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### **CMSI Translations #6: Building a World-Class Navy in a Comprehensive Way: It's Logic in Theory, History, and Practice**

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# 翻译

TRANSLATIONS

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**Building a World-Class Navy in a  
Comprehensive Way**  
*It's Logic in Theory, History, and Practice*



**中国海事研究所**  
China Maritime Studies Institute



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## “Building a World-Class Navy in a Comprehensive Way”

### *It's Logic in Theory, History, and Practice<sup>1</sup>*

By Liu Lijiao (刘丽娇) and Jia Benjia (贾本甲)

“Building a world-class navy in a comprehensive way” is a vivid embodiment and concrete manifestation of the Chinese Communist Party’s goal of building a strong military in the new era, as expressed in the domain of naval building and operations.<sup>2</sup> This is both a major theoretical issue and a practical issue. When it comes to realizing the centenary military building goal<sup>3</sup> and creating a new situation via naval modernization, this will have major and far-reaching importance. [We must] deeply understand its internal logic in theory, history, and practice to accelerate naval transformation and development, and elevate at-sea deterrence and combat capabilities.

### 1. Logic in Theory: Establishing a Powerful People’s Navy

As early as September 1949, Mao Zedong solemnly announced, “In the future we won’t only have a powerful army, but also a powerful air force and navy.” In February 1953, he made his first visit to a naval squadron. Thereafter, he wrote and sent the same message to five ships: “We absolutely must establish a powerful navy to defend against the invasion of imperialism.” This was a manifestation of New China’s resolute determination and will to build a powerful navy. In the late 1970s, Deng Xiaoping sent a message to 105 ships: “Establish a powerful navy that has modern combat capabilities.” He emphasized that, “This force must be most useful. It must be a truly modern thing.” To mark the People’s Navy’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Jiang Zemin said, “Struggle to build a powerful modern navy with comprehensive combat capabilities.” When [he was chairman] Hu Jintao said, “Struggle hard to build a powerful People’s Navy that is equal to China’s national status and can meet the PLA’s historic missions during this period in the new century. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> Communist Party Congress, Chairman Xi Jinping has made the naval

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<sup>1</sup> 刘丽桥 [Liu Lijiao] and 贾本甲 [Jia Benjia], “全面建成世界一流海军” 的理论逻辑, 历史逻辑与实践逻辑 [“Building a World-Class Navy in a Comprehensive Way”: It’s Theoretical Logic, Historical Logic, and Practical Logic], 军事历史 [Military History], No. 3, 2023 (Issue 252), p.6-8. Translator’s Note: This source is a bimonthly journal published by the PLA’s Academy of Military Sciences (AMS), specifically, the 解放军党史军史研究中心 [AMS Center for PLA Party and Military History Research]. The authors are both affiliated with the 海军研究院 [Naval Research Institute]. **Translator’s Note:** “A World-Class Navy in a Comprehensive Way” could also be translated literally as “A World-Class Navy in an All-Around Way.”

<sup>2</sup> **Translator’s Note:** “in the new era” is code for the period of time Xi Jinping has served as CCP General Secretary (2012 – Present); and “naval building and operations” could also be rendered as “naval construction and applications.”

<sup>3</sup> **Translator’s Note:** this could also be translated “the buildup goals set for the 100-year anniversary of the PLA’s founding.”

buildup a more prominent strategic priority. He has issued a series of important directives aimed at “building a world-class navy in a comprehensive way,” which give the word “powerful” new meaning in the new era.

Chairman Xi Jinping’s important directives are comprehensive, far-reaching, and full of rich meaning and deep thought. He has clearly said to build a powerful People’s Navy and follow the

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mighty project for the Chinese nation to go to sea in this era, which will serve as an important guarantor of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The Navy’s status and role are going to reach new and unprecedented heights. The guidance is clearly for the Navy to aim toward world-class and resolutely speed up the progress of naval modernization. [This includes] fully implementing the CCP’s strong military thought in the new era, building a political military, reforming the strong military, becoming a strong high-tech military, developing strong military talent, and ruling the military by law. According to the strategic requirements of near seas defense and far seas protection (*jinhai fangyu, yuanghai fangwei*), [the Navy must] accelerate the transformation from being a near seas defense type Navy to being a far seas protection type Navy and improve its strategic deterrence and counter-attack, maneuver warfare at sea, joint operations at sea, comprehensive defense operations, and comprehensive support capabilities. [Chairman Xi] scientifically delineated the path for building up [the Navy] in a comprehensive way.

