Introduction

Any discussion of the political aspects of Chinese military exercises is confronted with the fact that China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is a Party-Army and not a national army. The expected role of the PLA is to be a guardian and guarantor of the survival and viability of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and not necessarily the guarantor of the national security of the People’s Republic of China. The very raison d’être of the PLA, then, is filled with political purpose. The PLA is indeed charged with national security but only if it has been directed by the Party to do so. At the same time, like other militaries the PLA has a role in supporting the policies set down by the political leadership and if these policies have a military dimension, the PLA has a responsibility to develop its military capabilities for the purposes of achieving those political objectives.

This essay will identify the political objectives of the Chinese Communist Party, will discuss how the CCP translates these political objectives into identifiable military missions, and then assess how the PLA’s extensive exercise program may be calculated to meet these political objectives.

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1 The phrase ‘Politics in Command’ was originally coined by Mao Zedong during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (GPCR) to characterize the primacy of politics and ideology in governing the affairs of the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese People.
objectives. It finds that the training and modernization goals of the PLA are ambitious and that the exercises designed to support the development of the PLA are increasingly complex. Additionally, this essay concludes that the CCP is motivated to use exercises not only to develop the Chinese military for the purposes of accomplishing military tasks in support of the Party’s objectives, but is also motivated to use exercises as strategic signaling tools both to external and internal political actors.

The Political Objectives of the Chinese Communist Party — and the Implications for PLA Missions and Training

At the turn of the new century China finds itself in a curious geo-strategic and political position: Its economy is the second largest on the planet and is trending toward overtaking that of the United States within two decades; its potential to match the U.S. militarily creates the possibility of a security dilemma between the two great powers; the Chinese leadership still fears the possibility that Taiwan and other territorial issues will not be resolved in China’s favor; China’s main rival to leadership in the region—Japan—is closely allied with the United States; China has internal security and stability problems that its political leadership must contend with; China has increasing economic interests (and consequently security interests) abroad, particularly in the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean; and finally, the United States continues to pose significant political, strategic and security challenges to China through its military presence in the region, its possession of a massive nuclear arsenal, its significant allied network in Asia, and its possession of advanced capabilities in emerging security domains (e.g., cyber and space).

The single best concept which summarizes the Chinese Communist Party’s political objectives in facing these geo-strategic and political problems is the New Historic Missions.² As a number of China analysts

² Daniel Hartnett, ‘The ‘New Historic Missions’: Reflections on Hu Jintao’s Military Legacy’ in Kamphau-
have noted, the Chinese Communist Party, and the People’s Liberation Army have an approach to examine their security and strategic requirements. That process involves identifying China’s most likely adversary (the United States and its allies), the most likely geographical location that conflict is likely to take place in (along the East Coast of the PRC), the most likely scenario sparking the conflict (a Taiwan scenario), and the type of military conflict the PLA is likely to have to fight (a local war under conditions of ‘informatization’). The Party periodically reviews the security environment confronting China and will on occasion issue updates to the assessment discussed above. The New Historic Missions is one such update issued by General Secretary Hu Jintao in 2007 to an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission.

The New Historic Missions noted threats to the internal stability of the country based on an increase in discontent from China’s local population, the increasing restlessness of China’s ethnic minorities, and the increasing threat of ethnic Uighurs re-entering the country after being radicalized in Central and South Asia and the Middle East. That re-assessment noted China’s increasing interests abroad, and observed the increasing threats in non-traditional domains such as cyber and space. When elaborated in specific security objectives, the New Historic Missions’ are designed: (1) to guarantee the protection and survival of the Chinese Communist Party; (2) to protect the territorial integrity and national borders of the People’s Republic of China; (3) to provide the necessary conditions to ensure continued growth of the Chinese economy; and (4) to make contributions to global security for the purposes of maintaining a stable global security environment.

