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## Who's at the Helm? The Past, Present, and Future Leaders of China's Navy

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## WHO'S AT THE HELM?

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### The Past, Present, and Future Leaders of China's Navy

*Jeffrey Becker*

China's navy is undergoing a leadership transition not seen in a generation. Between late 2014 and the time of this writing (spring 2015), the upper echelons of leadership within the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy, or PLAN) began experiencing substantial change in personnel, with eleven of the fourteen positions on the navy's Party Committee Standing Committee (referred to below as the PLAN Standing Committee)—the navy's highest decision-making body—turning over (see table 1).<sup>1</sup>

Many of these new leaders have been promoted from one of China's three fleets: the North Sea Fleet (NSF), East Sea Fleet (ESF), or South Sea Fleet (SSF). In 2014, for example, Vice Admirals Tian Zhong and Jiang Weilie, former NSF and SSF commanders, respectively, both became PLAN deputy commanders, a position that carries with it a seat on the PLAN Standing Committee.

Tian and Jiang typify the PLAN's Rising Cohort. Born in the mid-1950s, these two officers came of age in a navy that was just beginning to reform. Since then, they have gained direct experience with the navy's new missions, including far-seas operations. They are increasingly at ease conducting international naval diplomacy. Vice Admirals Tian and Zhong have led PLA delegations abroad, Vice Admiral Tian to Russia, North Korea, and South Korea and Vice Admiral Jiang to the United States.<sup>2</sup> In 2014, Vice Admiral Jiang served as the PLA's highest-ranking officer in attendance during China's first-ever participation in the U.S.-led Rim

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of the Pacific naval exercise (RIMPAC 2014).<sup>3</sup> Other officers newly promoted to the PLAN Standing Committee have similar experiences and qualities. Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng, a former ESF deputy commander, is a model officer for China's far-seas expeditionary navy, having led one of the PLAN's Gulf of Aden escort missions, training missions near the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) islands, and multiple exercises with foreign navies.<sup>4</sup>

More changes are on the horizon. Before the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress in October 2012, rumors circulated of PLAN commander

**TABLE 1  
CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE PLAN STANDING COMMITTEE**

Name	Position	First Year on PLAN Standing Committee	Former Positions of New Members
Adm. Wu Shengli	PLAN Commander	2006	
Lt. Gen. Miao Hua	PLAN Political Commissar	2014	Political Commissar, Lanzhou Military Region
Vice Adm. Wang Dengping	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	2014	Director, PLAN Political Department
Vice Adm. Ding Haichun	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	2014	Political Commissar, East Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Tian Zhong	PLAN Deputy Commander	2014	Commander, North Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Jiang Weilie	PLAN Deputy Commander	2014	Commander, South Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Liu Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	2011–12	
Vice Adm. Ding Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	2014	Deputy Commander, North Sea Fleet
Vice Adm. Du Jingchen	PLAN Deputy Commander	2011	PLAN Chief of Staff
Vice Adm. Wang Hai	PLAN Deputy Commander	2015	North Sea Fleet Chief of Staff
Vice Adm. Qiu Yanpeng	PLAN Chief of Staff	2014	Deputy Commander, East Sea Fleet
Rear Adm. Yang Shiguang	Director, PLAN Political Department	2014	Director, Political Department, East Sea Fleet
Rear Adm. Xu Weibing	Director, PLAN Logistics Department	2011	
Rear Adm. Wang Jianguo	Director, PLAN Equipment Department	2014	Deputy Director, PLAN Equipment Department

Admiral Wu Shengli's retirement.<sup>5</sup> Although this did not come to pass, he is already the oldest member of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the highest decision-making body within China's military.<sup>6</sup> As a CMC member, Admiral Wu has no known formal retirement date. However, past practice suggests he will step down no later than the Nineteenth Party Congress, scheduled for 2017, when he would be seventy-two.

These changes raise a number of questions for those interested in China's naval modernization. How do China's new navy leaders compare with their fellow senior officers, and how will they affect the PLAN's ongoing modernization efforts? The PLA Navy's transition from a coastal-defense force to a blue-water navy has garnered significant attention in both policy and academic circles.<sup>7</sup> However, an examination of the individuals overseeing the PLAN's transition largely has been missing from this discussion. This article seeks to fill that void through an examination of the PLAN's current leadership transition.

### CHINA'S NAVY LEADERSHIP IN TRANSITION

To do so, the article examines three groups of officers. The first is the PLA Navy's Old Guard: leaders who joined the PLA in the late 1960s and came of age largely during the Cultural Revolution, one of the most tumultuous and chaotic periods in modern Chinese history. These officers, however, are rapidly retiring, and are being replaced by the second group examined here, the PLAN's Rising Cohort. This cohort consists of officers who joined the PLA largely in the mid-1970s to early 1980s and came of age when the PLA was just beginning to transition from a coastal-defense force to a blue-water navy. Naval officers who have recently transitioned into leadership positions, including those described above, are members of this group. Members of the third group constitute the PLAN's Future Leadership. These officers joined the PLA in the late 1980s and early 1990s and came of age during years of rapid economic growth and development. Although they have not yet ascended to leadership positions, the PLAN's next leadership core is likely to be selected from this cohort.

This is a watershed moment for China's navy leadership. The reforms of the past two decades have been led by a generation of leaders who, while extraordinary in many ways, had little opportunity to experience the types of operations they were tasked with readying the PLAN to undertake. They came of age in a PLA that was ideologically oriented, internally focused, and concerned with coastal defense. However, they have successfully overseen the development of an increasingly professional, modern, and international navy. Their successors, members of the Rising Cohort, have played an important and hands-on role in the PLAN's modernization program and led many of China's early blue-water operations, including historic global circumnavigations, training missions into

the western Pacific, and early anti-piracy escort operations in the Gulf of Aden. Thus, for the first time in modern history, China's navy will be led by officers for whom at-sea and blue-water experience is the norm rather than the exception.

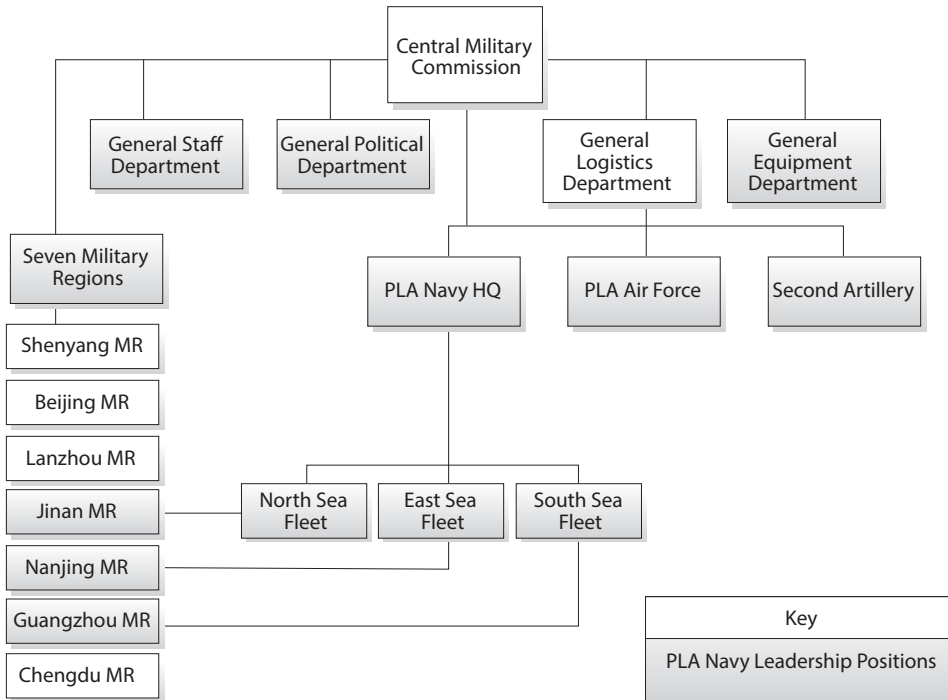
Following on their heels is the PLAN's Future Leadership, the first cohort of officers to join a Chinese navy that had already established a professional military education system and begun taking on more-expansive roles and missions before they joined. Not only do officers of this cohort have experience with blue-water operations, but they have experience operating in concert with foreign navies in combined military exercises and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) missions. Their eventual promotion into leadership positions will likely create a second watershed moment for the PLAN, for the service will then be led by officers experienced in not only engaging but operating with foreign navies, enabling them to incorporate many of the international best practices learned from these experiences.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. After a brief examination of PLAN leadership in historical and organizational perspective, the article compares and contrasts the retiring Old Guard with the Rising Cohort, focusing primarily on changes within the PLAN Standing Committee. It then provides a comparative analysis of all three cohorts. The paper concludes by examining implications of this leadership transition for the PLAN and the PLA more broadly.

### PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

PLAN leaders have historically carried little weight in the Chinese military or Chinese Communist Party (CCP) hierarchy. Early navy leaders were simply ground force officers and Party personnel transferred from elsewhere. The PLA Navy's first commander, Xiao Jingguang, spent his early military career in Guangdong, Wuhan, and Changsha. After Mao selected him to head the navy, there was still significant debate whether the navy would be an independent service or housed within the General Staff Department.<sup>8</sup> It was not until 1988, when career submariner Zhang Lianzhong was promoted to commander, that the PLAN was led by a career naval officer.<sup>9</sup> The PLAN's first career-navy political commissar did not come until the promotion of Zhou Kunren in 1993. In 2004, for the first time in the reform era, the PLA institutionalized the practice of having the commanders of each of the three nonground services (the PLAN, the PLA Air Force, and the Second Artillery) serve concurrently in the CMC, thus increasing the influence of these services in relation to the traditionally dominant ground forces.<sup>10</sup> Yet only recently were PLAN officers serving in military positions outside the navy allowed to wear their navy uniforms rather than the olive green of the ground forces.<sup>11</sup>

## PLAN LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE PLA



Source: Adapted from Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope*, p. 15.

From these humble beginnings, PLA Navy leaders appear to have gained considerable influence within the PLA over the past decade (see the figure). Detailed information on budgetary spending by service remains unavailable, but it is clear the PLA has made naval modernization a high priority, with acquisitions from abroad and construction of new ships and weapons platforms.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, the PLA remains ground force–centric, but navy officers are now found in all levels of China’s military and hold positions of great importance within the larger PLA hierarchy.

### HOW CHINA’S NAVY LEADERSHIP IS ORGANIZED

PLAN leaders hold important positions within the PLA’s four general departments: the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Logistics Department (GLD), and General Equipment Department (GED). These four organizations are tasked with coordinating and overseeing work within their specific purviews throughout the PLA. The GSD is responsible for planning, organizing, and directing military operations, and leads the PLA’s modernization program. The GPD manages the political relationship between the CCP and the PLA, and ensures the Party controls the armed forces. The

GLD oversees logistics work. The GED, also referred to as the General Armament Department, oversees weapons and equipment development and maintenance.

This four-department structure is mirrored in China's navy: the PLAN has a headquarters department, which serves a function similar to the GSD's, as well as political, logistics, and equipment departments. Many lower-level departments (*erjibu*, 二级部) found in the PLA's four general departments are also replicated within the PLAN. For example, the GSD Military Affairs Department is responsible PLA-wide for promulgating manuals and developing policies related to PLA career tracks; the navy's Military Affairs Department at PLAN headquarters has similar responsibilities within the PLAN.<sup>13</sup>

Of China's seven military regions (MRs), PLAN leaders serve in three (the Jinan, Nanjing, and Guangzhou MRs), and in China's three fleets, which are bureaucratically subordinate to the three respective MRs, with the commander of the fleet serving as deputy commander within that MR.

Most navy leaders are found at PLAN headquarters, or within the headquarters of one of the three fleets. However, PLAN personnel are increasingly holding positions of importance in central-level organizations and the MRs. Admiral Sun Jianguo, for example, is one of five deputy chiefs of the PLA General Staff, and chair of the China Institute for International Strategic Studies, a think tank for the Second Department of the PLA General Staff Department, the organ responsible for human intelligence gathering and analysis.<sup>14</sup> Vice Admiral Liu Zhuoming, son of the 1980s naval reformer Admiral Liu Huaqing, serves as the deputy director of the General Equipment Department's Science and Technology Commission, a body responsible for overseeing high-priority defense science and technology aspects of the PLA's modernization program.<sup>15</sup> Rear Admiral Guan Youfei is the director of the Ministry of National Defense Foreign Affairs Office, the primary organization that manages China's foreign military relations, while Rear Admiral Li Ji serves as one of his deputy directors.<sup>16</sup> Other PLAN officers serve as heads of navy departments or joint logistics departments within the MRs, maintaining force readiness and overseeing naval military training.

## DEFINING PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP

There exists no universally accepted definition of what constitutes a leadership position within the PLA Navy. The few discussions of PLAN leadership that exist focus almost exclusively on the PLAN commander, at most extending to a few members of the PLAN Standing Committee.<sup>17</sup> However, such a limited scope of discussion leaves out many officers with influence over day-to-day operations and over the PLAN's long-term strategic direction. With this in mind, this article substantially expands the discussion of PLAN leadership to encompass the following positions:

- PLAN headquarters
  - The PLA Navy commander and political commissar
  - PLA Navy deputy commanders and deputy political commissars
  - The PLA Navy chief of staff and deputy chiefs of staff
  - The directors, political commissars, and deputy directors of the navy's political, logistics, and equipment departments
  - The directors of second-level departments
- China's three fleets
  - Fleet commanders and political commissars
  - Fleet deputy commanders
  - Fleet chiefs of staff and deputy chiefs of staff
  - Directors of the fleet political, logistics, and equipment departments
- The four PLA general departments
  - Naval officers serving as deputy chiefs of the general staff
  - Naval officers serving as assistants to the director of a general department
  - Naval officers serving as directors or deputy directors of PLA first-level departments
- The military regions
  - Naval officers serving as MR deputy chiefs of staff
  - Naval officers serving as deputy directors of MR logistics departments
  - Naval officers serving as directors of MR navy departments

Definitions of PLAN "leadership" will remain subject to debate. However, the positions listed above all entail extensive responsibilities for portfolios that provide their incumbents with immediate PLAN-wide or fleet-wide influence. Focusing on these positions, this article relies on a data set of profiles of eighty-eight different PLAN officers serving in these positions.

### A YOUNGER PLAN LEADERSHIP

Before 2014, one of the most striking qualities of PLA Navy leaders was their advanced age. Almost every PLAN Standing Committee member had begun his military career in the late 1960s or early 1970s and had come of age during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), when China experienced what amounted to a low-intensity civil war.<sup>18</sup> In 2013, seven of the thirteen PLAN Standing Committee members had joined the PLA between 1964 and 1969, while four joined



**TABLE 2  
AVERAGE AGES OF SELECT PLA NAVY AND U.S. OFFICERS**

PLA Navy Officers		U.S. Navy Officers	
Admiral/General	64	Admiral	57
Vice Admiral	61	Vice Admiral	56
Rear Admiral	58	Rear Admiral	55
Senior Captain	52		

between 1970 and 1972. Only Logistics Department director Xu Weibing was younger, having joined the PLA in 1978.<sup>19</sup>

PLAN leaders were also considerably older than their foreign counterparts. For example, in

2013 the average age for the eleven serving U.S. Navy admirals (O-10) was fifty-seven, compared with an average age of sixty-four for the three PLA Navy officers of comparable rank.<sup>20</sup> Admiral Wu Shengli, born in 1945, was eight years older than his USN counterpart at the time, Admiral Greenert.<sup>21</sup> To put this in perspective, Admiral Wu’s continued tenure as PLAN commander would be roughly equivalent to the U.S. Navy being led by an officer whose formative experiences came during the middle period (1965–69) of the Vietnam War.

