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2015 Military Reform in the People's Republic of China

Defense, Foreign and Domestic Policy Issues

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Cover image: A Chinese military band conductor leads the band at the end of the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Saturday, March 5, 2016. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

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Table of Contents

Synopsis of the Study	vi
Introduction	1
The 2015 Reform as a New Stage of Implementing Long-Term Plans of Development for China’s Military Power	7
Historical Examples of the Role of China’s Armed Forces in Domestic Policy	14
The System of the Military Council (MC) of the CPC Central Committee and the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the PRC	18
New PLA Command and Control Structure	25
Conclusion	31

Synopsis of the Study

The military reform in the People's Republic of China (PRC), announced by China's supreme party and state officials in 2015, is unprecedented in scale and depth. It aims to add a new dimension to China's armed forces - to provide for more a compelling strategic deterrence and ability to win a local war, if such war breaks out. This reform is also a demonstration of a critical stage of development of China's political system.

This stage comprises another cycle of intensification of the role of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the country's political life, including the military.

The military reform also plays an important role in China's foreign policy, where the military component of the country's national security policy is becoming increasingly important.

This reform is inextricably entwined with the PRC government's large-scale efforts to fight against corruption, both in the military and the country as a whole. As noted by Mikhail Titarenko, member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, corruption among party and government officials in China is especially dangerous and "is declared the most serious, deadly threat to the socialist system and the CPC's authority among the nation."¹

1 M.L. Titarenko. *Rossiya i Kitai. Strategicheskoye partnerstvo i vyzovy vremeni* (Russia and China. Strategic Partnership and Challenges of Our Time). M.: ID "Forum," 2014, page 136.

The country's army, which will be under even more multifaceted control, executed by China's supreme party and government officials through the Military Council (MC) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CC CPC) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the People's Republic of China, will continue to provide for homeland security within China. In particular, one must not rule out that the new 5 theater commands established to replace 7 "major military regions" of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), in an acute crisis situation, will be intended to play the same role in the country as the "major military regions" could play.

Radical change of command and control (organization and equipment) structures is a classical maneuver to legitimize a massive staff reshuffling. In turn, staff reshuffling may improve the military forces' efficiency in problem solving and ensure the proper loyalty of commanders and political commissars to the country's party and state authorities.

The time-proven mechanisms of the Military Council (MC) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CC CPC) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the PRC, developed over the course of the reform, will enable the China's military-political and military-strategic management (governance) system to preserve its pronounced specific features.

中华人民共和国第十二届全国人民代表大会第四次会



A Chinese military band conductor leads the band at the end of the opening session of the annual National People's Congress in Beijing's Great Hall of the People, Saturday, March 5, 2016.

(AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)



Introduction

At the end of November 2015, Xi Jinping, Chairman of the PRC, announced the beginning of a large-scale military reform in the People's Republic of China. This reform, among other things, engages all major elements of the strategic command and control system in the area of defense and national security as a whole. The Chinese officials' statements emphasize the inextricable connection between the reforms of the PLA, successful construction of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," and the leading role of the Communist Party of China in all major aspects of the country.

It is also important to intensify efforts of creating a modern Chinese military force in order to implement the "Chinese dream," which was enunciated by Xi two years earlier – the "great renewal of a Chinese nation."¹ Gong Fanbin, professor at the University of National Defense of China, in his interview to the People's Daily, said that for Chinese people, the "dream of a strong army must encourage the Chinese dream."²

The reform is aimed at enhancing the PLA's efficiency in solving China's external tasks of national security, including the task of securing "victory in a local war." As Xi mentioned in one of his speeches (March 11, 2013, two years before the announcement of the military reform), "the principal requirement of the army" is its "fighting capacity and its ability to win." To achieve that, it is necessary to "enhance officers' and soldiers' thinking of war" and "be a soldier for the sake of war, be the soldiers' leader for the sake of war, and exercise for the sake of war."³

It is obvious that one of the principal tasks of the reform is to establish mechanisms to minimize corruption in the military.

- 1 Xi Jinping. Dlia togo, chtoby sbylas' "kitaiskaya mechta," neobkhodimo sledovat' po kitaiskomu puti. (We need to follow the Chinese path to fulfill the "Chinese dream"). 17.03.2013. Xinhua. – [Electronic source] <http://russian.people.com.cn/31521/8176942.html>. Accessed date: 15.05.2016.
- 2 Reforma vooruzhennykh sil KNR podayet signal (The PRC's military reform sends a signal) // INOSMI.RU, 01.12.2015. – [Electronic source] inosmi.ru. Accessed date: 02.06.2016.
- 3 Xi Jinping. To build the people's army, which obeys to the Party, is able to win, and has exemplary style... Page 303.

The reform is slated to be implemented by the year 2020; in 2010, in China's Defense White Paper, 2020 was called a milestone for "attaining major progress in informationization of the armed forces."⁴

The 2015 reform is, to a large extent, unprecedented. It is incorrect to compare it with the major strategic management (governance) system reform carried out in the U.S. in conformity with the Goldwater–Nichols Act of 1986.⁵ The Chinese military reform proclaimed by Xi is larger in scale and more thorough, especially since it seriously affects the country's domestic policy and is related to problems of stability in China's political system. The scale of the military reform in China can be compared only with the scale of anti-corruption measures taken throughout the China itself, including within the top party and government officials of the PRC. These measures, initiated by Xi, have affected a number of previously untouchable top CPC and government officials (including a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC), high-ranking military officials (deputy chairmen of the Military Council of the Central Committee of the CPC and the Central Military Commission of the PRC), as well as the top security officials. Corruption was addressed as almost the gravest threat to the PRC at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. An "inadequate solution of that problem could do deadly damage to the Party and even ruin it and the country."⁶

The reform has been prepared for at least seven years and Xi played an active role in its development in the later stages.

The top CPC officials and the senior military and political officials of the PLA actively debated ways of developing the armed forces under new conditions in the state, which had seriously decided to take on a role of the "second superpower."

4 See V. Kashin, *Evolutsiya kitayskoy voennoy politiki* (Evolution of China's Military Policy). Eksport vooruzheniy, 2012, Issue #10, page 6.

5 For example, see Saunders Ph.C., Wuthnow J. *China's Goldwater-Nichols Assessing PLA Organizational Reform* // Strategic Forum, Nat. Def. Univ. April 2016. [Electronic source] ndupress.ndu.esy. Accessed date: 15.05.2016.

