

Dispute Control: China Recalibrates Use of Military Force to Support Security Policy's Expanding Focus

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China has been expanding its array of national interests and has sought to increase China's influence on the regional and global order. Its leaders, led by Xi Jinping, have directed efforts to strengthen its control of this expansion and reform in a manner that minimizes the risk of conflict. As military thinkers grapple with these requirements, the management and use of military force to achieve policy goals has both increased in importance and taken on new points of emphasis. A review of recent Chinese official documents and military writings suggests that the shift in the nation's security policy towards one of a limited, peaceful expansion has increased interest in the use of non-military instruments of coercion and in the exploitation of militarized crises for strategic gain. Developments in the South and East China Seas suggest this line of thinking may already have informed policy. If so, Chinese behavior in coming years could show a greater willingness to engage in brinkmanship and other risk-taking behavior.

Key Words: China's national security concepts, China's dispute control, China's crisis management, China's non-war missions, China's strategic deterrence, China's peacetime methods for control.

As China's interests expand beyond territorial boundaries and relations with neighboring and other powers grow more complicated, senior leaders have expanded the military's role and missions. Military thinkers have responded to this demand by proposing new, and refining existing, concepts to guide the calibrated use of armed force in peacetime, crisis, and conflict. Initial Chinese writings on these topics reflected sensitivity to the tension posed by the requirements' more expeditionary and assertive focus and a traditional homeland defense-oriented security policy. These early writings managed this tension by

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focusing on non-war missions to promote international stability and by restricting discussions of crisis and conflict to scenarios involving Taiwan and defense of the homeland.

DISPUTE CONTROL: KEY TERMS

Term	Explanation
Crisis management	The military's support to civilian led efforts to restore stability to a situation facing the potential to escalate into conflict. In this context, crisis management involves disputes related to the expansion of strategic space along China's periphery.
Dispute control	A family of concepts that appeared, or underwent considerable refinement, during the mid to late-2000s. These ideas share a focus on the employment of military power in peacetime, crisis, and conflict to support the expanding focus of China's security policy.
Non-war missions	Non-combat military operations that address principally non-traditional threats, such as counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, military diplomacy, and international peacekeeping operations. Nonwar operations and actions aim to shape a favorable security environment and protect overseas interests.
Strategic deterrence	The display of force or show of determination to use force to compel an adversary to submit to China's volition and refrain from taking hostile actions or escalating hostile actions. Although the concept's application extends in other realms, strategic deterrence may support efforts to expand strategic space.

Following the global financial crisis and China's rise to the upper ranks of global powers by the late 2000s, however, the tension between the country's growing security needs and a legacy defensive security policy resolved in favor of a policy ostensibly unchanged from previous years, but one that more clearly supported the expanding focus of the country's security policy. Senior leaders led by Xi Jinping directed efforts to protect the nation's interests and to increase China's influence on the regional and global order. Scholars and experts have accordingly placed a greater emphasis on the coordinated employment of military and non-military power in peacetime and in a crisis. Chinese military thinkers are also refining ideas on how to calibrate the use of force in conflict, but the political imperative to avoid major war continues to impose a severe constraint. The invocation of terms and ideas from this literature in official documents and senior leader speeches, along with

Beijing's management of various maritime-related incidents, together suggest that these ideas may already be informing policy. Further evidence may be seen in organizational decisions consistent with the logic of the dispute control literature, such as measures to centralize national security decision-making, improve civil-military coordination, and elevate the role of non-military assets in defending national interests. However, the incomplete nature of the reforms and persistent defects in decision-making raise the risk of over-reaction and miscalculation in a crisis.

Background: Western scholarship review

For decades, Western scholarship on military doctrine reflected the PLA's focus on political work and combat operations to defend the homeland. For example, Paul Godwin noted that from the 1960s to the 1980s, PLA writings aimed to guide military operations to repel a threatened invasion from the Soviet Union. Doctrinal writings outlined strategy and tactics to "lure the enemy in deep."² Analyses of China's national military strategy in the 1990s and early 2000s similarly focused on operations related to what PLA authorities deemed "localized conflict under high-tech conditions," generally understood to refer to scenarios involving Taiwan.³

In the mid-2000s, however, Western scholars began to detect new points of emphasis in PLA writings. In 2007, Lonnie Henley analyzed the concept of "war control," which posited the calibrated use of military power in peacetime, crisis, and conflict (see below).⁴ That year, Bonnie

² Paul H. B. Godwin, "Changing Concepts of Doctrine, Strategy and Operations in the Chinese People's Liberation Army, 1978-1987," *The China Quarterly*, 112 (1987), 572-90, and "Mao Zedong Revisited: Deterrence and Defense in the 1980's," in *The Chinese Defense Establishment: Continuity and Change in the 1980s*, ed. Paul H. B. Godwin (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), 21-40.

