

CHINESE MILITARY

update

A RUSI periodical for the Study of the Chinese Military

ISSN 1470 – 9772 July 2003 Vol 1 No 2

China's Preliminary Assessment of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Garret Albert, Michael Chase, Kevin Pollpeter and Eric Valko

p1

Chinese Views of the US War in Iraq: Warfighting Lessons

Nan Li

p5

People's Liberation Army Ground Forces: Moving into the 21st Century

Dennis Blasko

p6

The North Korean Nuclear Crisis and China's Strategic Calculus

Rex Li

p8

The Chinese Military to Build Up a Unified Command System?

Arthur Ding

p10

£10 \$16

China's Preliminary Assessment of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Introduction

Concerned about the possibility of conflict with the United States over Taiwan, China has paid close attention to the performance of the US military in recent conflicts. For Chinese military and civilian strategists, conflicts involving the US military in recent years have showcased the latest in strategy, tactics, and technology, and presented opportunities to study a potential adversary in action. From the Chinese perspective, this detailed study has allowed for a greater understanding of the US military's strengths, as well as its potential vulnerabilities.¹ For these reasons, Chinese analysts have watched the recent conflict in Iraq with great interest. Xiong Guangkai, former head of Chinese military intelligence, emphasized the importance of studying the Iraq conflict in a recent lecture, describing the war as 'an extensive test of the fruits of the new US military transformation.'² China's senior civilian leaders, for their part, have also shown strong interest in the military trends demonstrated during the war.³

Chinese Analysis of the Gulf War and Other Recent Conflicts

The first Gulf War was a watershed for Chinese military analysts. In 1991, the impressive onslaught of American military power against an opponent similar to the PLA in both weaponry and operational thinking raised concerns that China's military was woefully ill-prepared to fight a war against a technologically superior opponent,⁴ a lesson that subsequent conflicts have reinforced.

Chinese military analysts termed the type of warfare fought during Desert Storm

'high-tech local war.' Based on their analyses of the Falklands War, Operation Desert Storm, and Operation Allied Force, the US-led intervention in the Kosovo conflict, they concluded that such wars would be limited in both geographic scope and political objectives. These wars would also be fought with a full-range of advanced weaponry, with air power being key. However, it was not just air power that led to victory. Air and space-based ISR systems enabled the US military to achieve unprecedented knowledge of the battlefield. Once identified, targets could be attacked with pinpoint accuracy. Global positioning (GPS) satellites provided navigation and positioning information to guide Army divisions across the desert. Linking this web of platforms, systems and operators was a network of advanced command and control systems providing real-time or near real-time transmission of information. These systems facilitated joint operations, which allowed the US military to fight in a manner in which the whole of the fighting force was greater than the sum of its parts. PLA analysts began using these assessments as a template for future warfighting and argued for changes in PLA training and equipment. Desert Storm and subsequent wars demonstrated that the PLA, once primarily a military based on ground forces, now had to focus on full spectrum dominance. In addition, the rapid pace of modern wars suggested that future wars could be as short as one campaign, requiring the PLA to gain the initiative early in the war. The ferocity of these wars also suggested that future wars would be extremely resource intensive, taxing logistics systems required to supply

the huge amounts of fuel and ammunition needed to swiftly defeat enemy forces. All these characteristics provided both challenges and opportunities in facing a technologically superior opponent. The PLA needed to develop new weapons and doctrine, but Chinese studies also identified several perceived vulnerabilities in the US approach to fighting high-tech local wars, including: overabundance of global commitments; over-dependence on the support of potentially fickle allies; weak domestic political willpower; heavy reliance on potentially fragile high-tech weapons systems and C4ISR; difficulties in deploying rapidly in response to emerging crises; and logistics and sustainment challenges.⁵

Preliminary Chinese Assessments of Operation Iraqi Freedom

Preliminary Chinese assessments of the war in Iraq point out that the outcome of the conflict was never in doubt given the clear superiority of coalition forces.⁶ Many Chinese analysts acknowledge, however, that US and coalition forces achieved an impressive victory in the conflict.⁷ Indeed, even as some Chinese analysts focused on perceived deficiencies in coalition strategy and operations, several Chinese commentators concluded that the war validated Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's emphasis on a military transformation enabled by special forces, precision air strikes, joint operations, and effective use of intelligence and other high-tech capabilities.⁸ Similarly, a strategist at China's National Defence University argued that US performance in the war represented the completion of a new stage in the transformation of an increasingly 'informationized' and versatile US military that has developed near-total battlefield awareness, real-time command and control, and unsurpassed rapid manoeuvre and precision-strike capabilities.⁹ In addition, other commentators assessed that the quality and not the quantity of forces will determine the outcome of future conflicts and that the United States will remain in an advantageous technological position and continue to improve its technical capabilities,¹⁰ further widening the gap between the US military and its potential adversaries.¹¹ Specifically, Chinese analysts acknowledged the impressive performance of the US military in several key areas, including joint operations, air power, C4ISR and high-tech weaponry, and psychological operations, although some shortcomings in each of these areas were also noted.

Joint Operations

The joint operations capabilities demonstrated in Operation Iraqi Freedom clearly impressed many Chinese observers. Discussions frequently mention the integrated nature of US air and ground attacks.¹² Chinese analysts also cite close coordination between the US Air Force and US Navy as a reflection of improved 'jointness.'¹³

Air Power

Some Chinese observers criticized the United States for not employing air power to its maximum effect. One author notes that using precision munitions to strike military targets, while avoiding damage to civilian infrastructure, allowed many Iraqi units to escape. Another article states that the ground war began too soon, before the air-strike stage was completed and while Iraqi morale was still intact.¹⁴ Other articles also assert that US air superiority was not used to the degree it could have been.¹⁵

C4ISR and High-Tech Weapons

Initial Chinese commentary on the war in Iraq highlights the tremendous US advantages in high-tech weaponry and C4ISR.¹⁶ One article refers to the Iraq war as the 'first true information war in human history,' highlighting the 'decisive role' of information and intelligence.¹⁷ Yet initial Chinese commentaries also argue that poor weather and confusion on the battlefield contributed to technological failures and mistakes, including some that resulted in friendly fire incidents.¹⁸ In addition, Chinese commentators assert that Iraqi forces 'used a series of technical and tactical methods to confront the new weapons of the US and British troops, including...producing smoke and using GPS jamming to disturb the US-British coalition's precision guided missiles.'¹⁹ Other analysts noted, however, that coalition forces generally dealt with these problems quickly and effectively. For example, the coalition responded to Iraq's attempts to jam GPS signals by destroying Iraq's GPS jamming equipment.²⁰

Psychological Operations

Preliminary Chinese assessments of the Iraq war also describe the effective use of psychological operations by the United States,²¹ which are referred to as 'irreplaceable.'²² According to one article, psychological operations began before the war with US attempts to influence foreign popular opinion. The article also states that the United States dropped more than 20 million leaflets on Iraq and broadcast propaganda 'on five different frequencies for as many as 17 hours a

day.' According to the article, the United States intimidated high-ranking Iraqi civilian and military officials and encouraged them to surrender through email and by placing calls directly to their cell phones. In addition, the article says, the United States attempted to mislead Iraqi troops with false commands.²³ Another article concludes that 'the present war against Iraq could mark a turning point in the development of [psychological] warfare as it moves from the backstage to the front stage to play a more important role in battle.'²⁴

Chinese Perceptions of Coalition Vulnerabilities

Chinese analysts also highlighted a number of perceived weaknesses in coalition strategy and operations, including shortcomings in coalition logistics, heavy reliance on unreliable allies, and excessive sensitivity to casualties. Chinese analysts also argued that coalition forces had some difficulty dealing with Iraqi cover, concealment, denial, and deception (CCD&D) efforts.

