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China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy: *The Science of Military Strategy*  
from 2001 and 2013

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# **China's Changing Approach to Military Strategy: *The Science of Military Strategy* from 2001 and 2013**

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Draft of a chapter to appear in Joe McReynolds, ed., *The Evolution of China's Military Strategy* (Washington, DC: Brookings *forthcoming*)

## **Abstract**

The 2013 publication of the *Science of Military Strategy* is an essential source for understanding how China's thinking about military strategy is changing. To examine how China's approach to military strategy is changing, this chapter compares the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* with the 2001 edition. The chapter reaches two conclusions. First, the 2013 edition represents an evolution of China's approach to thinking about military strategy. It does not contain a description of a revolutionary new approach to China's military strategy. Instead, it examines changes in China's security environment through traditional concepts that have underpinned the PLA's approach to strategy, such as "active defense," by modifying or adjusting these ideas based on new circumstances. Second, a main theme throughout the text is how new and expanding interests overseas, along with worldwide advances in military technology and the posture of potential adversaries, are expanding the battlespace in which the PLA will need to operate and the importance of greater strategic depth. Thus, much of the book can be interpreted as examining how the PLA should respond to these new conditions based on its traditional approach to strategy.

I thank Dennis Blasko, Fiona Cunningham, David Finkelstein, Eric Heginbotham and Joe McReynolds for helpful comments and suggestions.

## Introduction

In November 2015, Xi Jinping announced a series of sweeping and unprecedented organizational reforms designed to improve the PLA's military effectiveness. These reforms constitute the most significant restructuring of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) since the general staff system and military region structure were adopted in the early 1950s.<sup>1</sup> The broad scope of the reforms highlights China's commitment to developing a modern and capable military that matches its status as one of the largest economies in the world. The reforms also underscore the importance of understanding China's approach to military strategy, which may help illuminate how a restructured PLA will be employed. Specifically, the reforms beg questions about the content of China's military strategy. What wars might China fight? How would it fight them? What capabilities do Chinese strategists believe are needed to win such wars?

Definitive answers to questions about China's military strategy are hard to find, especially when key Chinese-language sources on the topic are not readily available in English. Although China issues biannual defense white papers, and Chinese leaders give speeches that sometimes address questions of military strategy, important military topics are discussed in only a broad and general way. In Chinese-language sources, however, PLA officers and scholars publish a wide range of opinions on military affairs, but generally they speak only for themselves and will often disagree strongly with one another on questions of strategy. When individuals within these debates are selectively translated into English, they can be mistakenly viewed as representing an authoritative view of the PLA. The quintessential example comes from a 1999 book, *Unrestricted Warfare*.<sup>2</sup> Despite being authored by two senior colonels from the PLA Air Force who specialized in political work and not strategic analysis, it was translated into English with the subtitle "China's Master Plan to Destroy America," and was erroneously understood as such by many within the Western media and policymaking communities. (The actual subtitle of the Chinese original was "Two Air Force Senior Colonels on Scenarios for War and the Operational Art in an Era of Globalization.")

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of the reforms and their potential significance, see David M. Finkelstein, *Initial Thoughts on the Reorganization and Reform of the PLA*, CNA China Studies, January 15, 2016; Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 1)," *China Brief*, February 4, 2016; Kenneth Allen, Dennis J. Blasko, and John F. Corbett, "The PLA's New Organizational Structure: What is Known, Unknown and Speculation (Part 2)," *China Brief*, February 23, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare: Two Air Force, Senior Colonels on Scenarios for War and the Operational Art in the Era of Globalization*, [超限战: 两个空军大校对全球化时代与 战法的想订], (Beijing: PLA Literature Press, 1999).

Within this context, the 2013 publication of the *Science of Military Strategy* is an essential source for understanding how China's thinking about military strategy is changing.<sup>3</sup> Replacing an edition published twelve years earlier, the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* reveals how some of the PLA's top strategists assess China's security environment, how military force should be used to secure China's interests, and what kinds of military capabilities the PLA should develop in the future. Analyzing and disseminating the content of this edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* is important for deepening understanding of China's approach to military strategy.

To examine how China's approach to military strategy is changing, this chapter compares the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* with the 2001 edition. The chapter reaches two conclusions. First, the 2013 edition represents an evolution of China's approach to thinking about military strategy. It does not contain a description of a revolutionary new approach to China's military strategy. Instead, it examines changes in China's security environment through traditional concepts that have underpinned the PLA's approach to strategy, such as "active defense," by modifying or adjusting these ideas based on new circumstances. Second, a main theme throughout the text is how new and expanding interests overseas, along with worldwide advances in military technology and the posture of potential adversaries, are expanding the battlespace in which the PLA will need to operate and the importance of greater strategic depth. Thus, much of the book can be interpreted as examining how the PLA should respond to these new conditions based on its traditional approach to strategy.

This chapter first reviews how to read or interpret books on military strategy published as part of the PLA's professional military literature. Importantly, the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* does not contain China's official military strategy or its military strategic guidelines (军事战略方针), nor does it contain a detailed discussion of the PLA's current operational doctrine. Instead, it conveys the views of strategists at the Academy of Military Science (军事科学研究院, or AMS), an organization that houses some of the PLA's most important military thinkers, some of whom play a much more direct role in the development of China's military strategy than their counterparts do in Western military educational institutions. The chapter then examines the key differences between the 2001 and 2013 editions of the *Science of Military Strategy*. Overall, the 2013 edition is more practical and applied (and thus less theoretical and conceptual) than the 2001 edition, with a heavy emphasis on the "system of military power with Chinese characteristics" and key capabilities that China needs to develop in the coming decades to defend its territory and interests. The chapter then examines new concepts introduced in the 2013 edition that were absent or downplayed in the 2001 edition, which are linked to the expansion of the battlespace and need for greater strategic depth. These

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<sup>3</sup> Shou Xiaosong, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy (Zhanlue Xue)* [战略学], (Beijing: PLA Press, 2013). Hereafter cited as SMS 2013.

concepts are forward defense, strategic space, effective control, and strategic posture. The conclusion discusses ways in which future research using the 2013 edition can help to deepen understanding of China's approach to military strategy.