³ David M. Finkelstein, "China's National Military Strategy: An Overview of the 'Military Strategic Guidelines,'" in *Right Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*, ed. Andrew Scobell and Roy Kamphausen (Carlisle: Army War College, 2007), 69-140; M. Taylor Fravel, "The Evolution of China's Military Strategy: Comparing the 1987 and 1999 Editions of Zhanlue Xue," in *The Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Operational Art of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, ed. David M. Finkelstein and James Mulvenon (Alexandria, Va.: Center for Naval Analyses, 2005), 79-100.

⁴ Lonnie Henley, "War Control and Escalation Management," in *Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan's Security*, ed. Michael Swaine, Andrew Yang, and Evan Medeiros (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 85-110.

Ling published a study on the PLA's increasing presence in UN missions.⁵ Real world developments confirmed the changing focus. In 2009, the PLA carried out its first-ever deployment of a naval task force to serve in counter-piracy operations off the horn of Africa, and the PLA has in recent years become one of the largest contributors of troops to United Nations peacekeeping operations (PKO).⁶

Scholarship on Chinese notions of crisis management has made important breakthroughs as well. In 2006, Michael Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng published one of the first major western studies on Chinese notions of crisis management. The book analyzed patterns in Beijing's approach to historical episodes of military crises.⁷ Jae Ho Chung's 2013 edited volume examined Chinese crisis management for both domestic and international incidents.⁸ Iain Johnston's 2015 study provided a thorough survey of the growing Chinese literature on crisis management.⁹ In 2016, Andrew Erickson and Adam Liff examined weaknesses in China's crisis management system within the context of the Senkaku dispute with Japan.¹⁰

Two points stand out regarding this body of western scholarship. First, the similar timelines identified for the emergence of topics related to war control, non-war missions, and crisis management topics suggest some loose affiliation between these ideas. Scholars have in fact identified Hu Jintao's late 2004 directive to expand the scope of military activity as part of the "historic missions" concept as a key driver of the PLA's interest in these topics. The "historic missions" outlined four strategic roles, calling on the PLA to: 1) provide support for the CCP's rule as a governing party; 2) provide support for the maintenance of a period of strategic opportunity; 3) provide support for the protection of national interests; 4) play a role in promoting world peace and common development. These

⁵ Bonny Ling, "China's Peacekeeping Diplomacy," *China Rights Forum* 1 (2007). URL: http://www.hrichina.org/sites/default/files/PDFs/CRF.1.2007/CRF-2007-1_Peacekeeping.pdf

⁶ Watson, Cynthia. "The Chinese Armed Forces and Non-Traditional Missions: A Growing Tool of Statecraft," *China Brief*, 9: 4 (2009).

⁷ Michael Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng, *Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006).

⁸ Jae Ho Chung, *China's Crisis Management* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁹ Alastair Iain Johnston, "The Evolution of Inter-State Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China," *Naval War College Review*, 69: 1 (2016), 29-72.

¹⁰ Andrew S. Erickson and Adam P. Liff, "Installing a Safety on the 'Loaded Gun'? China's Institutional Reforms, National Security Commission, and Sino-Japanese Crisis (In)stability," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 25: 98 (2016), 197-215.

missions provided much clearer direction to defend national interests abroad and shape a favorable international environment than had been the case in the preceding decades.¹¹ Second, current scholarship has focused primarily on the military's technical ability to fight wars and the leadership's decision-making processes in a crisis. Aside from the acknowledgement of the role of the historic missions, less attention has been paid to the political and strategic context that has given rise to, and informed the development of, ideas related to non-war missions, crisis management and related concepts. The focus on the military-technical meaning of these ideas may provide considerable insight into the contemporary PLA, but it also presents an incomplete picture for those seeking insight into why the military operates as it does and how it may act in a crisis.

An illustration of this point may be seen in the frequent invocation of the EP-3 incident off Hainan Island in 2001 in Western literature on Chinese crisis management. As many scholars have noted, China's response in that crisis appeared paralyzed and inefficient. Scholars tend to highlight factors of bureaucratic stove-piping (i.e., poor information flow between bureaucracies, or the withholding of information by bureaucracies), a consensus-style approach to decision-making, and insufficient staff to explain the response. Many of these organizational and procedural features persist today, and as a result some experts predict China's behavior in a crisis could well resemble its response to the EP-3 incident.¹²

