

## **The Chinese Military in National Security Policy-making**

Ching **Chang**\*

*ROC Society for Strategic Studies*

### **Abstract**

The political influence of the People's Liberation Army within the decision-making process of the People's Republic of China politics is persistently a focus of all sinologists. Nonetheless, the role actually played by the Chinese military in national policy-making is frequently overstated. The author of this paper would like to offer a perspective of this issue with certain aspects generally ignored by many China studies researchers. The author would like to scrutinize the involvement of the Chinese military in the national security policy-making from several different dimensions. What is the legitimate institution or mechanism for the People's Liberation Army leadership to participate in the overall national security policy-making? Whether a collective Chinese military perspective does exist in the process of the national security policy-making? Whether the military professional viewpoint may have the position against party leadership? How the service rivalry exposed out of the military may shape the national security policy? The actual influences owned by the Chinese military professionals on the national security policy can be identified through the efforts of observations from

angles listed above. The core issue of surveying the People's Liberation Army's authority on the national security policy may be the need to examine how the party leadership may effectively control the military professionals and its leadership. Whether the military professionals may only contribute their professionalism but never exercise their political aspirations during the security policy-making process is the key question that needs to be answered. The article would like to provide certain assessment on this aspect as its conclusion.

**Keywords:** *China, People's Liberation Army, national security policy, Chinese Communist Party*

## **1. Factors of the Chinese National Security Policy-making**

National security policy-making is a very popular topic for those who may have concern about politics, international relations or other related fields. Nonetheless, there are many factors that are contained within the process of national security policy-making.

National security was a concept originated by the United States after World War Two. It started from the military aspect and subsequently expanded to further cover other dimensions. Moreover, threats on the national security may not only come from origins other than nation-states, the traditional and major actors in the international community, but also other non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, criminal groups, domestic ethnic clans, religion branches or even establishments of the private sectors like the multinational corporations or other commercial communities as long as their objectives are against national policies and possess imminent threats to the nation. The range of national security threats may expand even to cover those natural disasters or other non-human factors affecting national security interests.

Different nations would have definitions for their own versions of national security concepts. Their coverage may include various dimensions: “There is no single universally accepted definition of national security.”<sup>1</sup> As we attempt to discuss the Chinese military in security policy-making for the moment, it is inevitably necessary to examine the “overall national security outlook” persistently addressed by the present Chinese political leadership. The overall national security outlook is a concept initially put forward by Xi Jinping ( 习近平 ) on April 15, 2014 at the first meeting of the PRC National Security Commission.<sup>2</sup>

It is necessary to note that the overall national security outlook was defined in a very broad scope by Xi as he personally chaired the first meeting of the PRC Central National Security Commission. Xi has specified a national security system covering eleven fields such as politics, territory, military, economy, culture, society, science and technology, information, ecology, nuclear and natural resources.<sup>3</sup> Frankly speaking, the scope of the national security matters can be very flexible. The coverage of issues may also be varied from state to state since different nations are facing their own specific strategic environment and their perceptions toward the national security challenges may also be altered accordingly.

The military may not be necessarily only involved in traditional security challenges. Employing armed forces to cope with non-traditional security challenges had already become more popular in recent years. Specific terms and military doctrines are also developed for tackling tasks originated from this non-traditional security threats.<sup>4</sup> We therefore should not be surprised that the Chinese military may also participate in many security tasks defined by their political leadership. Many aspects regarding the national security that the People’s Liberation Army forces are involved in can be very different from its Western

counterparts. We should also expect that the level of influences on the security policy decision-making that the Chinese military acts on can be varied from aspect to aspect and even from case to case. In other words, the PLA's policy influence on the national security matters should be fundamentally dynamic.

We also need to remind that the initial decision in the dimension of the national security for any specific event might not necessarily be the final conclusion. It may vary according to the substantial situations. The policy adaptation and adjustment is a frequent phenomenon in the actual national security practices. Again, this phenomenon may also prove the dynamic nature of the national security policy or decision-making process. All the policy-making processes are the reflections of political wrestling among various national security agencies or even all the public and private institutions involved in the specific cases. Regardless of the political institutions and the political cultures, the eventual national security decision-making is nothing but a realization of the interactions between these two elements.

