



Self-Study Syllabus

on the Chinese People's Liberation Army

Preface

About this syllabus.

The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is a key feature of China's political and foreign policy landscape. The PLA is transitioning from a large ground force to a regional one with limited global reach. The evacuations of Chinese citizens from Libya (2011) and Yemen (2015) demonstrate the PLA's usefulness to Chinese policymakers who face ever-expanding demands to protect China's increasingly far-flung interests and citizenry. The Chinese military is becoming a much more potent force along China's periphery, altering the regional military balance and reshaping how policymakers from Taipei to Tokyo and from Canberra to Washington think about China's challenge.

This syllabus is organized to build understanding of the PLA in a step-by-step fashion based on one hour of reading five nights a week for four weeks. In total, the key readings add up to roughly 800 pages, rarely more than 40–50 pages for a night. We assume no prior knowledge of the PLA, only an interest in developing a clearer sense of Chinese military affairs. The objective is to help you read beyond the headlines. Our goal is to provide you with the needed tools and knowledge to assist others in researching

Chinese military developments and begin developing your own thoughts.

The PLA's development has proceeded in leaps and bounds since 1993, when China substantially revised its guidance on military strategy. The pace and scope of this modernization surprised observers, and senior U.S. military officers complained that the Intelligence Community had underestimated most significant PLA developments. One of the challenges that the PLA has created for observers is that so much is going on every day that it is no longer possible to find one book on the PLA that will provide a clear-eyed assessment of everything that a China analyst should know, even if they are not interested in the PLA beyond its general place in understanding China today.

Nearly all of the suggested readings are freely available and accessible online. One important exception is Dennis J. Blasko's *The Chinese Army Today, 2nd Edition (2012)*, which is a critical book that will provide a tremendous amount of assistance in understanding all of the issues related to the PLA's modernization and how to go about

finding answers to questions about the Chinese military. It is, in Blasko's words, the book he wished he had before he went to Beijing as an assistant army attaché. If you are in a position where this syllabus will be useful, then the book is worth the modest investment.

For those who want to develop as a Chinese security analyst and build their competency in analyzing the PLA, we suggest using this syllabus in conjunction with *Analyzing the Chinese Military: A Review Essay and Resource Guide on the People's Liberation Army (2015)*.

Week One: Setting the Foundation

Introduction to the Chinese People's Liberation Army

Overview

The goal of this week's readings is to help you develop a basic familiarity with the People's Liberation Army. The following readings will first give you a little historical background. Then they will explain what the PLA does, how it is structured, and why it is different than other modern militaries.

Introducing the PLA

The Chinese People's Liberation Army is a large, complex organization with myriad interests and activities. These readings suggest some of the key issues in understanding the PLA as it is today.

- Dennis Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), Chapter 1, pp. 1–19.
- Peter Mattis, “[So You Want to Be a PLA Expert?](#)” War on the Rocks, June 2, 2015.
- Ian Easton, *The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia* (Arlington, Virginia: Project 2049 Institute, 2017), Chapter 2, pp. 35-66.

Reading the PLA

Those who have spent time learning the Chinese language hardly need to be told that forms of expression differ between English and Mandarin. You might not know, however, that Beijing also has specific linguistic formulations for military policy and guidelines. These readings will help you familiarize yourself with the terminology used in military policy. In addition, they will layout the hierarchy of sourcing often used by serious analysts, helping you sort the wheat from the chaff. The third reading selection highlights the importance of applying these lessons, because propaganda, messaging, and misinformation are key components of Chinese media reports on the PLA.

- David Finkelstein, “[China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'](#),” in Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), pp. 81–95.
- Paul H.B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, *China's Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation*, China Strategic Perspectives No. 6 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2013), pp. 29–37.
- Andrew Chubb, “[Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA's 'Hawkish Faction' \(Part One\)](#),” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, July 25, 2013 ; “[Propaganda as Policy? Explaining the PLA's 'Hawkish Faction' \(Part Two\)](#),” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, August 9, 2013.

PLA Responsibilities

The latest biannual defense white paper did little to define and describe China's military policy issues. However, it did list the basic responsibilities of the PLA and provided some insights into how China's sees its military. For

a deeper understanding of what missions get priority you will need to look in the Science of Military Strategy (2013). Here the PLA indicates, albeit indirectly, a prioritization of external missions in descending order of importance: war with Taiwan, border conflicts, and safeguarding disputed island sovereignty claims. For a better understanding of the PLA's roles and its expanding responsibilities abroad, you should read the December 2004 speech given by then-Central Military Commission chairman Hu Jintao. This speech was important because it described the PLA's "New Historic Missions" (新的历史使命) and expanded the scope of PLA responsibilities beyond China's immediate periphery.

- 国务院新闻办公室 [State Council Information Office], 《中国的军事战略》白皮书 [Chinese Military Strategy, White Paper], May 26, 2015. [English].
- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science's Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy 2013] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 198–200; 209–212; 221–222; 230–232.

Basic Structure of the PLA

Any meaningful understanding of the Chinese

military requires you to have at least a cursory understanding of how the PLA is organized and what its various components do. On November 26, 2015, Xi Jinping announced a dramatic reorganization of the PLA that Beijing expects to complete by the early 2020s.

