Shifts in Warfare and Party Unity

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Explaining China's Changes in Military Strategy

Since 1949, China has adopted nine national military strategies. Those issued in 1956, 1980, and 1993 represent major changes in Chinese strategy. Each sought to transform the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to wage war in a new way, involving changes to operational doctrine, force structure, and training. When, why, and how has China pursued major change in its military strategy?

The three major changes in China's military strategy, or what the PLA calls "strategic guidelines," present a series of puzzles. The adoption of the 1956 strategic guideline is puzzling because China chose a path that contrasted strongly with the approach of its principal ally, the Soviet Union, which it may have sought to emulate. China also adopted this new strategy in the absence of an immediate and pressing threat to its security. The 1980 strategy is puzzling for the opposite reason: Beijing had faced a clear threat from Moscow since 1969, but delayed formulating a new strategy to address this threat for more than a decade. The 1993 strategic guideline is puzzling because it was adopted when Chinese leaders viewed their country's regional security environment as the least threatening since 1949. Yet this strategy was arguably the most radical in terms of departing from past practices.

Explaining when, why, and how China has pursued major change in its military strategy is important for several reasons. Theoretically, the variation in China's approach to military strategy offers a rich set of cases with which to expand the literature on military doctrine and innovation.[1] The majority of scholarship has examined a relatively limited number of cases, primarily ad-

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1. Adam Grissom, "The Future of Military Innovation Studies," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (October 2006), pp. 905–934, doi:10.1080/01402390600901067.

vanced Western militaries in democratic societies and especially the United States and Britain.[2] Apart from Japan and the Soviet Union, non-Western and socialist states have received little attention.[3] Empirically, no systematic examination of change in China's military strategy since 1949 exists. Instead, scholars have studied China's military strategy either as part of broader surveys of the PLA at different periods in its history or in chapters and articles that document contemporaneous changes.[4] Moreover, these works do not examine China's military strategy through the PLA's own concept of the strategic guideline.

To explain when, why, and how China has pursued major change in its military strategy, this article presents a two-step approach. The first step concerns the motivation for changing strategy. Extending arguments that highlight the role of external sources of military change such as immediate threats, I argue that one reason to pursue strategic change has been overlooked. This reason is a significant shift in the conduct of warfare in the international system, as revealed in the last war involving a great power or its clients. A shift in the conduct of warfare should create a powerful incentive for a state to adopt a new military strategy if a gap exists between the state's current capabilities and the expected requirements of future wars. The effect of these changes should be particularly salient for developing countries or late military modernizers such as China that are trying to enhance their capabilities, because these states are

2. Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millet, eds., *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984).
3. Leonard A. Humphreys, *The Way of the Heavenly Sword: The Japanese Army in the 1920s* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993).
4. John Gittings, *The Role of the Chinese Army* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967); Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945–1981* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1982); Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); Ji You, *The Armed Forces of China* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); and David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). Paul Godwin's articles and book chapters are too numerous to cite. See, for example, Paul H.B. Godwin, "Change and Continuity in Chinese Military Doctrine: 1949–1999," in Mark A. Ryan, David M. Finkelstein, and Michael A. McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), pp. 23–55.

already at a comparative disadvantage and need to monitor closely their capabilities relative to stronger states.

The second step concerns the mechanism by which change occurs, which is shaped by the structure of civil-military relations. In socialist states with party-armies, the party can grant substantial autonomy for the management of military affairs to senior officers, who will adjust military strategy in response to changes in their state's security environment. Because these officers are also party members, the party can delegate responsibility for military affairs without the fear of a coup or concerns that the military will pursue a strategy inconsistent with the party's political objectives. Such delegation, however, is possible only when the party's political leadership is united around the structure of authority and basic policies. Thus, major change in China's military strategy is more likely to occur when a significant shift in the conduct of warfare arises and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is united.

Understanding change in China's military strategy carries implications for international relations theory. First, it complements existing arguments on external sources of military change by identifying a new motivation for some states to change their military strategy when not facing an immediate threat. Second, mirroring other recent studies, the role of party unity in enabling China to adopt new military strategies reinforces how civil-military relations can serve as an important independent variable in explaining state behavior.[5] Third, and most important, the China case shows that military professionalism can take root even in armed forces subject to extensive political control, challenging Samuel Huntington's claims that politicization harms professionalism.[6]

One caveat is necessary. The analysis below excludes China's nuclear strategy. Unlike conventional strategy, China's nuclear strategy has remained constant, keyed to achieving assured retaliation through the development of a secure second strike.[7] Nuclear strategy has remained constant because it is the

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5. See, for example, Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2015).

6. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), pp. 80–97.

7. M. Taylor Fravel and Evan S. Medeiros, "China's Search for Assured Retaliation: The Evolution of Chinese Nuclear Strategy and Force Structure," *International Security*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Fall 2010), pp. 48–87, doi:10.1162/ISEC_a_00016.

one area of China's defense policy that the CCP has never delegated to top military officers. Instead, party leaders, along with civilian scientists and weapons designers, have played a central role in the formulation of China's nuclear strategy.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section examines why states pursue major change in their military strategies, focusing on external incentives for change and the structure of civil-military relations. The subsequent section examines the PLA's concept of the strategic guideline and how it can be used to measure change in China's military strategy. The next four sections review the three major changes in China's military strategy—in 1956, 1980, and 1993—along with Mao Zedong's political intervention in strategic decision-making in 1964. The penultimate section examines the most recent adjustments in China's military strategy in 2004 and 2014. The conclusion assesses the implications of the analysis for China's military strategy in the future.

Explaining Major Change in Military Strategy

Any explanation of why a state pursues a major change in its military strategy must address three questions. First, what is a major change in military strategy? Second, what factors prompt a state to change its strategy? Third, by what mechanisms do states adopt a new strategy?

MAJOR CHANGE IN MILITARY STRATEGY
National military strategy is the set of ideas that a military organization holds for fighting future wars. Military strategy is part of, but not the same as, a state's grand strategy.[8] Also sometimes described as high-level military doctrine, a state's military strategy explains or outlines how its armed forces will be employed to achieve military objectives that advance the state's political goals. Strategy is what connects means with ends by describing which forces (means) are necessary and the manner or way in which they will be used. Strategy then shapes all aspects of force development.[9]

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8. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*; and Robert J. Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).
9. John I. Alger, *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art* (Wayne, N.J.: Avery, 1985); and John M. Collins, *Military Strategy: Principles, Practices, and Historical Perspectives* (Dulles, Va.: Potomac, 2001).

Major change occurs when the adoption of a new military strategy requires a military organization to change how it prepares to conduct operations and wage war. Drawing on the concept of military reform, major change requires that a military develop forces or capabilities that it does not already possess to perform activities that it cannot currently undertake.[10] Unlike some definitions of innovation, however, reform does not require that these changes be revolutionary.[11]

Major change in military strategy contains two components linked with military reforms. The first is that the strategy articulates a new vision of warfare and a call for change in how a military prepares to fight in the future. The second is that the new strategy must require some degree of organizational change from past practices, including operational doctrine, force structure, and training.[12] Major change highlights the desire to pursue significant organizational reforms over their successful institutionalization. The reasons why a state might decide to adopt a new military strategy are likely to differ from those that explain successful reform within a military organization.

Major change in military strategy must be distinguished from two other outcomes. The first is no change in military strategy. The second is a minor change in military strategy, defined as adjusting or refining an existing strategy. Here, although a state adopts a new national military strategy, the purpose of the change is to better accomplish the vision contained in the existing strategy.

AN EXTERNAL MODEL OF MAJOR CHANGE

Within the literature on military doctrine and innovation, a rough consensus exists around the primacy of external motivations for great powers to pursue change in military strategy. As great powers develop armed forces to defend against external threats or project power over others, a focus on external factors is unsurprising. These existing external incentives for change within the literature should be viewed as forming a general model of external sources of military change. The caveat, however, is that scope conditions, some of which

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10. Suzanne C. Nielsen, *An Army Transformed: The U.S. Army's Post-Vietnam Recovery and the Dynamics of Change in Military Organizations* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, Army War College, 2010), p. 14.
11. Rosen, *Winning the Next War*; and Grissom, "The Future of Military Innovation Studies."
12. Nielsen, *An Army Transformed*, pp. 3, 19.

are more restrictive than others, can limit the effect of these incentives in particular cases, and not all of them may apply to China's past strategies.

The literature contains four main external motivations for a change in strategy. The first and most general motivation is an immediate or pressing security threat, which occurs if a new adversary arises or if a state's existing strategy is revealed to be deficient following defeat on the battlefield.[13] The effects of immediate and pressing threats apply to all states and are not limited by many scope conditions, only a gap between the existing strategy and the new threat. Nevertheless, this motivation cannot account for peacetime change in the absence of a pressing threat. The second and closely related external motivation is change in an adversary's war plans, which then prompts a state to change its own military strategy in a "reactive innovation."[14] The possibility of a reactive innovation is limited to states already in a strategic or enduring rivalry that face an immediate threat if an adversary changes its strategy.[15] A third external motivation is the emergence of new missions for a military created by changes in a state's political goals. New missions can arise for a variety of reasons, such as the acquisition of new interests abroad to be defended, changes in the security needs of an ally, or shifts in a state's political goals for the use of force that require new capabilities. New missions as a source of change may be especially relevant to rising powers, which acquire new interests to be defended as their capabilities expand.[16] A fourth external motivation is the long-term implications for warfare of basic technological change. The advent of new technologies may lead states to consider their implications for warfare and to adjust their military strategies accordingly.[17] This motivation for change, however, applies only to the most advanced states in the system that enjoy a relative abundance of resources for developing military power along with mature industrial and technological capabilities that can develop or apply these technologies to warfare.

These four motivations can account for strategic change under different cir-

13. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, pp. 59–79.
14. Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy*, p. 4.
15. Gary Goertz and Paul F. Diehl, "Enduring Rivalries: Theoretical Constructs and Empirical Patterns," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (June 1993), pp. 147–171, doi:10.2307/2600766; and William R. Thompson, "Identifying Rivals and Rivalries in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (December 2001), pp. 557–586, doi:0.1111/0020-8833.00214.
16. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, pp. 59–79; and Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, p. 57.
17. Rosen, *Winning the Next War*, pp. 68–75.

cumstances, but they remain incomplete. Specifically, they cannot account for why a state might change its military strategy when these motivations are absent, such as when the state is not facing an immediate and pressing threat. Another possible motivation for a change in strategy is a shift in the conduct of warfare in the international system, as revealed in the last war involving one or more great powers or their clients (equipped with their patron's weaponry).[18] Other states' wars demonstrate the importance or utility of new ways of fighting or reveal new vulnerabilities that need to be addressed. Developing countries or states seeking to upgrade and modernize their forces, such as China, should be especially attentive to these conflicts because of the need to allocate their scarce resources for defense with care. Such shifts in the conduct of warfare should be especially powerful if a gap exists between a state's existing strategy and the requirements of future warfare.

In *Theory of International Politics*, Kenneth Waltz argues that because international politics is "a competitive realm," states will emulate the most successful military practices "contrived by the country of the greatest capability and ingenuity," including its weapons and strategies.[19] How does my argument differ from Waltz's? Although Waltz highlights competition as a reason for change in strategy, the specific motivation for change at any one time is unclear. As discussed above, much of the existing literature seeks to identify different motives that the competitive pressures of the international system create for changing strategy. Although competition under anarchy causes states to change their military strategies, the more interesting questions are when and why such change occurs, which can be answered only by looking beyond the general argument that Waltz offers.

