

Stay “absolutely loyal, absolutely pure”: Xi’s Memoires to the PLA

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Abstract

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has played a pivotal role in creating the People’s Republic of China and, fundamentally, acts as a central force in Chinese politics. Owing to the unique party-army relationship, the PLA has been an indispensable supporter of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ensuring the regime’s survival and leadership legitimacy since decades. However, the institution, especially under Xi Jinping, has come to act as an arm of the Party, particularly as a one-man army under the top leader. While the ‘party’s army’ arrangement had been put in place by Mao himself, the CCP-PLA relations in the Xi era have been increasingly characterised by the centralisation of power in the hands of a single individual. These include extensive reforms of the military command structure, large-scale personnel reshuffles, and wide-spread promotion of Xi’s image as the ‘commander-in-chief’. With this backdrop, the article argues that Xi, through its organisational reforms, administrative measures, extensive anti-corruption purges of the military personnel, and strengthened regulatory regimes to recuperate the PLA’s loyalty, discipline, and efficiency, has aimed to utilise the military as a tool to further his agendas. The PLA has also become an instrument to not only defend China’s sovereignty from external threats but also a medium for global power projection. These have enabled Xi to consolidate absolute authority over the PLA and the CCP, and shape the organisations in compliance with his thoughts.

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Introduction

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has been a vital force that enabled the successful culmination of the Communist revolution and led the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to power in 1949. Over the years, it has played a crucial role in Chinese politics and has been imperative in the CCP’s growth, struggle, stability, and success. However, the institution, especially under Xi Jinping has come to act as a military linchpin under the top leader. Additionally, centralisation of power in the hands of a single individual has become the dominant theme of CCP-PLA relations. These, notably, were echoed during Xi’s speech on the event of the CCP’s 100th anniversary on 01 July 2021, where he reiterated the necessity for the Party to maintain “absolute leadership” over the armed forces, along with the continuation of “comprehensive measures to enhance the political loyalty of the armed forces”.¹ With China progressing to achieve its second centennial goal for 2049 and moving towards the PLA centennial in 2027, what has the CCP’s 100th anniversary meant for the CCP-PLA relations as well as the Xi-PLA relations? Concurrently, how would the military’s role be shaped in Chinese politics and regional and, to some extent, global ambitions?

Tracing the History of CCP-PLA Relations

On 01 August 1927, the CCP launched an armed uprising to counter the anti-communist purges by the Kuomintang in Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and Zhu De. This was viewed as a bid to transform what was then called the “Chinese Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army” into the people’s army.² However, it was the ninth meeting of the CCP at Gutian, Fujian province in 1929, where Mao, while addressing the men of the Fourth Army, iterated the military’s role, stating, “It was “to chiefly serve the political ends”.³ By 1938, he had written in an article that “the party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the party” (*dang zhihui qiang*).⁴ Such an arrangement was intensively visible during the administrations of China’s two paramount leaders, Mao and Deng Xiaoping, who themselves were active commanders of the PLA. Their special standings enabled them to utilise the PLA to back their power base in China’s elite politics. For instance, Mao gradually involved the military for political

purposes in the period preceding and during the enormous embroilment in the Cultural Revolution⁵, while Deng utilised the PLA - though many military units were initially reluctant - to suppress the protests and demonstrations during the Tiananmen Square incident.⁶

However, the CCP-PLA relations have not always been seamless; contradictory characteristics have often marked them. In particular, while the CCP has sought to control the PLA, the latter has grown as an organisation that has been guided by its own specific interests, which have, on several occasions, contradicted those of the Party. Further, many of the successors, with the exception of Deng, lacked the charisma and other abilities and qualities needed to guarantee the Party's absolute control over the military.⁷ Thus, post-Deng, there were reports of elements of the PLA that resisted or tried to resist the authority of the Chinese leadership. Additionally, during the era of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, increased corruption was experienced in the military along with instances of the PLA being ill-prepared to carry out responsibilities.⁸ A glimpse of worsening military corruption was caught when Jiang opened an investigation into the Yuanhua Group in 1999, which used military connections to evade taxes of approximately \$ 6.3 billion through smuggling.⁹ Further, Gen Liu Yuan (retired)'s speech in late December 2012, where he stated that "No country can defeat China [...] Only our own corruption can destroy us and cause our armed forces to be defeated without fighting", was a searing indictment of the concerning state of the armed forces.¹⁰ This issue became more daunting with the indictment of Bo Xilai, which was viewed as a political crisis. But, more importantly, his indictment was alarming due to his connections with the army and irregular use of the police force.¹¹