- Kenneth W. Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, Jr., "Updated—The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation, Parts 1& 2," *Jamestown Foundation* [undated].
- Dennis J. Blasko, "What is Known and Unknown about Changes to the PLA's Ground Combat Units," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, Vol. 17, No. 7, May 11, 2017.
- John Costello, "The Strategic Support Force: Update and Overview," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, Vol. 16, No. 19, December 21, 2016.
- “中央军委关于深化国防和军队改革的意见 [Central Military Commission Opinion on Deepening National Defense and Military Reform],” *Xinhua*, January 1, 2016.
- SUGGESTED READING: Joel Wuthnow and Phillip Saunders, "Chinese Military Reform in the Age of Xi Jinping," National Defense University, *China Strategic Perspectives*, No. 10 (March 2017).

Chinese Military Strategy

In 1993, Beijing released a revised version of the Military Strategic Guidelines. The guidelines stated the PLA needed to move toward being able to "fight local wars under modern, high-tech conditions." This little phrase encapsulated how the PLA envisioned the future of warfare and would have effects across everything the Chinese military has done since that time. The PLA updated the Military Strategic Guidelines in 2004 amplifying this directive and expanding on the lessons learned in the preceding decade.

- M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Military Strategy: 'Winning Informatized Local Wars,'" *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, July 2, 2015,
- David Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines'," in Roy Kamphausen and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 69–140.

For Further Reading: The following citations are here to suggest focused readings based upon your interests and professional goals.

- Dennis Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2012).
- Bernard Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*, Second Edition (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2010).

Week Two: Chinese Military Modernization

The PLA Develops in the 21st Century

Overview

The first decade of Deng Xiaoping's 1980s policy of Reform and Opening saw the PLA suffer from low prioritization. Deng cannibalized both the defense industries and the PLA's budget for the benefit of his civilian programs. While the Chinese economy grew and more investment flowed to scientific research, the PLA languished until 1991. Then the United States led a six-week air campaign and 100-hour ground campaign to evict Iraqi forces from Kuwait, Operation Desert Storm. This provided a vivid illustration of how deficient Chinese military capabilities were against modern forces. Subsequent to this, China prioritized defense investments and began a rapid military modernization program. The effects of this decision have altered the regional security landscape in Asia and will continue reverberating well into the future. The goal of this week's readings is to familiarize you with the major units and weapons systems available to the PLA as the result of China's ongoing armament program. Assessing military strength, however, is about more understanding orders of battle. The readings also include an overview of how the PLA understands modern war, where it still has weaknesses, and how it is likely to develop in the future.

PLA Modernization:

A comprehensive and authoritative assessment of the PLA is released each year by the U.S. Department of Defense. This provides readers with an overview of China's strategy, force modernization, and the balance of power in the Taiwan Strait.

It also covers specialized aspects of PLA modernization; these vary from year-to-year. Another good source of information on PLA modernization is the testimony of U.S. officials on Capitol Hill.

- Department of Defense, *Military and Security Development's Involving the*

- *People's Republic of China 2017* (Arlington, VA: Department of Defense, 2017), pp. i–83
- Lee Fuell, “*Broad Trends in Chinese Air Force and Missile Modernization*,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 30, 2014.
- Jesse L. Karotkin, “*Trends in China's Naval Modernization*,” U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission, January 30, 2014.

China's Defense Budget:

Each year the National People's Congress announces China's annual military budget for the coming fiscal year. You can expect this event to be followed by an outpouring of commentary on China's “double-digit” growth on defense spending. The reality of China's defense spending is more complex, and the budget from the 1980s to the present tells a significant story about the priority the PLA has claimed within the Chinese policymaking.

- Adam P. Liff and Andrew S. Erickson, “*Demystifying China's Defence Spending: Less Mysterious in the Aggregate*,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 216 (December 2013), 805–830.

Chinese Lessons from the U.S.-Iraq Wars:

Because China has not fought a war since 1979, the PLA analyzes foreign conflicts for insights into how the Chinese military should modernize. In both 1991 and 2003, American-led coalition forces overran Iraqi military at a pace that shocked PLA observers. No other foreign wars have had such an impact on how the PLA understands modern warfare.

- Dean Cheng, “*Chinese Lessons from the Gulf Wars*,” in Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Lessons from Other People’s Wars* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), pp. 153–191.

PLA Weaknesses and Future Development:

China’s military modernization program is an incomplete and ongoing process. According to Chinese sources, modernization has been nearly continuous since 1949, albeit with mixed results. The PLA is well-aware of its shortcomings, but sometimes struggles to change. Understanding these two points is critical to understanding where the PLA will go in the future.

- Michael Chase, Jeffery Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, Kristen Gunness, Scott Warren Harold, Susan Puska, and Samuel Berkowitz, *China’s Incomplete Military Transformation: Assessing the Weaknesses of the People’s Liberation Army* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015), esp. pp. 13–24, 43–73.
- Dennis J. Blasko, “The ‘Two Incompatibles’ and PLA Self-Assessments of Military Capability,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, Vol. 13, No. 10, May 9, 2013.