These points are well made, but the conclusion should be tempered by a greater awareness of important changes in the political context between that time period and today. In 2001, for example, China faced an unusually sensitive political moment, as it was in the middle of a delicate leadership transition between Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. Accordingly, China could ill afford a crisis with the U.S. military, against which the PLA then compared poorly. This provided a powerful incentive to proceed with caution in responding to any international crisis (especially one involving the global superpower) and very likely compounded the organizational and procedural defects identified by Western scholars. More relevant for the purposes of this study, the Chinese political and military leadership at that time had not yet developed a clear articulation of ideas related to the non-war defense of sovereignty claims or to

¹¹ Roy D. Kamphausen, "China's Military Operations Other Than War: The Military Legacy of Hu Jintao," SIPRI (2013). URL: <http://books.sipri.org/files/misc/SIPRI-Hu%20Kamphausen.pdf>

¹² Erickson and Liff, 205.

crisis management. China's leadership did not articulate a strategic role for the military to manage such non-war security challenges until the issuance of the "historic missions" idea years later in 2004. The defense of "core interests," which Chinese officials today frequently invoke to criticize US reconnaissance operations, only began to gain prominence in official discourse around 2005.¹³ And the literature on war control, crisis management, and other related concepts similarly flourished largely after the EP-3 crisis.¹⁴

These ideas matter because China's political system continues to rely on indoctrination to motivate and guide bureaucratic action.¹⁵ As Ken Lieberthal has noted, the slogans, directives, and formulations (*tifa*) issued by senior leaders "create an atmosphere that affects behavior at all levels of the system."¹⁶ But for the bureaucracies to correctly understand and interpret these formulations, they must first have undergone some degree of indoctrination and study. Without a clear set of ideas to guide them, bureaucracies can become paralyzed in situations for which they have been poorly prepared. Consequently, the under-developed nature of theory and lack of a developed body of literature on ideas of non-war and crisis management in party and military journals very likely played a significant role in impairing China's response in that incident.

This paper seeks to draw attention to the strategic and political context for the country's approach to the use of force in crisis, non-war missions, and conflict. The political and strategic context is important for several reasons. First, political and strategic considerations can greatly influence how China's political and military leaders regard the use of force. Scholars have long noted the flexibility with which Chinese military analysts regard strategic and operational terms of art. For example, Chinese theorists emphasize the flexibility of the concept of "active defense," which permits its adaptation to widely varying situations. Second, the

¹³ Timothy R. Heath, "What Does China Want? Discerning the PRC's National Strategy," *Asian Security*, 8:1 (2012), 64.

¹⁴ Johnston, 38.

¹⁵ This paper uses the term "indoctrination" to refer to what the Chinese call "political and ideological education." This involves the transmission of ideas, theories, and concepts to motivate and guide the behavior of subordinates. It is compatible with a high degree of technical and professional knowledge and should thus be distinguished from the common pejorative connotations that suggest the inculcation of unreflective obedience to simplistic commands.

¹⁶ Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution to Reform* (New York: Norton, 2004), 190-191.

political context can play a key role in ameliorating or exacerbating defects in the bureaucratic processes related to decision-making. Beijing's reliance on consensus-building and indoctrination means the state of political consensus regarding security priorities can strongly influence the speed and decisiveness with which decisions are carried out. A clear and focused articulation of security goals and thorough indoctrination of the relevant bureaucracies can facilitate decisions, just as a lack of clear direction, imprecise articulation, and insufficient political training of the same bureaucracies can be expected to impair decisive action.

The remainder of this paper expands on this argument in three parts. The first part recounts how China's leaders have responded to key strategic drivers over the past 15 years by directing an important shift in security policy and indoctrinating the political and military establishment accordingly. The expanding focus of the security policy and China's increasingly complex ties with neighbors and with the United States has raised demand for a more varied and flexible approach to employing military power in peacetime, crisis, and conflict. The second part of the paper surveys how Chinese officials and analysts are exploring concepts to guide the use of military power to support the evolving security policy. The prevalence of key terms in official documents and scholarly writings provides indirect evidence of official acceptance and indoctrination of relevant bureaucracies. The third part examines evidence that Chinese leaders are pursuing policies consistent with the shift towards an expansion of strategic space. It concludes that the change in political environment may enable Beijing to respond more rapidly and in a more coherent manner to crises in some cases. However, Chinese leaders also face a growing risk of over-reaction and miscalculation in a military crisis, owing to excessive confidence and the over-concentration of decision-making, among other factors.