## How to Read Chinese Writings on Military Strategy

The 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* represents the apex of the PLA's professional military literature on the study of war. China's approach to military science divides the study of war into the three levels of strategy, campaigns, and tactics. Although not widely used in Western militaries, the phrase "science of strategy" is a term of art within the PLA.<sup>4</sup> Publications with the title "science of strategy" examine either overall military strategy or strategy for the services.<sup>5</sup> The PLA's own glossary of military terms defines the science of strategy as "the discipline of studying the overall situation and rules of war, national defense, and army building."<sup>6</sup> As a result, the purpose of such books is to improve understanding of the characteristics of war at any point time and the associated implications for how such wars should be prevented or fought, also known as "strategic guidance" (战略指导).

To date, research institutes associated with the PLA have published five books with the same title of *Science of Military Strategy*. The Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) has published three editions of the *Science of Military Strategy*, in 1987, 2001 and 2013.<sup>7</sup> The Deputy Commandant of AMS led the drafting of the 1987 volume, while the AMS Department of Military Strategy Studies authored the 2001 and 2013 editions.<sup>8</sup> AMS has also published two textbooks on the science of military strategy, in 2001 and 2013, whose content closely resembles the 2001 and 2013 editions. The PLA's National Defense University (国防大学, or NDU) has

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<sup>4</sup> Books published in China with the character "xue" (学) refer to the study of a subject. For example, "shuxue" (数学) is mathematics or the study of numbers. "Zhanlue xue" (战略学) is thus the study of strategy and, in a military context, the study of military strategy.

<sup>5</sup> On services, see, for example, Dai Jinyu, ed., *The Science of Air Force Strategy* [空军战略学] (Beijing: NDU Press, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Junshi kexue yuan, ed., *Military Terminology of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* [中国人民解放军军语], (Beijing: Academy of Military Science Press [internal circulation], 2011), p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> SMS 2013; Gao Rui, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学] (Beijing: Academy of Military Science Press [internal circulation], 1987); Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi [彭光谦、姚有志], eds., *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学] (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> In the past fifteen years, this department has been called the strategic studies department, the war theory and strategic studies department, and military strategy studies department.

separately published two editions of the *Science of Military Strategy*, in 1999 and 2015.<sup>9</sup> The Deputy Commandant of the PLA's NDU supervised the drafting of both volumes, with specific chapters authored by individual scholars. In addition, the PLA's NDU has published closely related books on military strategy, such as the 2007 *Theory of Military Strategy*.<sup>10</sup> The AMS editions are authoritative because they play a direct role in the formulation of the PLA's strategy and operational doctrine, while the NDU editions are authoritative because they are edited by one of the organization's top two leaders. Only one edition of these books has been translated into English. In 2005, AMS published an English translation of its 2001 edition, which is one reason why this edition is most widely known and widely used by those outside China.

The primary audience for these books are officers in the PLA, not foreign observers interested in China's military affairs. The books are often used in graduate courses at both AMS and NDU, though the edition can vary by the institution and by the instructor. The purpose of assigning these books is to teach officers in the PLA how to think about strategy and strategic issues. In this way, such books can indirectly influence the formulation of China's military strategy.

Although these volumes examine military strategy, they do not contain China's military strategic guidelines, China's official military strategy, or the PLA's military doctrine more broadly. The military strategic guidelines (军事战略方针) are introduced in internal speeches by China's top party or military leaders, usually at an enlarged meeting of the Central Military Commission. Nine of these guidelines have been issued since 1949 and they most closely approximate China's national military strategy.<sup>11</sup> The publication of the AMS editions of the *Science of Military Strategy*, however, significantly lags behind the introduction of new strategic guidelines. The 2001 edition, for example, was published eight years after the 1993 guidelines, while the 2013 edition was published nine years after the adjustment of the strategic guidelines in 2004. High-level authoritative statements of China's military strategy based on the guidelines are usually contained in the biannual white papers on national defense. In fact, the 2015 white paper focused extensively on military strategy.<sup>12</sup> Likewise, in some contexts, a recent volume on

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<sup>9</sup> Wang Wenrong, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学] (Beijing: NDU Press, 1999); Xiao Tianliang, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* [战略学], (Beijing: NDU Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Fan Zhenjiang and Ma Baoan, eds., *On Military Strategy* [军事战略论], (Beijing: NDU Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed study of China's strategic guidelines, see M. Taylor Fravel, *Active Defense: Explaining the Evolution of China's Military Strategy* (book manuscript under advance contract with Princeton University Press). The most recent guideline adopted in 2014, see M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Military Strategy: 'Winning Local Informationized Wars,'" *China Brief*, Vol. 15, No. 13 (2015), pp. 3-6.

<sup>12</sup> China's Military Strategy [中国的军事战略] State Council Information Office [中华人民共和国国务院新闻办公室], May 29, 2015. In previous research a decade ago on the 1999 NDU Science of Military Strategy, I overstated the degree to which such volumes are authoritative and reflect official military strategy. See M. Taylor Fravel, "The Evolution of China's Military Strategy: Comparing the 1987 and 1999 Editions of *Zhanlue Xue*," in David M.

national defense and military modernization published in a series of training materials for party cadres may come closer to offering an authoritative statement on specific aspects of current military strategy than recent editions of the *Science of Military Strategy*.<sup>13</sup> Finally, China does not have a concept of military doctrine directly analogous to that used by Western militaries, but what Western observers might view as doctrine is codified in documents such as campaign or operational outlines (战役作战纲要) or combat regulations (作战条令). These documents, which outline how campaigns or specific operations should be conducted, are classified as secret and not openly circulated.