Recent changes have injected younger blood into the PLAN Standing Committee. In early 2014, immediately before the most recent round of personnel changes, the average age of this body’s members was sixty-two; today it is fifty-eight.<sup>22</sup> Only two actively serving members, Admiral Wu and Vice Admiral Du Jingchen, joined the PLA in the 1960s (see table 3).

Moreover, fewer senior PLAN officers are remaining on active duty past the age at which retirement is mandated, which provides opportunities for younger officers to move up the ranks. Since the 1990s, the PLA has worked to normalize retirement ages for high-level officers, and roughly two-thirds of the officers examined herein joined the PLA between 1970 and 1980.<sup>23</sup> This appears to be true across the PLA. For example, after examining the careers of 107 PLA commanders and deputy commanders serving since 2005 in the army, navy, and air force, we found only seven officers within this group who had remained on active service past their respective retirement ages.<sup>24</sup>

**CHINA’S EAST COAST: THE CRADLE OF PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP**

Studies of civilian and military leadership under previous Chinese leaders Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao have shown an overrepresentation from eastern coastal provinces such as Shandong and Jiangsu and an underrepresentation from southern coastal provinces.<sup>25</sup> This is true for PLAN leaders under Xi Jinping as well, as most PLAN leaders come from the eastern third of the country, with a significant portion hailing from the same east-coast provinces as under Jiang and Hu. We identified the hometowns for forty-nine of the eighty-eight officers examined within this data set. All of those officers hail from the eastern third of

the country (see the map). Moreover, of those forty-nine officers, thirty-nine are from coastal provinces such as Shandong (eight) or Jiangsu (eight), with others hailing from Zhejiang (five), Liaoning (four), or Beijing (four). In contrast, we could not identify any navy leaders from western provinces such as Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, or Tibet.

Some provinces that are home to critical naval installations, such as Guangdong, home of the South Sea Fleet, or Shanghai, home to important bases for the East Sea Fleet, each have only one leader in this data set, and no representation on the PLAN Standing Committee. Eight of the fourteen current PLAN Standing Committee members hail from Jiangsu (three), Shandong (three), or Hebei (two) (see table 3).

### THREE COHORTS OF NAVY LEADERS

The section below compares and contrasts members of the navy's past, present, and likely future leadership across a wide range of factors, including key

**TABLE 3**  
**HOME PROVINCES AND FIRST YEARS OF SERVICE FOR PLAN STANDING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

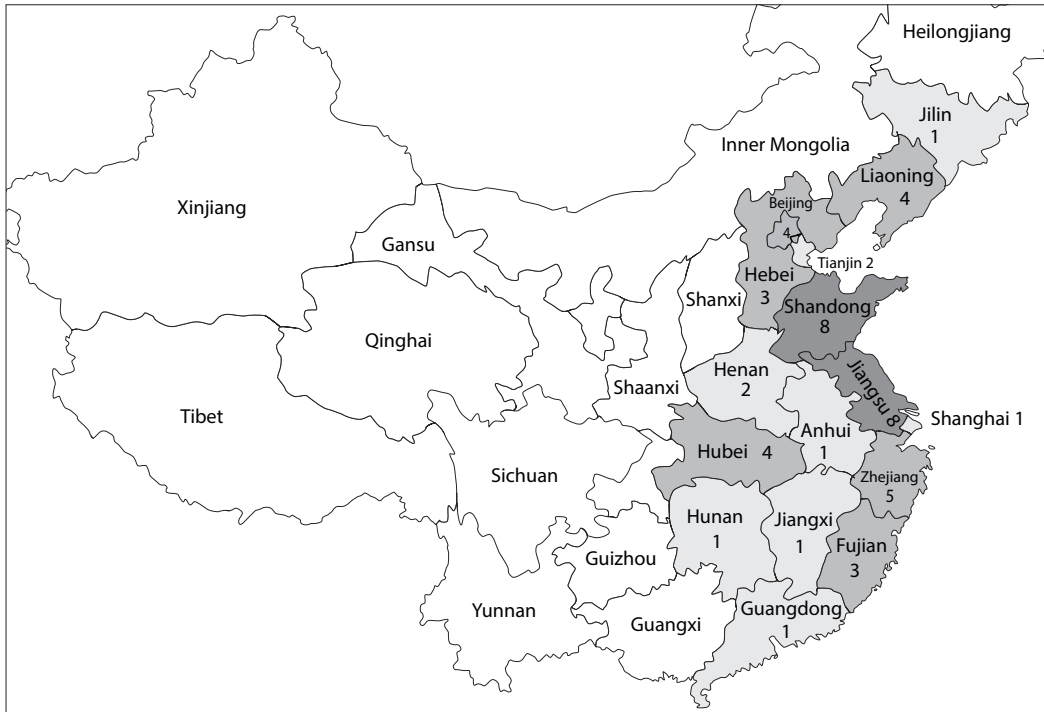
Name	Position	Home Province	First Year of Service
Adm. Wu Shengli	PLAN Commander	Zhejiang <sup>a</sup>	1964
Lt. Gen. Miao Hua	PLAN Political Commissar	Fujian	1972
Vice Adm. Wang Dengping	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	Anhui	1970
Vice Adm. Ding Haichun	PLAN Deputy Political Commissar	Hunan	1972
Vice Adm. Tian Zhong	PLAN Deputy Commander	Hebei	1974
Vice Adm. Jiang Weilie	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jiangsu	1972
Vice Adm. Liu Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	Shandong	1972
Vice Adm. Ding Yi	PLAN Deputy Commander	Jiangsu	1976
Vice Adm. Du Jingchen	PLAN Deputy Commander	Shandong	1969
Vice Adm. Wang Hai	PLAN Deputy Commander	Zhejiang	Unknown
Vice Adm. Qiu Yanpeng	PLAN Chief of Staff	Shandong	1974
Rear Adm. Yang Shiguang	Director, PLAN Political Department	Unknown	Unknown
Rear Adm. Xu Weibing	Director, PLAN Logistics Department	Jiangsu	1978
Rear Adm. Wang Jianguo	Director, PLAN Equipment Department	Unknown	Unknown

Note:

- a. Admiral Wu grew up in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, as his father was mayor of that city in the 1950s. However, Wu's ancestral home is Wujiao, Hebei Province, which is also the hometown of Admiral Sun Jianguo. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for highlighting this distinction.

historical experiences during the early stages of their careers, access to formal technical and professional education, approach to doctrine, experience engaging with foreign military personnel, and combat experience. This comparison is summarized in table 4.

**PLA NAVY LEADERS BY PROVINCE**



**TABLE 4  
THREE COHORTS OF PLA NAVY OFFICERS**

Cohort	Early Career Period	Defining Historic Event	Professional Technical Expertise	Doctrine	International Engagement	Combat Experience
Old Guard	Late 1960s Early 1970s	Cultural Revolution (1966–76)	Limited or no formal training until midcareer	Soviet Young School; Mao’s People’s War at Sea	Limited engagement at senior levels	Limited
Rising Cohort	Mid-1970s Early 1980s	Economic and military reforms (1979–85)	Rudimentary technical training	Offshore defense	Growing engagement opportunities as midcareer officers	None
Future Leadership	Later 1980s	Military modernization (1986–92)	Increasingly sophisticated training as junior officers	Offshore defense and far-seas protection	Operational-level engagement as junior officers	None

### *The Impact of History on China's Navy Leadership*

Shared historical experiences, particularly during individuals' "formative years" (late teens to early twenties), are frequently used to analyze Chinese military and political elites.<sup>26</sup> Most of the officers examined here joined the military during these years, making this approach particularly well suited to the study of China's naval leadership. Differences among the cohorts are also exacerbated by the extreme changes that occurred in China over the past few decades. For example, while members of the navy's Old Guard grew up under Maoist socialism and began their military careers during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, members of the slightly younger Rising Cohort began their careers during a period of significant transition, for both the military and China overall. In contrast, those in the PLAN's Future Leadership are some of the first officers to have never known anything but a stable and prosperous China increasingly powerful and confident on the world stage.

