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Field Guide: The Culture of the Chinese People's Liberation Army

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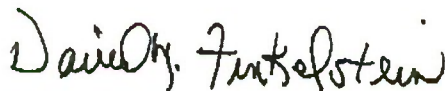
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**FIELD GUIDE:
THE CULTURE OF THE
CHINESE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY**

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INTRODUCTION

The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the world's largest standing army; it protects the world's fastest-rising economic power. In recent years Americans have gained a much greater understanding of the PLA's equipment and capabilities. However, knowledge of the values, beliefs, and essential cultural features that influence the way PLA members behave, interact, and make decisions is much less widespread. This guide is aimed at U.S. personnel who will interact with Chinese military personnel but have limited knowledge about China or the PLA. It is intended to help readers better understand why PLA members act as they do and how the PLA differs from the U.S. military.

The Marine Corps Intelligence Activity has also produced a more detailed, book-length study of PLA military culture. For a copy of the full study, call MCIA at 703-278-6146.

Part One of the guide, "Who is the PLA?" provides background on the people in the Chinese military and how the PLA is transforming itself.

Part Two, "How Does the PLA See Itself?" traces the beliefs the PLA promotes about its origins, historical legacies, and key values.

Part Three, "How Does the PLA Act?" describes key aspects of PLA behavior, including its changing operational practices and its decision-making principles and processes, and discusses how Americans can most effectively interact with PLA members.

Four key points

- The PLA is a Party-Army: its missions, institutions, and practices are all shaped by the fact that its ultimate loyalty is to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).
- Change is a key element of PLA culture. The PLA is currently undergoing tremendous changes in its personnel system and its operational doctrine and practices. It is still experiencing the "growing pains" of its transformation from a peasant army to a modern military.
- The PLA promotes the view that its greatest strengths are the morale and discipline of its personnel, and that these qualities enable the PLA to compensate for weak material capabilities. However, PLA leaders worry that these "human qualities" are increasingly difficult to maintain in a rapidly changing society.
- Americans are often frustrated by the different expectations that the PLA and the U.S. military bring to mil-to-mil interactions. However, Americans can improve the quality of these exchanges by gaining an understanding of the PLA's professional and cultural norms, and an appreciation of what its members seek to gain from interaction with the U.S. military.

Appendices 1-4 discuss the career paths and grades and ranks of PLA personnel. Suggested additional readings are included in Appendix 5 of this field guide.

PART ONE: WHO IS THE PLA?

A brief introduction to the PLA

Basic facts

China's armed forces have three components: The People's Liberation Army (PLA), the People's Armed Police (PAP), and the militia. This guide focuses exclusively on the PLA.¹

- The **PLA** includes China's ground forces, navy, air force, and strategic missile corps (known in the PLA as the Second Artillery). It is under the command of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).² With about 2.3 million active-duty members, it is the largest standing army in the world.³ In 2008, there were estimated to be an additional 800,000 reservists.⁴
- The **PAP** is a paramilitary force tasked with safeguarding internal security, social stability, citizens' lives and property, and economic development (such as mining and forestry operations). It is estimated to have between 660,000 and 900,000 members, and is the only active-duty security force in China that is part of both military and civilian administrative systems.⁵
- The **militia** is a reserve force expected to provide the PLA with combat support and manpower replenishment during wartime. It has recently taken part in peacetime security operations, such as disaster relief. Militia units are organized in rural counties, urban districts, and state-owned and private enterprises, and are overseen by local governments and Party committees as well as by local military units.⁶ Many militia members are former soldiers who were demobilized after two years of conscription.⁷ According to official Chinese documents, members of the "primary militia" receive 30–40 days of military training per year.⁸ China's 2008 National Defense White Paper claims that between 2006 and 2010 China plans to reduce total militia forces from 10 million to 8 million.⁹

A Party-Army

The PLA's status as a "Party-Army" is central to its identity. Political power and Party authority are closely tied in the Chinese government, and this is reflected in the PLA.

The PLA's "Party-Army" identity has several aspects:

- *The PLA's national command authority, the Central Military Commission (CMC), is a Party organization.* The Chinese government has a civilian Ministry of National Defense, but, unlike the U.S. Department of Defense, it has little real authority over the PLA. The Minister of National Defense is a powerful figure in the government, but his power comes not from his position as minister but rather from his high standing in the CCP.¹⁰

Party control of the military is as fundamental to the PLA as civilian control is to the American military.

- *Unlike newly commissioned U.S. military personnel, who swear to uphold the U.S. Constitution, Chinese military personnel swear allegiance to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).* ¹² PLA personnel, including non-Party members, are expected to abide by the principle that CCP leadership is the foundation of national stability and to always support the CCP's goals.

The PLA Oath

“I am a member of the People’s Liberation Army. I promise that **I will follow the leadership of the Communist Party of China**, serve the people wholeheartedly, obey orders, strictly observe discipline, fight heroically, fear no sacrifice, loyally discharge my duties, work hard, practice hard to master combat skills, and resolutely fulfill my missions. Under no circumstances will I betray the Motherland or desert the army.”¹¹

- *The vast majority of PLA officers are Party members.* Party credentials are indispensable to long-term advancement in the armed forces. This is not to say that PLA officers advance through the ranks based on Party status alone; technical and leadership skills are also highly valued. Most conscripted personnel are not Party members, but a growing number of non-commissioned officers (NCOs) are.¹³

PLA Missions

The Party tasks the PLA with the following basic missions:

- Defending China’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and domestic stability
- Supporting national economic development
- Aiding Chinese society in emergency situations, such as natural disasters
- Safeguarding China’s expanding national interests overseas
- Embodying and promoting the Party’s values to greater Chinese society.¹⁴

PLA Services

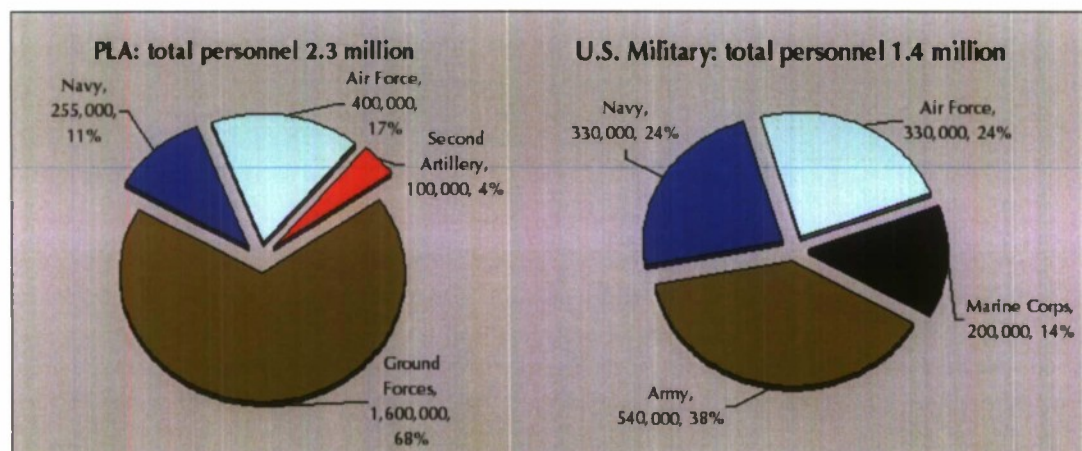
The PLA has three services and one independent branch that functions as a service:

- **PLA Ground Forces.**
- **PLA Navy (PLAN).** The PLA has a small **Marine Corps** (perhaps 10,000 personnel), but it is a subordinate branch of the PLAN, occupying the same position as, for instance, the submarine force.¹⁵
- **PLA Air Force (PLAAF).**
- **Second Artillery.** This is the PLA’s ballistic missile force, an independent branch that functions as a service.

The PLA is dominated by ground forces, though in recent years it has put more resources into building up its maritime and air power capabilities.¹⁶ The Chinese government does

not release official information on the size of each of its services, but outside sources provide rough estimates. Below, the left-hand pie chart shows these estimates graphically. Together, the two charts can be used to compare the PLA services to the U.S. military services in terms of size and relative percentage of the total force.¹⁷

Figure 1: Comparison of Chinese and American Military Personnel



The people in the PLA

The PLA divides its active-duty personnel into three categories: conscripts, NCOs, and officers.

Conscripts

All young men are required to register with their county or municipal military service office when they turn 18. They remain eligible for conscription until age 22. Young women may volunteer, but are not normally required to register.¹⁸ The PLA requires that one-third of conscripts come from urban areas and two-thirds from rural areas.¹⁹

PLA personnel terminology		
“Cadre”	=	Officer
“Soldier”	=	Enlisted personnel
“Officers and men”	=	Officers and enlisted personnel

Although millions of young men become eligible for conscription every year, the PLA needs only a few hundred thousand new conscripts. There are many ways of avoiding conscription; in the end, few people join the military who really don't want to. *Only a small proportion of the eligible population – probably less than five percent – join the PLA.*²⁰

In 1999, the mandatory conscription period was reduced from three or four years to just two years. At the end of the conscription period, conscripts may follow one of three paths: they may be demobilized and return to civilian life; they may apply to become NCOs; or they may take military academy entrance exams and eventually become officers.²¹

NCOs

The PLA decided to establish a formal NCO corps in 1998 and implemented this decision the following year.²² PLA enlisted personnel who become NCOs after completing their conscription period may remain on active duty for up to 30 years. NCOs may also be recruited directly from the civilian sphere if they have useful professional or technical skills. The percentage of NCOs recruited this way is rising, though most NCOs still come from the enlisted force.²³

NCOs hold many key technical billets in the PLA, and their responsibilities are increasing.²⁴ However, U.S. visitors report being surprised at the relatively limited authority that PLA NCOs seem to have.²⁵ Many tasks performed by NCOs in the U.S. military are done by junior officers in the PLA. For instance, as one USAF officer observes, in the U.S. military senior NCOs can sign off on the air-worthiness of an aircraft, while in the PLA that task would fall to a junior officer.²⁶ U.S. visitors note that the PLA is interested in learning about foreign militaries' use of NCOs.²⁷

One-half of the conscripted force turns over at the same time each year

Conscription and basic training are carried out as part of an annual cycle:

- On November 1, potential conscripts report for screening.
- By around February 1, new conscripts complete their initial processing and basic training.
- Between late October and mid December, conscripts who have completed their 2-year obligation are demobilized.