6 Cit. ex V.G. Burov, XVIII S'ezd KPK i strategiya razvitiya Kitaya (18th National Congress of the CPC and China's Development Strategy) // *Novaya i noveyshaya istorii*, 2013, issue #3, page 35.

As stated officially, there have been 860 workshops and forums of military and civil experts, surveys carried out in about 700 different military units of the PLA, and opinions of 900 commanders, senior officers, headquarters staff and political commissars gathered.⁷ This complies with the concept of “consultative democracy,” which has been continuously applied in China for the past 15-20 years.

This military reform should be analyzed in the context of the recent measures aimed at the development of a national security system within the PRC as a whole. Even at that time, it was revealed that 7 “major military regions” and 3 fleets of the navy of the PLA would be replaced by 5 allied commands. The establishment of the Central National Security Council (CNSC) of the Central Committee of the CPC in 2013 is an important measure taken in this area. The CNSC includes several members of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC and a number of members of the Political Bureau. Li Keqiang, Premier of the State Council of the PRC, and Zhang Dejiang, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress, are the Deputy Chairmen of the CNSC.

Addressing the first meeting of this body on April 15, 2014, Xi (who had become the head of the CNSC) spoke about foreign and homeland security, “traditional security” and “non-traditional security,” including political, territorial, economic, cultural, scientific and technical information security, as well as resource security, such as nuclear energy. This list also included military security (the decision was made at the 3rd Plenary Meeting of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China).⁸

The activities of the Central National Security Council (CNSC) of the Central Committee of the CPC are lesser-known than the activities of the Military Council (MC) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CC CPC) and the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the PRC. The CNSC of the Central Committee of the CPC will apparently

7 China Announces Important Military Reforms Guidelines: Implications. – Analysis // Eurasia Review, Dec., 2015 – [Electronic source] Eurasiareview.com. Accessed date: 05.06.2016.

8 Xi Jinping. To adhere to an overall national security outlook and explore a national security path with Chinese characteristics. From Jinping’s speech as of April 15, 2014. See Xi Jinping. O gosudarstvennom upravlenii (The Governance of China). Beijing: Izdatel'stvo literatury na inostrannykh yazykakh, 2015, pages 277-278.

continue to be a considerably closed structure, dealing predominantly with the country's homeland security issues. Several Russian experts believe that the CNSC will focus its activities on fighting separatism, terrorism and extremism, and on the preservation of China's territorial integrity. A number of issues related to distribution of functions between the Military Council of the Central Committee of the CPC and the Central Military Commission of the PRC, on the one hand, and the CNSC of the Central Committee of the CPC, on the other hand, remain unclear.

Chinese experts note that developers of the military reform in the PRC thoroughly studied the U.S. experience, the recent reform of the Russian armed forces, and the relevant Chinese historical experience. The developers have carried out a large-scale, in-depth survey of the history and theory of war and military art, as well as a comparative analysis of military-political and military-strategic management (governance) systems in different countries and at different periods in history. The PLA Academy of Military Sciences, the PLA National Defense University, the China Institute for International Strategic Studies and other institutions played an important role in this development.

Chinese experts have translated a large number of studies conducted by foreign military and civil experts on these issues; these translations are actively used by thousands of generals and officers, and civil servants of the Military Council and other bodies of the Central Committee of the CPC working on the military reform issues. The study of all aspects of the "military revolution" is also important for Chinese developers, scientists and experts. Additionally, Chinese military officials and experts paid close attention to the efforts taken by the U.S. Department of Defense (under the direction of Secretary Ashton Carter and Under Secretary Robert Work) to conceptualize and implement the "Third Offset Strategy."

One of the core issues faced by the Party and top state officials, when they considered the depth of the military reform (especially the issue of replacement of "major military regions" with allied commands), was the correlation between the armed forces' capabilities to provide for a more efficient use of military power to pursue foreign policy interests, and the preservation of the role of the PLA in resolving potential internal crises.

In their numerous speeches, Xi, military experts and top military officials have repeatedly emphasized the indisputable authority of the Communist Party with regards to the control of the country's armed forces. Thus, addressing the audience during his inspection visit to the Guangzhou Southern Theater Command in December 2012, Xi stated that the “construction of national defense and the army” requires a “strict obedience to the Party.” Xi said that “ideological and political construction must become a priority in strengthening the army.” To achieve that, it is vital to “constantly arm our officers and soldiers with the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics” and “instill the basic values of modern revolutionary army men among them.”⁹ In his speech at the plenary meeting of the PLA delegation at the first session of the 12th National People's Congress (NPC) on March 11, 2013, Xi said that it was “necessary to firmly uphold the principle of CPC's absolute leadership over the army,... ensure the army's absolute loyalty, purity and reliability,” and make certain that “all army's activities are under direct control of the CPC Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.”¹⁰

Statements saying that it was Xi who called the PLA the “army of the Party,” not the state, referring to what Mao Zedong had said 85 years ago, are incorrect.¹¹ The postulation that the PLA is subordinate to the CPC has been an enduring part of China's political life. This was repeatedly proclaimed by various Chinese leaders, including such predecessors of Xi (as the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee and President of the PRC) as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. This has always been the case, with the exception of relatively short periods of local “cultural revolutions” and the subsequent fight between the “leftists” and “pragmatists” among the country's top officials. However, the development of a market economy in China, sharp increase in the number and social importance of businessmen, and the enormous social stratification increasingly raise the issue of the CPC's role, with its official ideology (Vladimir Lenin- Karl Marx, Mao and Deng Xiaoping), in the life of society as a whole. Thus,

9 Xi Jinping. To strive for construction of strong defense and powerful army Xi Jinping. O gosudarstvennom upravlenii (The Governance of China), page 299.

10 Xi Jinping. To build the people's army, which obeys to the Party, is able to win, and has exemplary style. March 11, 2013. See Xi Jinping. O gosudarstvennom upravlenii (The Governance of China), page 303.

11 Xi's New Model Army / *The Economist*, Jan. 16, 2016. – [Electronic source] economist.com. Accessed date: 15.04.2016.

the preservation of the decisive role of the CPC in governance of the law enforcement agencies, particularly the PLA, and the armed forces as a whole (indeed, with Chinese specifications) has recently become very topical.

Undoubtedly, Xi's demand of absolute obedience of the army and the armed forces to the Party is more accentuated than that of his predecessor Hu, for example. The activity of the current Chinese leaders in this respect should not be underestimated.