Shifts in the conduct of warfare are one such trigger for a major change in military strategy. When a war occurs in the international system, states are likely to assess its key features and implications for their own security. Depending on their strategic circumstances, states may seek to emulate or they may seek to develop other responses, such as countermeasures. The 1999 Kosovo War was revealing not just because it highlighted the advances in stealth and precision-strike capabilities, but also because it suggested that simple tactics and procedures such as camouflaging tanks could blunt the poten-

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18. On client states, see Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, p. 59.
19. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 127.

tially devastating effects of precision-guided munitions.[20] States vulnerable to air strikes might have focused on the latter and not the former. Waltz also suggests that emulation will most likely occur among peer competitors or "contending states." Yet the lessons from contemporary conflicts should be especially relevant for developing countries, such as China, that may not yet be peer competitors but that seek to strengthen their forces.

PARTY UNITY AND MILITARY-LED CHANGE

In the literature on military doctrine and innovation, much of the debate about how change occurs in military organizations revolves around whether civilian intervention is required or whether change can be led by military officers and occur autonomously. The answer depends on the structure of civil-military relations and whether or not it empowers military leaders.

In socialist states such as China, a distinct kind of civil-military relations suggests that senior military officers will push for the adoption of a new military strategy without civilian intervention. The reason is that the structure of civil-military relations (more accurately, party-army relations) empowers military officers to initiate strategic change. In socialist states, the military is not a national army but a party-army or armed force subordinate to the vanguard party.[21] An interlocking directorate forms because the same leaders hold top positions in both the party and the military, while party membership and commissars embedded within military units ensure the army's loyalty to the party and not the state. Yet despite subordination to the party, the military is granted substantial autonomy within the realm of military affairs so that it has sufficient freedom to perform the tasks that the party requires.[22] Therefore, top officers in a party-army are positioned to initiate the process of strategic change more than civilian members of the party leadership. Yet because military leaders themselves are also senior party members, they will formulate new strategies consistent with the party's broader political goals, minimizing

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20. Timothy L. Thomas, John A. Tokar, and Robert Tomes, "Kosovo and the Current Myth of Information Superiority," *Parameters*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 13–29.
21. Amos Perlmutter and William M. LeoGrande, "The Party in Uniform: Toward a Theory of Civil-Military Relations in Communist Political Systems," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (1982), pp. 778–789, doi:10.1017/S0003055400189609.
22. Ibid.

differences with party leaders.[23] As William Odom notes, the military in socialist states is an "administrative arm" of the party.[24]

If this view of party-army relations is accurate, the timing and process of strategic change in socialist states will depend on the unity of the party—the condition that enables substantial delegation of military affairs to senior military officers. Party unity refers to agreement among the top party leaders on basic policy questions (the proverbial "party line") and the structure of authority within the party. When the party is united, it will delegate responsibility for military affairs to the armed forces with only minimal oversight. Top military officers are likely to play a decisive role in initiating and formulating major changes in military strategy, if required by the state's external security environment. In this way, party unity creates an environment similar to Huntington's ideal of objective civilian control, which fosters professionalism, even though a party-army is a politicized armed force.

By contrast, disunity at the highest levels of the party will likely prevent major strategic change from occurring, even if the state faces strong external incentives for change. Officers are likely to become diverted from military affairs if the armed forces are required to perform nonmilitary tasks such as maintaining law and order, if these forces become the object of elite contestation within the party, or if they become part of ideological campaigns pursued for other reasons.[25] Top military leaders may also become involved in intraparty politics, again at the expense of military affairs such as strategy.
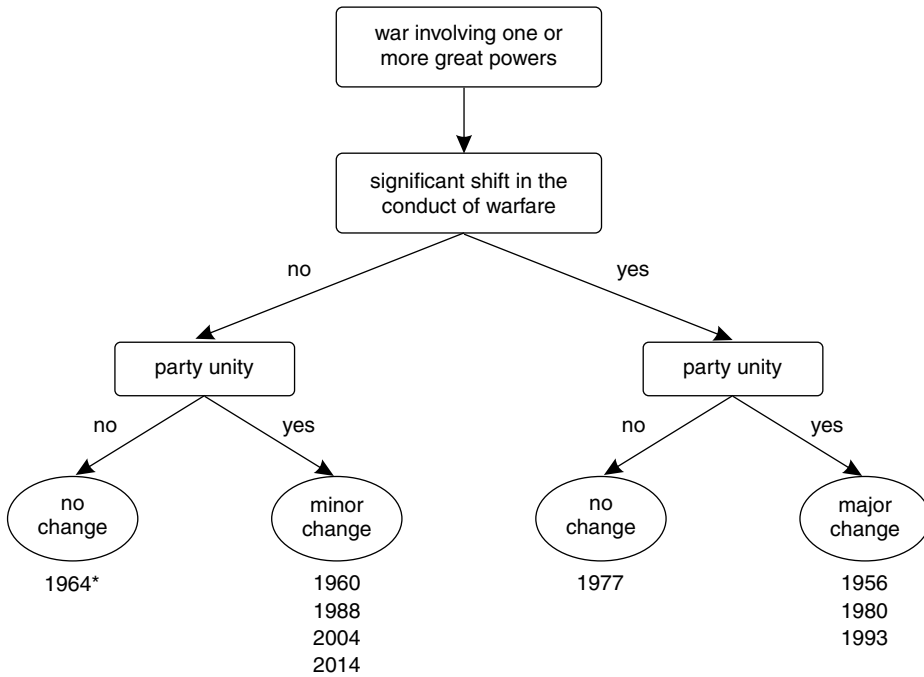
Is party unity independent of external motivations for change? An immediate external threat could enhance party unity, and thus party unity might be a function of the external environment. Nevertheless, external threats are unlikely to be able to unify a fractured Leninist party. In socialist states, the issues that create leadership splits involve either the distribution of

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23. Risa A. Brooks, *Shaping Strategy: The Civil-Military Politics of Strategic Assessment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008).
24. William Odom, "The Party-Military Connection: A Critique," in Dale R. Herspring and Ivan Volgyes, eds., *Civil-Military Relations in Communist Systems* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1978), pp. 27–52.
25. The effect of party disunity is similar to that of elite fragmentation in underbalancing, except that it refers to elites within the party and their agreement over party policies, not the assessment of external threats. See Randall L. Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Figure 1. Conduct of Warfare, Party Unity, and Strategic Change

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                    │  significant shift in the │
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            ┌──────────────┐         ┌──────────────┐
            │  party unity │         │  party unity │
            └──────────────┘         └──────────────┘
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             ╱           ╲              ╱           ╲
      ╭────────╮    ╭────────╮    ╭────────╮    ╭────────╮
      │   no   │    │ minor  │    │   no   │    │ major  │
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        1964*          1960          1977          1956
                       1988                        1980
                       2004                        1993
                       2014
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NOTE: The years below each node refer to my argument's prediction for each of China's strategic guidelines. The asterix (*) denotes the adoption of a guideline not predicted by my argument.

power within the party or questions relating to the party's basic or fundamental policies. External threats are unlikely to compel leaders to resolve these differences.

The argument is diagrammed in figure 1.

Major Change in China's Military Strategy

For the PLA, the concept of the strategic guideline most closely approximates national military strategy. Shifts in operational doctrine, force structure, and training serve as indicators of change in military strategy.

CHINA'S MILITARY STRATEGIC GUIDELINE

In China, the strategic guideline serves as the basis for China's national military strategy. As Marshal Peng Dehuai stated in 1957, "The strategic guideline relates to the fundamental nature of army building, troop training, and war preparations."[26] Similarly, as Deng Xiaoping observed in 1977, "Without a clear strategic guideline, many matters cannot be handled well."[27] After 1988, the "strategic guideline" (*zhanlue fangzhen*) has been described as the "military strategic guidelines" (*junshi zhanlue fangzhen*).[28]

The strategic guidelines, unsurprisingly, are closely linked with the concept of strategy more generally. Within China's approach to military science, the definition of military strategy remains influenced by Mao's own writings. The 2011 edition of the PLA's glossary of military terms defines strategy as "the principles and tactics for planning and guiding the overall situation of war," including both offensive and defense strategies.[29]

The PLA's definition of strategy, however, remains abstract. Strategy can be implemented only when a series of principles for force planning, training, and operations are articulated and disseminated. China's strategic guidelines contain these principles. As defined by the PLA, the strategic guideline is the "core and collected embodiment of military strategy."[30] Similarly, Chinese military scholars describe the strategic guidelines as the "principal part and heart of strategy."[31] Formally, the guidelines are defined as containing "the program and principles for planning and guiding the overall situation of war in a given period." The guidelines cover both general principles about the whole process of military operations and concrete or specific principles for certain types of

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26. Peng Dehuai, *Peng Dehuai junshi wenxuan* [Peng Dehuai's selected works on military affairs] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1988), p. 587.
27. Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping lun guofang he jundui jianshe* [Deng Xiaoping on national defense and army building] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1992), p. 26.
28. David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines,'" in Andrew Scobell and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military* (Carlisle, Pa.: Army War College, 2007), pp. 69–140.
29. Junshi kexue yuan [Academy of Military Science], ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junyu* [Military terminology of the Chinese People's Liberation Army] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2011), p. 50.
30. Ibid., p. 51.
31. Wang Wenrong, ed., *Zhanlue xue* [The science of military strategy] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 1999), p. 136.

operations.[32] In short, the strategic guidelines outline how China plans to wage its next war.

Authoritative Chinese sources indicate that the guidelines have four components. The first is the identification of the "strategic opponent" (*zhanlue duishou*), based on a strategic assessment of China's security environment and the perceived threats to China's national interests.[33] The second is the "primary strategic direction" (*zhuyao zhanlue fangxiang*), which refers to the geographic center of gravity that will decisively shape the overall conflict as well as military deployments and war preparations. The third and perhaps core component is the "basis of preparations for military struggle" (*junshi douzheng zhunbei de jidian*), which describes the "form of war" (*zhanzheng xingtai*) or "form of operations" (*zuozhan xingtai*) that outline how war will be waged. The fourth component of a strategic guideline is the "basic guiding thought" (*jiben zhidao sixiang*) for the use of military force or the general operational principles to be applied in a conflict.

When the party's Central Military Commission (CMC) formulates a new strategic guideline, it sets the requirements for force development, or what the PLA describes as "national defense and army building" (*guofang yu jundui jianshe*). After 1949, new guidelines have been issued only in peacetime. Although the top party leader of the CCP has always chaired the CMC, the CMC itself delegates the drafting of new guidelines to the CMC's general office or the General Staff Department (GSD), which is often described as the CMC's staff office, or *canmou*. Unlike the drafting of the *National Military Strategy* in the United States, direct civilian input is minimal, though the top party leader will approve a new guideline in his capacity as CMC chairman and can shape the assessment of the external security environment that identifies the strategic opponent.

MEASURING CHANGE IN MILITARY STRATEGY

A major change in military strategy requires a military to alter how it prepares to fight future wars. Specifically, it requires change in a military's operational doctrine, force structure, and training.