Chairman Xi Jinping’s important directives represent a step forward in sublimating the [longstanding] guidance for the Navy’s buildup and development. They achieve an organic unification of the CCP’s theoretical guidance for establishing a powerful People’s Navy and innovation in the new era. First, starting with the logic of embracing sea power as a means of becoming powerful (*xianghai tuqiang*), elevate planning to the strategic heights of building a powerful navy to serve as the guarantor of both [transforming China into] a strong maritime state and [achieving] the great rejuvenation of the Chinese people, scientifically responding to the historical pattern and call of the times, namely, a strong navy, a wealth of maritime rights, and prosperous national destiny. Second, build a sea force that comprehensively meets all requirements, one that listens to the Party’s commands, can fight victorious wars, and conducts itself well. Accelerate the [processes of] revolutionization, modernization, standardization, and the “four modernizations.” Make the Navy’s combat capabilities develop in a balanced and coordinated way across components. Third, make building world-class the end goal, the Navy must focus on fighting and winning wars, fixate on (*niuzhu*) the Strong Enemy opponent,<sup>4</sup> and forge powerful combat capabilities, competitiveness, and influence, ensuring that [the PLAN] has the ability to effectively shape the situation, control crises, deter wars, and fight and win wars.

## **2. Logic in History: Face the Sea and Prosper. Turn Away from the Sea and Decline. Gain Sea Control or Be Controlled from the Sea.**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mankind is entering into an age of large-scale exploitation of the sea. The central role of the sea in state security and development is increasingly apparent. For the state to go from big to strong, maritime capabilities and power must be strengthened, and a powerful modernized navy must be built. From the “Age of Exploration” onwards, history shows that

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<sup>4</sup> **Translator’s Note:** “the Strong Enemy” is CCP jargon for the United States.

competition for sea control is an important factor influencing the overall picture in terms of international strategy. Chairman Xi Jinping has deeply grasped the historical laws of great power competition in modern times. He has scientifically examined the risks and challenges facing China as we go toward being both a land power and a sea power. He has pointed out and emphasized that “In the expeditions of this new age, in this struggle to realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, the mission of building a powerful People’s Navy has never been as urgent as it is today.”

With a focus on providing robust power to support the realization of the dream of [becoming] a strong nation and a strong military in this new age, a world-class navy should be able to satisfy the following strategic needs:

- (1) It should be able to meet manifold security threats at sea. In recent years, the overall influence of the sea on state security and development has been increasingly apparent. But at the same time, China has been surrounded by island chains, and at sea it faces a long struggle and all kinds of contradictions in containment and counter containment, separatism and counter separatism, rights infringements and counter rights infringements. The Navy is the state’s main combat force when it comes to operations at sea. It must fully prepare and greatly improve its warfighting ability, and its ability to fight and win war. It must ensure that it can get to sea and fight and win at any time.
- (2) It should be able to safeguard overseas interests, which are ever more important. China’s economy has already deeply integrated into the world economic system. Safeguarding China’s overseas interests has already become critical for continued economic and social development. Objectively speaking, this requires us to significantly improve overseas security capabilities. The Navy is the strategic force that is best suited to going abroad and should go abroad the most.<sup>5</sup> Wherever the state’s interests should go, the Navy’s power and influence must closely follow.
- (3) It should respond to the serious challenges of the changing nature of naval warfare. Intelligent technologies (*zhineng keji*) are rapidly emerging and being quickly being applied in the military domain. Intelligentized (*zhinenghua*) operations at sea are becoming part of war, with operational space becoming integrated across domains (*duowei yiti*) via all-domain fusion (*quanyu ronghe*). The key to victory is achieving intelligent combat dominance (*zhineng zhudao*) through precise attacks and defenses, with weapons and systems that mix man and machine, with those that are unmanned being dominant, and combat units that are agile and can autonomously reconstruct themselves. The principle of combat is to have dispersed forces that can mass firepower, concentrate advantages to control the situation (*juyou shekong*), and achieve victory through cross-domain coordination and joint sea control. All nations are thinking about and preparing for intelligentized war. It can be anticipated that whoever wins the first mover advantage in the revolution of intelligent technologies will win the advantage in future wars at sea. As such, the Navy must accelerate the combined development of the “three ’ized” [三化; modernized, informatized, and intelligentized], speeding up the move to world-class and seizing the new high ground for victory.
- (4) It must advance the construction of a Community of Common Destiny at Sea. The present period represents a critical time, during which the global maritime governance

