



*Changing Character of War Centre  
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**From Concept to Capability:  
What Can the UK and its Allies Learn from Competitors and Rising Powers?  
The People's Republic of China**

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December 2018

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) development of military power is guided by the clearly defined strategic objective that the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) position in power be protected. The objective is described in the CCP's rhetoric as ensuring "state security" (国家安全). To maintain state security requires a constant consolidation and expansion of the CCP's power. The CCP's processes for modernising the People's Liberation Army (PLA) are never detached from this political objective. An important lens for understanding how the PRC turns a strategic concept into actual capabilities is the "People's War" concept, which is a concept describing a form of mass mobilization. This Maoist political-military strategy is applied in the present-day through the Party-state leadership's construction of a national defence mobilisation (国防动员) mechanism, which relies on military-civil fusion. The United Kingdom cannot replicate China's approach because the UK is not guided by the CCP's Leninist ideology. Instead, understanding the Chinese approach can inform better decision-making and development of long-term strategies for managing relations with China.

### **Strategy and State Security**

Discussion on Chinese "strategy" has led to both over- and underestimation of the Chinese party-state's capacity and objectives.<sup>2</sup> According to one view, the party-state has little control over the PLA's decision making. The PLA is seen as acting against the top leadership's interests over issues like territorial disputes, despite the lack of evidence to support this claim.<sup>3</sup> According to another view the Chinese party-state applies *The Art of War* to everything from modern military strategy, to the "Belt and Road Initiative", or ideas like the game of "Go" (*weiqi*) as a model for China's grand strategy.<sup>4</sup> Chinese strategy, however, cannot be simplified through the difference between 'western' and Chinese thought.

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<sup>2</sup> For a deeper discussion on the issue: Peter Mattis, "Just How "Strategic" Is China's National Security Strategy, Anyway?", *Paulson Institute's Contemporary China Speakers Series* (11 October 2016). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rjmz7zxburM>.

<sup>3</sup> For useful discussion on this issue: M. Taylor Fravel, "The PLA and National Security Decisionmaking: Insights from China's Territorial and Maritime Disputes," in *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking*, Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Vuving, "China's Grand-Strategy Challenge: Creating Its Own Islands in the South China Sea", *The National Interest*, 8 December 2014. <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-grand-strategy-challenge-creating-its-own-islands-the-11807>.

It is equally problematic to assume that concepts linked to CCP strategy can be mirror imaged with concepts found in the west. This approach tends to compartmentalise Chinese strategic thinking with frameworks that do not reflect the CCP's more holistic approach. An example of the problem is found in western conversation on Chinese anti-access area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities. Neither "A2/AD" nor "counter-intervention" (the phrase some analysts claim is the Chinese for A2/AD) are found in official documents like defence white papers or key texts like the *Science of Military Strategy*.<sup>5</sup> The A2/AD conversation in western analysis is focused on the PLA's activities in China's periphery, particularly concerning the South China Sea and Taiwan. It often centres discussion around the development of specific equipment to protect these interests, such as anti-ship ballistic missiles. Some existing analysis has called for approaching Chinese "A2/AD" or "counter-intervention" from a broader framework. For instance, Dean Cheng called for the "three warfares" (describing political, psychological and legal warfare) to be used to guide understanding of Chinese "A2/AD".<sup>6</sup> Yet, this discussion continues to frame the processes that would be labelled "counter-intervention" as primarily PLA driven and targeted against external threats. Even the "three warfares" is not an operational concept so much as it is the PLA's way of describing the Chinese Communist Party's mission for the PLA, which is to create (and protect) political power.<sup>7</sup>

"State security" is a more comprehensive way of framing the Chinese party-state's security strategy. Development of the overall state security strategy is not the PLA's responsibility. Instead, within the party-state's broad state security strategy, the PLA is just one part of a larger toolkit. State security is not simply the protection of a geographical space, but also the protection of the CCP's ideological and political security, which is not bounded by geography.<sup>8</sup> The nature of the type of threats this state security strategy is designed to mitigate and respond to have not changed drastically since the Mao era. These have always been either internal and external to the Party, and internal and external to the state. What has evolved, particularly since the Tiananmen massacre in 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union, is the integration of internal and external security themes under the single umbrella of "state security". This integrated threat perception helps to explain why the CCP's state security strategy has consistently involved a combination of the defence of power and the expansion of power.