*The Cultural Revolution and China's Old Guard.* Although many have recently stepped down, PLAN officers who joined the PLA in the 1960s or early 1970s remain in key positions. They include PLAN commander Wu Shengli as well as PLAN Standing Committee members deputy commander Vice Admiral Du Jingchen and deputy political commissar Vice Admiral Wang Dengping. Officers within this cohort came of age during the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, a period during which China experienced a breakdown of society and government as Mao sought to reestablish authority over the country through continuous and often violent revolution. During this time, the lives of millions were affected, including many of the PLAN's Old Guard.

For example, PLAN officers who began their military careers at this time worked within an organization focused almost exclusively on domestic political issues rather than professional military training and execution. With the breakdown of political authority, PLA troops, including PLAN units, were called on to secure important centers of power and maintain law and order. During the Wuhan incident in 1967—a pitched battle between rival political factions for control of the Hubei provincial capital—Mao dispatched PLAN gunboats from the East Sea Fleet to provide support to his factions fighting in the city.<sup>27</sup> Other units protected critical naval infrastructure on the Zhoushan islands near Shanghai, and their personnel provided temporary port labor to ensure the continued flow of necessary supplies.<sup>28</sup>

Opportunities for the PLAN's Old Guard to receive formal training and professional military education (PME) during this time were almost nonexistent. By the mid-1960s, most of China's PME institutions were shut down, and formal training and technical knowledge were radically de-emphasized. For example,

previous standards that required PLA Navy submarines to be manned with a 70 : 30 ratio of qualified to unqualified crewmen ran counter to Maoist teachings that political will could overcome a lack of specialized expertise, so they were revised to allow for as much as 80 percent of a submarine's crew to be newly assigned, unqualified personnel.<sup>29</sup> As many as 3,800 officers, including eleven rear admirals, were purged during this time.<sup>30</sup>

Many in the current upper echelon of navy leaders were forced to wait until the late 1970s to receive any form of PME. In 1964, just as many of the nation's educational institutions were being shuttered, Admiral Wu was enrolled at the PLA Surveying and Mapping College in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, where he would remain until 1968.<sup>31</sup> In 1968, Admiral Liu Xiaojiang, who only recently retired as PLAN political commissar, worked on a rural commune in Shaanxi as an "educated youth."<sup>32</sup> Although he joined the PLA in 1968, Admiral Sun Jianguo, the PLAN's third-highest-ranking naval officer, was unable to attend the Naval Submarine Academy until 1978.<sup>33</sup> Recently retired deputy commander Vice Admiral Zhang Yongyi had to wait years before attending the Shenyang Air Force Academy.<sup>34</sup>

*From Cultural Revolution to Reform and Opening: The PLAN's Rising Cohort.* As the older generation of leaders retires, officers who joined the PLA in the middle-to-late 1970s or early 1980s are replacing them. Many of the PLAN's newly promoted Standing Committee members are part of this group, including deputy commanders Vice Admiral Tian Zhong and Vice Admiral Ding Yi, and chief of staff Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng. They join PLAN Logistics Department director Xu Weibing as part of China's Rising Cohort of naval leaders.

Age differences between the Old Guard and the Rising Cohort are not always great. The Rising Cohort's Vice Admiral Jiang Weilie, for example, who joined the PLA in 1972, is not far removed from the Old Guard's deputy political commissar Vice Admiral Wang Dengping or deputy commander Vice Admiral Du Jingchen, who joined the PLA in 1970 and 1969, respectively. Members of the Rising Cohort were therefore affected by the Cultural Revolution as well. Yet as they were just a few years younger, those experiences were often radically different. Members of the Rising Cohort likely experienced the worst excesses of the Cultural Revolution as civilians, since many of the most violent events took place in 1967 and 1968, immediately before they joined the PLA. Absent the PLA's institutional protections, they were more likely to have been part of the "sent-down youth" movement, which forced roughly 12 million urban youths to work in the countryside between 1968 and 1975.<sup>35</sup> Current NSF commander Yuan Yubai, an older member of this cohort but one who did not join the PLA until 1973, spent two years as a member of his county's "Basic Line Education Work Team," in Gonggan County, Hubei Province.<sup>36</sup>

While marked by the Cultural Revolution, the PLAN's Rising Cohort also benefited greatly from China's economic reform and opening period as well as the PLA's early modernization efforts, both of which began in the early 1980s. By 1978, Deng Xiaoping had begun dismantling the collective system of rural agricultural production and establishing incentives for state-owned industries to increase production—steps that would put the Chinese economy on the road to three decades of double-digit growth. Around the same time, the PLA had reestablished its educational and training institutions, focusing primarily on rotational training and unit readiness. Cultural Revolution policies of preparing for total war gave way to training to fight what the PLA refers to as “local wars under high-tech conditions.” Most importantly, ideological purity was replaced with technical acumen, with a shift in emphasis back from “red” to “expert.”<sup>37</sup> Thus the Rising Cohort represents the first group of leaders who did not have to transition from an ideological to a professional focus midway through their careers.

*A Rising and Confident China: The PLA Navy's Future Leaders.* As the Rising Cohort moves up the ranks, this is creating space for a younger group of officers who came of age in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While they have not yet ascended to top leadership positions, in all probability the PLAN's next true “generation” of leaders—in the sense that they will be removed from their predecessors' experiences during the Cultural Revolution—will come from this cohort. Many in this younger cohort are currently serving in naval academic institutions or as ship commanding officers (COs) or political commissars. Examples include Senior Captain Li Hanjun, who until 2014 was serving as the director of the training department at PLAN headquarters and is now the director of the military training department at the Naval Command Academy.<sup>38</sup> This also includes Senior Captain Zhang Zheng, the CO of the PLA Navy's aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*; Zou Fuquan, the CO of *Haikou* (CNS 171) during the first Gulf of Aden escort operation in 2008; and Senior Captain Zhao Xiaogang, the PLA Navy's task force commander for China's first-ever participation in RIMPAC.<sup>39</sup>

Born in the late 1960s and early 1970s, these officers were children or adolescents during the Cultural Revolution, although it still undoubtedly influenced their lives. In their adult lives, however, they have experienced a much more stable domestic and international environment and an increasingly powerful and prosperous China. By the mid-to-late 1980s, when many of these officers were still in the early stages of their military careers, China's relations with the United States and the Soviet Union had improved considerably, allowing Deng Xiaoping in 1985 to put forth his strategic reassessment of the current international climate as one in which China could expect at least two decades of international stability.<sup>40</sup> These changes to China's strategic outlook mean that once these officers

move into top-level positions, they will be the first PLAN leadership cohort to have never served in a navy preparing for total war.

China's reassessment of its international environment also allowed the PLA to rethink its approach to training, modernization, and national defense. In the mid-1990s, Jiang Zemin's policy of "two transformations" (*liangge zhuanbian*, 两个转变) called for the army to shift from preparing to fight local wars under normal conditions to fighting local wars in a high-tech environment, and for the PLA as a whole to shift toward relying on quality rather than quantity.<sup>41</sup> As part of this reassessment, the PLA Navy in particular sought to professionalize its officer corps and improve training and recruitment, and officers within this younger cohort have benefited significantly. For example, since these officers joined the PLA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the PLA has been downsized by roughly 1.7 million personnel.<sup>42</sup> In addition, while much remains unknown about the importance of personal connections in the PLA promotion system, this is also the first group of navy officers for whom actual retirement at prescribed mandatory ages is the standard, making promotion practices more routine.

