

PLA Navy Equipment Department and Support Department: History and Organizational Background

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Kenneth W. Allen, “[PLA Navy Equipment Department and Support Department: History and Organizational Background](#),” *China Analysis from Original Sources* 以第一手资料研究中国, 22 January 2025.

This report provides some basic information about the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Navy’s (PLAN/人民海军) Equipment Department (装备部) and about when it was merged with the Logistics Department (后勤部) below the PLAN Headquarters (HQ) level in 2016 to form a Support Department (保障部).²

Equipment Department Background from the 1960s to 1990s

According to *China’s Navy 2007*, during the 1960s to 1990s, the PLAN established different departments to manage vessel equipment and technical issues. Following the establishment of the PLA’s General Armament Equipment Department (GAD) in 1998, the PLAN merged these departments into a single Equipment Department discussed below.³

The Equipment Department is primarily responsible for technical support for all PLAN equipment and weapon systems from concept development to retirement. As such, the Equipment Department is responsible for the PLAN’s special-use equipment throughout the following seven steps:⁴

- Plans and theoretical evaluation
- Technical design
- Construction design
- Inspection during construction
- Test and evaluation
- Delivery of the vessel to the unit
- Lifetime repair support

The Equipment Department has subordinate factories, repair facilities, hospitals, depots, warehouses, and purchasing stations. Because it is one of the largest components of the PLAN, the Equipment Department is organized more like a command than a department. As such, it has a director and a political commissar. The primary second-level functional departments are as follows:⁵

- Armament

- Comprehensive Plans
- Defense Industry Regional Representative Bureaus
- Electronics
- Equipment
- Inspection and Management
- Vessel Technology

Within the PLAN's lateral leadership and command structure, all four tiers have fairly equivalent staffs and functional departments, even though the names may be slightly different:⁶

- PLAN Headquarters, support bases, and garrisons have four first-level departments—Headquarters, Political, Logistics, and Equipment.
- The Fleet Headquarters have only two first-level departments—Headquarters and Political. They do not have a Logistics or Equipment Department.
- Support bases and garrisons have four first-level departments—Headquarters, Political, Logistics, and Equipment.
- *Zhidui* have three first-level departments—Headquarters, Political, and an On-Shore Service Department, which is equivalent to a Logistics Department.

PLAN Equipment Department Reforms up to 2010⁷

According to *The PLA as Organization v2.0* (2012), “In early 1961, the PLAN began reorganizing its equipment organizational structure into the following two departments to overcome various repair and maintenance problems: The Ship Repair and Building Department became the Equipment, Procurement, and Production Supervision Department (海军装备订货建造部); and The Logistics Department's second-level Armament Department (后勤部军械部) became the Equipment Repair Department (装备修理部).⁸ In 1963, the two departments were merged to become the Equipment Department (海军装备部). However, in 1974, following the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, a new Equipment and Technical Department (装备技术部) was formed to supervise equipment R&D, building inspection, and repair. In 1985, the Navy re-established the Equipment Repair Department as a separate entity from the Equipment and Technical Department. The Equipment Repair Department incorporated repair for weapon systems, communications, radar, sonar, navigation support equipment, and defense rescue equipment. Following the establishment of the GAD in 1998, the PLAN again combined the Equipment Repair Department with the Equipment and Technical Department, along with the Headquarters Department's subordinate Equipment Department, as well as the Logistics Department's subordinate Armament Department, into the Equipment Department (装备部), and made it responsible for all naval equipment except vehicles, which remains the responsibility of the Logistics Department.⁹

Current PLAN Equipment Department Overview

According to *The PLA as Organization v3.0* (2025),¹⁰ “The PLAN Equipment Department provides oversight of major PLAN platforms and weapons programs. It has bureaus and offices responsible for key categories of equipment such as aircraft, ordnance, submarines, and surface

vessels. The department also maintains a network of Military Representative Bureaus (军事代表局) with subordinate Military Representative Offices (军事代表室) in PRC cities containing important defense industry factories and research institutes.”¹¹ Military representatives stationed at these bureaus and offices likely play a frontline role in ensuring quality control of PLAN platforms and weapons throughout the stages of research, development, and production.¹²