Three major differences between the U.S. and PLA NCO systems

U.S. Military	PLA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCOs have rotational assignments. • NCOs take on increasing leadership responsibilities as they progress in their careers. • There is an enlisted advisor system through which NCOs advise officers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NCOs usually stay in the same unit for their entire careers. • NCOs' highest-level leadership responsibility is that of a squad leader. • NCOs have little influence on decision-making and few formal channels for communicating with officers

A diagram of the career paths for PLA enlisted personnel is in Appendix 1.

Officers

There is a far higher proportion of officers in the PLA than in the U.S. military: in the PLA, officers make up as much as a third of all personnel, compared with just 16 percent

in the U.S. military.²⁸ The number of PLA officers also includes “civilian cadres,” who wear uniforms but are comparable in function to U.S. Department of Defense civilians.²⁹

New PLA officers are required to have a four-year bachelor’s degree or a three-year “senior technical” degree. Officers may take one of two paths to a commission:

- **Graduating from a military academy.** Since the early 1980s, the PLA has depended nearly exclusively upon its military academies to provide its officer corps with a basic undergraduate-level education. The vast majority of PLA officers still come from military academies, of which there were 63 in 2005.³⁰
- **Being commissioned from a civilian college.** Since 1999, the PLA has pushed for a majority of officers to come from this path, though the change has been slow to take root.³¹

Appendix 3 provides an overview of the paths that PLA officers take toward commissioning and their first unit assignments, compared with their U.S. counterparts.

Determining an officers’ status within the PLA

When meeting PLA officers, Americans should understand that knowing their *rank* alone does not give a true picture of their position within the military bureaucracy. To gain a sense of where the officer sits in the PLA hierarchy, you need to know their *grade*; to know how to address officers, you need to know their *position* or *billet*.

- **Rank.** The PLA has ten ranks, most of which bear titles similar to U.S. military ranks (lieutenant, colonel, etc.). Rank epaulets allow an observer to fix only *approximately* where the officer fits in the PLA hierarchy.
- **Position or billet.** This is an officer’s job description within his unit – commander, political officer, logistician, staff officer, department director, etc. PLA personnel usually address one another by their position rather than by their rank – e.g., “Department Director Zhang” rather than “Colonel Zhang.”
- **Grade.** *An officer’s grade level indicates how much authority his position has in relation to other positions within the PLA bureaucracy.* The PLA has a single grade system, consisting of 15 grade levels, that is applied to *all* units, organizations, and officers in *all* services and branches. Each grade level has a name (e.g., “division leader” or “deputy MR leader”), and every job position is assigned a grade level. Officers at the same grade level are equal in status even if they have different ranks; conversely, an officer of a lower grade defers to another of a higher grade, even if they have the same rank. *By knowing a PLA officer’s grade level, an outside observer can ascertain how much authority that officer has relative to other officers in the room.*

Appendix 4 presents a chart of the grades and ranks, mandatory retirement age for each grade (the age by which an officer must either be promoted or retire), and dress insignia that indicate grade.

PLA officers follow one of five career tracks:

- Command (sometimes called the “military” track)
- Political
- Logistics
- Equipment
- “Special technical officers,” who are responsible for equipment maintenance, repair, research, development, and testing.³²

PLA officers lead far more insular lives than their American counterparts. Most PLA officers spend their entire careers in a single track; the major exception is political officers, who usually start in a command track and are expected to continue to receive command training throughout their careers. PLA officers also usually spend most of their careers in a single geographic location, until they reach a position at the grade level of deputy Military Region leader (i.e., flag officer level).

Appendix 2 presents a diagram of career paths for PLA officers.

Quality of Life

The lives of PLA personnel differ both from their American counterparts and from Chinese civilians in several notable ways:

- **Marriage and family life is more constrained.** Conscripts are not allowed to marry. NCOs may only marry people from their hometown or village, cannot live with their spouses while on active duty, and may only stay off-base with their families during vacations and holidays.³³ Junior officers also are not allowed to live with their families.
- **Material conditions are less comfortable.** On-base housing is extremely crowded and facilities are basic.³⁴ The monthly stipend paid to younger personnel also falls short of the salaries many of them could earn in the private sector.³⁵
- **PLA personnel have less personal autonomy.** In addition to restrictions on marriage and family life, younger PLA members are discouraged from having any personal life – or even contacts – off base.³⁶

Junior PLA personnel periodically complain about these circumstances, and since the early 2000s the PLA has made substantial – and well-publicized – efforts to improve living conditions. These measures include raising PLA salaries, improving base recreational facilities, upgrading the quality of uniforms, and improving basic infrastructure (such as electricity and water supply) in the barracks.³⁷ It has also loosened some restrictions on family visits, though it continues to discourage young personnel from being “distracted” from their work by outside obligations.³⁸

How PLA personnel live: a few examples

- In 2002, China's official news service reported that the majority of PLA barracks *finally* had year-round electricity, heat, air conditioning, and indoor plumbing.³⁹
- In 2003, a PLAN depot reported that it was rethinking its earlier refusal to install air conditioning in the quarters for NCOs' visiting family members. This refusal had resulted from concerns that if the quarters were too comfortable, family members would stay too long.⁴⁰
- In 2005, a PLA newspaper proudly reported that a tactical unit had installed 17 new showers, so that the troops could have one hot shower per week.⁴¹
- In 2006, the leaders of a Second Artillery unit, concerned that unit personnel would be "tempted" by the bars and markets of a nearby town, built a wall around the unit compound to keep personnel inside. Personnel simply climbed over it to go into town, for such purposes as calling their families and taking uniforms to the dry cleaners.⁴²

The role of civilians in China's military efforts

Day-to-day interaction between PLA members and Chinese civilians is limited. Active-duty military personnel make up a very small percentage of the larger population, far smaller than in the United States. Furthermore, Chinese military bases tend to be much more closed to nearby civilian communities than their U.S. counterparts: most on-base jobs are performed by servicemen or their family members, and, as noted above, servicemen are discouraged from spending much time off base.

This does not mean that civilians lack awareness of PLA activities. The Chinese government constantly promotes PLA activities in the media, and has established an

	China	U.S.	North Korea
Number of active-duty personnel⁴³	2.3 million	1.5 million	1.1 million
Population	1.3 billion	301.1 million	23.3 million
Active-duty personnel per 1,000 population⁴⁴	1.7	5.0	47.5

extensive system of National Defense Education (NDE) that is implemented in Chinese schools at all levels. The NDE system seeks to provide all Chinese citizens with a basic understanding of military affairs and the PLA's role in national security and domestic stability, and to ensure that civilians can be called upon to assist military efforts if needed. This education culminates with the several weeks of field training that all civilian college students are required to undergo.

It seems unlikely that China would directly involve civilians in war-fighting. The PRC does not yet have a national mobilization law mandating civilians to be mobilized in the event of emergency or war, and Chinese civilians are mostly unarmed.⁴⁵ The PLA does, however, look to Chinese society for logistical and economic support. In peacetime, this includes joint military-civilian maintenance of military equipment and supplies, and outsourcing of PLA logistics to civilian institutions. In wartime, civilians could be required to provide additional services such as equipment repair, medical and emergency services, communications support, logistics, and transportation.⁴⁶

A military in transition

Since the early 1980s, the PLA has engaged in a non-stop drive toward reform and modernization. PLA leaders have focused on identifying areas in which PLA personnel fall short, in terms of their skills, their attitudes, and their preparedness to fight. The following are some of those shortcomings and the remedies the PLA has introduced to address them.

Shortcoming: The PLA was too large and unwieldy – 4.5 million personnel in 1981.⁴⁷

Remedy: Downsize the PLA. The PLA reduced its forces by almost half, to 2.3 million in 2005.⁴⁸

Shortcoming: The PLA had too few officers who had good critical thinking skills, were capable of using new technologies, and were knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects.⁴⁹

Remedy: Add new officer accession paths. The PLA aspires to draw many more officer candidates directly from civilian colleges and universities, through on-campus recruitment offices and National Defense Scholarships (similar to the U.S. ROTC program). It also sends some officers to civilian institutions for advanced degrees.⁵⁰



Students from Ningxia University in northwest China stand in line behind an army officer while waiting to attend a recruitment ceremony, November 2006.

Shortcoming: The enlisted force was largely comprised of unskilled, poorly educated rural conscripts, who were incapable of using advanced technology and equipment.⁵¹

Remedy: Establish an NCO corps. The PLA established an NCO corps in 1998 to introduce more technically and professionally competent enlisted personnel.

Shortcoming: Younger members of the PLA, many of whom were born under China's "one child per family policy," are viewed by their superiors as spoiled, unable to handle hardship, and prone to psychological problems. This affects the PLA's preparedness for combat.

Remedy: Institute psychological counseling systems. While PLA officers have traditionally attributed behavioral problems to political weakness, recent PLA publications indicate that leaders are increasingly convinced that such problems are "psychological" in nature. In recent years the PLA has devoted more attention to providing psychological resources at the unit level, including psychological counseling offices, unit visits by psychologists, and mental health hotlines.

Looking for a few good men

According to a popular saying in imperial China, “Just as good iron is not forged into nails, good men do not become soldiers.” Today’s PLA faces immense difficulties in attracting the “good men” it needs in order to build the high-quality fighting force it wants. Based on the demands of 21st-century warfare, the PLA now seeks:

- Conscripts from urban, educated backgrounds
- Officers who are better educated and more technically capable⁵²
- Personnel who are innovative and willing to take risks.

However, due to recent changes in Chinese society, young people with strong skills have a wide range of opportunities in the private sector or overseas. Despite reforms to the personnel system, PLA leaders remain concerned that the PLA has too many:

- Conscripts who are rural, uneducated, and poor⁵³
- Officers who stay too long in their positions and are too slow to adapt to new techniques and technologies
- Personnel (particularly officers) who are conservative and risk averse.

Shortcoming: Since the PLA has not fought in a war since 1979, most PLA personnel have no direct experience of combat. This poses significant challenges for preparedness.

Remedy #1: Carry out “realistic war” training. The PLA claims to be more closely replicating the uncertain conditions of combat, rather than relying on familiar locations and closely scripted procedures. It is unclear how deeply this “real-world” orientation has really penetrated PLA training. Foreign observers note that the training exercises they have witnessed still seem highly scripted, and that the PLA still “trains to succeed” rather than seeing mistakes as learning opportunities.⁵⁴

Remedy #2: Engage in non-combat operations, such as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. Since the late 1990s, the PLA has been deployed to conduct major disaster relief efforts, in response to such catastrophes as:

- Several instances of Yangtze River flooding, most notably in 1998
- Severe snowstorms during the Chinese New Year holiday in January 2008
- The May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province.⁵⁵



A PLA soldier helps a wounded child after the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan Province.