Many previous efforts are already made for surveying the practices of the PRC's national security policies and decision-making. Among them, "Chinese national security decision-making: Processes and challenges" written by Yun Sun is an outstanding work published by the Brookings Institution in May 2013. *A study of the national security leadership system* ( 國家安全領導體制研究 ) written by Wang Xiaodong ( 王曉東 ) and published by the Current Affairs Publishing ( 時事出版社 ) in 2009 is a standard must-read text in Chinese for those who are interested in this dimension of contemporary China studies. Far earlier than these two publications, a journal article titled "The PLA and Chinese national security policy: Leaderships, structures, processes" has already been contributed by Michael D. Swaine and published by *The China Quarterly*. Swaine's efforts are popularly recognized by other

researchers working towards similar dimensions. In 2016, a research report with relatively minor scope on the Chinese national security and the People's Liberation Army was published by Rand Corporation after the overall national security outlook was eagerly advocated by Xi. The authors of this report titled "The PLA and China's rejuvenation: National security and military strategies, deterrence concepts, and combat capabilities" put focus on the purely military dimension. The same report also recommended readers to a reference published by Rand Corporation a year before known as "China, inside and out: A collection of essays on foreign and domestic policy in the Xi Jinping era" for understanding the domestic and foreign policy decision-making in the People's Republic of China. It proves that a linkage among the PRC's national strategy, security strategy, military strategy and the subsequent war fighting concepts was well perceived by the authors, and elements from domestic and foreign strategic environment naturally turn out to be the basis for the security calculus.

From all the texts already noted till now, we may clear identify that the Chinese national security policy and associated decision-making schemes are never a terra incognita for policy researchers. Indeed, much valuable information regarding the institutions, mechanisms, processes and particular individuals involved in the national security policy decision-making has been well recorded and analyzed by previous researchers. On the other hand, Beijing has also become much more willing to publicize its national security policies and concepts. Particularly, after Xi took over the leadership, it is obvious that the state and party mouthpieces are very eager to deliver his policy directives regarding the overall national security outlook concept. Many conclusions and directives regarding the national security policies are openly addressed after the meetings of the National Security Commission.

The transparency of the national security is theoretically improved significantly. Nonetheless, all these efforts seem fail to clarify the role of the Chinese military actually played in the PRC's national security policy decision-making process. What should be the basic logic behind the military involvement in the process? This is exactly what the author of this paper intends to examine and to argue in the following paragraphs. Instead of providing answers to this matter, the author would like to point out those issues beyond our apprehension at the moment. Perhaps, asking the right questions is much more valuable than giving answers in a reckless way.

## **2. The Identity of PLA in Policy Decision-making**

The most significant missing link of assessing the policy decision-making process regarding the military in the People's Republic of China is "Who is the People's Liberation Army"? Many researchers are frequently viewing the People's Liberation Army as one single identity. It is generally assumed that the Chinese military is a mechanism that may forge its own consensus since the general image of the military is a highly homogeneous professional group. All the pre-assumption of the Chinese military involved in the policy- or decision-making process is that the People's Liberation Army may exercise its influences to safeguard its individual organizational interests. Is this assumption totally true? Is there a possibility that the Chinese military may not necessarily have a consensus or even a firm stance towards certain issues but may only be following the will of its political masters? The perspectives shown by the Chinese military in the national security policy-making process that are a reflection of professionalism, or organizational interests or even political aspiration till now can only be a good question but with no answer yet. All the unsolved mysteries are

originated from a fundamental question: “Who is the People’s Liberation Army in the national security policy-making process of the People’s Republic of China?”

It is generally misperceived that there is only one voice in the military. In many cases, the military professionals are portrayed to be more faithful to their organizational interests than their commitment to the superior political directives or national goals. Nonetheless, are there always consensuses towards the national security issues at all time? How can the military personnel establish those consensuses on these matters? Will it be necessary to establish such consensuses or general perspectives around the low-rank military personnel before submitting the policy perspectives in the national level of security policy decision-making? There are many factors that are totally ignored as we simply label the military as basically homogeneous.

We also need to remind that compliance will also eliminate presence. If a certain institution always agrees with their peers or superiors in all cases, their perspectives will soon be totally ignored. The reason why we do need to be concerned with specific opinions from a particular institution is simply because this agency may express its disagreement on certain policy proposal and have the responsibilities of charging those assets and resources necessary to support the fulfillment of these policies. If an institution always unconditionally follow others’ perspectives but with no viewpoints of its own, we may conclude that this organization can be treated as totally insignificant since it has almost no influence at all.