Operational doctrine refers to the principles and concepts that describe how

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32. Junshi kexue yuan, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junyu*, p. 51.
33. Wang, *Zhanlue xue*, pp. 136–139; and Fan Zhenjiang and Ma Baoan, eds., *Junshi zhanlue lun* [On military strategy] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2007), pp. 149–150.

a military plans to conduct operations. Operational doctrine is usually codified in field manuals or regulations and then distributed throughout the organization. A major change in operational doctrine occurs when the content of new doctrine represents a departure from past practices. In 1982, for example, the U.S. Army issued a new edition of *Field Manual 100-5*, which reflected a dramatic departure from how the United States prepared to defend Western Europe through the adoption of a more offensive- and maneuver-oriented approach when compared with previous editions.[34] In China, the main indicator of change in operational doctrine is the promulgation of new operations regulations (*zuozhan tiaoling*), which have been issued four times since 1949.[35]

Force structure refers to the composition of an armed force in terms of the service branches (such as the army and the navy) and within a given service, its combat arms (such as infantry and armor). Changes in inter- and intra-service force structure are an important indicator of major change in military strategy because they reflect the allocation of scarce resources within an organization and the relative capacity of different services to conduct specified operations. In China, the main indicators of change in force structure would include army-wide reorganizations and downsizings as well as the procurement of new or different kinds of equipment among the services.

Military education and training demonstrates whether the force is learning how to conduct the operations envisioned by the new strategy. One component of training is the curriculum of the professional military education system and whether it provides soldiers and officers with the skills that they need to implement the new strategy. A second component of training is the frequency, scope, and content of military exercises and whether they are consistent with what is taught in the classroom and required by the strategy. In China, the main indicators of change in military training are the promulgation of new training programs (*dagang*) and the scope and frequency of military exercises.

Table 1 provides a list of China's nine strategic guidelines based on these criteria. As the table shows, the PLA has pursued major change in its military strategy in 1956, 1980, and 1993.

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34. John L. Romjue, *From Active Defense to AirLand Battle: The Development of Army Doctrine, 1973–1982* (Fort Monroe, Va.: Historical Office, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1984).
35. Ren Jian, ed., *Zuozhan tiaoling gailun* [An introduction to operations regulations] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2016).

Table 1. China's Military Strategic Guidelines since 1949

		Guideline Components					Indicators of Major Change	
Year	Name	Primary Opponent	Primary Direction	Basis of Preparations for Military Struggle	Main Form of Operations	Operational Doctrine	Force Structure	Training
1956	"Defending the Motherland"	United States	northeast	U.S. amphibious assault	positional defense and mobile offense	drafting of operations regulations begins (1958)	creation of new combat branches; reduction of 3.5 million troops; formation of general staff system; creation of military regions	draft training program issued (1957)
1960	"Resist in the north, open in the south"	United States	northeast	U.S. amphibious assault	positional defense and mobile offense (north of Shanghai)	operations combat regulations issued (1961)	—	—
1964	"Luring the enemy in deep"	United States	—	U.S. amphibious assault	mobile and guerrilla warfare	drafting of operations regulations begins (1970)	creation of Second Artillery; expansion to 6.2 million troops	—
1977	"Active defense," "luring the enemy in deep"	Soviet Union	north-central	Soviet armored and airborne assault	mobile and guerrilla warfare	operations regulations issued (1979)	—	training program issued (1978)

1980	"Active defense"	Soviet Union	north-central	Soviet armored and airborne assault	positional warfare of fixed defense	operations regulations drafted and campaign outline issued (1982–87)	transition from army corps to combined arms group armies; reduction of 3 million troops (1980, 1982, 1985)	training program issued (1980)
1988	"Dealing with local wars and military conflicts"	—	—	—	—	—	—	training program issued (1989)
1993	"Winning local wars under high-technology conditions"	Taiwan	southeast	warfare under high-technology conditions	joint operations	operations regulations and campaign outlines issued (1995–99)	shift to brigades; creation of General Armament Department; reduction of 700,000 troops (1997 and 2003)	training programs issued (1995 and 2001)
2004	"Winning local wars under informationized conditions"	Taiwan (United States)	southeast	warfare under informationized conditions	integrated joint operations	drafting of operations regulations begins (2004)	further shift to brigades	training program issued (2008)
2014	"Winning informationized local wars"	Taiwan (United States)	southeast and maritime	informationized warfare	integrated joint operations	?	reorganization of command and management structures; reduction of 300,000 troops (2017)	?

Regarding shifts in the conduct of warfare, there have been ten interstate conventional wars since 1949 involving a great power or its client using the great power's equipment and doctrine. These wars are the 1950–53 Korean War, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the 1980–88 Iran-Iraq War, the 1982 Lebanon War, the 1982 Falklands War, the 1990–91 Gulf War, the 1999 Kosovo War, and the 2003 Iraq War. Counterinsurgency wars, such as those involving the United States in Vietnam or the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, are excluded because these are unlikely to reveal major lessons for conventional wars, which are the focus of great power military strategy.[36] Among scholars of military history and operations, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the Gulf War are viewed as having had the greatest impact on how states viewed the conduct of warfare.[37] China should be most likely to change its military strategy in response to these conflicts.

Party unity is much harder to measure, especially given the differences between the Mao and post-Mao eras. Nevertheless, the two periods of greatest disunity were the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, and the years immediately following the 1989 events in Tiananmen Square.[38] Both periods witnessed open splits within the leadership over policy, and both were linked to questions about ultimate authority in the party that would prevent the PLA from pursuing major change in military strategy.

1956—"Defending the Motherland"

The strategic guideline adopted in March 1956 represents the first of three major changes in China's military strategy since 1949. Called the "Strategic Guideline for Defending the Motherland," the 1956 strategy outlined a plan to defend China against a U.S. amphibious invasion in the northeast. The adoption of this strategy is puzzling because China did not face an immediate or

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36. Conventional operations in counterinsurgency wars may yield lessons about changes in warfare, but such lessons are likely to be limited to a service or combat arm.
37. See, for example, Robert Michael Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); and Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Cambridge History of Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
38. Roderick MacFarquhar, ed., *The Politics of China: Sixty Years of the People's Republic of China*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

pressing threat and China's leaders viewed the country's external security environment as relatively stable. Moreover, despite China's 1951 alliance with the Soviet Union, China did not seek to emulate the military strategy of its partner. As Moscow was moving toward a first-strike posture, China emphasized a defensive approach in the 1956 strategy.

As the first military strategy adopted by China after the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, the external motivations for the new strategy are likely overdetermined. China would need to adopt a strategy at some point and was also absorbing the lessons of World War II and the Korean War. Even so, the process by which the strategy was formulated demonstrates how the party delegates responsibility for military affairs to senior officers, who then lead the formulation and implementation of the strategy.

OVERVIEW OF THE 1956 STRATEGY

In the 1956 strategy, the basis of preparations for military struggle was a surprise attack by the United States. After the stalemate in Korea, China began to fear a U.S. amphibious invasion, most likely on the Shandong or Liaodong Peninsulas. Top party and military leaders did not believe that an attack was imminent, but the concern did reflect the worst-case scenario for military planning based on the hostility between the two states.

The 1956 strategy envisioned a forward defense of China's coastal regions, using fortifications to prevent or limit any U.S. breakthrough. The new guideline outlined that the PLA "should be able to offer a powerful counterattack and resist the enemy's invasion in areas with prepared defenses." Peng Dehuai described "the basic content of our army's active defense strategic guideline" as "smashing the enemy's plans for a war of quick resolution [*suzhan sujue*] and forcing the enemy to wage a protracted war with us."[39]

In the civil war, the PLA had emphasized mobile and guerrilla warfare. The 1956 strategy, however, identified a new "form of operations" for the PLA— namely, "combining positional defensive warfare with mobile offensive warfare."[40] As Peng noted, the emphasis on positional warfare marked a transformation in how the PLA would fight, as it was "rare in the history of the

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39. Wang Yan, ed., *Peng Dehuai zhuan* [Peng Dehuai's biography] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1993), p. 537.
40. Ibid.

Chinese army."[41] About one-quarter of the ground forces would defend permanent fortifications, while the remainder would be maneuver forces to be deployed in the direction of the U.S. attack.[42] The ground forces would be structured to conduct combined arms operations as new equipment became available.

To implement the new guideline, the PLA initiated reforms in all areas. First, one of the initial tasks for the Academy of Military Science, established in March 1958, was to draft the PLA's own operational doctrine. In May 1961, the CMC issued the first two operations regulations, for combined arms and infantry operations. By 1965, eighteen combat regulations had been issued.[43] Second, the force structure shifted from light infantry to a more balanced composition. From 1950 to 1958, personnel in the air force and navy grew from almost none to constitute 12.2 percent and 5.8 percent of the PLA, respectively. Likewise, personnel in artillery and armored units constituted 4.8 percent and 2.3 percent, respectively.[44] Third, the PLA's first training program was written in 1957 and was issued in draft form in January 1958. The purpose of the new program was for troops to "learn combat skills for modern conditions [to] deal with emergencies at any time."[45]

WORLD WAR II AND THE KOREAN WAR

China's top military leaders pushed for the adoption of the new strategy in response to their perceptions of shifts in the conduct of warfare after World War II and the Korean War.

As the last major war in the international system, World War II loomed large. On November 2, 1950, as Chinese troops were moving into North Korea, leading general Su Yu outlined his view of the conduct of warfare at the time. He highlighted the multiple dimensions of warfare on and under the sea and on land and underground as well as on the frontline and in now-vulnerable rear areas. Warfare was a "competition of high technology" on the battlefield

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41. Yin Qiming and Cheng Yaguang, *Diyi ren guofang buzhang* [First minister of defense] (Guangzhou, China: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), p. 46.
42. Ibid.
43. Ren, *Zuozhan tiaoling gailun*, p. 44.
44. Shou Xiaosong, ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun de 80 nian: 1927–2007* [Eighty years of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: 1927–2007] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2007), p. 339.
45. *Jiefangjun bao* [People's Liberation Army Daily], January 16, 1958.

in which opponents would seek to use their most advanced weapons. Mechanization accelerated the speed of operations and consumption of matériel, while the coordination among combat arms assumed much greater importance than in the past.[46]

China's experience on the battlefield in Korea affirmed the shifts in warfare that Su had identified. For China, the war signaled a shift from singular infantry operations to coordination among services and combat arms. It also highlighted the importance of positional warfare, along with the vulnerability of rear areas.[47] China's lack of adequate airpower and vulnerability to artillery were the greatest challenges, as both contributed to high numbers of Chinese casualties and disruption of supply lines.[48] The Korean War also revealed how destructive modern warfare could be, especially for the technologically weaker side. As many as ten Chinese soldiers perished for every one U.S. soldier killed.[49] Finally, the PLA's experience in Korea underscored the importance of logistics for sustaining offensive operations for more than a few days.[50]

China paid more attention to the nuclear revolution after U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles articulated the doctrine of massive retaliation in 1954. Most Chinese generals believed that nuclear weapons would be used in strategic bombing campaigns at the start of a war. Highlighting the advent of jet propulsion, Su Yu described future war in 1955 as starting with an "atomic blitz" (*yuanzi shanji*) in which industrial centers, cities, and military targets would be bombed.[51] Nuclear weapons also underscored the importance of airpower for defending against nuclear strikes and of mechanization for ensuring a rapid response on the battlefield after a nuclear strike.[52]

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46. Su Yu, *Su Yu wenxuan* [Su Yu's selected works], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), p. 58.
47. Qi Dexue, ed., *KangMei yuanChao zhanzheng shi* [History of the War to Resist America and Aid Korea], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2000), p. 555; and Li Chen, "From Civil War Victor to Cold War Guard: Positional Warfare in Korea and the Transformation of the Chinese People's Liberation Army, 1951–1953," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 38, Nos. 1–2 (2015), pp. 183–214, doi:10.1080/01402390.2014.980578.
48. Qi, *KangMei yuanChao zhanzheng shi*, Vol. 3.
49. Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1500–2000* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland, 2002), p. 173.
50. Qi, *KangMei yuanChao zhanzheng shi*, Vol. 3, p. 552.
51. Su, *Su Yu wenxuan*, Vol. 3, p. 151.
52. Ye Jianying, *Ye Jianying junshi wenxuan* [Ye Jianying's selected works on miliary affairs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1997), pp. 244–265; and Su, *Su Yu wenxuan*, Vol. 3, pp. 164–171.

