. In short, Chinese campaign objectives would roughly conform to Chinese doctrinal writings on how to wage a "Local War under Conditions of Informatization".

Counter-Intervention Planning Considerations

In thinking through PLA efforts to keep the U.S. military at bay, the PLA has unquestionably thought through the following factors shaping their actions for pre- and post- initiation of hostilities against Taiwan. First, the exact force posture of U.S. military in the Asia-Pacific and theaters adjacent to the APR. For example, how is the U.S. postured in the CENTCOM AoR and which of those forces are likely to also respond to a Taiwan contingency? Can these responding forces be slowed down? How much military presence in the Far East can directly be applied to the Taiwan scenario? What size of a force rotates through the region and how much lift has the U.S. Navy dedicated to the region? Second, what is the current status of allied-U.S. relations? And has there been any evidence of daylight between the U.S. and allied involvement in a Taiwan contingency? Will U.S. allies be accompanying U.S. forces or at least lending assistance or providing other supporting assets? How long is the Taiwan military

anticipated to hold out before the U.S. can intervene? What is the latest intelligence on Taiwan military and civilian resiliency? Finally, what is the consensus on the U.S. actual operational response to a Taiwan contingency? An Air-Sea Battle response³, a response similar to an Offshore Control approach⁴, a hybrid of these two operational concepts, or something entirely different?

The PLA and Counter-Intervention Operations

A recent study by the RAND Corporation has modeled in detail what a set of PLA counter-intervention (i.e., against the United States military) campaigns might look like in 2017. Entitled *The U.S.-China Military Scorecard: Forces, Geography, and the Evolving Balance of Power, 1996-2017*, it first displays the respective orders of battle of the two powers and posits a number of different scenarios in which the military forces of the two are pitted against one another. These are: an Air Campaign over Taiwan and the Spratlys; U.S. penetration of Chinese airspace; U.S. capability to Attack Chinese air Bases; Chinese Anti-Surface Warfare; U.S. Anti-Surface Warfare Against Chinese Ships; U.S. Counterspace Capabilities Against Chinese Space Systems; Chinese Counterspace Capabilities Versus U.S. Space systems; U.S. and Chinese Cyberwarfare Capabilities; and U.S. and Chinese Strategic Nuclear Stability. The analysts at RAND then posited how these forces would be utilized against one another, and then ran a number of simulations between the two opposing forces and examined the results.

The extensive findings of this study are beyond the scope of this testimony. However, the specific findings as they relate to China's ability to effectively conduct counter-Intervention operations is directly relevant to this testimony. In general, the study found that while the U.S. continues to enjoy overall military dominance, at the same time "it faces a progressively receding frontier of military dominance in Asia. Chinese military modernization, combined with the advantages conferred by geography, have endowed China with a strong military position vis-à-vis the United States in areas close to its own territory (i.e. Taiwan). As a result, the balance of power between the United States and China may be approaching a series of tipping points...in contingencies close to the Chinese coast (e.g., Taiwan)...[T]hese tipping points may not give China ultimate victory in a war with the United States. Indeed, the United States is likely to maintain important advantages in a longer conflict. They do, however, represent points at which PLA forces could gain local or temporary air and naval superiority during the initial battles, and at which ultimate U.S. success might entail sustained combat and significant losses."⁵

The PLA and a full scale Taiwan amphibious and airborne assault

Although China has no published document similar to the U.S. "Unified Command Plan"⁶ or "UNAAF"⁷, the forces assigned to the Eastern Theater Command, formerly the Nanjing Military Region, are well

³ Jan Van Tol et. Al. "Air Sea Battle: A Point of Departure Operational Concept", Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA), Washington, D.C. , May 18, 2010, as found in <http://csbaonline.org/research/publications/airsea-battle-concept/publication>

⁴ T.X. Hammes, "Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict", *Strategic Forum*, # 278, NDU Press, 2012 as found in <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a577602.pdf>

⁵ Eric Heginbotham ET. Al. *U.S.-China Military Scorecard*, RAND, Santa Monica, 2015, p. 342.

