The role of the army in China's politics

SUMMARY

With about 2.3 million troops, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), founded in 1927 as the Red Army and renamed in 1946, is the largest army in the world, although its power projection capabilities are not yet commensurate with China's regional and global status. The PLA has undergone a profound transformation from its beginnings as a revolutionary army of ground troops engaged in guerrilla warfare against enemies on Chinese territory. The post-revolutionary army is now divided into the PLA Army, Navy and Air Force, as well as the Second Artillery Force which is increasingly – although not exclusively – trained to deploy outside Chinese borders. A comprehensive modernisation process has been under way since the 1980s, including a drastic downsizing of the PLA Army, supported by a defence budget rising in double digits.

Beyond traditional national defence and military operations other than war (MOOTW), such as anti-piracy and peace-keeping missions, emergency response and disaster relief, the PLA's fundamental role within the Chinese party-state is still to act as the military wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and guarantor of its one-party rule. Despite this functional continuity, civil-military relations have witnessed a major change from previously symbiotic ties. A gradual bifurcation of the civil and military spheres follows a generational shift in civil and military leadership at the end of the 1980s, and the PLA's growing professionalisation.

With its specialisation increasing and its representation in the highest party bodies diminishing, the PLA seems to have lost part of its past relevance, as it becomes one political actor among many. The PLA has largely withdrawn from non-military policy-making. It has concentrated on marking defence-related foreign policy and domestic security matters with its conservative nationalism, and has gained limited autonomy from the party in technical matters. Analysts are nonetheless sceptical whether the PLA is in transition from a party-army to a genuine national army.

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Background

With about 2.3 million troops, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the largest army in the world. Its size alone carries immense political weight. It is not led by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC), but is under the supreme leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).\(^1\) Beyond traditional national defence, the PLA guarantees the CCP’s one-party rule.\(^2\) The PLA is a crucial part of the Chinese party-state structure, and an essential pillar of the CCP’s power, with the PLA being subordinate to the party, in line with Mao Zedong's dictum: 'Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun, [but] our principle is that the party commands the gun and the gun must never be allowed to command the party.'\(^3\) Since the PLA functions as the CCP’s military arm and is still highly politicised, as the party penetrates the army at all levels through political work, it is typically referred to as a party-army as opposed to a national army.\(^4\)

Given their common revolutionary legacy, the links between the PLA and the CCP are more entrenched than between the PLA and the National People's Congress (the PRC's Parliament) and the State Council (the PRC's government). The PRC's fourth Constitution, adopted in 1982, sets out the powers and functions of the state institutions, but is silent on the powers of the CCP, which is only mentioned in the preamble. The PRC Constitution co-exists with the CCP’s party rules, which are also, significantly, referred to as a 'Constitution'. This parallelism results, in practice, in CCP political control over the PRC's National People's Congress, which according to the PRC Constitution is the 'highest organ of state power'.\(^5\) The boundaries between the functions of state, party and army have remained blurred, compounded by the high degree of informality in the Chinese political system more generally. Decision-making is difficult to trace, as there is no genuine separation of powers in Chinese politics.\(^6\)

An ingrained feature of the party-state is the CCP leadership's concurrent presence in the highest party and state decision-making bodies. Since the Jiang Zemin era, this has been reinforced by the concentration of considerable power in one person holding three high-ranking posts at the same time. The 'three in one' organisational model at the apex of the party-state is currently epitomised by the CCP's General Secretary Xi Jinping who now holds the position of PRC President and Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the highest decision-making body exercising control over the PLA. As CMC Chairman, Xi is also Commander-in-Chief of the PLA.

The PLA's role in politics has changed considerably. Civil-military relations have been redefined in the wake of past power transitions from one generation of CCP leaders to the next generation. A major shift in the political setting occurred with the passing away of the revolutionary veteran generation – Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping – who served in both military and civil functions and thus had a natural authority over the military. With the arrival at the party leadership of civil technocrats without military credentials – Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao – and of a military elite concentrating on the PLA’s professionalisation, the previous symbiotic relationship has given way to a gradual bifurcation of the military and civil elites.

