



PLA as Organization v3.0

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POST-CONFERENCE REPORT



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Conference Report: PLA as an Organization v3.0

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Introduction

Exovera LLC, on behalf of its parent company SOSi, partnered with TextOre, Inc. and The Jamestown Foundation to co-sponsor the third iteration of The People's Liberation Army (PLA) as Organization series of studies. The conference was held at the Hyatt Regency in Reston, Virginia, on May 13, 2024, and brought together 18 scholars to outline the reorganization of the PLA that began in December 2015. Attendees included academic, government and defense experts who follow China and the PLA closely. The purpose of this report is to summarize the presentations and discussions held on May 13th. It does not include updates to the chapters subsequent to the conference.

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This conference follows two previous iterations. The PLA as Organization v1.0 conference held in August 2000 (book published in 2002) focused on the history of the PLA from the 1920s to 2000. The PLA as Organization v2.0 conference held in June 2012 (book published in 2014) focused on the organizational structure since 2000.

This year's conference paid close attention to the changes made in the wake of Chinese Communist Party Secretary General XI Jinping's sweeping reforms announced in November 2015 and summarized as: "The Central Military Commission (CMC) provides overall management, the Theater Commands (TC) provide operational control, and the services^a provide administrative control."^b The PLA implemented its eleventh force reduction that reduced the size of the PLA from 2.3 to 2.0 million active-duty personnel, of whom 50% were officers who were demobilized. The initial reforms affected the "above the neck" (aka above the corps) level and then the "below the neck" (aka corps and below) level. The CMC was reorganized into 15 organizations and removed the commanders of the PLA Navy (PLAN), Air Force (PLAAF), and Rocket Force (PLARF) as CMC Members. The seven Military Regions (MRs)^c and Military Region Air Forces (MRAFs) were reorganized into five TCs,^d five Theater Command Armies (TCAs), and five Theater Command Air Forces (TCAFs). In 2018, the three existing Navy Fleets were renamed as Theater Command Navies (TCNs). The CMC created a new PLA Army (PLAA) Headquarters, upgraded the Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) from an independent branch to a full service (PLARF), created a new Strategic Support Force (PLASSF), which was abolished and reorganized in 2024, and a Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF). The People's Republic of China (PRC) also created a new

^a The protocol order for the four services is Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force.

^b [XI Jinping: Comprehensive implementation of a strategy to reform and strengthen the military while adhering to the Chinese Path of Building Strong Armed Forces] (习近平: 全面实施改革强军战略 坚定不移走中国特色强军之路), *People's Daily*, 27 November 2015, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2015/1127/c64094-27861889.html>, accessed on 30 May 2024.

^c The seven MR protocol order was Shenyang, Beijing, Lanzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Chengdu.

^d The five TC protocol order is Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, and Central.

Ministry of Veterans' Affairs (MVA) in 2018. Finally, the PLA reduced the number of academic institutions down to 37.

The reforms were intended to move the PLA toward becoming a truly joint military rather than an Army-dominated military, but changes continue.

One of the key elements for understanding the new PLA organizational structure concerns the relationship between the PLA's 15-grade and 10-rank structure and how the grades are applied to each organization as well as to personnel.

The Central Military Command as an Organization

The key to understanding the CMC is the 2015 Xi Jinping quote from the introduction that states that the CMC is in charge of overall management. The CMC has senior management responsibility for each subsidiary organization throughout the PLA (i.e., CMC Political Work Department (PWD) oversees all political work and other PWDs in the PLA).

The author for this chapter focused his analysis on two different aspects of the CMC. The first was a deeper look into the most senior level of the CMC and the changes that have taken place in that structure. The second was an overview of what is being termed the "15+1": the CMC organizations (15) plus the Joint Operations Command Center (JOCC), which the author's research indicated has been pulled out of its previously subordinate position under the Joint Staff Department (JSD), joining the other 15 organizations at the highest operational level (+1).

CMC Leadership

The author began his discussion by introducing the history of CMC membership. A key action by Xi Jinping at the 19th Party Congress in 2017 was to reduce the number of CMC personnel from 11 to seven. Notably, with the removal of LI Shangfu (CMC member; Ministry of National Defense / MND Minister) in October 2023, the current CMC has only six official personnel. A surprising development is that LI's replacement, DONG Jun, is not yet considered a member of the CMC. The expectation was that during the National People's Congress (NPC) held in March 2024, DONG would have been rubber stamped as a Party CMC member and subsequently "elected" to the State CMC^e. The author suggests that DONG's role on the CMC will be decided over the next year, although the situation remains a mystery at the moment.