Even though the various editions of the *Science of Military Strategy* do not reflect China's official military strategy, military strategic guidelines, or military doctrine, they do highlight the views of many of the PLA's leading strategists, some of whom are involved in the formulation of strategy or operational doctrine. In the case of the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy*, it was authored collectively by the Department of Military Strategy at AMS. AMS is one of the two most important research institutes in the PLA and reports directly to the Central Military Commission (CMC). Historically, this department has played an important role in assessments of China's security environment and especially China's assessment of the "shape" or "form" of war (战争形态) at any point in time. Led by Major General Shou Xiaosong (寿晓松), the writing team for the 2013 edition included thirty-five individuals. Major General Shou joined the PLA in 1969, serving in the former Lanzhou Military Region's 61<sup>st</sup> Division before moving to AMS in 1981.<sup>14</sup> Although the strategy department does not speak or write on behalf of the PLA as an institution, their views are quite influential within the PLA and should be taken seriously by outsider observers seeking to better understand China's approach to military strategy. Books like the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* are thus informative and illuminating but not completely authoritative or definitive statements of official strategy such as those contained in classified documents.<sup>15</sup>

A final point to note is the timing of the drafting process for the 2013 edition. Although published in December 2013, more than a year into Xi Jinping's leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the concepts and formulations (提法) in the volume reflect mostly

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Finkelstein and James Mulvenon, eds., *The Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army* (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, 2005), pp. 79–100.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang Yang, ed., *Accelerate and Promote National Defense and Armed Forces Modernization* [加快推进国防和军队现代化], (Beijing: People's Press, 2015). The chief compiler for this volume was General Zhang Yang, Director of the General Political Department. Scholars from the National Defense Policy Research Center at AMS played a role in the drafting of this volume. Individuals from the same center also participate in the drafting of China's biennial white papers on defense.

<sup>14</sup> “寿晓松,” *Baidu Baike*, [accessed March 15, 2016], <http://baike.baidu.com/view/1183279.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Also, expertise in the strategy department is not evenly distributed across all areas in the volume. For example, none of the authors listed are recognized experts in either nuclear strategy or cyber strategy.



those developed in the Hu Jintao era. The decision to draft a new edition was made in 2010 and the actual drafting occurred in 2011 and 2012. In December 2012, a meeting held to review the draft that resulted in several changes and the AMS leadership finally approved the final draft in April 2013.<sup>16</sup> Although one can find references to Xi Jinping's formula of a "strong army," the text should not be viewed as representing Xi's own thoughts or influence on military affairs and strategy. Instead, it reflects the culmination of developments in PLA thinking about strategy during the period of Hu Jintao's leadership of the CCP.<sup>17</sup>

### **Key Differences between the 2001 and 2013 Editions**

Although this chapter emphasizes the differences between the 2001 and 2013 editions of the *Science of Military Strategy*, an important similarity must be emphasized at the outset that underscores the PLA's evolutionary approach to thinking about military strategy. This similarity is the shared embrace of China's foundational strategic concept of "active defense" (积极防御). The concept of active defense in Chinese strategic thought can be traced back to the 1930s and has been incorporated into each military strategic guideline since 1949.<sup>18</sup> The essence of active defense is that China adopts a strategically defensive posture, in which China will not "fire the first shot" but will use offensive actions to achieve defensive goals. Other important elements of active defense include seeking to deter war, if possible, and mobilizing national support under the idea of "People's War" (人民战争).<sup>19</sup>

The authors of the 2013 edition make clear that active defense remains the foundation for thinking about China's military strategy. The book describes active defense as "the overall master guide for planning and guiding the development and use of armed forces with war as the core."<sup>20</sup> The book then identifies several components of the idea's "basic spirit," the most important of which is "adhering to the position of self-defense and upholding striking after the

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<sup>16</sup> On the drafting, see SMS 2013 p. 275.

<sup>17</sup> Herein lies one of the central challenges of understanding the evolution of China's military strategy: even somewhat authoritative Chinese publications often take years to prepare, and then additional time elapses before Western analysts of the PLA (many of whom do not read Chinese) begin to integrate the new materials into their assessments. This time lag of years complicates efforts at mutual strategic understanding in what is arguably the world's most important bilateral national security relationship.

<sup>18</sup> On the evolution of China's military strategic guidelines, see Fravel, *Active Defense*.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed review of active defense, see Dennis Blasko, "The Evolution of Core Concepts: People's War, Active Defense, and Offshore Defense, in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Travis Tanner, eds., *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Press, 2014), pp. 81–128.

<sup>20</sup> SMS 2013, p. 42.

enemy has struck” (严守自卫立场, 坚持后发制人). The book then invokes Mao’s statement that “We will not attack unless we are attacked; if we are attacked, we will certainly counterattack.” Other components highlighted by the book include combining strategic defense with offense at the tactical and operational levels, preventing or containing war if possible, and the role of People’s War.<sup>21</sup>

The shared embrace of active defense establishes the context for examining the differences between the 2001 and 2013 editions, including the definition of military strategy, emphasis on force development, descriptions of future wars, emphasis on functional domains and its prescriptive focus. These differences can be summarized as 1) a broader definition of military strategy, 2) a much more practical and applied focus, 3) a shift in the military conflicts China will face, 4) the role of the functional domains of nuclear, space, and cyber, 5) a forward-looking perspective and emphasis on advocacy, and 6) challenging the dominance of the ground forces.

The first difference between the two books is in their definition of military strategy itself. The 2001 edition defined strategy narrowly as “planning and guiding the ‘overall situation of war.’”<sup>22</sup> The 2013 edition, however, contains a much broader definition of military strategy as the “overall planning and guidance for the development and employment of armed forces, which take war as the core.”<sup>23</sup> This broader definition of strategy is also somewhat ironic, as it mirrors the definition from the NDU’s 1999 edition that scholars from AMS criticized at the time as being overly broad and not focused enough on the essence of military strategy or how to fight wars.<sup>24</sup>

The 2013 edition’s broader definition of strategy carries several implications. First, it expands the scope of strategy beyond a narrower focus on only how to wage war. Instead, it addresses strategic planning and guidance for military forces in peacetime, including deterrence actions, crisis management and control, and non-war actions, such as peacekeeping and disaster relief. In this way, the definition of strategy in the 2013 edition reflects the non-war goals for developing and employing military forces, especially those that were raised as part of the PLA’s “New Historic Missions” (新历史使命) in the Hu Jintao era.<sup>25</sup> In particular, the 2013 edition

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<sup>21</sup> SMS 2013, pp. 48–50.