Apart from the corruption and issues of elite politics, the PLA was also suffering from an out-dated organisation. The PLA under Jiang and Hu emphasised ground forces irrespective of the PLA adopting the doctrine specified in China's defence white paper of 2004, which necessitated integration and joint forces.¹²

CCP-PLA Relations under Xi Jinping: Loyalty, Discipline, and Efficiency

In this context, extensive reforms were carried out to the military command structure under Xi which included organisational

changes, administrative measures, and extensive purges of the military personnel to ameliorate the widespread corruption. The objective here was to strengthen regulatory regimes to recuperate the PLA’s discipline, efficiency and capability. The aim was also to bolster the PLA loyalty through large-scale personnel reshuffles prioritising the ones faithful to Xi to hold key military positions and ensure wide-spread promotion of Xi’s image as the ‘commander-in-chief’. These have led to a gradual decline of the PLA as a force in Chinese politics, which was already taking place since the 1980s.¹³ The initial phase of the reforms, introduced in a series of announcements in winter 2015-16, included “above the neck” (*bozi yishang*) reforms, which comprised changes to the three fundamental pillars of the PLA – the CMC, the services, and the theatres. Similarly, there were a series of “below the neck” (*bozi yixia*) reforms which included force structural changes; these contributed to China’s joint war fighting, deterrence and military operations other than war (MOOTW). These were also carried out in an effort to achieve the agenda for developing the PLA into a “modern military with Chinese characteristics that can win information-age wars” while ensuring absolute loyalty, discipline, and efficiency from the personnel.¹⁴

Further, since coming to power, Xi has sought to build an image of the top leader of the PLA. Undoubtedly, Xi has been the second most powerful leader since Mao, particularly with enshrining “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a new era” in the State Constitution, followed by inducting the same into the CCP Constitution at the 19th Party Congress in 2017.¹⁵ Holding the posts of the Commander-in-Chief of the PLA, Chairman of the CMC, and President of China, Vijay Gokhale, a former foreign secretary and India’s Ambassador in China for a brief period, stated that not even Mao assumed this level of power, who often had to share authority with Zhou Enlai even at the peak of his leadership.¹⁶ However, in Chinese elite politics, what has mattered is the amount of loyalty a leader has sustained and expanded, both in the CCP and the PLA. Evidently, this is something that has become a central theme in Xi’s leadership.

Xi’s image building as the PLA Commander-in-Chief

Primarily, the reforms started with Xi beginning to consolidate his control in the ‘CMC chairman responsibility system’ as the

'commander-in-chief' of the PLA. In retrospect, the CMC chairman responsibility system, started in 1982 by the constitution of China, was based on a single-head system where the top leader had the final say.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the CMC chairman responsibility system would often run up against problems of civilian control of the military with no military background. This issue started arising post the Deng era, where the system had started to experience discrepancies in interests and decision-making, particularly under civilian leaders like Jiang and Hu, who, lacking any kinds of military experience, were leading senior professional military experts.¹⁸ These gave way to increasing reliance on few professional military officers, which subsequently led to a reduction of the decision-making powers of the CCP, especially with instances of the officers having separate political interests or being corrupt.¹⁹ Thus, major changes to the CMC were imperative while Xi gradually began to consolidate control over the military policy-making body. Further, these reforms allowed Xi to overhaul the CMC membership and handpick trusted leaders who could carry out his agenda while removing those who were either too old, unreliable, or corrupt. In particular, the responsibilities of Xi Jinping as the CMC chairman were delineated in an article in *People's Daily*²⁰, which emphasised on the "party's absolute leadership over the army"; the essentiality to ensure that the Party Central Committee and the CMC have a "firm grasp of commanding power over the highest military leadership; and the importance of major issues of "national defence and army building [to be] made and decided by the chairman of the military commission".