The PLA Navy, like the PLA more broadly, has also sought to improve retention through increased compensation and improved living standards; PLAN commander Wu himself has written on this subject.<sup>43</sup> The navy's procurement of advanced weaponry in the mid- and late 1990s created even greater emphasis on educating and training officers who could operate, support, and maintain these new systems.<sup>44</sup> Thus, as this cohort of officers was joining up, the PLAN was beginning to recruit more college-educated personnel.<sup>45</sup> A growing number of younger PLAN officers have also studied in top-tier Chinese civilian universities; they include Senior Captain Zhang Zheng, who graduated from Shanghai Jiaotong University in 1990 with a degree in engineering.<sup>46</sup> While the PLAN's PME system continues to undergo reforms, the improvements China's navy has already made since these officers joined the PLA means the navy's Future Leadership includes some of the most highly trained and technically proficient personnel in the modern history of the PLAN.<sup>47</sup>

### *China's Changing Approach to Naval Doctrine*

As the PLAN leadership continues to transition to a new and younger cohort of leaders, so has the PLAN's approach to doctrine changed. Members of the navy's Old Guard were greatly influenced in their early careers by Mao's views of guerrilla warfare, adapted to the navy in the form of "People's War at Sea," as well as Soviet naval doctrine in the form of the Young School. In contrast, members of the PLAN's Rising Cohort were introduced in the early and middle stages of their careers to the concept of offshore or "near seas" defense (*jinhai fangyu*, 近海防御), a reorientation of Chinese naval assets seaward, and an extension of China's

area of operations. This gradual extension of the PLAN's area of operations continued with Hu Jintao's 2004 directive for the PLA to take on "new historic missions," pushing the PLAN farther and farther afield.<sup>48</sup>

*People's War at Sea: The Influence of Mao and the Soviet Union.* Navy operations and doctrine in the PLAN's early years were heavily influenced by two independent strands of thought: Mao's views of guerrilla warfare and Russian views regarding asymmetric warfare at sea.<sup>49</sup> While distinct approaches, both favored the use of smaller units operating in dispersed groups to engage in commerce raiding and coastal defense, and the PLAN's approach to warfare reflected this influence. For example, Chinese writings on naval operations during the PLAN's early years described the importance of "mak[ing] the best use of the sorghum fields at sea—the reefs, islets, cold, fog, and waves—and bring[ing] into full play the tactics and strategy of people's war."<sup>50</sup>

The PLAN's early approach to war fighting can be seen in early coastal operations against Kuomintang (KMT) forces in the 1950s. In the 1954–55 naval ambush operations off the coast of Zhejiang, for example, the PLA Navy conducted surprise attacks against KMT frigates and gunships using torpedo boats hidden among larger merchant ships moving down the coast. These torpedo boats were then dispatched on a rainy night with low visibility, and were able to get within four kilometers of their KMT targets before being detected, successfully sinking the KMT frigate *Taiping* and KMT gunship *Dongting*.<sup>51</sup>

The PLAN's limited capacity to remain at sea for prolonged periods surely limited any opportunities for members of the navy's Old Guard to acquire blue-water experience early in their careers. However, this focus on hit-and-run tactics and guerrilla warfare shows that the PLAN's transition to its current form resulted as much from a radical shift in mind-set as from the acquisition of new technology and operational capabilities.

*The Rising Cohort and Offshore Defense.* Deng Xiaoping's 1985 reassessment of the international strategic environment helped usher in a shift in the PLA Navy's strategy to "offshore defense" (*jinhai fangyu*, 近海防御), which sought to extend China's strategic maritime periphery farther from its borders. Much ink has already been spilled in analyzing in nuanced detail this shift in doctrine.<sup>52</sup> For those in the navy's Rising Cohort, however, this new doctrine fundamentally changed how they would think about war fighting. The PLAN would no longer use hit-and-run tactics but instead would train and prepare to fight in "more substantial and organized formations."<sup>53</sup>

The PLAN's shift to offshore defense would also expand its area of operations farther from China's coast, creating what may be the most important difference between this cohort and its predecessor: namely, that a much larger component



of the Rising Cohort has direct experience with blue-water operations.<sup>54</sup> Such operations have become an increasingly important component of the PLAN's regimen, and active-duty PLAN officers have not been shy in noting the importance of blue-water operations to the future of the PLAN. For example, speaking to the *PLA Daily* in 2012, current chief of staff then-rear admiral Qiu Yanpeng noted, "With the constant improvement of China's naval equipment and support capability, the waters for maritime training also keep expanding. Open-sea training has become an effective means and inevitable choice to enhance the combat capability of the PLA Navy."<sup>55</sup> China's 2013 defense white paper notes that the PLA Navy is "intensifying blue-water training" and "improving the training mode of task force formation in blue water."<sup>56</sup>

Prior to personnel changes in 2014, few members of the PLAN leadership had any extensive experience with blue-water operations. With the exception of Du Jingchen, no Standing Committee member had been involved with the PLAN's Gulf of Aden escort mission, a well-known and long-standing blue-water mission.<sup>57</sup> Now not only is Vice Admiral Du joined by Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng as another Standing Committee member with such experience (Qiu led the fourth escort mission, in 2010), but almost half the members of the Standing Committee have similar experiences leading blue-water operations.<sup>58</sup> Other members of the Rising Cohort with similar blue-water experience have recently been promoted as well. Rear Admiral Zhang Wendan, the commander of the fifth Gulf of Aden task force, was recently promoted to SSF chief of staff. Rear Admiral Zhou Xuming, the leader of the twelfth task force, was promoted to NSF deputy commander.<sup>59</sup>

Early blue-water operations likely carried significant weight for the few members of the Old Guard who commanded them. For the navy's Rising Cohort, however, the impact on a career of commanding a blue-water operation is not automatic. To paraphrase a senior PLA Navy officer:

Taking part in the escort operations is something we increasingly emphasize in promotion. *But escort participation by itself does not guarantee promotion* [emphasis added]. It is not the case that if you take part in the escort operations, you will be promoted, and if you do not take part, you will not be promoted. If you take part in the escort, and you show a good performance, then you may be promoted [paraphrase].<sup>60</sup>

Nor does commanding a Gulf of Aden task force specifically appear to lead directly to promotion. While Vice Admiral Du was promoted less than a year after commanding China's first escort mission in the Gulf of Aden, no other Gulf of Aden task force commander was promoted so quickly. Indeed, of the first fourteen officers who led a Gulf of Aden escort mission between 2008 and 2013, six remain in the same position at the time of this writing.<sup>61</sup>

*China's Expanding Interests Abroad and the Next Generation of PLAN Leaders.* Since Hu Jintao's 2004 "New Historic Missions" speech, in which he declared that China's interests abroad were expanding, and that the PLA, particularly the PLA Navy, had an important role to play in defending those interests, the PLAN has extended its operations farther afield.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, this trend appears to show no sign of slowing down. For example, the 2013 "Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces" notes the continuing importance of "comprehensive security" (*zonghe anquan*, 综合安全), including the strengthening of China's overseas operational capabilities such as search and rescue and emergency evacuation and protecting China's overseas interests, all of which are important missions for China's navy.<sup>63</sup> One of the main themes of the 2015 defense white paper "China's Military Strategy" is the need for China to "safeguard its maritime rights and interests," which requires that "the traditional mentality that land outweighs sea must be abandoned, and great[er] importance be attached to managing the sea and oceans and protecting maritime rights and interests."<sup>64</sup>

These two documents continue the shift in the PLA's focus from the land to the sea, and from China's coastal and littoral regions to far-seas operations. While it is too soon to know for certain the impact this trend will have on the PLAN's Future Leadership cohort, two distinct possibilities suggest themselves.

First, the PLA's continued placement of greater emphasis on China's maritime rights and interests may create opportunities for PLAN personnel to chip away slowly at the PLA ground force's monopoly on positions of power.