<sup>22</sup> Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, eds., *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学] (Beijing: Military Science Press, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> “对以战争为核心武装力量建设与运用全局的筹划指导.” See SMS 2013, p.4.

<sup>24</sup> Yao Youzhi and Zhao Dexi, “The Broadening, Conservation and Development of ‘Strategy,’” [‘战略’的繁华, 守恒与发展], *China Military Science*, No. 4 (2001), pp. 120–127.

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the new historic missions, see Daniel Harnett, “The ‘New Historic Missions’: Reflections on Hu Jintao’s Military Legacy,” in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Travis Tanner, eds., *Assessing the People’s Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Press, 2014), pp. 31–80; M. Taylor Fravel, “Economic Growth, Regime Insecurity, and Military Strategy: Explaining the Rise of Noncombat Operations in China,” *Asian Security*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2011), pp. 177–200.

identifies deterrence actions and non-war military actions as two of the three “basic methods of using military power” along with actual warfighting. In other words, the 2013 edition identifies non-combat uses of military power as equal to warfighting. Second, it focuses more explicitly on force development (建设), examining the kinds of capabilities that the PLA should have in the future and how these forces should be organized. The 2001 edition did not address force development, while the 2013 edition includes one chapter on how to develop a “military power system” (军事力量体系) and another chapter that examines the force development goals for each of the services.

A second difference is the thematic orientation. Although the 2001 edition had a strong theoretical focus, the 2013 edition largely ignores questions of how to conceptualize strategy and is much more practical and applied. As noted in its preface, the 2013 edition “does not rigidly adhere to the style and content of the two previous editions of the *Science of Military Strategy* and does not think grandiosely or attend to every aspect.”<sup>26</sup> Instead, the goal of the new edition is to “grasp firmly the major strategic issues of our military’s development and employment at the new stage of the new century.”<sup>27</sup> Later, the preface notes that the book “insists on combining theory and practice so that it has strategic height, theoretical depth and *strong practical focus* (强烈的现实针对性), and can theoretically explain and answer the major issues for the strategic guidance of our army under the new situation” [emphasis added].<sup>28</sup>

One consequence of this difference in orientation is that analysts must be somewhat cautious about automatically interpreting any particular omission of content from the 2001 edition in the 2013 edition as reflecting a change in Chinese thinking. In recent years, for example, each edition of China’s biannual defense white paper has adopted a specific thematic emphasis, which resulted in some outside observers incorrectly speculating at the time that policies going unmentioned in a given edition (such as China’s “no first use” nuclear policy) were perhaps being abandoned. When analyzing successive editions of important PLA texts, an absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence.

The length and organization of the two volumes reflects the practical orientation of the 2013 edition. The 2013 edition is about forty percent shorter in length than the 2001 edition. The 2001 edition endeavored to produce a detailed theoretical framework for conceptualizing all the dimensions of military strategy, while the 2013 edition avoids such a comprehensive examination and instead stresses the nature of the threats and wars that China will face, the operations and actions that should be conducted in response to those threats, and the force development required to enable those actions. Reflecting these differences, the 2001 edition

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<sup>26</sup> SMS 2013, preface 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

contained chapters on strategic decision-making, war preparations, war control, strategic deterrence, principles for strategic actions, strategic offense, strategic defense, strategic maneuver, strategic air raids and counter-air raids, strategic information operations, and strategic support. By contrast, the 2013 edition lacks chapters that cover these topics, with the sole exception of a chapter on strategic guidance for military deterrence actions.

Likewise, the two editions differ in their level of detail regarding the “form of warfare” (战争形态). The 2001 edition contains three chapters to the subject, reviewing the characteristics of high-tech local wars. The 2013 edition, however, devotes only part of one chapter to these same issues under the updated conceptual framework of “informatized” local wars.<sup>29</sup> The 2013 edition also examines topics not covered or not covered in detail in the 2001 edition, including the functional domains of nuclear, space and cyber, strategy for the services and theaters of operation (战区) as well as new concepts discussed later in this chapter.

A third difference is how the 2013 edition describes the future wars that China may face. To start, the portrayal of China’s security environment in the 2013 edition can only be described as dim, hostile, and basically zero-sum. In particular, the book identifies five challenges to China’s peaceful development. The first is that “Western nations led by the United States carrying out strategic encirclement against our country,” listing everything from U.S. efforts to integrate China into the existing (U.S.-led) international order to the rebalance and Air-Sea Battle as policies that treat China as America’s main adversary.<sup>30</sup> Another threat is “increasing resistance to [China’s] expanding national interests,”<sup>31</sup> with the authors arguing that Western monopolies control the majority of the world’s natural resources and that the United States controls the world’s major strategic channels (通道). Likewise, deep sea, polar, outer space and cyber areas where China has growing interests are described as having been seized decisively by other great powers, constricting the expansion of China’s interests.<sup>32</sup> Other challenges include “increasing security risks and dangers” in China’s periphery, obstacles to Taiwan’s unification, and growing domestic instability. In addition, the 2013 edition notably contains numerous direct or implied references to the United States as China’s chief adversary (对手), while similar references were much less common in the 2001 edition.

The 2001 edition only briefly describes the specific kinds of wars that China might face in the future. Specifically, it refers to the possibility of a local war of invasion and a war over

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<sup>29</sup> For more information on the PLA’s use of the “informatization” concept, see Joe McReynolds and James Mulvenon, “The Role of Informatization in the People’s Liberation Army under Hu Jintao,” in Roy Kamphausen, David Lai and Travis Tanner, eds., *Assessing the People’s Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Carlisle, PA: Army War College Press, 2014), pp. 207–256.

<sup>30</sup> SMS 2013, p. 79.