⁶ See <https://www.defense.gov/About/Military-Departments/Unified-Combatant-Commands>

⁷ "United Action of the Armed Forces" (UNAAF), Joint Publication O-2, 10 July 2001.

known to the China analytical and defense policy community.⁸ The expected forces for a Taiwan military contingency are listed in Table One. These assigned forces are not expected to change by 2020. It needs to be stated at the outset that the naval forces supporting this mission are in and of themselves insufficient to lift more than a division in a direct amphibious assault of Taiwan.⁹ It is possible that the PLA could launch a simultaneous airborne and amphibious assault along with SOF seizures of ports and airfields thereby allowing forces to flow in through these access points, but at present the PLAN lacks enough direct seaborne amphibious lift to land sufficient forces to seize and hold the island. This assessment still holds out to 2020.

In addition to those force assigned to the ETC for a Taiwan contingency, forces from the Southern Theater Command (STC) will also play a supporting or augmenting role. These assigned forces are listed in Table Two. Unlike the ground forces for the ETC it is not the case that all of the ground forces in the STC will have been allocated to ETC as follow on forces for a Taiwan contingency. A small number of these ground units may have been reserved for this role, but not all. We can gain a better sense of what proportion of STC ground units have been reserved for this role by the number of these units which have obtained consistent amphibious assault training. This number is not large. Only the 123rd and 124th Infantry Divisions in the Southern Theater Command have been designated as Amphibious Mechanized Infantry Divisions (AMIDs) and have received consistent amphibious training. Additionally, the ground forces located in Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces are not geographically situated to quickly participate in a Taiwan contingency. Similarly, not all PLAAF units listed in the STC table are likely to be assigned to support a Taiwan contingency. Given their geographic locations, those air force units assigned to Yunnan are more likely reserved for a Vietnam or India contingency. By contrast, PLA airborne forces assigned directly to the Central Military Commission (CMC) who have received the requisite training, such as the 15th Airborne Corps and its three airborne divisions located either in Kaifeng, Henan, or in Wuhan, are very likely expected to play a direct role in a Taiwan contingency. Additional follow-on forces can also be brought in from other locations throughout China. This is illustrated by the recent successful efforts at cross-Military Region transportation exercises for the purposes of moving large numbers of PLA ground forces from one region of China to another at times of crises.

By contrast to the limited number of ground and air force units in the STC supporting an ETC commander during a Taiwan conflict, a larger proportion of the PLA Navy assigned to the STC has probably been assigned to support the ETC during a Taiwan conflict. This is the case because the South Sea Fleet has already been assigned to address maritime territorial dispute issues in the South China Sea, has received amphibious training, and until recently has been the only part of the PLAN which has had a dedicated PLA marine corps force assigned to it. By similar logic, it makes sense that the PLAN's North Sea fleet would have a minimal supporting role as far as amphibious operations is concerned

⁸ For example see Ian Easton, "Challenges Facing Taiwan in the South China Sea" Project 2049, October 17, 2016, pp. 13-4 as found in http://www.project2049.net/documents/Challenges%20Facing_Taiwan%20in%20the_South%20China%20Sea.pdf; also see Peter Wood, "Snapshot: China's Eastern Theater Command", *China Brief*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, March 14, 2017 as found in https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/CB_17_4.pdf

⁹ See for example Dennis Blasko's assessment of Chinese amphibious lift capability in "The PLA Navy's Yin and Yang: China's Advancing Amphibious Force and Missile Craft" in Dutton and Martinson, eds., *China's Evolving Surface Fleet*, CMSI # 14, Naval War College, Newport, R.I., 2014, p. 13.

since NSF units receive little amphibious training. At the same time, the NSF might play an important function in keeping Japan and the U.S. preoccupied and out of the area during a Taiwan crisis.