To understand the evolution of Chinese security policy, this analysis focuses principally on Chinese primary source official documents and military writings. Official documents provide authoritative statements of the central leadership's intent and policy. The most important of these include documents and directives issued by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) central leadership, including the General Secretary, Politburo, Central Committee, the Central Military Commission (CMC). Examples of these items include Central Committee plenary documents, opinions [意见] issued by the CMC, and speeches by the General Secretary. White papers, issued by the State Council information office,

provide authoritative statements of the leadership's assessments and security policies. The State Council and ministries also translate top-level directives into law, regulations, and policy, many of which are publicly available. Commentaries in official journals, such as the Central Committee organ, *People's Daily*, or the CMC organ, *People's Liberation Army (PLA) Daily*, expound on the logic and reasoning of policies.

For insight into Chinese military thought, this paper examines party and military newspapers, journals and books. The most important of these include the *PLA Daily*, *China Military Science*, and articles by PLA generals and experts in party journals such as *Xinhua*, *People's Daily*, *Outlook* or *Seeking Truth*. The Academy of Military Science (AMS) is widely regarded as the CMC's "think tank" and its researchers specialize on topics of strategy and theory, although the National Defense Industry (NDU) carries out research on similar topics as well. Edited volumes written by teams of top experts at either AMS or NDU are especially valuable, as they provide a detailed, authoritative source of insight. The *Science of Military Strategy*, published by AMS in 2001 and in a new edition in 2013, is an important example of such a work, and its views feature prominently in this analysis accordingly.

The legacy of a homeland-defense policy

PLA writings on the use of military power in the late 1990s and early 2000s reflected the influence of a defense policy oriented towards homeland defense. The literature saw military power as principally useful for fighting combat missions to defend the homeland and ensure national unity, although a frequently unspoken assumption also affirmed the PLA's role in enforcing social stability. Policy documents insisted that the military would only be used to defend national territory and would not interfere in the affairs of other countries. For example, defense white papers beginning in 1998 affirmed the country's "independent foreign policy of peace." The papers also consistently stated that China's security policy remains "defensive in nature."

Regarding non-war uses of military power, military writings focused principally on issues of arms control and nuclear deterrence. The 2001 version of *Science of Military Strategy* differed from its predecessor in introducing the idea of a calibrated use of military force which it deemed "war control." However, it described the peacetime application in terms of international agreements and deterrence, ideas that demanded little of the PLA. The book argued that arms control "limits the escalation of

the arms race and creates an atmosphere of mutual trust, thus attaining the aim of containing and controlling war.”¹⁷ Other writings of this period explored ways to expand nuclear deterrence activities to dissuade military threats and ensure international stability.¹⁸

Regarding military conflict, writings in this period focused almost exclusively on contingencies related to the defense of national territory. The 2001 *Science of Military Strategy* envisioned conflict in terms of a “localized conflict under high tech conditions,” widely understood to refer to contingencies in Taiwan and China’s borders. The book reflected other writings of the time in its focus on the technical means to control military violence in such limited conflicts, such as the use of precision munitions and advanced, resilient communication systems.¹⁹

These writings reflected the reality that the PLA had barely begun to modernize and remained poorly prepared for most contingencies. Ground forces dominated the military, naval forces concentrated on coastal defense, and the air forces remained organized by large, cold war style formations designed to repel invasions. The PLA trained its forces for possible contingencies in Taiwan and along the country’s borders, per the doctrinal focus on “localized wars.” In unexpected situations that called for a response below the threshold of war, the military and political leadership often struggled to respond. China carried out deterrence and intimidation activities to cow the intransigent pro-independence leader of Taiwan, Chen Shuibian, from 2000-2008, but avoided more risky, escalatory behavior. And in its territorial disputes with neighbors in the 1990s, Chinese authorities similarly acted cautiously, spurring at least one Western scholar to conclude that Beijing tended to adopt a position of “compromise” in sovereignty disputes.²⁰

Shifting security needs raise requirements for “expansion of strategic space”

Reflecting the country’s rapid surge in economic and national

¹⁷ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, *The Science of Military Strategy*, (Beijing, China: Academy of Military Science Publishing, 2005), 197.

¹⁸ Michael Chase and Evan Medeiros, “China’s Evolving Nuclear Calculus: Modernization and Doctrinal Debate,” in ed. James Mulvenon and David Finkelstein, *China’s Revolution in Doctrinal Affairs: Emerging Trends in the Doctrinal Art of the People’s Liberation Army* (Alexandria, VA: CNA Corporation, 2005), 144-165.

¹⁹ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, 206.