<sup>31</sup> SMS 2013, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Taiwan's unification. By contrast, the 2013 edition outlines four kinds of potential conflicts, including not only a large-scale invasion of China or a war over Taiwan, but also conflicts over disputed territories or instability in neighboring states along with non-war actions such as counter-terrorism or sea-lane protection. In addition, the book offers an overall judgment about the key features of China's more complicated security environment. The book stresses the importance of the eastern and maritime directions, the role of new functional domains such as space and the electromagnetic spectrum, and the possibility of operations beyond China's borders over the traditional western and land directions and in traditional domains. Likewise, given ongoing disputes in the South and East China Seas, the book assesses that the most likely kind of war for China is "a limited military conflict in the maritime domain," while the most important war to prepare to wage "is a relatively larger and high intensity local war under nuclear conditions in the maritime direction."<sup>33</sup> This characterization of China's future war preparation goals significantly elevates the importance of the maritime domain when compared with the 2001 edition, and reflects the PLA's shifting budgetary and force development priorities over that time period.

A fourth difference is the emphasis in 2013 edition on the functional domains of nuclear, space, and computer networks. Nuclear likely received greater attention in the 2013 edition because China has become much more open in relative terms to discussing nuclear issues, including the official discussions of China's nuclear policy and strategy in the white papers as well as publications by individual Chinese scholars, both military and civilian.<sup>34</sup> The space and network domains, however, were not nearly as prominent as strategic concerns when the 2001 edition was being drafted and were also areas where China at the time lacked the sort of substantial military capabilities that it possessed in the nuclear domain. The 2013 edition emphasizes how modern war is now "five dimensional" (五维一体), characterized by contests for supremacy in the ground, sea, air, space, and information domains, with the characteristics of these domains and the interconnections among them carrying major implications for force structure as well as command and control.

A fifth difference is that the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* is much more forward-looking than the 2001 edition. The 2013 edition contains many sections where the book is clearly making suggestions and offering the collective advice of AMS's military strategy department regarding China's future military strategy. For this reason, the 2013 edition is fascinating to read and offers much clearer insights into how the PLA's leading strategic thinkers envision the relationship between ways, means, and ends. Yet for the same reason, the 2013 cannot be viewed as representing China's current military strategy, though some of the recommendations may be

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<sup>33</sup> SMS 2013, p. 100.

<sup>34</sup> For an example of research based on these new sources, see Fiona S. Cunningham and M. Taylor Fravel, "Assuring Assured Retaliation: China's Nuclear Posture and U.S.-China Strategic Stability," *International Security*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Fall 2015), pp. 7-50.

adopted as China adjusts its strategy in the future. Likewise, as the book was drafted by members of the PLA and recommends many changes that all involve enhancing the PLA's capabilities, it unsurprisingly helps the PLA to advocate for continued high rates of increases in China's military budget despite an overall slowdown in the civilian economy.

A final difference is how much the content of the 2013 edition challenged the existing organizational structure of the PLA at the time it was written. The volume attacks many of the traditional sacred cows of the PLA, starting with the dominance of the ground forces and all the institutional features that have followed from ground force dominance, such as the four general departments and the military region structure and the primacy of the ground forces in what are ostensibly joint command structures. The book criticizes "'big army' thinking" ('大陆军' 概念), the focus on defending homeland territory, the treatment of strategic directions and theaters of operation (战区) as independent or autonomous spheres or areas, and other features of the PLA that are associated with the long-standing dominance of the army. Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the book stresses the importance of new domains in conventional warfighting, calling for a more equal focus on the ground, air, sea, space and cyber domains.

## **New Strategic Concepts**

Although other chapters of this book explore the content of the *Science of Military Strategy* within specific domains and subject-matter areas in greater depth, several new high-level strategic concepts are introduced in the 2013 edition that provide important context for more specific analysis. These concepts are forward defense, strategic space, effective control, and strategic posture.

### *Forward Defense*

Perhaps one of the most important concepts introduced in the 2013 edition is "forward defense" (前沿防卫) or expanding the battlespace beyond China's borders to increase China's strategic depth.<sup>35</sup> The concept is introduced as part of an effort to redefine the foundational concept of China's military strategy, "active defense" (积极防御). The book notes that the content of China's active defense strategy has been adjusted several times in the past, but always as a part of "a defensive strategy for national territory" or a strategy that envisioned fighting

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<sup>35</sup> This could also be translated as "frontline defense."

within Chinese territory or on its borders but not beyond them. By contrast, the 2013 edition states that “in terms of content, [our] military strategy must breakthrough simplistic traditional strategic thinking of guarding borders and defending territory, and actively and reliably realize the enlargement of the defense of national territory to forward defense.”<sup>36</sup> Later, the volume urges its readers that “we strategically are obliged (有必要) to establish forward defense as guiding thought” because of the need to “support the omni-directional expansion of national interests and win future wars [we] might face.”<sup>37</sup> If the 2001 edition envisioned China’s borders and coasts as the strategic “first line” (一线) or front line in a war, the concept of “forward defense” in the 2013 edition calls for pushing the first line away from China’s borders and coasts to ensure that combat occurs beyond China’s homeland territory, not on or within it. In this way, China’s borders and coasts are now viewed as interior lines in a conflict, not exterior ones.

The emphasis on forward defense reflects several changes in China’s approach to strategic questions over the past decade. The first is the expansion or enlargement (拓展) of China’s national interests. Although China’s interests have expanded peacefully, the volume portrays them as facing resistance from the West, thus resulting in serious threats to China’s interests beyond its borders cannot be eliminated. As the book observes, “our country’s national interests already go beyond the traditional scope of national territory, territorial waters, and territorial airspace, and continuously spread toward the periphery and the world in a continuous extension to maritime, outer space, and electromagnetic space.”<sup>38</sup> As a result, the book highlights the importance of “struggle and control” in interstate conflict over the maritime, polar, space, and network domain global commons.

The second change is the assessment that the global trend toward informatized long-range combat systems requires China to expand the space for defense further from its shores to ensure sufficient strategic depth. Although China’s risk of being invaded is low, the book observes that “the main way of threat has already changed from a traditional land invasion to space, air-sea and network-air integrated non-contact strikes and our in-depth national territory is under the cover of the enemy’s medium and long range fire power.”<sup>39</sup> In a thinly veiled reference the United States, the volume describes a “strong adversary” with “comprehensive distant war superiority in the maritime direction” that can strike China without itself being attacked. As a result, “the difficulty of using ‘our land to defend our land’ and ‘using the near seas to defend the

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<sup>36</sup> SMS 2013, p. 104.

