

CHINA'S EVOLVING MILITARY STRATEGY



EDITOR
JOE McREYNOLDS

THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION



For over two decades, the People's Republic of China has been engaged in a grand project to transform its military into a modernized fighting force capable of defeating the world's most powerful militaries through asymmetric means. However, despite the considerable attention that has been devoted to cataloguing Chinese advances in weapons and hardware, much less is known about China's strategic thinking.

China's Evolving Military Strategy fills this gap by offering sector-by-sector expert assessments of the latest trends in Chinese military thought under Xi Jinping, covering not only traditional battle-spaces such as the air and sea but also China's strategy for the new domains of space, cyberspace, and electronic warfare. *China's Evolving Military Strategy* is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand the world's most important bilateral national security relationship.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

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Preface

For over two decades, the People's Republic of China has been engaged in a grand project to transform its military into a modernized fighting force capable of defeating major foreign powers. After the first Gulf War saw the United States use precision-guided munitions and C4ISR technologies to decisively defeat Iraq's aging, mechanized forces, Chinese military thinkers concluded that a similar fate would likely befall the People's Liberation Army in combat unless drastic changes were made. From that point onward, readying the PLA to fight in modern warfare has been firmly enshrined as one of the country's highest policy priorities.

Each successive leader has left their own imprint not only on the PLA's force structure, but also on its strategic guidance. Jiang Zemin's initial focus on developing the PLA's ability to win a "local war under high-tech conditions" gradually morphed into Hu Jintao's emphasis on building an "informatized" force capable of surviving and winning at modern information warfare, as well as enabling the PLA to carry out what Hu termed the "New Historic Missions," which emphasized for the first time the importance of Military Operations Other Than Warfare (MOOTW). As the PLA moves into the era of Xi's leadership, the evolution of its guiding military-strategic thought will continue alongside Xi's major changes to the PLA's force structure and China's expanding conception of its "core interests" in the South China Sea and elsewhere.

China's modernization of its military forces and continued points of sharp difference with the United States on foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific have increasingly forced the U.S. military and policy communities to prepare for the possibility of a serious confrontation with China. Although we do not face a "new Cold War," as the United States and China are at peace

with one another and are economically intertwined to an extent entirely unlike the U.S.-Soviet military rivalry of old, numerous flashpoints of contention exist that could bring China into a serious military conflict with either the United States or her allies. It is vital to understand both the capabilities of China's modernizing military and the military thinking of China's leadership when formulating policy or responding to China's actions.

However, despite the great attention that has been devoted to cataloguing the PLA's advances in its military platforms and technology, there is little in the way of comprehensive information available to analysts and policymakers regarding recent developments in Chinese strategic thought. China's military-strategic bodies publish a variety of influential and authoritative works explaining recent trends and debates, but few Western China analysts possess both the subject-matter expertise and Chinese language ability to absorb and contextualize this output and convey its central insights to a Western policy audience. When information does reach Western policymakers, it does so after an extreme delay; authoritative Chinese publications on strategy often take years to prepare, and then additional time elapses before Western analysts begin to integrate the new materials into their assessments. This time lag of years complicates efforts at mutual strategic understanding in what is arguably the world's most important bilateral national security relationship. As a result, foreign discussions of Chinese military behavior generally center on observing new military hardware as it is introduced into service and parsing the public declarations and actions of the Chinese leadership, neither of which are sufficient for predicting Chinese military and civilian decision-making in the event of a crisis.

This gap in understanding warps the U.S. debate over China policy in several important ways. First, it creates a bias toward treating the few Chinese-authored works on military strategy with English translations as being of great importance, even when they are neither authoritative nor representative. Second, it degrades the ability of Western analysts to contextualize observed changes in the PLA's force structure and operations for policymakers. Without access to current writings on Chinese military strategy, analysts and policymakers are forced to rely on a combination of out-of-date translated writings and official PLA communiques. In the absence of fuller information, analysts and policymakers are prone to engaging in mirror-imaging, erroneously assuming the PLA's approach to strategy is essentially the same as ours would be, were we in their position. Finally, it pushes U.S. defense planners toward a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to planning for how the United States will respond militarily to China's rise. Without information regarding leading indicators of deep strategic change, Western analysts are more likely to be caught unaware by shifts in policy or unanticipated Chinese military actions.

China's Evolving Military Strategy aims to address these challenges by offering sector-by-sector expert assessments of important recent developments in Chinese strategic thought to the Western foreign policy community. The first two chapters, by Timothy Heath and Taylor Fravel, grapple with big-picture questions of the sources and forms of PLA strategy and broad trends in the evolution of Chinese strategic thought. Cristina Garafola, Andrew Erickson, and Michael Chase then address recent shifts in strategic thinking in the "conventional" services of the Air Force, Navy, and Rocket Forces. The discussion then turns to the "non-traditional" domains of information warfare, with John Costello, Peter Mattis, Joe McReynolds, Kevin Pollpeter, and Jonathan Ray examining China's strategic approach to electromagnetic warfare, network warfare, and

space warfare in detail. The final three chapters by Dennis Blasko, Morgan Clemens, and Dan Alderman discuss the PLA's strategic approach to peacetime, covering deterrence, non-warfare military operations, and civil-military integration in China's defense modernization efforts. Collectively, the editor and authors hope that offering a comprehensive picture of current trends in Chinese strategic thought will equip Western analysts and policymakers with an improved conceptual and practical framework for assessing Chinese intentions and determining how best to respond to Chinese actions.

This project could not have succeeded without the assistance of many friends and colleagues in the China analyst community, and the authors of this volume would like to acknowledge their generous contributions. Kenneth Allen has lent his time and his wealth of knowledge to multiple chapter authors. Peter Wood at the Jamestown Foundation has done superb editing work in shepherding this volume to print. Glen Howard has championed this project at an executive level from its early stages. The editor and the Jamestown Foundation are grateful for the support of the Smith Richardson Foundation for this volume. Finally, the editor would like to thank Mike Green, Lonnie Henley, James Mulvenon, and Bob Sutter for serving as mentors from the start of his career as a China analyst; without their support (and patience) in training new generations of China analysts, projects such as this would not be possible.

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