Based on this hypothesis, we need to go back to the strategic culture or the military culture of “party commands the gun” (黨指揮槍) persistently emphasized by the Chinese Communist Party almost since its birth in 1920s. According to this principle, the Chinese Communist Party exercises the absolute leadership on the armed forces in various

periods of Chinese communist history. After establishing the People's Republic of China in 1949, the same code is retained till now. Most importantly, the possibility for professional differences with other peer administrative organizations does exist; yet, any perspective to reveal political aspiration of the military professional in the national security affairs should be well leashed and tightly gripped by the party apparatus within the People's Liberation Army, i.e., the political commissar system of the Chinese military.

We also need to remind that the utmost policy- and decision-making mechanism of the Chinese military, the Central Military Commission, is essentially a double-hatted committee under the one-party-dominated government and the party itself. It is very hard to identify the final conclusions regarding the national security policies as the reflection of the collective perspectives from the leadership of the military professionals, or, on the contrary, the professional advises granted by a party organization manned by certain party members with military professionalism. The ambiguity of the Central Military Commission identity may also further blur the true identity of the overall Chinese military involved in the national security policy decision-making of the People's Republic of China.

Another factor that may further confuse whether the Central Military Commission could have the capacity to represent the collective perspectives of the Chinese military professionals is that this highest-level policy- and decision-making mechanism is chaired by the civilian leadership. Different nations may have their own arrangement of political control or civilian supervision of the military. The Central Military Commission chaired by the civilian leadership is the Chinese style of superior oversight on the armed forces. Most of the time, the political figure who chairs the Central Military Commission in the mainland politics is the one who owns the fundamental power and the



final say of the policies in many cases. This arrangement may also reveal a simple fact that the military professionals may not have the chance to establish a final policy proposal without civilian leadership involvement but that is only achieved by the top brass. Again, this feature may return to the matter of the identity of the Chinese military. If there is no way to exclude civilian involvement in or even direction on all those seemingly People's Liberation Army's perspectives delivered to the supreme national security policy decision-making mechanism together with perspectives from other branches of the Chinese government for assessment or arbitration, then it is essentially very hard for us to judge the exact influence of the Chinese military on these aspects.

The possibility for the military professionals to challenge their political masters within the policy decision-making mechanism within the Central Military Commission is almost hard to assess since we may only get to know the final conclusions after the exact decisions were already made. Nonetheless, indication of openly criticizing the decisions already made by the Central Military Commission chaired by the civilian leadership seems never appear. Given the reality that the civilian leadership chairing the Central Military Commission may not have the appropriate military professionalism to dominate details in decision-making, we therefore may expect that the opinions of the military professionals should be well respected and considered.

One point that we should address here is that military professionalism is impossible to be the sufficient political capital for rebuking the directives of the political master, i.e. the civilian leadership of the Central Military Commission, in any dimension of decisions associated with the military affairs. Of course, it is hard to believe that the civilian leadership of the Central Military Commission may exercise micromanagement-style practices in trivial issues since the political master may not be necessarily needed to be concerned about such details

in policy decision-making. However, the civilian leadership may inevitably have the final say of the Central Military Commission's eventual policy proposals before delivering them to the higher level of the overall national security policy decision-making mechanism in the People's Republic of China.

It is necessary to note here that the military professionals may have a better chance to exercise their political influences only when they can secure personal loyalty from certain factions within the military community. Given the rigid internal control and supervision system generally conducted by the political commissar system, such an attempt to organize a personal connection network for influencing policies can be a suicidal act in the Chinese politics. Given the several cases of the People's Liberation Army's high-ranking officers facing disciplinary actions or even judiciary trials and punishments, regardless how influential these top brass were, no indication can prove that the authority of the civilian leadership within the Chinese military had ever been challenged in any circumstance.

Last but not the least, there is a very distinctive decision-making feature to indicate the tight policy control by the civilian leadership within the military. As for certain important issues, it is quite often to establish specific working group as the task force within the regular decision-making mechanism. Such a provisional arrangement can be viewed as a supplementary function or organization to support the existing institutions. Nonetheless, these ad hoc working groups or leading small groups, either provisional or institutional, associated with key policies are in general presided by the civilian leadership of the Central Military Commission. By such an institutional design, it is indeed to identify who is "the military" and separate the military perspectives from its civilian leadership in the overall policy decision-making process.