When interpreted as military missions or tasks the New Historic Missions translate into specific guidance to the PLA as follows:4 (1) be

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4 Hartnett, pp. 40-57.
prepared to take on a domestic internal security role which addresses internal security threats such as terrorists, insurgents, ethnic minority separatists, riots, protests, and other mass incidents; (2) develop military capabilities which ensure the security of China’s national territorial integrity including China’s land and maritime borders; (3) develop military capabilities which are designed to address China’s expanding economic interests abroad (Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations or NEOs, HA/DR, Counterpiracy operations and other ‘out of area operations’); (4) be prepared to defend China’s interests in non-traditional domains (e.g., cyber and space); and (5) develop military capabilities which are designed to show that China is not only a consumer of global public goods but is also a contributor (e.g., UN Peacekeepers).

The Political Role of Military Exercises

Military exercises, then, can directly support China’s political objectives by doing the following: (1) enhance the military effectiveness of the PLA so that it can fully execute the military missions assigned to it by the Party; (2) generate political effects to influence the decision-making of targeted leaders or groups (both inside the country and out), and (3) improve operational procedures to the extent that the act of rehearsing, experimenting, and training strengthens the control the Party enjoys over its external and internal security and political environment.

The Nature and Character of PLA Training

Before describing the specifics of how the CCP uses military exercises to accomplish its political objectives, a brief discussion on the Chinese military training process is in order. In 1996 Dennis Blasko, Philip

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5 Although the CCP recognizes that it has interests in such outer areas as the Middle East, it is unlikely to be proactive in such conflict zones as Syria. China has displayed a conservative and cautious foreign policy in the Middle East, offering to serve as a neutral power and to lend assistance in Syria, but unwilling to directly intervene in such a hot zone of geo-political conflict.
Klapakis and John Corbett, three former U.S. Army attachés with experience in China, wrote a ground breaking article describing the PLA’s training cycle. In it they pointed out that:

‘[b]ecause of its annual conscription and demobilization cycle (both of which take place in the late autumn) and method of providing basic training at the unit level (division or below during December and the first months of the calendar year), the PLA is confronted with a situation in which one-quarter to one-third of the troops in its units are always first-year soldiers. As such, small unit leaders must spend large blocks of a training year on basic, individual soldier tasks. Until they master these tasks, soldiers can only partially contribute to and learn from larger collective or unit training.’6

Although written in the late 1990s, this description of the Chinese military training cycle still applies today; a large proportion of the entire People’s Liberation Army is constantly engaged in basic and individual unit training. In 2008 Blasko updated his essay on the character of PLA training noting that ‘[t]raining begins around mid-December and lasts for up to 3 months until approximately February/March and/or around the Chinese New Year. Induction training is divided among military skill, political and physical training.’7

Blasko, additionally, observes that the PLA training and education has been confronted with the problem of taking a large conscription force, largely uneducated youth from the rural countryside, and turning them into modern warriors; and that the Chinese military training system still has not figured out a way to give greater roles and responsibilities to non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and is still overly reliant on junior officers

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to do tasks that ‘non-comms’ should be doing. The ultimate take away from this description of the nature and character of PLA training is that the Chinese military still confronts an enormous task of modernizing its military and providing adequate training to all of its units, and a great deal of ‘spade work’ lies ahead for the Chinese military as it attempts to bring its training process into the twenty first century. In so far as military exercises can serve as a political tool to support political objectives of the CCP, these can only be done within the limitations of China’s training and exercise system as a whole.

**PLA Exercises and Chinese Political Objectives**

*Military effectiveness and developing capabilities to execute military missions:*

The PLA has been directed to plan for, train for, and execute missions in support of the New Historic Missions. The Party leadership has directed the Chinese military to be prepared to fight ‘Local Wars Under Modern, Hi-Tech and “Informatized” Conditions.’ PLA assessments of the scenario most likely to involve a conflict between the PLA and its most dangerous adversary, is a Taiwan scenario. PLA warfighting development and preparation must therefore be geared to ultimately address some aspect of the Taiwan operational problem (even if PLA force development is confronted with competing mission requirements). Ultimately that means that PLA training is geared to develop the Chinese military into a modern fighting force. PLA doctrinal writings, primarily the 1999 ‘Principles of Joint Operations’ and the three PLA National Defense University publications ‘The Science of Strategy,’ ‘The Science of Campaigns’ and a Course of Study in Combined Arms Tactics’ collectively known as the ‘Trilogy,’ describe how the PLA defines modern military effectiveness. The PLA has stated that it must develop the