These operations allow the PLA to put its mobilization, command, and communications systems to the test in real-world (and often tense and dangerous) situations. They also serve an important public relations purpose by displaying to the Chinese people – and to the world – the PLA’s acts of bravery and sacrifice. In each of these cases, the Chinese government and state-run media have transmitted countless images of PLA members heroically “serving the people” and bearing enormous burdens to save civilian lives.



PART TWO: HOW DOES THE PLA SEE ITSELF?



Origins of PLA culture

China has one of the world's oldest military traditions, stretching back some 2500 years. From its most senior leaders to its newest conscripts, the PLA's personnel are constantly reminded of their military's roots in ancient Chinese traditions and in more recent revolutionary history. *PLA leaders believe that China's military traditions not only connect them to a proud past but also provide useful strategic and operational models for today's PLA.*

The following table lists and discusses the major historical sources of PLA culture.

Figure 2: Major historical sources of PLA culture

Source	Date	Why Important for the PLA?	Important Principles
<p>Confucius (Kong Zi or Kong Fuzi), <i>The Analects</i></p> 	<p>5th Century B.C.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confucianism forms the foundation of Chinese social relations even today. The PLA draws on Confucian values for many of the interpersonal behaviors it promotes among its personnel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harmony is based on key relationships between a superior and a subordinate figure (ruler and ruled, father and son, officer and enlisted personnel, etc.). Each partner in a relationship is responsible for the other's welfare. The superior partner has power over the subordinate but must also consider his advice. Moral behavior is the source of power and authority.
<p>Sun Tzu (Sun Zi), <i>The Art of War</i></p> 	<p>4th Century B.C.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Art of War</i> is the best-known of several martial texts written between the 7th and 4th centuries BC. It is viewed as holding key strategic and operational lessons for warfare. PLA educational and research institutions have entire offices devoted to study of <i>The Art of War</i>, and the PLA sponsors numerous books, courses, and conferences linking its teachings to the PLA's current missions. It is viewed as symbolic of China's long and sophisticated martial tradition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Victory is achieved by those who understand their enemies and understand themselves. "Subduing the enemy without fighting" is the highest objective, especially for a weaker military. Wars are won based on planning and calculation, deception, and "fighting spirit." Wars can only be won with the support of the people.

<p><i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i></p> 	<p>14th Century A.D.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms</i> is a fictionalized version of China's early dynastic history. • Its main characters (particularly the warrior Guan Yu and the strategist Zhuge Liang) are seen as embodying essential military virtues. • The battles described in the novel are still viewed as operationally relevant. • All Chinese military leaders are familiar with the novel's plot and main characters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The highest virtue for military men is loyalty – both to one another and to the principles of righteous rule. • Military heroes, such as legendary general Guan Yu (at left), value their obligations to others above even their own lives. • To wage war on behalf of the common people is a glorious thing.
<p>Mao Zedong, <i>On Protracted War</i> & other essays</p> 	<p>1893- 1976</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mao's many essays on warfare formed the foundation of the PLA's operational doctrine. • When subsequent Chinese leaders have made major changes to the PLA's strategic and operational standards, these are often justified in terms of "updating" Mao's basic principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The masses can be mobilized around a just cause, ultimately amassing an unbeatable force. • Human will and "fighting spirit" determine the success of all military endeavors, regardless of equipment or technology. • "Active defense" means to strike only after the enemy has struck, or when he is about to strike. • There is a "science" of military affairs that can be perfected by studying its laws. • No battle should be fought without extensive preparation.

How the PLA views history

The PLA conveys its values to its personnel partly through a selective retelling of modern Chinese history, which PLA textbooks and official histories divide into several major periods. The PLA draws lessons from each period for today's personnel.

1840–1921: Foreign intrusion, imperial collapse, and internal chaos. Throughout most of the 19th century, China was beset by foreign powers seeking to divide its territory and open its seaports to foreign trade. The collapse of the last imperial dynasty in 1911 led to a period of chaos in which large portions of China were controlled by brutal “warlords” with mercenary armies.

The PLA teaches that during this period the Chinese people, chafing under the “humiliations” brought about by foreign imperialists and feudal warlords, lacked the leadership and the political awareness to liberate themselves.⁵⁸

Suspicion of Foreigners

Today's PLA members – and Chinese citizens more generally – still display a sense of wounded pride over what they call the “Century of Humiliation,” the period between 1839 and 1949 when China lost sovereignty, power, and human lives to foreign invaders. Because of these bitter memories, Chinese resistance to foreign interference is very strong. PRC leaders and intellectuals interpret many U.S. actions as evidence that the United States is determined to keep China from gaining global influence.⁵⁶

The CCP actively encourages the PLA to distrust foreign intentions. For instance, President Hu Jintao, in a 2004 speech on the PLA's main tasks, warned that “Western hostile forces have not given up the wild ambition of trying to subjugate us, intensifying the political strategy of westernizing and dividing up China.”⁵⁷ American guests of the PLA may be surprised to find their hosts questioning the intentions of the U.S. government and people toward China during seemingly unrelated conversations.

1921–1949: Civil war and the victories of the CCP and the Red Army. The CCP was founded in 1921 and its military arm, the Red Army, was founded on August 1, 1927. Under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Marshall Zhu De, the Red Army faced formidable enemies: Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army, which battled the Red Army for supremacy over China; and the Japanese Army during World War II. The Red Army engaged in nearly constant warfare, and endured terrific physical hardship, particularly during the famous “Long March,” in which Mao's soldiers walked 8,000 miles to escape encirclement by Chiang's army, losing 90 percent of their personnel. During this period, Mao developed the principle of “People's War,” a form of guerrilla warfare that is credited with the eventual victory of the Red Army in 1949.

Today's PLA teaches that the CCP and the Red Army provided the leadership that the Chinese people needed in order to stand up against foreign aggressors and domestic tyrants. It further teaches that this period of brutal warfare toughened military personnel and earned them the trust of the Chinese people.

People's War

The concept of "People's War" combines Sun Tzu's principles of deception and calculation with the mobile, flexible tactics of guerrilla warfare.⁵⁹ As originally conceived, the components of "People's War" included the following:

- Fight wars of attrition with large, concentrated forces.
- "Lure the enemy in deep," then attack them.
- Mobilize the entire population to resist the enemy.
- Focus on the enemy's weakest points.
- Use speed, surprise, deception, and stratagem.
- Use guerrilla tactics when you are too weak for conventional operations.

Guerrilla warfare bears little resemblance to the wars that the PLA expects to fight today. However, "People's War" remains a revered concept for the PLA, and is frequently redefined to fit current operational doctrine.⁶⁰

1949–1978: "New China." Carried to power by the victories of the Red Army, the CCP founded the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949. Since then, the PLA has fought in a number of other wars: it fought the United States in the Korean War in the early 1950s; it engaged in a brief border war against India in 1962; and in 1979 it invaded Vietnam to "teach it a lesson" for invading Cambodia.

The PLA teaches its personnel that it won all of these wars handily, even those that foreign historians have deemed either draws or outright losses. For example, the PLA describes the Korean War – which it calls the "resist America, aid Korea" war – as a "great victory for the people's armies of China and Korea."⁶¹ Both China and Vietnam claim victory in the 1979 war, though the PLA sustained very heavy losses and withdrew before a clear conclusion to the war had been reached. The PLA emphasizes that it has always defeated larger, more-advanced adversaries due to the brilliance of China's traditional strategic principles and the superior human qualities of PLA personnel.

A victim of politics: the PLA and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976)

Between 1966 and 1976, the PLA played a central role in the political and social chaos that split China. In this era, Mao encouraged masses of student “Red Guards” to denounce and punish anyone deemed a “rightist,” sometimes including their own parents, teachers, and other authority figures. As the chaos escalated, the PLA was brought in to suppress some of the Red Guard factions, at times using deadly force.

The Cultural Revolution profoundly disrupted the PLA. Its modernization efforts were halted, as members were instructed to focus on ideological concerns rather than on training and preparedness. All educational institutions in China, civilian and military, were shut down. Therefore the generation that came of age during this period – those who are now at the highest echelons of the PLA – were unable to obtain any significant professional military education until they had already been in the PLA nearly 20 years. As a result, one analyst explains, “the current PLA elite are now responsible for shepherding a military modernization program that, given their personal and professional histories, they are ill-equipped to manage or even understand.”⁶²

1978–Present: “Reform and Opening Up.” After Mao died in 1976, his successor, Deng Xiaoping, moved to professionalize and modernize the PLA. In 1985, he announced that China could expect a period of “peace and development” for the foreseeable future, allowing him to shift the PLA away from a wartime footing and toward “army building.” Deng reopened the military academies, began a long-term process of PLA downsizing, updated operational doctrine and training regimens, and began to expose the PLA to foreign military personnel and ideas. This period has not been without its problems: in 1989, the PLA was deployed to forcibly end demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, damaging PLA relations with Chinese society for some years.

*The PLA teaches that during the reform period it has advanced far along the road to becoming a truly professional, modern military. It proudly notes that it has strengthened the military’s training regimens, encouraged innovation and critical thinking among its personnel, and acquired high-tech weaponry. While today’s PLA leaders worry that the PLA still has a long way to go, they are proud of its accomplishments over the past 30 years.*⁶³

PLA Values

PLA leaders have long believed that, although the PLA lags behind many foreign militaries in terms of weaponry and technology, it holds the advantage in terms of the moral, political, and spiritual superiority of Chinese troops. PLA leaders teach that these superior “human qualities” have allowed the PLA to prevail against better-equipped opponents in such conflicts as the Chinese Civil War and the Korean War. In this section, we discuss some of the values that the PLA promotes among its personnel, through its media, military academies, and political indoctrination.

Heroism

To the PLA, a hero does not have to be someone who performs outstanding feats of courage in combat. In fact, *PLA heroes tend to be ordinary people* who selflessly carry out their duties to the military and the people.⁶⁴ These are heroes for soldiers to model their everyday behavior on, not just idolize. *In the PLA, honor belongs to the group, not the individual.* The PLA actively discourages personnel from engaging in “individual heroism” and showing off.⁶⁵

Harmony and cohesion

In its views on unit cohesion the PLA differs from the U.S. military, which emphasizes strong, combat-forged bonds between individuals at the same level, or “buddies.” For the PLA, by contrast, the basis of cohesion is a close relationship built in peacetime between officers and enlisted personnel that mirrors the Confucian bond between parents and children. Harmony and morale are maintained when officers and enlisted personnel each carry out their

obligations toward the other: officers must take care of the men they command; enlisted personnel must respect officers and obey their orders without complaint. When this relationship is weak, cohesion suffers.