Logistics

Several Chinese analysts mentioned perceived weaknesses in coalition logistics, continuing a longstanding focus on logistics and sustainment as potential US weaknesses. For example, a *Liberation Army Daily* commentary argued that the rapid advance of US forces toward Baghdad, assaults on supply lines by Iraqi troops and irregulars, and the desert climate combined to pose substantial problems for coalition logistics and support operations.²⁵ The article asserts that the rapid advance stretched coalition supply lines over 350 miles, reducing support to coalition ground forces and rendering the supply lines susceptible to guerilla attacks.²⁶ While the logistics problems are cited repeatedly, the initial consensus among Chinese writers is that the absolute inferiority of the Iraqi forces prevented them from adequately exploiting these apparent vulnerabilities.²⁷

Reliance on Allies

Revisiting another theme that Chinese analysts stressed in their assessments of the Gulf War and the Kosovo conflict, Chinese writers also focused on the reliance of the American military on allies during the war in Iraq. Several sources noted that the lack of broad international support increased the difficulties of the war for the coalition. Turkey's refusal to allow the United States to launch attacks from bases in Turkey was also seen as a problem that forced a change in plan and the rerouting of US units.²⁸

Casualty Aversion

Chinese analyses also focused on US public opinion and the perceived aversion of the American public, military planners, and politicians to casualties – another topic that has received considerable attention in assessments of previous conflicts. One Xinhua article, for example, stated that Washington would confront heavy domestic pressure if US forces suffered numerous casualties.²⁹ Although many observers call attention to casualty aversion, there is some disagreement about its effects, and some writings even suggest that heavy coalition casualties would cause the United States to increase the intensity of the campaign.³⁰ In addition to the need to limit coalition casualties, apprehensiveness about Iraqi civilian casualties prevented the coalition from carrying out large-scale bombing and forced the coalition to launch night attacks when fewer civilians were likely to be outside.³¹ One analyst said it was as if US forces were operating ‘with one hand tied behind their back.’³² Similarly, other Chinese analysts point out that some of the coalition’s political goals – such as preserving Iraq’s infrastructure – imposed constraints on military operations.³³

Cover, concealment, denial, and deception (CCD&D)

Finally, preliminary Chinese writings on the Iraq war also show some interest in the Iraqi military’s use of CCD&D. The reports generally suggest that camouflage and fake targets could decrease the success rate of precision munitions.³⁴ Other articles mention the effectiveness of setting up fake military equipment to attract US air strikes and, hence, increase the survivability of the actual equipment.³⁵ These articles also discuss Saddam Hussein’s use of doubles to fool US intelligence and special operations teams.³⁶ Another article asserts that precision munitions can be ‘easily influenced’ by effective concealment and camouflage techniques.³⁷ The article acknowledges, however, that CCD&D ‘cannot impact the entire battle situation and can only play a supplementary role.’³⁸

Conclusion

In their comments on the Iraq War, Chinese military experts, regardless of their precise analysis, consistently point to the importance of studying the conflict to enhance China’s understanding of high-tech local wars and draw lessons for the PLA. While Chinese commentators do not explicitly apply their observations to a conflict over Taiwan, the scenario that is surely the

PLA’s highest priority, these observations of the Iraq conflict nevertheless do suggest several implications Chinese strategists may be considering. Overall, these initial assessments suggest Chinese analysts are concluding that Operation Iraqi Freedom provides further confirmation of many of the lessons they have drawn from previous conflicts involving the US military, despite evidence that suggests several of these conclusions are based on faulty assumptions.

Some aspects of the preliminary Chinese assessment, such as observations concerning C4ISR and precision strike capabilities, seem relatively balanced, and track closely with the preliminary assessments of many US observers. For example, the key difference between previous conflicts and the war in Iraq, according to one Chinese analyst, at least, is that compared to the first Gulf War, the Kosovo conflict, and even the recent conflict in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq displayed even greater advances in US military technology, especially in the areas of precision-guided weapons and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The war in Iraq thus reflected a further acceleration in the pace of the revolution in military affairs (RMA).³⁹ This conclusion is certain to have significant implications for the PLA. Indeed, for the PLA, even if Chinese perceptions of US vulnerabilities are accurate (and some surely are not, as is discussed below), Operation Iraqi Freedom still demonstrated that any US adversary must at least be strong enough to exploit those weaknesses. The Iraqi military was not and failed miserably. Despite China’s military modernization efforts and defence budget increases since Desert Storm, the gap between the PLA and the US military appears to be widening, as some Chinese analysts have acknowledged. To overcome this challenge, they will likely argue, the PLA must commit itself even more fully to reform and modernization.

It is also important to emphasize, however, that preliminary Chinese writings on the war also appear to reflect several misperceptions. In many instances Chinese authors appear to reach too far in assessing US vulnerabilities and flaws in US strategy. For example, the criticisms of the under-utilization of US air power betray a lack of understanding of the operation. Coalition air forces flew more than 40,000 sorties and contributed significantly to the war effort. Similarly, attacks on supply lines did not derail the overall operation, and initial Chinese

assessments seem to have overlooked the impressive achievements of coalition logistics and support efforts in the conflict. The Chinese analysts also appear to overestimate the impact that lack of support from certain allies had on coalition operations. In addition, the Chinese characterization of the United States as unwilling to tolerate casualties overlooks strong evidence to the contrary: recent research indicates that the US public is willing to support military operations despite heavy casualties as long as the interests at stake are considered important enough to justify the costs and US goals are backed by a broad consensus among political leaders.⁴⁰ Finally, depictions of Iraqi defences appear to be overplayed. Neither smoke nor GPS jammers curtailed coalition air operations, and the ‘Battle for Baghdad’ never materialized as anticipated.

It is likely that many of these initial Chinese observations will be revised as the debate within China on the ‘lessons learned’ from the conflict progresses.⁴¹ Indeed, it is worth noting that US defence analysts, too, are in the early stages of struggling with the challenges of producing a comprehensive review and analysis of the conflict.⁴² This initial look suggests, however, that students of Chinese military affairs should devote further attention to the Chinese analysis of the war in Iraq as more in-depth Chinese assessments of the conflict are published in the coming months.

Garret Albert, Michael Chase, Kevin Pollpeter and Eric Valko

The authors are analysts at the Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, California

Notes

* The authors would like to thank Roger Cliff and Mark Burles for their comments on draft versions of this article.

1 Through assessments of the performance of US forces in Iraq, Chinese strategists are not only trying to better understand the distinguishing features of contemporary warfare and US military operations, they are also seeking to highlight some of the shortcomings and deficiencies of the Chinese military. Indeed, some Chinese commentary on the recent war in Iraq may be intended to point out aspects of modern warfare to which Chinese analysts believe the PLA needs to devote increased attention.

2 Xiong Guangkai, ‘Guanyu xin junshi biange wenti’ (Some Issues Concerning the New Revolution in Military Affairs), keynote address presented at the ‘Chinese Social Sciences and Humanities Forum,’ *Xuexi Shibao* [Study Times], April 2003, <http://www.studytimes.com.cn/bike/viewnews.btml?id=5861>. In addressing the implications of the Iraq conflict for the PLA’s analysis of contemporary warfare, Xiong continued, ‘China must maintain a sober understanding of this transformation and earnestly study the new characteristics of local war under high-tech conditions.’