For the case like the national defense and military reform of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping personally chaired the Leading Group for the National Defence and Military Reform of the Central Military Commission (中央軍委深化國防與軍隊改革領導小組). This leading group drafted the Proposal of Deepening National Defense and Military Reform Overall Plan (深化國防與軍隊改革總體方案建議) as the mainframe roadmap for the Chinese defense reform task and submitted it to the Central Military Commission Standing Committee, which is again another institutionalized mechanism chaired by Xi himself. Finally, after this national security policy proposal was approved by the Central Military Commission Standing Committee, it was eventually reviewed and approved by the Political Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, once more another decision-making chaired by Xi Jinping. The subsequent result after the decision of the national policy was made is a practical plan for actual execution of the policy conclusions. The Implementation Plan for Administration and Command Structure Reform (領導指揮體制改革實施方案) submitted by the Leading Group for National Defence and Military Reform of the Central Military Commission was inspected and approved by the Central Military Commission Standing Committee in its routine meeting, which was still chaired by Xi, according to the party-approved proposal (Chang, 2016).

This is indeed a very unique decision-making process in national security affairs associated with the military organization. Nevertheless, it also revealed the fundamental fact that the “party commands the gun” principle is still firmly practiced by the politics of the People's Republic of China and Chinese Communist Party. The party and civilian leadership within the Central Military Commission almost totally eliminated the possibility to establish any pure military perspective.

The identity of the Chinese military becomes hard to be defined since there is no policy decision or policy proposal that may exclude the party direction or political leadership's direct influences. As long as the identity of the Chinese military could not be well defined and its distinctive separation from the party supervision and the civilian leadership involvement cannot be established, it is really very hard to assess the actual influence of the Chinese military towards the security policy-making in the People's Republic of China.

### **3. Possible Military Influences on Other National Security Aspects**

Apart from the traditional security dimensions such as territory, military and politics that the military would unavoidably get involved in, there are other dimensions also noted by Xi Jinping in his overall national security outlook such as economy, culture, society, science and technology, information, ecology, nuclear and natural resources that may also be associated with the Chinese military since the People's Liberation Army may either have the assets to cope with the potential challenge or is already being assigned tasks to help secure the national security of these dimensions.

As already noted above, it is very hard for the People's Liberation Army to form any collective consensus on national security policy by excluding the civilian leadership involvement or party supervision. Nonetheless, the Chinese military can still be very influential on security dimensions other than those traditional missions assigned to the People's Liberation Army through various approaches. These approaches are mainly established by personnel exchange, practical participation and institutional arrangements. It is very important to note that no matter how seriously the military had ever been committed to these aspects of the broadly defined national security, it is hard to believe that the

Chinese military may have the possibility to acquire the position of exercising the final say on any policy since the principle of “party commands the gun” already assured the party leadership and political control over the military.

There is much professionalism that exists in the Chinese military which may have the potential as the capital to construct the second career in public services or even private sectors. For instance, medical, judiciary, aviation, finance and engineering professionals would have the possibility to be transferred from their original military career to other professional fields associated with the national security matters. Especially, while these public or private institutions had accommodated discharged or retired military professionals to engage with the Chinese military for tackling the national security issues, whether the professionalism and practical military service experiences will become a factor to influence the policies and decisions though the level of their influences is really hard to reasonably assess. Although these former military professionals would not be directed by the military anymore, yet, their expertise is still a positive factor to implicitly represent military influences.

We also need to note that those paramilitary forces committed to social stability, a vital aspect of the overall national security outlook, are tightly associated with the Chinese military. Personnel exchange after leaving the regular military service is a well-known reemployment mechanism. Cadres of the People’s Armed Forces Department in various levels of local governments, state-owned enterprises and higher education institutions are manned by the retired People’s Liberation Army personnel. The Chinese paramilitary forces may include Armed Police, Militia, Reserve Service Forces and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.<sup>5</sup> Given the activities those paramilitary forces have been involved in and the significance of the national security contained

in those activities, we may well identify the extension of the influences from the Chinese military towards these dimensions. These paramilitary units have also contributed to defense education that is actively shaping the cultural aspect of national security. Coordinating the relationship between the military and local government may also positively harmonize the civil-military interactions, which is a vital factor of the national security calculus.

The space program of the People's Republic of China is closely associated with the People's Liberation Army though it is nominally directed by the China National Space Administration. Many key decisions regarding the space program such as the selection of astronauts as well as exploitation of Earth-Moon space for industrial development are openly directed and issued by the Central Military Commission.<sup>6</sup> The Chinese military has played a vital role in supporting all the activities of the space program, thus proving its significance in the dimensions of the national security on science and technology. Also, the People's Liberation Army is also retaining the partnership relationship with the defense industry community of the People's Republic of China. Features like military expenditures, research and development, weapons production and arms sales to foreign states all need the expertise provided by the Chinese military.<sup>7</sup> Many military personnel may have the possibility to be transferred to the defense industries to further contribute their expertise but are meanwhile extending the military influences towards this aspect implicitly. This connection makes the Chinese military have the opportunities to exercise its influences on the dimensions of economy, nuclear, science, and even technology aspects of the national security policies addressed by the overall national security outlook concept.