Patriotism and loyalty

PLA personnel are taught to be loyal to the Motherland, the Chinese people, the soldierly profession, and above all the Party.⁶⁸ A PLA member’s patriotism is judged by his

American vs. Chinese views of unit cohesion	
<u>U.S. Army</u>	<u>PLA</u>
“The objective measure of cohesion is whether a soldier will choose to stay with his buddies and face discomfort and danger when given the opportunity or temptation to choose comfort and safety. The extreme measure of cohesion is willingness to die with fellow soldiers rather than leave them to die alone.” ⁶⁶	“If officers can take care of [enlisted personnel] just like their parents did, considerably helping them to solve various difficulties, soldiers will be able to experience the warmth of the big family of the unit ... and the unit will be able to form very strong cohesion.” ⁶⁷

enthusiasm for “serving the people,” and he is taught that the PLA always puts the people’s interests above personal concerns.⁷⁰ This is reflected in the name “People’s Liberation Army” and such slogans as “The people love the Army, the Army loves the people.”

The “Four Loyalties” of the PLA

- To the Party
- To the Motherland
- To the people
- To the soldierly profession.⁶⁹

Obedience

The PLA encourages all personnel to offer opinions and suggestions before decisions are made. However, once decisions are made, PLA personnel are expected to obey them without complaint. As one PLA publication puts it, “Enlisted personnel obey officers, subordinates obey superiors, and the entire military obeys the unified leadership of the Central Committee [of the CCP] and the Central Military Commission.”⁷¹

PLA literature does not provide any guidance as to what personnel should do if they believe that superiors’ orders conflict with Party policies or national laws.

Discipline

The PLA requires officers and enlisted personnel to have “self-discipline.” This includes:

- Strictly abiding by PLA discipline, rules, and regulations
- Bearing physical and psychological hardship without complaining
- Having a strong work ethic
- Controlling one’s emotions, and not reacting to setbacks with anger or despair
- Avoiding distractions, such as drinking and wasteful spending.



PLA martial arts training

Without “self-discipline,” PLA leaders believe, there will be insubordination and discontent among the ranks. *Recently, many PLA leaders have become concerned that a new generation of officers and enlisted personnel, made up of children born since China introduced the “one child per family” policy, lack self-discipline.*

Fighting spirit

In China, “fighting spirit” has long been seen as the key to winning wars. The PLA defines “fighting spirit” as the morale and “mental and physical toughness” that leads to martial success. It teaches that “fighting spirit” is a reflection of the PLA’s moral strength—a moral army has good fighting spirit because it fights for a just cause.⁷² *PLA leaders worry that today’s young soldiers, who have never seen combat and are often considered “soft,” may be losing the “fighting spirit” necessary to defend China.*

PART THREE: HOW DOES THE PLA ACT?

V: Operations

Describing PLA operational behavior is challenging

It is difficult for outside observers to gain a complete and accurate picture of how the PLA would fight in a war, or even how it operates in peacetime. Below, we discuss some of the reasons that this is so difficult:

It has been a long time since the PLA last fought in a war. The PLA has not engaged in a full-scale conflict since China's brief war with Vietnam in 1979.⁷³ Since then it has undergone massive changes in its force structure, doctrine, and hardware. Some of its abilities have been tested in recent domestic disaster relief operations, but there have been virtually no recent opportunities to watch PLA combat units in action.

By American standards, the PLA is not transparent. The PLA provides only a limited amount of information about itself to outsiders. Even information that Americans might see as innocuous may be considered "state secrets."⁷⁶

This perceived lack of transparency has become a sticking point in U.S.–China military-to-military relations. The PLA argues that it has opened up more and more of its military exercises and documents for foreign observation in recent years. Still, American visitors complain that they are given access only to a limited number of "show units" putting on scripted displays, and that their requests to learn more about training procedures or about units' capabilities are politely but firmly turned down.⁷⁷

The PLA definition of "military transparency"

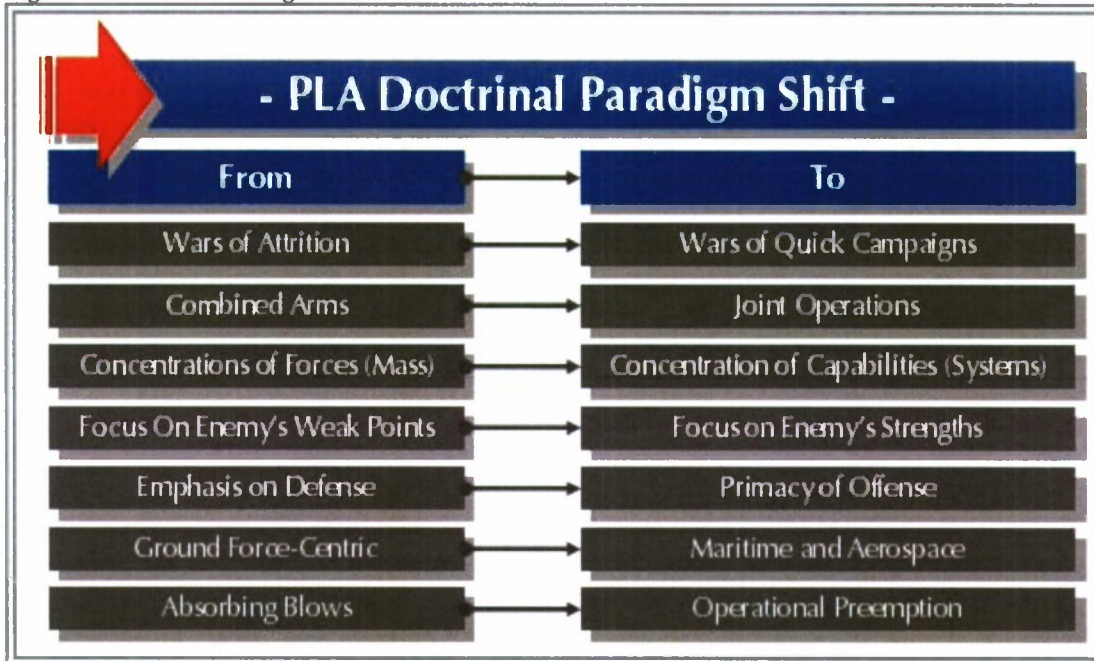
The PLA divides "military transparency" into two types: transparency of strategic intentions, and transparency of operational capabilities.⁷⁴ "Strategic intention" refers to a broad description of state principles, such as China's "no first use" policy on nuclear weapons or its assertion that it has no territorial ambitions; transparency of capabilities refers to specific knowledge of a military's organization, personnel, or assets. In the view of the PLA leadership, if a nation's strategic intentions are clear and benign, there is no need to worry about its operational capabilities.⁷⁵

PLA Operational doctrine is currently in transition

Despite these difficulties, we do know that the PLA's operational doctrine has shifted significantly since the late 1990s. Since 1999, the PLA has produced a large number of doctrinal documents, and has begun to test and adopt new training standards, regulations, and procedures to translate these operational aspirations into real capabilities.⁷⁸

Some major shifts in doctrine over the last two decades are outlined in the following chart.

Figure 3: Doctrinal Change in the PLA



The PLA pays close attention to foreign military experiences in formulating its doctrine and training standards

The PLA's modernization drive has been influenced by its observation of foreign military developments.⁸¹ For example:

- The swift resolution of the 1991 Gulf War impressed upon the PLA the need to develop better joint operations capabilities.⁸²
- The 1982 Falkland Islands War had earlier conveyed a similar lesson.⁸³
- The current Iraq War has highlighted for the PLA the importance of constant information flows on the battlefield.⁸⁴

Drivers of PLA doctrinal change

The PLA's doctrinal development is driven by a number of factors, including:

- New missions that the Party assigns to the PLA⁷⁹
- China's global threat perception
- Major world events
- Foreign doctrinal developments
- Foreign military operations.⁸⁰

The PLA's training goals are evolving

Operational aspirations can only be turned into fielded capabilities through effective training. PLA publications identify a number of training-related problems that they hope to address. Current training-related goals include the following:

- **Making training more mission focused.** The PLA wants its personnel to train as they would fight – in other words, to train for the specific wartime operations that their unit would most likely be tasked to carry out.

- **Making training more realistic.** The PLA also wants its personnel to train the way they would fight. PLA publications complain that current training too often resembles “dress rehearsals” and “warm-ups” for actual combat operations.⁸⁵ “Realistic war training” includes using simulators, operating on unfamiliar terrain or in poor weather conditions, and making unannounced changes to training plans and conditions to see how quickly units adapt.



PLA commando training: "Encircling and annihilating the enemy"

- **Improving personnel’s ability to operate under conditions of “informatized warfare.”** This includes both the ability to use high-tech equipment, and the ability to counter situations of “information blindness,” such as electromagnetic jamming.

What is “informatization”?

U.S. personnel who have taken part in mil-mil exchanges report that PLA leaders frequently use the term “informatization” during discussions of PLA modernization. Roughly speaking, it refers to the introduction of information technology (IT) to various aspects of military operations.⁸⁶ The PLA expects to fight “informatized wars” in the future that will:

- Employ IT-heavy weapons and equipment.
- Use “networked” battlespaces that encompass the electromagnetic spectrum, computer networks, and outer space.
- Emphasize non-contact and nonlinear operations as well as systems confrontation (rather than physical confrontation).
- Make information dominance a key aspect of military success.⁸⁷

- **Improving the PLA’s joint operations capabilities.** The PLA emphasizes the need for training to reflect a transition from “coordinated joint operations,” which bring together multiple services into a single operation but then allow each service to operate in a relatively insulated manner, to “integrated joint operations” that more closely resemble the American concept of jointness.⁸⁸

VI: Decision-making

PLA decision-making principles and processes mirror those of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In CCP decision-making, leadership is collective and decisions are based on broad agreement. This means that although certain individuals have a great deal of influence, *no one has the authority to single-handedly make decisions.*

Readers should note that what we know about the PLA's decision-making ideals comes entirely from what the PLA writes or says about itself. *It is not possible to know for certain how closely the PLA abides by these ideals in actual situations.*

Command officers share leadership with political officers

Each unit at the company level and above has a political officer in addition to its military commander. *The political officer and military commander are considered co-equals and share joint leadership over the unit. They jointly issue orders, give directions to lower levels, and oversee all of the unit's daily work.*⁸⁹ In practice, their responsibilities are divided – the commander usually oversees operational tasks while the political officer carries out “political work” tasks – but they maintain equal authority.