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<sup>5</sup> **Translator’s Note:** In this line, “go abroad” (走出去) is literally “go out”, as in “go out into the world.”

system will be remade. Each country needs to proactively embrace the concept of a Community of Common Destiny at Sea. All are in the same boat and must join hands to meet all manner of contradictions and problems. The Navy is a powerful instrument for executing state policy during peacetime, and it should unceasingly strengthen [China's] voice and influence in international maritime governance, and demonstrate how this great power contributes strategic capabilities and appropriately deters and stops wars, stabilizing and controlling situations. [It should] show China's willingness to provide a reliable strategic support [to the world].

Given the above, building a world-class navy will mean meeting the following standard requirements: It will serve both the state's strategy of peaceful development and the military's strategy of active defense. It won't seek a race for sea hegemony with the strong nation's navy [the U.S. Navy] or all-out confrontation. To safeguard state sovereignty, security, and development, it will be capable of deterring—and fighting and winning—local

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regional wars that could occur at sea. To build a strong maritime nation and to become a strategic support for the state's look to the sea, it will be capable of effectively supporting maritime development, maritime exploitation, maritime management and control, and the safeguarding of the sea. To construct a Community of Common Destiny at Sea, it will be capable of using weapons to stop war, participating in international maritime governance, and safeguarding world peace. It will strongly support the build up of a strong state and a rejuvenated ethnic nation. In summary, it will match China's position as a strong power, capable of comprehensively and effectively safeguarding the state's maritime security, and it will have a powerful international influence.

### **3. Logic in Practice: Resolutely Prepare for War by Seizing High Quality Development and Accelerating Chinese-Style Naval Modernization.**

Comprehensively building the People's Navy into a world-class navy is the only path forward. It is part of Chinese-style modernization for comprehensively advancing the national rejuvenation. It is the inevitable choice for achieving the Party's strong military goal in the new age and implementing the new "three step"<sup>6</sup> strategic plan for national defense and military modernization.

- (1) Foremost of all, insist on the Party's absolute leadership of the military. The Navy's forces mix nuclear and conventional, integrate land and sea, integrate long range and short, and integrate multiple domains. The level of integration is high when it comes to force structure, combat operations, training, and operations. It offers an overall advantage in production, situation management, deterrence, and combat. The Party's absolute leadership is even more needed under informatized and intelligentized conditions in order to unleash the power of integrated command for victory. Only by having the mindset of always uncritically listening to the Party's command can the old maxim be truly achieved: "The People's Navy is loyal to the Party. It can sail ten thousand miles and

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<sup>6</sup> **Translator's note:** The "three step" (*sanbuzou*) strategic plan refers to the Party's timeline for military modernization, namely, 1) achieve the PLA's centenary goals by 2027, 2) basically achieve military modernization by 2035, and 3) become a world-class military by mid-century.

never go off course.” As such, [we must] unwaveringly insist on the Party’s absolute leadership of the military; deeply understand the decisive meaning of the “Two Establishments”;<sup>7</sup> strengthen the “Four Consciousnesses”;<sup>8</sup> harden the “Four Confidences”;<sup>9</sup> fulfil the “Two Safeguards”;<sup>10</sup> implement the Central Military Commission’s Chairman Responsibility System;<sup>11</sup> forge excellent “four iron” units; and ensure the military’s absolute loyalty, absolute purity, and absolute reliability, so that it will follow to the Party Center, the Central Military Commission, and Chairman Xi’s commands at all times and under any circumstances.