The PLA's structure and budget

The division of the armed forces

China's military forces encompass the PLA Army (PLAA), the PLA Navy (PLAN), the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), the PLA Second Artillery Force (PLA SAF), plus paramilitary and
reserve forces. According to the PRC's 2006 National Defence White Paper, PLA forces have been downsized drastically since the mid-1980s. The PLAA's share in the total force structure declined from 77% in 1985 to 69% in 2014. The share of the PLAN grew from 8.6% in 1985 to 10% in 2014, that of the PLAAF from 12% to 17%, and that of the PLA SAF from 2% to 4%. Figure 1 shows the PLA forces, including reserve and paramilitary forces.

The PLA is estimated to have 2,285,000 active troops and 510,000 reserve forces, which far surpasses US military troop numbers. The 2013 Defence White Paper indicates that the PLAN accounts for 235,000 troops and the PLAAF for 398,000 troops. The PLAA's mobile operational units make up 850,000 troops of an estimated total of 1.6 million PLAA troops, and the PLA SAF accounts for about 100,000 personnel.

China has a large contingent of paramilitary forces, such as the People's Armed Police (PAP), with a total strength of about 660,000 staff, and the militia. Since its creation in 1983, mainly from the PLA, the PAP has primarily been charged with internal security challenges such as natural disasters, as well as ethnic and social (so-called 'mass incidents') unrest.

The PLA's defence budget
The Chinese defence budget has risen constantly since the end of the 1980s. Between 1998 and 2007, military expenditure rose by almost 16% on average, year on year. This compares to the surge in overall annual state expenditure by about 18%, and average annual GDP growth of roughly 12%. However, reported official data are highly controversial due to lack of transparency. In 2015, China announced its defence budget would rise by 10.1%, to about US$145 billion, thus greatly exceeding the expected annual GDP growth rate of 7%. China has the world's second-highest military expenditure after the US.

The organisational structure and command chain
The PLAA is organised in seven military regions. They are overseen by four general departments: the PLA's General Staff Headquarters, the General Political Department, the General Logistics Department, and the General Armaments Department. They are under the Ministry of National Defense, which is under the State Council. Technical services are divided into regional military regions, with a National University of Defense Technology and a number of military universities and academies.

Diagram 1 – The PLA’s structure and command chain

Source: Understanding China's Political System, March 2013, p. 27.
General Logistics Department and the General Armaments Department. The PLAN, PLAFAF and PLA SAF have separate headquarters. The red boxes in Figure 2 show the PLA command chain, with the Central Military Commission (CMC) playing a key role. The PAP is subject to a different, dual command structure. Unlike in countries with a national army under the jurisdiction of a Ministry of National Defence, in China the Ministry of National Defence, which is subordinated to the State Council, is outside the PLA's direct command structure. The Minister of National Defence is a uniformed CMC member. A 2015 US study found potentially serious weaknesses in the PLA's combat capabilities and shortcomings resulting from 'outdated command structures, quality of personnel, professionalism, and corruption'.

The PLA's potential influence in the party-state structure

Institutional relations between the PLA and the CCP

The PLA's formal influence on the political decision-making process within the party is based on its membership in several high-ranking party bodies, such as the Central Military Commission (CMC), also known as Central Military Affairs Commission, the Politburo, and the Small Leading Groups (SLGs), attached to the Central Committee.

![Figure 3 – The CCP's organisational structure at national level](source: People's Daily, reflecting the situation after the 18th National Congress in 2012.)

The CMC oversees military and defence affairs and is a high-profile party body, through which the PLA has controlled the PLAsince the 1930s. Its relevance is testified by the fact that Deng and Jiang kept their CMC chairmanship even after they had withdrawn from all other party positions, to ensure a smooth succession. The CMC is the most important channel for the PLA to provide its military input into the decision-making process on military-related aspects of foreign and security policy within the party-state
structure. The CMC ranks on a par with the State Council and above all state ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Experience has shown that the CMC's high standing can seriously undermine effective coordination between the CMC and the MFA, as well as with the many other agencies.\textsuperscript{12} The CMC is listed in the CCP's Constitution as a party body. Yet, details on its precise tasks and size are not provided. According to \textbf{Article 22}, the CMC's Central Committee 'decides' on the members of the CMC, and appoints its Chairman. The CCP's Central Committee (CC) is a 205-member party body, which usually meets once a year for one to two weeks. The PLA typically accounts for about 40 of its members. The Central Committee is elected by the National Party Congress, gathering more than 2 200 party delegates from the constituencies at lower party levels, and is convened by the CCP every five years.