Second, as the PLAN continues to embrace its global role, the navy's Future Leadership may increasingly take on the views and perspectives of officers who work in a truly blue-water navy. While this is not to suggest that China's younger leaders will forsake traditional security operations, some PLAN personnel have already noted that China's younger officers are more interested in far-seas operations outside the first island chain.<sup>65</sup> As the PLAN continues this decades-long shift from being an inward-looking, coastal-defense force to an outward-looking, expeditionary navy, the PLAN's next generation of leaders will have more experience at sea than any group of Chinese navy leaders in modern history.

### *International Engagement with Foreign Navies*

Each successive cohort of PLAN leadership has become increasingly comfortable and confident operating in an international environment. While members of the navy's Old Guard were almost completely isolated from the international maritime community early in their careers, those in the Rising Cohort have had opportunities to engage with that community, developing a confidence and sophistication honed from experience with naval diplomacy unavailable to most of their older counterparts save those of the highest rank. Yet even this confidence

and experience are quickly being overshadowed by those in the PLAN's Future Leadership, who engage with foreign navies not only diplomatically but operationally, increasingly working side by side with their foreign counterparts in bilateral and multilateral naval exercises as junior officers.

For China's Old Guard, international engagement with foreign navies came late in their careers. The Cultural Revolution effectively shut down China's naval diplomacy, and with the exception of a handful of senior exchanges with the North Korean and Sri Lankan navies, China's naval diplomacy did not restart until the mid-1980s.<sup>66</sup> For example, the PLA Navy did not conduct its first port visit until 1985, when a three-ship task force visited Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The Chinese navy only began to conduct combined military exercises with foreign navies in earnest in the early 2000s, and the PLAN's first bilateral maritime exercise in the region did not take place until 2007, when members of the Old Guard were already well established in their careers.

When the PLAN did begin engaging with foreign militaries, the importance of these initial operations meant that they were entrusted to established senior officers. For example, PLAN deputy commander Ding Yiping led the PLAN's first global circumnavigation in 2002 as a vice admiral. Vice Admiral Du Jingchen, one of the PLAN's current deputy commanders, led the PLAN's first Gulf of Aden operations as the South Sea Fleet's chief of staff, but was promoted less than a year later to PLAN chief of staff.

*The PLAN's Rising Cohort and Increasing International Engagement.* The members of the PLAN's Rising Cohort have had more exposure to naval diplomacy engagement at much earlier stages in their careers than their predecessors. As the PLAN continues to be China's primary service for military diplomacy—conducting counter-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden, humanitarian missions via the PLAN's hospital ship *Peace Ark*, and traditional combat exercises such as the annual MARITIME COOPERATION exercise with Russia—the opportunity to engage with foreign navy personnel has become increasingly common.<sup>67</sup> For example, as a senior captain commanding the East Sea Fleet's 6th Destroyer Flotilla in 2007, then-rear admiral Qiu Yanpeng led the PLAN's contingent in AMAN-07, a Pakistan-hosted multilateral exercise with eight other nations, including the United States. This marked the first time China participated in a multilateral combined naval exercise, the first time a PLAN task force traveled abroad without a supply ship, and the first time the navy used live ammunition overseas.<sup>68</sup>

*China's Future Leadership: Working with and alongside Foreign Navies.* While the PLAN's Rising Cohort has had substantial international engagement experience compared with the Old Guard, much of it has been limited to cursory diplomatic events such as meetings during port visits or communications at sea. In contrast,

China's Future Leadership has begun actually operating with rather than simply alongside foreign navies. For example, although U.S. Navy and PLAN ships have been interacting in the Gulf of Aden for years, in 2013 the two navies conducted their first exercise in that region, which included boarding operations, live-fire drills, and helicopter landings.<sup>69</sup> In September of that year the two navies conducted additional exercises off the coast of Hawaii.<sup>70</sup> In the summer of 2014, China sent four ships to participate for the first time in RIMPAC, the world's largest multilateral naval exercise. Senior Captain Zhao Xiaogang, the PLA Navy's task force commander at RIMPAC 2014, and the COs of the PLAN's four ships at the exercise each worked closely with ships from the U.S., French, Singaporean, and other navies for weeks, conducting a wide range of drills at sea and interacting with them on a daily basis.

Working so closely with foreign navies at such an early stage in one's career was not a possibility for those in the PLAN's Rising Cohort, and was unthinkable for Admiral Wu and other members of the Old Guard early in their careers. As the PLAN continues to work alongside and operate with foreign navies, China's future navy leaders will be provided with a fundamentally deeper knowledge and understanding of foreign navies than can be claimed even by members of the Rising Cohort.

### *Combat Experience*

While younger generations of PLA Navy leaders are becoming increasingly well educated, trained, and experienced with operations abroad, one characteristic that unites all three cohorts is their lack of combat experience. Historically, the PLAN's combat experience has been limited to a few operations, including the liberation of offshore islands from the KMT in the 1950s, two small skirmishes with KMT forces in 1965, and clashes with the Vietnamese navy in 1974 and 1988 over the Paracel (Xisha) Islands and Johnson Reef (Chigua Jiao) in the Spratly Islands, respectively.<sup>71</sup>

We have no evidence that any of China's current leadership has been directly involved in combat operations. Even the navy's Old Guard would have been too young to have experienced most of the PLAN's operations, which took place before even Admiral Wu, the PLAN's elder statesman, joined the PLA. Many of the Rising Cohort joined the PLAN around the time of the PLAN's clash with Vietnam over the Paracels in 1974. This includes current PLAN Standing Committee members Vice Admiral Tian Zhong and Vice Admiral Qiu Yanpeng as well as ESF deputy commander Rear Admiral Shen Hao. Again, the short, confined nature of these operations likely precluded any of these officers from participating directly, and certainly means they were unable to garner significant combat experience even if they did participate. However, for those officers joining the PLA

at this time, the navy's success likely served as a positive contrast to the failures of the PLA ground forces in the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War.

The available evidence indicates that the closest any of China's current navy leaders came to participating in any of these operations was Admiral Wu's role in the 14 March 1988 Johnson South Reef skirmish (*chiguajiao haizhan*, 吃瓜礁海战).<sup>72</sup> Although not directly involved, Admiral Wu was serving at the time as commander of the East Sea Fleet's 6th Destroyer Flotilla (*zhidui*, 支队), and had authority over the frigate *Yingtian* (CNS 531), which took part in the conflict.<sup>73</sup>

### THE FUTURE OF PLA NAVY LEADERSHIP

With the PLA Navy undergoing one of the most substantial leadership transitions in recent history, this article has sought to compare and contrast the members of the PLAN's Old Guard, who joined the PLA during the Cultural Revolution and who are fast retiring, with the Rising Cohort of leaders who are taking their place. The article also examines the navy's Future Leadership, whose eventual ascent will mark a second watershed moment in the evolution of China's navy leadership.

The findings above suggest that a profound shift is already under way in terms of the levels of professional education, training, international experience, and direct experience with the navy's new operations that the PLAN's emerging leaders possess. While the Old Guard was tasked with overseeing a navy that was rapidly transforming, the vast majority of them had little if any personal experience with the skill sets they sought to develop within that navy. Although under this Old Guard the navy began to recruit officer candidates with greater levels of formal education and provide them with more-robust training, they themselves had had limited opportunities for such training. Although the navy began to conduct advanced blue-water operations under their tenure, very few of these leaders, who joined a coastal-defense force during the Cultural Revolution, had that type of experience themselves.

How unique is China in this regard? Many developing navies must manage a certain level of inversion in the technical skills found in their institution's personnel, with younger, lower-ranking members being more technically sophisticated than their older, higher-ranking counterparts. Developing navies in South Korea, India, Vietnam, and others have faced similar challenges. However, the evidence provided above suggests that this difference has been particularly acute for China. Very few countries denigrated the possession of technical skill and knowledge or treated technical training as inversely related to political loyalty to the extent that China did during much of the early military careers of members of the Old Guard. Few countries were as closed to the outside world as China during the Cultural Revolution. Viewed in this context, the accomplishments of this fast-retiring cohort of PLAN leaders are all the more remarkable.