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8 *Ibid, pp. 100-1.*
9 *Ibid, pp. 18-21.*
doctrine and the force structure to do the following: (1) Effective joint operations; (2) seamless command and control of operations across the services; (3) to operate in a restrictive Information Environment; (4) to initiate lethal, pre-emptive strikes to paralyze an opponent’s high value targets (asymmetric strikes); (5) develop a sustainable logistics system which permits a high degree of mobility for the operating forces; and (6) deter the main adversary’s ability to use nuclear weapons as a form of coercion against China (counter deterrence). It needs to be noted that the Chinese concept of counter deterrence, as opposed to the Western concept of deterrence, is designed to prevent the West (read the United States) from preventing Beijing from asserting China’s influence within the region. In blunter terms, it is designed to prevent the United States from deterring China from coercing the other countries of the region. As a security concept counter-deterrence is meant to display survivability and nuclear warfighting effectiveness in order to affect the behavior of the United States, it is not designed to fully execute a Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP).

The recently enacted PLA military reforms of 2016 is a direct reflection of these military effectiveness goals. By ridding itself of the General Headquarters structure (e.g., General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department) and by eliminating the Military Regions (MRs) and replacing them with five joint operational commands, the PLA has eliminated some of the most significant obstacles to joint operations management. The military exercise program that the PLA has been utilizing since the 1990s has been attempting to enhance its military effectiveness as defined above. American China analysts observing and assessing Chinese military exercises since the middle of the 2000s have noted exercises (Kuayue or Stride Exercises) involving

trans-regional mobility, flexible command and control procedures and structures, extensive national defense mobilization, integrated civil-military joint exercises, sophisticated logistical management and large scale military mobilization, and ever increasing jointness (e.g., the Lianhe or Joint exercise series involved all of the services, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Strategic Rocket forces).  

Mark Cozad of RAND offers a comprehensive update on the status of joint operational development through the PLA exercise program. He writes:

‘PLA joint operations training entered a “standardized development phase” as the 10th Five Year Plan ended in 2010, presumably to experiment and test the joint operations concepts and practices that emerged from the Sharp Sword exercises. In 2009, PLA claimed a total of 18 large-scale exercises that explored a wide range of joint operations subject matter, including civil-military Integration, naval and air force power projection, “systemic operations”, joint training methods and war zone level command and control. Three key exercises during 2009 and 2010—Firepower 2009, Stride 2009, and Mission Action 2010—demonstrated PLA’s progress in joint operations during the 10th Five Year Plan.’

Finally, the PLA is responsible for developing its conventional and nuclear strike capabilities in support of larger CCP strategic and political goals. This has meant the development and procurement of a not insignificant number of conventional and nuclear armed ballistic

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13 Cozad, p. 4.
missiles of all ranges. In addition to firing exercises of these missiles, the
PLA has emphasized survivability for these forces since PLA doctrine has
enunciated a ‘No First Use’ nuclear doctrine. This means that the PLA
strategic rocket forces must constantly refine its capability to hide, move,
absorb a strike and then counterstrike. This military mission is indeed
practiced, developed and refined in Strategic Rocket Force exercises
involving drills in which PLA forces absorb a nuclear attack, remain in
protected underground areas for an extended period of time, and then
conduct a retaliatory nuclear counter-strike. One would think that if
the larger Chinese strategic objective is to influence the strategic nuclear
calculus of the United States, then the PLA would most likely coordinate
the training and exercise objectives of both Strategic Rocket Forces and
the PLA’s conventional military forces. To date, such coordination has
been scattered and infrequent at best. There is no solid evidence that the
Strategic Rocket Forces and the Joint Theater Commands (previously the
Military Regions) conducted extensive coordinated joint exercises.

The bottom line from Western analyses of Chinese military exercises
over the past two decades is that PLA exercises have increased in size and
complexity, are increasingly joint in nature, are less scripted (although
some degree of formal scripting persists for some exercises), involves
an opposing force (OPFOR), increasingly reflects realism in combat
such as the absence of access to information, and reflects a ‘Lessons
Learned’ process in which the PLA documents shortfalls of PLA unit and
command performance and improves upon the process in subsequent
training events.