There is a section in the Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China known as the Department of Arms Control that is in charge

of issues such as international arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation, export control and global or regional security.<sup>8</sup> This department is also tightly associated with the Chinese military though its leadership is fundamentally professional diplomat. The professionalism generally held by the Chinese military personnel is the essential elements for the diplomats to conduct their assigned duties. The military strategy insisted by the People's Liberation Army is also the core factor for the Foreign Ministry officials to fulfill the international obligations noted by the arms control mechanism that the People's Republic of China had promised. The Chinese military obviously has significant influences on this aspect of national security policies basically out of its area of responsibility. The possibility for the military personnel to support the diplomatic function of this dimension is also expectable.

Many members of the Chinese military who had been involved in the intelligence operations may have the chance to join other public service department to engage with foreign states or any situations possibly undermining the national security. The typical cases are those who have joined the organizations for dealing with Taiwan affairs or issues related to the Hong Kong or Macao Special Administrative Regions. This again justifies that the military professionalism may have the possibility to continue its influences on the national security affairs through personnel exchange.

The second approach for the Chinese military to exercise its influences on national security either from the policy formulation or on the practical execution is based on its substantial involvements in national security operations. The Chinese military has adopted its assets to support many missions other than the traditional defense operations. Those non-traditional military functions may facilitate the People's Liberation Army authority to acquire a better position in the central government's national security policy formulation process. It is well-

known that the Chinese military and the paramilitary forces, particularly, the Armed Police Forces, shouldering the protection of key infrastructures such as transportation, communication, energy and water supply facilities is already a routine mission. Many forces with the expertise in engineering, territorial survey and communication that are committed to these function have acquired significant achievements. These forces are not only important in the dimension of social stability and national security but are also successfully shaping a positive social image for the military professionals.

Sometimes, those military forces stationed in the remote locations will contribute to the infrastructure construction tasks. The Chinese military plays a key role in supporting the effort of forestation, wetland protection and ecological preservation, which is the essential dimension also addressed by the overall national security outlook. To support these construction tasks and infrastructure facilitations is a vital task for the military to secure its relationship with local community. It is very important for the Chinese military to retain a harmonic interaction with the general public since traditionally, according to Mao's directive, the military is the fish and the people is the water. The mutually supportive relationship does help many communities in the remote areas to improve their living standard and leave the status of poverty. By so doing, the Chinese military enhances social stability and support the overall national security via an indirect approach. The fact that it is necessary for the Chinese military leadership to participate in the annual Central Economic Work Conference since it was held for the first time in 1994 may indicate the importance of the People's Liberation Army in the economy aspect of the national security policy.<sup>9</sup>

The Medical Corps and military hospital service system is another asset owned by the military to support broadly defined national security. These medical assets and facilities are not only serving the practical



medical services in rural areas and poor remote countryside but also coordinating with national medical system to eliminate epidemic diseases in order to guarantee social stability and contribute to national security. Apart from practicing its medical professionalism to support social stability and welfare, the Chinese military medical service system also works with those military higher education institutions, research establishments and forces with advanced technology expertise to take charge or to share tasks assigned in the national science and technology research projects. By so doing, the Chinese military has also substantially contributed to the science and technology aspects of the overall national security outlook. In addition, all the efforts of supporting national economic and social development as noted by the government white paper titled *The diversified employment of China's armed forces* may have significant implication for the broadly defined national security policy as well.<sup>10</sup>

Another popularly recognized aspect to which the Chinese military is actively committed is emergency rescue, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup> Unquestionably, all these endeavors contributed by the People's Liberation Army and other Chinese paramilitary forces may support the security dimension of the social aspect. As the Chinese military is engaging with these missions in overseas territories, it may also support national security in the dimension of politics and diplomacy though such an apprehension may not be necessarily well identified and accommodated into the overall national security outlook yet.

Actually, maintaining social stability in order to assure national security in the social dimension is another vital application of the Chinese military forces openly addressed by the People's Republic of China government. All the substantial achievements are well listed in the government white paper to indicate this function.<sup>12</sup> Chinese paramilitary

forces such as the militia also participate in the collective efforts together with the constable units to safeguard important transportation infrastructures like bridges, tunnels and railroads as already noted before; yet, all these tasks are supported by the Chinese regular military forces as part of their national defense missions contained in the national security functions.

