

Introduction

Should China survive the trials of the coming decades, history may record this as the time it crossed the threshold to become a global power. In a twinkling it seems, the world's most populous nation has become the dominant manufacturer and exporter. While many Chinese remain impoverished, the sheer number of those relentlessly pressing into the middle and even upper classes is staggering. We have examined elsewhere the unique challenges of Chinese economic successes, and despite the many unresolved regional, social, and environmental contradictions that plague this land, China has a reasonable chance to regain its historical stature.¹

One reason for this opportunity is the grit and endurance of a talented people, but power is relative, and lest it be forgotten, over the past century several once-powerful states have lost vast amounts of their national treasure in warfare and from military or other unproductive programs in comparison to China. Comparatively speaking, these states may now face near-irreversible decline. While many current powers can still boast an edge in such critical areas as science and technology, China is working to lessen that advantage

through favorable business deals, strategic technology acquisitions, and targeted scientific programs. Should that effort continue unimpeded, China's race to greatness could succeed within the next twenty years.

To increase the odds for that success, China has dramatically reversed direction from the combative rule of Mao Zedong and even Deng Xiaoping. It has resolved virtually all its contested boundaries—the glaring exception being the Sino-Indian border—and in the case of the South China Sea and several disputed islands it has shelved the most contentious disputes indefinitely. Over the last decade or so, China has increasingly made its voice heard in the United Nations, joined multilateral organizations in East Asia, created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization jointly with Russia and four Central Asian states, moved aggressively in the common struggle against terrorism, and pursued a negotiated solution to the Korean nuclear crisis.

Standing outside the inner sanctum of Beijing's political-military high command, we cannot accurately determine whether this striking redirection toward growth and diplomacy stems from real choices and the political acumen of Mao's successors or from a more intelligent expression of the Machiavellian opportunism that underlay much of his strategy. Whatever the causes, China's path to greatness seems ever wider and smoother. Its current and potential rivals lack the fierce resolve of China's leadership, its near-universal appeal for investors, and the global dispersion of its people.

The Chinese know well that the past is littered with cases of nations with high promise missing or sacrificing their time of greatness. Their leaders in the new millennium have been acutely aware of the possible dangers for China, having so recently witnessed the rise and fall of the Soviet state. Still, they, too, cannot escape their own legacy with its false dreams and hidden perils. The very nationalism that mixed so uncomfortably with imported Marxism and revolutionary Maoism helped propel them to victory but then dogged them for the first thirty years of the People's Republic. Marxism and Maoism receded, it seems clear, but Chinese nationalism did not. It replaced discredited ideology and reinforced popular visions of grandeur, and it became the creed of the nation's youth and undercut strict economic rationalism. It came in the guise of "one China," and the fear of losing Taiwan gripped the Chinese soul.

It is Taiwan's moves toward *de jure* statehood that pose the most dangerous threat to China's long-term ambitions. In an important interview in November 2004, President Hu Jintao told an overseas Chinese audience

that Beijing's priorities are development first and reunification second, but he then said, "We absolutely do not allow anyone to separate Taiwan from China in whatever form."²

A war to prevent the island from becoming a sovereign state would slash the odds that China could become a great power within a generation, if ever. Though they profess to grasp the danger and thus to be acting with caution, all Chinese leaders feel compelled to advance toward an endgame that could ruin their fondest aspirations. Also in November 2004, President Hu told President George W. Bush that Taiwan's independence would "wreck the peace in the Taiwan Strait and seriously disrupt peace, stability, and prosperity in the entire Asia-Pacific region."³ Even so, China's leaders would once more prepare for deadly warfare, though this time the enemy would resemble the images in their mirrors. Hence this study's focus on China, war, and the coming confrontation with Taiwan, a confrontation that could doom China's long-sought promise.