²⁰ Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

power, China's leaders at the turn of the century concluded that the country faced a "period of strategic opportunity" in which the country could develop rapidly for the first two decades of the twenty-first century. At the 16th Party Congress, the Central Committee outlined a vision of "national rejuvenation" in which the CCP oversaw an increase in the standards of living for the population and the nation's revitalization as a great power by mid-century.²¹ Chinese official documents of the time also redefined security in terms of the nation's basic security, sovereignty and territory, as well as of an expanding array of overseas economic, cyber, space, and other interests needed to sustain growth — subsequently termed China's "core interests."²² Officials concluded that China accordingly needed to more actively shape an international security environment in a manner that featured cooperation on transnational threats, frequent dialogue, and the peaceful settlement of disputes, — tenets captured in the idea of a "new security concept [新安全观]" announced by authorities around the turn of the century.²³

Central leaders directed the military to adjust its role to more effectively support these strategic requirements. General Secretary Hu Jintao's 2004 invocation of the "historic missions of the armed forces" expanded the variety and type of military tasks to include peacekeeping, anti-terrorism, and humanitarian relief. Authorities began to apply the term "diversified tasks" to refer to the military's increasing diversity of war and non-war responsibilities.²⁴

The change in the military's strategic responsibilities mirrored broader changes in thinking in foreign policy that broke decisively with decades of tradition. The building of consensus in favor of a more expansive foreign and defense policy did not happen overnight, although in retrospect it seemed inevitable for a country of China's size, historical experience, and strength. Extensive debate preceded the changes in the forms of scholarly debates that raged in the 2000s over foreign policy ideas such as "peaceful rise," and long-standing foreign policy principles

²¹ "Full Text of Jiang Zemin's Report at the 16th Party Congress," Xinhua, November 17, 2002. URL: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/49007.htm>

²² "China's Defense White Paper," State Council Information Office, December 9, 2002. URL: <http://china.org.cn/e-white/20021209/index.htm>

²³ "China's Position Paper on the New Security Concept," PRC Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (2002). URL: <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceun/eng/xw/t27742.htm>

²⁴ Timothy Heath, "Towards Strategic Leadership: CCP-PLA Relations in the Hu Jintao Era," in ed. Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, Travis Tanner, *Assessing the People's Liberation Army in the Hu Jintao Era* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), 399-440.

such as Deng Xiaoping's "bide your time, hide your capabilities."²⁵ The 2000s also saw considerable debate over whether China should become a maritime power, a conversation that reflected similar underlying unease on the part of some thinkers over the strategic risks attending the country's ascent.²⁶

By 2010, however, a confluence of economic, geostrategic, and political factors bolstered consensus among central leaders in favor of a new set of policies. That year, China overtook Japan to become the second largest economy in the world, firmly establishing its status as a great power.²⁷ Moreover, this period saw China's economic interests spread throughout the globe, non-traditional threats proliferate, and disputes with neighboring powers over contested maritime regions intensify. Central leaders regarded as increasingly inadequate policies that had been first formulated in an era of relative poverty and weakness.

The 18th Party Congress reflected well the emerging consensus. Coinciding with Xi Jinping's ascent to power that year, central leaders directed greater efforts to consolidate control over disputed territorial and sovereignty claims, albeit in a manner that avoided war and supported the nation's revitalization through "peaceful development."²⁸ Evidence of implementation of relevant policies may be seen in a variety of developments that suggested greater confidence and risk-taking. China seized control of Scarborough Reef from the Philippines in 2012 and has carried out a major ramp-up in Coast Guard activity in the East China Sea since 2012. Small PLA units have carried out sporadic incursions along the Indian border, although no fighting has been reported.²⁹

²⁵ Bonnie Glaser and Evan Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign Policy Making: The Ascension and Demise of 'Peaceful Rise,'" *The China Quarterly*, 190 (2007), 291-310.

²⁶ Daniel Hartnett and Frederic Vellucci, "Towards a Maritime Security Strategy: An Analysis of Chinese Views Since the Early 1990s," in ed. Donovan C. Chau, Thomas M. Kane, *China and International Security: History, Strategy, and 21st-Century Policy* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2014).

²⁷ *Bloomberg News*, "China GDP Surpassing Japan, Capping Three Decade Rise," August 16, 2010. URL: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-08-16/china-economy-passes-japan-s-in-second-quarter-capping-three-decade-rise>

²⁸ Xinhua, "Xi Jinping Vows Peaceful Development While Not Waiving Legitimate Rights," January 29, 2013. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-01/29/c_132136202.htm

²⁹ "China's Assertive Behavior Makes Neighbors Nervous," *NPR*, November 2, 2012. URL: <http://www.npr.org/2012/11/02/163659224/chinas-assertive-behavior-makes-neighbors-wary>. See also Simon Denyer, "Tensions Rise Between Washington and Beijing Over Man Made Islands," *Washington Post*, May 13, 2015.

