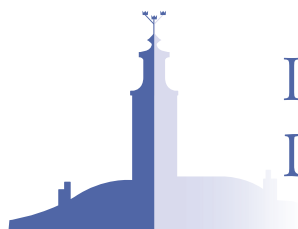


China's Military Reform: Prospects and Challenges

Shi Qingren

ASIA PAPER
September 2014



Institute for Security &
Development Policy

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ISBN: 978-91-86635-83-1

Printed in Singapore

Distributed in Europe by:

Institute for Security and Development Policy
Västra Finnbodavägen 2, 131 30 Stockholm-Nacka, Sweden
Tel. +46-841056953; Fax. +46-86403370
Email: info@isd.eu

Distributed in North America by:

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
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Key Abbreviations

CPC	Communist Party of China
CCCPC	Central Committee of the Communist Party of China
CMC	Central Military Committee
PLA	People's Liberation Army
R&D	Research and Development
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs

Executive Summary

Military reform has been an important theme in China's national defense and army building since the foundation of New China. Historically speaking, size and structure have always been the two main areas for China's military reform. In the latter half of the twentieth century, China's military reform mainly focused on the issue of size, i.e. reducing or expanding the number of armed forces personnel. In the new century, the problem of structure has emerged. Having an improper structure greatly restricts the improvement of military combat effectiveness and is the main obstacle to the modernization of national defense and armed forces. This is the situation today faced by Chairman Xi Jinping and China's new collective leadership.

Chairman Xi is adopting reform as the key means to push forward the country's development, and he views military reform as an integral part of the country's overall reform planning. As such, in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee, Xi released a major reform plan, in which military reform held an important position. He has subsequently presented his views on deepening military reform, and formulated a timetable for military reform. It is therefore clear that military reform will become the PLA's main task in the next few years.

The military reform implemented by Xi diverges from previous reform aims in that it mainly encompasses such areas as army establishments and army policy. The goals of the reform are to modernize the military organizational structure and to build a system of modern military forces with Chinese characteristics. As for the measures of military reform, Xi has also made clear statements, that is, to promote the reform of the leadership system and joint operational command system, to optimize the structure of the armed forces and its make-up, to boost the adjustment of military policies and mechanisms, and to boost coordinated development of military and civilian sectors. All of the above make up the military reform thought of China's new collective leadership. However, just as all reforms have their risks and uncertainties, China's military reform is also facing severe challenges necessitating courage and wisdom to advance it.

Introduction

China's national defense and military build-up has attracted increasing international attention on account of China's rise in recent years. Foreign researchers have attempted to analyze the development of China's military strength, with various studies and assessments having been released.¹ However, these have been more concerned with the current situation of China's military and tend to lack historical perspective. The new military reform of China is still in the process of being unveiled. It will largely decide the developmental direction of China's military strength in the next decade. Therefore, to track and study the military reform thought of China's new collective leadership is of great significance.

It has been 65 years since the founding of New China, with the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) military building having made notable progress during different eras. In the 1950s, the first collective leadership around Mao Zedong presented the PLA with the strategic task of developing its mastery of modern military science and technologies from a primary to an advanced level, in the process establishing New China's military system. In the 1980s, the second collective leadership under Deng Xiaoping led the PLA along the path of building a streamlined military with Chinese characteristics, and succeeded in simultaneously downsizing the quantity and upgrading the quality of the armed forces. Since the 1990s, the third collective leadership under Jiang Zemin and the fourth collective leadership under Hu Jintao have respectively strived to push forward the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) with Chinese characteristics and made steps toward enhancing the informationization of the armed forces.

In light of the above, it is easy to observe that military reform has been the leitmotif of the development of China's armed forces. In different eras successive collective leaderships have taken different measures concerning military reform in accordance with the country's needs and military

¹ Notable studies, among others, include Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner, *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (United States Army War College Press, 2014), and *Annual Report To Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014* (Office of the Secretary of Defense of the U.S.), available at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf.

conditions, and, in so doing, have attempted to catch up with worldwide military developments. Where military reform can be carried out correctly and promptly, China's national defense and army building can benefit accordingly and develop appropriately. Therefore, military reform provides a good perspective to observe and assess the development of China's military strength. Through assessing China's military reform, one can clearly identify the historical roots, current situation, as well as the future development of China's military strength.

It is clear that China and its armed forces stand on the threshold of a new era. China's GDP exceeded that of Japan in 2011, and it has since become the second-largest economy in the world—a fact of historical significance for the country's development. As a political instrument of the country, the armed forces are always dedicated to serving the country's needs. Undoubtedly, China's new stage of development will make new demands of the country's military strength. Accordingly, at the 18th Party Congress in November 2012, the strategic task was set of “building [a] strong national defense and powerful armed forces that are commensurate with China's international standing and [which] meet the needs of its security and development interests.”² In analyzing the situation as it stands now, China's military strength is far from the goal of possessing “strong national defense and powerful armed forces.” Indeed, on the whole it still finds itself at the stage of mechanization with a low level of modernization—which is the key problem of its development.