Political officers are not simply “babysitters.” They are professional military officers who are trained by the PLA to carry out Party tasks. Many political officers begin their careers with a command billet, such as a platoon or company commander, and they continue to receive command training throughout their careers.⁹⁰

What is political work?

Political work is more than just developing and disseminating Party propaganda. The purpose of PLA “political work” is to implement not only the Party's political objectives but also a number of operational and administrative tasks. Political work includes:

- Managing matters that affect PLA personnel, such as officer promotion and quality-of-life issues
- Conducting CCP activities among Party members in the PLA
- Coordinating relations between the PLA and the Chinese people
- Overseeing aspects of individual training, unit training, morale-building, and indoctrination
- Co-opting, coercing, or undermining opposing forces in wartime.⁹¹

Much of what the PLA calls “political work” plays a central role in other militaries. For instance, the U.S. Army Human Resources Command manages the personnel and human resources systems for Army officers, a function considered “political work” in the PLA. Other “political work” functions carried out in most or all militaries include public relations, training in military values and ethics, and counter-intelligence.⁹²

Decisions are made by Party committees, not by individuals

Although the commander and political officer share leadership over the unit, during peacetime they are not authorized to make decisions on their own. Rather, *all major decisions in PLA units are made by the unit's Party committee.*⁹⁴ Every military unit down to the company level has a Party committee or Party branch; a unit's political officer and unit commander usually serve as its Party secretary and deputy secretary respectively, and the committee also includes the heads of the unit's four functional departments (i.e., the chief of the staff or "headquarters" department, chief of the political department, chief logistics officer, and chief armaments officer). Party committees meet frequently and are responsible for all major decisions, including those in such areas as:

- Operations and training
- Officer evaluation, selection, and staffing
- Expenditure of funds
- Personnel management.⁹⁵

Decisions are made collectively and are based on consensus

At all levels of the PLA, decisions are reached through group discussions. Decision-making is expected to follow certain principles, including the following:

- *All* members of a unit Party committee are considered equal in status, even the Party secretary and deputy secretary.⁹⁶
- Decisions reflect the agreement of all members of the committee, not a single leader imposing his will.
- Decisions incorporate ideas and opinions from *all* affected parties. Though the Party committee has the final say, it gathers input from all members of a military unit, not just committee members.⁹⁷

Once a decision has been reached, the debate ends and all members of the unit are expected to abide by that decision.⁹⁸

PLA decision-making principles have operational implications

PLA decision-making bodies spend a great deal of time holding meetings, discussing and debating policy options, and deciding on courses of action. As a result:

- Decision-making tends to be slow.
- There is little individual accountability.
- Decision-making is difficult during times of crisis, when there is a demand for rapid action, information is scarce, and the stakes are high.⁹⁹

Would dual leadership and the Party committee system paralyze wartime decision-making?

Probably not. There are shortcomings associated with these systems that cannot be ignored. However, when an immediate tactical decision is required during combat, PLA regulations state that a commander may act on his own to carry out existing plans without establishing a consensus in the Party Committee or obtaining agreement from the political officer. Afterward, however, he is required to justify his decisions to the Party committee.⁹³

There are three main sources of influence in the PLA

Although formal PLA decision-making processes are structured so that no individual PLA member can make unilateral decisions, some individuals have a greater ability to *influence* decisions than others. This influence comes primarily from three sources:

- ***Position in the PLA:*** An officer holds a certain amount of authority based on the responsibilities of his billet.
- ***Position in the Party:*** Because key decisions are made in Party meetings, an officer's position within the Chinese Communist Party is a source of influence and authority.
- ***Informal networks:*** Like all members of Chinese society, PLA personnel can wield influence and be influenced through informal networks known as *guanxi* – literally, “connections” or “relationships.” The most influential CCP and PLA leaders are those who have been able to build extensive informal networks and place “friends” within organizations at many levels.¹⁰⁰

Of course, personal connections play a role in all militaries, but usually because people in authority feel secure surrounding themselves with those they know and trust. In China, and the PLA in particular, there is a much stronger emphasis on the obligations that people have to each other simply because they have a particular relationship or share a certain background. PLA *guanxi* networks include those that link:

- Officers who entered the PLA in the same province or region¹⁰¹
- Officers who attended the same institutions of professional military education¹⁰²
- Officers whose early service was in particular corps or group armies¹⁰³
- Officers from particular “generations” or age cohorts¹⁰⁴
- Commanders and their former subordinates.¹⁰⁵

Informal networks are largely invisible to outsiders. When interacting with the PLA, U.S. personnel should be mindful that a person's PLA and Party status do not always reflect that person's actual authority. *Guanxi* allows people to wield authority that may not be reflected in their formal titles.

VII: Interacting with the PLA

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in U.S.–China mil-mil activities, including delegations, base visits, joint exercises, and skills competitions. This section highlights some of the often frustrating issues that American military personnel confront when visiting China.

U.S.-China mil-mil relations: a brief overview

The U.S.-China military-to-military relationship has been volatile since bilateral relations were formally established between the two countries in 1979:

- Mil-mil relations are often the first to be cut off, and the last to be reestablished, when the political relationship sours.
- Mil-mil relations are the only element in the bilateral relationship that has undergone periods of complete suspension.

As a result, the United States and China go through periods of “courting” one another to resume or deepen military-to-military relations. Often such a period follows an incident that has led one side to cut off military contacts. Such incidents include:

- The Tiananmen Square massacre, 1989
- The PLA’s military exercises in the Taiwan Strait, 1995-96
- The U.S. military’s accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the war in Kosovo, 1999
- The collision of an American EP-3 surveillance aircraft and Chinese F-8 fighter plane in the South China Sea, 2001
- The U.S. sales of Patriot III missiles, Apache helicopters, and parts for F-16 jet fighters to Taiwan, 2008.

What does the PLA want from military-to-military interactions?

It is important to recognize that Chinese and U.S. objectives for mil-mil exchanges are not always the same. China’s goals for exchanges with the United States include the following.

Goal #1: Serve the diplomatic interests of the Chinese Communist Party

The Party sees mil-mil exchanges as an extension of the political relationship. “Political diplomacy” and “military diplomacy” are, in the Party’s eyes, different ways to reach the same goals.¹⁰⁶ As a result, PLA personnel find it difficult to “put politics aside” in conversations with their American counterparts.¹⁰⁷ PLA officers often make statements about China’s larger political and strategic goals, and ask questions about America’s goals, in ways that may seem strange to American visitors.¹⁰⁸

The Chinese see the mil-mil relationship as a symbol of the overall health of U.S.–China relations. Mil-mil relations with China are always captive to the broader political relationship, and in recent decades they have often been negatively affected by downturns in that relationship. When the overall relationship is troubled, it is difficult to agree on military cooperation.¹⁰⁹

If the Party deems mil-mil exchanges important, the PLA must carry them out whether or not it wants to. However, the PLA can drag its feet and make exchanges very difficult if it finds certain tasks unpleasant, and agreements in principle may not lead to action on the ground.¹¹⁰

Goal #2: Improve China’s image within the U.S. government and military

PLA leaders want mil-mil exchanges to help change “faulty” views about China’s military intentions and capabilities and to present a positive image of the PLA.¹¹¹



United States Marine Corps Commandant James Conway views a Chinese naval vessel in Zhanjiang, China, April 2008.

Goal #3: Gather information on the U.S. military

The PLA sees military exchanges as an opportunity to learn about aspects of U.S. military technology, doctrine, and organization that may be worth adopting.

- The PLA is very interested in how the U.S. military organizes and manages people. For instance, it has recently shown interest in learning about the role of NCOs in the U.S. military.¹¹²
- The PLA is also very interested in U.S. defense doctrines and manuals, and in U.S. operational practices in general.¹¹³

How do PLA personnel behave during mil-mil exchanges?

U.S. military personnel who have had a great deal of contact with the PLA have noted certain patterns in how PLA personnel plan and carry out mil-mil exchanges, interact with American visitors, and negotiate with Americans.

Planning and carrying out mil-mil exchanges

When American military delegations visit China, the PLA organizes their visits in ways that ensure that the Chinese side retains the initiative at all times.

The PLA personnel with whom U.S. visitors have the most direct contact are specialized “handlers,” not officers from operational units. U.S. personnel work most closely with members of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Ministry of National Defense (MND).¹¹⁴ These officers are carefully vetted by the Party, and most are intelligence

officers who are considered politically “reliable,” have significant foreign experience, and speak English well.¹¹⁵ Some U.S. personnel report that these officers appear to have little experience in operational units and little knowledge of the PLA outside their own responsibilities, and that they seem most concerned with keeping U.S. and Chinese operational personnel at arm’s length from one another.¹¹⁶

The PLA often withholds itineraries or changes them at the last minute. Some U.S. delegations do not know which cities and bases they will visit or whom they will meet until they arrive in Beijing.¹¹⁷ Also, PLA hosts often make major changes to itineraries with no advance notice or explanation. Some Americans believe that this behavior is meant to keep U.S. personnel off balance and overly dependent on their hosts.¹¹⁸

Access to PLA units and personnel is tightly controlled. The PLA often provides only a small window into operational units. It usually limits U.S. visitors’ access to:

- PLA weapons and equipment
- Younger officers and enlisted personnel.



A U.S. Air Force major exchanges salutes with a Chinese Army senior captain, Chengdu, May 2008.