UNPRECEDENTED PARTY UNITY AFTER LIBERATION

Top military officers were able to formulate a new strategy because of unprecedented unity among the party leadership. All members of the CCP's Central Committee (CC) were reelected in 1956 (along with new members). Little change in the composition of the Politburo occurred.[53] Only two senior party leaders were purged before the 1959 Lushan Conference, Gao Gang and Rao Shushi in 1954. Their purge did not threaten party unity, however, as both were seen as having violated party norms and the top leadership agreed to their removal.[54]

Party unity during this period stemmed from several sources. Victory in the revolution, and the national unification that was achieved as a result, consolidated the authority of the revolution's leaders. Top party leaders shared a commitment to Marxist ideology and to socialist modernization through the Soviet model. In addition, the initial success during the period of consolidation and in the first five-year plan further bolstered unity. Finally, senior party leaders acknowledged Mao's unquestioned authority. In contrast to later periods, Mao observed the principle of collective leadership, delegated authority to the most competent party leaders regardless of their personal ties to him, and encouraged debate among party leaders on key issues.[55]

Reflecting this unity, the party delegated responsibility for military affairs to top military leaders. The process began in mid-1952, when Peng Dehuai returned from Korea to take charge of the daily affairs of the CMC, replacing Zhou Enlai. The delegation was affirmed when a new CMC was formed in September 1954. Apart from Mao and Deng Xiaoping, all other members were generals from the civil war.[56] Reflecting this delegation, Mao did not personally attend an enlarged meeting of the CMC for four years, until June 1958. Then, Mao noted, "I have not interfered in military affairs for four years, which were all given to comrade Peng Dehuai."[57]

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53. Frederick C. Teiwes, "The Establishment and Consolidation of the New Regime," in MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China*, p. 8.
54. Ibid., pp. 45–50.
55. This paragraph draws on ibid., pp. 5–15.
56. Shou Xiaosong, ed., *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi* [A military history of the Chinese People's Liberation Army], Vol. 5 (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2011), p. 14.
57. Ibid.

ADOPTION OF THE 1956 STRATEGY

Senior officers pushed for initial reforms of the PLA and then the adoption of a new strategic guideline in 1956 to enable the PLA to wage war in a new way.

The first major reform was the drafting of a five-year development plan for the PLA in mid-1952. Before starting, however, Deputy Chief of the GSD Su Yu wrote that China should first determine its strategic guideline to serve as the basis for an effective five-year plan.[58] Su's report marked the first time since 1949 that a senior PLA officer called for formulating a national military strategy. Completed in June 1952, the five-year plan included an assessment of the enemy, the purpose and requirements of military planning, defense deployment scenarios, and organization and equipment.[59] The plan identified the northern theater as China's primary strategic direction, where it would a face a U.S. invasion (most likely on the Shandong Peninsula), while the east coast was a secondary strategic direction where China might confront a Nationalist invasion from Taiwan. The plan called for building fortifications in these areas while strengthening the army and air force.

The second major set of reforms occurred following an unprecedented conference of senior cadre in the military system from December 1953 to January 1954. The purpose of the meeting was to "discuss and resolve the guideline for army building in the future."[60] At the conference, Peng sought to underscore that to keep pace with changes in the conduct of warfare, modernization required the PLA's organizational transformation.[61] Challenges that Peng identified included overcoming the tradition of decentralization to emphasize the role of "unified and close cooperation" in a modern military.[62]

The senior cadre conference had far-reaching effects. The participants agreed that modernization required not just advanced weapons and equipment, but also the standardization of organization and procedures across the force and the strengthening of command and logistics. Organizational changes that fol-

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58. Su, *Su Yu wenxuan*, Vol. 3, pp. 71–75.
59. Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu (shang)* [Zhang Zhen's memoirs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003), p. 476.
60. Wang Yan, ed., *Peng Dehuai nianpu* [Peng Dehuai's chronology] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1998), p. 560.
61. Peng, *Peng Dehuai junshi wenxuan*, p. 470.
62. Ibid., p. 472.

lowed included the reorganization of the general staff system into a total of eight departments, the reduction of the force by 21 percent to 3.5 million by the end of 1955, and, starting in 1955, implementation of a system of salaries, formal ranks, and awards as well as the publication of military service regulations. These reforms were needed so that the PLA would be able to execute a national military strategy as soon as it was formulated.[63]

Once these organizational reforms were started, Peng turned toward formulating the PLA's first strategic guideline. Mao provided an opening during his assessment of China's security environment at the CCP's National Congress in March 1955. Although Mao was upbeat, noting the strength of the socialist bloc, he observed that China remained "surrounded by imperialist forces" and therefore "must prepare to deal with sudden incidents [*turan shibian*]." Mao did not say that war was likely or even imminent, but he believed that if "the imperialists" did strike, it would start with a "surprise attack" and China should "avoid being caught unprepared."[64]

In April 1955, Peng decided that the PLA should draft an operations plan for the use of China's armed forces in a major war. Peng further instructed that the plan should combine defensive positional warfare with offensive mobile warfare and contain basic guiding principles for operations.[65] Later in April, Peng delivered a report on the operations plan to the CC Secretariat, stating that to effectively defend against an attack, the main task is to "resolve the question of the strategic guideline."[66] Mao agreed, affirming that "our strategic guideline has always been active defense, our operations will be counterattacks, and we will never be the first to initiate a war."[67]

During a trip to Moscow in late May 1955, Peng became aware that the Soviet Union was moving toward an offensive first-strike strategy. Peng believed that such a strategy would be a disaster for China, adding urgency for China to codify its own defensive strategy, which Peng proposed be discussed and adopted at the next enlarged meeting of the CMC.[68] In July 1955, the CMC

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63. Shou, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi*, Vol. 5, pp. 4–11.
64. Mao Zedong, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong junshi wengao* [Mao Zedong's military manuscripts since the founding of the nation], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2010), p. 265.
65. Yin and Cheng, *Diyi ren guofang buzhang*, p. 43.
66. Wang, *Peng Dehuai zhuan*, p. 535.
67. Quoted in Yin and Cheng, *Diyi ren guofang buzhang*, p. 43.
68. Wang Yazhi, *Peng Dehuai junshi canmou de huiyi: 1950 niandai ZhongSu junshi guanxi jianzheng*

also decided to hold a large-scale exercise on the Liaodong Peninsula in November 1955 to simulate the main contingency for the PLA, an anti-landing campaign to counter an amphibious assault. The goal was to "study the organization and command of complex campaigns and battles under modern conditions" that would be part of the new strategy.[69]

On December 1, the CMC under Peng's leadership suggested holding an enlarged meeting in early 1956 for a high-level, army-wide discussion of strategy. Consensus on strategy was required, especially regarding operational plans, "so that everyone can comprehensively plan all work under unified operational guidance."[70] Mao agreed and the meeting was held from March 6 to 15, 1956. Peng presented his report on the new strategic guideline, which the CMC approved, thus establishing the PLA's first military strategy.

In August 1959, Peng was sacked at the Lushan Conference after he criticized the policies of the Great Leap Forward. His replacement, Lin Biao, led the adoption of a new strategic guideline in February 1960—"resist in the north, open in the south" (*beiding nanfang*). Despite the change in name, the strategy remained largely the same, keyed to forward defense against a U.S. amphibious landing in the north.[71]

1964—"Luring the Enemy in Deep"

The strategic guideline adopted in 1964 represents an anomalous—yet fascinating—case for my argument. It was an instance of what might be described as reverse or retrograde change, whereby an existing strategy was abandoned in favor of a previous one, in this case the idea of "luring the enemy in deep" (*youdi shenru*) from the Chinese civil war. It was also the only change in strategy initiated by the top party leader and not senior military officers. Nevertheless, the case illustrates how leadership splits that create

[The recollection of Peng Dehuai's militiary staff officer: Witnessing Sino-Soviet military relations in the 1950s] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2009), p. 142.

69. Jin Ye, "Yi Liaodong bandao kangdenglu zhanyi yanxi" [Recalling the Liaodong Peninsula anti-landing campaign exercise], in Xu Huizi, ed., *Zongcan moubu: Huiyi shiliao* [General Staff Department: Recollections and historical materials] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1995), p. 453.

70. Mao, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong junshi wengao*, Vol. 2, p. 292.

71. Jiang Nan and Ding Wei, "Lengzhan shiqi Zhonguo fanqinlue zhanzheng zhanlue zhidao de biange" [Evolution of China's strategic guidance in anti-aggression wars during the Cold War], *Junshi lishi*, No. 1 (2013), p. 16.

party disunity can distort strategic decisionmaking. Mao pushed for luring in deep not to enhance China's security but instead to attack party leaders whom he viewed as revisionists and a threat to China's continued revolution, efforts that would culminate with the launch of the Cultural Revolution two years later.

OVERVIEW OF THE 1964 STRATEGY

In the 1964 strategy China's strategic adversary remained the United States, but Mao pushed for two main changes. The first concerned the primary strategic direction. The existing strategy was premised on a U.S. assault in the north. Nevertheless, Mao questioned whether the north should be the primary strategic direction, saying it was "uncertain."[72] Mao then said that the attack could occur anywhere from the northeast coast, where Peng had believed the United States would attack, down to Shanghai, suggesting that a primary strategic direction could not be identified and China would need to prepare for an attack from many directions.

The second change concerned the basic guiding thought for operations. The concept of operations from China's civil war in the 1930s, luring the enemy in deep, replaced forward defense. Luring the enemy in deep was a form of strategic retreat, permitting an adversary to gain a foothold on Chinese territory, even occupying key cities such as Shanghai or Beijing. Afterward, Chinese forces could engage in a protracted war of attrition and fight battles of annihilation to defeat the invading force.[73] Therefore, mobile and guerrilla warfare, the most prominent modes of fighting from the civil war, replaced positional warfare as the main form of operations for the PLA.

With the launch of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, it is impossible to observe the implementation of the 1964 strategy, as the political upheaval consumed the PLA high command. Nevertheless, available evidence indicates

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72. "Mao Zedong zai Shisanling shuiku de jianghua" [Mao Zedong's speech at the Ming Tomb's Reservoir], June 16, 1964, from the Fujian Provincial Archive, Fuzhou, China. I am grateful to Andrew Bingham Kennedy for sharing this document with me. See Kennedy, *The International Ambitions of Mao and Nehru: National Efficacy Beliefs and the Making of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 117–118.
73. Han Huaizhi, *Han Huaizhi lun junshi* [Han Huaizhi on military affairs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2012), pp. 202–206.

that little effort was made to alter the PLA's operational doctrine, force struc-ture, or training (with the exception of a greater focus on political work) from mid-1964 to mid-1966. Thus, the key change was abandoning the existing strategy for an earlier one that did not require being able to wage war in a new way.