China’s Defense Industry:

The defense-industrial complex supporting the PLA has evolved dramatically since the 1980s, when it could not support the military’s need for modern conventional weapons. Though somewhat dated, you should read the RAND report below. It still offers the best description of the post-1979 development of the Chinese defense industries. Those interested can follow up with the suggested reading for an updated story.

- Evan S. Medeiros, Roger Cliff, Keith Crane, James C. Mulvenon, *A New Direction for China’s Defense Industry* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2005), pp. 1–49.
- SUGGESTED READING: Tai Ming Cheung,

“Dragon on the Horizon: China’s Defense Industrial Renaissance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2009), pp. 29–66.

For Further Reading:

- Tai Ming Cheung, *Fortifying China: The Struggle to Build a Modern Defense Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).
- Tai Ming Cheung, ed., *Forging China’s Military Might* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).
- Kevin Pollpeter, ed., *Getting to Innovation: Assessing China’s Defense Research, Development, and Acquisition System* (La Jolla, CA: University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, January 2014).
- Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Lessons from Other People’s Wars* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2011).

Week Three: Chinese Military Strategy

Introduction to the Chinese People's Liberation Army

Overview

The goal of this week's readings is to help you develop a basic familiarity with Chinese thinking on military strategy and how the PLA tries to shape a conflict before it begins. Much of the Western literature on military strategy examines warfare itself without considering the context or how to shape it. [The Science of Military Strategy](#) (2013 Edition) forms a critical part of this week's readings, and it is accessible online through the Federation of American Scientists in a very large PDF file (60MB). This book should be your first stop when trying to understand PLA thinking about warfare and what can be achieved with military force.

Understanding Strategy:

Military strategy, at a basic level, is about connecting military capabilities to the achievement of national objectives. Although there is a broad corpus of literature on strategy available, the readings here offer you a basic Western discussion of strategy and an introduction to how the PLA conceives of strategy.

- H. Richard Yarger, "Towards A Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model," Unpublished working paper.
- Barry Watts and Andrew F. Krepinevich,

[Regaining Strategic Competence](#), Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, September 1, 2009, pp. 15–21.

- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science's Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 1–27.

The PLA's Strategic Assessments:

The articles below will help you understand the PLA's strategic assessments of the international security environment. The two authors both have recently held the

position of deputy chief of the general staff with responsibility for foreign affairs and intelligence. These officers often represent the PLA in the leading small groups related to foreign policy and national security policy. The third reading is from *The Science of Military Strategy*, the most authoritative work on how the PLA thinks about strategy and the strategic environment.

- 孙建国 [Sun Jianguo], [坚定不移走中国特色国家安全道路 — 学习习近平主席总体国家安全观重大战略思想](#) [Unswervingly Adhere to the Path of National Security with Chinese Characteristics — Study Chairman Xi Jinping's Comprehensive National Security Concept Important Strategic Thought] 《求是》 [Seeking Truth], No. 5, February 28, 2015.
- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science's Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 69–86.

Introduction to Winning without Fighting:

One of the most quoted passages of Sunzi Bingfa (Sun Tzu's Art of War) is "To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To win without fighting

is the acme of skill.” Modern Chinese strategic thinking takes this aphorism to heart. The PLA is engaged in a variety of activities, from political warfare to deterrence, that aim to “win without fighting.”

- Dennis Blasko, “[Sun Tzu Simplified: An Approach to Analyzing China’s Regional Military Strategies](#),” AsiaEye Blog, Project 2049 Institute, April 10, 2015.
- Dean Cheng, “[Winning without Fighting: The Chinese Psychological Warfare Challenge](#),” Heritage Foundation Backgrounder, No. 2821, July 11, 2013.
- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science’s Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 134–153 on deterrence, 154–168 on military operations other than war.
- SUGGESTED READING: Mark Stokes and Russell Hsiao, [The People’s Liberation Army General Political Department: Political Warfare with Chinese Characteristics](#) (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, October 2011).

China’s Latest White Papers: The PLA’s latest defense white paper is aptly named China’s Military Strategy and addresses

the latest in what Beijing wants the world to understand about how its modernizing military will be used. It also details “active defense” (jiji fangyu, 积极防御), what Beijing calls its strategic approach to its use of force. The preceding white paper, Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces.

- 国务院新闻办公室 [State Council Information Office], 《[中国的军事战略](#)》白皮书 [Chinese Military Strategy, White Paper], May 26, 2015. [\[English\]](#)
- 国务院新闻办公室 [State Council Information Office], 《[中国武装力量的多样化运用](#)》白皮书 [Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces, White Paper], April 16, 2013 [\[English\]](#).

The Value of Warfare:

Strategy is the art of connecting military means to achieve political objectives. Chinese policymakers in the 20th Century took the primacy of politics over war quite seriously, throwing the PLA into conflicts where it was tactically outclassed but still capable of achieving Beijing’s strategic objectives.

- Ron Christman, “[How Beijing Evaluates Military Campaigns: An Initial Assessment](#),” in Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry

M. Wortzel, eds., *The Lessons of History: The Chinese People’s Liberation Army at 75* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2003), pp. 253–292.