<sup>37</sup> SMS 2013, p. 105. This is one clear example where the authors, by the language they use, are advocating for a position, not reflecting official policy. Indeed, the concept of forward defense does not appear in the official 2015 white paper on national defense and only a single entry can be found in the *Liberation Army Daily* newspaper, to an article published in 2014.

<sup>38</sup> SMS 2013, p. 105.

<sup>39</sup> SMS 2013, p. 106.

near seas' has greatly increased, and we are even perhaps unable to ensure victory. Therefore, [we] must consider expanding the scope [of warfare] for the implementation of outwardly oriented defensive operations."<sup>40</sup> In the past, the main threats to Chinese interests overlapped with direct threats to national territory. At present and looking to the future, however, China's interests have expanded beyond China's national boundaries, while advances in military technology and the maritime area of conflict are more prominent concerns. As a result, China will need to prepare to counter these threats by operating beyond its borders to create the necessary strategic depth.

Offering the concept of forward defense as a basis for adjusting the content of active defense carries several important implications. First, it requires a "new-type concept of strategic space" that is "internal and external, multidimensional" (内外兼顾, 多维立体). This concept is discussed in greater detail below. Second, it requires adjustments to the scope of China's strategic directions (战略方向) and theaters of operation (战区). For example, the scope of the strategic directions should be expanded to combine areas inside and outside China's borders. Inland theaters should be extended beyond China's land borders, while coastal theaters should expand further toward the sea. Moreover, the book urges that "when conditions are ripe, consider establishing an independent maritime theater to better plan as a whole advancing into the oceans and managing the oceans."<sup>41</sup> Third, it requires that China "have strategic attack capabilities" (战略攻击能力) and create a "strategic attack posture" (态势).<sup>42</sup> The main reason is that since the 1990s, the trend is that "offense and defense are increasing integrated and the distinction between the two is increasingly vague," while "great power militaries increasingly emphasize offensive operations."<sup>43</sup> As a result, the book states that "while our military maintains 'striking after the enemy as struck' strategically...strategic offense should be an important operational type for active defense." Fourth, China "should view joint distant warfare (联合远战) based on our territory as an important form of operations (作战形式)."<sup>44</sup> The authors view China's homeland territory and near seas as interior lines and the Pacific Ocean as exterior lines. The basic idea they advocate is using "forces and weapons for long-range warfare" deployed on Chinese territory or in the near seas to strike targets on the periphery, increasing the survivability of China's forces by leveraging China's sheer size. In essence, they write, the "character" of joint distant warfare is "integrated joint operations" (一体化联合作战). Integrated joint operations is a PLA term of art that generally refers to joint operations as they are understood in the West,

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<sup>40</sup> SMS 2013, p. 106.

<sup>41</sup> SMS 2013, p. 107.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> SMS 2013, p. 108.



whereas the Chinese term for joint operations generally refers to what would elsewhere be considered mere combined arms.<sup>45</sup>

### *Strategic Space*

The 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* defines “strategic space” (战略空间) as “the area required by a nation (民族) or state to resist foreign interference and aggression, and safeguard their own survival and development.”<sup>46</sup> Although similar to forward defense, the main difference between the two concepts appears to revolve around the scope of combat operations. The concept of forward defense is linked clearly to the areas where China should be able to conduct military future military operations, namely, the idea of pushing out or extending the front line from along China’s borders and coasts into its periphery. By contrast, strategic space captures areas that China would want to influence with its military capabilities, including non-war operations and presence more generally, but not combat operations.

Of all the new concepts in the book, strategic space is perhaps the most ambiguous. It conveys the idea that China’s interests extend far beyond its borders, in multiple dimensions, and thus military capabilities in all these dimensions will be needed to defend China’s interests. The extent of strategic space is defined as follows: “Its outer edge is determined by the expanded scope of national interests and determined even more by the distance in which military power can be projected.”<sup>47</sup> The book deems strategic space as “brand new topic in the process of China’s rise.”<sup>48</sup> The rationale for the idea of strategic space comes from the recent “profound changes” in China’s development and security environments, “especially the threat of war from multidimensional spaces.”<sup>49</sup>

Following a discussion of the changing nature of strategic space in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the book then describes what is required for China. It offers a new formula of “national territory as the support, the two oceans as the key point, space and networks as the key” as an outline for expanding China’s strategic space. The basic idea is that China should “moderately expand strategic space” from its homeland territory (本土) into areas that will have a direct impact on China’s security environment. The two oceans refers to an expansive conception of the Indo-Pacific that comprises all littoral areas, including Africa, North America, South America, Oceania, and Antarctica—fifty percent of the world’s oceans. This reflects the need to further

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<sup>45</sup> SMS 2013, p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> SMS 2013, p. 241.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

protect China's maritime rights and interests and defend them if a crisis erupts.<sup>50</sup> Outer space refers to concerns about the United States, which is viewed as "plotting for outer space dominance." China's expansion into space is described as "inadequate" at a time when threats from space are seen as only increasing.<sup>51</sup> Finally, the reference to information networks refers to China's view that it is pervasively vulnerable to network attacks and information technology supply chain infiltration by "some Western nations," and that China's lacks of indigenous development of core technologies limits its ability to defend against such attacks.<sup>52</sup>

### *Effective Control*

A third concept introduced in the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* is "effective control" (有效控制) of conflict situations. Although the concept of "war control" (战争控制) featured prominently in the 2001 edition, the concept of effective control is broader because it encompasses the deterrent, crisis management, and non-war uses of military power in addition to warfighting. Effective control refers to preventing wars from occurring (遏制战争) and managing crises, if possible, while also protecting or defending Chinese interests.