The 2015 Reform as a New Stage of Implementing Long-Term Plans of Development for China's Military Power

In 2001 Jiang Zemin, President of the PRC and General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, introduced a strategy for developing a defense and industrial potential and modernizing China's armed forces for the first half of the 21st century. According to the research of the Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IFES RAS), this program included three stages: the first stage (until 2010) stipulated the grounding of the reforms; at the second stage (2010-2020) China's armed forces would become the strongest in Asia; and by the third stage (2020-2049) the modernization would be completed and reach the level of the armed forces of developed countries. This program as a whole is being fulfilled; however, according to many sinologists, this is not mentioned in Chinese leaders' modern statements on the current military reform. On a number of instances, it was stated that the progress in implementing the modernization program of the PRC armed forces was in fact greater than had been stipulated by Jiang. At the same time, various experts note that the PLA is facing a number of complex problems related to establishing real-time systems of command, communications, control, intelligence and targeting, the make-up of PLA staff with highly qualified personnel in all its segments, and "allied" drilling at strategic, operational and tactical levels.

Before China's economic and military power reached a higher level of development, Chinese leaders strongly called for keeping a "low profile" on external political activities in conformity with Deng Xiaoping's maxims of the late eighties and early nineties, and in line with traditional Chinese strategic thinking. Chinese leaders frequently stated that the PRC should not prematurely shoulder the burden of an active confrontation with the U.S. or a full-scale arms race with the US, thus avoiding the mistakes made by the USSR.

The formulas for China's development and the global stature used by Chinese leaders did not stipulate an accelerated conversion of China's

increased military power into international political (including military) influence and lessened ideological influence until recently.

While evaluating China's motivation to develop its military power, it is important to note that many representatives of the political establishment, as well as the country's military leaders, believe that a primary strategic goal of the U.S.' "national security establishment" is not just aimed at limiting China's influence through "containment," thus "breaking the line" of China becoming the "second superpower" by liquidating the PRC's political system as it did with the USSR in 1991. The perception of the current U.S. policy towards China as the policy aimed at the breakdown and fragmentation of the PRC and liquidation of the "communist regime" considerably "raises the stakes" in the standoff between the PRC and the U.S., including in the nuclear sector. For Chinese leaders, contention with the U.S. will lead to a struggle for their political, social, economic and even physical survival for millions of state and party officials and military officers of the PLA. A threat from the U.S. may lead to a mobilization of resources in China, including significant defense resources.

For Chinese political and military elites (and to a large extent business elites, since they are tightly intertwined with political and military elites in modern China) the high stakes in crises may signify China's readiness to initiate greater escalation in potential conflicts. A considerable part of China's political class is not primed for confrontation with the U.S. and is ready to make various kinds of trade-offs with Washington. Nevertheless, even those Chinese officials, who are considered to be pro-western are not ready to play second fiddle in the global economy and global policy fields, or in the national security sector.

Beijing clearly understands that the PRC and the U.S. are highly interdependent economically, and this fact significantly limits opportunities for political and military clashes, as well as financial and economic conflicts. This interdependence and its realization exist concurrently with the serious tensions, including in the military dimension, between the current and sole superpower and the potential superpower in the Asia-Pacific region (China), preeminently in North-East and South-East Asia.

From the late nineties onwards, the PLA has been undergoing a complex, and to a large extent painful, liberation from many economic functions and from the task of contributing to the national economy, which was entrusted to the army by Deng (in particular, in his speech at the meeting of the Military Council of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China as of November 1, 1984). Various top PLA officers (including commanders of “major military regions,” army commanders, and corps’ commanders) were in charge of coal mines, airports, oil refineries, large and small hotels and other enterprises.

For several decades, the economic functions entrusted to the PLA and its control over numerous enterprises were not only means of survival, but an extremely important way to guarantee the command staff’s loyalty to the supreme power of China in such an ideologically, socially and psychologically difficult period of time, characterized by government reforms. According to various sources, in the 1980-90s many top PLA commanders, including senior political officials opposed many aspects of the economic and social reforms, believing them contradictory to established ideological stereotypes and threatening to the social and political status of the PLA officers in the face of the rapidly growing status of businessmen, managers and economic officials.

It follows then, that the goal of ensuring loyalty of the military, pursued by the state and its leaders, had been essentially fulfilled in the past two decades, despite the fact that the living conditions of the junior command personnel and even middle-rank PLA officers until recently were quite harsh.

In the past 8-10 years, the situation of financing the PLA and equipping China’s armed forces with arms and military hardware has radically changed for the better.

The PLA’s economic activities fostered the spread of corruption, which the current leaders of the PRC are trying to curb. It is obvious that these activities, which are unusual for armies in the overwhelming majority of countries, significantly lowered the combat capabilities of the PLA in potential conflicts against any serious enemy. Neither the party and government officials of the PRC nor the military command held any illusions

in that respect. Guided by Sun Tzu's theory, which was applied in full by Mao back in 1930-s, China's leaders, as a rule, always take an unbiased look at their capacity and capabilities and their opponent's potential.

In the past, many experts wondered if China was distancing itself from the principles of moderation and cautiousness as a result of the involvement of the US, which has recently intensified its "deterrence policy" towards China and proclaimed a pivot in the Asia-Pacific region that many top officials in Beijing consider to be primarily anti-Chinese.

One of the key issues in the future world politics (including the military-political and military-strategic spheres) is whether there will be critical collisions between China and the U.S. leading to a crisis similar to the collision between the USSR and the U.S. during the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. Speaking about the U.S.-China future relations, Graham T. Allison, prominent political scientist and professor at Harvard University, refers to the remarks of the ancient Greek historian Thucydides on the real causes of the Peloponnesian war between the two contenders for hegemony in Greece – Athens and Sparta. Allison warns the U.S. against falling into Thucydides's trap by engaging militarily with the PRC, a young, rising superpower.¹² Thucydides wrote: "I consider the real cause to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon made war inevitable."¹³

In the past 10-15 years, China's defense-industrial sector, thanks to the scientific and industrial achievements of China as a whole, has made significant progress. China's defense industry is rapidly shifting from replication to its own research and development. Right before our eyes China has reduced its dependence on the import of arms, military hardware and military technologies, which it primarily purchased from the Russian Federation. The delivery of arms and military hardware from Russia to China and India played an extremely important role in the survival of Russia's defense-industrial sector in the turbulent 1990s, when the "shock

12 Allison, Graham T. Avoiding Thucydides's Trap. — *Financial Times*. August 22. 2012. [Electronic source]: http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/22265/avoiding_thiucydiddess_trap (Access date: 15.05.2014).