Bearing in mind the problems above, the new collective leadership has adopted military reform as the means to the solution. In fact, Xi Jinping considers that “the military reform of China has entered a critical stage and a deep water zone,³ [with] the arm[y] hav[ing] a great expectation of and [being in favor of] military reform,”⁴ and, furthermore, that “China must deepen its all-round reform with a new starting point.”⁵ In the overall

² “Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China,” November 8, 2012, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/language_tips/news/2012-11/19/content_15941774_10.htm.

³ A “deep water zone” refers to an area full of challenge and difficulty.

⁴ Xi Jinping's speech at a conference on developing a new “working style” in the military, July 2013.

⁵ “Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening Reform,” November 2013, http://www.china.org.cn/china/third_plenary_session/2013-11/16/content_30620736.htm.

reform plan outlined in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee, the reform of national defense and the army occupies an important position. As Xi Jinping stated: “national defense and military reform are an important part and an important symbol of China’s overall reform.”⁶ To carry out military reform is therefore among the most urgent tasks for the PLA in the next few years.

While the military reform being advanced by Xi Jinping is still a set of principles, it does nevertheless exhibit several new features. In such issues as what to reform and how to reform, Xi has already made some new and different statements, which serve as guidelines for the military reform. In his view, the reform will target key problems in strengthening combat preparedness and the weak links in honing combat effectiveness,⁷ with the main areas being adjustments to the army establishment and army policy.

The main body of this paper consists accordingly of three parts. The first part considers the main drivers behind the military reform, the second part examines more closely the measures of military reform, while the third part focuses on the challenges for the future of military reform. A comparative perspective is also adopted in using examples from other countries to demonstrate certain viewpoints.

⁶ “Xi leads China’s Military Reform, Stresses Strong Army,” *Xinhuanet*, March 15, 2014, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-03/15/c_133188618.htm.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The Main Drivers of the Military Reform

Military strength essentially depends on three factors: personnel, weaponry, and organizational structure. It therefore stands to reason that any military reform must focus on these three areas. What exactly to reform, however, is decided according to specific needs and conditions.

The military reform advanced by Xi Jinping takes the military organizational structure as the main area for reform. Accordingly, the aim of military reform is to “modernize the military organizational structure, and build a system of modern military forces with Chinese characteristics.”⁸ Xi calls for developing combat forces by accelerating reform in some important fields and key chains, and providing support for “the aim of building a strong armed forces” in the aspects of structure, mechanism, and policy. In Xi’s statement, organizational structure mainly encompasses the military’s composition and functions, as well as policies and mechanisms. To make breakthroughs in these areas is thus the main task for military reform.

The reasons why Xi Jinping endeavors to solve the problem of organizational structure are rather complex, including the trend of military changes underway worldwide, the new missions of the armed forces, the development of high-tech weaponry, and so on. According to Xi Jinping, “We are facing [a window of opportunity] in deepening the reform of national defense and armed forces and should grasp it firmly.”⁹ The main drivers behind the need for reform are explored at greater length below.

Adapting to the Trend of Worldwide Military Changes

As asserted by Xi Jinping, “the military field is among the fields that [witnesses] the strongest competition and confrontation, and [which] necessitates more innovative vigor and spirit.”¹⁰ In viewing the history of the development of human society, one can observe that the military has always

⁸ Hu Jintao, “Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China” on November 8, 2012.

⁹ Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

¹⁰ Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference on developing a new “working style” in the military, July 2013.

adopted as a priority the most advanced applications of science and technology. The groundbreaking use of computers in the research and development of nuclear weaponry in the 1940s is one example of this. Nowadays, “the extensive applications in the military field of new and high technologies led by IT have stretched the battlefield into multidimensional space which includes the land, sea, air, outer space, and the electronic domain.”¹¹ It can thus be observed that the form of war is becoming increasingly information-oriented.

In recent years, countries such as the United States, Russia, Japan, and South Korea have been accelerating their military reform and have made breakthroughs in such aspects as optimizing structures, improving command chains, integrating systematically, enhancing capability, and so on. The trend of military reform is to push forward the transformation of the armed forces from handling large-scale warfare under mechanized conditions to being operational and mobile under informationized conditions. The development of military strength features combination, mobility, rapid reaction, flexibility, high efficiency, and multi-functionality.

The new defense guidelines of the United States present a vision of future military reform, the core of which is “to change, from the aspects of size and composition, the combat modes of coping with large-scale ground war during the Cold War and the 1990s, and build [a] 21st century modern joint force that is agile, flexible, more adaptable and able to quickly and efficiently respond to all types of emergencies and potential enemies.”¹² Russia has been carrying out military reform since 2008, and has realized the transformation from being mobile in conditions of large-scale warfare to being standing and mobile under informationized conditions. Japan has also enhanced its military reform, which is aimed at a transformation from “basic defense forces” to “mobile defense forces.” Additionally in Northeast Asia, the South Korean defense ministry has outlined its Fundamental Plan of National Defense Reform (2012-2030), which is focused on establishing a more streamlined and highly efficient system of national defense and boosting the joint operation command system of services and armies. Elsewhere,

¹¹ *China's National Defense in 2002* (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China: December 2002), accessible at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/zhengfu/2003-02/27/content_748657.htm.

¹² Center for National Defense Policy of the AMS, *The Strategic Review* (2012), April 2013.