Chairman Xi has retained the positions of two vice-chairmen on the CMC, but has not added a civilian vice chairman, a role that usually indicates the next Party leader. These two vice-chairmen roles are often given a "senior" and "junior" designator, respectively. The current structure of the CMC is as follows:

- ▶ Chairman
 - XI Jinping
- ▶ Vice-Chairmen
 - Senior – ZHANG Youxia

^e Concerning the two CMCs, the author opines that there is no difference between the two, but the one to pay attention to is the Party CMC with elections held during the Party Congress in October/November. The Party CMC indicates exactly who will be on the State CMC, whose March election is largely performative.

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- Junior – HE Weidong
 - ▶ Members
 - MND Minister - currently “vacant”
 - CMC Joint Staff Department (JSD) Chief – LIU Zhenli
 - CMC Political Work Department (PWD) Director – MIAO Hua
 - CMC Discipline Inspection Commission (DIC) Secretary – ZHANG Shengmin

The author called out a few major changes since XI’s ascension as the chairman in 2012. First, the directors of the Four General Departments (General Staff, Political, Logistics, and Armament Department) were previously represented on the CMC as members, as were the commanders of the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLASAF since 2004. However, since the reorganization began in December 2015, only the leadership from the Joint Staff and Political Work Departments have retained their posts on the CMC today. In addition, at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, the Secretary of the DIC was added; however, the PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF commanders were not added.

Concerning the compositions of the CMC leadership, the author discussed corruption purges, member age, and length of tenures as some additional scenarios that could cause a change in leadership prior to the 21st Party Congress in 2027. Additionally, the CMC leadership’s “jointness” was considered, with the author concluding that the PLAA-heavy breakdown is an indicator of the PLA’s continued inability to be a joint force across the services.

The last aspect of the CMC as a leadership organization considered by the author was the types and frequency of publications produced by organizations within the CMC. Topics were considered on their technical merits and topics and the percentage of papers published could be considered technical (less than 25%) reinforced that the CMC is focused more on “overall management,” rather than technical breakthroughs. The author concluded that reduction of financial risk, attraction of talented personnel, improvement of operational security, and tracking the progress and development of the U.S. military are specifically of interest to the CMC.

CMC Subordinate Organizations (15+1)

After discussing the leadership, the author discussed the CMC’s 15+1 subordinate organizations. Those organizations are below, listed in protocol order:

1. General Office (TC Deputy Leader)
2. Joint Staff Department (CMC Member)
3. Political Work Department (CMC Member)
4. Logistic Support Department (TC Leader)
5. Equipment Development Department (TC Leader)
6. Training Management Department (aka Training and Administration Department) (TC Deputy Leader)
7. National Defense Mobilization Department (TC Deputy Leader)
8. Discipline Inspection Commission (CMC Member)
9. Politics and Law Commission (TC Deputy Leader)
10. Science and Technology Commission (TC Deputy Leader)

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11. Office for Strategic Planning (Corps Leader)
 12. Office for Reform and Organizational Structure (Corps Leader)
 13. Office for International Military Cooperation (Corps Leader)
 14. Audit Office (Corps Leader)
 15. Agency for Offices Administration (Corps Leader)

One of the most important issues was that one-half of the staff of the former Four General Departments were demobilized and the remaining personnel were reassigned to man the 15 organizations and create a new PLA Army Headquarters.

It was noted that the Director of the General Office, ZHONG Shaojun, is considered one of XI Jinping's closest confidants and seemingly accompanies him to every engagement. There is a dearth of information about ZHONG himself, but he is clearly a key piece of the PLA decision-making process. The importance of the General Office cannot be overstated. Virtually every one of the CMC's laws, documents, opinions, regulations, policies, notices, etc. come through the General Office to the chairman, vice-chairmen, and members, and that all documents from the leaders filter down to the other organizations through the General Office. The importance of the General Office is also clear because it is listed first in protocol order among the 15 organizations.

The author also introduced the JSD and noted its wartime planning and coordination role.

The author discussed the JOCC and its recent addition to CMC's directly subordinate organizations. At the 2022 National Defense and Armed Forces Reform Symposium, General HE Weidong was seen wearing what appears to be a CMC JOCC patch, indicating that the JOCC is now part of the 15+1 and directly subordinate to the CMC itself.