In recent years, the People's Liberation Army Navy is very enthusiastically committed to overseas deployment that is basically supporting the diplomatic and political functions by fulfilling the United Nations Security Council resolutions. For instance, assisting the United States vessels to destroy the Syrian chemical weapons is a typical case (Perlez, 2013). Other than that, the Chinese communist navy vessels and air force aircrafts also attended as the platforms for retracting overseas Chinese during contingencies.<sup>13</sup> These civilian evacuation operations may also be defined as an extension of the national security coverage.

Of course, the People's Liberation Army Navy has also coordinated with other Chinese maritime law enforcement forces in various functions to safeguard national maritime interests. It is necessary to note that the People's Liberation Army Navy also owns certain utmost authority on oceanographic issues, as it is noted by the China Navy Hydrographic Office website:

According to the relevant rules and regulations of Surveying and Mapping of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Navy is in charge of the management of PRC basic hydrographic surveying and mapping. CHINA NAVY HYDROGRAPHIC OFFICE is the PRC's official hydrographic surveying and mapping organization and the only publishing house for nautical publications authorized by the government. The Navy has the specialized academy to train professionals in hydrographic, institute of hydrographic technology,

hydrographic surveying and research fleet, navigation publications press, and has the offices and agencies to sell nautical publications along the coastal cities of the mainland, Hongkong, and Tokyo of Japan. Currently, the Navy has officially published all kinds of Charts, Thematic Charts and Atlas including Navigational Chart, Harbor Chart, General Sea Area Chart, Fishery Chart and so on, regularly publishes Notice to Mariners and all kinds of nautical publications including Nautical Almanac, List of Lights, Sailing Directions, produces hundreds of paper charts and digital charts yearly and hundreds volumes of nautical publications which have been sold to many countries around the world.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, the influence of the Chinese military on this part of national security issues in many aspects can be undeniably identified.

Given all the activities associated with the national security aspects noted by the overall national security outlook persistently addressed by the Chinese political leadership directly involved by the People's Liberation Army or indirectly supported by the Chinese military, we may clearly recognize that the Chinese military would have certain level of influence on the policy decision-making regarding all these issues. However, the actual influences of the People's Liberation Army are hard to measure since we could not specifically identify the identity of the Chinese military by excluding effects caused by the party supervision and civilian leadership within the Central Military Commission.

Besides by way of the personnel exchange and substantial participation of the national security matters, we also need to remind that the Chinese military always have its traditional position in political participation process of the Chinese communist regime since the military has played a vital role in the nation-building process and subsequently acted as the essential element of sustaining internal stability in the

People's Republic of China. Members from the People's Liberation Army attending the National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is guaranteed by the actual practices of the People's Republic of China politics.

Although the military personnel presence in these meetings may signify that the political sphere of influence is firmly held, yet, as already mentioned before, it does not justify that the Chinese military may have its own policy position free from the party direction and civilian political leadership.

By the same token, the number of seats in the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party can be another indication of Chinese military political influences. Likewise, there are two seats of the Chinese communist politburo that are reserved for the Deputy Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Nevertheless, these two members are appointed simply to contribute their professionalism in the political decision-making process within the politburo, not to reflect their political preferences collectively decided by all the military personnel. Other party apparatuses such as the Secretariat of the Communist Party of China and the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection may sometimes recruit party members with military background. Some military members are frequently selected into the Central and Political and Legal Affairs Commission. However, such appointments are never regular and routine. It may more or less indicate that the influence from the military professionals is virtually limited within the party organization.

As for the military influence on the national security decision-making, we should point out that the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group, the National Security Affairs Leading Small Group and the National Security Commission of the Communist Party of China are the

major mechanisms for formulating the national security policy and exercising those associated decision-making processes. Members of the Chinese military leadership are directed to participate in these mechanisms; yet, the staff organization of these leading small groups and national security commission is mainly under the influences of professional diplomats and party bureaucracy.

Obviously, the Chinese military would have less influence to set the agenda for issues discussed within these mechanisms. It may reflect that the Chinese military is actually in a less favorable position in national security policy decision-making through these party apparatuses. Regardless of these mechanisms specifically addressing the national security matters, the final decision would still be achieved through the party decision-making system, i.e. the Politburo of the Chinese Communist Party. The Outline of the National Security Strategy is a directing document adopted by the Politburo of the Communist Party of China on January 23, 2015, indicating that the party leadership held a tight grip on the fundamental directives of the national security matters (Tiezzi, 2015). In such a process, the Chinese military influence and perspective have no chance to prevail in front of party leadership.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper has analyzed the identity of the Chinese military and the features of the People's Liberation Army in the national security matters of the People's Republic of China. The author would like to argue that the role played by the People's Liberation Army leadership within the PRC national security policy decision-making and the influences of the Chinese military are generally overstated. The politics of the People's Republic of China is mainly a one-party system that retains a traditional principle known as "party commands the gun"; the military therefore has

a very slim possibility to acquire policy choice and political maneuver spaces of its own.