Sweden released its Defense Reform Bill of 2009, according to which the number of servicemen will be reduced from 500,000 to 30,000.¹³

The military changes underway across the world pose severe challenges to the national defense and army building of China. China has already learned—to its cost—from history the military challenges posed by the outer world. In the late Qing Dynasty, for instance, the government of the time ignored the gunpowder revolution, with the result that it suffered a disastrous defeat when faced with Western firearms and artillery. This is also the reason why Xi Jinping has stressed that China can't repeat the historical tragedies since the Opium Wars, when the Chinese people were enslaved and colonized by means of the more advanced weaponry of other large powers. Shifting perspective to the present day, the Revolution in Military Affairs led by information technologies engenders the risk of forming a generation gap in military technology between China's armed forces and those of certain other countries. Adapting to these new challenges and accelerating military reform is thus a necessary countermeasure.

Accomplishing the Historical Missions of the Armed forces for the New Stage in the New Century

The missions of the armed forces are the main tasks accorded to it by the country; they act as the strategic traction for national defense and army building. China's armed forces have been entrusted with different missions since the founding of New China. According to the white paper *China's National Defense in 2006*, in the twenty-first century the armed forces are entrusted with the historical missions for the new stage, namely: "providing an important source of strength for consolidating the ruling position of the CPC, providing a solid security guarantee for sustaining the important period of strategic opportunity for national development, providing a strong strategic support for safeguarding national interests, and playing a major role in maintaining world peace and promoting common development."¹⁴

The new missions of the armed forces make new demands on China's military strength. To perform the new missions, the armed forces need not only to win under conditions of mechanized warfare, but also those

¹³ An Interview with Major General Karlis Neretnieks, May 13, 2014.

¹⁴ *China's National Defense in 2006*, December 2006, http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/2011-10/16/content_23637045_4.htm.

of informationized warfare; not only ensure territorial security, but also maritime, space, and electromagnetic space security; and not only perform regular military operations, but also military operations other than war (MOOTW). In short, it requires the armed forces to possess capabilities of countering various security threats and accomplishing diversified military tasks.

The present reality is that China's military strength is essentially predicated on conditions of mechanized warfare and large-scale ground warfare, being further characterized by ground combat and homeland defense in terms of organizational structure. This traditional military system fails to fully meet the need to win local wars in conditions of informationization; nor can it sufficiently ensure maritime, space, and electromagnetic space security or perform tasks of counter-terrorism, maintaining stability, emergency rescue, and international peacekeeping. Thus, it behooves the Chinese armed forces to adapt to the new historical missions.

Seeking to Solve Deep-seated Problems on the Basis of Previous Military Reforms

All collective leaderships of China have taken some reform measures to advance national defense and the building of the armed forces during different periods. A study of history reveals similarities in these military reforms, that is, they mainly concerned the size of the armed forces. The size of the armed forces peaked at over six million,¹⁵ which greatly restricted the army's quality and heavily burdened the country. The reason for this is that the PLA's backward state in terms of military technology forced it to take a manpower-intensive approach to military strength. There have thus been nine large-scale efforts to streamline and reorganize the PLA since 1949,¹⁶ with downsizing being the central theme for these military reforms. Therefore, reducing quantity and improving quality has long been a basic principle in the army's modernization.

¹⁵ In 1951, the size of the PLA reached 6.27 million personnel.

¹⁶ "The Large Streamlining and Reorganization of the PLA (after 1949)" (in Chinese), *Xinhuanet*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-07/20/content_1618369.htm. Editor's note: Translations of original Chinese-language source are those of the author alone.

Table 1. Number of PLA Personnel (1985-2005) (Unit: 1000s)

Year	1985	1987	1997	2000	2005
Quantity	4238	3235	3000	2500	2300

After several rounds of streamlining, China now maintains the size of the PLA at 2.3 million, which is a much more appropriate size. Therefore, the main areas of military reform will shift from size and quantity to the organizational structure of the armed forces. In this aspect, some deep-seated impediments and problems have emerged, which have greatly hindered the further development of armed forces. For instance, the structure of the armed forces is not proper, the composition of services and arms is disproportional, the different levels of headquarters are overlapping, some types of armed forces (such as cavalry and railway corps) are outdated, the organization and structure of combat forces is in need of improvement, and so on. All in all, the organizational structure of China's armed forces remains as it was under conditions of mechanization and semi-mechanization, which makes it difficult to adapt to army building and performance of tasks under conditions of informationization.

What is more, China has been bolstering its research on and production of high-tech weaponry and equipment in recent years, with the result that the armed forces are being equipped with a large amount of informationized weaponry. This will also result in the change of operation patterns as well as command patterns and organizational systems. All these make high demands on the reform of the armed forces' organization and structure.

The Measures of Military Reform

Carrying out military reform cannot be achieved without taking some forceful and effective measures. Whether the goal to modernize the military organizational structure can be achieved depends to a large extent on what measures are taken. Xi Jinping considers military reform to cover all aspects of national defense and armed forces building. The principal measures of military reform are examined below.

Promoting Reform of the Leadership System and Joint Operational Command System

The system of leadership and the joint operational command system—which determines combat efficiency—occupy dominant positions in the military organizational structure. Viewed as the “nerve center” of the armed forces, they are considered the focus of the military reform by Xi Jinping.