The CCP often labels threats as "hostile forces" (敌对势力). These are anything perceived as directly undermining the PRC. The United States and Taiwan are the most obvious examples. The concept is not limited to state actors, and includes any individual or group that challenges the CCP's narrative. For the CCP, a breakdown in narrative-control can be the starting point of a Colour Revolution or Jasmine Revolution-type event. Groups like Falun Gong, Tibetans, Uyghurs, therefore, are perceived as having capacity to threaten state security. 'Hostile forces' are also found within the Party, but power dynamics determine who is labelled a threat. Examples include the corruption cases against Zhou Yongkang, Bo Xilai, Guo Boxiong, Xu Caihou, and Ling Jihua, who Xi Jinping reportedly accused of being 'engaged in political conspiracy activities'.<sup>9</sup> State security strategy is also inclusive of non- "hostile" threats, such as natural and manmade disasters, food and drug safety, and public health crises. Such cases often point to negligence and can be a source of instability when poorly managed— there is a long history of CCP cover-up of accidents.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> M. Taylor Fravel and Christopher P. Twomey, "Projecting Strategy: The Myth of Chinese Counter-intervention," *The Washington Quarterly*, 37, 2015, pp. 171-72.

<sup>6</sup> Dean Cheng, "The U.S. Needs an Integrated Approach to Counter China's Anti-Access/Area Denial Strategy," The Heritage Foundation, 9 July 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Mattis, "China's 'Three Warfares' In Perspective." *War on the Rocks*, 30 January 2018. <https://warontherocks.com/2018/01/chinas-three-warfares-perspective/>.

<sup>8</sup> Samantha Hoffman, "China's State Security Strategy: 'Everyone is Responsible'", *The Strategist*, 11 December 2017, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/chinas-state-security-strategy-everyone-is-responsible/>.

<sup>9</sup> Shan Gao, "China's President Xi Jinping Hits Out at 'Political Conspiracies' in Keynote Speech", *Radio Free Asia*, 3 January 2017, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/speech-01032017123112.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Jeremy Brown, "When Things Go Wrong," ed. Perry Link, Richard P. Madsen, and Paul G. Pickowicz, Kindle ed., *Restless China* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013).

State security strategy takes into account the full range of the CCP's threat perceptions. The emergencies the PLA prepares for range from isolated but large-scale unrest events to massively destabilising unrest events, like a Colour Revolution or Jasmine Revolution. In these cases, the PLA would be the final actor called in a worst-case scenario. They also include wars, not just over disputed territory like the South and East China Seas, but also an attack on the Chinese mainland by a foreign military, particularly in a scenario like the Kosovo War where a domestic conflict could be a justification. It is part of why multiple defence white papers point to 'signs of increasing hegemonism, power politics and neo-interventionism'.<sup>11</sup> Another claimed: '[China] faces strategic manoeuvres and containment from the outside while having to face disruption and sabotage by separatist and hostile forces from the inside'.<sup>12</sup> Among the Party's greatest fears is that the military will not be loyal to the Party, which would be particularly impactful in the event of a domestic crisis coupled with an external crisis.