- Allen Whiting, “China’s Use of Force, 1950–1996, and Taiwan,” *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Autumn 2001), 103–131.
- SUGGESTED READING: Mark Ryan, David Finkelstein, and Michael McDevitt, eds., *Chinese Warfighting: The PLA Experience since 1949* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), esp. pp. 3–22.

For Further Reading:

- Joe McReynolds, ed., *China’s Evolving Military Strategy* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2015).
- Andrew Scobell, *China’s Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation: Cooperation and Conflict in China’s Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Week Four: Pulling It All Together

Civil-Military Relations and Regional Perspectives on the PLA

Overview

By now you know that the PLA is the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). It is a fundamentally political organization, not a professional military. Nonetheless, today's PLA is also a modern fighting force. This week's readings will therefore address the PLA services and civil-military relations in China. The foremost mission assigned to the PLA, while often overlooked, is to ensure the CCP's monopoly on power in China. One of your readings will be about how the PLA manages internal security. Closing out your list will be a sample of Japanese and Taiwanese writings on the PLA. These are often useful for filling gaps missed by American analysts.

Pick a Service:

To develop a more concrete sense of how military modernization takes form, we recommend skimming one of these books on the PLA service that most interests you. Some chapters are suggested, but these are cornerstone works that should be read in their entirety over time. China's strategic rocket force, the Second Artillery, unfortunately, does not yet have a book written about it, and some articles written about it are behind a paywall.

- GROUND FORCES: Dennis J. Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and*

Transformation for the 21st Century, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2012), Chapters 5 and 6.

- Dennis J. Blasko, "[Recent Developments in the Chinese Army's Helicopter Force](#)," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, June 9, 2017.
- Dennis J. Blasko, "[PLA Special Operations Forces: Organizations, Missions and Training](#)," *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, May 1, 2015.
- PLA NAVY: [Office of Naval Intelligence, The PLA Navy: New Capabilities and Missions for the 21st Century](#) (Suitland, MD: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015);
- Ronald O'Rourke, "[China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy](#)

[Capabilities](#)," Congressional Research Service Report, September 18, 2017;

- Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher D. Yung, Michael Swaine and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, eds., [The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles](#) (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2011), Chapter 5;

OR

- Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy Enters the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Edition (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012), Chapters 6 and 7.
- PLA AIR FORCE: Richard P. Hallion, Roger Cliff, and Phillip C. Saunders, eds., [The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities](#) (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2012), Chapters 4, 5, and 8;
- [National Air & Space Intelligence Center, The People's Liberation Army Air Force 2010](#) (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio: National Air & Space Intelligence Center, August 2010);
- SECOND ARTILLERY: Mark A. Stokes, "The Second Artillery Force and the Future of Long-Range Precision Strike," in Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, eds., *Strategic Asia 2012–13: China's Military Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012), pp.;
- Michael S. Chase and Andrew S. Erickson,

“The Conventional Missile Capabilities of China’s Second Artillery Force: Cornerstone of Deterrence and Warfighting,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2012), pp. 115–137;

OR

• Vitaliy O. Pradun, “**From Bottle Rockets to Lightning Bolts: China’s Missile Revolution and PLA Strategy against U.S. Military Intervention**,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Spring 2011), pp. 7–39.

Civil-Military Relations:

As the armed wing of the Chinese Communist Party, the PLA is different than most modern militaries. The political role of the PLA is difficult to sort out, but it cannot be ignored. The following readings will help you explore the ways in which analysts have approached this question.

- Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, **Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA’s Role in Elite Politics**, *Institute for National Strategic Studies, China Strategic Perspectives No. 2* (August 2010).
- Peter Mattis, “**The PLA Puzzle in Chinese Politics**,” University of Nottingham, China Policy Institute, Policy Paper No. 8 (October 2015).
- SUGGESTED READING: Thomas J. Bickford, “A Retrospective on the Study of

Chinese Civil-Military Relations Since 1979: What Have We Learned? Where Do We Go?” and David Shambaugh, “**Commentary on Civil-Military Relations in China: The Search for New Paradigms**,” in James Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., *Seeking Truth From Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2004), pp. 1–38, 39–50.

“A Mission that Dare Not Speak Its Name”:

The PLA’s status as the party’s army has, on a few occasions, burst to the forefront when the CCP leadership called on the military to reassert order. Notable examples include the Cultural Revolution in 1968 and the Tiananmen Massacre of 1989. The PLA’s importance to party for maintaining its security also has been highlighted more recently, although in less dramatic ways.

- Murray Scot Tanner, “**How China Manages Internal Security Challenges and Its Impact on PLA Missions**,” in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Beyond Taiwan* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), pp. 39–98.

Regional Views:

The Japanese and Taiwanese governments regularly release authoritative reports on the PLA. These are worth reading because they provide nuggets of information that are sometimes missing in U.S. reports. Regional think tanks can also provide a valuable perspective on the PLA. We suggest picking one and reading it closely.