In recent years, many countries have actively boosted the leadership system of their armed forces. In 2003, for instance, the U.S. substituted the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) with the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution System (PPBE). This change was conducted according to the guidelines for the Department of Defense transition plan aimed at improving the strategic leadership system of the armed forces. In 2004, Russia completed the reorganization of its defense ministry and established a leadership system of civilian control of the military. Germany has also attached more importance to the leadership system since 2006, establishing intervention forces, stabilization forces, and support forces.

The PLA has also made some adjustments to its leadership system. In June 2011, the Communications Department of the General Staff Headquarters was reorganized into the Informationization Department. In November 2011, furthermore, the Strategic Planning Department of the PLA was newly set up with the purpose of strengthening research, planning, and cooperation on major strategic issues. The following month the Department of Military Training and Arms was reorganized into the Department of Military Training.

China is faced with a myriad of security threats both traditional and non-traditional, domestic and international, making great demands on the leadership system of the armed forces. For example, rapid reaction capabilities are required to perform strategic command and to deal with major emergency incidents. Therefore, it is of high necessity to improve the military leadership system and strengthen the strategic managing function in line with the general approach of adjusting function, clarifying relations, optimizing the structure, and improving efficiency. To achieve this, the PLA needs to optimize the function allocation and organ establishment of the CMC and the general departments, improve the leadership and managing of institutions of the arms and services, perfect the leading systems of new types of combat forces, and strengthen the centralized management of informationization building.¹⁷

Xi Jinping has also placed great priority on reform of the joint operational command system. Modern warfare features information dominance, systematic confrontation, and joint operations. Accordingly, establishing a joint operational command system is in line with the conditions of informationized warfare. In recent years, some countries have taken measures to improve their joint operational command system. In Russia's military reform since 2008, the previous command chain consisting of four levels was condensed to three levels: that is, joint strategic headquarters, operational headquarters, and brigades. Furthermore, the six military region commands were reduced and reorganized into four commands, each of which functioned as the joint strategic headquarters in the correspondent strategic direction. The Space Forces and Aerospace Defense Strategic Command of the Air Force were merged into the Aerospace Defense Forces (ASD). The Russian army has moreover adopted the corps-brigade structure. In another example, Japan has also boosted reform of its joint command system and implemented a command system that features separating command and administration. A Joint Staff was established, and the staffs of the services were put in charge of administration and military training rather than commanding. The joint task forces were organized in terms of carrying out spe-

¹⁷ Xu Qiliang, "Unswervingly Deepen Reform of Our National Defense and Armed Forces," *The People's Daily*, November 21, 2013, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/1121/c1001-23611574.html>.

cialized tasks. The command system consists of the defense minister, the joint staff, and the commander of services or the joint task forces.

The PLA has made adjustments to its combined operational command system since the 1980s and established the joint command system for rapid reaction; yet the joint command system for the armed forces as a whole is far from established. For this reason, Xi Jinping has emphasized that “we should have a sense of urgency to advance the joint command system in the levels of [the] CMC and military regions and can’t defer this any longer.”¹⁸ The reform of the joint operational command system needs to focus on the centralization of operational command authority and the allocation of the command centers. It needs variously to abide by the rules of joint operations under informationized conditions; be based on the conditions of the PLA; improve the joint command operational system in the levels of both the CMC and military regions; boost the systemic reform of training, logistics, and equipment support for joint operations; and meet the demands of authority, streamlining, flexibility, and efficiency.¹⁹ What is more, the structure and command system of the Chinese People’s Armed Police Force needs to be perfected to meet the needs of safeguarding the country’s security and stability as well as protecting people’s lives.

Optimizing the Structure of the Armed Forces and its Composition

The structure determines the function. And the structure of the armed forces is a key area of military reform. Many problems concerning the structure have arisen in recent years, which have hindered the generation of combat capabilities. According to a speech given by Xi Jinping in December 2013, “it is a must to optimize the size and structure of the armed forces, to make it more streamlined and to have a better make-up.”²⁰

Catering to the needs of the RMA, the structure of Japan’s armed forces features a small size, modularization, and multi-functionality. The Ground Self-Defense Force was reorganized from 13 divisions and 2 brigades to 9 divisions and 6 brigades, respectively. The Central Readiness Force and the rapid-reaction brigade for island operations were also established and the Maritime Self-Defense Force streamlined. Elsewhere, the reform plan of the

¹⁸ Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

South Korean military in 2012 involved a long-term blueprint for the structure of the armed forces. According to this plan, the standing forces will be downsized from 636,000 to 522,000, with cuts affecting the army first. The current number of 444 generals will be reduced by 15 percent before 2030, the proportion of officers will be increased from 29.4 percent to 42.5 percent, whilst the number of non-commissioned officers will be increased from 115,000 to 152,000.²¹

The military reform of China's neighboring countries has also brought challenges to the PLA. China also needs to optimize the structure of the armed forces and its make-up. The trajectory to follow is to transform the armed forces from a numerically superior to a qualitatively superior force, and from a manpower-intensive to a technology-intensive force, in so doing attempting to generate systematic combat capability based on an informationized system. The focus is "to strengthen the Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force, advance the transformation of the Army as a whole, boost the building of new types of combat forces and perfect the size of the services and arms and the make-up of troops."²²