Just as Mao's anti-American and anti-Soviet pronouncements blithely dismissed the consequences of a nuclear war for his nation, his heirs would now willingly mortgage the nation's destiny in order to preserve Taiwan as a province of China despite the huge losses that the effort could inflict.⁴ One need only speak to a Shanghai college student or a Guangdong merchant to appreciate the depth of that commitment, its hold on the national psyche. China's defense White Paper for 2004 called the cross-strait situation "grim," and declared: "We will never allow anyone to split Taiwan from China through whatever means. Should the Taiwan authorities go so far as to make a reckless attempt that constitutes a major incident of 'Taiwan independence,' the Chinese people and armed forces will resolutely and thoroughly crush it at any cost."⁵

This is a book about conflicts waged since the 1960s and preparations for a renewed, but more deadly civil war that no one wants but all see coming. Facing any large conflict in the nuclear age is sometimes said to clear the mind and simplify the available alternatives, though considerable evidence exists to the contrary. In the decades encompassed in this study, moreover, the old rationales for going to war, at least in East Asia, have come into conflict with the compelling forces of economic globalism and regional cooperation. Were it not for the specter of terrorism, the notion of inevitable conflict between states, let alone civilizations, could well have been relegated to historical annals and fading memories.

Military intentions and capabilities have constantly shifted, to be sure, but for the Chinese people the possibility of war in this nuclear era, though low, has not disappeared, nor have they made a clear choice between national development and imposed unification. At the same time, thoughtful Chinese appear to understand that when the flames of war have finally died out, no one would be able to distinguish victor from vanquished among those they once called brothers.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

This book begins in the Middle Kingdom's ancient but hardly forgotten past and moves quickly to events only a few decades old. It thereby acknowledges what all current military leaders in China assume: They are at heart a product of both proud tradition and events within their own memories or that of their immediate forebears. That tradition and those events, future historians will correctly hold, help justify otherwise prudent Chinese and their commanders embracing policies that could lead to national disaster.

For two centuries, war has gone hand in hand with China's quest for survival, independence, and unity. Born in 1949 after decades of chaos and devastating violence, the People's Republic of China applied the lessons and culture of the revolutionary years to the next three decades of near-perpetual hostilities and repeated warfare. Korea, America, India, Russia, and Vietnam came one after the other in the parade of enemies.

While inherited dogma dictated the primacy of Party rule over the nation's powerful armed forces, the recurrent warfare and constant external tensions in those thirty years reinforced military traditions and gave license to imposing military solutions on political problems, thereby shaping economic plans and social institutions. Nevertheless, Mao's China was never a typical military dictatorship, though People's Liberation Army (PLA) commanders did temporarily hold state power in the aftermath of their victory in 1949 and did grab it again for a few fleeting months during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. Moreover, the unrelenting quest for nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them in those years dominated the nation's industrial policies, and each nuclear explosion or missile launch was heralded as great-power symbols as well as agents of retaliation or deterrence.⁶ For

Mao, political power grew out of the barrel of a gun, and in later days the gun enforced the authority of his Party and state.⁷

Although those symbols and their architects held sway during the first decade or so after the Korean War and then again in the 1980s to restart China's industrial programs, the leaders after Mao Zedong's death in 1976 always had more in mind than just raw military power.⁸ They saw beyond the swords to the plowshares. During the 1980s, under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping, economic and social priorities came dramatically to the fore, and with the end of the Cold War and the country's opening to the West, many senior cadres and educated youth were motivated to demonstrate for more rapid political reforms and personal freedoms in defiance of traditional Party values. The resultant crisis in 1989 forced the Party elders to choose, and they opted to use force to suppress those incipient reforms and freedoms at the showdown in Beijing that June. The appreciation of the social limits of politically induced change came slowly and at significant additional cost to the Party's legitimacy and mystique.

Nevertheless, the momentum of national modernization had its own logic over the next decade as China moved to become a powerful economic engine, and the grip of the People's Liberation Army on the national consciousness and state's purse strings was steadily diminished. Only the threat of Taiwan "separatism" and the far lesser danger of widespread domestic turmoil seemed to justify spending much on advanced armaments or a multimillion-man army, and when Party leader Deng Xiaoping ordered the slowdown of military modernization and then the end of military-run businesses in the 1990s, the army lost most of its autonomous economic base. The recurrent debate over whether the Party would control the army seemed ever more dated and far removed from other high-profile concerns. Since Jiang Zemin became chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 1989, its leadership has been held by men with no modern military experience and who have viewed the armed forces as contributing little to China's "peaceful rise," though vital to preserving national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Nevertheless, the PLA elite judged these transitions in a very different light, though generational changes, career advancement, and infrastructure requirements made some of them more sympathetic to the new domestic priorities than others. Recognizing these variations and the problems in integrating them in a coherent study, this book attempts to reveal and analyze the

full range of security decisionmaking from the national command authority to operations in the field, from planning and research centers to weapons procurement and war preparations.