- **NIDS China Security Report 2017** (Tokyo, Japan: National Institute for Defense Studies, 2017).
- **National Defense Report 2015** (Taipei, Taiwan: Ministry of National Defense, 2015), pp. 50–65.
- **China’s Military Threats against Taiwan in 2025** (Taipei, Taiwan: New Frontier Foundation, March 2014), pp. 37–85.

For Further Reading:

- Larry M. Wortzel, *The Dragon Extends Its Reach: Chinese Military Power Goes Global* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013), pp. 117–173.
- Mark A. Stokes and Ian Easton, **Evolving Aerospace Trends in the Asia-Pacific Region, Project 2049 Institute, Occasional Paper** (May 2010).
- David M. Finkelstein and Kristen Gunness, eds., *Civil-Military Relations in Today’s China:*

Swimming in a New Sea (Armonk, New York: The CNA Corporation, 2006).

- You Ji and Daniel Alderman, “**Changing Civil-Military Relations in China**,” in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds., *The PLA at Home and Abroad: Assessing the Operational Capabilities of China’s Military* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 135–192.
- Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945–1981* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982).

The Next Steps: Keeping Up and Moving Forward

Moving Beyond Familiarity toward Expertise

Overview

If you wish to go beyond this syllabus and develop your expertise on Chinese military affairs, below are suggested readings and ways for both keeping up and digging deeper into the PLA.

Five Book Core:

This syllabus suggested Dennis Blasko's *The Chinese Army Today* and *The Science of Military Strategy* as the two must-reads alongside Peter Mattis' *Analyzing the Chinese Military* as a resource. If you will be looking at the PLA on a day-to-day basis, then we suggest the following five books as a core set of readings to frame many of the essential issues in analyzing the Chinese military.

- Roger Cliff, *China's Military Power: Assessing Current and Future Capabilities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- Phillip Saunders and Andrew Scobell, eds., *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Security Studies, 2015).
- Laurie Burkitt, Andrew Scobell, and Larry

Wortzel, eds., *The Lessons Of History: The Chinese People's Liberation Army At 75* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2003).

- Andrew Scobell, David Lai, and Roy Kamphausen, eds., *Chinese Lessons From Other Peoples' Wars* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 2014).
- Joe McReynolds, ed., *China's Evolving Military Strategy* (Washington, DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2016).

Routine Readings:

The sources below are a few ways to keep up with PLA developments requiring a modest investment of time.

- *The Jamestown Foundation's biweekly, electronic journal China Brief* offers one of the

few places where analysis of current Chinese military policy and PLA developments can be found on a regular basis. Available freely online and based predominantly on Chinese sources, *China Brief* regularly engages some of the best experts on the PLA to write for it.

- *China Military Online* and its English-language portal provide regular reporting on PLA developments. The associated newspaper, *PLA Daily* [解放军报], is the official newspaper of the PLA, and it is the only PLA newspaper with an online presence. Its information can be supplemented through *Xinhua* and occasionally other Chinese news outlets.

- *Taiwan Security Research* is a weekly newsletter with a roundup of the week's readings related Taiwan's military and security situation. PLA capabilities and developments clearly qualify as relevant.

- The online portal for the Central Party School journal *Seeking Truth* offers more selective articles on Chinese military developments. Although much of the content comes from other Chinese newspapers, *Seeking Truth* and its companions *Red Flag* and *Study Times* sometimes carry articles from senior military officers. The portal provides a good filter for important articles by senior PLA leaders.

- Whenever a major new report, book, or article appears on the PLA and Chinese national security policy, *U.S. Naval War*

College professor Andrew Erickson will post a link to it and occasionally comment on it on his personal website.

- Several specialists on the PLA regularly post related information on Twitter, ranging from new publications to breaking news. Most notable among the potential voices for following Chinese military developments are Andrew S. Erickson (@andrewserickson), M. Taylor Fravel (@fravel), and Daniel M. Hartnett (@dmhartnett).
- [The Eastern Arsenal Blog](#) published by [Popular Mechanics](#) offers routine posts on new Chinese military equipment. The authors, Peter Singer and Jeffrey Lin, draw on a range of Chinese-language sources, including discussion forums and social media.

Basic Literacy in Military Affairs:

Understanding the PLA requires a broader understanding of military affairs that cannot be learned from just analyzing the Chinese military. Here are three suggestions that will help illuminate the questions you should be asking about the PLA and make a broad corpus of historical and strategic knowledge easily accessible.

- Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939–*

1945 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982).

- Colin Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on Peace, War, and Strategy* (Fairfax, VA: Potomac Books, 2009).
- Allan R. Millett, Williamson Murray, and Kenneth H. Watman, “The Effectiveness of Military Organizations,” *International Security*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Summer 1986), pp. 37–71.

Books for the Advanced Reader:

If you continue to delve into the PLA on your own or seek to build deeper expertise, then the next suggestions are key works that will help round out and deepen your understanding of the PLA.

Historical Perspective:

- James Mulvenon and Andrew N.D. Yang, eds., [Seeking Truth from Facts: A Retrospective on Chinese Military Studies in the Post-Mao Era](#) (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001).
- Harlan W. Jencks, *From Muskets to Missiles: Politics and Professionalism in the Chinese Army, 1945–1981* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982).
- Ellis Joffe, *The Chinese Army after Mao* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).
- David Shambaugh, *Modernizing China’s*

Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

China’s Use of Force and Warfighting:

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- Mark Burles and Abram Shulsky, [Patterns in China’s Use of Force: Evidence from History and Doctrinal Writings](#) (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000).