It is therefore necessary to firstly adjust the structure of services and arms, and achieve their coordinated development. The Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force need to be given priority in building the armed forces to keep pace with the dictates of informationized warfare. The Navy needs to transform from offshore defense to distant waters defense, and to develop capabilities "in conducting operations in distant waters and in countering non-traditional security threats."²³ The Air Force needs to develop long-range operations capabilities both in the air and over the sea, as well as to develop new types of combat aircraft ground-to-air missiles, radar, and so on—all so as to satisfy the strategic requirements of conducting both offensive and defensive operations. The Army needs to transform from regional defense to trans-regional mobility, develop capability concerning mobile operations and tri-dimensional offense and defense, and boost troops in

²¹ Center for National Defense Policy of the AMS, *The Strategic Review* (2012), April 2013.

²² Wang Guanzhong, "Endeavor to Build Solid National Defense and Strong Army," *The People's Daily*, December 13, 2012, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2012/1213/c112851-19882477-4.html>.

²³ *China's National Defense in 2010*, March 31, 2011, http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7114675.htm.

terms of light mechanization, information counter-measures, and special operations. The Second Artillery Force further needs to aim at striking multiple targets in many fields.

Second, there is a need to boost the building of new types of combat forces. Xi Jinping stated at a CMC conference in 2013 that “we should give priority to the development of new types of combat forces, reduce outdated weaponry within a [certain] time limit and make place for the new types of combat forces.”²⁴ Accordingly, distant waters defense capability needs to be reinforced; the capabilities of air strikes, air and missile defense, and strategic projection need to be strengthened; and the capabilities for carrying out strategic reconnaissance and early warning as well as information counter-measures need to be improved. To achieve these, great importance needs to be attached to the associated building of technology and weaponry, personnel training, and operation patterns for the new types of combat forces developed.

The third priority is to perfect the make-up of the armed forces. In accordance with the national security demands and operations in different strategic directions, reforms regarding the make-up of troops need to be carried out to strengthen combat troops, with the aim being to make them joint, multi-functional, and flexible. In addition, the personnel composition of the military needs to be adjusted and non-combatant elements and staff members need to be reduced. In the aspect of military personnel training, it is expected that reforms will be deepened with regard to military academies, the integration of educational resources, and boosting the training system of new-type and high-caliber military personnel featuring a triad of institutional education, training in units, and professional military education. More importance will be attached to such means as long-distance online education, as well as establishing “study camps” and promoting quality education.

Boosting the Adjustment of Military Policies and Mechanisms

Military policies and mechanisms are an important constituent of the organizational structure. Many of the current military policies and mechanisms of the PLA were formed under the conditions of the planned economy,

²⁴ Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

which lags behind the times as well as the conditions faced by the armed forces. Hence, it is necessary to make adjustment of military policies and mechanisms. As such, the latter need to adapt to the changes of social interest relationships and innovations in the country's policies and mechanisms, keep pace with the improvement of technological structures and knowledge levels of the armed forces, and meet the demands of the complex management of the armed forces.

The first issue is to improve the policies and mechanisms of military human resources. As Xi Jinping pointed out, "the policies and mechanisms of military human resources are the key issue in the reform of military policies and mechanisms, which concerns the immediate interests of officers and men."²⁵ The objective for the reform of the officers' system is to set up an all-volunteer officer system. According to a CCCPC statement, "[a] modern personnel system for officers will gradually take shape with the establishment of an all-volunteer officer system as the initial step."²⁶ In fact, the PLA had already made some explorations in adopting an all-volunteer officer system. The first Military Service Regulations Pertaining to PLA Officers in Active Service issued in 1955 introduced the system of military ranks, which was based on the consideration that officers needed to be encouraged to consider their military jobs as their long-term or lifelong profession.²⁷ To establish an all-volunteer officer system, it is necessary to abide by the principle of personnel management by the Party, focus on improving the combat capability and professional quality of the officers, and make breakthroughs in some key issues pertaining to officers such as active service, management of categorization, experience, and qualifications, promotion mechanisms, and so on. Hence, a systematic adjustment of the policies and mechanisms of selection and appointment, training and exchanges, salaries and allowances, and pensions and guarantees, need to be made so as to follow a scientific and standardized road for professional development featuring a correct orientation and transparent future. Meanwhile, the policies and mechanisms regarding contracted civilians, military service, non-commissioned

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Decision of the CCCPC on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform," November 2013, http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2014-01/17/content_31226494_15.htm.

²⁷ "Military Service Regulations Pertaining to PLA Officers in Active Service," *The People's Daily*, February 9, 1955.

officers, resettlement of servicemen discharged from active service need to be perfected, and the reforms of policies and mechanisms concerning medical issues, insurance, and the housing of military personnel need to be deepened so as to enhance the servicemen's sense of pride, together with the armed forces' unity.