Ground Forces	Naval Forces	Air Forces	Rocket Forces
First Group Army	East Sea Fleet		Base 52, Huangshan
1st Amphib Mech Inf. Div.	Naval Aviation, Ningbo	3 rd Fighter Division	807 th Launch Bgde.
178 Mech Inf. Brigade	4 th Air Division, Taizhou	14 th Fighter Division	819 th Bgde.
3 rd Motorized Inf. Brigade	6 th Air Division, Shanghai	29 th Fighter Division	811 th Launch Bgde.
10 th Armored Brigade	1 st Flying Panther Rgt	28 th Attack Division	820 th Bgde.
Artillery Brigade, Wuxi	8 th Frigate Dadui	10 th Bomber Division	Launch Bgde., Shaoguan, Guangdong
Long-distance Artillery Bgde, Wuxi	6 th & 8 th Destroyer Zhidui	SAM Bgde., Quanzhou	817 th Launch Bgde.
5 th Army Aviation Brigade	5 th landing ship, Zhidui	UAV Bgde., Liancheng	
Air Defense Bgde, Zhenjiang, Jiangsu	42 nd Submarine Zhidui	85 th Air Bgde.	
12th Group Army	22 nd Submarine Zhidui	3 rd SAM Bgde.	
34 th Mech Inf. Brigade	21 st Fastboat Zhidui	8 th AAA Bgde.	
35 th Mech Inf. Brigade	2 nd Combat Support Ship Zhidui		
179 th Motorized Inf. Bgde.			
Artillery Bgde., Xuzhou, Jiangsu			
Air Defense Bgde., Hua'an			
Spec. Ops Bgde., Jiangsu			
31st Group Army			
86 th Motorized Inf. Div.			
91 st Motorized Inf. Div.			
92 nd Motorized Inf. Bgde.			
3 rd Artillery Bgde.			
13 th Air Defense Bgde.			
Amphib. Armored Bgde.			
Special Ops Bgde.			
10 th Army Aviation Rgt.			

Table One. Eastern Theater Command (ETC) Order of Battle¹⁰

The State of PLA Training for a Taiwan Conflict

A number of specialists on PLA training have observed the contents of PLA exercises and their possible application to a Taiwan operation going back to the mid-1990s. One analyst observes that between 1979 and 1999 the PLA conducted 100 large-scale blue water combined training programs and exercises. A 1996 study identified 96 brigade or larger PLA training exercises between 1990 and 1995 or about 16

¹⁰ Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2016 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2016); Jamestown Foundation China Brief; The Directory of PRC Military Personalities (2016 edition).

exercises per year.¹¹ The Navy was identified as participating in 36 of these.¹² It is therefore unquestionable that in terms of level of effort the PLA is attempting to improve its capability to conduct large scale military operations. The Dongshan exercises, explicitly identified by analysts as designed to either prepare PLA units for a Taiwan contingency or at a minimum to give the impression of preparation for a Taiwan assault, have received mixed reviews. While increasing in size and complexity, in reality the PLA has conducted a series of discrete exercises, some joint, some not, with the various units of the PLA. One assessment stated that the Dongshan exercises “lacked the attributes of a true joint operation.”¹³ Some observers have noted, however, that other exercises have moved from extremely scripted affairs to the initial signs of unscripted free play for the exercise participants.¹⁴ Other observers have noted that the “jointness” in the exercise is still rudimentary and involves “consultation” and “de-confliction” but not true joint inter-operability of the different services present.¹⁵

Nonetheless, in addition to the Dongshan exercises, a number of other large scale training events have implications for a Taiwan conflict. The Kuayue (Stride) Exercise series involve the long distance movement of division size forces across China, the transfer of operational control from one Military Region Commander to another and display an increasingly sophisticated capability to manage logistics at long-distances.¹⁶ The Lianhe (Joint) Exercise series is designed to “enhance joint intelligence acquisition, joint command and control, joint fire power strikes, joint electronic confrontation, joint actions of forces and joint support and reinforcement.”¹⁷ These two selected exercises alone have implications for a Taiwan contingency since the movements of large forces can be undertaken to provide follow-on forces in the latter stages of a Taiwan conflict, and as discussed previously the PLA must refine and improve an extensive array of joint operational functions.

Ground Forces	Naval Forces	Air Forces	Rocket Forces
14th Group Army	South Sea Fleet		N/A
1 st Inf. Bgde., Yunnan	2 nd Destroyer Zhidui	2 nd Fighter Division, Guangdong	
40 th Inf. Bgde., Yunnan	9 th Destroyer Zhidui	9 th Fighter Division, Guangdong	
42 nd Inf. Bgde., Yunnan	11 th Fast Boat Zhidui	18 th Fighter Division, Hunan	
Artillery Bgde., Yunnan	Fast Boat Zhidui	44 th Fighter Division, Yunnan	
Armored Bgde., Yunnan	Operations Support Vessel Zhidui	8 th Bomber Division, Hunan	

¹¹ Bernard Cole, “China’s Navy Prepares: Domestic Exercises, 2000-2010” in Kamphausen, Lai, and Tanner, eds., Learning by Doing: the PLA Trains at Home and Abroad, U.S. Army War College Press, 2012, pp. 38-40 as found in <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a570772.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Bernard Cole, “China’s Navy Prepares: Domestic Exercises, 2000-2010” in Kamphausen, Lai, and Tanner, eds., Learning by Doing: the PLA Trains at Home and Abroad, U.S. Army War College Press, 2012, p. 37 as found in <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a570772.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 38. See also Kevin Pollpeter, “Towards an Integrative C4ISR System: Informatization and Joint Operations in the People’s Liberation Army” in Kamphausen, Lai, and Scobell, eds., *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China’s Military*, U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, 2010, pp. 212-9.