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- Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China’s Navy Enters the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd Edition (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2012).

- Phillip C. Saunders, Christopher D. Yung, Michael Swaine and Andrew Nien-Dzu Yang, eds., **The Chinese Navy: Expanding Capabilities, Evolving Roles** (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2011).
- Richard P. Hallion, Roger Cliff, and Phillip C. Saunders, eds., **The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities** (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2012).

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- Andrew S. Erickson and Lyle J. Goldstein, eds., **Chinese Aerospace Power** (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011).
- Ashley J. Tellis and Travis Tanner, eds., **Strategic Asia 2012–13: China's Military Challenge** (Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2012).
- Larry M. Wortzel, **The Dragon Extends Its Reach: Chinese Military Power Goes Global** (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2013).

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- Ian Easton, **The Chinese Invasion Threat: Taiwan's Defense and American Strategy in Asia** (Arlington, VA: Project 2049 Institute, 2017)
- Ian Easton, **China's Evolving Reconnaissance-Strike Capabilities: Implications for the U.S.-Japan Alliance**, Project 2049 Institute, Occasional Paper (February 2014).
- David A. Shlapak, David T. Orletsky, Toy I. Reid, Murray Scot Tanner, and Barry Wilson, **A Question of Balance: Political Context and Military Aspects of the China-Taiwan Dispute** (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2009).

Appendix: Key Chinese Language Terms and Phrases

“Winning Informatized Local Wars” (打赢信息化局部战争):

This phrase is the current Military Strategic Guidelines, which provides overarching guidance related to PLA combat capabilities and outlines how the PLA intends to fight its next war. This new phrasing appeared in the 2015 defense white paper, China’s Military Strategy, and it was subsequently confirmed as a minor adjustment to the Military Strategic Guidelines.

- M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s New Military Strategy: ‘Winning Informatized Local Wars’,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, June 23, 2015.

“Active Defense” (积极防御):

China’s Ministry of National Defense describes “Active Defense” as the PLA’s strategic concept that “adheres to the principle of featuring defensive operations, self-defense and striking and getting the better of the enemy only after the enemy has started an attack.” This concept has caused some confusion among some Western analysts, who have seen Beijing as willing to launch offensive campaigns like the tactical surprises of the Sino-Indian War (1962) and the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979). The central

point of confusion is at what point Chinese leaders believe “an attack” has started and, therefore, believe China should respond with force. This is a strategic judgment that Chinese strategists do not think precludes tactical surprise and initiative: “Striking only after enemy has struck does not mean waiting for the enemy’s strike passively ... for the ‘first shot’ on the plane of politics must be differentiated from the ‘first shot’ on that of tactics” (The Science of Military Strategy).

- Paul H.B. Godwin and Alice L. Miller, China’s Forbearance Has Limits: Chinese Threat and Retaliation Signaling and Its Implications for a Sino-American Military Confrontation, China Strategic Perspectives No. 6 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2013).
- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science’s Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 103–121.

“Main Strategic Direction” (主要战略方向):

This is an important, and oft-used, euphemism for China’s long-term campaign

to annex Taiwan. According to the Science of Military Strategy (2013), it involves large scale operations to safeguard national unification. Operational components of this campaign include: “joint” blockade operations (联合封锁作战); firepower strike operations (火力打击作战); amphibious landing operations (登岛作战); and coastal defense operations (防卫作战).

- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science’s Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 198–200, 209–212, 221–222, 230–232.

“Border Self-Defense Counterattack Operations” (边境自卫反击作战):

This is a euphemism for “joint” PLA operations to fight along the Sino-Indian border. According to the Science of Military Strategy (2013), the objective would be to capture disputed territory (currently controlled by India) in order to improve China’s “defensive” position; thereby resolutely “protecting territorial sovereignty and restoring border area peace and stability.”

- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science’s Military Strategy Research

Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 198–200, 209–212, 221–222, 230–232.

“Operations to Defend Strategic Nodes” (战略要地防御作战):

This is a euphemism for “joint” PLA operations to defend Beijing and other key centers of gravity from American airstrikes in the event of a great power conflict. These operations, which would involve “counterattacks” on U.S. aircraft carriers and bases, include actions that are commonly referred to by Western observers as China’s “anti-access/area denial (A2/AD)” or “counter-intervention” strategy.

- 军事科学院军事战略研究部 [Academy of Military Science’s Military Strategy Research Department], 《战略学2013年版》 [The Science of Military Strategy, 2013 Ed.] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science, 2013), pp. 198–200, 209–212, 221–222, 230–232.

“Integrated Air and Space [Aerospace] Operations” (空天一体):

This is the long-term PLAAF development concept, first discussed in 2004 along

with “integrated information and firepower operations” (xinxi huoli yiti, 信息火力一体). Instead of the typical U.S. description of air and space as separate domains, the PLAAF has articulated an ambitious concept that defines air and space as a single domain. The concept potentially leads to bureaucratic competition over China’s space capabilities, because of the Second Artillery’s role in traditional aerospace missions.