A second priority is to improve the management of military expenditures and resources. Xi Jinping said: "Another important issue in the reform of military policies and mechanisms is to manage and [maximize] military expenditures and resources to boost the efficiency of military economy."²⁸ Therefore, it is necessary to persist in building the armed forces through diligence and thrift, and set up mechanisms to make plans to deal with requests and to ensure that resources are allocated in accordance with the plans. The reform of budget management mechanisms needs to be deepened, income and payment need to be centralized, and the procurement of military materials needs to be strengthened. The goal is to make sure that budget requests are fully scrutinized, the allocation of resources is scientifically planned, and every penny is utilized to the full.

A third aspect concerns the military legal system. In order to adapt to the changes in social environment, organizational structure of the armed forces, weaponry and equipment, and the composition of servicemen, it is necessary to adopt modern management concepts, to explore and perfect the means for military management, and to improve the military legal system. Military management needs to be enhanced to be scientific, legal, standardized, and meticulous. The forming of the cultural conscientiousness of each serviceman needs to be accelerated. And, furthermore, forceful legal support for national defense and army building needs to be provided.

Boosting Coordinated Development of Military and Civilian Sectors

The integrated development of military and civilian sectors plays an important role in keeping the country prosperous and the armed forces strong. The rapid increase in China's GDP since the country's reform and opening up lays a strong foundation for the coordinated development of military and civilian sectors. As Xi Jinping stated to the CMC in December 2013: "We should strengthen overall planning and coordination [...] make full use of

²⁸ Xi Jinping's speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

the guiding role of military demands, and integrate national defense and armed forces' building into the social and economic development system of the whole country in a better way."²⁹

The adjustment of the coordinated development of military and civilian sectors involves reform of systems in a number of areas. These include areas such as R&D of defense-related science, technology and industry, weaponry and equipment, military personnel training, outsourcing of military logistics support, national defense mobilization, and so on. It is necessary to enhance systems featuring centralized leadership, coordination between military and civilian sectors, and satisfaction of needs and distribution of resources, in order to achieve further integration in the construction of certain infrastructure facilities and other fields. In addition, in order to achieve a coordinated development of the economy and national defense, efforts need to be made to use military resources in an appropriate way and to control the scale of military expenditure.

With regard to R&D there needs to be a strengthening of technology and industry, weaponry and equipment, and the system of defense-related industries, in addition to innovation in defense-related science and technology. Furthermore, the system governing the development, production, and procurement of weapons needs to be adjusted and private businesses need to be encouraged to invest in the development and repair of military hardware sectors. All of the above would serve to enhance China's capacity for independent innovation in R&D of weaponry and equipment.

In terms of the systemic reform of military personnel training, the policies and institutions of training supported by national education need to be perfected, and the training goals and size needs to be determined in an appropriate way so as to improve the efficiency of military personnel training.

Regarding the systemic reform of outsourcing military logistics support, the scope and field of the outsourcing of support needs to be broadened, while the burden of the armed forces concerning some social support businesses needs to be reduced. Meanwhile, the armed forces need to play an active role in enhancing domestic demand and accelerating economic development.

²⁹ Xi Jinping's speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

National defense mobilization is among the important organizational means for the coordinated development of the military and civilian sectors. Promoting systemic reform encompasses deepening reform of national defense education, perfecting the system of national defense mobilization, advancing changes to the militia and reserve institutions, optimizing the size and structure of the backup force, and improving the legal system of peacetime requisition and wartime mobilization. Further to this, the management system of land, sea, and air borders is in need of adjustment, and its building capacity and comprehensive managing capability needs to be improved. In sum, only a national defense mobilization system that is centralized and unified, well structured, rapid in reaction, and authoritative and efficient, can be expected to strengthen national defense potential to win future wars.

Challenges for the Future of Military Reform

Military reform cannot be expected to proceed smoothly without a hitch. China has already implemented military reforms on several occasions, but the progress achieved in some key areas has been far from satisfactory, especially in regard to the organizational structure of the armed forces. The reasons for this are deep-rooted and can be traced to vested interests and relations among various services and arms as well as the limitations of current conditions. Generally speaking, it can be said that military reform lags behind the overall reform of the country.

The military reform as outlined by Chairman Xi Jinping focuses on the main issues facing the armed forces and strives to make breakthroughs in such issues as military composition and functions, military policies and mechanisms, and so on. However, the task of advancing military reform is a tough one, during the process of which China will face many challenges that will require courage and wisdom. The nature of these challenges is further outlined below.

Innovating Military Strategy as a Prerequisite

The innovation of military strategy is always seen as the prerequisite for military reform. Whether China can achieve progress on this issue will largely determine the success of military reform.

Military strategy serves as the general guideline for national defense and the building of armed forces. As such, it is necessary to make corresponding adjustments to military strategy before military reform. For example, in the 1990s, in line with the trend of high-tech warfare, China adjusted the orientation of military strategy to winning local warfare under high-tech conditions, as well as continuously advanced the transformation of the military from a manpower-intensive one to a technology-intensive force. Entering the new century, China readjusted the orientation of military strategy to winning local warfare under informationized conditions in accordance with the informationized military revolution. In so doing, it advanced the RMA with Chinese characteristics, featuring the strategic goal of building informationized armed forces and winning informationized wars.