MAO'S CONCERN WITH REVISIONISM

Mao's fear of revisionism within the party began in the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward. The economic and human devastation of the Leap's failure raised questions about Mao's leadership. By early 1962, other party leaders had begun to blame the party's policies, and thus Mao himself, for the catas-trophe. Liu Shaoqi, Mao's successor, famously suggested that the destruction caused by the Great Leap was mostly man-made, thus indirectly blaming Mao and the party.[74] By the summer of 1962, the party had put in place recovery policies that seemed to roll back Mao's emphasis on collectivization while strengthening central planning based on the Soviet model that Mao had sub-verted when launching the Great Leap.[75]

In response to these trends, Mao emphasized the importance of class strug-gle at the 10th Plenum in September 1962. Mao heavily edited the plenum's report, which underscored China's potential to "take the capitalist road" and urged the party to focus on "carrying out struggle against class enemies at home and abroad." According to Mao's official biography, the plenum's report outlined his basic strategy of "opposing revisionism and preventing revision-ism" (*fanxiu fangxiu*).[76] Starting in 1963, "opposing revisionism" would be achieved through polemics denouncing revisionism in the Soviet Union, while "preventing revisionism" was the goal of the Socialist Education Movement in China, which started with the "four cleans" and "five antis."[77]

By 1964, then, the trends that would push Mao to attack the CCP's leader-

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74. Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, Vol. 3: *The Coming of the Cata-clysm, 1961–1966* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 145–158.
75. Ibid., pp. 274–281.
76. Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, *Mao Zedong zhuan 1949–1976* [Mao Zedong's biography 1949–1976] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2003), p. 1260.
77. Wu Lengxi, *Shinian lunzhan: 1956–1966 ZhongSu guanxi huiyilu* [Ten years of polemics: A recol-lection of Chinese-Soviet Relations from 1956 to 1966] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1999), pp. 561–562.

ship as revisionist were present. As Andrew Walder writes, the ninth polemic against the Soviet Union, published in July 1964, "expressed what was to be the ideological justification for the Cultural Revolution."[78] The document decried the domestic and foreign policies of "the revisionist Khrushchev clique" before asking whether "genuine proletarian revolutionaries" would maintain control of the party and the state in China. Furthermore, the selection of revolutionary successors was described as "a matter of life and death for our Party and our country."[79]

MAO'S ATTACK ON ECONOMIC PLANNING

Before July 1964, however, Mao had already signaled his intention to focus on revisionism within China. At a Politburo Standing Committee meeting in March, Mao noted that "in the past year, my main efforts have been spent on the struggle with [Soviet Premier Nikita] Khrushchev." More important, he informed his colleagues that "now I will turn back to domestic issues, engaging opposing revisionism and countering revisionism internally."[80]

Mao's decision set the stage for a clash over economic policy. Mao targeted the central planning bureaucracy, which had developed a draft framework for the third five-year plan to start in 1966. The framework's main task was to continue China's economic recovery by emphasizing agriculture over defense and basic industries to "basically resolve the people's issue of food, clothing, and consumer goods."[81] Yet at a central work conference in May 1964, Mao suddenly criticized the framework for paying insufficient attention to the industrialization of the "third line" (China's hinterland) and basic industry.[82] Mao claimed that "in the nuclear era, it is unacceptable to have no rear area."[83] Mao further suggested that "a foundation should be established in the

78. Andrew G. Walder, *China under Mao: A Revolution Derailed* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 195.

79. Ibid.

80. Wu, *Shinian lunzhan*, p. 733.

81. Fan Weizhong and Jin Chongji, *Li Fuchun zhuan* [Li Fuchun's biography] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2001), p. 629.

82. Barry Naughton, "The Third Front: Defense Industrialization in the Chinese Interior," *China Quarterly*, No. 115 (Autumn 1988), p. 365, doi:10.1017/S030574100002748X.

83. Pang Xianzhi and Feng Hui, eds., *Mao Zedong nianpu, 1949–1976* [Mao Zedong's chronology, 1949–1976], Vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 2013), pp. 354–355.

southwest" that would include industrial bases for metallurgy, national defense, oil, railroad, coal, and machinery.[84] Mao's justification was to "guard against enemy invasions."[85]

Mao's intervention transformed the focus of the May 1964 conference. Available sources contain no references by Mao to the development of the third line before this meeting. As Mao had removed himself from economic policy-making in 1960, his desire to reinsert himself and change the focus of the third five-year plan was remarkable. Moreover, no clear external threat existed in the first half of 1964 that would have warranted the concerns about war he (and only he) expressed. The PLA remained focused on strengthening island and coastal defenses as part of China's forward defensive posture.[86]

In early June 1964, Mao linked his attack on the five-year plan with his fear of revisionism. On June 6, Mao charged that China's approach to economic planning had been "basically learned from the Soviets" and ignored the possibility of unpredictable events such as wars and natural disasters. As a result, Mao instructed that "we must change the method of planning," a clear attack on the existing party leadership associated with economic recovery.[87] In other words, Mao used the need to develop the third line and prepare for a war as an excuse for attacking what he viewed as revisionism within the party, starting with the State Planning Commission, which represented all the flaws for Mao of a centralized bureaucracy. Two days later, Mao observed ominously that "a third of the power of the state is not in our hands, it is in the enemy's hands."[88] Mao even said that "if Khrushchev's revisionism appears in China in the center, then each province must resist."[89]

MAO REPLACES THE EXISTING STRATEGY

If the possibility of a war required the massive industrial development of the third line, then it naturally raised questions about whether China's existing

84. Ibid., pp. 344–345.
85. Jin Chongji, ed., *Zhou Enlai zhuan* [Biography of Zhou Enlai], Vol. 4 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1998), p. 1768.
86. Shou, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun junshi*, Vol. 5, pp. 323–329.
87. Mao quoted in Bo Yibo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu* [Reviewing several major decisions and events] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi chubanshe, 1993), pp. 1199–1200.
88. Pang and Feng, *Mao Zedong nianpu, 1949–1976*, Vol. 5, p. 358.
89. Bo, *Ruogan zhongda juece yu shijian de huigu*, p. 1148.

strategy was appropriate for the threat that Mao envisioned. If the most likely location of a U.S. attack was in Shandong, then developing the third line in the southwest made little sense. Mao thus had to challenge the idea of a primary strategic direction in China's military strategy to be consistent with the vague and general threat he invoked to upend China's economic policy.

The venue Mao chose for rejecting the existing strategy was not a meeting on military affairs with senior PLA officers. Instead, it was a June 1964 meeting of Politburo members and first party secretaries from the regional bureaus.[90] This choice of venue alone reveals Mao's political motives for intervening in military affairs. Similarly, he ended the speech by raising the question of "selecting successors," which he linked with "preventing revisionism" in China.

Reflecting concerns about revisionism, Mao emphasized the military deficiencies of local party leaders. Mao charged that they were complacent and interested only in economic affairs, not promoting China's revolution. Mao's rejection of the existing military strategy was designed to address this complacency by identifying a general problem around which they could mobilize—namely, their lack of preparations to conduct independent military operations if China was attacked. If an attack could come from any direction, not just the northeast, then military affairs would be the responsibility of all local party leaders.

Mao's speech reflected his political logic. He started by stating that provincial first secretaries were also political commissars. If they did not focus on military affairs, then they were "phony political commissars." He then questioned whether "the enemy" would "necessarily have to come from the northeast" and stated that an attack could occur from Tianjin down to Shanghai. Furthermore, he challenged the goal of resisting an invasion, alluding to luring the enemy in deep by stating that "it is better to fight when you can fight and win, and to go when you cannot fight and win." Finally, consistent with his desire to attack the party's centralized bureaucracy, which he viewed as revisionist, he argued that each province, county, and prefecture should develop its own militia and local forces (*difang budui*) that could conduct independent military operations. As he stated, "It is insufficient to just rely on the People's

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90. "Mao Zedong zai Shisanling shuiku de jianghua." All quotes from the speech in this section are taken from this document.

Liberation Army." A few weeks later, Mao even said that "if Beijing is lost, it is not critical."[91]

EXTERNAL THREATS?

Mao's desire to change China's military strategy is normally viewed as a response to the deterioration of China's security environment. Nevertheless, external threats cannot account for Mao's intervention. First, although China had experienced a period of heightened insecurity in 1962, China's external environment had stabilized by mid-1964. Two of the threats from 1962, on the border with India and in coastal provinces adjacent to Taiwan, had been reduced significantly. Ties with the Soviets were poor, but the military threat from Moscow would only begin in 1966.

Second, Mao's push to develop the third line and rejection of the existing strategy occurred three months before the August 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident, when U.S. and North Vietnamese ships clashed. Moreover, the U.S. bombing of North Vietnam after the incident did not alter Mao's assessment. In a mid-August meeting with the general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Lê Duẩn, Mao remarked that "America has not sent ground forces," and "it appears that America does not want to fight."[92]

Third, when Mao discussed external threats in May and June 1964, they were described in vague but not urgent terms. Mao's statement in May 1964 to guard against an imperialist attack repeated almost verbatim his assessment from the national congress in March 1955 discussed above.[93] Likewise, when Liu Shaoqi summarized Mao's remarks in early July 1964, he noted that "we have not yet seen a sign of when the imperialists plan to attack."[94]

Fourth, the development of the third line did not reflect a sense of urgency that would be associated with an immediate threat. The main projects Mao identified, for example, were steel mills, other basic industries, and railways—all capital-intensive projects with lead times of seven to ten years. These proj-

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91. Mao Zedong, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong junshi wengao* [Mao Zedong's military manuscripts since the founding of the nation], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2010), pp. 251–252.
92. Pang and Feng, *Mao Zedong nianpu, 1949–1976*, Vol. 5, p. 385.
93. Mao, *Jianguo yilai Mao Zedong junshi wengao*, Vol. 2, p. 265.
94. Liu Chongwen and Chen Shaochou, eds., *Liu Shaoqi nianpu, 1898–1969 (xia)* [Liu Shaoqi's chronology, 1898–1969] (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1996), p. 596.

ects would not be useful for defending against a pressing threat, but they did allow him to attack central planners and decentralize economic policymaking.

Luring the enemy in deep would remain China's strategic guideline until 1980. In April 1969, Mao reaffirmed it after tensions increased with the Soviet Union following the clash over Zhenbao (Damansky) Island.[95] It was formally affirmed in the first strategic guideline adopted after Mao's death in December 1977, though largely to stabilize the PLA in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution.[96]

1980—"Active Defense"

The strategic guideline adopted during a September 1980 meeting of senior officers represents the second major change in China's military strategy since 1949. The adoption of the 1980 strategy is puzzling because it occurred more than ten years after the Soviet Union began to pose a clear and present military threat to China, by deploying almost fifty divisions along China's northern border. China's top military officers pushed for the change in response to shifts in assessments of the Soviet threat that were influenced by the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, but only after Deng Xiaoping restored party unity by establishing himself as China's paramount leader.