The starting point for effective control is a clear acknowledgment of China's current limitations and weaknesses. As the book notes, "our country is presently in the key phase of becoming rich and strong. [Our] comprehensive national power has clearly increased, but our strategic capabilities and especially our capabilities for military actions abroad (境外) are still limited."<sup>53</sup> As a result, the book endorses the late 2000s modification of Deng's guideline to "persist in biding time while actively achieving something."<sup>54</sup> Given the imperative of peaceful development, "the employment of military power must reflect even more the spirit of 'soft weapons' (弱武), displaying the strategic functions of support, awe, and persistence to achieve the strategic goals of controlling situations and stabilizing the overall situation."<sup>55</sup> The book notes that despite the increase in China's warfighting power and potential over the past thirty years, China's warfighting endurance capability (战争承受能力) has declined, which places a premium on fighting short wars or even avoiding wars that would have the potential to escalate and become protracted. Thus, the book notes that even the local wars that China prepares to fight

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<sup>50</sup> SMS 2013, pp. 246–247.

<sup>51</sup> SMS 2013, p. 247.

<sup>52</sup> SMS 2013, p. 248.

<sup>53</sup> SMS 2013, p. 110.

<sup>54</sup> SMS 2013, p. 110.

<sup>55</sup> SMS 2013, p. 111.

must be actively controlled “to reduce as much as possible the risks of war and destructiveness of war.”<sup>56</sup>

More generally, effective control seeks to change the means by which strategic goals may be achieved short of war. The book notes that core of effective control contains three shifts in approach: 1) from “emphasizing ‘defense’ (防) to emphasizing ‘control’ (控),” 2) from “emphasizing ‘war’ (战) to emphasizing ‘power’ (势),” and 3) from “seeking ‘victory’ (战胜) to ‘winning first’ (先胜).”<sup>57</sup> In other words, effective control seeks to achieve the same goals as war, but without needing to resort to combat if possible, and restricting the intensity of conflict if hostilities do occur.

According to the book, the concept of effective control includes three components. The first is “creating situations” (营造态势). The authors define this as “creating a strategic situation advantageous for internal stability and external expansion and a long period of order and security. The core lies in strategic balance, a stable periphery, and opposing separatism to promote unity.”<sup>58</sup> Strategic balance refers to how China should deal the “hegemon’s” efforts to “contain and control” (遏控) China. The book notes that China should avoid being provoked, prevent political, economic, or diplomatic issues from becoming strategic conflicts, prevent U.S. alliances from treating China as the adversary, and increase the “risk and price for an opponent to carry out strategic deterrence and control or armed intervention against us.”<sup>59</sup> The book also discusses creating a favorable posture for China in the region and over Taiwan. The former includes all of China’s “good neighborly” engagement policies along with the means to effectively control crises to strive for a region “without war and with less chaos” (不战少乱).<sup>60</sup> The latter refers to continuing with the long-standing strategy started by Jiang Zemin of “attacking with the pen and defending with the sword” (文功武备), or seeking to deter Taiwan’s independence militarily while pursuing unification politically.<sup>61</sup>

The second component of effective control is preventing and controlling crises (防控危机). The book notes that China remains in a period of “strategic opportunity,” which is also a

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<sup>56</sup> SMS 2013, p. 111.

<sup>57</sup> SMS 2013, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> SMS 2013, p. 113.

<sup>59</sup> SMS 2013, p. 113. However, the 2013 edition of the Science of Military Strategy does not offer an explicit strategy of “counter-intervention.” See M. Taylor Fravel and Christopher P. Twomey, “Projecting Strategy: The Myth of Chinese Counter-Intervention,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2015), pp. 171–187. For an opposing view, see Timothy Heath and Andrew Erickson, “Is China Pursuing Counter-Intervention?,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (2015), pp. 143–156.

<sup>60</sup> SMS 2013, p. 113.

<sup>61</sup> SMS 2013, p. 113.

period of “strategic danger”. As the book states, “as soon as a crisis is inappropriately handled, it can create serious interference and destruction of the overall situation of the nation’s development and security, even affecting the historical process of China’s rise.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, the book calls for strengthening crisis management and “especially using appropriate military deterrence and non-war military actions to prevent small disturbances from creating great suffering and prevent crises from escalating to wars.”<sup>63</sup> At the same time, the book suggests that crises can be exploited to “seize opportunities so as to implement some strategic measures that would have been difficult to resolutely push during peacetime.”<sup>64</sup> Although the example used in the book is the implementation of “democratic reforms” in Tibet after the outbreak of the rebellion in Lhasa in 1959, such advice might also resonate with China’s seizure of effective control of Scarborough Shoal during a crisis with the Philippines in April 2012. The book does not describe how to balance these different elements of effective control, but the implication is that opportunistic behavior should be pursued when the risk of further escalation is low.

The third component of effective control is “controlling war situations” (控制战局). Control of war situations occurs after “the overall situation of peace and development is damaged,” but in many ways repeats ideas from the 2001 edition on war control. These would include ensuring that military goals support political goals, ensuring a favorable situation on the battlefield does not expand political goals and escalate the war, only starting a war once completely prepared, and ending a war in a controlled manner.<sup>65</sup>

### *Strategic Posture*

“Strategic posture” (战略布局) is defined as “carrying out overall deployment activities of strategic forces (力量) and resources to achieve strategic goals.”<sup>66</sup> According to the book, the objective of strategic posture is using the overall deployment of military capabilities “to form a favorable strategic situation (态势)” and “compete for the strategic initiative” (战略主动).<sup>67</sup> In this way, the book calls for a holistic approach to the deployment of Chinese forces in a way that will enable China to control “key nodes” (关节点).<sup>68</sup> The implication is that China lacks

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<sup>62</sup> SMS 2013, p. 114.

<sup>63</sup> SMS 2013, p. 114.

<sup>64</sup> SMS 2013, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup> SMS 2013, pp. 115–117.

<sup>66</sup> SMS 2013, p. 244. This could also be translated as “strategic layout,” but as used in this part of the book, “posture” in terms of how forces are arranged and deployed better captures the meaning of the Chinese term than layout.

<sup>67</sup> SMS 2013, p. 250.

<sup>68</sup> SMS 2013, p. 251.

sufficient overall planning and deployment, largely because of rigidity introduced by the idea of independent and mutually exclusive strategic directions and military regions. The complexity of China's security environment, and its varied objectives for the use of military power, require a more holistic and integrated approach to how forces are deployed.