- (2) Work hard to bolster naval deterrence and combat capabilities. [The Navy must] deeply internalize the Party’s strong military thought in the new era; internalize the military’s strategic direction in the new era; strengthen the consensus to prepare for war by seizing high quality development; insist on the advancement of plans to build and prepare for war; accelerate the combined development of the “Three ’ized” (三化); speed up the “Four Modernizations”; and effectively improve the Navy’s strategic capabilities for safeguarding the nation’s sovereignty, security, and developmental interests. The first [order of business] is to strengthen innovation in the Navy’s military theory by sticking closely to actual combat and focusing on the opposition. [The Navy must] strengthen strategic and operational research, making it forward looking, targeted, and about fighting, and [it must] reinforce the theoretical advantages of first strike (*xianfa youshi*) and asymmetry. The second is to speed up the reorganization of the Navy with an eye to improving its contributions to the joint operational system. [The Navy must] advance plans for the development of combat capabilities that can be deployed to the far seas (*yuanhai yuanyu*),<sup>12</sup> cutting edge (新质新域),<sup>13</sup> and both manned and unmanned. [The Navy must] construct a system for naval combat power that is combined, multipurpose, and highly effective. The third is to produce new naval and military talent. [The Navy must] work hard to cultivate outstanding and talented commanders, top experts, essential technicians, and subject matter experts; speed up the forging of new talent for operational forces that can powerfully support the Navy as it reforms and makes preparations for war. The fourth is to improve the high-quality development of naval weapons and equipment, to fix shortcomings, to strengthen methods of deterrence and balancing, to expand the

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<sup>7</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The “Two Establishes” (两个确立) is a reference to the CCP decisions: (1) to establish Xi Jinping as the “core” leader of the Party, the leader of the people, and the supreme commander of military; and (2) to establish his “thought” as sacrosanct and as the true representative of 21<sup>st</sup> century Marxism.

<sup>8</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The “Four Consciousnesses” (四个意识) is a reference to the need for Chinese people to have a “consciousness” or understanding of politics, of the general situation, of the core role the CCP plays, and of the requirement to align themselves with the CCP.

<sup>9</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The “Four Confidences” (四个自信) is a reference to Xi Jinping’s exhortation for the Chinese people to have confidence in the China’s communist path, theories, system, and culture.

<sup>10</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The “Two Upholds” (两个维护) is a reference to an amendment placed into the CCP constitution that upholds Xi Jinping as the core of the entire CCP and upholds the authority of the Party Center (Xi Jinping).

<sup>11</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The CMC Chairman Responsibility System (军委主席负责制) refers to the extension of the “cult of Xi” to the military, and the personalization of his absolute control over the PLA.

<sup>12</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The literal translation of 远海远域 would be “distant seas, distant areas/domains.”

<sup>13</sup> **Translator’s Note:** The literal translation of 新质新域 would be “new quality, new areas/domains.”

application of new technologies, to tighten equipment management, and to make significant strides toward a first-class supply base.

- (3) Improve and strengthen the use of laws to rule the military. [The Navy must] comprehensively implement the strategy of using laws to rule the military; focus on key links and especially important domains, hammering away at contradictions and problems; work hard to implement naval rule by law, norm building, and ensure the “two comprehensive strictures” (*liangge quanmian congyan*). Under the overall reforms in military policy and organization, [the Navy must] optimize the top-level design of the Navy’s legal and regulatory system such that it organizationally captures newly established laws and regulations and discards the old; focus on breaking through obstacles and building complete mechanisms for rolling updates to the naval development strategy and related regulations and plans; make a good overall system to verify designs for major programs and combat processes, and optimize strategic management and linkages. At the same time, [the Navy must] strengthen faith in rule by law and the idea of rule by law. [It must] transform military control methods according to the requirements of rule by law; strengthen the implementation of legal and regulatory systems; apply legal controls to strengthen loyalty to the Party’s command; apply laws and norms in war preparation and training, in education and management, in the reserve and support forces, and in all elements of navy building, to ensure the naval buildup proceeds in an orderly and powerful fashion on the rule by law track.

[Edited by Liu Xiangdong (刘向东)]