Many of the PLA facilities that U.S. visitors see are “showcases.” The PLA tends to bring visiting delegations to a small number of designated “showcase units.”¹¹⁹ Most other bases are off-limits to foreigners, and U.S. military personnel are often taken to the same units repeatedly.¹²⁰

The PLA sends messages to U.S. delegations by canceling or rescheduling meetings. For the PLA, meetings with powerful individuals have a high symbolic value, regardless of what is discussed or achieved. Therefore, when the PLA changes the itinerary to cancel or reschedule important meetings, it is often meant to send a message of dissatisfaction.¹²¹ However, U.S. personnel often miss these signals, unaware that they are meant as snubs.¹²²

Interacting with American visitors

The Chinese take seriously their responsibilities as hosts. U.S. personnel visiting China are often impressed by the “charm offensive” conducted by their PLA counterparts. Delegations are treated to extravagant banquets, shows, and visits to Chinese cultural sites. These activities can make for an enjoyable trip, but can also give the visitor a false sense that the exchange has been successful and that substantial things have been achieved. As one U.S. military attaché puts it, mil-mil exchanges can be “like Chinese food: it looks great, it tastes great, but an hour later you’re hungry again. People feel good about their visit, and only later say ‘Hey, we didn’t really get anything there!’”¹²³

The PLA speaks with one voice. Chinese officers almost always adhere closely to a



Admiral Timothy Keating, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, meets in Beijing with Central Military Commission Vice Chairman Guo Boxiong, May 2007.

central message, and use identical rhetoric.¹²⁴ Chinese counterparts often seem focused on gathering the maximum amount of information from U.S. visitors in exchange for the minimum amount of useful information about the PLA. This can be frustrating for American visitors, as it is difficult to have a frank exchange of views with Chinese officials who give “canned” presentations and stick to their “talking points.”¹²⁵

Some PLA officers are more candid in certain circumstances. Some

Americans have encountered PLA officers who were unusually candid and informative. This has been particularly noted during:

- One-on-one conversations held outside formal meetings, such as during tea breaks or meals.¹²⁶ The language barrier between U.S. and Chinese personnel may limit the opportunities to hold such conversations, but they are often worthwhile.
- Informal talks with officers at an early or late stage in their careers.¹²⁷ Many younger officers and officers close to retirement seem to believe they have “less to lose” by departing from the official line in their casual chats with foreigners.¹²⁸
- Visits to lower-ranking institutions far from Beijing or Military Region headquarters, or meetings with “uniformed academics” at PLA academies.¹²⁹

PLA officers do not like confrontation or delivering “bad news.” PLA officers very seldom say “no” to their guests’ requests, but they do have a set of phrases that essentially mean “no.” Though these phrases make it sound as though the issue is still unresolved, they usually indicate that the Chinese have already made up their minds, and the answer will not change.¹³⁰ Often the person delivering this message does not have the authority to change it.

How PLA members say “no”

“It is not convenient.” Example: “It is not convenient for you to meet with the Military Region commander today.”

“It is not clear” or **“I cannot say for certain.”** Example: “I cannot say for certain whether your offer will be acceptable to Director Zhang, but I will ask him.”

“We are embarrassed.” Example: “We cannot show you that base because we are embarrassed about its poor condition.”

Negotiating With Americans

Chinese negotiators often try to reach agreement on basic principles before they will discuss specific issues. These principles serve as guidelines and constraints for negotiation on individual issues. Some observe that the Chinese appear frustrated with

Americans' preference for detailed agreements to be executed to the letter. The Chinese tend to be more focused on the "spirit" of the agreement.¹³¹

Chinese negotiators avoid making incremental concessions. The Chinese do not like to follow the American style of negotiation, in which each side offers a series of piecemeal concessions. The Chinese usually come to the table with a "hard position," and attempt to persuade the other side that this position is correct.¹³² They believe that Americans always offer concessions, and their strategy is to wait and see how much ground the U.S. will give up before reaching its bottom line. When they judge that American concessions have been exhausted, they finally put forth a compromise position, often just before the deadline for agreement arrives.¹³³

PLA negotiators place great importance on the history of a negotiation. Americans are often impressed with the way PLA negotiators "keep book." The Chinese take careful note of what the Americans say, have a strong sense of the history of a negotiation, and can bring up tiny details of previous meetings.¹³⁴ They immediately point out when U.S. positions contradict statements that U.S. officials made in earlier exchanges.¹³⁵



Chinese and U.S. marines compete in a skills contest in Zhanjiang, November 2006

The Chinese appear prepared to "wait out" their foreign counterparts. The Chinese actively promote the view that they tend to think in the long term, have infinite patience, and are not under as much pressure to reach agreement as the Americans.¹³⁶ This image is not always true – Chinese negotiators are under their own pressures and may make concessions in the end rather than let an agreement slip away. Intervention by senior leaders late in the game is a sign that they are ready to reach final agreement.¹³⁷

Who's in charge?

- Often only the senior officer will speak during a formal presentation.
- The officer with the best English is often the least knowledgeable about PLA operations; his primary role is to act as a liaison with foreigners.
- Knowing officers' grades can help you determine their relative authority.
- It is useful to pay attention to how people in the room treat one another. In certain circumstances, other officers may defer to an individual with strong personal connections.

The real decision-makers are often not at the negotiating table. The officers who are at the table often have little personal authority. American offers often have to be "taken back" to senior leaders in Beijing.¹³⁸ This is similar in effect to a car dealer having to discuss an offer with his manager before agreeing – he can secure a commitment from the customer but is not authorized to reciprocate.

Negotiations continue even after an agreement is reached. Even after an agreement is finally signed, the Chinese often continue to push for a better deal.¹³⁹ They see negotiation not as an event with a clear end point, but as an open-ended process. They are not reluctant to reopen matters that appear settled or to push for agreements to be interpreted in ways that are favorable to them.¹⁴⁰

What should U.S. personnel do?

Prepare well. Spend time, as the Chinese do, studying the history of the relationship and the other side's negotiating tactics. Develop a common view of what the United States wants to achieve from this interaction.

Be clear with the PLA about U.S. bottom lines. Be upfront about what the U.S. feels must be achieved for the exchange to be considered successful, and make sure all delegation members speak from the same page about these objectives.

Be patient and persistent. Avoid placing arbitrary deadlines on the completion of negotiations. Expect frustrations and delays, and be prepared to handle them.

Take advantage of opportunities for informal discussions. Pursue one-on-one discussions with Chinese personnel during breaks in the formal program, such as meals or tea breaks. Try to avoid "sitting at the American table" or otherwise separating yourself from your Chinese counterparts on these occasions, thereby missing terrific opportunities to learn about their lives and views.

Send signals of dissatisfaction that the Chinese will understand. Be aware that by canceling meetings and changing the schedule, the Chinese may be signaling dissatisfaction with the U.S. handling of the relationship. Be prepared to send back similar signals, by canceling or shortening visits or restricting Chinese access to high-ranking U.S. personnel. Recent experience shows that such signals can be effective.

Don't be afraid to say "no." Be prepared to return from China with few or no tangible achievements. Avoid conceding too much just to reach an agreement.

Effective and Ineffective Signals

Members of the U.S. military who have dealt with the PLA point out that PLA counterparts place more importance on *whom* they meet with than on *what* is discussed. For example, one former attaché notes, "If they meet with the Secretary of Defense and he tells them the U.S. isn't happy about something, they'll just say 'we met with the Secretary!' and miss the message."¹⁴¹

Denying the PLA access to top U.S. personnel can send a much stronger signal of dissatisfaction. One way to achieve this is to postpone or cancel visits by top military commanders or defense officials to China until preliminary agreements are reached on a productive agenda.¹⁴²

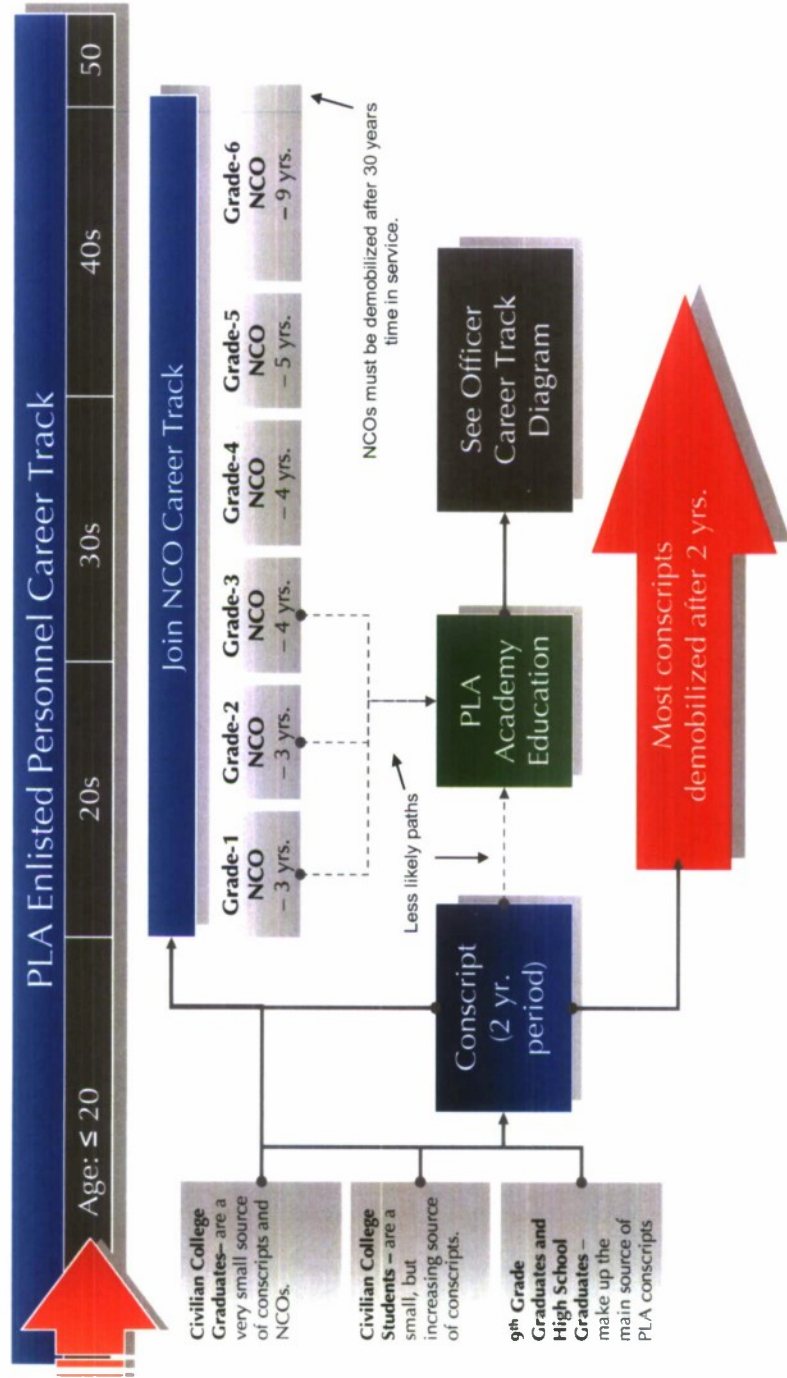
Cultivate long-term relationships, but don't expect too much. It is in the U.S. interest to identify and form friendly ties with PLA officers who appear likely to rise to important positions. These ties can be useful during stable periods in the U.S.–China relationship. However, do not expect that these ties will be enough to relieve tensions in times of crisis.

Be familiar with basic principles of Chinese professional etiquette. Chinese culture includes many customs dictating how hosts and guests should interact, and the PLA is no exception. PLA hosts will not expect their American guests to be familiar with the intricacies of Chinese social interaction, but displaying some understanding of these customs will impress the Chinese and make exchanges go more smoothly.