13 See Fulkidid. *Istoriya (Thucydides. History of the Peloponnesian war)* Leningrad: Izdatelstvo "Nauka," 1981, page 14.

therapy” measures resulted in a reduction of Russia’s GDP and large-scale deindustrialization, which the country has not overcome yet. Such military-technical cooperation accompanied by a development of military cooperation has largely contributed to the political convergence of China and Russia and a deep mutual understanding of many international security issues. This cooperation allowed Russia to preserve not just a number of important components of the country’s defense industry, but many research-intensive industries as a whole. The benefits from military-technical cooperation with the PRC provided Russia the scientific and technical framework for establishing a promising armaments systems for the country’s military.

The PLA modernization was and is accompanied by a considerable reduction of its staff. The current military reform will be accompanied by a PLA staff reduction by 300 thousand people, as announced by Xi on September 3, 2015.

There will also be a considerable reduction of the administrative personnel and the share of non-combatants. Staff reduction may also affect a number of ground force units.

Reduction of the aggregate PLA personnel began back in 1985, which at that time, amounted to 4.5 million people. Reduction mainly affected the ground forces, which were partially incorporated into the People’s Armed Police (an analogue of the Internal Troops of Russia). By 1991, the number of the PLA personnel slightly exceeded 3 million people. Reduction of the PLA personnel, primarily at the cost of the ground forces, went on. By 2012, the PLA personnel were reduced to 2.285 million people (the ground forces staff was reduced from 2.3 to 1.6 million people).¹⁴ According to a number of estimates, a considerable portion of PLA servicemen (including entire units and forces) were transferred to the People’s Armed Police (PAP); the PAP troops were used primarily to reinforce the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and Tibet.

One must not rule out that that the same may happen again as a result of the current reduction of the PLA staff.

¹⁴ V. Kashin, *Evolutsiya kitaiskoy voennoy politiki (Evolution of China’s Military Policy)*. Ekspert voprosy, 2012, Issue #10, page 7.

The current development of the Chinese armed forces began at the end of 2004, after an extended meeting of the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the PRC, chaired by Hu Jintao. At that meeting, the PLA was entrusted with the following long-term tasks: “Provide serious power support to ensure the leading role of the Party; provide security guarantees during the important period of auspicious opportunities for the country’s development; provide strategic support for the expansion of the country’s national interests; play an important role in safeguarding global peace and ensuring overall development.”¹⁵

In his speech at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012, Hu proclaimed the “new and modern military strategy of active defense.” “We should act to meet the new requirements of China’s national development and security strategies and ensure that the armed forces fully carry out their historic mission in the new stage in the new century. We should implement a military strategy of active defense for the new period, and enhance military strategic guidance as the times so require,” he said.¹⁶ When stepping down as the PRC’s leader, Hu stated that it was necessary to “attach great importance to maritime, space and cyberspace security, and make active plans for the use of military forces in peacetime, expand, as well as intensify military preparedness, and enhance the capability to accomplish a wide range of military tasks.”¹⁷

A significant part of the PLA’s development efforts is focused on the navy. At the end of the eighties, the PRC had developed the maritime concept of “near-seas active defense.” According to this concept, the PLA was supposed to gain the capacity to ensure naval supremacy with regard to the so-called “first island chain” in the seas around China, and gradually advance to the “second island chain.” The long term plan was to construct an ocean-capable fleet.¹⁸ Only in the past 7-8 years has China been able to implement this concept. “Supremacy in the near seas within the first island

15 Cit. ex V.B. Kashin. Na puti k globalnoy voennoy derzhave: Evolutsiya voennoy politiki KNR v 1949-2014 (On the Path Towards the Global Military Power: Evolution of the PRC’s Military Policy in 1949-2014). Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta. Series #25. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya i mirovaya politika, 2013, Issue #4, page 113.

16 Report of Hu Jintao, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China // People’s Daily Online, 19.11.2012. – [Electronic source] http://russian/people.com/en/31521_/8023_RRL.html. Accessed date: 15.12.2012.

17 Ibid.

18 V. Kashin. Evolutsiya kitaiskoy voennoy politiki (Evolution of China’s Military Policy), page 7.

chain” is considered the prerequisite of a resolution of the Taiwan problem. Aircraft carriers, among other things, are needed to accomplish this.

Beijing believes that its most important task is to ensure China’s sovereignty in regards to the disputed islands and zones in the South and East China Seas. The PLA Navy also has to provide for China’s most important sea lanes traversing the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. “Demonstration of the flag” is becoming increasingly important for the PRC Navy.

About four years have passed since the date of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Much progress has already been made within this short period of time of Xi in power, including in the arena of technical equipment for the PLA.

The 2015 military reform consolidates (in an organizational and regulatory sense) the efforts made by the CPC and the PRC to provide opportunities for the “new period” to a considerably larger extent and with new focal points.

Historical Examples of the Role of China's Armed Forces in Domestic Policy

The armed forces have played an important role in China's modern domestic policy, more important than in many other countries. By Chinese standards, the historical events characterizing the special role of the military happened not long ago.¹⁹ These lessons are taken into account by the current Party and government officials of China, who place emphasis on the CPC's absolute control of the country's armed forces in a way that does not anticipate any independent role of the army.

After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, power was seized by dictator General Yuan Shikai (1913-1916); this period was followed by a power struggle between various groups, where the military played the leading role. During the dictatorship of Yuan, local commanders (primarily military governors of the country's provinces) had become akin to "apanage princes" of the territories that they controlled. These "apanage princes" primarily relied on their loyal armies, which were not under the control of China's central power. Under Yuan's military dictatorship system, these regional leaders opposed Yuan's ascendance to power, hindering his monarchic plans to restore the empire (in the form of a constitutional monarchy) and proclaim himself the emperor.²⁰

Yuan repeatedly attempted to lessen the role of the military ("local militarists") in the state governance and national political life, by attempting to make the status of civil governors higher than that of the military, however, his efforts fell short. For this period of time in the country's history, military officers of various ranks had turned into the "main political force in China." An eminent Russian sinologist Oleg Nepomnin writes that "at the

19 Henry Kissinger reasonably wrote in his recent work on China: "One cultural trait regularly invoked by Chinese leaders was their historic perspective—the ability, indeed the necessity, to think of time in categories different from the West's." See Henry Kissinger. *On China*. Translated from English. M.: Astrel, 2012, page 271.