¹⁶ Dennis Blasko, “PLA Exercises March Toward Trans-Regional Joint Training” in *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, November 4, 2009 as found in https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/11/cb_009_59.pdf

¹⁷ Zhang Yuqing and Zhang Julong, “Jinan Military Region’s ‘Lianhe-2008’ Research Purposed field Drill is Unveiled”, *Xinhua*, September 19, 2008.

Air Defense Bgde., Yunnan	6 th Landing Ship Zhidui	4 th Transport Division, Guizhou	
Infantry Bgde., Yunnan	1 st Marine Bgde.		
41st Group Army	164 th Marine Bgde.		
121 st Mountain Inf. Bgde, Guangxi	8 th Naval Aviation Division, Hainan		
122 nd Inf. Bgde., Guangxi	22 nd Naval Aviation Regiment		
123 rd Mech. Inf. Bgde., Guangxi	23 rd Air Regiment		
Artillery Bgde., Guangxi	9 th Naval Aviation Division		
Armored Bgde., Guangxi	25 th Air Regiment		
42nd Group Army	28 th Air Regiment		
132 nd Inf. Bgde, Hainan	27 th Air Regiment		
Artillery Division, Guangdong			
12 th Amphib. Mech. Inf. Division, Guangdong			
163 rd Inf. Division, Guangdong			
Special Ops Bgde., Guangdong			
Long Range Artillery Bgde., Guangdong			
Air Defense Bgde., Guangdong			
Army Aviation Bgde., Guangdong			
9 th Armored Bgde., Guangdong			

Table Two. Southern Theater Command (STC) Order of Battle

Finally, the mounting evidence of the PLAN fleets capable of sailing across maritime boundary areas and changing operational control from one Sea Fleet Commander to another has implications for the ability of the PLA Navy to break off naval units from one fleet, dispatch it to the operating area of another, and to have the latter fleet take command of the newly dispatched forces. A more generous interpretation of the utility of the Dong Exercises points out that Dongshan 2004 involved naval forces from all three fleets thereby explicitly demonstrating the PLAN’s ability to “cross fleet and theater boundaries.”¹⁸ A National Defense University report documenting the activities of PLAN flotillas sailing out to the East China Sea and conducting naval exercises of increasing complexity and diversity—adds to this mounting evidence.¹⁹

Eastern Theater Command Joint Campaign Coordination and De-Confliction

With the arrival and utilization of forces outside of the ETC, it is logical to ask how these forces are expected to be de-conflicted and coordinated. Fortunately a substantial amount of scholarship has been undertaken to assess how the PLA manages joint campaigns. Zhanyixue or the Science of Strategy specifically addresses joint campaign management. Accordingly, Dean Cheng notes that “the joint

¹⁸ Christopher Sharman, “China Moves Out: Stepping Stones Toward a New Maritime Strategy”, China Strategic Perspectives # 9, NDU Press, Washington, D.C., 2015, p. 10.

¹⁹ Ibid.

campaign command structure will vary, based on the scale of the joint campaign. Thus, war zone strategic campaigns, the largest-scale joint campaign, will be built upon a three-tier campaign command structure. A war zone direction campaign, an intermediate joint campaign will have a two-tier campaign command structure, and a group army-scale joint campaign, the smallest will have a single tier command structure.”²⁰

When specifically applied to Taiwan, presumably the largest scale of the joint campaigns noted above, “[t]he three-tier joint command structure clearly is the most involved. It will usually include not only war zone and Service command staff, but also, when necessary, senior leadership elements from the central government and the General Staff, in its highest tier.”²¹ According to Zhanyixue, “[t]he joint campaign command section is the highest level command structure for campaigns and receives direction from the senior leadership.” The second tier, according to Cheng, “will either be a war zone direction command section, or a service campaign command section, drawn from the relevant staff. Finally, the lowest tier of the three-tier joint command structure will be the campaign-level juntuan command section, which may be drawn from the leading Service’s campaign juntuan command section.”²²