Ministry of National Defense (MND)

The Ministry of National Defense (MND) is a small office, considered by some to be a shell ministry, with limited public information available. The PLA as Organization v1.0 did not include a chapter on the MND, while Volume 2.0's MND chapter had limited data with the authors indicating that more research needed to be done in order to begin to understand this ministry.

The author of this chapter states that the MND is more representational than operational. In the course of research, no Chinese government website was found to include a description of the MND's organizational structure, responsibilities, or even a billet for the Minister. Despite this, the MND does play a role within the PLA, with representation as its operational mission. The author described his analysis of the MND mission from three points of view: the political, executive, and legislative.

The author notes the importance of understanding *duiwai* (对外) as a key to the role of the MND and its Minister. Most analysis focuses on the *wai* portion of the term, completely failing to consider the dual nature of *dui*. *Duiwai* obligates the Ministry to represent the CMC and the PLA both in an outward facing role leading foreign military exchanges and cooperation, and inward; upward to the State Council and NPC, and downward in the form of media releases to the Chinese populace. Overall, MND's function is to insulate the PLA from both domestic and foreign interference.

Office of International Military Coordination (OIMC)

The OIMC is officially one of the 15+1 subordinate organizations under the CMC, but this office is traditionally dual aligned within the PLA. Since the 2016 reforms, the OIMC has been given

their own shoulder patch and raised to Corps Leader-grade, but otherwise performs the same functions as it did prior to the “above the neck” reforms when it was under the General Staff Department. Regarding the MND, the OIMC has a role in the performance of the MND’s information and representation missions.

Of the OIMC leadership, only two officers are currently in the news. The first, Major General LI Bin, was reported as a participant in the February delegation to Cambodia, where discussions are ongoing concerning the establishment of the PLA’s second overseas military installation. In the report, there was a noticeable lack of information provided or discoverable concerning Li’s personal history or background. The other officer discussed, Deputy Director ZHANG Baoqun, was reported as an attendee to a China-Japan event, but, again, with no accompanying background information, including rank.

The missions of the OIMC are to sponsor foreign military attachés; arrange for and host foreign military delegations; arrange, coordinate, and escort outgoing PLA delegations; provide translators and regional desk officers; and host the monthly MND Information Office press conference and spokesperson. The OIMC supports messaging and event operations for both domestic and foreign audiences and is sub-organized into the West Asian and African, the European and Asian Affairs (Western and Eastern Europe, Russia, and East Asia), American and Oceania, and Asian (South Asia, Southeast Asia, Asia-Pacific multilateral security cooperation) Affairs Bureaus.

The Ministry of National Defense Information Office (MODIO) is described by the author as possibly the most important mission remaining to the MND. In coordination with the OIMC, MODIO is the primary organization promoting the PLA’s military discourse, achieved via dissemination of Chinese positions and narratives both internationally and domestically.

Army (PLAA)

The PLAA presentation was focused on the recent reforms that the force has seen and the purposes behind those reforms. The author began his discussion with an insistence that the PLA watching community must get past several biases in order to fully understand certain elements of the PLA. The community biases are below:

- ▶ PLAA is not as important as it once was. There is a lot of emphasis on the roles of the other PLA forces and a belief that the PLA is the same fighting force that it has been for the last 50 years. However, continued emphasis on regional dominance and shared borders with 14 other nations ensures the continued importance of the PLAA.
- ▶ Casualties don’t matter to the PLAA. The systems that have been built, the careful training implemented, the development of the force’s structure, and efforts made in equipment modernization and innovation all tell a different story.
- ▶ A protracted conflict is unlikely. The Ukraine-Russia conflict serve as an example of this possibility, and the PLAA would be fundamental to China’s strategy in such a conflict.

Next, the author outlined the PLAA’s mission in the context of reforms and overall reorganization. Based on PLA documents and defense white papers, the overarching desire is to move away from a static force intended to absorb high casualty rates and move toward the development of a much more mobile force that can more effectively and flexibly deploy forces across domains. Some of the actions taken in response to the reform mandates (increased training, establishment of joint TCs, downsizing of inflated forces) are indicative of strong momentum toward a better, more flexible force.

The author discussed the size of the PLAA (more than fifty percent of the overall PLA) and indicated that its role is unlikely to diminish as the primary fighting force. The PLA needs a large ground force to achieve regional dominance and to protect the PRC's borders.