- 3 In late May, two researchers from the PLA's Academy of Military Science (AMS) briefed Party General Secretary and President Hu Jintao and the members of the Politburo on 'global new military changes' and 'the basic situations in the promotion of new military changes by the world's principal countries.' Given the timing of the briefing, it is almost certain that the war in Iraq and its potential implications for the Chinese military were among the major topics of discussion. See 'Hu Jintao Addresses CPC's Study Session on Global New Military Changes,' *Xinhua*, 24 May 2003, in FBIS, 24 May 2003.
- 4 Paul Godwin, 'The PLA Faces the Twenty-First Century: Reflections on Technology, Doctrine, Strategy, and Operations' in James R. Lilley and David Shambaugh, *China's Military Faces The Future* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), p. 55. As Paul Godwin writes, 'What PLA analysts saw was not a war of the future, but a war as it could be fought today by a post-industrial power. Little the PLA had achieved...could offset the impact of technology on operations by well trained, properly organized joint forces exploiting the technological sophistication of their armaments and supporting systems.'
- 5 See, for example, Pan Xiangting and Sun Zhanping, editors, *Gao jishu tiaojian xia meijun jubu zhanzheng* [The US Military in Local Wars under High-Technology Conditions], Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 1994, pp. 236-238.
- 6 See, for example, 'Thinker's Forum: The US-Iraq War and Postwar Changes in International Relations,' *Zhongguo Pinglun* [China Review], 1 May 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Experts, Scholars Discuss US-Iraq War and Its Impacts on International Relations.'
- 7 Offering a dissenting view, one Chinese analyst quipped that the US did not win the war so much as Iraq lost it. See 'PLA Expert on Trends in Warfare,' *Jinan Ribao* [Jinan Daily], 21 April 2003. The article is based on an interview with NDU strategist Zhang Zhaozhong.
- 8 See, for example, 'Iraq War Reshapes Military Landscape,' *People's Daily*, 29 April 2003; Chen Jian, 'Rumsfeld Will Direct Continued US Military Adjustment,' *Zhongguo Xinwen She*, 29 April 2003, in FBIS as 'ZXS Commentary on 'US Military Adjustment' Under Rumsfeld,' 29 April 2003; and 'War Reshapes Military Landscape,' *China Daily*, 28 April 2003.
- 9 'PLA Expert on Trends in Warfare,' *Jinan Ribao* [Jinan Daily], 21 April 2003.
- 10 'War Reshapes Military Landscape,' *China Daily*, 28 April 2003.
- 11 'Thinker's Forum: The US-Iraq War and Postwar Changes in International Relations,' *Zhongguo Pinglun* [China Review], 1 May 2003.
- 12 'War Reshapes Military Landscape,' *China Daily*, 28 April 2003.
- 13 'PLA Expert on Trends in Warfare,' *Jinan Ribao* [Jinan Daily], 21 April 2003.
- 14 Lin Bo, 'Why the US Military Has Made Repeated Miscalculations,' *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], 27 March 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Military Expert Reviews US 'Miscalculations' in War Against Iraq,' 27 March 2003.
- 15 Lin Chieh, 'Nine Majors Errors Committed By The US Troops At The Beginning of The War of Attacking Iraq,' *Hong Kong Hsin Pao* [Hong Kong Economic Journal], 1 April 2003, in FBIS as 'HK Daily: Chinese Military Experts Cite Nine US 'Errors' at Start of Iraqi War,' 1 April 2003.
- 16 See, for example, 'Strategists Embrace High-Tech,' *Liberation Army Daily*, 9 April 2003; 'Iraq War Reshapes Military Landscape: News Analysis,' *People's Daily*, 29 April 2003; and 'Iraq: Testing Ground for US Hi-tech Weapons,' *People's Daily*, 29 March 2003. According to the *PLA Daily* comment, 'in the ongoing US-led war against Iraq, the US armed forces have used more than 50 military satellites, as well as...early warning planes and several types of reconnaissance planes to collect battlefield information to facilitate their decision-making. In addition, the command network of the US ground, marine, and air forces are effectively integrated.' In addition, the 29 March 2003 *People's Daily* article highlights some of the many improvements in US military technology since the 1991 Gulf War, concluding that there has been 'remarkable improvement' in the 'targeting accuracy, firing power and communications capability' of US forces.
- 17 'War Reshapes Military Landscape,' *China Daily*, 28 April 2003; Tian Ping, 'Global Military Situation Becoming More Grim,' *Hsiang Kang Shang Pao* [Hong Kong Commercial Daily], 20 April 2003, in FBIS as 'HK Paper's Military Commentator on post-Iraq War Global Military Situation,' 20 April 2003. Other Chinese analysts argue that the Kosovo conflict was the first 'informationized' war.
- 18 See Chen Yong, 'Insight into the 'Misfires' in the Iraqi War,' *Xinhua*, 29 March 2003, in FBIS as 'XNA Report Cites Unreliable Weapons, Iraqi Resistance, Others for US 'Misfires' in Iraqi War,' 29 March 2003; Chai Yongzhong and Bao Guojun, 'Penetrating The Dense Fog of the 'Iraq War'—A Dialogue With Some Experts And Scholars From the Academy of Military Sciences,' *Liberation Army Daily*, 2 April 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Military Sciences Academy Experts Interviewed on US War on Iraq,' 2 April 2003; and Lin Bo, 'Why the US Military Has Made Repeated Miscalculations,' *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], 27 March 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Military Expert Reviews US 'Miscalculations' in War Against Iraq,' 27 March 2003.
- 19 'Through the Mist of War' *PLA Daily*, 2 April 2003.
- 20 'PLA Expert on Trends in Warfare,' *Jinan Ribao* [Jinan Daily], 21 April 2003.
- 21 Tian Zhaoyun and Chen Hui, 'Focus on 'Second Battlefield'—How the United States Wages Psychological War Against Iraq,' *Xinhua*, 24 March 2003, in FBIS as 'Xinhua on US Psychological War Against Iraq,' 24 March 2003.
- 22 Li Xuanliang, 'The Iraq War Opens the Door to the Use of Information Technology for Psychological Warfare,' *Xinhua*, 13 May 2003, in FBIS as 'Xinhua Article Views 'Irreplaceable Role' of Psychological Warfare in Iraq War,' 13 May 2003.
- 23 Many articles also assert that the US made use of 'embedded' reporters to influence perceptions of the war through the media, and several articles suggest the news media overall was manipulated.
- 24 Tian Zhaoyun and Chen Hui, 'Focus on 'Second Battlefield'—How the United States Wages Psychological War Against Iraq,' *Xinhua*, 24 March 2003, in FBIS as 'Xinhua on US Psychological War Against Iraq,' 24 March 2003.
- 25 'Logistics Shortage Foils Rapid Victory,' *Liberation Army Daily*, 23 April 2003.
- 26 'Logistics shortage foils rapid victory,' *Liberation Army Daily*, 23 May 2003. The article also asserts that lack of international support contributed to deficiencies in forces allocated to logistics support
- 27 Li Donghang, 'Military Expert on Iraqi War,' *Liberation Army Daily*, 1 April 2003.
- 28 Lin Bo, 'Why the US Military has Made Repeated Miscalculations,' *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], 27 March 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Military Expert Reviews US 'Miscalculations' in War Against Iraq,' 27 March 2003.
- 29 Yan Feng, 'How Long Will The Iraq War Last?,' *Xinhua*, 25 March 2003, in FBIS as 'Xinhua 'News Analysis' Views How Long Iraq War to Last, Possible Consequences,' 25 March 2003.
- 30 'US Military Early in the War Reveals Multiple Purposes,' *Xinhua*, 24 March 2003, in FBIS as 'Xinhua: Military, Political Goals Behind US Tactics in Iraq Outlined,' 24 March 2003.
- 31 Zhang Nan, 'Chinese Military Expert: US Initial Assaults Atypical,' *Wen Wei Po*, 23 March 2003, in FBIS as 'Beijing Military Expert Says US Military Operations Different in Attack on Iraq,' 21 March 2003.
- 32 Han Xudong, 'Understanding the Riddles of the Iraq War,' *Qingnian Bao* [Youth Post], 6 March 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Youth Paper: US, UK Forces Face 'People's War' in Iraq,' 6 March 2003.
- 33 Chai Yongzhong and Bao Guojun, 'Penetrating the Dense Fog of the 'Iraq War' — A Dialogue with Some Experts and Scholars from the Academy of Military Sciences,' *Jiefang Jun Bao* [Liberation Army Daily], 2 April 2003, in FBIS as 'PRC Military Sciences Academy Experts Interviewed on US War on Iraq,' 2 April 2003.
- 34 Mei Shixiong, 'Battlefield Magicians' Cause Frequent Missteps by US-British Coalition Forces,' *Xinhua*, 2 April 2003, in FBIS as 'Xinhua: Iraqi Camouflage, Effects on US Tactics Viewed,' 2 April 2003.
- 35 'Xinhua Compares US, Iraqi Military Power; Analyzes Iraqi Plans for Counterattack,' *Xinhua*, 21 March 2003, in FBIS, 21 March 2003.
- 36 Mei Shixiong, 'Battlefield Magicians' Cause Frequent Missteps by US-British Coalition Forces,' *Xinhua*, 2 April 2003.
- 37 Lin Chieh, 'Nine Majors Errors Committed By The US Troops At The Beginning of The War of Attacking Iraq,' *Hong Kong Hsin Pao* [Hong Kong Economic Journal], 1 April 2003, in FBIS as 'HK Daily: Chinese Military Experts Cite Nine US 'Errors' at Start of Iraqi War,' 1 April 2003.
- 38 Mei Shixiong, 'Battlefield Magicians' Cause Frequent Missteps by US-British Coalition Forces,' *Xinhua*, 2 April 2003.
- 39 Xiong Guangkai, 'Guanyu xin junshi biange wenti' (Some Issues Concerning the New Revolution in Military Affairs).
- 40 Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for US Military Operations*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1996.
- 41 In this regard, it is important to note that the definitive Chinese history of the first Gulf War was not published until long after the end of the conflict. See Academy of Military Sciences, Military History Research Department, *Haiwan zhanzheng quanshi* [The Complete History of The Gulf War], Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2001.
- 42 For early US analyses of the war, see, Anthony H. Cordesman, *The 'Instant Lessons' of the Iraq War* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2003); and Fred Barnes, 'The Commander: How Tommy Franks Won the Iraq War,' *The Weekly Standard* (Vol. 8, No. 37, 2 June 2003).