On the other hand, military reform will lag behind if there is no innovation in military strategy in accordance with the times. For example, China failed to reform militarily in adapting to conditions of informationization in the 1990s. This was because the trend toward military informationization was largely ignored, with no corresponding innovations made in military strategy. By not keeping up with the changing requirements of military strategy of the times, China's overall military development was set back. For example, in the 1960s and 1970s, while China enforced the military strategy of "luring the enemy troops in deep" and effectively deterred potential invasions, it also led to the large-scale expansion of the armed forces, which hindered economic development.

Nowadays, China is faced with a rather new and different situation both at home and abroad with its rapid development, which poses new demands for the armed forces. All these need to be reflected in the military strategy. A more proper guideline for national defense and armed forces building should be provided to keep pace with the new situation. Without the proper adjustment of military strategy, military reform cannot pursue the correct course or may even lead to absolute failure. Therefore, China is faced with the challenge of clarifying its new military strategy in keeping with the times.

Being Active and Prudent in Carrying Out Military Reform

The basic principle in carrying out military reform is to do so in an "active yet prudent"³⁰ manner, a principle which has been repeatedly stated by Xi Jinping. To be active means to pluck up enough courage and to advance military reform in a timely and prompt manner. In this aspect, Xi gives priority to establishing the organization responsible for military reform and laying down the plan for military reform. In 2014, the establishment of a leading group for deepening reform on national defense and the armed forces was announced with Xi at its head. This marked an important step in advancing the military reform, and reflected Xi's determination and courage in reform. To be prudent means to take the risks of military reform into full consideration. Reform is always full of risks because of the uncertainties. Furthermore, improper reforms can have adverse consequences. For example,

³⁰ "Xi Leads China's Military Reform, Stresses Strong Army."

Ukraine launched a reform of its armed forces in 2004. However, just six years later it was deemed a failure by Russian and Ukrainian researchers: the quality of weaponry and equipment had achieved little improvement, the combat capability of services declined, and the reputation of the armed forces worsened. Even Russia's new military reform was not without its shortcomings. While Russia was inclined to adopt a radical approach in advancing military reform, it took it for granted that the armed forces would take on a "new look" in a short time. And whereas adjustments of organization were not difficult to make, the transformation of the command pattern and the generating of combat capability necessitated a longer process.

The above examples show that, on the one hand, determination and the correct timing are needed to push through military reform. On the other hand, there is a need to attach great importance to strengthening the scientific planning and assessment of military reform. The key issue is to have a good mastery of the relationship between reform, development, and stability. It is furthermore important that military reform be carried out with the primary purpose of enhancing combat capability, at the same time ensuring the stability of the armed forces and reducing the risks and costs as much as possible.

With regard to China's armed forces, the risks associated with military reform are considerable. In previous rounds of reforms, some measures failed to be taken because of a lack of courage, and which subsequently proved to make the problems even more serious. In other instances, some measures were taken without the appropriate scientific assessment with negative effects as a result. This is the reason why Xi Jinping stressed: "Important reform measures must be taken prudently because a slight move in one part may affect the situation as a whole."³¹ China should therefore firstly make clear the direction of military reform, and make sure that the decision of reform is made scientifically and that measures of reform are coordinated. A well-designed plan for military reform should be adopted and repeated reviews and scientific assessments made before any measures are introduced. In sum, efforts should be made to arrange and coordinate reform, which should be pushed forward as a whole, and the implementation of reform plans supervised.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Overcoming the Challenge of Vested Interests

Military reform encompasses the reorganization or downsizing of various units of the armed forces. In so doing, it can meet resistance from various vested interest groups. Some reforms have even failed on account of the latter. Military reform as advanced by the former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld provides a good example in this regard. With the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force having their own respective systems of operational command ever since their establishment, there are clear divisions and conflicts of interests between them. At the beginning of the 2000s, Donald Rumsfeld actively pushed forward military transformation and presented the new goals of “global strike” and “integrated establishment and operation” for the armed forces. However, the services strongly resisted when Donald Rumsfeld tried to advance joint operations and weaken the roles of service headquarters. Each of the services had their own conception of military reform based on their respective interests. For instance, the Air Force considered the operation of air strikes to play a more important role in modern warfare, and that, hence, the Navy and Army should be placed under the command of the Air Force.³²

Meeting resistance from interest groups has also occurred in previous rounds of reform in China. For example, some units or individuals have sought support from higher levels through wrongful ways, and hindered the formulating and enforcement of any reform plan perceived to run counter to their interests. The coming military reform in China will also be faced with such obstacles. Considering that the current organizational structure was formed long ago, and that the interest relationship is deep-rooted and complicated, resistance can be expected to be very strong. Hence, Xi Jinping stressed: “It is inevitable to change the current interest structure and interest relationship in the military reform. Many obstacles to the reform are not from outside the system, but just from within the system, especially the hindrance of various vested interests.”³³ To overcome this requires not only the determination of the leadership, but also the support of units and individuals at all levels. This will be a stern challenge for China’s new collective leadership.

³² “Rethinking of the RMA--An Interview with Lin Dong,” *China Youth Daily*, September 7, 2007, http://zqb.cyol.com/content/2007-09/07/content_1885746.htm.