The changes seen have several drivers. In 2022, XI Jinping made it clear that force reductions would continue but coupled with actions to make the PLA a more efficient and better fighting force. From XI's 2022 *Work Report* to the 20th Party Congress, several priorities were listed:

- ▶ Faster development and iteration of high-tech weaponry and “new domain forces.”
- ▶ Development of doctrine to put these advanced technologies into use.
- ▶ Improvement of strategic deterrence capabilities.
- ▶ Improvement of training for joint forces, force-on-force, and the operation of advanced technologies.
- ▶ Deploy more frequently and efficiently.
- ▶ Develop a systemic approach to bring the entirety of China's capabilities to bear.

This set of priorities challenges traditional PLAA thought and will serve to force them to define their role as a “new domain force” while demonstrating their ability to effectively integrate into joint operations.

Furthermore, each TC Headquarters now has one permanent PLAA deputy commander, and the TCA commander serves as a concurrent TC deputy commander. In addition, each TCA PC serves concurrently as a TC deputy PC.

The presentation closed with a discussion of three themes to the PLAA's modernization. First, there is a continuing emphasis on the improvement of mobility, both among the troops and for the force as a whole. Second, the PLAA's long-range fires capabilities has been expanding. Experimentation with new forms of fires (e.g., first-person view (FPV) uncrewed aerial systems (UAS)) is ongoing and expected to continue as the PLA attempts to create organic capabilities across its forces to help address the challenges with jointness. Finally, multi-domain operational support will continue to be improved upon and remains a top priority.

Navy (PLAN)

The author of the PLAN chapter divided the topic into three sections focusing on reforms made to PLAN organizational structure and characteristics at the service headquarters (PLAN HQ), TC, and operational unit (service community: submarines, surface ships, naval aviation, marine corps, and coastal defense) levels, specifically pointing out aspects of these changes that affect the PLAN's ability to operate as a joint force and project power overseas.

Six key changes made to the PLAN organization since XI Jinping took power in 2012 were discussed during the proceedings; each of the highlighted reforms have sought to improve PLAN capabilities for joint and expeditionary operations as outlined in China's *2015 Defense White Paper*, which laid out the PLAN strategy of “near seas protection and far seas defense.”

The first change of note is that PLAN HQ has ceded most of their operational control to each TC. The five overall PLA TCs field three TCNs: the Eastern, Southern, and Northern TCNs. The establishment of these three TCNs on the foundations of the former East, North, and South Sea Fleets is the second major change of interest. Bringing operational control under the TC system, which spans the various forces, directly affects the PLA's ability to act as a joint operations force.

The third organizational change noted is the development of carrier task groups (CTGs). The ability to field and operate such a carrier is a significant step towards the projection of PLA power in both near and far seas engagements. The next change discussed concerned the establishment, expansion and transformation of the PLAN Marine Corps (PLANMC) and its HQ. The PLANMC force expanded threefold during the “below the neck” reforms of 2017. The fifth change of note to the PLAN is the transformation of the PLA’s naval aviation force (NAF), which serve to project power and provide protection to surface assets. In 2023, the NAF transferred the majority of its manned shore-based aircraft to the PLA Air Force (PLAAF). Looking forward, there is evidence that the PLA may attempt to establish a base in Cambodia.

The author outlines several aspects of the PLAN organization to watch in the coming years.

- ▶ The command-and-control relationships between PLAN HQ, PLA HQ, TCs and the CMC are unclear and could change over time.
- ▶ The development of the PLAN carrier air wings and the formalization of the CTGs, especially as the *Fujian* comes online. The *Fujian* has an electromagnetic catapult system that allows it to launch heavier aircraft which expands the CTGs operational range, which could lead to new types of aircraft being added to the airway and new capabilities, including for aerial attack and missile launch.
- ▶ The development of the PLANMC as a whole.
- ▶ Overseas infrastructure development and increases in out-of-area operations are of vital importance.
- ▶ Changes in naval aviation capabilities, especially concerning the PLA’s embrace of unmanned aircraft, may affect power projection in particular.

Finally, concerning personnel, the Eastern, Southern, and Northern TC HQ each has one permanent PLAN deputy commander, and the TCN commander serves as a concurrent TC deputy commander. In addition, each TCN Political Commissar (PC) serves concurrently as a TC deputy PC.

Air Force (PLAAF)

The author of the PLAAF chapter divided the topic into sections covering changes in force size, organizational and force structure, and operational command, noting changes due to the establishment of the TC system and how that has affected grade structure.