20 See O.E. Nepomnin. *Istoriya Kitaya: epokha Tsin. XVIII – nachalo XX veka (History of China: The Qing Epoch. From 18th Century to the Beginning of the 20th Century*. M.: "Vostochnaya literatura" Publishing House, 2005, pages 592-594.

time of the republic, generals and officers had tasted the sweets of power and did not want to serve the civilians again.”²¹

Yuan’s death was followed by a number of military coups d’état and counter-coups d’état, in which the “Beiyang Clique” generals played an important role.

The military played an important role in political life in many regions of China during the sustained civil war and struggle against Japanese invaders from 1920-1940s. This refers to various “local militarists” commanders of troops and forces of the Kuomintang Army, and the commanders of the Red Army established by the Communist Party of China.

The PLA played an enormous role during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when Mao essentially used the PLA as a replacement for the government and Party authorities.

The PLA, like the Red Army of the USSR, was a target of repression, especially during the Cultural Revolution. Many prominent military commanders were sanctioned, including Marshal Peng Dehuai. However, the number of PLA commanders killed over the course of those repressions is significantly fewer than that of the USSR in 1937-38. The overwhelming majority of PLA officers retained their positions during the Cultural Revolution.

The PLA played an important role in stabilizing the situation in the country after the Cultural Revolution. In particular, many officers strove for the overthrow of the leftist Gang of Four headed by Mao’s widow Jiang Qing, who sought absolute power in China after the death of the Great Helmsman.

In October 1976, Ye Jianying, Minister of Defense of the PRC and a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC, played a role similar to the role played by Georgii Zhukov, Marshall of the Soviet Union, in the removal of Lavrentii Beria in 1953 and the defeat of the Anti-Party Group of Vyacheslav Molotov, Georgii Malenkov

21 Ibid, page 595.

and Lazar Kaganovich in 1957. However, unlike Zhukov, Ye was not later expelled from power; instead he received a number of other appointments. In addition to Ye, a number of regional PLA military commanders also played an important role in the defeat of the Group headed by Jiang Qing.

Experts note the role played by Xu Shiyou, Commander of the Guangzhou Military Region. In their letter to the Central Committee of the CPC as of February 1977, the commanders of that military region and the Party Committee of Guangdong demanded recognition of Mao's mistakes over the course of the Cultural Revolution. In their letter, the authors spoke about the need to rehabilitate those who had been repressed during those years – Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai, Deng Xiaoping and even Lin Biao.²² (For some time Lin, Minister of National Defense and a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC, was considered to be Mao's successor; the united "leftists" and "pragmatists" tried to persuade Mao that Lin was brewing a military coup d'état. In September 1971 Lin and his family died in a mysterious plane crash in Mongolia. Lin's colleagues were targets of repression. As a result, the influence of the military faction in the CPC Central Committee was weakened.)²³

Shortly before the 11th Congress of the CPC (August 1977) Deng Xiaoping, with the support of the military, was reinstated in positions that he had held before his second removal from power in the spring of 1976 – Deputy Chairman of the CPC Central Committee and the Vice Premier of the State Council. Deng was also appointed the Chief of the PLA General Staff Department, becoming more of a Party and government leader, rather than a military professional. Many repressed officials returned to the Party and government institutions together with Deng.

The military never regained the political influence that it had had at the end of the Cultural Revolution and immediately following it. Many experts believe that this is of the deliberate result of Deng's policy. The influence of the military diminished further, when high priority was placed on economic development, and a policy of reform and openness (in 1997, after

22 A.V. Meliksetov (Editor). *Istoriya Kitaya* (History of China). M.: Izdatelstvo Moskovskogo universiteta (Moscow University Publishing House), 1998, page ...

23 *Ibid*, pages 688-689.

83-year old Liu Huaqing resigned, there were no military officials in the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC).

Chinese leaders had to use the PLA to suppress the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989. The military force used against numerous protesters in Beijing was fairly extensive. Units and forces from 10 armies of regular ground troops from various “major military regions,” amounting to 400,000 people, were brought into Beijing. The State Council of the PRC (equivalent of the Cabinet) passed an official resolution (signed by Li Peng) on the imposition of the martial law. This resolution was the decision of the Party leaders’ group headed by Deng. The military took complete control of the main railway station, airport and telegraph office. The decision to defeat the protesters was taken jointly by the Military Council of the Central Committee of the CPC, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC and the State Council of the PRC. There is significant evidence that the main role in this lengthy and painful decision-making was played by Deng.

The actions of the PLA were opposed by many residents of Beijing. According to data from a variety of sources, more than 1,000 military vehicles, over 60 tanks and armored personnel carriers, 90 police cars, 120 trolleybuses and buses, and other vehicles were bashed and burnt within a few days.²⁴ In many instances the clashes between the army and protesters were very violent. There is no doubt that the Chinese leaders’ decision to use force against the protesters was induced by the “velvet revolutions” in the Soviet Union and socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

24 V.N. Usov, *Den Xiaopin i ego vremia (Deng Xiaoping and His Time)*. M.: Institut Dal'nego Vostoka RAN (Institute of Far Eastern Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences), “Dom Konfutsiya” (House of Confucius), 2009, pages 754-756.

The System of the Military Council (MC) of the CPC Central Committee and the Central Military Commission (CMC) of the PRC

While evaluating the current reform, one should immediately note that the main role in controlling China's armed forces (including political control) is still played by the Military Council of the CPC Central Committee and its governmental analogue, the Central Military Commission of the PRC.

The Military Council of the CC CPC has existed since the 1930s. Its governmental analogue was established on October 1, 1949, together with the establishment of the People's Republic of China. In 1949-1954, it was called the People's Revolutionary Military Commission of the PRC; in 1954-1976 – the National Defense Council of the PRC, and since 1976, the Central Military Commission of the PRC. Thus, there are two parallel structures – the Military Council of the CC CPC and the Central Military Commission of the PRC. Members of the Party and the state bodies are the same, but each body has its own apparatuses. The members of the Military Council of the CC CPC and the Central Military Commission of the PRC are members of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC or members of the CPC Central Committee. The available Chinese publications show that the current reform affects the apparatus of the Central Military Commission of the PRC, but not the Military Council of the CC CPC.

The CPC Congress elects the members of the CPC Central Committee and the members of such important body as the CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), which considerably outstrips the Party Control Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in capabilities and prerogatives.

The Chairman, Deputy Chairmen and members of the Military Council of the CC CPC are elected at the Plenary Meeting of the CPC Central

Committee, alongside the election of the members of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC, members of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee and members of the Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee. The Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC, Deputy Chairmen and members of the Central Military Commission of the PRC are elected at the session of the National People's Congress and meetings of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress.

