

Shambaugh's New Volume: Progress, Problems, and Prospects

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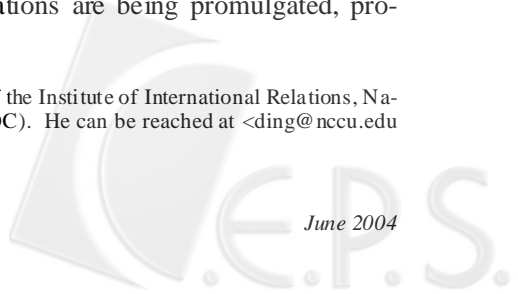
Modernizing China's Military is a very comprehensive publication, covering all aspects of the Chinese military. In the book David Shambaugh correctly notes that since Ellis Joffe published *The Chinese Army After Mao* in 1987, fifteen years have passed and many changes have come to the Chinese military. A new study analyzing these changes is clearly well-warranted, and Shambaugh's new volume indeed provides analysis of the changes over the past fifteen years, outlining possible factors that have contributed to the changes. Furthermore, each chapter can be read independently of each other, allowing readers to start by reading any chapter. My review here will focus on four of these chapters: (1) civil-military relations, (2) defense industry, (3) command, control, and force structure, and (4) threat perceptions.

Civil-Military Relations

In his treatment of civil-military relations, Shambaugh provides a historical review of the development of party-military/civil-military ties, illuminates how changes made in the past fifteen years have impacted these relations, and concludes by proposing that China is on the verge of the state gaining (some) control of the military. He cites the 1997 National Defense Law as evidence, noting that the term "the state" is mentioned more than "the party" in the text of the law.

Shambaugh's observation may be right. The Chinese military is indeed changing: more laws and regulations are being promulgated, pro-

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motion is now made based more on merit, and military training (rather than political study) accounts for the lion's share of the average soldier's day. Yet another indicator is the recent expansion of the Central Military Commission (CMC), with the commanders of the PLA Air Force, PLA Navy, and Second Artillery being brought into the CMC as regular members; this new development indicates that the status of the political commissar system is diminishing.

Shambaugh should probably be reminded of one important regulation amendment made in 1994. In the late 1980s, Chinese Generals were divided into four ranks: Major General (少將), Lieutenant General (中將), General (上將), and Senior General (一級上將). However, the Senior General rank was abolished in 1994 by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, with no reason given. This was no small action given the context of Jiang Zemin's (江澤民) efforts to consolidate his power. Note that Senior General is a life-long rank, enjoyed only by those with the highest status in the military. In any developing country, a person with this rank may constitute a threat for a new leader attempting to consolidate his power. The amendment, which assuredly was endorsed by the paramount leader of the time, Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平), thus might be a compromise reached between the Chinese military and Deng Xiaoping/Jiang Zemin that allowed Jiang to settle into the preeminent leadership position.

As for the overall state of civil-military relations, it is almost impossible for the Chinese military to become a state army. The reason is simple: the defeat of the Kuomintang (KMT, 國民黨) in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections in Taiwan shocked the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and certainly strengthened any doubts many party members had about implementing democracy in China. Without democracy, moreover, the concept of a state army is impossible.

Will domestic pressure force the CCP to open China's political system? The likelihood is almost nil. Dissident—and any other organized—movements have been suppressed, NGOs are not allowed, elections at the town level have been closely monitored, and the media have been under tight state control. Domestic pressure cannot possibly mobilize inside China to open the political system, and thus transforming the Chinese

military into a state army is similarly impossible.

Moreover, as Shambaugh himself points out, the real power and authority is placed in the party's CMC, while "the state CMC is a hollow body with no autonomous power" (p. 116). It is hard to image how the Chinese military can be transformed into a state army under this current circumstance.

Defense Industry

In the chapter on defense industry and procurement, Shambaugh briefly introduces the historical development of China's defense industry. By citing the research of other analysts, he points out that there have been many problems in China's defense industry—including a lack of market competition, cultural factors, and the low likelihood for China to close the military gap with the Western world in the near future.

Shambaugh comprehensively outlines the procurements China has made in the past ten years. However, one aspect is missing: land attack cruise missiles (LACMs). The U.S. Department of Defense has published reports on Chinese military power that have pointed out that China is actively developing LACMs, in addition to various short-range ballistic missiles.¹

Command, Control, and Force Structure

Shambaugh gives a detailed briefing on the PLA's four major general departments as well as the overall command structure. There is one useful source to which he did not refer: the *China Directory*, a manual book published every year by Radio Press of Tokyo.

This publication lists some information that was overlooked in *Modernizing China's Military*. To the overview of the General Political Department (GPD, 總政治部), for instance, I would add one major department, which, for an unknown reason, was ignored by Shambaugh. Under the GPD, there should be a "Department for Mass Work" (群眾工作部, *Qunzhong gongzuo bu*). This department plays a liaison role with the

¹Annual Report on the Military Power of the People's Republic of China, available at <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/20030730chinaex.pdf>.

"masses" (i.e., society in general). Note that Deng Xiaoping's younger sister, Deng Xianqun (鄧先群), used to be the head of this department.

A second example concerns the military police (MP, 憲兵). Shambaugh's chart on page 135 indicates that the MP is under the Security Department (保衛部) of the GPD. There has not, however, been an independent MP in the Chinese military system for some time now. My impression from reading the *Jiefangjun bao* (解放軍報, Liberation Army Daily) is that the military districts in various provinces and military garrisons which command the three major cities—Shanghai (上海), Beijing (北京), and Tianjin (天津)—play the role of MP (along with fulfilling other functions).

There is also an error in the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS, 軍事科學院) chart on page 180. There is no longer a War Theory Department, with the name having been changed to the Strategic Research Department (戰略研究部). The name change was made after the PLA National Defense University (NDU, 解放軍國防大學) established the Institute for Strategic Studies (戰略研究所) in 1985—an institute which has subsequently built up an international reputation.

Threat Perceptions

There is one interesting point that deserves detailed discussion. Shambaugh cites Chinese analysts by saying that the Chinese view threats, security, and power in more comprehensive terms, and for them the term "security" means *complete stability*. I would question whether there really exists a fundamental difference between Western and Chinese views on this matter. If security means "complete stability" in the eyes of the Chinese, only complete dominance can help achieve this goal. The question that follows is thus: when does any country have complete dominance? Moreover, if China does indeed achieve complete stability via complete dominance, how would this complete dominance then differ from "hegemony," a term China frequently applies to criticize the United States? China has criticized the Western idea of deterrence in the past, charging that the term is full of immorality, power politics, and hegemonistic values. If, as Shambaugh analyzes, China pursues complete stability, I do not see how China could continue to claim the moral high ground.