The author highlighted that the PLAAF HQ cut its personnel by half, demobilizing (rather than retiring) them. This is one major result of the 2016 “above the neck” reorganization that removed operational command from the services in favor of the TCs. Each TC has a TCAF, one aligned with each region – Eastern, Southern, Western, Northern, and Central. Furthermore, each TC HQ now has one permanent PLAAF deputy commander, and the TCAF commander serves as a concurrent TC deputy commander. In addition, each TCAF PC serves concurrently as a TC deputy PC.

The author concluded with the note that the 2016 reorganization affected every level of the PLAAF, including PLAAF Headquarters, the TCAF HQ, the Corps level, and each of the branches. Additionally, there was a major shift from a division-regiment structure to a brigade structure.

Rocket Force (PLARF)

The PLARF was established as a direct result of the PLA reorganization that began in December 2015, built whole cloth from the former Second Artillery (PLASAF), which was considered as an independent branch treated as a service. In contrast to the other forces, the PLARF maintains a relatively higher degree of control over their forces, despite its establishment under the TC system. The PLARF has seen rapid force growth with the addition of ten brigades in the three years following its establishment.

Within the PLARF organization, the author emphasized a few key organizational components. Of note is the interesting and mysterious unit known only by its military unit cover designator: MUCD 96902. It is believed that this unit's mission has a foreign liaison or foreign advisory function.

The PLARF is made up of nine bases (61–69) which support various nuclear and conventional missile operations and missions. Each base has a similar organization with minor variations depending on the mission. Of special note is Base 61, which the author describes as a “key base.” This base is primarily tasked with supporting the Eastern TC and has the Taiwan contingency in its mission set. Also interesting is the 2018 move of Base 62 to Hainan Island, allowing it to effectively cover the whole of the South China Sea.

In 2021, the PLARF began construction on three large silo fields, bringing the number of silos under its command from fewer than 20 to more than 300. It is still unclear how this will fit into the PLARF organizationally, but a vague outline of an organizational structure is beginning to form around the new silos.

The author notes that the PLARF's role with the TC system remains questionable. Specifically, unlike the TCA, TCN, and TCAF HQ, there are no TCRF HQ and no PLARF officers serve as a TC deputy commander or PC. However, there are PLARF officers assigned to the relevant TC JOCCs.

There is evidence of an effort to streamline their integration into the system and increase their overall jointness with the other services, despite divisions with key capabilities (i.e., nuclear brigades, engineering and training units) remaining outside the TC system.

The author closed the discussion by stating that the PLARF was a winner of the recent reforms. It was elevated to a full service, grown substantially at a time when the PLAA has been shrinking, and is increasingly integrated into the theater system.

Ministry of Veteran Affairs (MVA)

Established in 2018, the MVA is primarily tasked with providing policy formulation, guidance, and oversight for the wider veteran's affairs organizations (Departments, Bureaus, or Service Centers) in each province, autonomous region, municipality, district, and city.

The presenter for this paper began by contextualizing the MVA's establishment as part of a broader party-state reorganization focused on asserting the Party's position over several *xitong* and on addressing some inefficiencies associated with veterans' affairs.

The presenter asserted that the MVA will be a key indicator of the PLA's modernization as its establishment is an attempt to remove a tremendous fiscal and administrative burden from the PLA, provide an unprecedented level of support to active-duty troops and their families, enhance the social prestige and material benefits of service, and increase veteran participation in national

defense, especially through the militias. If China gets the VA system right, the two big dividends for the PLA will be money and manpower.

The presentation continued with a discussion of the drivers and motivations for the MVA's creation, noting that the widely reported protests were just one of the factors to consider. Economic reforms, force modernization, talent acquisition, and force reduction were all among the reasons for this reform to the VA system.

The presenter notes that the VA system in China differs from the U.S. system in that the VA organs at each level are not components of the MVA itself, but rather they are components of the relevant civilian government at each level.

The available data on budgets for the VA system is limited and this study entailed a limited survey of budgetary information. The presenter highlighted some key points from the chapter, which included substantial but unevenly distributed spending, a need for high levels of spending on infrastructure, various sources financing the overall VA system, and the high possibility for increase corruption as the amount of money passing through the system increases.

Of interest throughout much of the conference was the VA system's overall role in attracting top-tier talent to the PLA. A modernized military requires college-educated personnel with technical degrees, but uncertainty concerning the degree to which the PLA will take responsibility for its soldiers and their families can be a deterrent for talented individuals joining the PLA. How the VA system, and the PLA overall, addresses these concerns will affect how people will make career choices going forward.