## People's War and Defence Mobilisation

The People's War (人民战争) is the Party's theoretical concept guiding the construction of a mobilisation mechanism that ensures the Party can both mitigate and respond to threats of all types. The importance of the People's War to the state security strategy concept is clear.<sup>13</sup> The CCP has called the "People's War" the 'magic Weapon for our victory over the enemy at home and abroad and the victory of the revolutionary war'. Party leaders from Deng to Xi have successively drawn attention to the centrality of the concept.<sup>14</sup>

*China's Military Strategy* (the 2015 defence white paper) defines the 'missions and strategic tasks of China's armed forces. It is worth quoting at length:

In the new circumstances, the state security issues facing China encompass far more subjects, extend over a greater range, and cover a longer time span than at any time in the country's history. Internally and externally, the factors at play are more complex than ever before. Therefore, it is necessary to uphold a holistic view of state security, balance internal and external security, homeland and citizen security, traditional and non-traditional security, subsistence and development security, and China's own security and the common security of the world. To realise China's national strategic goal and implement the holistic view of state security, new requirements have been raised for innovative development of China's military strategy and the accomplishment of military missions and tasks. In response to the new requirement of safeguarding state security and development interests, China's armed forces will work harder to create a favourable strategic posture with more emphasis on the employment of military forces and means, and provide a solid security guarantee for the country's peaceful development. In response to the new requirement arising from the changing security situation, the armed forces will constantly innovate strategic guidance and operational thoughts so as to

<sup>11</sup> "中国武装力量的多样化运用 (The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces)," (Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, 2013); Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. "2000年中国的国防 (China's National Defence in 2000)," October 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. "中国的军事战略《2008》 (China's National Defence in 2008)," January 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Dennis Blasko emphasised the importance of the People's War and Active Defence concepts, writing the key principles embedded in both include: mobilising the entire country to "achieve the military objectives defined by the Party", and requiring that all members of the armed forces are loyal to the CCP. Blasko is also among several authors in the edited volume *China's Evolving Military Strategy* who described the concept's relationship to present-day approaches in areas like deterrence and military-civil fusion. One critical element missing from existing analysis, which further supports the claim of the concept's continued relevance, is the concept's direct linkage to Communist Party's political security strategy. See Dennis Blasko, "The Evolution of Core Concepts: People's War, Active Defense, Offshore Defense," in *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era*, Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2014); Joe McReynolds, ed. *China's Evolving Military Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Guoying Lü, "国防后备力量走向强大 (National Defence Reserve Capacity Marches Toward Greatness)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 20 October 2002. ; "习近平在庆祝中国人民解放军建军 90 周年大会上的讲话 (Speech given by Xi Jinping at the Chinese People's Liberation Army's 90th Anniversary Assembly)," The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 1 August 2017.

ensure the capabilities of fighting and winning. In response to the new requirement arising from the worldwide revolution in military affairs, the armed forces will pay close attention to the challenges in new security domains, and work hard to seize the strategic initiative in military competition. In response to the new requirement coming from the country's growing strategic interests, the armed forces will actively participate in both regional and international security cooperation and effectively secure China's overseas interests. And in response to the new requirement arising from China's all-round and deepening reform, the armed forces will continue to follow the path of military-civil integration, actively participate in the country's economic and social construction, and firmly maintain social stability, so as to remain a staunch force for upholding the CPC's ruling position and a reliable force for developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>15</sup>

The same white paper, like nearly every version before it, identifies the People's War concept as a key for implementing China's strategic guideline and state security strategy. It called for "[Giving] full play to the overall power of the concept of People's War, persist in employing it as an ace weapon to triumph over the enemy, enrich the contents, ways and means of the concept of People's War, and press forward with the shift of the focus of war mobilization from human resources to science and technology".<sup>16</sup>

The concept points to the fact that the PLA's modernisation is not only driven by technological and professionalisation objectives alone. It is also about politics and protecting the Party's power – not only from external 'hostile forces', but also from internal 'hostile forces'. In conversation on the PLA's modernisation, two priorities stand out in addition to the need to develop more advanced technology and the talent to use it: [1] Each major internal crisis the Chinese party-state has faced has drawn attention to the issue of Party loyalty within the security forces; and [2] numerous external security crises have increased the Party-state's sense of urgency to develop emergency mitigation and response capabilities that achieve the objective of rapid response to any kind of threat.