*Generating political effects and influencing decisions:*

Whether arising out of a Chinese Strategic tradition illustrated
by Sunzi’s maxim ‘To Win Without Fighting is the Acme of Skill’ or
originating from a Leninist organization structure which calls for
the military to plan for and engage in ‘political warfare’, the Chinese

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military has a long history of using military exercises to send signals to other parties, whether they be potential adversaries, likely international partners or its own people. Before discussing the strategic signaling aspect of Chinese military exercises, it is necessary first to discuss the political-military environment of the Asia-Pacific in which Chinese signaling would be received. Unlike other regions of the world, most notably the European theater, the Asia-Pacific lacks the multilateral security architecture and the multinational confidence building measures which shape, constrain, and define the security environment of other regions. There is, for example, no OSCE Vienna Document necessitating the powers of the region to inform one another that a major exercise is about to be undertaken. In fact, the countries of the region may rely on the lack of transparency of exercises to keep their potential adversaries guessing, off balance, and to maximize the political effect of their military exercise. The U.S. and China have recently agreed to inform one another of major military exercises, but this is the result of recent agreements coming out of bilateral military-to-military engagements, and are entirely voluntary.

With regard to how China specifically uses military exercises to send political signals to the countries of the region, the best known of these is the Dongshan exercise series which date back at least to the 1990s. These exercises, large scale in scope, and amphibious in character were designed to send the not so subtle message to the population of Taiwan that Taiwan’s independence and even autonomy is unacceptable to the CCP leadership. Geographically the exercises have tended to take place in Fujian Province, adjacent to Taiwan. The PLA has consistently rolled out the newest military equipment invariably centered around the theme of gradually improving amphibious and airborne capability. The ultimate message is that at some point the Chinese will have developed the military capability to settle the Taiwan issue permanently; therefore, Taipei’s political leadership had best negotiate a gradual integration of Taiwan into China’s sphere sooner rather than later.

Similarly, through another set of naval exercises undertaken by the PLA Navy since 2007, the Chinese have attempted to deter U.S.,
Japanese and other country involvement in a Taiwan scenario by showing that China is improving its capability to meet the challenge of U.S. Navy and Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) intervention. According to a U.S. National Defense University report on Chinese naval exercises, ‘[d]uring the period 2007-2009, the PLAN continued to train and exercise in areas supporting future contingency operations, particularly expanding operations into the Philippines Sea beyond the First Island Chain as part of the evolution of [the doctrine of] “Near Seas Active Defense”.15 The NDU report states that:

‘The November 2007 exercise east of Taiwan followed the other noteworthy North Sea Fleet PLAN deployments to the Philippines Sea in 2007. The first deployment started on April 28 when a flotilla of five frigates and destroyers and a supply ship departed Qingdao … Two destroyers and a supply ship passed through the Miyako Channel, passing east of Taiwan and then back west through the Bashi Channel, where they joined the two frigates west of Taiwan … Japanese and Russian Commentators described the deployments as training for Taiwan contingencies. Primary objectives were disrupting the U.S. dispatched forces stationed in Okinawa and Guam in support of Taiwan, and for the PLAN to become more familiar with Taiwan’s major east coast naval and air bases. By transiting along strategic approaches the U.S. Navy might use to intervene in a Taiwan contingency, the PLAN expanded its operating areas and familiarized itself with locations that could be used to deny or delay the ability of the U.S. Navy to intervene.’ 16

A small number of China defense analysts have argued that some of these exercises could be precursors to an actual initiation of conflict in Taiwan or other parts of the Asia Pacific.17 This is not beyond the

16 Ibid, p. 15.
realm of the possible. A large scale naval exercise off of the East Coast of Taiwan or in the vicinity of the Spratlys could indeed be a disguised effort to put forces in place for a surprise maritime offensive; however, given China’s larger strategic interests in preserving a stable, peaceful periphery; maintaining stable relations with the U.S.; and a larger strategy of easing the U.S. out of the region over time strongly suggests that the Chinese are more likely to use exercises as a signaling tool than as a precursor to an attack.