Major reforms were also brought into the four general departments of the forces - the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department, General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Armament Department (GAD) — which were disbanded post an announcement in January 2016 and replaced with 15 smaller functional CMC departments, commissions, and offices that would report directly to the CMC, and, thus, to Xi Jinping.²¹ Notably, these departments, built on the Soviet model, were developing into expansive, semi-independent entities, particularly during the eras of Jiang and Hu.²² This indicated towards large-scale corruption and power factions, further reducing central control.

A considerable change was also brought into the administrative constructs, which were transformed from seven military regions to five joint theatre commands. Interestingly, this change had a dual purpose: transforming the PLA into integrated joint forces while shaping the forces’ orientation in compliance with China’s regional threat perceptions and strategic core interests. Notably, the erstwhile military regions had no operational control over air, naval, or missile forces during peacetime. In contrast, the current theatre commands have the capability to manage conventional forces within their respective areas of responsibility and plan and execute operations in an effort to improve joint war fighting operations and win “intelligentized” wars.²³ This was not a new goal; since the 1990s, the Chinese military strategists began acknowledging and understanding the importance of modern battlefield capabilities of advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems (C4ISR) and logistics systems. The inspiration was taken from the US military, particularly as the US joint command system cemented with the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act, showcasing their operational capabilities during the Gulf War, in the Balkans, and during the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1995-96.²⁴ On the other hand, each command now has a geographic responsibility which often seem designed according to China’s perceived threats and strategic interests. Thus, the Northern Theatre has been responsible for Northeast Asia and, particularly, the possible threats arising from Mongolia, Russia, or North Korea; the Eastern Theatre focuses on Taiwan and Japan and, thus, the disputed areas of the Taiwan Straits and the East China Sea (ECS); the Southern Theatre covers the South China Sea (SCS) and land borders with Southeast Asian states; the Western Theatre handles the land borders with India and Central Asian states; and the Central Theatre takes care of the defence of the capital as well as provides support to other Theatre Commands, if needed.²⁵

Another important reform was the size reduction of the PLA ground forces. In particular, the ground forces witnessed a reduction by 300,000 personnel, a goal Xi announced during the 2015 military parade in September that year.²⁶ An objective was to reduce the share of armed forces, which had earlier constituted to be approximately 70 per cent, to now declining to less than 50 per cent.²⁷ This was commensurate with the realities of the 2015

defence white paper which stated the need to change the “traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great importance has to be attached to managing the seas and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests”²⁸ while devoting the resources for more efficient use, ensuring a “stronger battle capability”.²⁹

Also, through the reforms, Xi aimed to address a few organisational weaknesses that failed to be rectified during the prior administrations. Notably, the organisational culture had been prioritising the interests of the ground forces above others, which was not synergising with the demands of advancements in the air, maritime, and space domains. Further, a greater focus on the ground forces seemed to hinder the PLA transformation towards a seamless joint command structure. These underpinned the fact that the security situation during Xi has been becoming relatively and increasingly complicated; China’s security and strategic relations with the US, Japan, Taiwan, and even India have been worsening. These require the PLA to prepare to win “informationized local wars” (*xinxihua jubu zhanzheng*),³⁰ for which the foundation remains the ability to conduct joint operations.³¹ Thus, the reforms undertaken between 2015 and 2018 were dedicated to rebalancing service composition with more weightage on navy, air force, and missile forces while cutting down on troops equipped with outdated armaments, office staff and personnel of non-combat organisations.³² Thus, China announced the creation of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) and Joint Logistics Support Force (JLSF), facilitation of theatre commanders to supervise and manage conventional forces within their respective regions, and establishment of independent training departments under the CMC to facilitate joint training.