Some Russian experts state that in the USSR, there was a body similar to the Military Council of the CC CPC – the Administrative Organs Department of the CPSU Central Committee. This department supervised the activity of the KGB, subordinate to the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, as well as the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR. The Administrative Organs Department played an important role in implementing the personnel policy and securing the “Party’s leading role” in the security agencies, but it never had even a fraction of the prerogatives that the Military Council of the CC CPC and the Central Military Commission of the PRC had (and still have).

There has been no unity of command of China’s armed forces since the end of 1920s, when the Red Army of China was established.²⁵ All orders at the level of military regions, armies, corps, divisions, and down to the lower company level, were signed by two people – the commander and the commissar. Unity of command (one-man command) was present only at the lowest tactical level, i.e. in platoons and squads. Each platoon has a CPC party cell. Practically all PLA privates are members of the Communist Youth League of China, guaranteed by the conscription system. Such selection is possible because, as many estimates show, 25-26 million people are called into service in China every year, which is twice as much as is required by the PLA and the People’s Armed Police of the Ministry of Public Security (MPS) of China.

25 It is believed that the PLA was founded on August 1, 1927, when the revolutionary forces headed by Zhou Enlai, Zhu De, He Long and Ye Ting took part in the Nanchang Uprising against the Kuomintang, i.e. 22 years before the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Now the impressive building of the Central Military Commission of the PRC in Beijing is called “August 1 Building” in commemoration of this event.

The role of commissars and political instructors of the Red Army of China was copied from the Soviet Red Army's system during the civil war in Russia, which underwent recurrent transformations. The system of military commissars, who had the right to supervise all aspects of life of a particular military body together with its commander, was finally liquidated in the USSR in 1942. However, even after that, political instructors continued to play an important role in morale building in the Armed Forces of the USSR, in evaluating officers' career potential.

The importance of the Central Military Commission in China's party and state governance system is substantiated by the fact that Deng, after he had left all of his posts, retained the positions of Chairman of the Military Council of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC. In these positions, Deng was still able to control the activities of the President of the PRC (General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Jiang Zemin) and make adjustments when necessary (most likely until his removal from power).

In 2000, Hu Jintao, member of the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC, who had superseded Jiang Zemin as the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee at the 16th Congress of the CPC (and later was elected the President of the PRC), became the First Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Hu got an opportunity in advance "to be privy" to the subtleties of the supreme governance of the state. A number of Russian sinologists believed that after the 16th Congress of the CPC, when young Hu became the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee and later the President of the PRC (while Jiang remained Chairman of the Military Council of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC) China faced a unique diarchy (barely noticeable and obscure to an external observer), which, however, did not undermine China's state and political system.

There are many indications that the Central Military Commission is not only the supreme military administration authority, but the principal state governance body, especially during an emergency, when there is a higher threat to domestic political stability in China. Many studies show that

the Central Military Commission was founded as a “reserve authority” of supreme power for different crisis situations, where the system of power, which is most efficient in crisis-free environment, is no longer functional. This role of the Central Military Commission (and “major military regions,” which will be discussed below) probably reflected the Chinese leaders’ fears that the CPC could *de facto* lose the role of being the leading power in the country during this period of history. Such assumptions are based on the fact that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, China thoroughly studied the aspects of development of the Soviet political system in the final years of the USSR’s existence. Reportedly, in the early 1990s, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a number of other research agencies, under the guidance of the CPC Central Committee, polled over 900 high-profile policymakers and public figures from different former Soviet republics. Based on these polls, the experts prepared confidential conclusions for the Chinese leaders in order to prevent and preclude similar events in China.

In conformity with the 1997 Law on Defense, the Central Military Commission supervises the People’s Armed Police of China (an analogue to the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, recently transformed into the Russian National Guard, an independent agency that reports directly to the President), as well as China’s militia. In other words, these troops report directly to the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC), and *de facto* to the Deputy Chairman of the CMC. In conformity with this law, China’s armed forces consist of the PLA, the People’s Armed Police, and militia troops.

For quite a long time, the number of members of the Central Military Commission of the PRC (and the Military Council of the CPC Central Committee) was limited. In addition to the Chairman, the members included the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission (sometimes two Vice Chairmen), the Minister of National Defense of the PRC, Director of the Political Work Department, Chief of the PLA General Staff, Director of the PLA Logistic Support Department, Director of the PLA Equipment Development Department, and the Commanders of the PLA Air Force and the Navy. Sometimes members of the Central Military Commission also included Deputy Directors of the Political Work Department.

As a rule, several members of the Central Military Commission were members of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC, while the others were members of the CPC Central Committee. All members held the highest military rank in the PRC – Lieutenant General (three-star general). As a result of the current reform, the composition of the Central Military Commission (and the Military Council of the CPC Central Committee) will probably be a bit different. In most instances, in China’s strategic command and control structure, the Minister of National Defense did not have (and does not have) the powers that are similar to Ministers of Defense in many other countries (including Russia and the United States). Usually, as a member of the State Council of the PRC, the Minister of National Defense fulfills representative functions on the global stage (with the exception of Lieutenant General Cao Gangchuan, who was a member of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC and, in particular, was famous for his achievements in military and technical equipment of the PLA.)

One of the most important strategic command and control links in China prior to the 2015 reform were the “major military regions,” which answered to the Central Military Commission of the PRC. Despite the obvious dominance of the ground forces in the PLA, the Ground Forces High Command was not part of the command and control system; it was likewise absent in the Soviet system during WWII.

Before the 2015 reform, there were seven “major military regions” in China: Shenyang, Beijing, Lanzhou, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou and Chengdu military regions. These included a number of combined-arms armies, military formations and units of various military branches and armed services (including the air force), logistics support units, as well as provincial commands. Most of these were founded on the basis of the old “small military regions,” that is, provincial and garrison commands. Commanders and political commissars of the “major military regions,” who controlled several provinces at the same time, were an important element safeguarding the central political power of Beijing. These commanders and political commissars were under control of the Main Political Department of the PLA, which reports directly to the Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the PRC. In the event of domestic crisis, commanders and political commissars of the “major military regions” had a wide variety of

opportunities to establish emergency control over the provinces located within these regions.