A third type of military exercise designed to send signals to potential rivals and possible adversaries is a series of naval exercises that the People’s Liberation Army (Navy) or PLAN has undertaken since the beginning of the second decade of the 2000s. Joint China-Russia naval drills beginning in 2012 are specifically designed to signal to both the United States, to Japan, and their allies in the region, that China too can form military alignments, is improving its naval capabilities through cooperation with Russia—a major naval power—and is evolving its military force to be able to defend China’s maritime sovereignty rights in the East China Sea, and ultimately to rival Japan’s maritime capabilities in the long run.  

A fourth type of signaling military exercise is designed to shape the perceptions of China’s potential international partners. Beginning in 2003 the PLA began exercising with Russia and the countries of Central Asia. Under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the *Great Wall Exercises* have focused on the organization of the international response to large scale unrest caused by a major terrorist attack or incident taking place in a friendly country adjacent to China. The diplomatic implications of the *Great Wall Exercise* series are that they promote security cooperation between China, Russia and the Central Asian countries. As one commentator has noted, the lack of realism of

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some of these exercises, their highly scripted nature, and the lack of in-depth coordination amongst the exercise players, strongly suggests that this is an exercise not meant to enhance interoperability between China and potential allies significantly, but more likely, the purpose of the exercise is largely diplomatic and political: to entice the Central Asian countries and Russia to be aligned with China’s interests rather than with those of the West.

A fifth type of signaling exercise is designed to send signals of reassurance to the established hegemonic power—the United States. China has since 2014 participated in the Rim of the Pacific Exercises (RIMPAC) and has dispatched surface combatants to participate in this annual multinational maritime exercise led by the United States. China’s participation in RIMPAC is reflective of its ambiguous attitude with the United States and its allies in the region. China is neither friend nor enemy to the U.S. and the U.S.-led international order. That ‘frenemy’ status is illustrated in the way the PLAN participates in the exercise. Its participation is strictly restricted by PACOM planners to operations which do not improve Chinese naval capabilities and the Chinese have repaid this ‘frenemy’ status by dispatching surveillance and intelligence gathering ships to monitor and collect data on the participating naval forces. Nonetheless, both China and the U.S. consider PLAN participation in RIMPAC to be an important display of China’s willingness to cooperate and work with the U.S. on security related matters. Related to China’s participation in RIMPAC is its participation in counterpiracy exercises with the United States Navy and other Western navies in the Indian Ocean for the purposes not only of improving the PLAN’s capabilities to perform these types of operations, but also to signal to other countries that China is acting as a ‘responsible global stakeholder’. China uses these exercises to demonstrate that it too is a contributor of international public good.

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20 Ibid.
Ensuring the survival of the Party and addressing internal stability threats:

As a Party-Army, the paramount mission of the People’s Liberation Army is its role as a guarantor of CCP survival. This has meant that the PLA has the responsibility to meet internal security/stability threats emerging from a number of diverse quarters. These include both homegrown and foreign terrorists, mass protests, ethnic minority uprisings and large scale disorder contingencies, and other groups seeking to separate parts of China proper from the People’s Republic (a.k.a. ‘Splittists’). Given the messy historical record of the PLA getting directly involved in helping the Party brutally suppress the Tiananmen Square protestors, both the Party and the PLA have tended to give the day-to-day management of internal order within China to the People’s Armed Police (PAP). Ultimately, however, the PLA is the final guarantor of internal stability, and law and order in China. That means that if the PAP cannot handle a ‘mass incident’, the PLA must be able to do so. Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party defines internal stability broadly to include contingencies which extend beyond mass protests or security incidents. These include natural disasters, manmade disasters or large scale accidents, and mass public health incidents. In these cases, the PLA does have a direct responsibility to respond to these types of incidents as well.

