THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Military Capabilities

The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is the unified military organization of all land, sea, strategic missile, and air forces of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The PLA is the world’s largest military force, with approximately three million members, and the world’s largest active standing army, with approximately 2.25 million members. The PLA comprises five main service branches, consisting of the PLA Ground Force, PLA Navy (PLAN), PLA Air Force (PLAAF), Second Artillery Corps (SAC), and the PLA Reserve Force. The People’s Armed Police (PAP) is a Chinese paramilitary force.

PLA Ground Force
The PLA deploys the world’s largest ground force, currently totaling some 1.6 million personnel, or about 70 percent of the PLA’s total manpower. The Ground Force is divided among seven military regions. The regular forces of the Ground Force consist of 18 group armies, which are corps-size combined units each with approximately 30,000 to 65,000 personnel and over 9,000 main battle tanks. The group armies contain among them nine armored divisions, three mechanized infantry divisions, 24 motorized infantry divisions, 15 infantry divisions, two amphibious assault divisions, one mechanized infantry brigade, 22 motorized infantry brigades, 12 armored brigades, seven artillery divisions, 14 artillery brigades, 19 anti-aircraft artillery missile brigades, and 10 army aviation regiments.

PLA Navy
The 250,000-man PLAN is organized into three major fleets: the North Sea Fleet headquartered at Qingdao, the East Sea Fleet headquartered at Ningbo, and the South Sea Fleet headquartered at Zhanjiang. Each fleet consists of a number of surface ship, submarine, naval air force, coastal defense, and marine units. The Navy includes 35,000 coastal defense force and 56,000 naval infantry/marines, plus a 56,000 PLAN Aviation naval air arm operating several hundred land-based aircraft and ship-based helicopters. As part of its overall program of naval modernization, the PLAN has been developing a blue water navy. The Navy also utilizes the CJ-10 naval cruise missile system.

PLA Air Force
The PLAAF, with some 250,000 personnel and 2,500 fighters and attackers, is organized into seven military region air forces and 24 air divisions. It is the largest air force in the Asia Pacific region and the third largest in the world. The largest operational unit within the aviation corps is the air division, which has two to three aviation regiments, each with 20 to 36 aircraft. The surface-to-air missiles corps is organized into divisions and brigades. There are also three airborne divisions manned by the PLAAF.

Second Artillery Corps
The SAC is the strategic missile force of the PLA. It controls China’s nuclear and conventional strategic missiles. China’s total nuclear arsenal size is estimated to be between 100 and 400 nuclear weapons. The SAC has approximately 90,000 to 120,000 personnel and six
ballistic missile divisions. The six divisions are independently deployed in different military regions and have a total of 15 to 20 missile brigades.

*People’s Armed Police*

The PAP is the paramilitary force primarily responsible for law enforcement and internal security. In wartime, the PAP would be used as light infantry, performing border defense and other support functions to assist the PLA Ground Force.

**Government Structure**

*Key Institutions*

- General Secretary: highest ranking official within the Communist Party and usually the Chinese Paramount leader
- Politburo: group of 22 people who oversee the Communist Party
- Politburo Standing Committee: acts as the de facto highest and most powerful decision making body in China
- Secretariat: principle administrative mechanism of the Communist Party, headed by the General Secretary
- Central Military Commission: nominally considered the supreme military policy making body
- Central Discipline Inspection Commission: charged with rooting out corruption and malfeasance among party cadres

*Key Players*

- President and Chairman of the Central Military Commission: Hu Jintao
- Vice President: Xi Jinping
- Premier of the State Council: Wen Jiabao

**Political Culture**

The population, geographical vastness, and social diversity of the PRC frustrate attempts to rule out of Beijing. Economic reforms during the 1980s and the devolution of much central government decision making, combined with the strong interest of the local Communist Party officials in enriching themselves, has made it increasingly difficult for the central government to assert its authority. Political power has become much less personal and more institutionally based than it was during the first forty years of the PRC.

Central government leaders must increasingly build consensus for new policies among party members, local and regional leaders, influential non-party members, and the population at large. Control is often maintained over the larger group through control of information. The Communist Party considers China to be in the initial stages of socialism. Many Chinese and PRC observers see the PRC as in transition from a system of public ownership to one in which private ownership plays an increasingly important role. Privatization of housing and increasing freedom to make choices about education and employment severely weakened the work unit system that was once the basic cell of Communist Party control over society.

As the social, cultural, political, and economic consequences of market reform become increasingly manifest, tensions between the old – the way of the comrade – and the new – the
way of the citizen – are sharpening. Some Chinese scholars argue that gradual political reform as well as repression of those pushing for overly rapid change over the next thirty years will be essential if China is to avoid an overly turbulent transition to a middle class dominated polity. Some Chinese look back to the Cultural Revolution and fear chaos if the Communist Party should lose control due to domestic upheavals, and so a robust system of monitoring and control is in place to counter the growing pressure for political change.