Weeding out ‘Baneful’ Influences

The most important objective of this reform was to consolidate greater control over the ground forces, weed out the corrupt elements from the army, and consolidate authority over the PLA in absolute, thereby setting an example for other senior PLA members. Thus, the cuts came in the backdrop of Xi’s massive anti-corruption campaign. In retrospect, while fundamentally the PLA had been the Party’s army, Xi and his colleagues worried about weakening CCP control over the PLA. A part of the worry

was the likeliness of the PLA prioritising the nation’s or the people’s interests over the Party’s. This concern had come to the forefront during the Tiananmen Square incident when few party units refused to use force against the protesters.³³ Thus, a concern had been revived that some officers were advocating for transforming the PLA into a “national army” (*jundui guojiahua*), which, if actualised, could act as a serious threat to the CCP’s regime survival, stability, and legitimacy, as well as act as a risk to Xi’s leadership.³⁴ Further, Xi remained apprehensive about the PLA placing own personal interests before the Party’s. Xi recognised the problems of corruption in the PLA, which were festering since the 1980s, along with a weak central control which could tarnish the CCP’s public image, obstruct readiness and morale, and restrict the willingness of the senior officers to comply with the reforms.

However, the loyalty issues mainly came to light with the indictment of the two highest-ranking military officers and the “big tigers” of the PLA and former Central Military Commission vice-chairmen - Guo Boxiong and Xu Caihou – as a part of Xi’s on-going anti-corruption purge.³⁵ In fact, in the past few years, many senior officers and their close associates had been toppled due to corrupt practices. Nonetheless, greater significance can be placed on a factional overhaul signifying towards Xi’s efforts to strengthen the PLA’s absolute loyalty towards the commander-in-chief. Interestingly, both Guo and Xu, like many others, were close confidants of Jiang. In fact, both of them owed their eventual promotion to CMC vice-chairmanship to Jiang and, thus, remained a part of faction which fell out of favour during Xi’s command and control.³⁶ Thus, Xi, with his anti-corruption campaign, has sought to purge “enemy factions” and fill senior positions in the Party and the PLA with allies and the trusted generals.³⁷ A similar fate ensued General Fan Fenghui – linked to the two “big tigers” – who was accused of corruption and attempting a coup, irrespective of participating in numerous high-profile diplomatic exchanges and tipped for a CMC vice chairman position at the 19th Party Congress in 2017.³⁸

The purges reiterate the imperatives of the political army building as the foundation of the People’s army, the Party’s absolute leadership over the army, and ideological and political construction focusing on firm ideals and beliefs. These were a central theme in Xi’s 2014 speech in Gutian which emphasised proper ‘ideology,

politics, and work style'. However, these instances have also revealed the complex and often unpleasant elements of the factional politics in the CCP, and the PLA, pointing out the role of patronage and loyalty to climb up the military positions. With Xi in power, China has been witnessing the rise of a new power-seeking faction under the commander-in-chief's patronage with an indication of weakening power-sharing between factions. By appointing his trusted men across critical positions in the PLA while incrementally eliminating protégés from rival factions, and tightening military discipline, Xi has ensured the absolute loyalty of the Chinese military.

PLA and China's 'Development Interests'

Particularly noteworthy are PLA's linkages with the development interests of China, which have been witnessing increasing advancements under Xi. This was reiterated during Xi's speech on the event of 100 years of CCP where he emphasised the role of the PLA to protect "national sovereignty, security, and development interests". Interestingly, since 2013, the development interests of China have increasingly been connected to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)³⁹ which, though assures no military involvement in the infrastructural projects, also acknowledges that "where national interests expand, the support of the military force has to follow".⁴⁰

These, when juxtaposition with China's growing footprints into strategically vital domains, do unravel a grander intent by the strategic minds of China, led by Xi. The PLA, in this context, does not just become an instrument to defend China's sovereignty from external threats but also acts as a tool for global power projection. These also hold more significant implications for China's neighbouring powers and major countries in the region, which have or would likely start witnessing infrastructural projects being undertaken under the banner of the BRI in their neighbourhood. These infrastructure projects do hold considerable implications for China's neighbouring and regional countries like India, Japan, Australia, the US, countries in Southeast Asia and Africa, and more, considering the growing security concerns and apprehensions related to the instances of financial, environmental, and social unsustainability of the BRI projects as well as the ambiguous and non-transparent interest policies.