The article's findings also suggest that each successive cohort of navy leadership is increasingly developing the characteristics and obtaining the maritime engagement experiences found in the officer corps of other modern, developed navies. The Rising Cohort is more at ease interacting with foreign navies than its predecessor, while those in the Future Leadership cohort have operated with U.S. Navy ships and studied alongside foreign naval officers in NATO member countries.<sup>74</sup> These traits will likely facilitate future engagement with naval officers from the United States and U.S.-allied countries, with whom they are likely to have more and more in common.

Despite these changes, it is important to note some of the similarities that remain between the old and the new. Like the Old Guard, the Rising Cohort is dominated by officers from China's developed coastal provinces. Like their predecessors, they have a living memory of the Cultural Revolution, one of the most dangerous and unstable periods in modern Chinese history. Although it is unclear how this experience affected individual officers, they all remember a time when China was weak, unstable, and under constant threat of war.

Finally, it is important to note that, despite the PLAN's growing professionalism, PLA Navy leaders remain firmly embedded within the CCP. While some have suggested the possibility that military modernization and PLA professionalization would lead to a Huntingtonian-style transition from a party to a national army, this has not occurred.<sup>75</sup> In fact, the party continues to have control over PLAN personnel decisions, reflected over the past few years most clearly in the CCP's expansive anticorruption campaign, which has removed a number of senior military figures on charges of corruption or lack of party discipline. Within the navy, key leaders who have been caught up in the campaign include deputy PLAN political commissar Vice Admiral Ma Faxiang and Rear Admiral Jiang Zhonghua, the director of the Equipment Department for China's South Sea Fleet.<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is important to remember that despite this growing professionalism among PLAN personnel, China's new navy leaders will remain subject to strict party control and oversight and will continue to identify first and foremost with the party.

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#### NOTES

1. In 2015, Rear Adm. Wang Hai was promoted from chief of staff of the North Sea Fleet to PLA Navy deputy commander, increasing the number of deputy commanders to six, and the total number of members of the PLAN Standing Committee to fourteen. See “王海少将任海军副司令 曾任辽宁舰编队司令”

[*Wanghai xiaojiang ren haijun fu siling ceng ren liaoningjian biandui siling*] [Rear Admiral Wang Hai Promoted to Deputy Commander Served as Commander of Liaoning Strike Group], *Sina*, 22 July 2015, [www.mil.news.sina.com.cn/2015-07-22/0924835560.html](http://www.mil.news.sina.com.cn/2015-07-22/0924835560.html).

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3. Pyoung K. Yi, "PRC Vice Admiral Tours Mercy during RIMPAC 2014," *America's Navy*, 20 July 2014, [www.navy.mil/](http://www.navy.mil/).
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5. Lu Siqing, "消息指下月四中全会海军司令员吴胜利可能退休" [*Xiaoxi zhixiyue sizhong quanhui haijun silingyuan wu shengli keneng tuixiu*] [News That PLA Navy Commander Wu Shengli May Retire Next Month at the 4th Plenary Session], *Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy*, 24 September 2012.
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7. For a small sample of such work see for example Bernard D. Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy Enters the Twenty-First Century* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001); Thomas J. Bickford, *Uncertain Waters: Thinking about China's Emergence as a Maritime Power* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2011); Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2013); Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Nan Li, eds., *China, the United States, and 21st-Century Sea Power: Defining a Maritime Security Partnership* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2010); Ronald O'Rourke, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 8 September 2014).
8. Dianqing Wu, 在毛泽东关怀下成长起来的萧经光 [*Zai Mao Zedong guanhuaxia chengchang qilai de Xiao Jingguang dajiang*] [Admiral Xiao Jingguang Growing Up under the Care of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: People's Press, 2007), pp. 146–49.
9. Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007* (Washington, D.C.: 2007), pp. 12–13.
10. The Second Artillery is a separate branch of the PLA and serves as China's strategic missile force.
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13. On the PLA Military Affairs Department, see David Finkelstein, "The General Staff Department of the Chinese People's Liberation Army: Organization, Roles, & Missions," in *The People's Liberation Army as Organization: Reference Volume v1.0*, ed. James C. Mulvenon and Andrew N. D. Yang, Conference Proceedings (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND, 2002), p. 171. On the PLAN Military Affairs Department, see Jeffrey Becker, David Liebenberg, and Peter Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope: Leadership in China's Navy* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2013), p. 238.
14. Finkelstein, "General Staff Department," p. 146.
15. "Liu Zhuoming Promoted to Deputy Director of the Science and Technology Commission in the General Armament Department," *Oumil*, 31 August 2011. On the Science and Technology Commission, see Eric Hagt, *China's Defense High-Tech Leadership: Implications for*

- S&T Innovation*, Policy Brief 22 (San Diego: Univ. of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, September 2011).
16. Zhang Tao, ed., "Interview with Guan Youfei, Director of Foreign Affairs Office of MND," *Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, 17 April 2013, [www.eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2013-04/17/content\\_5303997.htm](http://www.eng.chinamil.com.cn/special-reports/2013-04/17/content_5303997.htm); U.S. Army Pacific, "U.S., China Conduct Disaster Management Exchange," *U.S. Department of Defense*, 25 November 2013, [www.defense.gov/](http://www.defense.gov/).
  17. See for example Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*; and Cheng Li, "Wu Shengli—China's Top Future Leaders to Watch," *Brookings*, [www.brookings.edu/](http://www.brookings.edu/).
  18. Roderick MacFarquhar and Michael Schoenhals, *Mao's Last Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).
  19. The thirteenth member of the PLAN Standing Committee in 2013 was PLAN Equipment Department director Hu Yuhao. However, we do not know his birth date or when he joined the PLA.
  20. This includes Adms. Wu Shengli and Sun Jianguo, and Lt. Gen. Miao Hua. For dates of birth for U.S. Navy O-10 officers, see *Wikipedia*, [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org).
  21. Matt Bewig, "Chief of Naval Operations: Who Is Jonathan Greenert?," *AllGov*, 16 June 2012, [www.allgov.com/](http://www.allgov.com/).
  22. This average age for the current PLAN Standing Committee omits two members (Rear Adm. Yang Shiguang and Rear Adm. Wang Jianguo) whose dates of birth remain unreported in open-source materials.
  23. See *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo xianyi junganfa* (中华人民共和国现役军官法) [Law of the People's Republic of China on Officers in Active Service] (promulgated by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, 5 September 1988), available at [www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=6236&CGid=](http://www.lawinfochina.com/display.aspx?lib=law&id=6236&CGid=).
  24. Deputy commanders Chen Xitao and Gao Zhongxing from the Beijing MR, Zhong Shenqin from the Jinan MR, Zou Gengren from the Lanzhou MR, Gui Qianzhi from the Chengdu MR, Yu Jixun from the PLA Second Artillery, and Wang Chaoqun from the PLA Air Force.
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  27. Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982), p. 242.
  28. *Ibid.*, pp. 241–42.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
  30. Lyle Goldstein, "From Humble Origins: China's Submarine Force Comes of Age," *Undersea Warfare* (Winter 2004).
  31. Center for China Studies, "Profile of Wu Shengli," *National Taiwan Chengchi University*, [www.ics.nccu.edu.tw/chinaleaders/profile.php?id=2787](http://www.ics.nccu.edu.tw/chinaleaders/profile.php?id=2787).
  32. "Liu Xiaojiang," 中国国情 [*Zhongguo guoqing*] [The State of China], 30 January 2012, [www.china.com.cn/guoqing/2012-01/30/content\\_24506383\\_2.htm](http://www.china.com.cn/guoqing/2012-01/30/content_24506383_2.htm).
  33. Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope*, p. 36.
  34. Given the limited naval aviation capacities of the PLA Navy during this time, Vice Admiral Zhang, like many naval aviators, originally joined the PLA Air Force, switching to the PLA Navy only later in his career.
  35. Thomas P. Bernstein, *Up to the Mountains and Down to the Villages: The Transfer of Youth from Urban to Rural China* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1977).