The functions of the Main Political Department of the PLA were considerably broader than those of the Main Political Department of the Soviet Army and Navy. In addition to the units that were engaged in proper “political work,” propaganda and agitation, which were the “classical” activities of political commissars, the PLA Main Political Department supervised other bodies, which were out of scope of the Main Political Department of the Soviet Armed Forces, as well as the PLA Internal Security Service (including the military counterintelligence). This body was similar to the special (counterintelligence) departments in the Red Army and the Armed Forces of the USSR, which for the larger part of Soviet history, were part of the security agencies (rather than the Armed Forces) that replaced one another, i.e. the Emergency Committee (Cheka)

State Political Directorate (GPU), the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), the Ministry for State Security (MGB), and the Committee for State Security (KGB). Only in 1941-1945, during WWII, the military counterintelligence (SMERSH) was part of the People’s Defense Commissariat, which was then headed by Joseph Stalin.

The PLA General Staff had an extended structure, which was to a certain extent similar to the structure of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR.

The nucleus of the PLA General Staff has always been the Operation Directorate, akin to the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR and the Russian Federation. China’s General Staff had a number of divisions, which were engaged in various types of intelligence. The prerogatives of this included a number of issues related to mobilization training of the armed forces.

Neither the Ministry of State Security of China (MSS), which supervises the counterintelligence agencies, nor the Ministry of Public Security of China (MPS), which has divisions that are similar to the 5th Department of the KGB (fighting against “ideological subversion”), were authorized to

interfere with PLA internal security issues. Security issues had always been resolved by the system of the Central Military Commission of the PRC through the aforementioned service of the PLA Main Political Department. Many experts noted that this security service was also in charge of criminal cases within the PLA.

Control of security agencies (independent from the Ministry of State Security of China and the Ministry of Public Security of China) and cadre bodies made the PLA Main Political Department a more sustainable organization in the event of a possible “disturbance within the Celestial Empire” than the Main Political Department of the Soviet Army and the Navy, which did not have such structures and powers. The lack of control of China’s Ministry of State Security over the PLA made (and still makes) the relationship between state security agencies and the armed forces of China considerably different from the system of relations that existed in the USSR.

The security service in the PLA certainly emphasized the special status of the military in the country’s power structures (taking into account the aforementioned lack of unity of command in the PLA, and greater power of political workers than in the armed forces of the USSR prior to restoration of unity of command in 1942).

Chinese experts believed that before the reform, the PLA Main Political Department outweighed the PLA General Staff in the system of the Central Military Commission of the PRC.

Even before the 2015 reform, there had been attempts to turn the “major military regions” into allied commands and make the Joint Staff an efficient center for joint operations planning. For this purpose, the PLA Navy admirals and the PLA Air Force generals were appointed deputy heads of the PLA General Staff. But ultimately, the PLA recognized that its desired real combat effectiveness cannot be achieved without fundamental changes of its command and control structure.

New PLA Command and Control Structure

The PLA's organization is being changed at three levels simultaneously – national, theater (of potential war operations) and armed services.²⁶

The Party and government officials of the PRC frequently stated that it was necessary to use “modern command and control technologies” in the armed forces.

The former four Main Departments, the General Staff, the Main Political Department, the Logistics Department and the Armament Department, were transformed into 15 structures, some of which were previously a part of the aforementioned main departments. Seven new departments of the Central Military Commission are established: the Joint Staff, the Political Work Department, the Logistic Support Department, the Equipment Development Department, the Training and Administration Department, the Combat Command and Control Department and the National Defense Mobilization Department. These structures also include the following commissions: the Discipline Inspection Commission and the Politics and Legal Affairs Commission of the Central Military Commission.

In addition, the Central Military Commission incorporated such structures as the Science and Technology Commission, the Office for Strategic Planning, the Office for Reform and Organizational Structure, the Office for International Military Cooperation, the Audit Office and the Agency for Offices Administration of the Central Military Commission.

The CMC's Political Work Department is supposed to deal with issues of party-building in the armed forces, provide for political indoctrination of the PLA staff, and ensure the “absolute” leading role of the Party and “the command and control of the military personnel” by means of party-building development, and promotion of political commissars' activities. The latter anticipates the preservation of the personnel command and control

26 Garafola Cristina L. Will the PLA Reforms Succeed? The RAND Corporation. April 2016. – [Electronic source] rand.org. Accessed date: 10.06.2016.

functions of the old Main Department of the PLA (except for the general office personnel).

The Joint Staff (JS), as much as was possible, were relieved from administrative and economic duties, which the PLA General Staff used to have. The Joint Staff no longer supervise a number of educational institutions. They are no longer in charge of mobilization issues and logistical support of the PLA, unlike the old General Staff (together with the PLA Logistic Support Department).

The task of the Joint Staff is to provide for strategic planning and “joint command and control of the troops.” As Chinese experts emphasize, one of the principal tasks of the Joint Staff is to “study future wars and learn how to win them.”

The main body of the Joint Staff, like the PLA General Staff, will be the Operational Office, which, to a certain extent, is similar to the Main Operations Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the USSR and the Russian Federation. According to various sources, the Joint Staff will retain the main strategic intelligence prerogatives (and structures). One of the most important tasks of the Joint Staff of the Central Military Commission of the PRC is to provide for joint operations training (which often overlaps with combat training). It is highly possible that the Joint Staff will combine a number of features of both the Russian General Staff and the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Armed Forces (more precisely, its Joint Staff). It is not likely that the Chinese Joint Staff will be transformed into a sort of the American Joint Staff (The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 clearly specifies that the Joint Staff shall not operate or be organized as an overall Armed Forces General Staff and shall have no executive authority).²⁷

The Equipment Development Department of the Central Military Commission is a proximate successor of the PLA General Armaments Department.

²⁷ Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. 99th Congress, 2nd Session. House of Representatives, Report 99-825. P. 20.

The same may be said about the Logistic Support Department of the Central Military Commission, successor of the PLA Main Logistics Department. The Logistic Support Department will not have financial control, unlike its predecessor.

The National Defense Mobilization Department will be in charge of mobilization training and generating reserves for the PLA. It will supervise and administer the provincial military regions, which presumably will no longer report to the theaters' joint commands.

Chinese experts emphasize that in the present context, mobilization is “strategic work” that must be the focal point for the country's leaders.

The Discipline Inspection Commission of the Central Military Commission used to be part of the Main Political Department and was headed by the Deputy Head of the Main Political Department. Now it is an independent body, which reports to the Central Military Commission.²⁸

The Training and Administration Department is *ipso facto* supposed to provide for combat training of the military forces. Reportedly, this department also has jurisdiction over military educational institutions.