A Few Tips

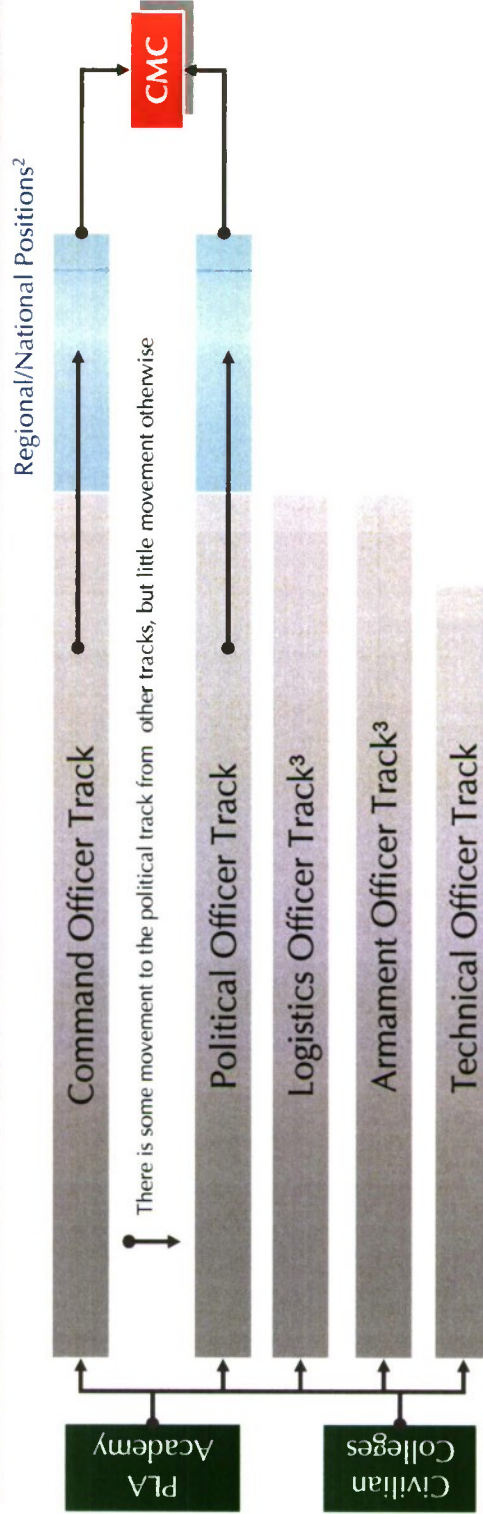
- Bring many business cards; the Chinese place great emphasis on exchanging cards.
- Expect to receive small gifts, and consider bringing gifts in return (such as plaques, souvenirs of your branch or service, or coins from your home state).
- Learn and use appropriate titles for your hosts (e.g., “Division Leader Wu”).
- Remember that PLA personnel are usually strongly patriotic and supportive of the Party. Avoid harshly criticizing China or the Party, or asking “what they *really* think” about the Chinese government.
- Expect to be asked what seem like uncomfortably personal questions, such as how much you earn or what your religious or political affiliations are. The Chinese do not consider such questions rude, and may be asking them out of genuine curiosity. You may sidestep these questions without insulting them.
- When Chinese hosts invite you to a banquet or other event, be sure to attend, or you will risk insulting them.
- At a banquet or other seated event, Chinese hosts often carefully design a seating plan; do not seat yourself until your host indicates where you should be.
- Chinese banquets often include multiple toasts with Chinese alcohol; this is not an attempt to loosen you up, and your hosts will drink as much as you do. However, if you don't want to drink, be sure to prepare a convincing excuse, such as a medical condition. It is considered rude to drink alcohol (other than beer) when not making or participating in a toast.
- Try at least a small bite of every dish your hosts offer you. Do not “clean your plate,” as your hosts may take this as a sign that they have not fed you well enough. Leave some food on your plate when you are finished. Also, if rice is served, do not eat large amounts; this is a sign that the hosts did not serve enough good dishes and you had to fill up on rice.
- If you are comfortable using chopsticks, do so – your hosts will be impressed that you have mastered this “Chinese skill.” However, do not leave the chopsticks sticking out of a rice bowl; the Chinese consider this bad luck.

APPENDIX 1: ENLISTED PERSONNEL CAREER PATHS



APPENDIX 2: OFFICER CAREER PATHS

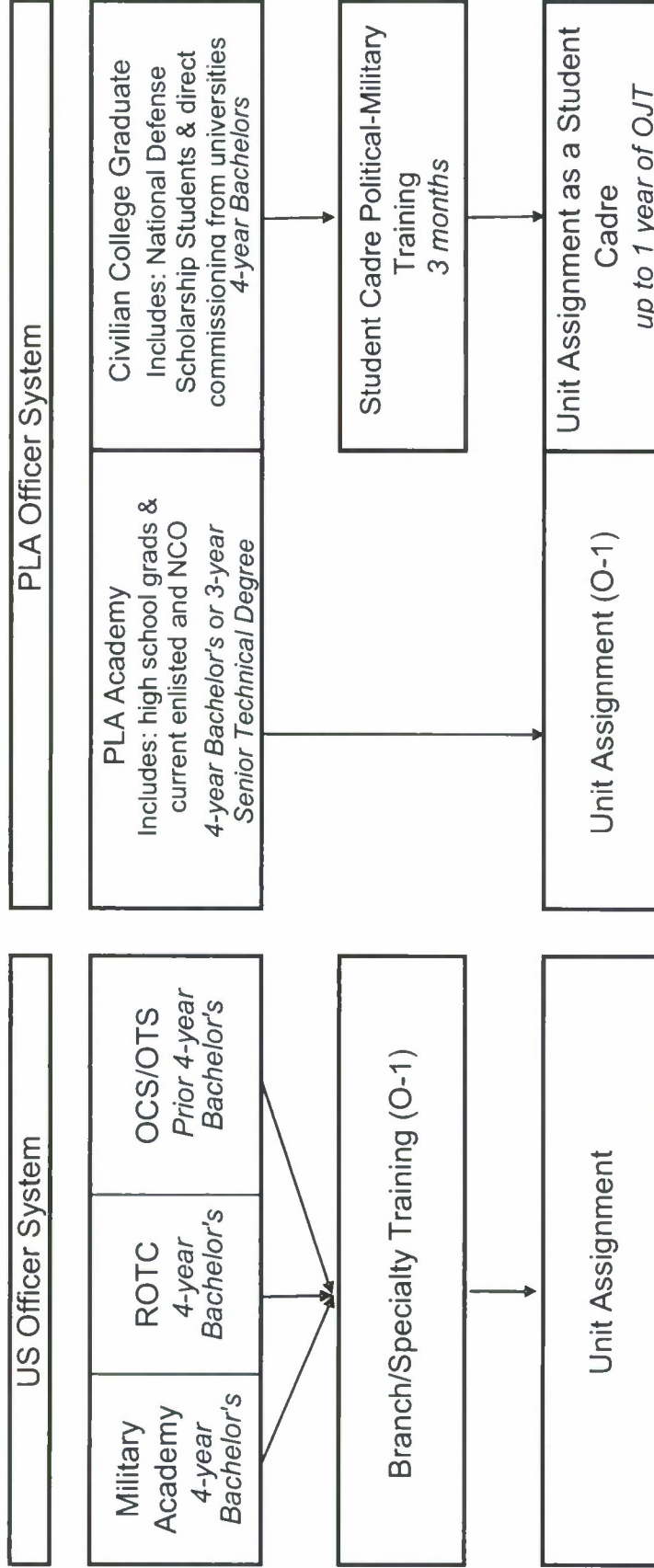
PLA Officer Career Track									
Age	20s		30s		40s		50s		60s+
Grade	Platoon	Company	Battalion	Regiment	Division	Army ¹	Military Region	CMC	



Notes:

1. The PLA term *Jun* can be translated as either "army" or "corps."
2. When a PLA officer reaches a position at the grade level of deputy MR leader or above, he may begin to move geographically, away from the unit in which he has served his entire career.
3. Logistics and armaments officers tend not to go above a grade of "army leader."

APPENDIX 3: COMPARISON OF US & PLA PATHS TO COMMISSIONING AND FIRST ASSIGNMENTS



APPENDIX 4: PLA GRADES AND RANKS

PLA Grades, Ranks, Insignia, and Ribbons					
Grade #	Ret. Age	Grade	Primary Rank/ Secondary Rank	Insignia	Rows of Ribbons
1	N/A	CMC Vice Chairman	N/A or Gen		7
2	70	CMC Member	Gen		
3	65	MR Leader	Gen/Lt Gen		6
4	63	MR Deputy Leader	Lt Gen/Maj Gen		
5	55	Army Leader	Maj Gen/Lt Gen		5
6	55	Army Deputy Leader	Maj Gen/Sr Col		
7	50	Division Leader	Sr Col/Maj Gen		4
8	50	Division Deputy Leader	Col/Sr Col		
9	45	Regiment Leader	Col/Lt Col		3
10	45	Regiment Deputy Leader	Lt Col/Maj		
11	40	Battalion Leader	Maj/Lt Col		2
12	40	Battalion Deputy Leader	Capt/Maj		
13	35	Company Leader	Capt/1 st Lt		1
14	35	Company Deputy Leader	1 st Lt/Capt		
15	30	Platoon Leader	2 nd Lt/1 st Lt		

APPENDIX 5: SUGGESTED FURTHER READINGS

The PLA's personnel, organizational structure, and recent changes

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⁴ *The Military Balance 2008*.

⁵ Thomas J. Bickford and Frederic Vellucci, *The Chinese People’s Armed Police: Organization, Roles, and Missions*, CNA Research Memorandum D0018781.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2008), pp. viii, 5.

⁶ *China’s National Defense in 2006* and *China’s National Defense in 2004*.

⁷ “Military Service Law of the People’s Republic of China,” 30 Dec 1998.

⁸ “China’s National Defense in 2004.”

⁹ *China’s National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2009), IX: “National Defense Reserve Buildup.” The U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense estimated the militia forces at between 10 and 15 million in 2008; *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008), p. 5.

¹⁰ Kenneth Allen, “Introduction to the PLA’s Administrative and Operational Structure,” in *The People’s Liberation Army as Organization: Reference Volume v1.0*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang (Arlington, VA: Rand, 2002), p. 39.

¹¹ Xinhua, “Internal Service Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” 1 Apr 2002, Chapter 2, Article 12.

¹² Xinhua, “Internal Service Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army,” 1 Apr 2002. Chapter 2, Article 12.

¹³ See Kenneth Allen and James Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Enlisted Forces*, CNA Research Memorandum D0014253.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2006), p. 97-108.