The 18th Party Congress also directed greater effort to consolidate the country's leading position in the Asia-Pacific and extend its influence globally.³⁰ Chinese leaders accordingly announced major initiatives to expand infrastructure, extend trade pacts, and establish alternative security arrangements, as seen in The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and proposed measures to enable greater Chinese leadership in security affairs at venues such as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building (CICA).³¹ It has also stepped up efforts to shape a favorable international security environment. China has increased its participation in peacekeeping operations and carried out more vigorous mediation in inter-state conflicts, such as those in Sudan and Afghanistan.³²

These developments underscore the significant changes that have occurred in security policy. In contrast to a long-standing emphasis on upholding regional and international stability to enable domestic growth, Chinese leaders increasingly balance the pursuit of stability with an incremental expansion of influence, albeit an expansion of a limited and opportunistic type that seeks to realize gains in the least destabilizing manner possible. Xi's directive in 2013 to "uphold stability *and* uphold rights [维稳维权]" well captures this policy shift, as it elevated in priority the "defense of rights and interests" to a status co-equal to that of the long-standing focus on stability.³³

In practical terms, China is seeking to turn contested regions (principally in the first island chain) that previously rested under the control of other countries into regions that now rest primarily under Chinese control. Beijing is simultaneously seeking to more actively in-

URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/tensions-rise-between-washington-and-beijing-over-man-made-islands/2015/05/13/e88b5de6-f8bd-11e4-a47c-e56f4db884ed_story.html

³⁰ Timothy Heath, "The 18th Party Congress: Policy Blueprint for the Xi Administration," *China Brief*, November 30, 2012. URL: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40182&cHash=15c-31780cea335c08645f1644ef17799#.Vhe7yek4SM4

³¹ Liang Fei and Chang Meng, "AIIB and OBOR Hotly Debated at Boao Forum," *Global Times*, March 27, 2015. URL: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/914299.shtml>

³² Voice of America, "China Mediates Peace Talks on South Sudan," January 12, 2015. URL: <http://www.voanews.com/a/china-mediates-peace-talks-on-south-sudan/2595612.html>

³³ "Xi Advocates Efforts to Boost China's Maritime Power," *Xinhua*, July 21, 2013. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-07/31/c_132591246.htm

fluence the evolution of the security environment along its periphery. This is functionally equivalent to a pursuit of an *expansion of actual control* of land and maritime space, and, to a lesser extent, in global domains, even though the Chinese have not actually introduced any new territorial claims. The level of expansion remains quite limited, however. China has not signaled any aspirations beyond “recovering” disputed territories. Moreover, its ambitions to *expand influence over the regional and international order* remain confined to modifications and changes to accommodate Chinese preferences. Focused principally on regional aspirations, Beijing has shown less interest in contesting U.S. leadership of the international order.

For military thinkers, the pursuit of greater control over core interests and reform of the international order merge together in the idea that China’s rise requires an “expansion of strategic space” (扩大战略空间). The 2013 version of the *Science of Military Strategy* defined the strategic space as an “area required by China to resist foreign interference and aggression, and to safeguard the country’s development.” The definition notably does not restrict the area to Chinese territory. In fact, the book explained that the area is “determined by the expanded scope of national interests and the distance in which military power may be projected.” This view suggests the strategic space could expand as economic and strategic interests grow. It also suggests the space is determined in part by the range of modern weapons systems that could threaten China.³⁴ Chinese sources suggest the first island chain as a rough boundary for the envisioned strategic space. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* explained that the strategic space could enable the military to “implement operations with the mainland and the coastal seas as the strategic inner line; and to deter, absorb, and control the near seas and Northern Indian Ocean as the strategic outer line.” This strategic space thus appears to encompass as a type of defensive buffer zone the air and maritime region along China’s periphery and throughout the first island chain (i.e., the first chain of islands from the Asian mainland, encompassing the Kuril Islands, Japan, the Philippines, and the Malay peninsula) and even extending into the Indian Ocean. It also appears to require China field military capabilities to defend its interests in space and cyber space. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* stated that establishing such a space would allow China to “support the expansion of national interests in

³⁴ Academy of Military Science Editorial Committee, *Science of Military Strategy* [战略学] (Beijing, China: Academy of Military Sciences Press, 2013), 241.

peacetime, respond effectively when crisis emerges, and to adopt an attack-momentum defense [采取攻势防卫] during war time.”³⁵ Similarly, a 2009 analysis by Chen Zhou, an expert on national defense policy at the Academy of Military Sciences, affirmed the country’s commitment to a “defensive” policy, but defined it in terms of an “expansion of scope” to account for the “intermingling of security and developmental interests” and the “close connection between China’s interests and the interests of other countries.” The expanded scope, he argued, should “break through the limits of China’s coastline, actively construct a strategic foundation in the periphery, expand the defensive forward positions, and stretch the line of national defense in the air and sea.”³⁶

The pursuit of an expansion of strategic space unavoidably increases tensions with the United States and its allies because the expansion is premised, to some extent, on the contraction of influence by those same countries. Military officials accordingly have anticipated greater strains in the relationship with the United States and its allies. Sun Jianguo, PLA Deputy Chief of the General Staff, explained in 2015, “without struggle, it will be impossible for the United States to respect our core interests.”³⁷ This, in turn, raises the importance of finding ways to reduce the risk of conflict, to manage crisis, and to deter adversaries.