Strategic Support Force (SSF)

The authors for this chapter refer to the former PLASSF as a consolidation of disparate space, cyber, and electronic warfare assets composed of the Aerospace, Cyberspace, and Information Technology Forces. Research concerning the PLASSF indicates that it was designed to create a greater synergy among information support and information warfare elements of the PLA. Of particular note, the PLASSF was created as a force, not a service, but it had the same grade (TC leader) as the four services.

The PLASSF exhibited a number of peculiar distinctions in its organizational structure which persisted until its dissolution in 2024. The subsequent dissolution of the PLASSF and elevation of its three, largely independent branches into their own service-level organizations directly subordinate to the CMC addressed these issues, allowing the remaining forces to adopt a more traditional bureaucratic and operational structure. It is not yet clear what the grade for each of the new organizations will be.

Next, the authors discussed the three branches of the former PLASSF and the major developments that were seen across the last five years. Among the forces under the former PLASSF, the Aerospace Force came into the organization with the most mature organizational structure, and it remains largely intact.

The authors closed their presentation by suggesting that the PLASSF was always intended to be a transitional structure within the overall PLA organization. This is predicated on a hindsight view of the peculiar grade structure of the PLASSF, the independence of its subordinate forces, and its ill-fitting status as an operational service. There were no steps taken towards jointness within the SSF itself. In 2016, the three forces were in their early stages of development and were neither mature nor integrated enough to be viable on their own.

While the dissolution of the PLASSF appears to have been in the design of the organization, political pressures served as a practical reason for the move. The authors outlined the challenges the SSF faced in 2023:

- ▶ Microsoft revealed that PLA hackers had compromised critical U.S. infrastructure.
- ▶ A PLA spy balloon was shot down by the U.S. Air Force off the coast of South Carolina.
- ▶ Rumors of corruption connected with the former Minister of National Defense, who had previously been the head of the Aerospace Force, led to his dismissal.

All of these items support the reasoning that the dissolution of the SSF served the CMC's interests and that the action worked as designed.

Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF)

The JLSF was introduced as an organization tasked with unification of logistics forces at the strategic level and the improvement of logistics support to the PLA and PAP. Established in 2016 as part of the “above the neck” reforms, the JLSF is key to China's efforts to build a joint, efficient, “combat-oriented” modern logistics system: an essential component of modern warfare. The JLSF approaches its mission of modernizing PLA strategic and campaign level logistics by creating a mechanism to streamline theater-wide support and sustainment, clarifying support relationships among PLA units, and enhancing the PLA's ability to leverage civilian resources to support logistic operations.

The authors note that the JLSF is a *joint* support force with personnel representing all four PLA services, as well as civilian, technical, and professional staff. It is believed that the command post at the JLSF is a joint staff developmental assignment, rather than a logistician's role.

The authors took pains to identify and describe the Joint Logistics Support Centers (JLSCs), their capabilities, and their key role in the post-reforms PLA. There are five TC-aligned JLSCs with control centralized under the JLSF Headquarters. The JLSCs provide operational logistics support to the TCs and are outside of the operational control of the TCs during peacetime, although their wartime relationships are unclear. This arrangement allows the PLA to more effectively direct resources toward the area of greatest need, eliminating the internal struggle for resources between the TCs. JLSCs are capable of forming mobile ad-hoc logistics support brigades from subordinate or adjacent services to provide rapid comprehensive logistics support. The author notes that this is a nascent capability which should develop more fully over time.

The authors discussion of how different types of JLSC unit might be activated in a wartime situation. The Joint Logistics Support Brigades, which are a modular task force controlling the core of the C2 functions, have the ability to pull from a wide range of entities to task and organize the logistics support as needed. These Brigades are likely designated to provide direct and accompanying logistics support for maneuvering combat units, pushing support forward. The Storage and Supply Bases may serve as military logistics hubs to push comprehensive joint logistics support into the Theaters via the Joint Logistics Support Brigades. The Bases may coordinate with comprehensive and single-materiel depots as well as Procurement Service Stations to source supplies necessary to support combat forces at the front edge battle space.

The authors concluded with some key conclusions.

- ▶ The JLSF remains organized to support operations within China and along its periphery. The Zhengzhou Strategic Delivery Base (Central TC) is the only military-civilian integrated transportation facility for long-range, rapid, multi-dimensional projection of large units

overseas. This functionality has been reserved for participation in trans-regional military exercises, special police missions, and the deployment of U.N. Peacekeeping forces.