OVERVIEW OF THE 1980 STRATEGY

In the 1980 guideline, the basis of preparations for military struggle was a surprise attack by the Soviet Union. Such an invasion would be characterized by rapid, deep strikes of tank columns, with airborne operations in rear areas, to seek a swift and decisive victory.[97] China's view of the Soviet threat reflected a Chinese assessment of shifts in the conduct of warfare as well as Soviet intentions. When endorsing the new strategy, Marshal Ye Jianying emphasized these shifts, observing that "in future war, the enemy may come from sky, land, or sea; the difference between front and rear is small. This is unprecedented three-dimensional warfare [*liti zhan*], combined warfare [*hetong zhan*],

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95. Han, *Han Huaizhi lun junshi*, p. 203.
96. Jiang and Ding, "Lengzhan shiqi Zhonguo fanqinlue zhanzheng zhanlue zhidao de biange," p. 17.
97. On the guideline, see Xie Hainan, Yang Zufa, and Yang Jianhua, *Yang Dezhi yi sheng* [Yang Dezhi's life] (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2011), pp. 313–315; Han, *Han Huaizhi lun junshi*, pp. 293–301; and Shou, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun de 80 nian*, pp. 455–457.

and overall warfare [*zongti zhan*]. It is conventional war, but it is different than the past."[98]

The 1980 strategy envisioned a forward defensive posture. The new strategy called for the PLA to resist a Soviet invasion and prevent a strategic breakthrough to buy time for national mobilization for what would still be a protracted conflict. In contrast to luring the enemy in deep, which emphasized strategic retreat and mobile operations on fluid fronts, the 1980 strategy called for positional warfare as the main form of operations, using combined arms operations in a layered system of defenses. This was described as "positional warfare of fixed defense" (*jianshou fangyu de zhendizhan*).[99] The role of mobile warfare was limited to small and medium-sized offensive operations close to these fixed positions that the PLA would try to hold.

As the new guideline was being implemented in 1981, the PLA launched reforms in all areas. First, in 1982, the PLA began to draft the "third generation" of operations regulations, which focused on combined arms and were published in 1988.[100] Second, the PLA engaged in three rounds of downsizing and reorganization to improve overall effectiveness while reducing the defense burden on the economy. Conducted in 1980, 1982 and 1985, these downsizings reduced the PLA from more than 6 million soldiers in 1979 to 3.2 million when concluded in 1987.[101] Experimental group armies to enhance combined arms by bringing infantry, tank, artillery, and antiaircraft artillery units under unified command were created in 1982 and, in the 1985 downsizing, all army corps were converted.[102] Third, in September 1980, the GSD issued a new training program, with an emphasis on combined arms operations.[103] In September 1981, the PLA held its largest campaign-level exercise to date,

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98. Ye, *Ye Jianying junshi wenxuan*, p. 717.
99. Junshi kexue yuan junshi lishi yanjiu suo [Academy of Military Science Military History Institute], *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun gaige fazhan 30 nian* [Thirty years of the reform and development of the Chinese People's Liberation Army] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2008), p. 21.
100. Ren, *Zuozhan tiaoling gailun*, p. 48. On the challenges of developing operational doctrine during this period, see Li Chen, "Operational Idealism: Doctrine Development of the Chinese People's Liberation Army under Soviet Threat, 1969–1989," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5 (2017), pp. 663–695, doi:10.1080/01402390.2017.1281802.
101. Ding Wei and Wei Xu, "20 shiji 80 niandai renmin jiefangjun tizhi gaige, jingjian zhenbian de huigu yu sikao" [The PLA's reform, streamlining, and reorganization in the '80s of the 20th Century], *Junshi lishi*, No. 6 (2014), pp. 52–57.
102. Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping junshi wenxuan* [Deng Xiaoping's selected works on military affairs], Vol. 3 (Beijng: Junnshi kexue chubanshe, 2004), p. 178.
103. Liu Yongzhi, ed., *Zongcan moubu dashiji* [A chronology of the General Staff Department] (Beijing: Lantian chubanshe, 2009), p. 739.

which involved more than 110,000 troops and simulated defense against a Soviet armored invasion to "implement the strategic guideline."[104]

1973 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR AND THE SOVIET THREAT

When the Soviet threat intensified in 1969, China maintained the strategy of luring the enemy in deep adopted in 1964. Although the Soviet threat remained constant, a key impetus for adopting a new strategy in 1980 was China's assessment of the kinds of operations that the Soviets would conduct, which were associated with shifts in the conduct of warfare as revealed in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

Su Yu offered the earliest and most prominent critiques of luring in deep in reports to the party leadership from 1973 to 1979. In 1974, for example, Su argued that the speed and lethality of military operations would greatly increase the costs of strategic retreat and called for a renewed emphasis on positional warfare to blunt or delay Soviet attacks. Su urged "sufficient understanding" of the importance of positional defensive operations and argued that cities and key strongpoints (*yaodian*) "must be resolutely defended tenaciously," not abandoned.[105] In 1975, Su concluded that China's future wars would be unlike those it had waged against Japan, the Nationalists, or the United States. Su stressed, for example, that the Soviet Union's advanced weaponry, especially its tanks and armored vehicles, could not be destroyed using the PLA's traditional methods of "gouging eyes" (throwing grenades through sight openings) and "cutting ears" (using grenades to destroy the antennae).[106]

In January 1979, Su's ideas gained much wider exposure when he delivered a lecture at the PLA's Military Academy. Importantly, Su's speech on "solving operational problems under modern conditions" was delivered before China's ill-fated invasion of Vietnam the next month. Su argued that advances in science and technology heralded a new stage in the development of weapons, equipment, and warfighting methods. According to Su, "These changes challenge some of our army's traditional operational arts and urgently demand that our army develop our strategy and tactics." Otherwise, "as soon as the en-

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104. Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu (xia)* [Zhang Zhen's memoirs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003), p. 212.
105. Su, *Su Yu wenxuan*, Vol. 3, p. 529.
106. Ibid., pp. 568–572.

emy launches a large-scale war of aggression, we will not be able to meet the requirements of the situation of the war and even pay much too high a price."[107] Senior officers reached similar conclusions in essays published in the internal journal *Military Arts* in 1979 and 1980.[108]

When the 1973 Arab-Israeli War occurred, the PLA's research institutes were only beginning to resume normal operations. Documents from the period are limited, but nevertheless suggest that China's assessment of the Soviet threat mirrored the analysis of the 1973 war. For example, a 1975 article in the *Liberation Army Daily* emphasized the speed and lethality of tank attacks, the role of antitank weapons, and the importance of air superiority—topics addressed in Su's reports.[109] In 1978 and 1979, the war featured prominently in anti-tank training in the Shenyang and Beijing Military Regions.[110] Many commentaries on Su's 1979 speech used the 1973 war as an important example to highlight the value of positional defense over strategic retreat.[111]

PARTY DISUNITY DURING AND AFTER THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Party disunity at the highest levels during the Cultural Revolution prevented the PLA from developing a new strategy for the Soviet threat. Even after Mao's death in 1976, the party remained fractured and lacked consensus regarding the structure of authority. Mao's successor, Hua Guofeng, had been anointed only several months earlier, after Deng Xiaoping was purged again in April 1976. Although Hua would hold top positions in the party, state, and military hierarchies, he lacked substantial national leadership experience in all areas. The arrest of the Gang of Four eliminated the most radical group within the elite, but tension remained between veteran revolutionaries such as Deng, who were persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, and "beneficiaries" such as Hua, whose careers had advanced when they replaced those who had been purged.[112]

In July 1977, Deng Xiaoping returned to work following a disingenuous

107. Ibid., p. 672.

108. Junshi xueshu zazhishe [Military Arts Magazine], ed., *Junshi xueshu lunwen xuan (xia)* [Collection of essays on military arts] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 1984).

109. *Jiefangjun Bao*, December 15, 1975.

110. *Jiefangjun Bao*, September 13, 1978; and *Jiefangjun Bao*, March 1, 1979.

111. Junshi xueshu zazhishe, *Junshi xueshu lunwen xuan (xia)*.

112. Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era: Chinese Politics during the Twilight of the Cultural Revolution, 1972–1976* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), pp. 12–14; and Rich-

pledge to respect Hua's authority. Although Deng ranked lower in the party, state, and military hierarchies than Hua, he possessed decades of leadership experience that Hua lacked. Deng and Hua surprisingly agreed on many policy issues, especially economic ones.[113] Nevertheless, Deng exploited Hua's political vulnerability as Mao's successor by promoting a debate over whether "practice is the sole criterion for judging truth," which questioned the utility of Maoist ideas under the slogan of the "two whatevers."[114] Because he was Mao's successor, Hua was particularly vulnerable to any reevaluation of Mao's ideas and role in the Cultural Revolution.[115] As Joseph Torigian describes, "Deng had artificially manufactured an ideological debate he could turn into a political debate."[116]

The turning point was a November 1978 Central Committee work conference to prepare for the Third Plenum. Participants, led by veteran leader Chen Yun, quickly hijacked the agenda to discuss Hua's opposition to reversing the verdicts on victims from the Cultural Revolution and from the 1976 Tiananmen Incident.[117] As support for these demands grew, Hua conceded.[118] When the Third Plenum was held in mid-December, it confirmed the reversal of verdicts for thousands. Chen Yun joined the Politburo Standing Committee and replaced a key supporter of Hua's, Wang Dongxing.

By this time, Deng had begun to exercise the authority of a paramount leader. Deng altered work assignments for those on the Politburo and Politburo Standing Committee, actions normally reserved for the party chairman, such as Hua.[119] Even before the work conference had started, Deng over-

ard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 27–29.

113. Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun, "China's New Economic Policy under Hua Guofeng: Party Consensus and Party Myths," *China Journal*, No. 66 (July 2011), pp. 1–23, doi:10.1086/tcj.66.41262805.

114. They were: "Resolutely uphold whatever policy decisions Chairman Mao made, and unswervingly follow whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave."

115. Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 170; and Teiwes and Sun, *The End of the Maoist Era*, p. 489.

116. Joseph Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion: Elite Power Struggles and the Fate of Three Revolutions," Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2016, p. 398.

117. In April 1976, ordinary people gathering in Tiananmen Square to mourn Zhou Enlai's death began to express dissatisfaction with the Cultural Revolution, thereby threatening Mao and the Gang of Four.

118. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 236; and Torigian, "Prestige, Manipulation, and Coercion," p. 351.

119. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China*, p. 196.

saw the negotiations for the normalization of diplomatic relations with the United States and pushed for a punitive attack on Vietnam in February 1979 for Hanoi's alignment with Moscow and invasion of Cambodia.[120] Previously, only Mao (or Zhou with Mao's approval) would have handled decisions such as high-level diplomatic negotiations or the use of force.

Deng completed his consolidation of power in 1980. At the Fifth Plenum, in February 1980, four members of the Politburo Standing Committee close to Hua Guofeng were removed, while Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang were added. Although Hua would remain chairman of the CCP and CMC until a series of Politburo meetings at the end of 1980, he had been effectively side-lined as a leader.

ADOPTION OF THE 1980 STRATEGY

Once party unity was restored, senior military officers pushed to adopt a new military strategy. In March 1980, Yang Dezhi, commander of the Kunming Military Region, replaced Deng Xiaoping as the chief of the general staff. One of Yang's first initiatives was to review China's strategic guideline. Following the publication of Su Yu's 1979 lecture, a gap existed between the growing consensus to adopt a forward defensive posture and the existing strategy of "active defense, luring the enemy in deep." The speed with which senior officers embraced Su's ideas and the gap with the existing guideline indicated the need to "unify thought" on strategy and operations.