As discussed below, the Logistics Department and Equipment Department in each service headquarters remained following the 2016 PLA reorganization; however, they were merged into a single Support Department (保障部) below the service headquarters level in 2016. Specifically, several organizational aspects are common to the three Theater Command Navies (TCN/战区海军) Headquarters.¹³ First, in contrast to PLAN HQ, which has four key administrative and functional departments (Staff, Political Work, Logistics, and Equipment), each TCN HQ consists of three: a Staff Department, Political Work Department, and Support Department (保障部). A TCN’s Support Department may consolidate analogous functions that are divided among PLAN HQ’s Logistics Department and Equipment Department.¹⁴ The following bullets identify the current structure of the PLAN HQ’s Equipment Department, including their grade:¹⁵

- Equipment Department (装备部); Corps Leader grade
 - Aircraft Office (飞机办公室); Division Leader grade*
 - Carrier-borne Aircraft Support Division (舰载机保障处); Regiment Leader grade*
 - Aviation Equipment Bureau (航空装备局); Division Leader grade
 - Comprehensive Planning Bureau (综合计划局); Division Leader grade
 - Equipment Bidding Center (装备招标中心); Division Leader grade
 - Ordnance Equipment Bureau (军械装备局); Division Leader grade
 - Submarine Equipment Bureau (潜艇装备局); Division Leader grade
 - Surface Vessel Equipment Bureau (水面舰艇装备局); Division Leader grade
 - Testing Management Bureau (试验监管局); Division Leader grade

Support Departments Created in 2016

As part of the PLA’s 11th force reduction and major reorganization that began in 2016, the PLA continued to make some major changes to the logistics and equipment structures that began around 2012, when some Logistics Departments and Equipment Departments were merged into a Support Department.¹⁶

Whereas the former 7 Military Regions (MRs) each had a Joint Logistics Department and an Equipment Department, the newly created 5 Theater Commands (TCs) do not have either department. However, the CMC did create a Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF) as a corps leader-grade organization to support each of the TCs. The JLSF has five Joint Logistics Support Centers divided among the five TCs, respectively,

Prior to the 2016 reorganization, the general overall structure for logistics and equipment is shown in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1: Pre-2016 Logistics, Equipment, and Support Department Structure

Level	Logistics Department	Equipment Department	Support Department
CMC	Yes	Yes	
Service HQ (Navy, Air Force, Second Artillery Force)	Yes	Yes	
Military Region HQ	Yes	Yes	
Navy Fleets and Military Region Air Force HQ	Yes	Yes	
Corps (Military Districts, Garrisons, Group Armies, Bases, Command Posts)	Yes	Yes	
Division (Navy <i>Zhidui</i>)	Yes	Yes	
Brigade	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regiment (Navy <i>Dadui</i>)	Yes	Yes	

Regarding the table above, there are several points worth keeping in mind. Prior to 2016, the CMC served as the PLA Army Headquarters. The Second Artillery Force (PLASAF) was an independent branch under the Army but was treated as a service. The MRs served primary as the regional army headquarters. Each MR had a Joint Logistics Department. Corp-level organizations include both corps leader and corps deputy leader grade. Garrisons include Tianjin, Chongqing, Shanghai, Macao, and Hong Kong. A *zhidui* is sometimes translated as flotilla. Some Support Departments were identified in Group Armies as early as 2013. They apparently replaced the Logistics and Equipment Departments which merged as the Support Department. Regiments did not have a Logistics Department or an Equipment Department, but they had relevant organizations with those responsibilities. For example, aviation units have airfield stations that are responsible for both logistics and aircraft maintenance. Finally, a *dadui* is sometimes translated as squadron.

- As part of the 2016 reorganization, the Central Military Commission renamed the former three Navy Fleets (North Sea, East Sea, and South Sea) as Theater Command Navies. Each TC Navy combined the former Logistics Department and Equipment Department into a single Support Department.
- Although information was found for Support Departments in Army, Air Force, Rocket Force,¹⁷ Military District (MD), and Garrison corps-, division-, and brigade-level headquarters, no information was found concerning the PLA Navy's headquarters at those levels. Some Support Departments were identified in Group Armies as early as 2013. They apparently replaced the Logistics and Equipment Departments which merged as the Support Department.