The CMC is chaired by the CCP's General Secretary (GS), who according to the party's Constitution, is to be 'elected' by the CC in a bottom-up procedure, but in practice is selected by higher party bodies in a top-down procedure. Contrary to past party strongmen like Mao and Deng, today's GS acts within the rules of collective leadership and as 'first among equals', with a view to favouring consensus-based decision-making. The current 11-member CMC was formed in 2012. It has a civilian Chairman, PRC President Xi, two uniformed Vice Chairmen, who are members of the Politburo, and eight uniformed regular members. The eight are the Minister of Defence, the Directors of the PLA's four central departments, and the Commanders of the Navy, Air Force, and strategic missile forces, known as the Second Artillery Corps.

\textbf{Figure 4 – The CCP’s Central Military Commission as of 2012}

Through the two Vice-Chairmen and President Xi, PLA influence on military policy issues may be exercised in the Politburo, which ranks above the CMC and has a membership of 25 civilian and military members. The 23 civilian Politburo members represent the party (eight representatives including the GS), the State Council (five representatives), geographical regions (six party secretaries of key provinces), Parliament (two representatives) and one advisory body, the \textbf{National Committee of the Chinese People’s Consultative Conference} (CCPCC), while the two CMC Vice-Chairmen are the two military members.\textsuperscript{13} One of the uniformed CMC members is also a member of the CCP Secretariat which oversees the lower-level party bureaucracy. There is no military
representative in the **Politburo Standing Committee** (PSC) which was reduced from nine to seven members in 2012 and may be seen as an inner circle of the Politburo, with all PSC members also serving on the Politburo. Collectively, they hold the highest authority in the PRC and take their decisions by consensus. Since the 15th National Congress in 1997, the military has not been represented in the PSC. There has, however, been no tradition of continued PLA representation in previous decades, with a military presence favoured by political circumstances such as the Cultural Revolution.

If the number of military representatives in the Politburo and its Standing Committee is taken as a measurement of the scope of the PLA’s potential influence on political decision-making, then the PLA's diminished presence in these bodies suggests a significant erosion of its powers over the past decades. Hence, it is argued that the PLA today wields considerably less political power than during the Mao and Deng eras. In 1982, 20 of 25 Politburo members had military credentials, with seven holding military positions during their membership. In 1997, 21 of 24 Politburo members lacked a military background, with only two occupying military posts, i.e. the two Vice-Presidents of the CMC. In the PSC the PLA may rely on the indirect representation of its interests through the CMC chair, who concurrently presides over the highest party body.

Another channel for PLA influence within the party are the **Leading Small Groups** (LSGs) which may take the form of permanent or ad hoc working groups. Each PSC member is responsible for a specific portfolio for which a **Leading Small Group** is set up and convened at irregular intervals. The LSGs have a cross-agency coordinating function and are intended to facilitate the consensus-building process between party, government and military. Senior PLA officers are associated with the LSG relevant for their service, i.e. those on foreign affairs and defence and security policy. The membership of the two uniformed CMC members in the LSG on foreign affairs and on Taiwan affairs is an opportunity for the PLA to provide input into the foreign policy process. The LSGs are only an advisory stage with final decisions being made by the PSC.

Although the PLA primarily uses these formal fora to channel its views on defence-related aspects of foreign policy, senior PLA officers have often criticised the stance taken by the MFA on specific foreign policy-related issues, such as US-China relations and those with Taiwan, and called for greater assertiveness.