36. "Yuan Yubai," *Gongan County Website*, 22 November 2010, [www.gongan.gov.cn/news\\_show.aspx?id=12403](http://www.gongan.gov.cn/news_show.aspx?id=12403).
37. The formula "red versus expert" describes the common tension in Maoist China between a focus on ideological purity and a possession of technical skill and acumen.
38. "李汉军任海军指挥学院训练部部长" [*Lihanjun ren haijun zhihui xueyuan xunlianbu buzhang*] [Li Hanjun Promoted to Director of the Training Department at the Naval Command Academy], 秦都布衣的博客 [*Qindu buyi de boke*] [Qindu Commoner Blog], 25 April 2014, [www.blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_6ac4e1aa0102ebmh.html](http://www.blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_6ac4e1aa0102ebmh.html).
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40. Yao Yunzhu, "The Evolution of Military Doctrine of the Chinese PLA from 1985 to 1995," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 7, no. 2 (1995), pp. 57–62.
41. Kristen Gunness and Fred Vellucci, "Reforming the Officer Corps: Keeping the College Grads In, the Peasants Out, and the Incompetent Down," in *The "People" in the PLA: Recruitment, Training, and Education in China's Military*, ed. Roy Kamphausen, Andrew Scobell, and Travis Tanner (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), p. 192.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 194–95.
43. Wu Shengli, "Beginning to Bid Farewell to Sleeping and Eating aboard the Ship in Port: The Lifestyle Revolution for Chinese Sailors," *解放军生活* [*Jiefangjun shenghuo*] [PLA Life], no. 9 (2010).
44. Kenneth Allen and Morgan Clemens, *The Recruitment, Education, and Training of PLA Navy Personnel*, China Maritime Study 12 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press for the China Maritime Studies Institute, 2014), p. 2.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4.
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49. See Martin N. Murphy and Toshi Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon: Evolution in French, Soviet, and Chinese Naval Thought," *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 3 (Summer 2015), pp. 13–39.
50. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*.
51. Huang, "The PLA Navy at War, 1949–1999," pp. 257–58.
52. For a small survey of this literature see for example Murphy and Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon"; Andrew S. Erickson, Lyle Goldstein, and Carnes Lord, eds., *China Goes to Sea: Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2009); Cole, *The Great Wall at Sea*; and Office of Naval Intelligence, *China's Navy 2007*.
53. Murphy and Yoshihara, "Fighting the Naval Hegemon," p. 30.
54. The Chinese term "blue-water" is *yuanhai* (远海), which has also been translated as "distant seas" or "open oceans." See, for example, Lu Xue, "Views on Improving the Armed Forces' Ability to Execute the Historic Missions," *军事科学* [*Junshi kexue*] [Military Science], no. 5 (2007), p. 107.
55. Sun Yanxin and Ju Zhenhua, "Chinese Navy Normalizes Open-Sea Training," *PLA Daily*, 12 December 2012.
56. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces," 16 April 2013, available at [www.news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c\\_132312681.htm](http://www.news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm).
57. Du Jingchen led the PLAN's first escort operations as chief of staff of the South Sea Fleet.
58. In addition to Du Jingchen and Qiu Yanpeng, this includes Vice Adm. Wang Dengping, who led the PLAN's first global circumnavigation; Vice Adm. Tian Zhong, who led

- China's component of PEACE MISSION 2012, the PLAN's largest bilateral combined military exercise with Russia; and Vice Adm. Liu Yi, who led 2009 training events on board the PLAN training ship *Zhenghe*.
59. “周煦明接替袁誉柏任北海舰队副司令员” [Zhou xuming jieti yuan yubai beihai jiandui fusilingyuan] [Zhou Xuming Succeeds Yuan Yubai as North Sea Fleet Deputy Commander], Sohu.com, 8 November 2014, [www.news.sohu.com/20141108/n405893283.shtml](http://www.news.sohu.com/20141108/n405893283.shtml); “张文旦任南海舰队参谋长” [Zhang wendan ren haijun nanshaijiandui canmouzhang] [Zhang Wendan Promoted to South Sea Fleet Chief of Staff], *Zhenjiang Daily*, 18 March 2014.
  60. Discussions with Chinese officials, 2013.
  61. This includes SSF deputy commander Yao Zhilou, ESF deputy commander Wang Zhiguo, SSF chief of staff Wei Xueyi, ESF deputy commander Zhang Huachen, and SSF deputy chief of staff Li Shihong.
  62. Tanner and Mackenzie, *China's Emerging National Security Interests and Their Impact on the People's Liberation Army*; Jonas Parello-Plesner and Mathieu Duchâtel, *China's Strong Arm: Protecting Citizens and Assets Abroad*, Adelphi 451 (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2015).
  63. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, “The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces.” It is important to note that these missions are not exclusive to the navy, as evidenced by the role of the PLA Air Force in the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in 2014.
  64. Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, “China's Military Strategy,” 25 May 2015, available at [www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content\\_20820628.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm); Dennis J. Blasko, “The 2015 Chinese Defense White Paper on Strategy in Perspective: Maritime Missions Require a Change in the PLA Mindset,” Jamestown Foundation *China Brief* 15, no. 12 (29 May 2015), [www.jamestown.org/](http://www.jamestown.org/).
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  66. Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon*, p. 257.
  67. Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, “China's Blue Soft Power: Antipiracy, Engagement, and Image Enhancement,” *Naval War College Review* 68, no. 1 (Winter 2015); Peter W. Mackenzie, *Red Crosses, Blue Water: Hospital Ships and China's Expanding Naval Presence* (Alexandria, Va.: CNA, 2011); Andrew S. Erickson and Austin M. Strange, *No Substitute for Experience: Chinese Anti-piracy Operations in the Gulf of Aden*, China Maritime Study 10 (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press for the China Maritime Studies Institute, 2013).
  68. Becker, Liebenberg, and Mackenzie, *Behind the Periscope*, p. 197.
  69. Sam LaGrone, “China and U.S. Participate in Rare Joint Exercise,” *USNI News*, 26 August 2013, [news.usni.org/](http://news.usni.org/).
  70. “Chinese Naval Vessels in Rare Visit to Hawaii for Exercises with US,” *South China Morning Post*, 7 September 2013, [www.scmp.com/](http://www.scmp.com/).
  71. Huang, “The PLA Navy at War, 1949–1999,” pp. 249–63.
  72. In China, many major historical events are referred to by the date they occurred. This particular event is often referred to as the “3.14 Naval Battle” (3.14 *haizhan*, 海战).
  73. Yang Zhongmei, 中国即将开战: 中国新军国主义崛起 [Zhongguo jijiang kaizhan: zhongguo xin junguo zhuyi jueqi] [China's Coming War: The Rise of China's New Militarism] (Taipei: Time Culture Press, 2013), pp. 201–11.
  74. According to an official Chinese government website, Senior Capt. Zhang Zheng studied at the Defense Language Institute of the United Kingdom (英国国防语言学院), which we believe to be the British Defence Centre for Languages and Culture. See “Zhang Zheng, Commander of China's 1st Aircraft Carrier,” [China.org.cn](http://China.org.cn), 29 September 2012, [www.china.org.cn/chinese/2012-09/29/content\\_26674394.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2012-09/29/content_26674394.htm).
  75. David L. Shambaugh, *Modernizing China's Military: Progress, Problems, and Prospects* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004), pp. 11–31.
  76. Minnie Chan, “Senior PLA Navy Officer Leaps to His Death from Beijing Block, Source Says,” *South China Morning Post*, 16 November 2014; Miles Yu, “Chinese Leaders Committing Suicide in Drones,” *Washington Times*, 20 November 2014.