The focus on an expansion of strategic space has coincided with a vigorous criticism of a legacy security policy centered on homeland defense. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* observed, for example, that the “defect of homeland defense based strategic mindset is becoming more obvious by the day.” In dismissing the previous passive, defensive mode as obsolete, it argued instead that China should “establish a new strategic space” that “surrounds and protects the home territory, radiates to the periphery, and takes care of both the physical and virtual realms.”³⁸

Official policy documents since 2014 have echoed many of these ideas, although they eschew provocative terms like the “expansion of strategic space.” Like its predecessors, the 2015 Defense White Paper upheld the country’s “defensive” security policy. However, the same document hinted at changes in the interpretation of that policy, when it

³⁵ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 106.

³⁶ Chen Zhou, “On the Development of China’s Defensive National Defense Policy Under the New Situation,” *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], 6 (2009), 63-71.

³⁷ Sun Jianguo, *Seeking Truth* [求是], March 1, 2015.

URL: http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2015-02/28/c_1114428331.htm

³⁸ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 104.

explained that “new requirements” called for the military to help build a “favorable strategic posture [有利战略态势]” to “guarantee the country’s peaceful development.” It noted in particular the country’s “growing strategic interests,” which it explained required the military to “actively expand military and security cooperation” and “promote the establishment of a regional framework for security and cooperation.” It also reiterated Xi Jinping’s directive to balance “rights protection and stability maintenance.” To achieve these goals, it called on the military to carry out preparations, planning, and activities in “all directions and in all domains [各方向各领域]” and to “effectively secure China’s overseas interests.”³⁹ The similarity between these official documents and the works by the AMS scholars is likely more than coincidental. The Academy of Military Sciences, after all, exists principally as a research institution to advise the Central Military Commission, the main authority for military policy. And AMS experts, such as Chen Zhou, have played a critical role in drafting virtually all defense white papers.⁴⁰ Books and articles by the AMS, such as the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy*, thus likely both reflect the development of security policy and amplify and expound on the meaning of policy directives contained therein.

In addition, the evolution of China’s security and the growing literature on the expansion of strategic space policy mirrors trends in the military’s modernization and operations since around 2010, suggesting a direct relationship. The PLA in 2016 announced a major reorganization aimed in part at expanding its ability to project power as a joint force. The PLA Navy has added an aircraft carrier, advanced warships, and aircraft capable of operating at greater distances. Indeed, the PLA Navy has already begun to occasionally field forces beyond the second island chain (i.e., the second chain of islands from the Asian mainland, encompassing the Ogasawara Islands in Japan and the Mariana Islands) in line with its aspiration to carry out a “distant seas defense,” even as it strengthens its ability to carry out “near seas” defense within the first island chain. The PLAAF has over the same period also added more advanced fighters, transports and bombers. These additions appear consistent with its stated ambition to become a “strategic air force” capable

³⁹ “China’s Military Strategy,” State Council Information Office, May 26, 2015. Ministry of National Defense website. URL: http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Database/WhitePapers/2015-05/26/content_4586686.htm

⁴⁰ Jian Zhang, “China’s Defense White Papers: A Critical Appraisal,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, 21: 77 (2012), 881-898.

of carrying out offensive and defensive operations over long distances. China is adding to its capabilities in space and cyber space.⁴¹ Finally, the PLA has significantly expanded its overseas presence since. It has expanded its role in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, participated in a growing array of bilateral and multilateral exercises, and sustained a naval deployment off the Horn of Africa since 2009.⁴²

Shift in security policy increases strategic risks

The security policy's shift towards an expansion of strategic space, carried out within the formal framework of a "defensive" policy, carries inherent risks if competing imperatives are weighed too heavily in one direction or the other. The directives to strengthen control of disputed sovereignty and territorial claims and further reform the international order, for example, provide a strong incentive for proactive and assertive uses of military power. But too aggressive an effort to gain control of disputed regions or revise the international order, however, could incite a regional war that would almost certainly undermine the country's revitalization.