**Institutionalised relations between the PLA and the State Council**

In the framework of political reforms initiated by Deng in the 1980s to create institutional boundaries between the party and the state, a state **counterpart** entity to the party CMC was added to the constitutional framework in 1982. The state CMC is a body of the State Council. It has the same name as the party body and an **identical** membership. Due to its composition, genuine civil oversight is lacking.

The chairman of the state CMC is formally 'elected' by the National People's Congress (NPC). Upon nomination of CMC members by the chairman, the NPC 'decides' on the choice of these members (Article 62(6) of the PRC Constitution). Since the party CMC is usually determined by the Central Committee several months before the state CMC is by the NPC, and the membership must be identical, there is no freedom for the NPC to deviate from the party choice, except for casting lesser votes for individual members as a sign of lack of approval. For several months between the Party Congress and the National People's Congress, the membership of the two CMCs differs.
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Article 93 of the PRC 1982 Constitution, states that the state CMC has a Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and regular members. It does not spell out the size of the body but indicates that the CMC's term of office is the same as that of the NPC. Article 94 provides that the CMC's chairman is accountable to the NPC and its Standing Committee.

Since 1997, the functions and powers of the state CMC are governed by Article 13 of the National Defence Law:

'The Central Military Commission directs all the armed forces of the country and exercises the following functions and powers:
(1) to exercise unified command of all the armed forces of the country;
(2) to decide on military strategies and form concepts of operations for the armed forces;
(3) to direct and administer the building of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, formulate programmes and plans and arrange for their implementation;
(4) to submit bills or proposals to the National People's Congress or its Standing Committee. ...'

The actual work carried out by the two different CMCs is difficult to judge, as it is highly secretive. It appears, however, that although the state CMC is formally vested with military and defence matters, the party CMC de facto exercises command over the PLA. The party CMC seems to provide the political direction for military policy-making, while the state CMC serves as an implementing body, which ensures oversight over military appointments and the PLA's financial and material resources. One of the CMC members is Minister of National Defence and State Counsellor of the State Council. He or she is the highest PLA representative at the regular State Council-CMC coordination conference, and chairs the State National Defence Mobilisation Commission (SNDMC). Membership in both bodies is regarded as very promising for channelling PLA policy input.

Institutionalised relations between the PLA and the National People's Congress
In addition to the PLA's influence channelled through the party/state CMC, it also elects a PLA delegation to the NPC. The NPC, among other things, decides on war and peace according to Article 62(14) of the 1982 Constitution. Due to the infrequency of its meetings, the NPC has delegated legislative powers to its Standing Committee. The latter has several permanent committees, where PLA delegates outline their military viewpoint, notably when laws are being debated on PLA-relevant topics. PLA delegates tend to chiefly lobby for higher defence budget allocations and submit defence-related proposals to the NPC. Although the NPC is still considered a powerless institution, merely rubber-stamping legislation and candidates proposed by party bodies, there is evidence to suggest that it has recently gained more legislative oversight, including over army matters. A case in point is the 1997 National Defence Law. It does not mention the CCP and appears to strengthen the state's authority over the army – at least on paper. It has thus been interpreted as an effort to subordinate the military to state control. The law is one of a series of military-related legislation codifying civil-military relations and bringing the military under the jurisdiction of the state.

PLA-related initiatives under Xi Jinping
Unlike his two predecessors, Jiang and Hu, Xi quickly gained PLA backing after his accession to the CMC chair in 2012. This is not only due to his military credentials, but also to the major role the PLA plays in the realisation of Xi's China Dream. The vague slogan appears to be an effort to embed the CCP's legitimacy more strongly in nationalism and patriotism. It is currently chiefly rooted in economic performance. The China Dream refers to the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation', i.e. the idea of an
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Economically prosperous and militarily strong China.\(^{21}\) Xi has also taken action on several long-standing challenges involving the PLA. These challenges include rampant corruption and shortcomings in cross-agency coordination in security matters likely to have foreign policy implications. These have grown in relevance with the PLA's increasing external missions, in part linked to China's ambition to seize this century's strategic opportunities for national development.