Politically the CCP is most interested in the following as it relates to internal stability. First, it is intent on deterring would-be terrorists, insurgents and separatists from launching terrorist attacks in the first place. Second, it is intent on smothering ethnic minority aspirations to create mass protest movements. Third, it wants to give the citizens of China as well as other law abiding ethnic minorities of the provinces and ethnic minority autonomous regions the reassurance that the Party is in full control not only of public security threats but of all types of contingencies including disasters and public health crises. Fourth, if a stabilization incident does take place the Party wants the PAP or PLA to handle the crisis quickly with as little subsequent disorder as possible.
Finally, the Party wants to firm up actual control of the provinces, municipalities, and counties, and cement the coordination of all local governments, and security forces under the Party’s guidance.

In support of these political objectives, exercises play both a signaling and mission effectiveness role similar to those discussed above for the PLA’s external defense missions. By displaying the PLA/PAP responsiveness and effectiveness to potential internal security contingencies the CCP is sending a signal to both potential adversaries and to law abiding ethnic minorities and Han Chinese citizens alike. By demonstrating firm control over all of the local provincial ministries and the security agencies involved, the CCP is signaling to all local government and security agencies that its authority is beyond questioning. Finally, by rehearsing, experimenting and practicing procedures which cement Party control over local ministry and security agency functions, the Party is effectively reinforcing its control over these locals. In theory this is what the Party believes are the political effects of these exercises. In practice have we witnessed the PAP engaged in these kinds of exercises?

Given the priority the Party places on stability, it should not be surprising that Counter-Terrorist exercises comprise one of the most numerous types of these internal stability exercises. Between mid-2006 and mid-2011 the People’s Armed Police took part in 55 major PAP counterterrorism exercises. According to Cortez Cooper who frequently researches and writes on this subject ‘[t]he frequencies of these exercises is increasing from 9 in 2007 to 15 in 2010. Four of these were international exercises, three of which were conducted under the auspices of the SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization]. All of these involved the Snow Leopard Commando unit. The 2008 Defense White Paper notes that PAP units participated in Great Wall 2003 and Great Wall II counterterrorism exercises; deployed for the SCO-sponsored Joint-2003

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exercise; and hosted Guard 04 and Guard 06 exercises focused on large-scale emergency response operations. Each of these exercises has been described as involving displays of the PAP’s latest tactical equipment for the local population to mull over—a blatant effort at sending signals to would-be insurgents, terrorists and/or law abiding Chinese citizens alike.

A large part of what Western analysts know of Chinese PAP and PLA counterterrorism exercises are the result of the open source reporting related to the large scale Counterterrorism exercises associated with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or SCO. These annual exercises began in 2001 and have continued to the present. In fact, the PLA’s first participation in an international exercise was an SCO sponsored Counter-Terrorist exercise with Kyrgyzstan involving a total of 300 troops. The first multilateral counterterrorism exercise on Chinese soil Joint Coalition 2003 involved Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Russia. By 2010 the size of the exercises had grown significantly with the number of troops involved exceeding 10,000. The Peace Mission 2010 was designed to test the interoperability of SCO armed forces assisting a member involved in internal armed conflict, or which just suffered a mass terrorist attack. As Daniel Hartnett commented on the character of the exercise, the highly scripted nature of the exercise, the lack of realism and the lack of in-depth coordination amongst the multinational forces suggests that the main purpose of this exercise was not to actually develop inter-operability amongst the participants but to foster political solidarity and to provide the Central Asian countries a political alternative to the West.

PAP and PLA exercises conducted in conjunction with local ministries within China proper address the Party’s objective: that its military, security agencies and local governments can effectively manage a large scale mass incident. These types of exercises have also had a civil-military integration

24 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
function. That is, such exercises serve as a means to foster inter-agency coordination between civilian and military organizations normally not in each other’s respective chains of command. Cortez Cooper notes that in preparation for the 2008 Olympics, the PAP participated in a number of ‘simulated and live fire training activities focused on counterterrorism and emergency response while providing security at pre-Olympic events, creating a realistic training environment corresponding to ethnic unrest deployments. This training environment also provided significant joint training opportunities for the PAP, as they participated in emergency response scenarios with PSB [Public Security Bureau], militia, People’s Air Defense, and other PLA units.’27 As has been the experience in the West, the interagency aspect of counterterrorism is a crucial element of addressing the terrorist threat. Cortez Cooper adds:

‘In an attempt to break down administrative barriers and improve coordination, the Chengdu Military Region (MR) and its sub-districts have instituted joint training and exercise programs focused on civil-military integration under leadership groups. Composed of prefecture and county-level border defense committees, the training program focuses on three missions: defensive operations, counterterrorism, and disaster response.’28

Beyond internal security issues, the PAP and the PLA are also expected to directly support the local administrative organs in facing other types of disturbance to internal stability. As noted above by Cortez Cooper, civil-military integration exercises are conducted at the provincial level not only to train for border defense and counterterrorism contingencies, they are also designed to meet natural disasters and other non-security related contingencies. He adds that in ‘Wenshan subdistrict of the Chengdu MR, additionally, all prefectural and township military and police units

28 Ibid, p. 156.
are required to form ‘one unit’ for joint training for at least 20 days per year. The training includes command control, intelligence gathering and sharing, communications testing, emergency rescue procedures, and counterterrorism.'

Conclusion

Since the People’s Liberation Army is a Party-Army and not a National Army, its sole function is to serve as the military wing of the Chinese Communist Party. Hypothetically, if the Party places its survival and viability over that of the defense of China’s borders, then the PLA would shift resources to reflect that strategic guidance. If the Chinese Communist Party declared that growing the economy was paramount and that strategic and security issues were less urgent, as did happen in the late 1970s and early 1980s under Deng Xiaoping, then the PLA would have to adjust its role in this case as well. This isn’t to say that the PLA has no role in framing national security issues before the Party leadership or cannot significantly influence the national security decision making process in China, in fact the opposite is the case; however, when it comes to the final say on strategic direction the Party enjoys an unchallenged monopoly.

As it turns out the ‘New Period’ under Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao and now Xi Jinping is marked by the CCP concern over a diverse array of security challenges. There is a potential conflict with the United States over Taiwan to worry about, terrorist attacks and other mass incidents occurring within China primarily in the country’s northwestern provinces, and other smaller but still intense local conflicts around China’s periphery.

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30 The ‘New Period’ in China is considered to have begun in that period following Deng Xiaoping’s relinquishment of his formal titles of power and the passing of political power to Jiang Zemin. The entire period at present encompasses the administration of Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping.
The CCP has also identified emerging challenges to China's security related to its increased interests abroad, non-traditional security threats originating in new domains (cyber and space), and challenges to China's maritime sovereignty in the South and East China Sea. All of these latter security concerns fall under the rubric of the New Historic Missions.

The Party's preoccupation with this wide range of security concerns has had a significant impact on the People's Liberation Army, how it views military preparedness and its role in providing military support to the Party and by extension, the State. As this essay has argued these specific security concerns have found their way into the wide range of military exercises in which the PLA takes part. The PLA views as its responsibility the development of capabilities to address these security challenges firmly. At the same time, military exercises have a diplomatic function in that they can be used by the Party to convey to foreign and domestic audiences and to the international community as a whole, a wide range of messages that the CCP leadership wishes to convey for political purposes.

Military and internal security exercises can directly cement or firm up control the Party may have over local provincial, municipal or county-level governments. By rehearsing the coercive and security-oriented aspects of the state, the CCP reinforces its control over local government processes that it has in place to ensure not only stability but Party political control. To some degree one might make an argument that China's leadership in the SCO counter-terrorism exercises with the Central Asian countries might enjoy a similar reinforcement when the Great Wall or other SCO-led exercises take place. However, such an argument is beyond the scope of this conclusion and this paper.

Finally, while it appears to be the case that the CCP uses the military to accomplish political and strategic objectives of the Party, and makes use of military exercises to accomplish those ends specifically, the Party's freedom to do so is limited by the enormous challenge the People's Liberation Army faces in attempting to modernize its force and provide
adequate training for all units within the PLA. The obstacles mentioned earlier in this chapter on the seasonal aspects of China’s overall training cycle, the significant challenge of taking personnel from the relatively backward countryside and turning them into 21st century warriors, the persistent difficulty of transforming China’s NCO corps into a more proactive and capable group, will all serve as brakes to the Party’s belief that it has unfettered ability to use the PLA as an instrument of the Party’s political objectives.