We first probe the traditional Chinese approaches to military power and how they have been transformed in response to lessons of the battlefield and the revolution in weaponry and information technology. High-performance weapons and technology have radically altered how militaries act and widened the gap between the leading military powers and all others. For the last forty or more years, on an extraordinarily slim budget and slowly evolving technology base, the Central Military Commission has sought to leave “all others” behind and join the first rank of military powers.

This volume builds on our earlier studies that focused on the making of China’s atomic bomb, ballistic missiles, and nuclear-powered submarines and summarized the decades-long development of China’s strategic nuclear forces and their influence on PLA plans and objectives. Our purpose here is to go beyond these advanced military technologies and to examine the underlying decision processes and operations of a Chinese military on the move, the People’s Liberation Army in action.

As we explore the intellectual and operational world of the Chinese military and security establishment, we touch on but do not deal with the raging academic dispute in the West about China’s long-term goals. The questions often posed in that debate are: Is China a status quo or dissatisfied power?⁹ Is China a potential or an unlikely threat in the future? These are important questions for the Chinese state and those who must deal with it in this century, but they are not the most compelling questions for the military. They do what they are told, and there is no doubt that senior generals are unhappy with the status quo not because they are seized of the question of China’s ultimate status but because the PLA has been tasked to deal with threats on budgets that would seem ludicrously small in Washington’s terms.

As we shall see, especially in the final chapter, many of the modernization campaigns within the command, weapons procurement, and strategic planning systems over the past decade have concentrated on a possible war with Taiwan. Given the history of the Taiwan crisis, the high command has concluded that should the order come to attack or militarily contain Taiwan, the United States undoubtedly would intervene on the side of Taipei and the war could easily become regional and even nuclear.

While this potential conflict poses great dangers and uncertainties, it also has focused the Chinese military on a single mission, the forceful preservation of one China. That mission has given Beijing's military planning what might be termed mission coherence. Such coherence in turn has structured national security decisionmaking and operational command and control. It has given direction to acquisitions, deployments, and logistics and helped refine doctrine and strategy. To a remarkable degree, the steady but reasonably low-budget growth of the PLA's capability has depended on the mission's objective requirements, and those requirements have collided with and reshaped the security establishment's thinking about war.

To reach the point in our story on a potential future conflict, we have chosen to divide this study into four parts. The first deals with the traditional military mind-set or culture reaching back over the centuries to the writings of Sun Tzu. In Chapter 2, we attempt to trace the evolution of tensions between Chinese and Western military philosophies and between old and new concepts. The search for understanding then leads us to consider what in Chinese planning for war has changed and why and to examine the post-1989 reappraisals about what wars might come.

Still within this first part of the book, Chapter 3 revisits the pivotal decade of the 1960s, the years of internal political struggle and a two-front confrontation with the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War struggle for Indochina. We examine the tortuous path that led Party chairman Mao Zedong in these tumultuous years to move closer to Washington and to define Moscow as his main enemy.

The conflicts along the Soviet border toward the end of the decade coincided with the meteoric rise of Marshal Lin Biao, a figure whose position in Chinese history is only now coming into balance. The moment of truth arrived in October 1969, during the showdown with the Soviets and the apparent triumph of Lin, then Mao's anointed successor, when Beijing's missile forces were put on a war footing apparently without Mao's prior approval. The results of this episode came just as China was deploying the missile delivery systems for its first-generation nuclear warheads. Its lessons then shaped China's national command authority and the PLA's command-and-control system, the Second Artillery, and the air force, each the subject of the chapters that follow.

The second part of the book deals with how those lessons were applied over the coming thirty-five years. Chapter 4 details the structure and operations of

the national command authority (NCA), primarily as it functions in peacetime. Like almost everything else in China, the origins of the central Party and state systems can be traced to the pre-1949 revolution and its powerful legacy. That experience proved the efficacy of authoritarian rule and the necessity of a small core within the Party Politburo having supreme command. The terminology and organizational details affecting that core—whether Standing Committee or Central Secretariat—would change over time under the rule of Chairman Mao Zedong, but the principle of Party dominance of the state and army remained constant.