**Anti-corruption campaign targeting the PLA**

Corruption in the PLA has been a persistent scourge since the 1980s, when the military's large-scale **involvement** in commercial activities was encouraged under Deng. This was at a time when resources to finance all **four modernisations** envisaged for the economy were scarce, and national defence was given least priority. The PLA's **divestiture** of major commercial assets in 1998 under Jiang was a decisive step to curb corruption and to bring the PLA under 'the power of the purse' of the party-state. PLA corruption was also an issue under Hu, as evidenced by investigations against Admiral Wang Shouye in 2006. In 2008, Hu launched his 'core values of military personnel', extending his concept of a 'socialist core value system' to the PLA.

Since he took over his party mandate, Xi, like Jiang and Hu, has launched a sweeping **campaign** to crackdown on endemic corruption in the PLA targeting both high-ranking 'tigers' and low-ranking 'flies', in line with his **concept** of the 'Four Comprehensives' to tighten the party's grip on the PLA. Former CMC vice-chair Xu Caihou and Major-General Huang Xing have so far been among the highest-ranking PLA staff investigated on corrupt practices. The **campaign** recently gained further traction, when a list of 14 generals under investigation or already convicted for corruption, was **published**.\(^{22}\)

**Enhancing inter-agency coordination in security matters**

In recent years, several incidents of dysfunctional civil-military coordination concerning both internal and external security issues have been reported. An example of the first category was the poor **crisis management** during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2002-03. The delayed acknowledgment of cases in military hospitals entailed a rapid spread of the disease and undermined effective disaster relief. In the second category of external security matters with foreign policy implications, the lack of an effective emergency response system led to a long delay in reacting to the **US-China aircraft collision incident** involving a US Navy EP-3 reconnaissance plane and a PLA naval F8-fighter in the South China Sea in 2001. The incident brought to light **shortcomings** in communications between military and civilian decision-makers. Further examples are the 2007 Chinese **anti-satellite missile test** which reportedly was insufficiently coordinated among different agencies, with the MFA not able to comment until weeks later; and the **2011 J-20 test flight**, on which Hu was allegedly not briefed, although the test had been approved.

These **incidents** have been **interpreted** as signs of a loss of full control by the civil party leadership over specific military tests and out-of-area operations or activities at disputed maritime or land borders, such as those with India. Shortcomings in the coordination of PLA activities with China's foreign affairs and diplomatic structures seem rooted in the professional autonomy the military has gained over operational details, coupled with the lack of a permanent cross-agency coordinating body that provides general oversight over PLA actions with potential impact on national security.\(^{23}\)

The need for a body coordinating domestic and foreign policy across multiple agencies concerned with security matters – PLA, PAP, Ministry for Public Security and the
Ministry for State Security – has long been considered, but met with resistance. In 2000, the Small Leading Group on National Security was established. However, this body lacked a solid mechanism to function as an effective coordinator of decision-making and covered only high-level strategy issues, leaving most routine domestic security matters at the discretion of individual agencies, without coordination.

The Third Plenum of the 18th CCP’s Central Committee in 2013 approved the creation of a new body, the Central National Security Commission (CNSC), to better streamline the civilian and military sides of the foreign and security apparatus. It was established under the CCP’s Central Committee, rather than the State Council and is headed by Xi, who thus has further centralised power in his hands. Premier Li Keqiang, Head of the State Council, and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the NPC, Zhang Dejiang, were appointed by the Politburo as CNSC Vice-Chairs. While no further details of its composition were given, it is likely to include the PLA. The CNSC deals with an 'overall national security outlook', balancing 'domestic and international concerns, and addressing both traditional and non-traditional security concerns'. The CNSC's mandate encompasses seven areas: political, homeland, military, economic, cultural, social, scientific and technological, information, ecological, resource and nuclear security.

The body has been perceived as the Chinese version of the US National Security Council (NSC). However, commentators have argued that the new body will rather combine functions of the US NSC, in that it provides a forum for high-level long-term foreign policy strategy, with the functions of the UK's Civil Contingencies Committee, which acts as a forum for formulating policy on domestic security matters in emergency situations.