Diplomatic Relations with Other Teams

United States

- The United States and the PRC are usually neither allies nor enemies; the U.S. government and military establishment do not regard the Chinese as an adversary but as a competitor in some areas and a partner in others.
- Relations between the PRC and the United States have been generally stable with some periods of tensions, most notably after the breakup of the Soviet Union, which removed a common enemy and ushered in a world characterized by American dominance. There are also concerns relating to human rights in the PRC and the political status of Taiwan.
- While there are some tensions in Sino-American relations, there are also many stabilizing factors. The PRC and the United States are major trading partners and have common interests in the prevention and suppression of terrorism and nuclear proliferation. China is also the largest foreign creditor for the United States. The country’s challenges and difficulties are mainly internal, and there is a desire to maintain stable relations with the United States. The Sino-American relationship has been described by top leaders and academics as the world’s most important bilateral relationship of the 21st century.

India

- Relations between contemporary China and India have been characterized by border disputes, resulting in three major military conflicts – the Sino-Indian War of 1962, the Chola Incident of 1967, the Sino-Indian Skirmish of 1987. However, since the late 1980s, both countries have successfully attempted to reignite diplomatic and economic ties. In 2008, China emerged as the largest trading partner of India, and the two countries have also attempted to extend their strategic and military relations.
- Despite growing economic and strategic ties, several issues continue to strain Sino-Indian relations. Though bilateral trade has continuously grown, India faces a massive trade imbalance in favor of China. The two countries have failed to resolve their long-standing border dispute, and Indian media outlets repeatedly report Chinese military incursions into Indian territory. Both nations have steadily built up military infrastructure along border areas. In addition, India harbors suspicions about China’s strong strategic relations with its archrival Pakistan, while China has expressed concerns about Indian military and economic activities in the disputed South China Sea.

Pakistan

- Favorable relations with China is a pillar of Pakistan’s foreign policy. China is perceived by Pakistan as a regional counterweight to NATO and the United States. China and Pakistan also share close military relations, with China supplying a range of modern armaments to the Pakistani defense forces. China supports Pakistan’s stance on Kashmir,
while Pakistan supports China on the issues of Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan. Lately, military cooperation has deepened with joint projects producing armaments ranging from fighter jets to guided missile frigates.

- Chinese cooperation with Pakistan has reached economic high points, with substantial Chinese investment in Pakistani expansion of infrastructure, including the Pakistani deepwater port at Gwadar. Both countries have an ongoing free trade agreement. Pakistan has served as China’s main bridge to Muslim countries.

**Uighur Conflict**

The establishment of the Communist-ruled PRC in 1949 led to a government clampdown on all types of religious expression. According to communist philosophy, traditional religions, including Islam, are superstitions used as tools for the oppression of the people. With this in mind, the Chinese government began unseating Muslim leaders and relocating Han Chinese (those who are of purely Chinese heritage) to the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR) (also known as East Turkestan) in an effort to weaken the territory’s strong Muslim influence. The Chinese government viewed Muslims as separatists who might undermine the country’s unity or upset the Communist regime, and the religious freedom of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang has been growing increasingly limited.

The XUAR occupies approximately one-sixth of China’s landmass, contains some of the world’s largest oil deposits, borders eight countries (Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India), and houses China’s nuclear test site, Lop Nor. In addition to its vast resources and strategic significance, Xinjiang is home to approximately eight million Muslim Uighurs.

The Uighurs are a Muslim minority made up of Turkic people (an ethnic group from northern, central, and western Eurasia) who possess their own language and culture. The Chinese government accused them of trying to re-establish the independent Islamic State of East Turkestan. The supposedly militant East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) was reportedly established by Uighur Hasan Mahsum, whom the Chinese government accused of committing, or at least masterminding, various criminal and terrorist acts, including robbery and murder, in the early 1990s. The government also released a report alleging that he had ties to al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden, who offered the ETIM money, weapons, and support.

Regardless of the Chinese government’s wariness of the ETIM, it has taken some measures to improve the economic situations of poor Uighurs living in Xinjiang. In the spring of 2009, the government began transplanting Uighurs to a toy factory in the city of Shaoguan as part of a program to encourage migration to wealthier areas. The program was established to provide jobs for the 1.5 million unemployed workers in Xinjiang. It had its critics, though, as the increasing Uighur presence in Shaoguan has also increased cultural and racial tensions in the area.
Maps

Figure 1. China’s Military Regions.
Figure 2. Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.