

## Book Reviews

*Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*

Edited by PHILLIP C. SAUNDERS, ARTHUR S. DING, ANDREW SCOBELL,  
ANDREW N. D. YANG, and JOEL WUTHNOW

Washington, DC: National Defense University, 2019

xi + 768 pp. \$22.99

ISBN 978-1-797-05190-1 doi:10.1017/S030574102000003X

Starting in late 2015 and continuing into 2016, Xi Jinping announced the most sweeping set of organizational changes in the history of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). Part of this major reorganization involved replacing the PLA's seven military regions with five theatre commands. Another key component abolished the PLA's four general departments (the General Staff Department, General Political Department, General Logistics Department and General Armaments Department) and transferred many of their functions to offices under the Central Military Commission (CMC). Other major changes included upgrading the strategic missile force to the level of a service and renaming it PLA Rocket Force, and creating two new organizations – the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF), established to take charge of the PLA's space, cyber and electronic warfare capabilities, and the PLA Joint Logistics Support Force. The reforms also included a 300,000-person reduction in the size of the PLA, an overhaul of China's professional military education (PME) system, and the elimination of a number of group armies and conversion of army divisions and some PLA Air Force (PLAAF) divisions to brigades. Subsequently, China placed the People's Armed Police (PAP) under the military command structure and subordinated the Coast Guard to the PAP. This sweeping reorganization of the PLA is aimed at helping to achieve the long-term vision of military transformation that Xi set forth at the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, when he called on the PLA to basically complete its modernization by 2035 and to transform itself into a world-class force by the middle of the century.

The definitive account of these reforms is *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA: Assessing Chinese Military Reforms*, a mammoth edited volume consisting largely of updated versions of papers originally presented at two conferences co-hosted by Taiwan's Council of Advanced Policy Studies (CAPS), National Defense University (NDU), and the RAND Corporation in 2016 and 2017. Easily the most comprehensive and detailed assessment of the reforms available to date, *Chairman Xi Remakes the PLA* not only catalogues the numerous changes to the organizational structure of the PLA, but also explores the strategic context for and the key drivers of the reforms, as well as the PLA's attempts to forge a more joint force, overhaul the services, centralize the authority of Xi and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over the PLA, and reshape the military's relationship with society. In doing so, the authors of the various chapters draw upon a wide range of primary sources, most notably Chinese-language books, journal articles and official media reports. These sources provide new insights into a number of topics central to the PLA reforms, including the role of organizational interests, restructuring of the services, civil–military integration and the military's relations with localities. The introduction and conclusion

provide essential context for the reforms as well as analysis of their implications. This is a particularly important contribution because of the length of the volume and the wide range of subjects covered in its 18 chapters.

The main takeaway from this indispensable account of the reforms is that Xi's sweeping organizational changes are intended to accelerate the PLA's drive to become a world-class military, which he views as key to achieving the larger strategic goal of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation." As this volume underscores, the latest reform of the PLA is also an area in which Xi has distinguished himself from his recent predecessors. Although the need for sweeping reforms has been clear since the 1990s, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao were unable or unwilling to push for the fundamental changes required to transform the PLA from a ground-force-dominated military with an outdated organizational structure to a more modern, joint and operationally capable fighting force. In contrast, Xi appears to be succeeding in leveraging his political power and an unrelenting anti-corruption campaign to remake the PLA, resulting in the most important reorganization in its 90-year history. The reorganization will have major implications for the United States and other countries. In particular, as Wuthnow and Saunders observe in the Introduction, although challenges remain, Xi's reformed PLA is likely to be better able to deter or intimidate potential adversaries, win future "informationized" wars, and protect Chinese interests in the region and beyond.

Given the detailed coverage of the reforms and insightful analysis of their drivers and implications, the potential audience for this volume is not limited to China scholars and PLA analysts. It should also be of interest to a wider range of scholars and analysts. The volume is also suitable for teaching in the fields of Chinese studies and security studies, particularly for China studies or regional studies courses with a focus on Chinese military modernization, and for security studies courses that cover military reorganization and reform efforts more generally and might benefit from comparing PLA reforms to military reorganizations in other countries.

MICHAEL CHASE

[chase@rand.org](mailto:chase@rand.org)

*China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status*

COURTNEY J. FUNG

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019

xix + 282 pp. £26.99

ISBN 978-0-19-884274-3 doi:10.1017/S0305741020000041

Chinese officials have long been sceptical of using the tools of the United Nations to pressure those accused of human rights violations. Sanctions and military interventions weaken the norm of sovereignty, a strong version of which Beijing relies on to reject foreign interference in its own affairs. As a veto-holding member of the UN Security Council, why then has China sometimes acquiesced to, or even supported, such pressure? In *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council*, Hong Kong University professor Courtney Fung argues that anxieties about the loss of status can help explain the puzzle. In doing so, she not only draws attention to an underappreciated motive of Chinese foreign policy, but also develops a sophisticated, and largely persuasive, theory of how and when status concerns encourage leaders to do the unexpected.