On May 3, Yang proposed to the CMC that the GSD convene a seminar (*yanjiuban*) for senior officers on operations that would focus on the initial phase of a war.[121] The CMC agreed and a leading small group headed by Yang was formed to prepare for the meeting. Yang and his deputies agreed that a central issue for the seminar was to decide what was the "correct expression" of the strategic guideline "to unify the thinking of the whole army."[122] When the group finished its deliberations in August, it decided that the strategic guideline should be revised and that "luring the enemy in deep" should be dropped.[123] The group solicited opinions on changing the strategic guideline from the CMC's Strategy Commission and veteran marshals and CMC

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120. Xiaoming Zhang, *Deng Xiaoping's Long War: The Military Conflict between China and Vietnam, 1979–1991* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
121. Xie, Yang, and Yang, *Yang Dezhi yi sheng*, p. 313.
122. Zhang, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu (xia)*, p. 194.
123. Ibid., p. 198.

vice chairmen such Nie Rongzhen, Ye Jianying, and Xu Xiangqian, all of whom supported the change. On September 30, Yang reported their activities to Deng Xiaoping, who "clearly affirmed our views" and stated that he wanted to speak at the seminar.[124]

When the seminar began, more than 100 officers from the general departments, services, military regions, and other units attended. The discussion revolved around the assessment of the international situation, the content of the strategic guideline, and strategic missions for the PLA in the opening phase of the war. At the end of the meeting, Deng Xiaoping addressed the participants to approve the change in strategy that had been discussed. Deng asked, "For our future anti-aggression war, what guideline should we adopt after all?" He responded, "I approve these four characters—'active defense.'"[125] In his concluding remarks, Yang Dezhi stated that the meeting had "unified understanding of the CMC's strategic guideline, and further clarified strategic guiding thought and strategic missions in initial period of future war."[126]

Shifts in the conduct of warfare featured prominently as a rationale for the change in strategy. According to one account, the participants concluded that "today's war was completely different from yesterday's war," emphasizing that "the weapons and methods of war are changing, becoming staggering."[127] Likewise, Ye Jianying told the participants that "our military thought must follow changes and developments in warfare." For Ye, "many aspects are different than the past and not the same as 'millet and rifles.'"[128]

In 1985, the CMC's announcement of a 1-million-soldier downsizing was accompanied by a "strategic transformation in guiding thought for army building" to shift force modernization from a wartime footing to peacetime development. The main reason for this change was Deng's assessment that the threat of a total war had receded.[129] Nevertheless, a new strategic guideline was not adopted at this time. After studying China's security environment for several years, the CMC in December 1988 adopted a new strategic guideline, in which the basis of preparations for military struggle was "dealing with local

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124. Ibid., pp. 197–199.
125. Deng, *Deng Xiaoping junshi wenxuan*, Vol. 3, p. 177.
126. Xie, Yang, and Yang, *Yang Dezhi yi sheng*, p. 314.
127. Zhang Weiming, *Huabei dayanxi: Zhongguo zuida junshi yanxi jishi* [North China exercise: The record of China's largest military exercise] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008), p. 36.
128. Ye, *Ye Jianying junshi wenxuan*, p. 717.
129. Xie, Yang, and Yang, *Yang Dezhi yi sheng*, pp. 345–346.

wars and military conflicts."[130] This 1988 strategy for local wars, however, did not describe how such conflicts would be fought or what forces would be required, questions that would be answered only after the Gulf War.

1993—"Winning Local Wars under High-Technology Conditions"

The strategic guideline adopted in January 1993 represents the third major change in China's military strategy since 1949. The 1993 strategic guideline is puzzling because it was issued when Chinese leaders viewed their regional security environment as the "best ever."[131] The PLA's top military officers pushed for the change in response to shifts in the conduct of warfare revealed in the Gulf War, but only after party unity was restored following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

OVERVIEW OF THE 1993 STRATEGY

Unlike the 1956 and 1980 guidelines, the 1993 guidelines were not based on countering an invasion. When introducing the new strategy, Jiang Zemin in his capacity as CMC chairman explained that the PLA "must place the basis of preparations for military struggle on winning local wars under modern especially high-technology conditions that might occur."[132] This judgment was premised on the assessment that "as soon as a war breaks out, it is likely to be a high-technology confrontation."[133] If a state lacked high-technology capabilities, "it would always be in a passive position as soon as war erupted."[134] Although the speech did not explicitly identify a "main strategic direction," Jiang noted that the "focal point of military struggle is to prevent a major incident of 'Taiwan independence' from occurring," indicating a focus on the southeast.[135]

Liu Huaqing, vice chairman of the CMC, later described the changes in China's approach to military strategy. For Liu, this was the "shift from countering the invasion of one main enemy to countering multiple forms of

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130. Huang Yingxu, "Zhongguo jiji fangyu zhanlue fangzhen de queli yu tiaozheng" [The estabishment and adjustment of China's strategic guideline of active defense], *Zhongguo junshi kexue*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2002), p. 63.
131. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan* [Jiang Zemin's selected works], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 279.
132. Ibid., p. 285.
133. Ibid., p. 286.
134. Ibid., p. 285.
135. Ibid., p. 289.

conflicts from different adversaries, from defensive battles of long duration in the hinterland to short and decisive mobile operations in the coastal and border regions, from having plans for the battlefield and making long preparations for large-scale conflicts to making temporary arrangements and responding rapidly to limited conflicts, from ground warfare–based coordinated operations to joint operations of the three services with increased air and naval warfare." Liu concluded that this set of changes "enables [us] to shift from [fighting] conflicts in ordinary conditions to winning local conflicts with high-tech conditions."[136]

As the new guideline was implemented, the PLA initiated reforms in all areas. First, the PLA rewrote its operational doctrine around joint operations and the basic guiding principle for operations of "integrated operations, key-point strikes" (*zhengti zuozhan, zhongdian daji*). The CMC issued the fourth generation of operations regulations along with seven campaign outlines in January 1999.[137] Second, the force was substantially reorganized through two downsizings to increase effectiveness in 1997 and 2003 that cut 700,000 soldiers.[138] Although the size of the air force and navy each declined by 11 percent, the ground forces shrunk by 19 percent, taking the largest hit, with many divisions being transformed into brigades. To strengthen weapons design and procurement, a fourth general department was created in 1998, the General Armaments Department.[139] Third, in December 1995, the GSD issued a new, army-wide training program.[140] A second training program was promulgated in 2001 and implemented in January 2002 to emphasize standards for the evaluation of training.[141]

THE GULF WAR

The external motivation for the adoption of the new strategy was the assessment of China's top military leaders that the Gulf War heralded a significant

136. Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing huiyilu* [Liu Huaqing's memoirs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004), p. 645.

137. Ren, *Zuozhan tiaoling gailun*, p. 51.

138. Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 22.

139. Jiang Tiejun, ed., *Dang de guofang jundui gaige sixiang yanjiu* [A study of the Party's thought on national defense and army reform] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2015), p. 112.

140. *Jiefangjun bao*, December 12, 1995.

141. *Jiefangjun bao*, August 10, 2001.

shift in the conduct of warfare. The rapidity and destructiveness of the conflict awed the PLA, like most other militaries around the world.

In early March 1991, just days after the Gulf War ended, the CMC launched an army-wide effort to study conflict, including implications for changes in the conduct of warfare and countermeasures that China should adopt in response. Liu Huaqing concluded that "our past considerations were correct, but a new situation has occurred."[142] The purpose was to develop concrete proposals for how the PLA should respond to this situation lest China "suffer losses in future local wars and military conflicts." As Liu stated, "We should study how to . . . fight a future war."[143]

The CMC reached several conclusions during these meetings. The first was that the shift in the conduct of warfare revealed in the Gulf War revolved around the application of high technology on the battlefield. According to Liu, "Under modern conditions, military technology, especially new and high technology, is becoming increasingly important as a decisive factor for victory."[144] The second conclusion was that the Gulf War, as a high-technology local war, reflected the kind of conflict that China would likely face in the future. In March 1991, Zhang Zhen, commandant of the PLA's National Defense University, asserted that "the Gulf War has revealed some basic characteristics and operational patterns of high-technology conventional local wars."[145] The third conclusion was that China was woefully unprepared for such wars. As Jiang Zemin observed in June 1991, "We really do lag far behind in weapons and equipment, and in some areas, the gaps are increasing."[146]

Two years before the new strategic guideline was formulated, the GSD's leadership clearly linked the Gulf War with the need to reconsider China's military strategy. After the initial study of the conflict in 1991, the GSD submitted a report on the war to the CMC, which suggested that the PLA should "learn from the experience and lessons of the Gulf War and strengthen research of military strategy and other important problems."[147] In January 1992, the GSD

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142. Liu Huaqing, *Liu Huaqing junshi wenxuan* [Liu Huaqing's selected works on military affairs], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008), p. 127.
143. Ibid., p. 128.
144. Liu, *Liu Huaqing huiyilu*, p. 610.
145. Zhang Zhen, *Zhang Zhen junshi wenxuan* [Zhang Zhen's selected military works], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2005), p. 469.
146. Jiang, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan*, Vol. 1, p. 145.
147. Kong Fanjun, *Chi Haotian zhuan* [Chi Haotian's biography] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009), p. 326.

sent a report to the CMC on China's security situation. As Chief of the General Staff Chi Haotian noted, the analysis was "related to the important matter of correctly determining military strategy."[148]

PARTY DISUNITY AFTER TIANANMEN

The demonstrations and massacre in and around Tiananmen Square in 1989 created a rift at the highest levels of the party, which prevented PLA officers from changing China's military strategy. Deng Xiaoping remained committed to reform, but was opposed by economic conservatives such as Chen Yun and ideological ones such as Deng Liqun, who blamed Deng's policies for the circumstances that had given rise to the protests.[149] Joseph Fewsmith concludes that "the depth of Party division created by Tiananmen was far greater than at the time of Hu Yaobang's ouster" as general secretary in January 1987.[150] These divisions prevented the party from reaching consensus on economic policy at party plenums in 1990 and 1991.

As the party split over economic policy, the PLA became increasingly politicized. Following Tiananmen, the PLA emphasized political work designed to affirm the party's control and ensure the "absolute loyalty" of the force. Immediately after Tiananmen, investigations were launched to identity disloyal officers. One hundred eleven officers were deemed to have breached discipline and twenty-one were court-martialed, including Gen. Xu Qinxian, who refused to implement martial law.[151] In January 1990, the PLA launched an indoctrination campaign to ensure that the PLA would be "forever qualified politically," emphasize political work as "the lifeline" of the PLA, and maintain the party's absolute leadership.[152]

The emphasis on political work enhanced the role of Yang Baibing and his elder half-brother, Yang Shangkun, old allies of Deng. In November 1989, Yang Shangkun, who was already president of the PRC and a member of the CMC, became the first vice chairman, replacing Zhao Ziyang. Yang Baibing, the di-

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148. Ibid., p. 327.
149. On leadership divisions, see Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 275–368; and Joseph Fewsmith, "Reaction, Resurgence, and Succession: Chinese Politics since Tiananmen," in MacFarquhar, *The Politics of China*, pp. 468–527.
150. Fewsmith, "Reaction, Resurgence, and Succession," p. 473.
151. Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military*, p. 24.
152. Shou, *Zhongguo renmin jiefangjun de 80 nian*, p. 482.

rector of the General Political Department, became the secretary-general of the CMC, thus placing him in charge of personnel issues and the CMC's powerful general office. Both brothers oversaw a large-scale reshuffling of personnel, with a special emphasis on commissars, which created a rift within the PLA between the brothers and the more professionally oriented commanders.[153]

In early 1992, Deng launched his "southern tour" as a last-ditch attempt to mobilize support for continued reform. Unlike his 1991 trip to Shanghai, he enlisted the support of the PLA in addition to allies within the party leadership. In a speech at the National People's Congress in March 1992, Yang Baibing declared that the PLA would be "'protecting and escorting' reform and opening."[154] The General Political Department then organized four groups of generals to retrace Deng's southern tour and used the *Liberation Army Daily* to stress the military's support for Deng.