While it is generally known how Communist systems such as China's work, we concluded that a comprehensive treatment of the NCA's history and its structural and operational peculiarities were essential to a full understanding of the overall political-military system. So, while much of the initial treatment of the subject may seem formalistic, it should quickly become obvious that the very bureaucratic formalism was having a crippling effect on a leadership faced with fast-paced, complex political-military crises.

Deng Xiaoping also recognized that effect and revived an interagency institution introduced by Mao in the 1950s, the leading group, to counteract it. We review the further development of leading groups as their number increased in the 1990s, and suggest that those dealing with security, foreign policy, Taiwan affairs, and counterterrorism might be merged and streamlined. This could well constitute an interim solution whose final form could resemble the U.S. National Security Council, as the Chinese understand the present-day NSC. As the number of leading groups and their composition changes, however, the central Party and military decision, reporting, and enforcement structures remain in place. We end this examination of the NCA with our analysis of the likely institutional transformations that lie ahead.

This fourth chapter highlights the war-making authority of the Party supreme leader and the Politburo Standing Committee prior to the outbreak of a conflict and the transfer of responsibility to the Party's military leaders under the Central Military Commission when war begins. The discussion that follows in Chapter 5 deals with that commission and its subordinate organizations for command and control (C^2) of the entire PLA. It was in the military domain after 1949 that Maoist ideology and political skills could be most quickly and directly applied, but the crises since 1969 and the growing understanding of American power in a unipolar world energized the leadership to modernize both the NCA and the PLA's C^2 mechanisms. Here

we provide a detailed examination of the improvement and current status of those mechanisms and stress the functions of the General Staff and its Operations Department system.

The first real test of those C² functions came in the brief but broad-scope war against Vietnam in February 1979, and to highlight the problems, we examine the lead-up to that war within the planning and operations commands. Responding to the many command-control-communications-and-intelligence (C³I) failures in that conflict, some more capable PLA officers understood the need for basic changes and began to press hard for them. But, no serious enemies loomed on the horizon thereafter, and in any case Deng Xiaoping's economic and foreign policy priorities in the 1980s did not permit an accelerated military reorganization or a fundamental reallocation of scarce resources. For many PLA soldiers who had faced the battle-hardened Vietnamese, moreover, the war had become a bitter memory that none wanted to deal with truthfully or openly. For these and other reasons, the story of that conflict has yet to be fully told, and few Chinese who were not there grasp the full import of China's "last war" for the present-day PLA.

When the United States unleashed its most sophisticated weaponry and made the world aware of its information and surveillance technologies in the wars of the 1990s, however, Beijing quickly decided that well-overdue changes could no longer be avoided. Even so, the improved relations with Taiwan, the United States, and its neighbors early in the decade drained the imperatives from plans for revamping the C³I system and applying the lessons of Vietnam and the Gulf War of 1991. We will examine the rethinking that occurred later in the 1990s, but our assessment at the end of Chapter 5 suggests that the process of change in that system is far from completion.

A series of events in the mid-1990s fundamentally transformed and drove the PLA's strategic priorities. This was the mounting crisis in the Taiwan Strait from 1995 to 1996, which has been widely analyzed and discussed.¹⁰ Until then, the rule of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT) on the island seemed safe against the vocal but hardly threatening independence-minded parties composed mostly of native Taiwanese. Within the KMT, however, key leaders, including Party chairman Lee Teng-hui, were planning to undo earlier agreements that had endorsed the enduring unity of Taiwan and the mainland and began advancing toward nationhood. Lee's moves split the Kuomintang, energized the Taiwanese opposition, and caused a fierce reaction from Beijing.

That reaction led to the confrontations of 1995 and 1996, when Chinese threats and missile firings provoked a direct American intervention. As fate would have it, these Chinese and American actions almost immediately followed the completion of the CMC's detailed assessments of the U.S.-led Gulf War and the comparative status of China's combat forces. Comparable evaluations of Chinese military readiness after the disastrous invasion of Vietnam in February 1979 had led to a concentration on the modernization of command and control just as the 1969 alert of the Second Artillery and the entire army had caused enhancements to be made in the national command authority. The coincidence of Taiwan's defiance and the intervention of U.S. naval forces further confirmed the systemic weaknesses that remained uncorrected and caused the highest priority to be placed on strengthening and retrofitting the strategic rocket forces and the PLA Air Force.