- ▶ A significant change that has resulted from the reorganization is the structure of the JLSF organization which enhances combat service support potential to PLA by providing direct and accompanying support to maneuvering combat units. These changes increase JLSF operational control over the resources necessary to deploy and sustain forces from across China to the front line in any direction. Representing a change in wartime sustainment thought, the priority is now on pushing support to the front to maintain operational tempo, rather than to preserve the strategic rear; pushing out rather than falling back to stage a counterattack.
- ▶ The JLSF remains heavily reliant on civilian support for transportation, materiel, technical, and professional needs, which is a significant departure from the U.S. model.
- ▶ The formal establishment of the JLSF as a “support force” may enable it to increase integration of service logistics capabilities into joint formations, effectively addressing capabilities gaps such as:
 - Combat engineering which is predominantly controlled by the PLAA
 - Port and airfield operations which are still primarily controlled by the PLAN and PLAAF
 - Establishment of comprehensive joint forward arming and refueling entities
 - More effective utilization of multi-domain lift in synchronized logistics operations.

Academic Institutions

The author of this chapter stated the PLA’s academic institutions are led and managed in a two-tiered system, at the CMC and military services levels. At the CMC level, the CMC’s Training and Administration Department provides oversight for all PLA colleges and universities, specifically through its subordinate Military Education Bureau. *Service-level oversight of their respective PLA academic institutions is handled at each service or force’s headquarters, specifically its first level Staff Department.*

The author noted that, prior to the PLA’s 2016 reorganization, the PLA operated 71 academic institutions, which included the People’s Armed Police’s (PAP) universities and institutions affiliated with the CMC’s General Departments^f and the MRs. The reorganization reduced the number of PLA officer and non-commissioned officer academic institutions to 43, including the six overseen by the PAP – later 44, after the China Coast Guard Academy was transferred to the PAP in 2018.

The numbers reduction was accomplished by merging and consolidating institutions, rather than simply abolishing them. As a result, roughly one-third of the current PLA academic institutions are the product of mergers with institutions that existed prior to the 2016 reorganization.

The author concluded with an observation that changes to the PLA’s academic institutions’ organizational structure has been consistent. In particular, the PLA has regularly adjusted the number of its academic institutions to meet current needs, a trend that is expected to continue.

^f Namely, the General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department, and General Armament Department.

People's Armed Police (PAP)

Prior to the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the PAP enjoyed relative obscurity, receiving very little interest from the international community. However, as unrest increased across the city and possibility of a second Tiananmen Square Massacre became prevalent, the importance of the PAP was brought to the forefront.

The author explains that the Chinese armed forces reforms that began in 2015 did not exclude reforms to the PAP, but rather reforms to the leadership and management system were always included in the CMC's 2015 plans. A few years behind other major organizational changes throughout the PLA, the PAP reforms were rolled out in 2017 and 2018 and were targeted at modernizing the PAP, particularly concerning the PAP's leadership and management structure.

The PAP today is based on the principle that “the army is the army; the police are the police; and civilians are civilians.” This slogan addresses the issue of blurred responsibilities between actors and implies a modification of the PAP's function. Prior to XI Jinping leadership, the PAP was so closely aligned with civilian law enforcement and emergency management that it became necessary to draw a distinction between the PAP and civilians. The PAP must hold itself in a position to pivot one way to support the PLA, and also pivot the other way to support civilian law enforcement and the emergency management system.

The author next shared the PAP mission set, which was taken directly from authoritative Chinese sources and always appeared in the order listed.

- ▶ Guard duty – protection of key government sites/infrastructure
- ▶ Stability maintenance – handling sudden incidents
- ▶ Counterterrorism
- ▶ Maritime rights protection – China Coast Guard functions
- ▶ Emergency rescues and assistance
- ▶ Defensive operations – wartime support for PLA

The author describes the changes to the lines of authority within the PAP as the most important outcome of the PAP reforms implemented under XI's leadership. The authority to deploy armed police no longer lies with civilian authorities at the national, provincial, or prefecture levels, but rather lies with the CMC directly. While this has made it more difficult to mobilize the PAP, resulting in fewer erratic incidents in society, it also necessitated a “deploy while reporting” rule to give the PAP the autonomy to rapidly deploy in emergency situations. Additionally, CMC authority ensures that alternative power centers at the national or provincial level are not established, preventing undue influence over the PAP outside of XI Jinping's control.