Consider the Gulf War, which highlighted the PLA's technological backwardness and inability rapidly to mobilise.<sup>17</sup> To the Chinese leadership, the military's technological modernisation was only part of what was required to assure the PLA could defend the Party-state. Even if the PLA could match the United States' technological capabilities, this would mean very little if the people controlling that equipment were not 'making the right decisions' in defence of the Chinese Communist Party leadership. The result is that each effort to improve state security-relevant technology is also matched with political and social control efforts. This includes ensuring the military's loyalty to the Party.

National defence mobilisation is divided into two parts. There is a military function and (Party) state function. They are separate parts of the same system, which is directed at ensuring that the government can effectively implement national defence mobilisation in times of war and/or internal crisis. While the parts are capable of functioning independently they are designed to function as a whole.<sup>18</sup> The defence mobilisation committee system was initiated in 1994.<sup>19</sup> The system created the State National Defence Mobilisation Committee (SNDMC), which is under the joint leadership of the State Council and Central Military Commission (CMC).<sup>20</sup> A partially separate structure sits within the PLA. With the 2016 military reforms, defence mobilisation in the PLA is directed through the CMC Defence Mobilisation

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<sup>15</sup> Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China. "中国的军事战略 (China's Military Strategy (2015)," May 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Samantha Hoffman, "Programming China: The Communist Party's Autonomic Approach to Managing State Security," (PhD Thesis, The University of Nottingham, 29 September 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Yushu Chen and Shandong Li, *富国强军 —— 军民融合深度发展 (Enrich the Country, Empower the Army-- on the Deep Development of Military-Civil Fusion)* (Beijing: Changzheng Publishing House, 2015), 133.

<sup>19</sup> "国务院、中央军委关于成立国家国防动员委员会的通知 (Notice From The State Council and Central Military Commission on the Establishment of National Defence Mobilisation Committees)." 1994. [http://www.gov.cn/xxgk/pub/govpublic/mrlm/201108/t20110812\\_63985.html](http://www.gov.cn/xxgk/pub/govpublic/mrlm/201108/t20110812_63985.html).

<sup>20</sup> "国家国防动员委员会 (State National Defence Mobilisation Committee)." 2016. [http://www.gfdy.gov.cn/org/2016-09/28/content\\_7281555.htm](http://www.gfdy.gov.cn/org/2016-09/28/content_7281555.htm).



Department, its director is simultaneously a deputy director of the SNDMC. The SNDMC-led system is located at the national, provincial and municipal, city and district levels, and county levels, with national defence mobilisation responsibility at the street level through community management committees.

The structure is replicated, creating a horizontal and vertically connectivity from the national down to local levels. The SNDMC structure is designed for the integration, balancing and coordinating of overall national defence mobilisation, and to ensure that the system is capable of 'unifying all plans, unifying all organizations, and unifying all actions in order to improve the efficiency of mobilisation.'<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, at the lowest street-government level, mobilisation functions include to carry-out political and ideological work, through portfolios such as civil affairs, cultural, health and family planning and education.<sup>22</sup>

This creates an organisational system where, if functioning properly, the military submits national defence mobilisation requirements, the national defence mobilisation committee handles the coordination, and governments at various levels handle implementation.<sup>23</sup> The system is designed to handle every contingency, including small localised unrest, a natural disaster or public health emergency, or serious crises including large-scale unrest directly threatening the Party, and war. The system is mobilised depending on severity and crisis types, and based on a four-level system outlined in the 2006 National Emergency Response Plan.<sup>24</sup> The most critical point is the system is largely pre-emptive, and so its functions include advancing political work, and cooperative and coercive social control. The PLA trains for the time it might be called to defend the Party even though it does not step in for handling of day-to-day unrest. The People's Armed Police, which sits under the Central Military Commission as of late 2017, is trained and equipped to handle significant unrest decisively.