The high command, finally recognizing the absolute centrality of a survivable missile deterrent and modern air power for national defense and in any future attack on Taiwan, abandoned the desultory attempts to modernize the air force on a self-reliant basis. For years thereafter CMC representatives would negotiate deals with Russian, other European, and Israeli arms manufacturers to purchase advanced aircraft, avionics and other electronics, and air defense arms. The new national strategy called for air dominance over the Taiwan Strait and protection of the missile units, part of which would now carry conventional warheads. The ultimate logic of that strategy, as we shall see in the final chapter, would lead to a debate within the PLA on the use of nuclear weapons not just as a last resort.

The third part of the book thus deals with the primary weapons systems that have changed the most in line with the growing concerns about Taiwan "separatism" and American "interventionism." Chapter 6 provides the most complete description in any unofficial source of the evolution, organization, and operations of the Second Artillery and builds on the discussion in Chapter 3 of the 1969 missile alert. Chapter 7 updates our earlier publication on "China's search for a modern air force" and expands that work to include air defense. This does not mean that the other services are unimportant. They are critical to any complete evaluation of China's military capabilities. We and others have dealt with programs for the navy, and we analyze key components of the other general purpose forces in the context of command and control in Chapter 5 and the 2001 Dongshan exercise in Chapter 8.¹¹

We justify the focus on the Second Artillery and the PLA Air Force because they have taken center stage in China's strategic plans and they constitute the most relevant case studies of the direction, obstacles, and successes in restructuring the entire military. Throughout much of the last fifty years only the program to build the nuclear-powered submarine had the same urgency as the strategic nuclear programs and the PLA Air Force, and the PLA Navy was what one retired U.S. admiral has called "the step-child of the Chinese armed forces."¹² Only after Jiang Zemin's call in October 1995 for the "construction of a modern navy with comprehensive combat capabilities" did Chinese military budgets allow for the purchases of Russian ships and naval aircraft and the placing of the Naval Air Force in "an important strategic position." The modernization of the navy has just begun even though a decade ago Jiang had made it responsible for the security of China's territorial waters and possible moves against Taiwan.¹³

Within the military, it is painfully obvious that the CMC "shift of the focal point of weapon systems development to conventional weapons" in 1977 was almost solely limited to antitank and anti-aircraft weapons, suppression weapons (foreign advanced artillery and rocket launchers), and modifications of existing tanks and naval vessels.¹⁴ PLA officers we have interviewed made no secret of the rivalry between the General Staff's Equipment Department (conventional weapons procurement) and the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND) (weapons R&D with special emphasis on strategic weapons). The 1998 merger of the department and COSTIND into the General Armament Department under the leadership of General Cao Gangchuan was supposed to have rekindled the long-delayed effort to rebuild the conventional ground forces, but that did not happen except in the area of C³I.

Part Four then summarizes Beijing's national strategy and its preparations for war. Chapter 8 begins by posing questions that a latter-day Sun Tzu or Mao Zedong might have asked themselves were they members of today's CMC. It examines the growing complexity and nuanced realism of Chinese foreign policy as it leaves well in the past simplistic friend-or-foe dichotomies that no longer apply. The leadership of the Politburo Standing Committee can now foresee a coming historic shift in global power within the next few decades, with China the chief beneficiary.

This final chapter treats the military consequences of this transformation by looking first at the reevaluation of the traditional "active defense" doctrine

over the past fifty years. The Chinese language has several words that can be translated as “doctrine” or “thought,” and most often Chinese texts refer to the “active defense strategic doctrine” (*jiji fangyu zhanlüe sixiang*). Military writers differentiate the “active defense strategy” (*jiji fangyu zhanlüe*) from the doctrine, though that distinction is often blurred by explanations that make the strategy “the essence” of the doctrine. In this study, we will discuss “active defense” doctrine with quotation marks but active defense strategy without them.