Chinese Views of the US War in Iraq: Warfighting Lessons

Chinese readings of the US war in Iraq in respect of warfighting have been divided between those who took an information-centric warfare (IW) view and those who adopted the people's war (PW) view. The key assumption of the IW view is that information technology (IT) and related concepts were so thoroughly utilized during the war that they were central to the US military victory in Iraq. The PW view, however, focused on the unconventional tactics that were, or could have been, used by Iraq to exploit US vulnerabilities. This article sets out the main outlines of the two views as reflected in the Chinese military press and journals, and attempts to synthesize the analytical dynamic that underlies China's military modernization drive.

Information-centric Warfare View

The findings of the IW view can be summarized as follows: the US won largely because it had asymmetrical advantages over Iraq in command and control, strikes, mobility, and logistics, which can be attributed to the intense assimilation of IT and related concepts by the US military. The high quality, real time information generated by IT-based sensors and computer processing, and shared through a digital communications and display-based network, enabled US commanders to have a high level of situational awareness of the battlefield. This translated into quick, flexible, and effective strategies, tactics, and co-ordination to diminish the Iraqi defence. The Iraqi forces command, however, was hampered by poor sensors and communications, and weakened by the US 'decapitation' campaign (to destroy top leadership targets), the US bribing of Iraqi commanders to quit their positions, and a culture of self-deception (subordinates covering up bad news and reporting only good news to their superiors). Consequently, Iraqi commanders fought with 'deaf ears' and 'blind eyes', and its units were mostly 'a host of dragons without a head' (*qunlong wushou*).

IT was also central to the effectiveness of US strikes because time-sensitive target information provided by the sensors, combined with the standoff platforms and munitions enhanced by the IT-based navigation and positioning systems, rendered US strikes long-range, fast, and precise. Such strikes made it extremely difficult for the Iraqis to engage the US forces in close combat and to prolong the war. In comparison, the Iraqi strikes were

largely ineffective, because they could not get close to the US forces without being destroyed, or were unable to gain accurate targeting information with weak IT.

IT also gave the US an advantage in mobility. IT-based information and positioning support facilitated the US long-range outflanking movement to draw Iraqi forces out to exposed positions (as in the US drive toward Baghdad). The same support, combined with probes, helped to detect gaps and vulnerabilities in Iraqi defences, which led to quick, deep thrusts to cut up, encircle, and annihilate the Iraqi forces (as in the battle of Baghdad). IT-based point precision strikes of Iraqi targets also increased the speed of mobility of US forces (by removing obstacles and resistance to create a 'security corridor'). Information support also ensured the security of the long logistics tail from sabotage and ambush. In contrast, Iraqi forces, confused and confounded by US mobility-driven momentum, became increasingly slow, exposed, and disorganized.

People's war View

The PW view emphasized the US vulnerabilities that were or could have been exploited by the Iraqi forces through unconventional tactics. It maintained that the initial US strategies of 'decapitation' and 'shock and awe' did not work, because there was no sign of the Iraqi leadership collapsing, no massive surrender of Iraqi forces or a big exodus of refugees. This was because the Iraqi command and control were dispersed, and Iraqi nationalism continued to sustain the will to resist. Also, US co-ordination was not seamless. The US Army's vulnerable Apache helicopters, which flew deep into Iraqi defences, suffered heavy damage, mostly from small arms fire. Such damage could have been avoided if these deep strikes were conducted by the less vulnerable A-10s of the US Air Force.

The dependence of US precision strikes on IT-based sensors and navigation and positioning systems meant that their effectiveness could be hampered by jamming (as when US missiles strayed to places outside Iraq) as well as sandstorms and smoke from oil fire. The enmeshing of Iraqi paramilitary forces with civilian crowds and installations in towns such as Basra rendered it difficult for the allied forces to launch precision strikes.

The rapid advance of US forces to Baghdad may have left them overextended and exposed their flank and rear. The Iraqi forces could have exploited this by reorganizing themselves into smaller units to wage a guerrilla war. Such warfare could have entailed sinking ships to block the ports, mining roads, blowing up bridges, and laying ambushes to tie down the US forces. Moreover, US special operations units, paratroopers, and logistics convoys operating in unfamiliar territories could be vulnerable targets for Iraqi forces to ambush (as happened near Nasiriya). Finally, the dependence of US forces on supplies such as fuel, munitions, food, and water, together with the overly extended and exposed logistics tail and the human and equipment exhaustion caused by the high heat, might offer opportunities that the Iraqi forces could have exploited to weaken the US offensive.

Implications

The US victory in Iraq would have reinforced the IW view and weakened the PW view, because the Iraqi resistance was insignificant and ineffective. Drawing this conclusion would suggest that several major changes are likely to be made to the PLA (People's Liberation Army) in future. In command and control, some layers of the PLA bureaucracy and some non-essential political-military and logistics organizations may be eliminated. The current tree-shaped structure would gradually become a more flat, network structure enhanced by IT. The downsizing would help to free up resources for IT development and shorten response time. In force structure, smaller, more mobile, more versatile, better integrated, and new types of forces enhanced by IT may gradually replace the existing manpower-intensive or heavy formations. Gradually IT-based capabilities may be developed and deployed for competition in the multi-dimensions of space, air, ground, sea, information, and psychology. Finally, training, education and recruitment may place a new emphasis on enhancing IT knowledge-intensive personnel.

Challenges

Even though the PW view appears to be discredited by the war, the above account of this view suggests that it is still influential in the PLA, because it implies that the war only proved that Iraq was a the poor student of PW, but not that PW was an anachronism.

The persistent influence of the PW view may lead to conceptual and organizational problems that pose challenges to China's military modernization. Conceptually, the PW view connotes a condition of 'inferior fighting superior', where the human factor can overcome the material obstacles. Such a bias seems to be so entrenched in the mindset of some PLA commentators that during the war, they made wild and erroneous claims and predictions about the development of the war. The underlying assumption that an 'inferior' Iraq could defeat the 'superior' US was so out of touch with reality that these comments drew strong criticism from the public, who branded their authors as 'propaganda tools rather than military experts', who had 'a cold war mentality with Chinese characteristics.' Indeed, unless a conceptual transformation takes place, the self-denial sustained by PW-driven misinformation and misjudgment may make it difficult to

introduce some serious changes to transform the PLA.

Organizationally, the PW view justifies the existence of the party and political apparatus in the PLA, because it assumes that war is in essence a political and human affair. The substantial party and political apparatus in the PLA contributes to several organizational problems. First, the party committee deliberation and the requirement for the political commissar to co-sign orders of the commander tend to slow down the decision process and thus lengthen the response time. This apparatus also competes with the command and staff and technology departments for programme budget, officer positions, and training time, but does not directly contribute to combat effectiveness. Finally, this apparatus tends to disrupt the development of the professional norms and distorts information by inserting political agendas into the military programmes.

It is certainly true that for the past two decades, the PLA has been trying to 'internalize' and 'professionalize' this apparatus by reducing its size, and shifting it toward military functions such as military administration, morale enhancement, discipline enforcement, and psychological warfare. But under the dual pressure of IW and tight budget, more may have to be done to minimize the role of this apparatus in the PLA, if modernization is to be fully accomplished.

**The views expressed in this article are the author's and do not represent the official position of IDSS*

Nan Li

The author is Senior Fellow at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (IDSS), Singapore.

People's Liberation Army Ground Forces: Moving into the 21st Century

Numbers

It's springtime and reports of another 500,000-man reduction in the PLA are in the air. If the reports prove true, then it is likely that the PLA ground forces will once more bear the brunt of the reductions. Such a development is not unexpected in the PLA's long-term modernization programme to transform itself into a smaller, more technologically-advanced force. But unlike the last major reduction from 1997 to 2000,¹ this time the PLA ground forces are also training much harder, using large numbers of new equipment, and testing a new doctrine in scenarios that emphasize amphibious operations and defence against precision weapons of the type the United States recently employed effectively in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Currently, PLA ground forces number about 1.6 million personnel with 'more than 40 maneuver divisions and some 40 maneuver brigades.'² Most major combat units are organized into 21 Group Armies (corps-size combined arms units consisting of two to four manoeuvre divisions or brigades plus support elements) subordinate to seven Military Regions (MR), joint administrative headquarters that control forces in multiple provinces. Additionally, these 'main force' units are reinforced by local PLA and People's Armed Police (PAP) units for defence of specific locales, as

well as reserve and militia units that are being reorganized and given new missions for the twenty-first century. During the last reduction, entire units and headquarters were eliminated, remaining units reassigned to new headquarters, and many divisions transformed into brigades. One army division was transferred to the PLA Navy to form a second marine brigade and 14 divisions were reassigned to the PAP. While much of the ground force was being reduced, Special Operations Forces were formed in each MR, the army aviation (helicopter) force was expanded,³ and a short-range surface-to-surface missile unit was assigned to the ground forces in the Nanjing MR.