- Mark Stokes, “China’s Question for Joint Aerospace Power: Concepts and Future of Aspirations,” in Richard P. Hallion, Roger Cliff, and Phillip C. Saunders, eds., *The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2012), pp. 33–70.
- Kevin Pollpeter, “The PLAAF and the Integration of Air and Space Power,” in Richard P. Hallion, Roger Cliff, and Phillip C. Saunders, eds., *The Chinese Air Force: Evolving Concepts, Roles, and Capabilities* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2012), pp. 165–187.

“System of Systems Operations” (体系作战) and “Integrated Joint Operations” (一体化联合作战):

The PLA’s description for how it plans to fight in the future under “informatized conditions” is described in these two phrases: “System of Systems Operations” and “Integrated Joint Operations.” They describe PLA aspirations for joint operations enabled by information technology that allow horizontal coordination at lower levels as well as a “plug-and-play” approach for matching different capabilities across the services into a single unit tailored campaign objectives.

- Kevin McCauley, “Quality Over Quantity: A New PLA Modernization Methodology?” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, July 17, 2014.
- Kevin McCauley, “System of Systems Operational Capability: Key Supporting Concepts for Future Joint Operations,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, October 5, 2012.

“Military-Civil Integration” (军民融合):

Sometimes translated as “Civil-Military Integration” (and, in Chinese, junmin yitihua, 军民一体化), “Military-Civil Integration” has four components in Chinese policy. The first and most well-known component relates to the integration of the defense industry with the civilian economy. The second is national

defense education, which, as defined by the 2004 Defense White Paper, serves “to enhance the national defense awareness of the people” and provide “education in patriotism.” The third is joint military and civilian efforts to secure PLA facilities and communications. The final component is national defense mobilization for military use of civilian resources in wartime. It also includes integrating demobilized soldiers into civilian government posts as a way to improve coordination.

- Daniel Alderman, Lisa Crawford, Brian Lafferty, and Aaron Shraberg, “The Rise of Chinese Civil-Military Integration” in Tai Ming Cheung, ed., *Forging China’s Military Might: A New Framework for Assessing Innovation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).
- Matthew Luce, “A Model Company: CETC Celebrates 10 Years of Civil-Military Integration,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, February 21, 2012.

Counter-Intervention (反干涉):

“Counter-intervention” refers to a set of capabilities and operations designed to prevent a third-party from interfering in PLA operations. It is most closely analogous

with the U.S. term “anti-access/area-denial” (abbreviated A2/AD). Unlike U.S. analysis of A2/AD as a strategy, “Counter-intervention” is not a strategy or a guiding principle but a way of conceptualizing auxiliary operations to sustain the main PLA effort in the face of foreign, third-party interference.

- M. Taylor Fravel and Christopher P. Twomey, “*Projecting Strategy: The Myth of Chinese Counter-Intervention*,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Winter 2015), pp. 171–187.

Officer Grades (职务等级):

Although the point should be self-evident by now, the PLA functions differently than its Western counterparts. The PLA has ten ranks, but 15 grades that denote whether the officer is a leader or a deputy leader at particular level. The grade, not the rank, is the key indicator of authority and position within the PLA. Grade also applies to units, and, for the PLAN, each ship and submarine has a unit grade. The grade level determines who can give orders to whom, and, therefore, grade shapes all joint and combined arms operations within the PLA. The best explanations of officer grades can be found in these two works:

- *China’s Navy 2007* (Washington, DC: Office of Naval Intelligence, 2007), 2–4.

Here are some samples of PLA analysis using grade as the basis for assessment:

- Kenneth Allen and Aaron Shraberg, “*Assessing the Grade Structure for China’s Aircraft Carriers - Part 1*,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, July 15, 2011.
- Kenneth Allen and Aaron Shraberg, “*Assessing the Grade Structure for China’s Aircraft Carriers - Part 2*,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, July 29, 2011.
- David Chen, “*The PLA’s Evolving Joint Task Force Structure: Implications for the Aircraft Carrier*,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, October 28, 2011.
- David Chen, “*Examining the New Aircraft Carrier through the PLA’s Revolution in ‘Organizational’ Affairs*,” Jamestown Foundation China Brief, October 5, 2012.