The Politics and Legal Affairs Commission of the Central Military Commission is expected to establish strict order in the PLA. This commission will deal with prevention and detection of criminal offenses in the PLA. These activities shall be carried out in full conformity with the law. Prominent sinologist Vasily Kashin notes that “the Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Central Military Commission will supervise the military prosecutor's office and the courts.” Apparently, this body of the Central Military Commission will also supervise the main army law-enforcement structure, i.e. the Security Service of the former Main Political Department” of the PLA.²⁹ Other sources say that this service will remain under the jurisdiction of the PLA Political Department.

28 See V.B. Kashin. Reforma organov upravleniya kitaiskimi vooruzhennymi silami (Reform of the Chinese Armed Forces' Management Bodies). // Problemy Dal'nego Vostoka, 2016, Issue #2, page 38.

29 Ibid, page 39.

The Office for Reform and Organizational Structure of the Central Military Commission will focus on the improvement of the PLA structure in accordance with the tasks of highly integrated joint operations. Work within the framework of this branch will be focused on organizational preparation and manning the schedules of the combined armed forces, troops and units, with the aim of providing high-level integration and “consolidation” in conformity with the requirements of contemporary command and control science.

Chinese officials have associated the foundation of the Science and Technology Commission with the requirement to enhance innovation of the PLA armaments and military and special-purpose machinery and equipment. They emphasize that it is important to provide for “integrated development” between the military, civil science, and technology. China expressed a great interest in the activities of the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Program Agency (DARPA). It is quite possible that the functions of this Commission will also include functions that are similar to those of DARPA.

The 7 “major military regions” were replaced with five theater commands: Eastern Theater, Southern Theater, Western Theater, Northern Theater and Central Theater Commands. The headquarters of these allied commands are located in the following cities: Eastern Theater Command in Nanjing, Southern Theater Command in Guangzhou, Western Theater Command in Chengdu, Northern Theater Command in Shenyang and Central Theater Command in Beijing. As mentioned above, these theater commands will not supervise the “provincial military regions,” which will play a different role. Establishing the allied commands instead of the seven “major military regions” does not necessarily mean that these commands (combining the inter-branch and territorial features) will be deprived of the internal political functions, which, for commanders and political commissars, were inherent roles of the “major military regions,” in the context of acute crisis situations. Certainly, this issue still needs to be clarified.

The Western Allied Command holds the highest concentration of the People’s Armed Police (which, as was already mentioned above, is part of China’s Armed Forces and is subordinate to both the Central Military

Commission of the PRC and the Ministry of Public Security), which are charged with providing for homeland security in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and Tibet.

As previously noted, in the late 1980s, the location of the PLA forces and resources began to shift over the territory of China. As the foreign political situation changed, the number of the PLA troops in the North considerably decreased. At the same time, the concentration of PLA forces increased in the East and in the South.

Not all experts noticed that in addition to the PLA allied territorial commands, a new functional command was established, the strategic support (service) force command. The available data shows that this command (among other things) supervises operations in cyberspace, electronic warfare activities, and special operations forces. This command is headed by a young lieutenant general, Gao Jin, who immediately prior to this appointment was the President of the PLA Academy of Military Science, the “think tank” of the Central Military Commission of the PRC.

In conformity with the 2015 reform, branches of the armed forces are responsible only for construction, training and development; they no longer have the operational command and military force employment (combat and non-combat) capabilities. In wartime, all operational command is carried out by the Joint Staff and the Joint theater commands. In addition to the PLA Air Force and the PLA Navy command structures, a new structure was established – the PLA Ground Forces command. There was no such element in the strategic command and control system before: the Ground Forces were governed directly by the PLA General Staff. (The Ground Forces will apparently have both divisions and brigades, attributed to the military reform in Russia, where divisions were first abolished and then partially restored. In the past 10-15 years, the PLA has been gradually reducing the number of divisions and increasing the number of brigades.)³⁰

30 P.B. Kamennov. *Voyennaya politika (Military Policy)*. From “Kitaiskaya Narodnaya Respublika. K 60-letiyu KNR.” (The People’s Republic of China. 60th Anniversary of the PRC). .: Publishing House “Forum.” 2009, page 275.

Another new PLA branch is the Missile Forces, which is being established on the basis of the so-called “2nd Artillery Corps.”³¹ China did not call them the “strategic missile forces,” unlike the USSR and Russia.

This military branch has intercontinental-range missiles with nuclear warheads, and probably MRBMs with nuclear warheads, as well as cruise missiles. Perhaps, MRBMs and shorter-range missiles with non-nuclear warheads will be under dual control by the Missile Forces and the relevant territorial inter-branch commands.

31 The official publication (in Russian) of the State Council of the PRC specified the following tasks of this PLA's structure: “The 2nd Artillery Corps (strategic missile forces) are they key strategic deterrent forces. The principal task of the Corps is to deter the use of nuclear weapons against China by other countries, ensure retaliatory nuclear strike if necessary, and precisely hit the targets with conventional ballistic missiles.” See Raznostoronniaya deyatel'nost' vooruzhennykh sil Kitaya (Multifold Activities of China's Armed Forces). Beijing: The Information Office of the State Council of the PRC. Beijing: Izdatel'stvo literatury na inostrannykh yazykakh, April 2013, page 14.

Conclusion

The military reform implemented in China is related to the PLA's new tasks set by the Party and government leaders of the PRC. The reform reflects the heightened levels of China's economic, scientific and technological development; it is part of enormous efforts taken by the country's leaders to fight against corruption, which may threaten not just China's economic well-being, but its political stability as well (or even the country's political system as a whole).

There is no doubt that the Communist Party, its supreme bodies, starting from the General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, and the Standing Committee of the Central Political Bureau of the CPC will preserve or perhaps even strengthen political and ideological control over the armed forces. The top officials of the PRC clearly place considerably greater focus on the PLA these days.

There is every reason to believe that the role of the Military Council of the CPC Central Committee and the Central Military Commission of the PRC in controlling the country's armed forces has become more important as a result of the military reform in China.

The reform of the strategic command and control system and organization and equipment structures of the Chinese armed forces down to the tactical level provides great opportunities for the renewal of command and political staff in the PLA, both in terms of improving its preparedness to fulfill modern professional tasks for the armed forces, and in terms of securing loyalty to the state and political system of the PRC, and to the CPC's leaders.

The military reform resulted in a dispersion of powers between the structural components of the Central Military Commission, which is supposed to provide for a more sophisticated system of "checks and balances" in this area that is particularly unique to China. The management of such a large number of bodies by the Central Military Commission becomes a much more complicated task (taking into account more than a threefold increase in number). This supposedly means consolidating of the role of Deputy Chairmen of the Central Military Commission. It is clear that it will take much time and effort to make this new system sufficiently effective.

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