We argue that the content of the doctrine has repeatedly changed, though the term “active defense” has remained constant. The earlier chapters will have shown how the doctrine’s fluid content has reflected new military realities and international challenges. The strategy gives the appearance of continuity but provides a political cover for agile decisionmaking and the modernization of PLA forces for both offensive and defensive missions.

The subsequent section in the chapter pursues these doctrinal changes into the practical world of military exercises, especially the mammoth Dongshan exercise of 2001. Designed to test the recently introduced command-and-control systems and active defense strategies as applied to Taiwan, these exercises help explain the reasoning behind the precedence given to the Second Artillery and PLA Air Force. At the same time they revealed the high command’s thinking about the progression of a conflict with Taiwan from a preemptive information war to a land invasion and a probable confrontation with the United States Navy.

Finally, the chapter shows how the current mainland-Taiwan impasse is slowly becoming a major crisis and reveals how U.S. military doctrine and actions from the Gulf War of 1991 to the Iraq War of 2003–4 have led the CMC to reappraise that progression. In appearance, U.S.-China relations have steadily improved despite recurrent ups and downs, but hidden from view, the Chinese military has concluded that should a cross-strait military showdown occur on President Bush’s watch, the Americans would probably intervene and have signaled in the U.S. *Nuclear Posture Review* that they would use nuclear weapons. At the same time, Taiwan also would resort to measures that Beijing would regard as the use of weapons of mass destruction. Thus China could foresee a narrow use-it-or-lose-it window for their missile units and the planes that would be defending them and providing air cover for an invasion of the island. In 2004, a few in the Chinese military issued a signal of their own: they would now contemplate the preemptive use of tactical

nuclear weapons, thereby meeting strategy for strategy. While that signal was quickly silenced, it served as a warning that nuclear threats against China could have disastrous consequences.

The logic of this book then links past, present, and future in the arenas of Chinese military power that would be brought to bear in any future conflict. The past helps explain the operational Chinese military culture and the impact of the violent revolutionary heritage on how that power is conceived, unleashed, directed, and employed. The chapters on the Second Artillery and the air force illuminate how competing priorities and the larger political context have affected that culture and weakened the efficacy of the power system in building a modern military force. It is our hope that by the end of Chapter 8 the reader will have a much better understanding of how Beijing views crises, reacts to them, and may deal with the most intractable of them, the crisis in the Taiwan Strait.

THE SOURCES

In developing the story of the People's Liberation Army in action, we have stayed close to the sources at hand. Not all sources in China are equal, of course, and no single source rarely if ever gives the full picture on even limited subjects. Key elements of military programs are either highly confidential or known to only a select few. We have used hundreds of written sources and drawn on three decades of interviews in the People's Republic, but many of these sources are contradictory, not just incomplete, and with changes ongoing, many sources are time-bound without a clear dating of the evidence. Moreover, how can we fairly distinguish fact from fiction when the goal so frequently is to obscure, not inform?

We know that Beijing wants outsiders to answer such questions on its terms or not at all. Although numerous publications and insiders do go beyond the established line, their information is often hard to verify. Dealing with military questions is a difficult undertaking in any society, but China has put a secret or confidential stamp on a large array of military documents, and even when this is not the case it has declared unclassified or widely available materials to be off-limits to foreigners. Our own experience with a gifted colleague now in prison for "leaking state secrets" has painfully sensitized us to the problem of foreigners dealing with open materials on our

own library shelves. So, it is that the references section painstakingly lists all of the sources we have cited. In addition to protecting other Chinese colleagues from similar unfounded charges, we hope that this listing will help guide the reader to what is the opportunity and yet the problem of dealing with a vast array of documentary collections, articles, memoirs, and official histories.