On the specific subject of command and coordination of joint forces, Cheng notes that according to Zhanyixue “[c]oordination...can therefore be undertaken in three ways: by mission, by phasing, and by involved battle-space...when undertaking joint campaign coordination by mission, it is essential to first determine the goal of the campaign. Once that is accomplished, missions necessary to achieve those goals can be determined and available forces applied against those missions. In the process of assigning forces, who is supporting whom needs to be determined, as well as which missions need to have priority.” He observes further that according to Zhanyixue, “[w]hen undertaking joint campaign coordination by phasing, it is necessary to first map out the campaign’s phases, then determine the missions of each of the participating forces for each phase...It is possible, depending on the phasing that a given Service or force will go from supporting to dominant role, or vice versa. The most attention must be paid to the transitional period between phases, since this is the most vulnerable period.”²³ Lastly, “if undertaking joint campaign coordination by battle-space, each participating Service is given specific operational spaces that are its responsibility. It is presumed that such assignments will exploit the relative strengths of each participating Service, while minimizing their respective weaknesses. This is undertaken after due consideration of overall campaign timing, battle-space, and missions. Special effort must be made to insure that the various participating forces don’t interfere with each other. Moreover, priority per battle-space must be assigned based on the campaign’s ends rather than Service interests.”²⁴

Zhanyixue and the analysts which make ample use of it sheds some important light on how the PLA is looking at management of joint campaigns of the largest scales. In general, the U.S. military’s management of joint operations has coordinated and de-conflicted joint forces with procedures noted

²⁰ Dean Cheng, “Zhanyixue and Joint Campaigns” in Mulvenon and Finkelstein, eds., *China’s Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army*, RAND, Santa Monica, CA, 2010, p. 107.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, pp. 107-8

²³ Ibid, p. 109

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 109-10

above (e.g., by mission, by phasing, by battle-space). Nonetheless, the U.S. experience with the difficulties of “jointness” highlights that the above description of PLA thinking on joint force management, generates as many questions as it does answers. Within the context of a Taiwan contingency, a number of other areas of attention will need to be addressed by the PLA if it expects to be able to carry out a truly seamless, joint military operation in a Taiwan contingency. The first of these is the development of joint theater management beyond what Zhanyixue describes as the process of joint force management. How specifically would the Eastern Theater Command jointly manage this rather large force? The ETC may serve as a joint warfighter and the establishment of a joint warfighting staff is the objective on paper, however, how would the ETC manage all of the joint operational functions? Through joint component commanders such as a Joint Force Land Component Commander (JFLCC), a Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC) or a Joint Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC)? At present there is no evidence that the PLA intends to fight this way. If that concept is considered far too ambitious for the PLA, the force could be managed through the creation of Service Warfighting staffs. In the case of the PLA Navy forces, is it to be expected that the navy theater service component which has now been stood up in peacetime, is also expected to shift to a warfighting Naval Component Command or NAVFOR? The 2016 joint reforms (discussed below) call for the creation of a PLA Navy Eastern Theater component staff which is responsible for providing day-to-day Service expertise to the ETC during peacetime. Does this staff automatically become the NAVFOR which serves as the warfighting naval staff which coordinates the forces of the East Sea Fleet and those of the South Sea Fleet in wartime? Similar questions pertain to the theater management of the other services within the ETC.

PLA Reforms and the Taiwan Contingency

In early 2016 the Chinese military announced the details of the long-awaited joint military reforms originally announced at the 18th Party Congress. The specific details of those reforms are described elsewhere.²⁵ Suffice it to say that the content of the reforms suggest two objectives for the reforms: (1) asserting greater political control of the Party over the PLA; and (2) enhancing PLA joint warfighting effectiveness. The former is illustrated by the elimination of the PLA’s general departments—the General Staff Department, the General Political Department, the General Logistics Department, and the General Armaments Department. This move can arguably be said to have removed a bureaucratic layer between Party decision-makers and the PLA commands in theater and which the Party has itself stated allowed for the PLA high command to build its own fiefdoms. Additionally, the reforms reinvigorated Party monitoring and inspection functions which strengthened CCP oversight of the military as a whole. The second objective of the reforms, which is of greater interest to this testimony is illustrated by: the dismantlement of the seven Military Regions or MRs and the creation of five Joint Theater Commands; the above mentioned elimination of the General Departments (essentially a demotion of the Army) and the creation of a PLA Army Staff (the functional equivalent of the PLA Navy, PLA Air Force staffs); the creation of theater Service component commands; the elevation of a non-ground force flag officer—a