Whether the Chinese military may play a vital role in executing the PRC national security policies is a question that does not need to be asked since the People's Liberation Army is openly participating in many activities with national security significance. What is the exact level of influence possessed by the Chinese military in the processes of PRC national security policy decision-making is a matter of perception and also a matter of judgment. Perhaps we could never have a consensus on this issue.

## Notes

- \* Dr Ching Chang (張競) is a researcher with long distinguished experiences in national security affairs. He served in the Republic of China Navy as a line officer for over a quarter of a century. Numerous lessons were acquired from various posts in his naval career. Particularly, a decade of sea duty service in which he has committed to different types of surface combatants allows him to grasp much valuable first-hand information and lessons that could never be gained from any academic arena. Further, as a graduate from the Republic of China Naval Academy (中華民國海軍軍官學校, 高雄 / Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, ROC), Naval Staff College of the US Naval War College and Naval Command College of the US Naval War College, Dr Chang received orthodox professional military education which serves to support his advancement in research on national security. Dr Chang has a diversified academic background comprised of a Bachelor's degree in navigation and maritime engineering granted by the Republic of China Naval Academy, a Master's degree in electrical engineering gained from the University of Colorado at Boulder in the United States, and a Doctorate in politics and international studies

conferred by the University of Hull in the United Kingdom. Apart from the posts in the naval fleet, Dr Chang also attained the position of staff officer at various levels in the defense hierarchy. With nobility granted by the defense authority of the Republic of China, Dr Chang has been selected as the teaching staff in the Chinese Naval Command and Staff College as well as the War College of the ROC National Defense University (國防大學, 桃園 / Taoyuan City, Taiwan, ROC). Dr Chang also owns a honor to be the speech writer for the Defense Ministers of the Republic of China and in charge of the Office of Policy Coordination for the Defense Ministers for two years. Dr Chang has concluded his military career with the rank of navy captain several years ago, thus acquired a privilege called the “Honorable Citizen of the Republic of China”, and was invited by the ROC Society for Strategic Studies (中華戰略學會, 台北 / Taipei, Taiwan, ROC) to be a research fellow. Further, Dr Chang is also an active columnist and TV commentator on political issues. <Email: [chingchang@hotmail.com](mailto:chingchang@hotmail.com)>

The progenitor of this paper was presented in the Fifth Global International Studies Conference held at the National Taiwan University, Taipei, on 2nd April 2017.

1. “Definitions” under “National security”, *Wikipedia*. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_security](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_security)> (data accessed time: 1200, February 27, 2017).
2. “Xi stresses national security education”, *Xinhuanet* (Xinhua News Agency), 14th April 2016. <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-04/14/c\\_135279444.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2016-04/14/c_135279444.htm)> (data accessed time: 1215, February 27, 2017).
3. “Commentary: China to follow specific national security strategy”, *Xinhuanet* (Xinhua News Agency), 16th April 2014. <[http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2014-04/16/c\\_133267984.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/indepth/2014-04/16/c_133267984.htm)> (data accessed time: 0900, February 28, 2017).