中文

霸权主义
 暴恐势力
 边境自卫反击战
 传统安全
 大校
 单边主义
 弹道导弹
 单极
 第二炮兵
 帝国主义
 地缘政治
 电磁空间安全
 东突
 独联体
 多级
 反海盗
 非传统安全
 非对称作战
 非战争军事行动
 共同安全
 国际秩序
 国家主权
 海湾战争
 航空母舰
 和平发展
 核心利益
 轰炸机
 缉毒
 积极防御
 军备竞赛
 军民融合

拼音

bà quán zhǔ yì
 bào kǒng shì lì
 biān jìng zì wèi fǎn jī zhàn
 chuán tǒng ān quán
 dà xiào
 dān biān zhǔ yì
 dàn dào dǎo dàn
 dān jí
 dì èr pào bīng
 dì guó zhǔ yì
 dì yuán zhèng zhì
 diàn cí kōng jiān ān quán
 dōng tū
 dú lián tǐ
 duō jí
 fǎn hǎi dào
 fēi chuán tǒng ān quán
 fēi duì chēng zuò zhàn
 fēi zhàn zhēng jūn shì háng dòng
 gòng tóng ān quán
 guó jì zhì xù
 guó jiā zhǔ quán
 hǎi wān zhàn zhēng
 háng kōng mǔ jiàn
 hé píng fā zhǎn
 hé xīn lì yì
 hōng zhà jī
 jī dú
 jī jí fáng yù
 jūn bèi jìng sài
 jūn mín róng hé

英文

hegemonism
 forces of violent terrorism
 border self-defense and counterattack operations
 traditional security
 senior colonel
 unilateralism
 ballistic missile
 unipolar
 second artillery
 imperialism
 geopolitics
 cybersecurity [older term but appears in readings]
 East Turkestan
 Commonwealth of Independent States
 multipolar
 anti-piracy
 non-traditional security
 asymmetric warfare
 military operations other than war
 collective security
 international order
 sovereignty
 gulf war
 aircraft carrier
 peaceful development
 core interest
 bomber
 anti-narcotic
 active defense
 arms race
 military civilian integration

中文

军事外交
军事战略
军种战略
恐怖主义
空地一体战
空海一体战
联合作战
民族分裂势力
潜水艇
抢险救灾
区域拒止
驱逐舰
上将
少将
双极
孙子兵法
台独势力
突击步枪
网络安全
威慑
武警
西藏农奴制
新干涉主义
信息化局部战争
新型大国关系
巡洋舰
亚太再平衡战略
颜色革命
一带一路战略
一国两制
意识形态

拼音

jūn shì wài jiāo
jūn shì zhàn lüè
jūn zhǒng zhàn lüè
kǒng bù zhǔ yì
kōng dì yī tǐ zhàn
kōng hǎi yī tǐ zhàn
lián hé zuò zhàn
mín zú fèn liè shì lì
qián shuǐ tǐng
qiǎng xiǎn jiù zāi
qū yù jù zhǐ
qū zhú jiàn
shàng jiāng
shǎo jiāng
shuāng jí
sūn zǐ bīng fǎ
tái dú shì lì
tū jī bù qiāng
wǎng luò ān quán
wēi shè
wǔ jǐng
xī zàng nóng nú zhì
xīn gàn shè zhǔ yì
xìn xī huà jú bù zhàn zhēng
xīn xíng dà guó guān xì
xún yáng jiàn
yà tài zài píng héng zhàn lüè
yán sè gé mìng
yī dài yī lù zhàn lüè
yī guó liǎng zhì
yì shí xíng tài

英文

military diplomacy
military strategy
armed services strategy
terrorism
integrated air and land warfare
integrated air and maritime warfare
integrated warfare
forces of ethnic separatism
submarine
emergency rescue and disaster relief
anti-access/area denial (A2AD)
destroyer
general
major general
bipolar
The Art of War
forces of Taiwan separatism
assault rifle
cybersecurity
deterrence
armed police
Tibetan serfdom
neo-interventionism
informatized local wars
new type of major power relations
cruiser
Asia rebalancing strategy
color revolution
one belt one road strategy
one country two systems
ideology

中文

隐形战机
 藏独
 战斗机
 战略机遇期
 战略空间
 战略判断
 战略评估
 战略武器系统
 战略指导
 战区战略
 政委
 殖民主义
 中将
 中央军委
 洲际导弹
 主要战略方向
 主战坦克
 总参谋部
 综合国力
 总后勤部
 宗教极端势力
 总政治部
 总装备部

拼音

yǐn xíng zhàn jī
 zàng dú
 zhàn dòu jī
 zhàn lüè jī yù qī
 zhàn lüè kōng jiān
 zhàn lüè pàn duàn
 zhàn lüè píng gū
 zhàn lüè wǔ qì xì tǒng
 zhàn lüè zhǐ dǎo
 zhàn qū zhàn lüè
 zhèng wěi
 zhí mín zhǔ yì
 zhōng jiāng
 zhōng yāng jun1 wěi
 zhōu jì dǎo dàn
 zhǔ yào zhàn lüè fāng xiàng
 zhǔ zhàn tǎn kè
 zǒng cān móu bù
 zōng hé guó lì
 zǒng hòu qín bù
 zōng jiāo jí duān shì lì
 zǒng zhèng zhì bù
 zǒng zhuāng bèi bù

英文

stealth fighter jet
 Tibetan separatist
 fighter jet
 window of strategic opportunity
 strategic space
 strategic judgement
 strategic evaluation
 strategic weapon system
 strategic guidance
 war zone strategy
 commissar
 colonialism
 lieutenant general
 central military commission
 intercontinental ballistic missile
 main strategic direction
 main battle tank
 Headquarters of General Staff
 comprehensive national power
 General Logistics Department
 religious extremist force
 General Political Department
 General Armament Department