Major trends in civil-military relations and outlook
From civil-military symbiosis to bifurcation of the civil and military spheres
The generational shift at the end of the 1980s from revolutionary veterans, to civil technocrats without military credentials in the civilian leadership, was a crucial turning point in the evolution of civil-military relations. It marked an end to the decades-long symbiotic relationship between the civil and military leadership, in what some analysts have called the 'interlocking directorate'. With Jiang’s incremental accession to power, in 1989 as CMC Chair and GS, and in 1993 as PRC President, a gradual civil-military bifurcation set in, characterised by a departure from decades of strong politicisation of the PLA towards corporate professionalism, with the army increasingly focusing on purely military matters.

The PLA has disengaged from most internal security tasks, following its frequent interventions in inner-party power struggles and political campaigns during Mao’s rule, and subsequently in favour of Deng’s return to power after the Cultural Revolution, as well as the suppression in 1989 of the Tiananmen Square civilian protests by the PLA, at the request of the civil leadership, to guarantee the survival of the regime. The PLA has focused on an almost exclusively externally oriented mandate, while always remaining available as a last resort to avoid regime change. The PAP took over responsibility for maintaining domestic social stability and was substantially strengthened through PLA staff transfers. Low-violence anti-protest tactics were developed during Hu’s rule, in response to the growing number of so-called 'mass incidents' concerning land and property compensation and environmental grievances. These de-escalation policies were not only aimed at tackling social unrest without employing police and PAP forces, but also at reducing the need to use the PLA against domestic political threats.
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Deng encouraged the PLA to engage in commercial activities to generate its own resources for its 1980s modernisation, thus allowing the state to concentrate on modernising agriculture, industry and science and technology. But under Jiang's rule, the PLA was divested of the majority of the army's commercial assets in 1998, in order to tackle rampant corruption. This divestiture has significantly diminished the PLA's role in the civilian economy but has not eliminated its stake completely.

The declining or even complete loss of institutional representation of the military in senior party bodies since the end of the 1990s has translated into its reduced influence and diminished interest in non-military matters. The PLA thus wields much less power today than in the past, with the weight of provincial party leaders and their economic interests having grown instead. The PLA's role has diminished, as it has become one political actor among many others within the party and Chinese society at large. It is confined to a functional and technical role and is essentially concerned with building up a strong modern army for which it has obtained a steadily increasing military budget.

The civil-military bifurcation has resulted in the military's quasi-institutional autonomy from the party, operating under the particularities of a Leninist one-party state. Based on the two-pronged premise that the PLA accepts the CCP's supreme leadership and its one-party rule, and that the army's role within Chinese politics is confined to military matters, with the army remaining largely outside non-military policy-making, the PLA has gained limited autonomy in respect of its modernisation.

Outlook for future civil-military relations

Some analysts expect that the future direction of civil-military relations, and whether they will result in more autonomy for the PLA or lead to a more symbiotic relationship, will depend on three factors: 'the level of success of civilian governance, the degree of the PLA's professionalisation and the extent of the PLA's involvement in external missions.' Others highlight that the PLA's growing professionalisation has not led to its de-politicisation or loss of political influence. Although commentators are sceptical as regards the PLA's short-term transition from a party-army with limited autonomy towards a fully fledged national army controlled by civilian rule and subject to legislative oversight, a case has been made for the incremental rise of the role of state institutions, such as the NPC, to which the PLA is made formally accountable.

Analysts emphasise the contradiction between the PLA's outsized role in national security policy-making and its autonomy in the implementation of this policy on the one hand, and the efforts of dismissing regional concerns about China's rising military power on the other. Considering the PLA's growing capabilities and out-of-area activities, an enhanced awareness of second-order effects of the PLA's autonomous decision-making would be conducive to avoiding tensions in foreign relations.