²⁵ David Finkelstein, “Initial Thoughts on the Reorganization and Reform of the PLA”, CNA, Arlington, Va., January 15, 2016 as found in https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DOP-2016-U-012560-Final.pdf; also see Phillip Saunders and Joel Wuthnow, “China’s Goldwater-Nichols?: Assessing PLA Organizational Reforms”, Strategic Forum, NDU Press, Washington, D.C., April 2016 as found in <http://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratforum/SF-294.pdf>

PLAN Admiral-- to the Commander of the Southern Theater Command (as opposed to the old MR system in which all MR commanders had been Army Ground forces general officers); the stated intent of staffing the Joint Theater Commands with joint personnel; and the creation of Joint Operations Coordination Centers (JOCC) to allow the Central Military Commission to actually exercise joint command and control over PLA forces.

Other analysts have tackled the subject of how the joint reforms and the PLA reorganization enhances PLA joint warfighting capabilities, particularly in a Taiwan and South China Sea context. To summarize the work that Joel Wuthnow of National Defense University has written on the subject, the reforms enhance PLA joint warfighting effectiveness in the following areas: (1) it creates a standing joint headquarters with existing infrastructure, operational procedures and personnel in place to take up a massive joint effort that a Taiwan contingency would demand. Under the former system there would have inevitably been a disruption in operations as the PLA transitioned from a peacetime MR to a Warfighting Zone; (2) with a standing headquarters in place along with a dedicated joint staff comprised of members of the other services, the Joint theater commander could actually engage in bona fide joint planning to tackle anticipated joint operations; (3) with a joint planning process in place, the theater commanders could more effectively identify gaps in joint operations. Although not noted by Wuthnow, this improvement is made even more effective with the establishment of theater component staffs who could serve as more in-depth subject matter experts on the requirements and operational needs of the separate services; (4) the creation of a Joint Staff Division within the Central Military Commission and a Joint Operations Center (JOC) designed to coordinate across Joint Theaters, the link between theater and center will have been enhanced as well as the quality of the joint coordination since, presumably, the JOC and JSD will have been staffed by joint personnel who actually know about joint operations.²⁶

While these initiatives unquestionably will improve the PLA's joint warfighting effectiveness when they have been fully implemented within the PLA, analysts like Wuthnow have correctly identified other issue areas which will need to be improved if the PLA hopes to become a truly joint warfighting force. Specific areas requiring attention are: (1) the lingering effects of an Army dominated system and whether Army parochialism and favoritism will have a negative impact on the effectiveness of a joint system; (2) the lack of combat experience for virtually the entire operating forces, and; (3) the apparent continuing gap between the training and inter-operability of the Strategic Rocket Forces and their conventional service counterparts remains an obstacle to truly joint and integrated operations.²⁷ Add to this list the need for continued reform of the personnel and ranking system to match the PLA's traditional process of promotion and personnel management with the evolving needs of a system that is more joint oriented.

PLA Planning and Thoughts on the Aftermath of a Taiwan Invasion

A truly under-examined subject is the "day after" a successful PLA assault on Taiwan, and what factors the PLA has probably considered in thinking about the military requirements to stabilize the political situation on the island once the PLA has successfully accomplished its mission. First, it needs to be said that if the PLA has undertaken a full-scale assault on Taiwan, then it is obvious that the political process between the PRC and Taiwan has broken down and that Taiwan has offered sufficient resistance and

²⁶ Joel Wuthnow, "A Brave New World for Chinese Joint Operations" in China and the World Program Website March 3, 2017, as found in <https://cwp.princeton.edu/news/%E2%80%98brave-new-world-chinese-joint-operations%E2%80%99-cwp-fellow-joel-wuthnow>

²⁷ Ibid.