The PAP, as an organization, has three main operational forces, each aligned with specific roles and missions. These forces are comprised of provincial zongdui⁹, which was been a mainstay within the PAP from before the reforms, and two new additions since 2018, the mobile zongdui and the Coast Guard. The PAP defines itself a multipurpose force with air, sea and land capabilities, with a ground component, an air component in the form of helicopter detachments,

⁹ The author uses zongdui – a trans-alliteration of the Chinese characters – rather than corps or contingents because their meaning in this context is unclear and would introduce confusion to the discussion.

as well as the Coast Guard, which constitutes their maritime component. Despite this description of themselves as a joint force, albeit a smaller one, sitting alongside the PLA, the author concludes that they are not overly joint.

The author closed his presentation with a discussion of the key takeaways from his analysis.

- ▶ The new work coordination system which adjudicates deployment of the PAP adds a friction point in rapid deployment of PAP. The new “deploy while reporting” rule set in place in 2020 makes it unclear how the system works in practice, representing a potential conflict, especially in an emergency response situation if the local officials don’t feel empowered to use the PAP forces. Additionally, the wide variation in how and when PAP should mobilize in an emergency situation could cause further confusion and inconsistencies.
- ▶ XI intended for greater PAP participation in the “joint ops system” but this has not been reflected in the TC structure, PME system, training, etc.
- ▶ While the mobile zongdui capabilities do enhance rapid response functions, there has been no evidence of large-scale mobilization. The author assesses that this is more of a capability on paper rather than in practice.
- ▶ While the PAP describes themselves as a mini joint-force, the China Coast Guard’s (CCG) poor integration with rest of the PAP is one example of how that isn’t the case in practice. There is no PAP HQ function responsible for maritime law enforcement, the CCG has no Deputy Commander of the PAP, they have different uniforms, roles, missions, histories, and so on. There is also no indication that the CCG is training with other parts of the PAP to increase joint capabilities.
- ▶ The PAP is still a mostly inward focused organization, but some external facing missions including UN Peacekeeping Operations, continued PAP presence in Tajikistan, academic exchanges, international internal security partnerships, and the addition of the CCG to their operational control.
- ▶ The PAP organization is more streamlined and less convoluted than before the reforms. This also means that there are fewer checks and balances on PAP leadership, a situation which could breed poor management and corruption. The PAP now is more of a service in that they are insular and self-contained, much like the PLA, with no external oversight of their operations. They may have solved an operational efficiency issue and better-aligned the PAP with the PLA, but they have also created PLA-like problems.

Five Theater Commands

In February 2016, a few months after the major “above the neck” reforms began, the PLA transitioned from seven MRs to five TCs. Ultimately, their decision to transition to five TCs is based on the concept of Information System-based System-of-Systems Operations.

The author introduced TCs as strategic areas that have evolved into a first-level military command institution responsible for executing operational activities towards a specific direction. A former MND spokesperson stated that the “TC’s mission is to win wars by responding to security threats in their respective strategic direction, maintaining peace and containing war.” The TC system was built upon the foundations of the former MRs, but the TCs were established to facilitate and command joint operations.

The author highlighted some aspects of the TCs organizational structure, noting that they are ultimately an exception to the “four departments and one discipline inspection commission” organization model found within other PLA units and organizations.

The author indicated that a key goal of the transition from MRs to TCs was to increase the level of jointness, which is partially achieved via the TC JOCC, which are subordinate to the CMC JOCC. Within the TC JOCC, there are subcenters responsible for land, maritime, air, and conventional missile operations. TC JOCCs are ultimately staffed by PLAA, PLAN, PLAAF, and PLARF personnel. In recent years, TC JOCCs have carried out a variety of actions and engagements both domestically and internationally.

Despite the JOCCs, which the U.S. Department of Defense would consider to be joint, and the joint activities carried out, the author assessed that the composition of TC leadership (predominantly PLAA) indicates that there is still work to be done before they can be considered truly joint.

Conclusion

Throughout the conference, Xi Jinping’s goals for the reorganization and his progress towards those goals were discussed and analyzed. The conference revealed that, in terms of “jointness”, the PLA has made obvious progress, but the PLAA remains heavily represented in leadership and there is little evidence of cross-service experience. Many of the conference participants and authors emphasized the importance of, need for, and evidence of the development of personnel and talent acquisition for the PLA. Finally, it is clear that Xi’s overhaul of China’s armed forces has served to flatten the organizational structure and bring the overall PLA apparatus more firmly under his control, thus solidifying his power base even further.