## Implementation

Given that the CCP's threat perception is so wide, management strategies must be equally comprehensive. The People's War is a clear part of China's military-civil fusion objective.<sup>25</sup> Part of the concept of military-civil fusion in China is focused on "unity", both military-government and military-civilian.<sup>26</sup> The idea is not simply to ensure that civilian resources can be converted easily for military use, nor is it simply a way of dealing with problems in the military-industrial complex. Military-civil fusion is also designed to generate the People's War strategy's whole-of-society approach for defending the Party-state.

Military-civil fusion is also being designed and optimised to ensure that national defence mobilisation's technical and logistical sides can operate as a whole system if called upon. Transportation hubs are also used as joint logistical and joint mobilisation command centre, with joint logistical and joint

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<sup>21</sup> Chen and Li, 富国强军——军民融合深度发展 (*Enrich the Country, Empower the Army-- on the Deep Development of Military-Civil Fusion*).

<sup>22</sup> "上海市静安区人民政府江宁路街道办事处主要职责和机构设置 (Principal Responsibilities and Institutional Set-up of the Jiangning Street Sub-district Office, Jing'an District People's Government, Shanghai)," Jingan, Shanghai (Government Web Portal), 21 August 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Chen and Li, 富国强军——军民融合深度发展 (*Enrich the Country, Empower the Army-- on the Deep Development of Military-Civil Fusion*), 133.

<sup>24</sup> "全国应急预案体系初步形成(附图) (Preliminary Draft of National Emergency Response Contingency System (Diagrams))," 1 September 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Luguo Wu, "何谓'国防教育'?" (What is "National Defence Education"?), *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 30 November 1990. ; Huaqing Liu, "坚定不移地沿着建设有中国特色现代化军队的道路前进 (Unswervingly Following the Path of Building a Modern Army with Chinese Characteristics)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 6 August 1993. ; Yuwen Luo, "全国军政军民团结大好局面更加巩固 (The Country's Military and Government and Military and Civilian Unity Is More Consolidated)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 31 July 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Ex.: Hui Cai, "深入贯彻'5·31'重要讲话精神积极推进国防和军队建设 (Thoroughly Implement the Spirit of the Important Talk of 5·31 [Jiang Zemin's 31 May 2002 Speech] and Actively Promote National Defence and Army Construction)", *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 25 June 2002.

mobilisation systems designed strengthen the 'whole combat "joint" mechanism'.<sup>27</sup> Systems applied in any crisis scenario, including countering external intervention, are the same used to increase the CCP's capacity to control internal security. As the national defence mobilisation structure at the local government levels indicates, military-civilian fusion serves pre-emptive functions. The structure is also designed to enable more effective and rapid defence mobilisation and logistical mobilisation for any type of crisis.

Through multiple stages and years, it is the plan that technology will be leveraged to add further cohesion and coordination to the system. Eventually, it will enable a comprehensive "smart mobilisation" system, which utilises public security "grid management" surveillance coordination systems.<sup>28</sup> The objective is to 'organically integrate' the national defence mobilisation network and the [military] command network. It would allow for "holistic" unification and coordination to solve problems related to interconnectivity, intercommunication and interoperability.<sup>29</sup> For instance, by 2007, Shandong's national defence mobilisation committee set up an information network to gather voice, images, and data. It allowed for the exchange of information 'as part of an integrated whole system'. For the military there is a vertical video-conferencing network, command automation network, and all army military affairs information network connection. Horizontally, the military network is capable of connecting to local government national defence mobilisation networks. Other locations, have referred to this vertical and horizontal integration process as a 'Grid(-ized) Management Service System' to expand a new channel for 'double support', which implies a mechanism designed for military-civil fusion.<sup>30</sup>

## Implications for the United Kingdom

China's threat perception necessitates a pre-emptive state security strategy, creating a limited distinction between war and peace. This translates into an approach for turning a concept into a capability that is best described as a continuous whole-of society style of mobilization. In practical terms, this means the PRC has the capacity to leverage larger parts of the state and society to successfully translate concepts into capabilities.