4. See, for example, *Foreign humanitarian assistance*, Joint Publication 3-29, 3rd January 2014, U.S. Department of Defense; also see *Disaster relief operations overseas: The military contribution*, Joint Doctrine Publication 3-52, Third Edition, November 2016, Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom.
5. “Paramilitary forces of China”, *Wikipedia*. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramilitary\\_forces\\_of\\_China](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paramilitary_forces_of_China)> (data accessed time: 1300, March 1, 2017).
6. “Chinese space program”, *Wikipedia*. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_space\\_program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_space_program)> (data accessed time: 1420, March 1, 2017).
7. “Defense industry and economic role of the PLA” under “Modernization of the People’s Liberation Army”, *Wikipedia*. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernization\\_of\\_the\\_People%27s\\_Liberation\\_Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modernization_of_the_People%27s_Liberation_Army)> (data accessed time: 1510, March 2, 2017).
8. The Department of Arms Control, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, <[http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjw\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/jks\\_665232/](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjw_663304/zzjg_663340/jks_665232/)> (data accessed time: 1700, March 2, 2017).
9. “Central Economic Work Conference”, *Wikipedia*. <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central\\_Economic\\_Work\\_Conference](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Economic_Work_Conference)> (data accessed time: 1800, March 2, 2017); please also see “Top Chinese cadres meet to plot economic course for 2017”, *South China Morning Post*, 14th December 2016 (reported by Liu Zhen). <<http://www.scmp.com/news/china/economy/article/2054610/top-chinese-cadres-meet-plot-economic-road-2017>> (data accessed time: 1920, March 2, 2017); and also see “會議成員” [conference members] under “中央經濟工作會議” [Central Economic Work Conference], 百度百科 (*Baidu encyclopedia*). <<http://baike.baidu.com/view/1293830.htm>> (data accessed time: 1940, March 2, 2017).
10. “IV. Supporting national economic and social development”, in: *The diversified employment of China’s armed forces*, the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, April 2013, Beijing.



[http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/gfbps/Document/1435337/1435337\\_4.htm](http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/gfbps/Document/1435337/1435337_4.htm)  
(data accessed time: 1400, March 3, 2017).

11. “Participating in emergency rescue and disaster relief”, in: *The diversified employment of China’s armed forces*, the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, April 2013, Beijing. [http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/gfbps/Document/1435337/1435337\\_5.htm](http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/gfbps/Document/1435337/1435337_5.htm) (data accessed time: 1420, March 3, 2017).
12. “Maintaining social stability”, in: *The diversified employment of China’s armed forces*, the State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, April 2013, Beijing.
13. “PLA Navy sends warship to safeguard Libya evacuees”, *South China Morning Post*, 26th February 2011 (reported by Minnie Chan). <https://www.scmp.com/article/739196/pla-navy-sends-warship-safeguard-libya-evacuees> (data accessed time: 1500, March 3, 2017).
14. *China Hydrography Official Website*, China Navy Hydrographic Office. [http://hydro.ngd.gov.cn/Default\\_e.aspx](http://hydro.ngd.gov.cn/Default_e.aspx) (data accessed time: 1700, March 3, 2017).

## References

- Chang, Ching (2016). The nature of the PRC’s national defense and military reform. *CIMSEC*, 8th March 2016. Washington, D.C.: Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC). <http://cimsec.org/nature-prcs-national-defense-military-reform/22675> (data accessed time: 2000, March 1, 2016).
- Chase, Michael S., Cortez A. Cooper III, Keith Crane, Liisa Ecola, Scott W. Harold, Timothy R. Heath, Bonny Lin, Lyle J. Morris and Andrew Scobell (2015). *China, inside and out: A collection of essays on foreign and domestic policy in the Xi Jinping era*. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation.

- Disaster relief operations overseas: The military contribution*, Joint Doctrine Publication 3-52, Third Edition, November 2016. Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom.
- Foreign humanitarian assistance*, Joint Publication 3-29, 3rd January 2014, U.S. Department of Defense.
- Heath, Timothy R., Kristen Gunness and Cortez A. Cooper III (2016). *The PLA and China's rejuvenation: National security and military strategies, deterrence concepts, and combat capabilities*. Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation.
- Perlez, Jane (2013). Chinese navy to aid U.S. ship destroying Syrian chemical weapons. *The New York Times* (*Sinosphere: Dispatches from China* blog), 20th December 2013. <[https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/20/chinese-navy-to-aid-u-s-ship-destroying-syrian-chemical-weapons/?\\_r=0](https://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/20/chinese-navy-to-aid-u-s-ship-destroying-syrian-chemical-weapons/?_r=0)> (data accessed time: 1345, March 3, 2017).
- Sun, Yun (2013). Chinese national security decision-making: Processes and challenges. *CNAPS Visiting Fellow Working Paper*, May 2013, Washington D.C.: Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution.
- Swaine, Michael D. (1996). The PLA and Chinese national security policy: Leaderships, structures, processes. *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 146 (Special Issue: *China's military in transition*), June 1996, pp. 360-393.
- Tiezzi, Shannon (2015). China's National Security Strategy. *Pakistan Defence*, 24th January 2015. <<https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/chinas-national-security-strategy.355452/>> (data accessed time: 1200 March 4, 2017).
- Wang Xiaodong (王曉東) (2009). 國家安全領導體制研究 [a study of the national security leadership system]. Beijing: 時事出版社 (Current Affairs Press).

*Culture, Sustenance and  
Development*