Figure 2 below shows the current structure compared with that of **Figure 1**.

Figure 2: Current Logistics, Equipment, and Support Department Structure

Level	Logistics Department	Equipment Department	Support Department
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CMC	Yes	Yes	
Service HQ (Navy, Air Force, Second Artillery Force)	Yes	Yes	
Theater Command HQ	No	No	No
TC Service HQ			Yes
Joint Logistics Support Force			
Corps (Military Districts, Garrisons, Group Armies, Bases, Command Posts)			Yes
Division (Navy <i>Zhidui</i>)			
Brigade			Yes
Regiment ¹⁸ (Navy <i>Dadui</i>)	No, but have organizations with these responsibilities	No, but have organizations with these responsibilities	

¹ The views the author expresses are his alone and do not necessarily represent the views, policies, or positions of the U.S. Department of Defense or its components, to include the Department of the Navy or the U.S. Naval War College. This research is derived entirely from open sources. For some of the author's many related publications, see <https://jamestown.org/analyst/kenneth-allen/>.

² For further context and additional basis for the analysis throughout the present report, see Kenneth W. Allen, "PLA Logistics, Equipment, and Support Organizational Structure Overview," *PLA Logistics and Sustainment: PLA Conference 2022*, 3 February 2023, 1–16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep47249.6?seq=2>; as well as *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2024* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 18 December 2024), <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA-2024.PDF>; *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019), https://www.dia.mil/Portals/110/Images/News/Military_Powers_Publications/China_Military_Power.pdf.

³ *China's Navy 2007* (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, March 2007), <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2007/03/office-of-naval-intelligence-report-chinas-navy-2007/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds., *The PLA as Organization v2.0* (Vienna, VA: DGI, 2015).

⁸ *China Today: Navy* (当代中国海军), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1989, p. 246, 253-254, 324, and 554-555. See also "Historical Evolution of the PLAN's Equipment Department" ("中国人民解放军海军装备部历史沿革"), 10 February 2011, www.360doc.com/content/11/02/10/11/955164_91807512.shtml.

⁹ *World Military Yearbook 1999* (Beijing: Yearbook Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Brian Waidelich, "PLA Navy Organization," in Frank Miller, Tung Ho, and Kenneth Allen, editors, *The People's Liberation Army as Organization Volume 3.0* (Exovera/Jamestown, February 2025).

¹¹ It appears that this arrangement of military liaison offices within China's defense industry is not reciprocated by the civilian side. That is, there do not appear to be formal organizational structures in place for detailing PRC defense contractor representatives to PLA naval commands.

¹² For a brief overview of the responsibilities of the PLA's Military Representative Bureaus, see Kevin Pollpeter and Amy Chang, "Chapter Seven: General Armament Department," in Kevin Pollpeter and Kenneth W. Allen, eds. *The PLA as Organization 2.0* (Defense Group Inc., 2013), 222.

¹³ Brian Waidelich, "PLA Navy Organization" in Frank Miller, Tung Ho, and Kenneth Allen, editors, *The People's Liberation Army as Organization Volume 3.0* (Exovera/Jamestown, February 2025).

¹⁴ Prior to the establishment of the Theater Command Navies, the PLAN's East, South, and North Sea Fleets each possessed a Logistics Department and Equipment Department.

¹⁵ Brian Waidelich, "PLA Navy Organization" in Frank Miller, Tung Ho, and Kenneth Allen, editors, *The People's Liberation Army as Organization Volume 3.0* (Exovera/Jamestown, February 2025).

¹⁶ Kenneth W. Allen, "PLA Logistics, Equipment, and Support Organizational Structure Overview" in George R. Shatzer and Roger D. Cliff, editors, *PLA Logistics and Sustainment: PLA Conference 2022*, Carlisle, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, February 2023.

¹⁷ Ma Xiu, *PLA Rocket Force Organization*, China Aerospace Studies Institute, 5 January 2022, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/PLARF/2022-01-05%20PLARF%20Organization%20ExecSum.pdf>.