³³ Xi Jinping’s speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

Breaking the Bondage of Some Outdated Concepts

Military reform concerns not only the transformation of the armed forces, but also a change in people's conceptions and thoughts. Without a change in mindsets there can be no successful reform. Therefore, it is also vital to break the bondage of some outdated concepts and make breakthroughs on some important theoretical problems.

In this aspect, the military reform of the late Qing Dynasty left a lasting lesson. In response to the failure to counter foreign invasions, some officials led by Li Hongzhang carried out military reform, establishing the Beiyang Navy in 1871. Among other reform measures, advanced warships were procured and equipped, a number of students majoring in military science were sent abroad to study, some foreign experts were brought to China, and many military factories, academies, and naval ports were established. Nevertheless, it was not enough to merely possess modern weaponry and equipment for a modernized armed force; mastery of advanced theories and concepts are of equal importance. The military reform of the time failed to make breakthroughs in theories and concepts in line with the dictates of modernized warfare on account of the strong conservatism of the officials, which deeply restricted the organization and training of the armed forces in a strict and regularized way. This finally led to the Beiyang Navy's "Waterloo" with Japan in the September 1894 Battle of the Yalu River.

In the forthcoming military reform, the PLA is also faced with the challenge of changing outdated concepts. More broadly it is the mindset of mechanized warfare that needs to be updated to meet with present and future realities. Accordingly, new concepts in line with conditions of informationized warfare need to be established. For one, the concept of territorial defense should be updated to reflect the new missions of the armed forces. Second, the concept of single service operations should be replaced with the concept of the joint operation of combined services and arms. Third, the concept of advancing national defense and army building under a highly centralized planned economy needs to be updated by new concepts in accordance with the opening up and reform of the socialist market economy.

Learning from the Experiences of Foreign Militaries while Insisting on the Correct Political Direction

Carrying out military reform needs broad perspectives and also entails learning from the experiences of foreign militaries. Indeed, it can be argued that there exist certain commonalities in the national defense and armed forces' building of all countries, which make it necessary to learn from one another in regard to military reform.

Nevertheless, learning from the experiences of foreign militaries also engenders certain risks. The conditions facing countries are quite different. Therefore, any attempt to merely copy another country's military reform measures is doomed to failure. In the 1950s, for instance, the PLA advanced military reform based on lessons from the Soviet Army. On the one hand, this accelerated the modernization of PLA greatly. On the other hand, it also brought negative consequences for the PLA on account of certain dogmatic practices which have persisted until the present day and which are now the target of the coming military reform. Similarly, when Russia carried out its first military reforms it took the approach of copying the United States. However, the former defense minister, Anatoly Serdyukov, pointed out that the concept of reform was thus adopted without consideration of the specific conditions prevailing in the two countries.³⁴

The coming military reform of China will also face such a challenge. To keep pace with the dictates of informationized warfare, China needs to draw on the experiences of other countries. But in so doing, China should not lose sight of the fact that it needs to incorporate such lessons in an appropriate way in keeping with China's own unique conditions. It follows therefore that military reform will be carried out with strong Chinese characteristics. As Xi Jinping has stressed, military reform will follow the socialist road with Chinese characteristics: "We will reject both the old and rigid closed-door policy, and any attempt to abandon socialism and take an erroneous path. The core [of] the reform is to adhere to and improve the Party's leadership as well as socialism with Chinese characteristics."³⁵ The challenge posed to the new collective leadership, therefore, is to handle the

³⁴ "Putin Sets Tone for the Military Reform of Russia and Makes Clear the Five Tasks in the Future," March 8, 2013, http://military.china.com.cn/2013-03/08/content_28179952_2.htm.

³⁵ Xi Jinping's speech at a conference of the CMC, December 2013.

relationship between learning from others while adhering to China's unique characteristics.

Conclusion

The forthcoming military reform advanced by Xi Jinping will have a tremendous influence on the development of China's military. Relatively little attention has been paid so far to this military reform by foreign researchers. This paper has therefore focused on the military reform thought of China's new collective leadership, and in so doing, has sought to make an overall and objective introduction to the subject.

In the view of Xi Jinping, the new military reform should take the military organizational structure as the main area for reform. Thus the aim of military reform is to modernize the military organizational structure and build a system of modern military forces with Chinese characteristics. As outlined in this paper, the reasons for this can be traced to the need to adapt to the worldwide trend of military changes, to accomplish the historical missions of the armed forces for the new stage in the new century, and to seek to resolve deep-seated problems on the basis of previous military reforms. In terms of the actual measures for military reform, Xi Jinping has outlined the need for China to promote reform of the leadership and joint operational command system, optimize the structure of the armed forces and their make-up, promote the adjustment of military policies and mechanisms, and boost the coordinated development of military and civilian sectors.

In conclusion, the military reform advanced by Xi Jinping is determined to resolve the key and difficult problems of the armed forces. The challenges are considerable. Not only does military strategy have to become more innovative as a prerequisite, but also military reform must be carried out actively and prudently, the obstacle of vested interests must be overcome, the bondage of certain outdated concepts broken, and lessons from foreign militaries adopted while at the same time pursuing the correct political direction. All these will test the capability of China's new collective leadership in advancing China's military development.

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