The first reports of divisions being downsized to brigades came around 1998. Initially, some analysts (this one included) speculated that the new brigade structure might be the nucleus of a smaller, more rapidly deployable, modern ground force. However, three years after the reduction was completed, it is now apparent the most powerful Group Armies in the PLA, the 38th and 39th in the Beijing and Shenyang MRs, retained their division structure, and priority for new equipment entering the inventory went to the remaining divisions, not the recently formed brigades.⁴ While the divisions received new domestically produced tanks, armoured personnel carriers

(APCs), artillery, and air defence weapons, the brigades were enjoined to make do with 'existing equipment' and find innovative ways to defeat a more technologically-advanced enemy. Finally, Chinese newspapers reported in 2002 two brigades were issued new tanks and APCs, one, a motorized infantry brigade in the Beijing MR and the other, the 58th Mechanized Infantry Brigade in the Jinan MR.⁵

From 1997 to 2001 three former motorized infantry (truck mobile) divisions were transformed into mechanized units with tracked or wheeled APCs: the 1st and 124th Amphibious Mechanized Infantry Divisions in the Nanjing and Guangzhou MRs and the 127th Light Mechanized Infantry Division in the Jinan MR. The 38th and 39th Group Armies each have three mechanized divisions; mechanized infantry units are also organic to the PLA's 10 armoured divisions and 13 brigades. Thus, after the reductions of 1997–2000, about 40 per cent of PLA manoeuvre units are mechanized or armoured, almost double the percentage before the reduction. With the creation of the two amphibious mechanized infantry divisions, the ground force now has a larger amphibious force than the PLA Navy. Moreover, in addition to the amphibious lift assets found in the navy, 'army ship transport units' have been

identified in the Nanjing, Shenyang, and Guangzhou MRs.

Amphibious Operations

Less than 10 years ago, amphibious operations were not a high priority for the PLA. The 1995 guidelines for training issued by the General Staff Department concentrated on increasing the army's abilities to fight and win Local Wars under High-Technology Conditions, which implied amphibious operations, but did not mention them specifically.⁶ In the intervening years, for reasons that go beyond the scope of this article, the emphasis on amphibious operations has increased dramatically. Much of the new equipment deployed to the force and new units formed had that specific mission in mind. Training for 'sea-crossing' operations has developed an intensity over the past three years that has caught the attention of the region and world.

From May to September 2001 and 2002, the PLA conducted large-scale, joint amphibious training exercises. At the same time these exercises were underway along the coast, throughout the country many other forms of training also were being conducted, often of a joint nature involving more than one service. Training in these years was guided by the new Military Training and Evaluation Program that provides common standards and evaluation criteria for the entire PLA.

Amphibious training was predominant in the coastal Nanjing and Guangzhou MRs, though additional amphibious events were conducted in the Jinan and Shenyang MRs both years, and in the Beijing MR in 2002.⁷ In 2001, it is likely that four divisions and a brigade from the two Group Armies in Guangzhou MR and at least four divisions and a brigade from the three Group Armies in the Nanjing MR were involved. Two divisions in the Jinan MR conducted training along the coast and an armoured division in the Shenyang MR at an inland reservoir in 2001.

In 2002, five divisions and a brigade in the Nanjing MR and three divisions from the Guangzhou MR were identified in amphibious training. Though multiple divisions or brigades from a Group Army might have been in the field at the same time, the largest operations undertaken appear to have been division-level exercises conducted independently of each other. Although, PLA Navy marine and PLA Air Force airborne units conducted training events at the same time, their operations were not integrated into ground force scenarios. Nevertheless, the size and duration of the

exercises in 2001 and 2002 were unprecedented in the PLA.

Away from the coast, several units practiced mobilization and deployment exercises that lasted a relatively short time. Force-on-force training, command post exercises, and live fire drills were common. Units in Chengdu and Lanzhou MRs conducted high altitude and cold weather training. Throughout the country, many units remained in the field for two or three months. In doing so, they usually conducted progressive training from individual skills to small unit to larger unit combined arms and joint training. These exercises provided leadership opportunities for junior officers and especially the new, more numerous Non-Commissioned Officers. Just keeping such large numbers of troops in the field for extended periods of time was a real-world test for the recently created joint logistics system in each Military Region. Future exercises will build on the experience gained these past few years.

Troop Reductions

But now there are reports of new troop reductions. A Hong Kong newspaper reported that another 500,000 personnel will be eliminated *in one year*, and the existing structure of Military Regions would be replaced by an undetermined number of a new headquarters 'in the style of US joint combat commands...[which are] completely different from the existing regions which defend their territory, and will be subregional joint command commands.'⁸ It would seem unlikely that a new round of reductions of this magnitude could be executed in a single year. Such a rapid cutback would play havoc with the organization of the remaining units.

The *Washington Post* presented a more likely scenario shortly after the Hong Kong article was published. Based on Chinese and Western sources, a 500,000 person cut *over five years* was reported and 'at most, China will cut the number of military regions from seven to six, merging the Jinan Military Region with the Nanjing Military Region.'⁹ The *Post* also predicted, that as in the previous 500,000-man reduction, some demobilized soldiers will be transferred to the PAP to increase its domestic security capabilities.

There is little doubt that a further decrease in the size of the PLA would result in certain efficiencies, such as allowing limited official funds to be spent on fewer forces, increasing the training opportunities for remaining units, and

requiring fewer new weapons to upgrade the force. A multi-year reduction would be less disruptive both to the military and society than a rapid downsizing. If the experience of past years continues, the recently upgraded divisions will not be cut; more likely to feel the knife are the divisions and brigades that have not received new equipment.

PAP

It is also likely that some PLA units again will be transferred to the PAP. As a domestic security force, the PAP does not need the tanks, APCs, and artillery found in mechanized units prevalent in the PLA today. As the PLA increases its degree of mechanization, it becomes less appropriate for domestic security functions, which are better performed by highly trained and specially equipped, lightly armed mobile forces. Light infantry forces, equipped with trucks and communications, which are likely to be cut from the existing force structure are more suited to domestic security roles than heavily armoured units.

The PLA has a secondary task defined in the 1997 National Defence Law 'to assist in maintaining the public order,' while the PAP has the primary mission of 'safeguarding security and maintaining public order.' Especially since 11 September, the PLA sees its domestic security role in defending against the 'danger posed by terrorist, separatist, and extremist forces.'¹⁰ In particular, it has added anti-terrorist training to its training programme and conducted the first-ever combined anti-terrorist exercise with Kyrgyzstan in October 2002. In this mission, the PLA acts primarily on China's Western borders and has been involved with local government organizations in responding to acts of terror. However, in recent years, the PLA has not participated in controlling the numerous demonstrations and riots by Chinese citizens, often caused by local economic conditions or corruption, preferring PAP and local police force perform these functions.

Nearly every year large formations of the PLA, PAP, reserves, and militia are involved in emergency actions in the wake of natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. In addition to helping those in need, these deployments give the units valuable experience in command and control, rapid deployment, communications, logistics, and problem solving. The Chinese military also continues to provide labour to important infrastructure tasks, like laying optical fiber lines, and grows a portion of its own food.

Conclusion

The PLA remains a military led primarily by ground force officers. However, the next round of reductions will certainly hit the army harder than the other services. Gradually, the percentage of army personnel is getting smaller while the navy, air, and missile forces increase. This will have impact on the distribution of funds, types of operations that are planned and practiced in training, and maybe, someday, senior leadership.

As PLA active forces decrease in size, the reserves and militia will be expanded. The roles of these forces are receiving new prominence as China prepares to defend its territory from long-range attacks in scenarios most foreigners dismiss as unlikely. Nevertheless, nearly every training exercise highlights in some way the 'three strikes and three defences,' defined as 'strike at stealth aircraft, cruise missiles, and gunship helicopters; defend against precision strikes, electronic jamming, and reconnaissance and surveillance.' From this list of weapons and capabilities, the United States armed forces can be inferred as the PLA's worst-case opponent for planning purposes. In order to defeat a high-technology foe, great emphasis is placed on various methods of camouflage and concealment, deception, use of stratagem, and the PLA's own electronic jamming.