Conclusion

At the turn of 100 years for CCP, the past, present, and future developments of the PLA hold enormous implications for not just China but also for Asia and the Indo-Pacific Region at large. Irrespective of the sustenance of PLA’s already decreased role in Chinese politics, the Chinese military is likely to be a tool to further Xi’s domestic, regional, and global agendas. As Xi echoed the Maoist sentiments of CCP-PLA relations in his centenary speech, reiterating that the PLA “must command the gun and build a people’s military of its own”, it is only expected that Xi would further enhance consolidation of power and control over the PLA in future, enact greater measures that reinforce his authority, and shape the PLA further in compliance with the “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a new era”. This also means that the PLA, as directed by Xi to prepare for war and stay “absolutely loyal, absolutely pure”, would be better equipped to undertake complex operations in the regional and global arena.

The PLA under Xi would also seek to quell any protest or act of dissent in its internal domain with the help of its armed police (now under the CMC) while aiming to resolve the ‘Taiwan question’ through ‘complete reunification’ and expand its control over its core strategic interests in the SCS, ECS, as well as India-China border. Lastly, with China’s implicit warning to competitors and rivals of finding themselves “on a collision course with a great wall of steel” if “any foreign force [tries] to bully, oppress, or subjugate us (read the CCP and the Chinese people)”, the PLA advancements would unlikely board well for countries, especially with India, the US, Japan, Australia, etc.⁴¹

Endnotes

¹ “Full text: Speech by Xi Jinping at a ceremony marking the centenary of the CPC”, *Xinhua*, July 01, 2021, Accessed on September 21, 2021. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2021-07/01/c_1310038244.htm.

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⁵ Ellis Joffe. "The Chinese army in the Cultural Revolution: The Effects of Intervention", *The China Quarterly*, No. 55, July-September 1973, pp. 450-477.

⁶ During the Tiananmen Square incident, many units of the Chinese military were extremely reluctant to move against the protesters, as they were indoctrinated to believe that the PLA was people's army, and not the party's. This led to delay in breaking the demonstrations, which, coupled with inadequate training and inappropriate equipment of the military units indicated towards the inadequacy in training and inexperience in urban military operations reiterated the need for stronger CCP-PLA coordination and control, with a greater focus on military operational training. Please read, Andrew Scobell. "Why the People's Army Fired on the People: The Chinese Military and Tiananmen", *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 18, No.2, Winter 1992, pp. 193-213.

⁷ Peter Kien-Hong Yu. "The Dialectical Relationship of the Chinese Communist Party and the PLA", *Defense Analysis*, Vol. 16, Issue. 2, July 02, 2010, pp. 203-218.

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⁹ John Garnaut. "Rotting from Within", *Foreign Policy*, April 16, 2012, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/04/16/rotting-from-within/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Jeremy Page and Lingling Wei. "Bo's Ties to Army Alarmed Beijing", *The Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2012, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304203604577398034072800836>.

¹² "China's National Defense in 2004", *Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China*, December 2004, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <http://en.people.cn/whitepaper/defense2004/defense2004.html>; Michael S. Chase, Jeffrey Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, Kristin A. Gunness, Scott Warren Harold, Susan Puska, and Samuel K. Berkowitz. "China's Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People's Liberation Army", *Rand Corporation*, 2015,

Accessed on September 21, 2021. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR893/RAND_RR893.pdf.

¹³ The PLA’s declining role in Chinese politics can be understood by analysing the highest decision-making body of China, the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) where no PLA personnel has participated since 1997. The second most powerful political institution, the Politburo, too, has witnessed only two PLA representations since 1987. In contrast, the PLA constituted between two-third and one half of the Politburo between 1980-1982 and more than one-third between 1982-1987. The absence of the PLA from the highest decision-making bodies have kept the military out of most of the important national decision-makings, while reiterating that the PLA is a “party’s army” and would do what the party, or the commander-in-chief directs it to. Please read, Gerald Segal, “The PLA and Chinese Foreign Policy Decision-Making”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 3, Summer 1981, pp. 449-466; Kate Hannan. “The Role of the Military in Chinese Politics”, in S. Ratuva et al. (eds), *Guns & Ruses: Comparative Civil-Military Relations in the Changing Security Environment*, 2019, pp. 201-214; Christopher K. Colley, “How Politically Influential is China’s Military?”, *The Diplomat*, April 27, 2019. Accessed September 21, 2021. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/how-politically-influential-is-chinas-military/>.