resiliency to prompt a military reaction from China. That suggests the possibility that the Taiwan population and the Taiwan military has put up a stiff enough resistance that the PLA will need to account for the possibility of an insurgency campaign against its occupying force. Given the geography of Taiwan it is very conceivable that Taiwan Special Forces can take to the mountains ringing the coastlines of the island and lead an effective insurgency with popular support. The PLA, having successfully established a beachhead and presumably after having seized ports and airports, would necessarily have to fight their way into the interior of the country to get to Taipei and other important cities on the island. Assuming that the PLA has successfully done this, they will then possibly have to turn to a protracted insurgency campaign.²⁸ One assessment of a post-invasion PLA requirement to garrison Taiwan argued that the number of troops would be in the tens of thousands and that an active counter-insurgency force in Taiwan could require hundreds of thousands of soldiers and paramilitary forces.²⁹ It also needs to be recalled that if a full scale Chinese attack on Taiwan has taken place, a considerable amount of infrastructure destruction and damage will also have taken place, as well as a huge number of casualties both military and civilian. Therefore, the Chinese will not only have to manage a counter-insurgency, it will also have a not insignificant amount of nation rebuilding to undertake as well.

Conclusion

The aftermath of a PLA full scale attack on Taiwan paints a grim picture. Not only will this involve a huge loss of life and destruction of Taiwan private property and infrastructure, there will undoubtedly be a significant negative impact on the economies of the PRC, on the United States and on the World Economy. Additionally, it will surely be the case that China's international and regional reputation will be in tatters, and China's place in the global economy will have been irreparably altered. For this reason, the testimony of this analyst is that the Chinese Communist Party will very reluctantly pursue a path to conflict. It is more likely to pursue a gradual erosion of the barriers in Taiwan to political integration with the PRC, and an eventual strategic situation in which the United States finds itself unable or unwilling to militarily respond to a Taiwan crisis.

That said, the PLA must be prepared to answer the call to arms if the CCP deems it necessary for regime survival or to counter a perceived significant threat to China's sovereignty. Before a full scale assault is undertaken, however, the PLA will undertake a long-term campaign of coercion against Taiwan to include extensive political warfare campaigns, cyber attacks, espionage, military demonstrations, in conjunction with other whole of government coercive efforts by the PRC (e.g., economic coercion, diplomatic pressure on Taiwan's remaining allies).

If all of these actions fail, the PRC is likely to undertake military measures short of a large scale attack such as interception of shipping heading to Taiwan, and a range of increasingly hostile blockade options,. It needs to be pointed out that as these options fail, international and especially U.S. reactions are likely to be particularly hostile, and could involve the pursuit of negative policies directed at the PRC

²⁸ Indeed some U.S. analyses have strongly recommended that the Taiwan military seriously look into preparing for such a campaign as a deterrent tool directed at Beijing. See Thomas, Stillion and Rehman, "Hard ROC 2.0: Taiwan and Deterrence Through Protraction", Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, Washington, D.C., 2014 as found in http://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/2014-10-01_CSBA-TaiwanReport-1.pdf

²⁹ Wang Mouzhou, "What Happens After China Invades Taiwan?" in *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2017 as found in <http://thediplomat.com/2017/03/what-happens-after-china-invades-taiwan/>

(e.g., an enhanced arms sale or direct military support to Taiwan). These in turn could escalate the crisis and threaten CCP survivability even more. It is at this point that the Chinese leadership might decide to undertake a full-scale attack on the island.

The PLA at present lacks the amphibious lift to directly assault the island and successfully establish a beachhead for follow on operations on the island itself. For the PLA to successfully attack the island it must rely on the successful seizure of ports and airports for the purposes of flowing in follow-on forces for subsequent operations on Taiwan. A successful joint campaign against Taiwan also requires that the PLA master the intricacies of managing joint operations. At present we have little information on the specifics of how the PLA will manage joint land, air and maritime campaigns, but it is certainly the case that with the 2016 military reforms the PLA will be in a much better position to conduct such an operation. Additionally, a significant number of China defense analysts believe that the 2016 military reforms will be a long-term effort which could take decades to come to fruition.

Nonetheless, it is clear that with continued PLA modernization, a relentless effort to refine and improve joint warfighting procedures, continuous improvement in PLA training techniques including the application of advanced technology simulations to enhance training realism, refinements in individual Services warfighting functions, and a military culture that seems eager to learn and improve, within two decades the PLA will most likely enjoy dominance over its Taiwan counterparts and will have significantly eroded any decisive military advantages the United States enjoys over the PLA at present.