PLA ground forces have not been involved in military operations against a foreign enemy since 1979. It is impossible to predict the degree of success the reforms of the past two decades will have on a real battlefield. Every contingency must be evaluated according to mission, capabilities of the opponent, distance from China, and the political environment. In many potential future conflicts, initially the ground forces will not have a leading role in the fighting. These new environments and concepts challenge the PLA's traditions of the last century.

Dennis J. Blasko

The author served as US Army attache in Beijing and Hong Kong from 1992-1996 and is currently an adjunct professor at the University of North Florida and a consultant.

Notes

1 Jiang Zemin formally announced the 500,000-man reduction in September 1997, but an important part of the downsizing had begun in 1996 with the transfer of PLA divisions to the People's Armed Police.

2 International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2002-2003*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 145 and US Department of Defense, 'Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China,' July 12, 2002, p. 23. 'Manoeuvre' units include infantry units of all types and armoured units.

3 The size of the helicopter force is still relatively small,

however, with about 320 aircraft in about 12 regimental size units. See *The Military Balance, 2002-2003*, (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 145.

4 Unlike the navy and air force, which have received their most advanced weapons from Russia, the ground forces have imported only limited numbers and types of systems, Mi-17 helicopters and SA-15 surface-to-air missile systems, and perhaps some precision-guided artillery technology. The vast majority of new equipment issued to the ground forces is produced by Chinese factories.

5 Beijing MR newspaper *Zhanyou Bao*, 19 October 2002 and Jinan MR newspaper *Qianwei Bao*, 29 January 2003.

6 See Dennis J. Blasko, Philip T. Klapakis and John Corbett, Jr., 'Training Tomorrow's PLA – A Mixed Bag of Tricks,' in *The China Quarterly*, June 1996, pp. 496-7.

7 The details of these exercises were derived from the author's review and analysis of translations of several hundred articles in Chinese military newspapers published from June to October 2001 and 2002.

8 'HK Paper: PLA Set to Carry out Major Organizational Reforms,' Hong Kong Hsiang Kang Shang Pao [Commercial Daily] in Chinese 5 Jun 03 p B3, translated by the Foreign Broadcast Information System. The article also predicted the formation of a new, second airborne army, the 16th, subordinate to the PLA Air Force in addition to the one airborne army currently in existence. There were several factual errors in the article which detract from its predictive value.

9 John Pomfret, 'Beijing Plans to Reorganize Its Armed Forces, Military to Be Streamlined To Extend China's Influence,' *Washington Post*, 11 June 2003; Page A16.

10 See Xinhua: 'Full Text' of White Paper on China's National Defence in 2002 Paper <http://english.people.com.cn/features/ndpaper2002/nd.html>

The North Korean Nuclear Crisis and China's Strategic Calculus

North Korea's withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its admission of possessing nuclear weapons have once again drawn the world's attention to the security of the Korean Peninsula. In recent months the United States, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea have all been engaged in a variety of diplomatic activities geared to finding a solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Of all these countries, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is believed to be in the best position to influence the behaviour of North Korean leaders. This is because the PRC and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) have had a close relationship of so-called 'lips and teeth' for over fifty years. With Pyongyang's increasing isolation in the international community, it remains more and more dependent on China as its major source for energy and food supplies.

However, their relationship is no longer based on ideological convergence.

Beijing's stance on the North Korean situation must be analyzed within a wider context of strategic relations. To the PRC leaders, the main consideration is the likely impact of the crisis on China's strategic position vis-à-vis other great powers in the Asia-Pacific.

China's Changing Strategic Environment

Since the terrorist attacks on America in September 2001, PRC leaders and security analysts have been reassessing China's strategic environment.¹ They have found the changing international security situation rather disturbing. Of special concern to Chinese strategists is the augmentation of American power in the post-11 September world. From Beijing's perspective, America's strategic position has been enhanced immensely by the development of its anti-terrorist networks around the globe.

Specifically, the 'war on terror' is thought to have enabled the US to fortify its defence ties with traditional allies and develop new security relations across

Asia. In South East Asia, the US security role has been strengthened by various types of military co-operation with Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines and other states. In South Asia, Washington was able to secure Pakistan's military co-operation in removing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. To PRC defence analysts, the most worrying development is the decision of Central Asian countries to open their air space and military bases to the West. In particular, the presence of US forces in the oil-rich region of Central Asia is seen as a significant threat to China's energy and military security. The Chinese are also disturbed by the success of America's military operations in Afghanistan and, more recently, in Iraq. Beijing's concern over the emphasis on pre-emptive attacks against the 'rogue states' in America's anti-terrorist strategies is clearly reflected by its assessment of the 2002 US National Security Strategy.²

Chinese Perceptions of the Nuclear Crisis

It is within this strategic context that

China views the North Korean nuclear crisis. Even before Pyongyang's acknowledgement of a clandestine programme for producing highly enriched uranium in October 2002, Chinese analysts assert, Washington had identified the DPRK regime as a potential target for pre-emptive attack. They maintain that America's hostile attitudes towards North Korea have been expressed consistently by US officials ever since President Bush gave his 'axis of evil' speech in January 2002.³

The Chinese seem to appreciate Pyongyang's fear of a potential US pre-emptive strike which, they contend, has little to do with issues relating to terrorism or weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Rather, the Bush administration has allegedly used the threat from the 'rogue states' to justify military actions against countries whose leaderships or political systems are disapproved by the Americans.⁴

According to Chinese analyses, it was America's menace to the DPRK's regime survival and its refusal to engage in a direct dialogue with Pyongyang that has led North Korea to play the 'nuclear card' in order to seek a non-aggression pact with the US. Thus, America is thought to be the primary source of instability on the Korean Peninsula.

Nevertheless, Chinese leaders are unhappy with Pyongyang's provocative behaviour which is believed to be counter-productive in resolving the nuclear issue. In Beijing's view, the heightened tension on the Korean Peninsula is partly a result of North Korea's brinkmanship. To show its displeasure with Pyongyang, China closed the oil pipeline to North Korea for three days in March 2003.

While exerting pressure on the Kim Jong-il leadership, the Chinese argue that a fundamental change in America's North Korean policy is essential to the solution of the problem. What is needed, they suggest, is a comprehensive package which would address North Korea's security concerns and economic problems, the normalization of US-DPRK relations, the denuclearization of the North Korean Peninsula and other relevant issues.⁵

Regional Strategic Balance

China's interests in the stability and peace on the Korean Peninsula are a reflection of its desire to maintain the existing regional strategic balance. If North Korea continues its nuclear development, Japan may feel that it is necessary to acquire a

nuclear capability to defend itself against potential missile attacks from Pyongyang. Already some Japanese officials have argued for acquisition of new weapons to protect their country. Some politicians even suggest that Japan should be allowed to develop nuclear weapons for defence purposes. Apparently, this idea has some supporters in Washington.⁶

Beijing has long been suspicious of Japan's ambition of becoming a military power (*junshi daguo*).⁷ The strengthening of the US-Japan alliance in recent years and Tokyo's support for America in its 'war on terror' has made China more wary of Japanese security strategy. They suspect that the Koizumi government has exploited the fear of terrorism to push legislation through the Diet which would allow the Self-Defence Forces to be deployed beyond Japanese waters and air space.⁸

Should Tokyo choose the nuclear option, it would have a far-reaching impact on the current strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific. To Chinese leaders and defence planners, the emergence of Japan as a nuclear power would present a tremendous challenge to China's strategic position in Asia. Japan's support for the US proposed Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) system in Asia has caused considerable concern in China.⁹ The Chinese are worried that the North Korean nuclear threat would accelerate Japan-US co-operation on TMD.

Another worry of Chinese leaders is that the North Korean situation might be used by Taiwan as a pretext to get involved in the TMD project, thus binding its security closely with that of the US and Japan. Since President Bush came to power, Taipei's military relations with Washington has been strengthened. With American protection against missile attacks, the Chinese fear, Taiwan would become bolder in pursuing its independence agenda.¹⁰ Chinese military analysts are convinced that a TMD system would undermine the PRC's nuclear deterrent and alter the strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific.¹¹

Apart from Japan and Taiwan, it is possible that South Korea may also decide to develop nuclear weapons in order to deter North Korean aggression. In the event of a nuclearization of North East Asia, India may feel the need to upgrade its nuclear capability. This would be likely to provoke some sort of response by Pakistan. Thus, the whole of Asia could fall into the trap of a 'security dilemma' which would not serve China's strategic interests.