In the summer of 1992, consensus emerged around Deng's reform program. Reflecting Deng's victory, the 14th Party Congress in October 1992 called for creating a "socialist market economy."[155] Although Deng had used the Yang brothers to consolidate the party's control of the army and then cajole conservatives to support reform, he also recognized the dangers of disunity within the top ranks of the PLA. At the party congress, Yang Shangkun retired from all his posts, while Yang Baibing was elevated to the Politburo, but stripped of his military positions, and a new CMC was formed.

ADOPTION OF THE 1993 STRATEGY

Once party unity was restored, the PLA moved to adopt a new military strategy. Shortly after the new CMC was formed in October 1992, Jiang Zemin indicated that because "the international situation is now changing rapidly," China must "correctly decide our military strategic guideline."[156] Jiang was likely drawing on his own participation in the PLA's discussions of the Gulf War in 1991 as well as the GSD's reports to the CMC on the need for a new strategy in 1991 and 1992.

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153. Michael D. Swaine, *The Military & Political Succession in China: Leadership, Institutions, Beliefs* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1992), p. 145.
154. *Jiefangjun Bao*, March 24, 1992.
155. Baum, *Burying Mao*, pp. 360–361.
156. Jiang Zemin, *Lun guofang yu jundui jianshe* [On national defense and army building] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2002), p. 74.

Within the CMC, newly appointed Vice Chairman Zhang Zhen assumed leadership of the process. The CMC decided to hold a small-scale forum (*zuotanhui*) on military strategy in early December to analyze "the international strategic situation and closely examine the regional security environment," which would be a key factor in formulating a new strategic guideline.[157] In addition, the CMC tasked Chief of the General Staff Zhang Wannian with drafting a report and providing suggestions for the new strategy. Zhang then formed a working group, which focused on developing answers to four questions: "With whom will we fight? Where will we fight? What is the character [*xingzhi*] of the war that we will fight? How will we fight?"[158]

The symposium on military strategy was held in Beijing on December 4–5, 1992. The participants reaffirmed previous assessments that local wars on China's periphery and not total wars would be the scenario that the PLA would most likely confront. They also agreed that the basis of preparations for military struggle would be high-technology local wars. Given the previous assessments of the Gulf War, this is unsurprising, but was now established as consensus among the PLA leadership. As Zhang Zhen recalled saying at the meeting, "When future war erupts, it will be a high-technology war and unlike past wars. . . . The Gulf War is a representative example."[159]

The focus on high-technology local conflicts, however, raised another question—namely, how to carry out "active defense" under these conditions. Participants agreed on traditional ideas such as "strategically striking after the enemy has struck" (*houfa zhiren*) and "being rooted in using inferior equipment to defeat an enemy."[160] At the same time, Zhang Zhen highlighted important problems that China would need to resolve under "new conditions," including rapid reaction and flexibility, as well as effectively subduing the enemy (*youxiao zhidi*). To address these challenges, Zhang Wannian proposed that China must create "fists" (*quantou*) and "assassin's maces" (*shashoujian*). The "fists" would be units with robust mobility, especially naval, air, and conventional missile forces. According to Zhang Wannian, "As soon as an incident oc-

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157. Zhang, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu (xia)*, p. 361.
158. Guo Xiangjie, ed., *Zhang Wannian zhuan (xia)* [Zhang Wannian's biography] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2011), p. 62.
159. Zhang, *Zhang Zhen huiyilu (xia)*, p. 363.
160. Zhang Wannian, *Zhang Wannian junshi wenxuan* [Zhang Wannian's selected works on military affairs] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008), p. 365.

curs, these forces can be sent rapidly to the theater, control the situation, and resolve problems."[161] The "assassin's maces" referred to the development of advanced weapons for "subduing the enemy."

After the meeting, Zhang Wannian's working group spent the rest of December completing a report with recommendations for the new military strategy. The CMC also held several standing committee meetings to discuss the new strategic guideline. On December 31, 1992, Zhang's report was completed and sent to Jiang Zemin. This report formed the basis of the speech that Jiang delivered at an enlarged meeting of the CMC on January 13, 1993, that formally established the new strategy.

China's Military Strategies since 1993

Since 1993, China has changed its military strategy twice, in 2004 and 2014. Existing sources on these changes are relatively sparse and permit only a cursory examination of the reasons why each was adopted.

2004—"LOCAL WARS UNDER INFORMATIONIZED CONDITIONS"

The 2004 strategy was adopted at an enlarged meeting of the CMC in June 2004. As CMC chairman Jiang Zemin stated, "We must clearly place the basis of preparations for military struggle on winning local wars under informationized conditions." This change reflected the assessment that "informationized warfare will become the basic form of 21st century warfare."[162] "Informationization" is an awkward translation of the Chinese term *xinxihua*. A more literal but less concise translation is "the application of information technology," focusing on all aspects of military operations.[163]

The 2004 guideline represents a minor change to the 1993 strategy, based on a refined understanding of technology's role in warfare. "Integrated joint operations" (*yitihua lianhe zuozhan*) replaced joint operations as the main form of operations. Starting in 2004, the PLA began to draft new combat regulations to focus on informationization, along with twelve joint campaign outlines, but

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161. Ibid.
162. Jiang Zemin, *Jiang Zemin Wenxuan* [Jiang Zemin's selected works], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006), p. 608.
163. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today*, p. 13.

these were never promulgated.[164] The new CMC, formed in September 2004, sought to improve the PLA's ability to command joint operations by including, for the first time, the commanders of each of the services and thus eroding the dominance of the ground forces. Finally, a new military training and evaluation program took effect in January 2009.[165] Training exercises focused on how to execute joint operations, first at the tactical level and then at the campaign level.[166]

A key factor behind the adoption of the 2004 strategic guideline was the PLA's assessment of the implications of the 1999 Kosovo War and 2003 Iraq War. As a textbook from the Academy of Military Science describes, these wars "gave us a glimpse of the vivid realities of local wars under informationized conditions, providing us with many lessons."[167] Internal studies of both conflicts stressed the role of informationization.[168] In February 2000, Chief of the General Staff Fu Quanyou foreshadowed the change by stating that the most important aspect of the Kosovo War was the "integrated joint operations of the services" focusing on land, sea, air, space, and electromagnetic domains.[169] In December 2000, Jiang Zemin underscored that "the main characteristic of high-technology war is informationization."[170]

2014—"INFORMATIONIZED LOCAL WARS"

China's most recent strategy was adopted sometime in the summer of 2014. As the 2015 white paper on China's military strategy revealed, the basis of preparations for military struggle changed from "informationized conditions" to just "informationization."[171] Information, broadly defined, was now seen as

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164. Ren, *Zuozhan tiaoling gailun* p. 52.

165. *Jiefangjun bao*, August 1, 2008.

166. Kevin McCauley, *PLA System of Systems Operations: Enabling Joint Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2017).

167. Qiao Jie, ed., *Zhanyi xue jiaocheng* [Lectures on the science of campaigns] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2012), pp. 30–31.

168. Huang Bin, ed., *Kesuowo zhanzheng yanjiu* [A study of the Kosovo War] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2000); and Chen Dongxiang, ed., *Pingdian Yilake zhanzheng* [Discussion and assessment of the Iraq War] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2003).

169. Wang Xuedong, *Fu Quanyou zhuan* [Fu Quanyou's biography] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2015), p. 717.

170. Jiang, *Jiang Zemin wenxuan*, Vol. 3, p. 162.

171. This section draws on M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Military Strategy: 'Winning Local Informationized Wars,'" *China Brief*, Vol. 15, No. 13 (2015), pp. 3–7.

playing a "leading role" in war and was no longer just an "important condition" of warfare.[172] Importantly, however, the main form of operations in the new strategy remained the same as in the 2004 strategic guideline: integrated joint operations.

Available evidence suggests that the 2014 strategic guideline was a minor change adopted to provide top-level support and justification for the implementation of unprecedented organizational reforms announced in November 2015. Broadly speaking, the reforms are designed to improve joint operations envisioned in the 1993 and 2004 strategies by transforming seven military regions into five theater commands, breaking up the four general departments into fifteen smaller organizations directly under the CMC, elevating the Second Artillery from a combat arm to a service, creating a separate ground forces command for the first time, establishing a Strategic Support Force, and cutting 300,000 from the armed forces.[173] The possibility of such reforms first appeared during the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in November 2013, which called for "reform of the military leadership system" with an emphasis on joint operations. As Xi Jinping explained in December 2013, "We have already explored the command system for joint operations, but problems have not been fundamentally resolved."[174] Thus, the strategy appears to have been changed to provide the rationale for these organizational reforms. No significant shift in the conduct of warfare occurred from 2004 to 2014 to prompt adoption of a new strategy.

The separate and secondary change in the 2014 strategic guideline concerned elevating the importance of the maritime domain. As part of winning informationized local wars, the white paper called for giving prominence to "maritime military struggle" and "preparations for maritime military struggle." The added emphasis on the maritime domain reflects the intensification of disputes over territorial sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction in waters

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172. Wen Bin, "Dingzhun junshi douzheng jidian" [Pinpointing the basis of preparations for military struggle], *Xuexi shibao*, June 1, 2015.
173. Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders, *Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2017).
174. "Xi Jinping: Jundui gaige shi huibi buliao de dakao" [Xi Jinping: Reform of the armed forces is a great test that cannot be avoided], *Renmin wang*, August 15, 2014, http://politics.people .com.cn/n/2014/0815/c1001-25474880.html.

near China, and the expansion of China's interests beyond East Asia. The PLA appears to be responding to a combination of growing threats, along with a desire to defend new interests that China has acquired.

Conclusion

Significant shifts in the conduct of warfare in the international system best explain when China has pursued major changes in its military strategy. Yet China has been able to respond to these shifts and change its strategy only when the party is united and delegates substantial responsibility for military affairs to senior PLA officers. China pursued major changes in its military strategy in 1956 in response to lessons it observed from World War II, along with its own experience in Korea, during a period of unprecedented unity. China pursued major change in 1980, as lessons from the 1973 Arab-Israeli War shaped how the PLA assessed the Soviet threat, but it did so only after Deng Xiaoping had consolidated his authority as China's paramount leader in a power struggle with Hua Guofeng after Mao's death. In 1993, China pursued a major change in military strategy in response to the shift in the conduct in warfare highlighted by the Gulf War, but only once divisions among the elite over reform after Tiananmen were removed. In one case, 1964, the top party leader, Mao Zedong, intervened in China's military affairs to push for a new strategy, but the purpose was to justify a dramatic reversal in economic policy and attack political opponents he viewed as revisionist.

 The conditions under which China has pursued major change in its military strategy may help illuminate when and why future changes are likely to occur. Overall, China will continue to monitor closely other wars that occur in the international system, especially those involving U.S. forces. China will focus on the United States and its allies not just because of the potential for greater competition with the former in the Western Pacific, but also because the United States possesses the most advanced military power in the world, whose operations could signal a shift in the conduct of warfare. At the time same, China's rising power suggests that China may pursue minor changes in its strategy as its interests expand. But for the short to medium term, the main issues over which China would use force remain unresolved sovereignty and territorial disputes within East Asia, such as over Taiwan and the South China Sea. As a

result, China's military strategy is likely to emphasize how to prevail in such conflicts, especially over Taiwan. Finally, China's ability to pursue either major or minor changes in strategy will depend on continued unity within the leadership of the CCP over basic policies and the structure of authority. Although periods of disunity within the party may be hard to predict, one important consequence is that they can prevent the adoption of a new military strategy.