

Speaking notes

Operational competence and Chinese military modernization

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- PLA is halfway through a multi-generation military reform program
 - Started 1979
 - State of the PLA before reform
 - Very few officers and virtually no troops had any formal education
 - PLA had not done serious military training since late 1950s
 - Officer education system totally defunct (like every other education institution)
 - PLA deeply involved in political struggle and local, regional government
 - Very little combat experience for over 25 years
 - Events prompting reform
 - Deng Xiaoping statement 1975: PLA is lazy, bloated, inefficient, ineffective
 - Death of Mao, fall of Gang of Four, end of Cultural Revolution (1976)
 - PLA poor performance in Vietnam 1979
 - Major events shaping subsequent course of reform
 - Decline of Russian threat
 - Gulf War
 - Availability of Russian hardware
 - Changes in Taiwan behavior
 - Chinese economic success

- Major themes of PLA military reform
 - People before hardware
 - Standardization, regularization, rule of law
 - Adjust to changing realities of “socialist market economy”
 - Adjust to changing geostrategic situation
 - No longer facing major Russian ground threat
 - Taiwan “splittism” constitutes major political threat
 - High likelihood of war with US in event of a Taiwan conflict
 - Rapidly changing military technology and military operational concepts (Revolution in Military Affairs)

- The most important component of Chinese military modernization: increasing levels of operational competence
 - Hardware is important, but not decisive
 - Individual competence

- Basic education
 - Professional military education
 - A career spent in a force dedicated to reform and improvement
 - Unit competence
 - More realistic, more demanding training
 - Systemic competence
 - More realistic appraisal of logistics needs
 - More effort to manage large, complex combat operations
 - More effort to develop doctrine, tactics, techniques, procedures for modern warfare
 - Effort to address large, systemic problems
 - Logistics
 - Mobilization
 - Command and control communications
 - Standardization of operational procedures
- What the PLA can do now that it could not do 15 years ago
 - Communicate effectively between services
 - Command and control large multi-service operations at the theater level
 - Deploy large forces in a timely manner across military region boundaries
 - Defend selected air space against mid-level threats (but not fully defend against US airpower)
 - Provide a serious challenge to individual US fighter aircraft
 - Effectively strike a large number of relatively small targets on Taiwan
 - Probably sufficient to ground the Taiwan air force and disrupt Taiwan command and control functions
 - Conduct rudimentary suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD) operations
 - Conduct effective battalion-sized amphibious landing operations
 - Conduct high-intensity attack against naval surface targets (but only at short/medium range)
- Things it could do 15 years ago, and remains able to do despite increasing difficulty
 - Survive a limited nuclear strike and conduct effective retaliation
 - Inflict serious damage on US forces in any major conflict
 - Inflict serious pain on Taiwan, and perhaps defeat it in the absence of US intervention
 - Defeat any land neighbor in a localized border conflict
- What the PLA still cannot do that it needs to do
 - Locate and track naval surface targets over the horizon
 - Defend its ships against sophisticated air and cruise missile attack
 - Conduct effective anti-submarine warfare; defend its ships and submarines against submarine attack

- Conduct and sustain large-scale, high-intensity, protracted air operations
 - Conduct real-time battle damage assessment and flexible targeting
 - Provide logistical support for a large force in protracted high-intensity combat operations beyond China's borders or across Taiwan Strait
 - Land large amphibious forces across mud flats on the west coast of Taiwan
- What it cannot presently do, and does not presently seek to do, but might in the future if strategic priorities change
 - Project and sustain a large force in combat operations more than a short distance from its own border
 - Invade and defeat any land neighbor
 - Intervene in military conflicts elsewhere in the world
 - Protect its own sea lines of communication
 - Conduct nuclear launch-on-warning retaliatory strikes (as opposed to survive-and-reconstitute)
- Impressive progress, but far yet to go
 - Overall educational levels still low – e.g., only 30% of officers have bachelor's degree
 - Professional military education still inadequate
 - stiff, rote, with inadequate emphasis on creativity
 - not enough places for everyone
 - one or two long courses during an officer's career, rather than many short courses – makes it hard to keep current
 - Some parts of military training still lacking
 - Large, sustained air operations
 - Anti-submarine warfare
- Major challenges the PLA faces in increasing its own operational competence (all well recognized by the PLA, but still daunting challenges)
 - The need for better trained enlisted soldiers, vs. the conscript system
 - The need for more versatile, more creative officers
 - The need for better legal underpinnings for mobilization and war preparations
 - The challenge of getting its officers and soldiers to internalize a different mode of war
 - The problem of being two major military revolutions behind the US – mechanization and informationization
 - But really, it's three revolutions: professionalization was the first, most fundamental revolution in US forces (restoration of professionalized military after Vietnam – see Scales, *Certain Victory*)