US Military Strikes on North Korea

Despite Beijing's apprehensions of American intentions, it does not wish to see an escalation of the crisis which could lead to a US military strike on North Korean nuclear facilities. Indeed, this option has not been ruled out by the Bush Administration.

A US attack on Pyongyang could provoke a North Korean retaliation on American allies such as South Korea and Japan. Under such circumstances, a full-scale armed confrontation in North East Asia might occur, leading to further US military involvement. Chinese security analysts have warned of a possible realignment of strategic forces in the region as a result of such a conflict on the Korean Peninsula.¹² Given America's overwhelming military power, it is certain that North Korea would be defeated, and that the Kim Jung-il regime would not survive the conflict. The result could be a reunified Korea, which would have serious security implications for China.

Another consequence of such a conflict would be a mass migration of North Korean refugees into Chinese territories, which Beijing would find hard to cope with.

In the event of the collapse of the North Korean regime, PRC leaders would lose a buffer area between China and American forces in North East Asia. Furthermore, should the United States maintain its military presence in Korea, Washington's influence in the region, which is clearly strategically vital to Beijing, could increase. This would be regarded by Chinese leaders as a threat to their national security interests. On the other hand, a united Korea may well become more confident and assertive in resisting pressure from external powers. Either way, China could lose what it perceives as its traditional sphere of influence.

China's Response: Strategic Aims and Objectives

The nuclear crisis has put the Chinese leaders in a difficult position. It has to act as a mediator between two countries that are hostile to each other. This is why some Chinese analysts believe that the role of China in breaking the deadlock on the nuclear issue has been somewhat exaggerated.¹³

With the opaqueness of North Korea's decision-making well-known, it is doubtful whether PRC leaders are able to gain a better insight into the mind of their comrades in Pyongyang than any other country. However, one thing is clear in that Beijing is loath to see the demise of

the North Korean communist regime. This is not because China has a strong ideological affinity with Pyongyang. In fact, North Korea's behaviour has at times infuriated Chinese leaders.

Nevertheless, an escalation of the nuclear crisis could result in all sorts of strategic uncertainty which may imperil what PRC leaders consider as their security interests. What the Chinese wish to preserve is strategic stability, which would allow them to concentrate on the development of their country's comprehensive national strength (*zhonghe guoli*). For this reason, China will make every effort to co-operate with the US and other countries in resolving the North Korean issue. But the nature and degree of China's co-operation are determined primarily by its strategic considerations. China's response to the crisis would be guided by a set of strategic aims:

- To prevent a deterioration of the Asia-Pacific security environment which could jeopardize China's modernization programme;
- To preserve the existing strategic balance in the Asia-Pacific;
- To minimize US security influence on the Korean Peninsula and other parts of the Asia-Pacific;
- To thwart other countries in the region from exploiting the situation to enhance their strategic position;
- To maintain stable strategic relations with other great powers, especially the United States; and
- To project an image of China as a constructive and responsible member of the international community.

To protect China's strategic interests PRC leaders would seek to achieve the following objectives:

- To ensure the survival of the DPRK regime and to perpetuate the division between North and South Korea;
- To discourage the United States from resolving the crisis through military means;
- To dissuade North Korean leaders from taking further provocative actions; and
- To co-operate with Russia, Japan and South Korea in searching for a non-military solution to the problem.

China has repeatedly urged both the US and DPRK to hold direct talks that address issues of mutual concern. In April 2003 China hosted a much-publicized meeting between North Korea and America in Beijing, but this failed to produce any positive outcomes. The PRC will no doubt continue to explore other channels of dialogue through quiet diplomacy but any proposals are likely to reflect Beijing's strategic interests.

It is certain that Chinese leaders would oppose military attack of any kind on North Korea and object to any US plan for seeking 'regime change' in Pyongyang. They would also be reluctant to back any UN sanctions or indeed other tough measures against North Korea, such as a naval blockade, which might push Pyongyang towards a more radical direction. However, it would be in China's interests to persuade North Korea that it should not rely on nuclear menace to secure its survival, and that it would only be 'rewarded' for abandoning its WMD programme, which threatens regional and global security.¹⁴

Rex Li

The author is senior lecturer in International Relations at Liverpool John Moores University and an associate editor of *Security Dialogue*. He has also been a visiting lecturer at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, UK Defence Academy.

Notes

1 For an analysis of China's assessment of its changing strategic environment since September 11, see Rex Li, 'A Rising Power with Global Aspirations: China' in Mary Buckley and Rick Fawn (eds.), *Global Responses to Terrorism: 9/11, Afghanistan and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2003), ch. 18.

2 See, for example, Su Ge, 'On the Adjustment in the US National Security Strategy', *Guoji wenti yanjiu* (International Studies) [Beijing], No. 2, March 2003, pp. 5-10, 22; Guo Xianggang, 'The Shifting of US Global Strategic Priority', *ibid.*, pp. 17-22.

3 Wang Hongwei, 'Reflections on the 'Axis of Evil'', *Dangdai yatai*, (Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies) [Beijing], No. 4, April 2002, pp. 22-24.

4 Piao Jianyi, 'The North Korean Nuclear Issue and Its Future Developments', *Dangdai yatai*, (Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies), [Beijing], No. 3, March 2003, p. 24.

5 Piao Jianyi, 'The North Korean Nuclear Issue and Its Future Developments', *Dangdai yatai*, p. 26.

6 Paul Reynolds, 'Nuclear Threat Casts Global Shadow', BBC News, 9 May 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3011313.stm.

7 See the analysis in Rex Li, 'Partners or Rivals? Chinese Perceptions of Japan's Security Strategy in the Asia-Pacific Region', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, (Vol. 22, No. 4, December 1999), pp. 1-25.

8 Yang Yunzhong, 'Japan: Speeding Up Its Progress in Achieving the Goal of a World Military Power', *Dangdai yatai*, (Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies) [Beijing], No. 5, May 2002, pp. 12-13. Yang is a professor at Jinan Military College in China.

9 Yang Yunzhong, *ibid.*, p. 16.

10 Wu Xianbin, 'TMD and the Taiwan Issue', *Dangdai yatai*, (Contemporary Asia Pacific Studies) [Beijing], No. 4, April 2002, pp. 41-49.

11 See, for example, Ge Lide, 'America's Withdrawal from the 'ABM Treaty' and the Prospects for the Development of the Strategic Anti-Missile System', *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economics and Politics) [Beijing], No. 4, April 2002, pp. 37-42. Ge is a professor at China's National Defence University.

12 Zhu Feng, 'The Bush Administration's Policy towards the Korean Peninsula and the North Korean Nuclear Crisis', *Xiandai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations) [Beijing], No. 2, February 2003, p. 7.

13 Piao Jianyi, 'The North Korean Nuclear Issue and Its Future Developments', *Dangdai yatai*, p. 26.

14 Jung-hoon Lee and Chung-in Moon, 'The North Korean Nuclear Crisis Revisited: The Case for a Negotiated Settlement', *Security Dialogue* (Vol. 34, No. 2, 2003), pp. 135-151.

The Chinese Military to Build up a Unified Command System?

Hong Kong media reported recently that China is to launch another round of wide-range military reform, and the focus of the reform is to build up a unified command system integrating all services and branches in different theatres in military operation.

Military Reform Package

There are several points in the reform

package. They are:

- To abolish the current Military Region (MR) system and its replacement by US style unified command systems able to conduct joint operations. The number of the unified commands is not decided, but the new system will command forces assigned by the Central Military

Commission (CMC) in accordance with need.

- A further reduction of force scale of 500,000. After the reduction, the total size will be less than 2 million, and the money saved from the scale-back will be allocated for procuring new equipment and armaments of a high-tech nature so that the Chinese

military force can fight a high-tech war.

- The army will account for the major share of the reduction. Total numbers of the army Group Army (GA) will be slashed from the current 21 to 13. Other planned changes in the army are to replace army division with combined brigade, to transform provincial military district into conscription station, and to slash infantry units on a large scale.
- Some GAs will be further mechanized and equipped with new tanks, missiles and artilleries. These include 1st, 13th, 21st, 27th, 38th, 39th, and 54th, and all these GAs will be designated as rapid response units.
- To streamline the garrison commands. Some garrison commands, such as those of Shanghai, Beijing, and Hong Kong, will be streamlined so that they will be more capable.
- To build up a new paratroop unit to strengthen rapid response capability. In addition to current 15th Airborne Command, a 16th Airborne Command is to be organized by merging some field army units from Jinan and Nanjing MRs, with the new airborne command temporarily headquartered in Jinhua, Zhejiang Province.