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¹⁷ PLA numbers from *The Military Balance 2008*; Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 20. U.S. numbers are as of

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¹⁹ Qin Lichun and Deng Zhiqiang, “This Life has a Reason to Make Us All March Together,” *Kongjun Bao*, 14 Feb 2006, p. 3.

²⁰ Allen and Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s Enlisted Forces*, p. 53.

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²² Su Ruozhou, “Major Reform in Our Army’s Service System – Yang Zhiqi, director of the Military Affairs Department of General Staff Headquarters, Answers Reporters’ Questions on Military Service Regulations,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 13 Jul 1999, p. 2.

²³ *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008*, p. 46; Blasko, p. 52.

²⁴ Jiang Heping and Su Ruozhou, “Training and Recruitment for Officer Billets to be Converted to NCO Duties Next Year,” *Jiefangjun Bao*, 23 Dec 2004, p. 1.

²⁵ Interviews #1, 9, 10, 12, 15.

²⁶ Interview #9.

²⁷ Interviews #1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15.

²⁸ *2006 Uniformed Services Almanac* (Falls Church, VA: Uniformed Services Almanac, Inc, 2006), p. 251.

²⁹ Allen and Bellacqua, p. 35; Lei Yuanshen, “Formal Presentation at CISS-IDA-CNA Workshop at CISS,” Beijing, 27 Mar 2006.

³⁰ Prior to 1982, many PLA officers had no higher education at all, due partly to the fact that all China’s educational institutions – military and civilian – had been shut down for nearly a decade during the Cultural Revolution. For the number of PLA academies, see Chen Liangyu, Sun Wei, Lu Li, *Education and Management of Cadets at Military Schools (junxiao xueyu jiaoyu yu guanli; 军校学员教育与管理)* (Beijing, National Defense University Press, December 2003), p. 20. For a detailed study of China’s professional military education (PME) system, see James Bellacqua, Malia K. DuMont, Kristen Gunness, David M. Finkelstein, and Maryanne Kivlehan-Wise, *Professional Military Education in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: An Institutional Overview, Volume 1*, CNA Research Memorandum D0012462.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: The CNA Corporation, 2005).

³¹ “PLA Rank Regulations” (*zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junguan jun xian tiaoli; 中国人民解放军军官军衔条例*), at http://www.gov.cn/banshi/gm/content_63642.htm.

³² “Technical officers” may not be able to progress past the two-star level; traditionally these positions have also been less desirable, but they may take on a higher status with the growing PLA emphasis on military modernization. Elizabeth Hague, “PLA Career Progressions and Policies,” in Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner, eds., *The ‘People’ in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China’s Military* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), p. 264. See also Blasko, p. 55.

³³ Gong Yide, Xu Jiangrui and Jiang Hongjun, *PLA Enlisted Force Handbook (zhongguo renmin jiefangjun shibing shouce; 中国人民解放军士兵手册)*, Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 1999, p. 123; Xinhua, “Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on the Management of NCOs,” 20 Jan 2001.

- ³⁴ See, e.g., Allen and Bellacqua, p. 120; interview #10.
- ³⁵ *Kongjun Bao*, "Adjusting Wages, Subsidies, and Retirement Assistance," 1 Jan 2004, p. 2.
- ³⁶ Xinhua, "Internal Service Regulations of the Chinese People's Liberation Army," 1 Apr 2002.
- ³⁷ Allen and Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Enlisted Forces*, pp. 119-123.
- ³⁸ Allen and Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Enlisted Forces*, pp. 127-128.
- ³⁹ Su Yincheng and Xu Jinzhang, "Chinese Military Establishes New Type of Logistical Support System," Xinhua, 24 Jul 2002.
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- ⁴¹ *Kongjun Bao*, 26 April 2005, p. 2.
- ⁴² *Huojianbing Bao*, 23 May 2006, p. 2.
- ⁴³ The figure for China, 2.3 million, comes from *China's National Defense in 2006*. All other figures from *The Military Balance 2008*.
- ⁴⁴ *The Military Balance 2008*.
- ⁴⁵ *Small Arms Survey 2007: Guns and the City* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 47.
- ⁴⁶ On peacetime civilian support for the PLA, see, e.g., "PLA Guizhou MD Has Military, Civilian Forces Jointly Maintain Arms," *Zhongguo Guofang Bao*, 30 Oct 2008; Collins Alt, *The PLA Logistics System & Armaments System: Organizations, Roles, and Missions*, CNA Research Memorandum D0018111.A1/Final (Alexandria, VA: Aug 2008), p. 26. On wartime support, see Dean Cheng, *Chinese Approaches to Mobilization: An Open Source Exploitation*, CNA Research Memorandum D0010853.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, Oct 2004), p. 74.
- ⁴⁷ Harlan Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Military, 1945-1981* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982), p. 146.
- ⁴⁸ Guo Nei, "PLA Downsizes Its Forces by 200,000," *China Daily*, 10 January 2006.
- ⁴⁹ Shang Chunming, "A Review of New Age Military Academy Training and a Preview of Coming Reform and Development," *Zhongguo Junshi Kexue*, 20 August 1999.
- ⁵⁰ "PRC Issues Decision on Training Military Cadres at Universities," *Xinhua*, 22 June 2000.
- ⁵¹ Cheng Sijin, "The Challenge of Conscription in an Era of Social Change," *Civil-Military Relations in Today's China: Swimming in a New Sea* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), pp. 237-239.
- ⁵² *Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008), p. 46.
- ⁵³ Allen and Bellacqua, *Overview of the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Enlisted Forces*, pp. 6-7.
- ⁵⁴ Interviews #3, 10; "JFJB: PLA Must Stress 'Inheritance, Innovation,' Resolve 'Contradictions,'" *Jiefangjun Bao*, 13 May 2008, p. 6; *Huojianbing Bao*, April 4, 2006, pg. 2.

⁵⁵ Gao Jianguo, "JFJB: PLA Must Build Image To Promote 'Soft Power' During 'PLA Transformation,'" *Jiefangjun Bao*, 24 Jul 2008, p. 6.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Rosalie Chen, "China Perceives America: perspectives of international relations experts," *Journal of Contemporary China* 12:35 (2003), p. 286; Yong Deng, "Hegemon on the Offensive: Chinese perspectives on American global strategy," *Political Science Quarterly* 116:3 (2001).

⁵⁷ Hu Jintao, "Understand the New Historic Missions of our Military in the New Period of the New Century" (*Renqing Xinshiji Xinjieduan Wojun Lishi Shiming*; 认清新世纪新阶段我军历史使命), <http://gfjy.jiangxi.gov.cn/yil.asp?idid=11349.htm>.

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⁵⁹ William W. Whitson, *The Chinese High Command: A History of Communist Military Politics, 1927-71* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), p. 18.

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⁶⁸ Zhou Xiaoxian and Tian Wenming (eds.), *Guidebook for Unit Construction under High-Tech Conditions*, (*gaojishu tiaojian xia budui jianshe shiyong zhinan*), Volume 2 (Hai Chao Publishing House, 2002), p. 760.

⁶⁹ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 160.

⁷⁰ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, p. 159.

⁷¹ *PLA Air Force Enlisted Forces Handbook*, pp. 105-106.

⁷² “Analysis: PLA Focus on ‘Fighting Spirit’ Concept Reflects Concerns,” *Open Source Center Analysis*, December 20, 2007.

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⁷⁴ Interviews #1, 7. See also Arthur Ding, *U.S.-China Ties: Seeking Common Ground Amid Mutual Suspicion*, RSIS Commentaries, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University (Singapore: 27 November 2007), p.2. Ding, p. 2.

⁷⁵ This point is repeated in numerous PLA writings; see, e.g., Luo Yuan, “China to Increase Military Transparency,” *China Daily*, 25 October 2007, and Xu Jia, “Issues of Military Transparency,” *China Daily Online*, 1 Aug 2008.

⁷⁶ See, e.g., *Military Power of the People’s Republic of China 2008*. For details on the PRC’s extensive secrecy laws, see “Law of the People’s Republic of China on Guarding State Secrets,” selected portions available at <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/newLaws/protectSecretsENG.php>; “Regulations of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army on the Guarding of Secrets.”

⁷⁷ Kevin Pollpeter, *U.S.-China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship* (Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2004), pp. xiv, 55; Interviews #1, 2, 7, 9; Kurt Campbell and Richard Weitz, “The Limits of U.S.-China Military Cooperation: Lessons from 1995-1999,” *The Washington Quarterly* 29:1 (Winter 2005-06), p. 175.

⁷⁸ Maryanne Kivlehan, *Doctrinal Change in the Chinese People’s Liberation Army: Institutions, Processes, and Influences*, CNA Research Memorandum D0008391.A2/Final (Alexandria, VA: CNA, August 2003), pp. 12-13.

⁷⁹ For an overview of the most recent missions with which the PRC government has tasked the PLA, see Hartnett, “Toward a Globally Focused Chinese Military.”

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⁸⁴ See, e.g., Luo Yuan and Zhu Bian, *Debates on the military – a commentary on aspects of the Iraq War (taubing lunzhan – yilake zhanzheng dianping; 谈兵论战 – 伊拉克战争点评)* (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2003).

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¹⁰⁷ Interview #6.

¹⁰⁸ Interviews #7, 8.

¹⁰⁹ Finkelstein and Unangst, p. 50.

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¹¹² Interviews # 9, 10, 12, 14, 15.

¹¹³ Campbell and Weitz, p. 173.

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- ¹¹⁹ Interviews #3, 9, and 10.
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- ¹²¹ Solomon, p. 108.
- ¹²² Interview #3.
- ¹²³ Interview #4.
- ¹²⁴ Solomon, p. 49.
- ¹²⁵ Interviews #1, 8, and 13.
- ¹²⁶ Interviews #8, 9, and 10.
- ¹²⁷ Interviews #3 and 8.
- ¹²⁸ Interviews #3, 5.
- ¹²⁹ Interviews #1 and 2.
- ¹³⁰ Interview #2.
- ¹³¹ Wilhelm, p. 14.
- ¹³² Wilhelm, p. 16.
- ¹³³ Solomon, p. 50.
- ¹³⁴ Interview #6.
- ¹³⁵ Interview #3; Solomon, p. 172.
- ¹³⁶ Solomon,, p. 165.
- ¹³⁷ Solomon, p. 7.
- ¹³⁸ Interview #5.
- ¹³⁹ Interviews #3 and 6.
- ¹⁴⁰ Wilhelm, pp. 20-21, 48, 62-63; Solomon, p. 7; interview #6.
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- ¹⁴² Interview #1.

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