Some analysts stress the power of the PLA expertise, based on the civil leadership's strong reliance on the PLA's military experience, given the unavailability of independent assessments from non-governmental and non-party think-tanks or research institutes. The PLA's bargaining power vis-à-vis the civil leadership also results from its improved capabilities as compared to those during the 1995/96 Taiwan Strait crisis. They enable the military elite to provide the civil leadership with more assertive options, which will continue to translate into a strong power position for the military to extract concessions, such as bigger budget allocations. The PLA's key concerns in defence- and security-related foreign and domestic policy are rooted in its conservative nationalism, aimed at enhancing the PRC's national power through national economic and
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In foreign policy, the PLA position has been, and is likely to remain, more assertive than the CCP leadership's stance on China's relations with the US (missile defence or war on terror), Japan, North Korea, Taiwan, East and South China Sea issues as well as proliferation, arms control and energy security, and outspoken on criticism.

Further reading


Endnotes


2 'The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is dedicated to performing its historical missions for the new stage in the new century, namely, providing an important source of strength for consolidating the ruling position of the Communist Party of China (CPC), providing a solid security guarantee for sustaining the important period of strategic opportunity for national development, providing a strong strategic support for safeguarding national interests, and playing a major role in maintaining world peace and promoting common development.' China's National Defence White Paper 2006, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2006.


4 Some elements the Chinese army lacks in order to be called a national army are: strong legislative oversight, legislative control of the army's budget, no extra-budgetary revenue, a civilian minister of defence, a Ministry of National Defence at the end of the command chain and no political content in professional military education. China's New High Command, Shambaugh D., in: The People's Liberation Army and China in Transition, Flanagan S. J. and Marti M. E., 2003, chapter 3, pp. 61-62.

5 For an illustration of the divergence between the theoretical powers wielded by Chinese state institutions, according to the 1982 Constitution and the CCP political dominance over these state institutions in practice, see the two charts in China's Political Institutions and Leaders in Charts, Lawrence S. V., Congressional Research Service (CRS), November 2013, p. 3.


10 Following the PLA interventions in Tibet and Tiananmen Square in 1989, the PLA has been reluctant to participate in suppressing rising cases of social (‘mass incidents’) or ethnic unrest. Sources are unclear as to whether the PLA supported the PAP in quelling the uprising in Tibet in 2008 and in Xinjiang in 2009. For more related information and an overview of the legal framework governing the internal deployment of the PAP and the PLA for internal security issues, see The People's Liberation Army and China's Internal Security Challenges, Tanner H. M., in: The PLA at home and abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China's Military, Kamphausen, R., Lai, D., Scobell, A. (eds.), Strategic Studies Institute, June 2010, chapter 6, pp. 237-274.

11 For further details on the CMC please see The People's Liberalisation Army as Organisation, Mulvenon, J. C. and Yang, N. D., RAND National Security Research Division, 2002, pp. 45-121.

12 Stirring up the South China Sea, International Crisis Group, Asia Report No. 223, April 2012, p. 15.


15 China's Assertive Behaviour. Part Three: The Role of the Military in Foreign Policy, Swaine, M. D., China Leadership Monitor, no. 36, January 2012, p. 10.


17 It is argued that the state CMC was established in 1982 to 'give the impression that the military came under control of the state rather than the party. This was done in particular with respect to possible reunification with
Taiwan; the military was thus portrayed as one arm of the Chinese state rather than the CCP.’ Governance and Politics in China, Saich, T., 2011, pp. 124-125.

18 Understanding China’s Political System, Dumbaugh, K. and Martin, M. F., CRS, December 2009, p. 3.


21 Fierce debate erupts over the meaning of the ’China Dream’, Lam, W., ChinaBrief, vol XIII, issue 9, 25 April 2013, pp. 3-6.

22 Following the 2013 Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress, the PLA launched institutional reforms tackling corruption, command and control, political work and training, which are overseen and coordinated by five newly created military leading groups for the survey of military infrastructure projects and real estate resources, for the all-party-army’s mass line education and practice activity, for inspection work, for deepening national defence and military reform and for military training supervision. Groupthink? PLA Leading Small Groups and the Prospect for Real Reform and Change in the Chinese Military, Mulvenon, J., China Leadership Monitor, no. 44, July 2014.


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