History

The idea of abolishing the MR system and its replacement with a unified command system is not new. In the spring of 1992, media reports indicated that the MR system would be abolished and all 24 GAs would be commanded directly by the CMC. In the autumn of the same year, it was further reported that a US style Joint Chief of Staff (JCS) would be established. The first chairman of the new institution would be Gen Yang Baibing, the then director of the General Political Department, and concurrently the then secretary-general of the CMC, who apparently benefited from the 4 June suppression of 1989. In October 1992, General Yang Baibing, along with his half brother, the then state president, Yang Shangkun, was reportedly forced to step down amid the rumour and accusation of building up Yang's faction.

The above story had two implications. First, it might reflect that Chinese decision makers knew from the early 1990s, probably as a result of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, that China's military commanding system was full of flaws

and early action had to be taken to tackle the problems. Though General Yang Baibing might attempt to expand his personal power by taking advantage of establishing the Chinese version of the JCS, it still showed that some studies had been made to justify the need for a new institution able to facilitate joint operations.

However, like any organizational adjustment and re-structure, the 1992 reform package also involved an inevitable power struggle. Despite the fact that there was a strong need to reform Chinese military institutions, military top brass were more concerned with the power issue at the time. With Gen Yang Baibing's step-down in 1992, the issue of setting up the Chinese version of the JCS was aborted accordingly.

There is no doubt that the overall circumstance has changed in the past ten years. The Chinese military has become more professional than before, although the military is still under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. The most recent Gulf War reminded the Chinese military top brass that it was the right time to restore the once aborted reform package so that China can catch up. The most important change is that current CMC chairman Jiang Zemin has full control of the military and there is no longer a threat to this control from a person like Gen Yang Baibing. All these facilitate the further reform of China's military institution.

Institutional Problems

To some extent, we can infer that there might be continuity between the two reform packages. Both emphasized the need to abolish MR and replace it with something new, which is able to conduct joint operations.

However, there are institutional problems hindering the effort to transform the current MR system into a unified command system. The first is the party committee system in the Chinese military. In theory, the party committee is the highest decision making body of any military unit under the CMC. Composed of major leaders of a military unit, including a commander, political commissar, vice commanders and vice political commissars, chief of staff and director of political department, the party committee adopts a system of '*jitilingdao fengongfuze*' – 'collective leadership and division of labor for responsibility.' That means to reach a decision based on 'collective leadership' but there is no clear cut definition for

what this term really means and how to do it in practical way. It is apparent that the party committee system conflicts with the unified command system.

The second has to do with the dual leadership system in the Chinese military. There are two leaders in any military unit under the CMC, ranging from MR to company level, and they are commander and political commissar. Any decision has to be endorsed by the political commissar before it is sent out. In most cases, the political commissar is the secretary of the party committee of military unit, and the party committee secretary is endowed with the power to veto any proposal made by the commander. Under this context, it is impossible for the political commissar to provide a free hand to the commander unless the dual leadership system is abolished.

The third involves the party-state system. There is no sign of China looking to drop the current party-state system in the foreseeable future. As long as China maintains the party-state system, there will remain a need to ensure the current political-related units undertake political work in the military. This is particularly the case if General Secretary Hu Jintao is a weak leader, because Hu will need to boost his status through political work in the military. The need for the political work system, to some extent, reinforces the status of political commissar, which, in turn, makes the transformation impossible.

The fourth involves the power relationship among the four general departments at the CMC. At present, the four general departments have equal standing (in Chinese military tradition, the heads of the General Staff and General Political Departments are a little higher than those of the General Logistics and Armament Departments in terms of status). If China's military system is transformed in accordance with that of the US, the status of the GSD head will ascend while the status of the other three general departmental heads will fall. Also, resistance from the military is conceivable because it implies fewer three-star positions will be available in the future.

The fifth involves power competition among different services. If the US system is emulated, where, for example, the Commander of the Pacific Command is a navy person, the likelihood of appointing a navy admiral to head any commanding post in the southeast and south coast rises. This is because any potential operation targeting Taiwan and

also any military operation in the South China Sea will both be dominated by maritime based joint operation warfare. In that case, it is conceivable that the army people will be very reluctant, and may resist giving those posts to navy or air force people.

The sixth has to do with streamlining bureaucratic layers. At present, the MR system is typified by bureaucratic layers. For instance, at MR level, there is the political work system, which is headed by a political commissar. However, navy and air force of the same MR also have their own political work system, which are also headed by separate political commissars. These layers are clearly not favourable to effective joint operations.

Consequence and Observation

A consequence can be expected from the reported reform: a potential build-up of tension between command and political commissar/political work systems. Prior to the 4 June suppression of 1989, there had been heated debate within the Chinese military regarding whether the political commissar/political work system should be abolished. Those for the abolition argued that the political commissar/political work system only bring more problems and troubles for the Chinese military to fight a modern war instead of efficiency and efficacy, while the political work people emphasized that they have made a contribution to the stability of the military and the nation. The political work people prevailed, and indeed the perceived need for political work intensified after the 1989 crackdown.

It is apparent that many of those who argued for abolishing the political commissar/political work system have not changed their mind after fifteen years. Instead, the most recent Gulf War

has reinforced this belief. The belief is that the present time is best for transforming China's commanding system, and if practical steps to reform China's military structure are not taken, China will lag far behind. Thus, the Chinese military will never be able to fight a modern war because of layered hierarchies and restraints by the political work system.

It is inevitable that the reported reform package may raise another round of debate and tension between command and political work systems. It is likely that the debate and tension may lead to struggles between the two systems in order to justify the importance of their own system.

Another point to watch is the sensitive relationship between Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. On 23 May Hu Jintao made a speech entitled 'Leap forward Development of Defense and Military Modernization', at a Politburo convened study session. This study was the fifth in a series of studies since Hu Jintao took over the position of General Secretary in November 2002 after the 16th Party Congress, and the study sessions have covered various issues, ranging from the constitution to the military.

Hu Jintao was reported as saying that in the present world, the development of information technology based high technology affects the economy, international politics, economic and cultural relations, as well as boosts new military transformation. We have to strengthen the study on military transformation, he added, and adopt necessary measures to actively respond so that defence and military modernization can be promoted. Lastly, he noted that the party and government at various levels have to actively support defence

and military modernization, allowing defence construction and economic development to facilitate each other.

Related to Hu Jintao's remarks is the personnel reshuffle in the Chinese navy following a Ming class submarine sinking in the Bohai Bay at a recent training course. Two months later, a total of eight high ranking navy officials were demoted or transferred, including a navy commander, navy political commissar, North Sea Fleet commander and a political commissar as well as others. Chinese media said that the personnel change was made as a reprimand to those responsible for mis-operation of the submarine.

However, the point to watch is the wording reported by the New China Agency. 'Approved by the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s center, the CMC announced the instruction recently' was the phrase used by the news agency. The purpose of the wording was to send a signal that the CPC has absolute leadership power over the military.

Why did Hu Jintao organize, and what did he attempt to get from, the study session? What did Hu Jintao's remark on defence and military modernization imply? Would Hu Jintao's remark offend the chairman of the CMC, Jiang Zemin? How did Jiang Zemin perceive Hu Jintao's remark? How should we interpret the wording used by the news agency? To what extent was Hu Jintao involved in the most recent personnel reshuffle in the Chinese navy? All these questions are inter-related, and need to be studied.

Arthur S. Ding

The author is a Research Fellow at the Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

ORDER NOW FOR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION RATE: £80

Editor **Dr Jonathan Eyal**
Managing Editor **Andrew Kennedy**

CHINESE MILITARY update

The Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies

Published ten times a year

Contributors

The views expressed in the *RUSI Chinese Military Update* are those of the individual authors and should not be taken to represent a corporate view of RUSI.

Feedback

asia@rusi.org

Copyright

All *RUSI Chinese Military Update* articles are the copyright of the RUSI and may not be copied, reproduced or electronically transmitted in any form without prior permission from the Institute.

Subscription

The *RUSI Chinese Military Update* is available by subscription. For further information, please contact the Managing Editor, Andrew Kennedy

Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies

Whitehall, London, SW1A 2ET United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7930 5854

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7321 0943

E-mail: asia@rusi.org

Website: www.rusi.org