In the past, the book notes, the deployment of China's forces according to the "primary strategic direction" was an example of strategic posture in action. By concentrating forces against the primary strategic direction, the goal was to create a favorable strategic situation to prevent a possible invasion. Consistent with the book's theme of moving beyond territorial defense, the authors note that changes in China's security threats, strategic goals, strategic tasks, military capabilities, the form of war, and geographic conditions all "require the optimization and adjustment of the military strategic layout."<sup>69</sup> Changes in China's security situation (安全形势), including the increasing links between traditional and nontraditional security threats, requires that China improve its capabilities for dealing with its main strategic adversaries and operational targets (主要战略对手与作战对象). This preparation is considered particularly important due to the possibility of "chain reactions" or the simultaneous occurrence of multiple crises or conflicts.<sup>70</sup> In addition, on a global level, national interests are gradually transcending national borders. The authors refer to rights and interest in the maritime, space, and information domains as examples of this trend, along with overseas economic and security interests. Finally, the speed of changes in the "form of war" is accelerating. Informatized warfare requires China to abandon its traditional emphasis on ground war (陆战性), close war (近战性), and territorial defense (国土防御性) in favor of joint, long distance, and offensive-focused (联合, 远战, 攻势) approaches.<sup>71</sup>

The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* identifies the "four transformations" that are needed to optimize China's strategic posture as "functional versatility, multidimensional integration, internal and external unity, and integrated coordination." Functional versatility (功能多样) refers to a shift from "emphasizing security" to "safeguarding security and supporting development." This creates a strategic posture that can deal with old domains and new ones, traditional threats and nontraditional ones, to create "a peaceful and stable internal and external environment for the nation's peaceful development." This includes cultivating a strategic deterrence posture in peacetime and a rapid reaction capability when a crisis occurs to prevent escalation, while in wartime it requires the ability to seize the strategic initiative. Multidimensional integration (多维一体) refers to the transformation from emphasizing the

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<sup>69</sup> SMS 2013, p. 252.

<sup>70</sup> On concerns about a multiple simultaneous conflicts, see M. Taylor Fravel, "Securing Borders: China's Doctrine and Force Structure for Frontier Defense," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4-5 (2007), pp. 705-737.

<sup>71</sup> SMS 2013, p. 252.

ground forces to an “omni-directional, multi-dimensional, and multi-domain” posture.<sup>72</sup> The book again criticizes “big army” thinking to emphasize the networked integration of the ground, maritime, air, space, and network spaces. Internal and external unity (内外结合) refers to creating a strategic posture that combines internal and external elements to shift from homeland defense to forward defense. Internally, this means moving to a more forward deployment of forces within China by shifting forces from the interior to coastal areas. Externally, this means creating overseas strategic support points (支点) to support overseas military actions. Integrated coordination (整体协调) refers to the transformation from compartmentalization of functions to the combination of centralization and decentralization that would improve the responsiveness of the PLA. The main target of this transformation is the stove-piped approach to planning for the services and theaters of operation that has hindered the flexibility of the force in the past.

The book contains three guiding principles for how to optimize China’s strategic posture. These principles again reflect the forward-looking nature of the 2013 edition. The first is adjusting the strategic posture for land-based strategic directions to create “an outwardly extending strategic posture with effective strategic depth, mutual reliance and sufficient capability.”<sup>73</sup> The second is “enriching” the maritime direction to create a strategic posture that can “effectively support near seas defense (防御) and far seas defense (防卫).”<sup>74</sup> The third is creating a strategic layout for space, which is described as its own strategic direction.

### ***The Science of Military Strategy and the Future of the PLA***

The 2013 edition of the SMS is an important book that should be read by anyone with an interest in China’s approach to thinking about military strategy. Although it does not constitute China’s official military strategy or doctrine, it captures the views and insights of a group of prominent strategists within the PLA on China’s current security environment and future military strategy. Moreover, it provides an important baseline for further study and examination of how Chinese strategists approach questions of strategy and how China’s own military strategy might evolve in the future.

Looking forward, future research to deepen understanding of China’s military strategy might focus on three areas. The first would be to compare the 2013 edition of the *Science of*

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<sup>72</sup> SMS 2013, p. 254.

<sup>73</sup> SMS 2013, p. 255.

<sup>74</sup> SMS 2013, p. 255.

*Military Strategy* with the 2015 Defense White Paper on military strategy and the organizational reforms outlined in November 2015. Such a comparison would help identify which the ideas from the 2013 edition are reflected in China's official military strategy. For example, the emphasis on functional domains and theaters of operation in the white paper track closely with the discussion of these subjects in the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy*. At the same time, the white paper lacks any references to the concepts of forward defense, effective control, or strategic space. Likewise, the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* notes the importance of improving joint command and downplaying the ground forces that reflect one basic thrust of the reforms, which includes the creation of a Joint Staff Department (联合作战部) under the CMC and the creation of an army headquarters equivalent in rank with the other services. At the same time, the 2013 edition calls for the PLA Air Force to focus on space, which in the reforms were centralized across several different organizations including the new Strategic Support Force. In other words, the 2015 white paper and reforms offer an ideal opportunity to see which ideas have been adopted and which have not, at least yet.

The second area would be to compare the 2013 edition of the *Science of Military Strategy* published by AMS with the 2015 edition published by the PLA's NDU. Such a comparison would help to highlight differences among PLA strategists on the question of military strategy. In the late 1990s, for example, AMS and NDU engaged in a debate over the meaning of military strategy with dueling editions of books with the same title. The near simultaneous publication of two volumes on the same topic by different institutes within the PLA permits yet again a detailed analysis of different approaches in China to the same questions of how to formulate and execute military strategy.

The third area for future research would be to track the use of the key concepts and ideas contained in the 2013 edition. Although it does not reflect China's official military strategy or doctrine, the book's ideas could play an important role in how China's strategy develops in the future. One way to examine the influence of the book would be to examine the degree to which the concepts it introduces are embraced by other publications and documents in the future.

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