China's so-called "counter-intervention" approaches, therefore, are not limited to capabilities with military-only applications, such as anti-air or anti-ship systems. The way the UK government and its allies define "dual use" technology [also including agreements like the Wassenaar Arrangement that inform the UK domestic export control list] is narrower than the way China defines "dual use". UK legislation regulating "dual use" technology should take this into account. The government should review what strategic and emerging technologies are or could be used in the state security context. The knowledge should support decisions on where to control and restrict access to technologies.

The conceptual difference and whole of society mobilization also broadens the base of resources the CCP readily leverages to achieve desired state security outcomes. One tool for achieving this objective is cooperation in scientific research through the framework of military-civil fusion. A recent report, for instance, identified about two dozen cases where PLA from PLA-affiliated academic institutions travelled abroad, obscuring PLA links, to participate in civilian research projects directly contributing

<sup>27</sup> "孟建柱：不断提高社会治理科学化法治化智能化水平 (Meng Jianzhu: Continuously Improving Social Governance's Scientific(-isation), Rule of Law(-isation) and Intelligence(-isation) Standards)," 24 March 2017.

<sup>28</sup> Wutao He, Yu Wang, and Xingliang Wu. "小网格里的大动员——湖北省武汉市江汉区探索推进“智慧动员”闻思录 (Massive Mobilisation In a Small Grid-- Exploring the Advancement of "Smart Mobilisation" in Jiangnan District, Wuhan, Hubei)." *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 19 September 2016. [http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2016-09/19/content\\_156954.htm](http://www.81.cn/jfjbmap/content/2016-09/19/content_156954.htm).

<sup>29</sup> Chuanfu Zheng, "简论快速动员 (On Rapid Mobilisation)," *The People's Liberation Army Daily*, 2 August 2005.

<sup>30</sup> "浙江嵊泗加强军民融合 海疆要塞双拥潮涌 (Strengthen Military-Civil Fusion In the Coastal Stronghold of Shengsi, Zhejiang with "Double Support" )," 7 March 2015.

to technology that the PLA can use, including against the UK.<sup>31</sup> The more integrated PRC research institutes are into global scientific networks, the broader its base for mobilization.

Finally, there is a lack of interdisciplinary thinking both within China studies on security and politics, and outside China studies between issues like research on the Chinese military and research on technological security. An example is UK's approach to identifying and dealing with the security risks linked to Chinese state-backed telecommunications company Huawei. In the UK, a Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre oversight board was formed in 2014 to assess risks Huawei posed to critical infrastructure in the UK. Its 2018 annual report found that at best the commission could only provide "limited assurance that all risks to UK national security from Huawei's involvement in the UK's critical networks have been sufficiently mitigated."<sup>32</sup> The problem runs deeper. The commission itself was formed on a starting point that did not apply Chinese security concepts to the UK's own method for risk assessment. Its focus on the UK's domestic security meant it was not designed to deal with the political or overall security implications of cooperation with Huawei. Preventing these problems in the long term will, at the very least, require moving UK research efforts away from the CCP and PRC-linked entities.

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<sup>31</sup> Alex Joske, "Picking Flowers, Making Honey: The Chinese Military's Collaboration with Foreign Universities", The Australian Strategic Policy Institute's International Cyber Policy Centre, 30 October 2018. <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/picking-flowers-making-honey>.

<sup>32</sup> "Annual Report 2018: A report to the National Security Adviser of the United Kingdom", Huawei Cyber Security Evaluation Centre (HESEC) Oversight Board, July 2018.

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