¹⁴ Dennis J. Blasko. “The PLA Army after ‘below the neck’ Reforms: Contributing to China’s Joint Warfighting, Deterrence and MOOTW Posture”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, December 27, 2019, Vol. 44, Issue 2, pp. 149-183

¹⁵ Xiang Bo. “Backgrounder: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era”, *Xinhua*, March 17, 2018, Accessed on September 21, 2021. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/17/c_137046261.htm.

¹⁶ Sanjiv Shankaran. “Is Xi Jinping the most powerful and dangerous man in the world?”, *Times of India*, July 31, 2020, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/cash-flow/is-xi-jinping-the-most-powerful-and-dangerous-man-in-the-world/>.

¹⁷ Chien-wen Kou. “Xi Jinping in Command: Solving the Principal-Agent Problem in CCP-PLA Relations”, *The China Quarterly*, No. 232, December 2017, pp. 966-885.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ David M. Lampton. *Following the Leader: Ruling China, From Deng Xiaoping to Xi Jinping*, Berkley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 47-77.

²⁰ “Commentator of the People’s Liberation Army Daily: The work system should be further tightened and implemented (解放军报评论员：工作制度要进一步严起来实起来)”, *cpcnews*, January 28, 2015, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <http://cpc.people.com.cn/pinglun/n/2015/0128/c78779-26464541.html>.

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²² Joel Wuthnow and Phillip C. Saunders. “Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping: Drivers, Challenges, and Implications”, *China Strategic Perspectives*, No. 10, March 2017, p. 6

²³ At present, the PLA strategists are anticipating a new, developing style of warfare which evolves from “informationized” towards “intelligentized” (智能化) warfare. This kind of warfare will focus on AI, along with a range of technologies, which are changing the form of warfare. Please see “Experts: Military Intelligentization Is Not Merely Artificial Intelligence” [专家：军事智能化绝不仅仅是人工智能], *People’s Daily*, December 6, 2017, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <http://military.people.com.cn/n1/2017/1206/c1011-29689750.html>; “Lt. Gen. Liu Guozhi: The Development of Military Intelligentization Is a Strategic Opportunity for our Military to Turn Sharply to Surpass” [刘国治中将：军事智能化发展是我军弯道超车的战略机遇], *CCTV News*, October 22, 2017, Accessed on September 21, 2021. <http://mil.news.sina.com.cn/china/2017-10-22/doc-ifymzqpq3312566.shtml>.

²⁴ Joel Wuthnow and Philip C. Saunders. *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA*, National Defense University Press, 2019, p. 8

²⁵ The introduction of the five Theater Commands play a great role in accentuating Xi Jinping’s desire to make the military a more effective and capable fighting force, an imperative for national security and attainment of China’s core strategic interests. It also remains a landmark progress in implementing the military reforms and building PLA’s joint battle system. The Theater Commands are designed in such a way that each unit remains responsible for their respective areas which focus on China’s strategic priorities shaped by regional environment. If anything, the establishment of the Theater Command and the formation of the joint battle command system remains a strategic decision by the party, headed by Xi, to realize the Chinese Dream of a strong military. Please read Joel Wuthnow and Philip C. Saunders, “Chinese Military Reforms in the Age of Xi Jinping”, *China Strategic Perspectives*, No. 10, March 2017, pp. 23-37; “China’s military regrouped into five PLA theatre commands”, *China Military Online*, February 01, 2016, Accessed on September 21, 2021. http://english.chinamil.com.cn/news-channels/china-military-news/2016-02/01/content_6884789.htm.

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³⁰ Please refer to note no. 23

³¹ Joel Wuthnow. “A Brave New World for Chinese Joint Operations”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1-2, February 2017, pp. 169-195.

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