Based almost exclusively on Chinese sources, this study examines the operations of China's military forces and central aspects of their development required to cope with the onslaught of advanced technologies, global political changes, and demands driven by old rivalries and rising nationalism. It thus touches on a vast literature dealing with the modernization and evolution of those forces. We have drawn heavily on this secondary literature, but have cited only those publications that we have used directly in the study, which gives credit to only a small percentage of what is available. Fortunately, within the past several years several bibliographical compilations and assessments have been published, and we see no need to duplicate them here.¹⁵

Although we might claim to have used "original" Chinese materials, most historians would dismiss most of them as not truly original but merely Chinese-language sources, notwithstanding the fact that many are written by well-placed Chinese officials and military officers and are published in the official media. They are correct. That is the lot of those faced with a staggering number of published materials and interview opportunities that not only are derivative, strictly speaking, but also must be presumed to be biased. Historians bearing these caveats in mind can use focused questions and relevant knowledge of Chinese history and culture to sift through so much information, to identify possible nuggets of potentially useful evidence, and to subject that evidence to extensive reliability tests, including multiple sourcing, which can never be perfect.

Zhou Enlai once quipped to a senior U.S. official about the quaintness of Americans who had no historical memory, and it is clear that for Chinese officials history, distorted and ethnocentric though it may be, critically determines their current mind-set. But, as a colleague of ours once remarked, "for Marxists, history is always changing, only the future is certain." One need only have visited the Historical Museum on Tiananmen Square over several decades to recognize the truth of his observation—the constantly changing selection of historical displays all too often reflect the political correctness of the moment. This, too, is the case with many Chinese memoirs,

however useful, and with official compilations of documents that purport to be accurate and representative. Especially on such politically sensitive topics as leadership disputes or unsuccessful military operations of the past, meeting objective standards for the selection and dissemination of information is seldom a main concern.

There is another problem in the matter of sources that is not unique to the People's Liberation Army. For shorthand identification, we call those who advocate armed might in the solution of political problems "hard-liners," and for them, the military power that must be available to the state must equal or exceed that of China's potential foes. Yet, as is so often the case in any military service, mid-rank officers (majors through senior colonels) have tended to espouse a less moderate line to prove their mettle as trusted warriors, only to become more seasoned and realistic about the efficacy of military force as they rise through the ranks. Over the years, we have witnessed this transformation as officers move up the promotion ladder with a secondary phenomenon of reversion to their earlier, hard-line views that occurs as senior flag officers touch the uncompromising world of high politics.

Yet, even the most self-serving memoirs and propagandistic articles can provide significant data and insights. These data and insights, it would seem, have been introduced by their authors to prove their works' authenticity to hostile critics and knowledgeable peers, though often with incomplete or altered texts and without acknowledging that deletions or modifications have been made. Selectivity and bias are not unknown even in official U.S. compilations, but eventually archives are opened and the true record is revealed. To date in China, no Party, military, or state contemporary security-related archives have been opened to the general citizenry, let alone foreign scholars.

Save for their retirement memoirs, senior officers typically write less for open publications and are more circumspect in their public statements in order to protect themselves and their reputations. Perhaps for this reason, a large number of published sources on the Chinese military have come to display a toughness and opaqueness. The same holds true for research papers, both open and classified. The toughness will be seen in the articles on the possible uses of nuclear weapons in an invasion of Taiwan, and opaqueness will be repeatedly evident in Party pronouncements and general calls for modernization. Only careful mining of non-obvious writings and interviews with senior officers can help right the balance in assessing the leadership's actual

intentions, but even with these we have tried never to forget the necessary cautions in dealing with Chinese military documents and specialists.

Those cautions apply with special force to the Internet. Much has been made recently of the extensive and highly useful Internet-based PLA sources that often reveal important but hard-to-verify military information, including data in private homepages, discussion forums, and so-called enthusiast sites.¹⁶ Beginning in late 2001, some of the most productive sites, such as the homepage for the Academy of Military Science (www.ams.ac.cn), were removed from public access and transferred to the PLA's own restricted-access intranet or taken offline. As our citations will show, we, too, have used many of these troves of Internet materials, while recognizing and attempting to deal with their selectivity and potential distortions.

The art of writing on military history and operations never gets much easier with practice. It always requires extraordinary patience and discrimination while wading through oceans of materials often obscured by politically inspired generalizations and, taken together, conflicting testimony. Many other scholars have also found themselves caught up in the tasks of trying to understand China's military programs and security dilemmas, and we owe them a great debt. The fields of Chinese studies and security research have become so large and complex that it could not be otherwise, and as we look to the next generation of scholars our hope is that we collectively have done our job in providing them the intellectual tools and knowledge base to continue the building process.