Similarly, the imperative to maintain international stability and maintain a strictly "defensive policy" centered on homeland defense provides a strong incentive to limit the use of military power to avoid destabilizing the security environment. However, a failure to secure core interests and shape a favorable security environment would render China vulnerable in several ways. First, failure to adequately defend Chinese interests in such sensitive areas as Taiwan, and the South and East China Seas, in a crisis could carry destabilizing political consequences for the ruling CCP. Chinese citizens nurtured on nationalist enthusiasm may receive poorly evidence that the military had suffered a major defeat, especially if the defeat occurred in a contingency involving neighbors widely perceived as militarily inferior. Second, failure to gain control of disputed maritime regions could result in the loss of valuable fishing, mineral, and energy resources to rival claimants. Third, a failure to strengthen influence over strategic passageways such as through the East and South China Seas would render the country's economic lifeline highly vulnerable to disruption in the event of conflict with other

⁴¹ Department of Defense, "Annual Report on Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," 2015. URL: http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2015_China_Military_Power_Report.pdf

⁴² State Council Information Office, "China's Military Strategy," May 26, 2015. URL: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2015-05/26/content_20820628.htm

countries. Fourth, a failure to blunt the efforts by the United States and its allies to strengthen a U.S.-led security architecture would leave China more exposed to pressure and coercion should US-China relations sour.

Military writings recognize these risks. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* noted that past rising powers relied on warfare and military power to achieve strategic expansion, but that China had opted instead for a “peaceful, cooperative expansion” that relied principally on “economic exchange and cultural blending.” It acknowledged, however, the possibility of “contradictions and conflicts” arising from resistance to the country’s peaceful expansion.⁴³ In a 2012 article, First Deputy of the General Staff General Zhang Qinsheng similarly explained that because Western powers “will not easily give up their status of dominating international affairs,” China’s situation would be “more difficult and arduous” in the second decade of the 21st century.⁴⁴ In 2012, NDU Deputy Director Meng Xiangqing warned that China is currently in a period of “high of strategic friction” with the international community, and “in particular, with nations on China’s periphery,” which suggested a higher risk of standoffs at sea, military patrols, exercises, and even the possibilities of militarized crisis. Moreover, Meng assessed that the risk of conflict had significantly increased.⁴⁵

To balance the competing imperatives and manage risk, military experts have espoused a tightly controlled, carefully calibrated use of military power to achieve national goals. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* explained that requirements for war control had “grown higher, the means of control more numerous, the modes of control more flexible, and the comprehensive nature of control stronger.” It explained that effective war control requires a transition from a focus on “defense” to “control”; from a focus on “combat” to “momentum”; and from a focus on “combat victory” to “early victory.”⁴⁶ In 2014, Liu Shenyang, Deputy Commander of the Jinan Military Region, explained that in determining strategic objectives to control the use of military power in any situation, China should “avoid aiming too high,” as this might result in a “politi-

⁴³ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 104.

⁴⁴ Zhang Qinsheng, “Firmly Grasp the National Development Important Period of Strategic Opportunity [牢牢把握国家发展重要战略机遇期],” *Seeking Truth* [求是], December 3, 2012, 12-16.

⁴⁵ Huang Yingying, “孟祥青：中国周边危机管控已有大突破 [Meng Xiangqing: China Has Had Great Breakthroughs on Regional Crisis Management],” *International Herald Leader* [国际先驱导报], November 6, 2012, 1-2.

⁴⁶ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 112.

cally passive position,” since “excessive military action” could result in “international isolation.” However, he argued China should also avoid “aiming too low,” else it would “fail to make appropriate gains at the negotiation table.”⁴⁷

Consistent with the trend in military writings away from an exclusive focus on homeland defense, such descriptions highlight the importance of controlling the use of military power, principally in peacetime and crisis, and of the importance of coordinating civilian and military power to realize political objectives. As before, military scholars emphasize the importance of “shaping the situation” [造势], which requires a coordination of military, political, economic, and diplomatic efforts to build a favorable environment for China’s rise. However, more recent interpretations of the idea have defined this idea in terms of an expansion of strategic space. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* called for “creating a strategic situation [战略态势] favorable for internal stability and for an external expansion [拓外] that is lasting in stability and durable in peace.” Shaping the situation now requires efforts such as “strategic balancing,” which suggests balancing bilateral and multilateral relationships to strengthen deterrence; “stability on the periphery,” which evokes the construction of a favorable regional security architecture; and “anti-independence” and “unity building” actions, which suggests military preparations and operations to defeat Taiwan, Xinjiang, and other perceived threats to China’s unity and security.⁴⁸

Dispute control: Using military power to expand strategic space without war

Chinese military theorists have proposed or refined a variety of concepts applicable in peacetime, crisis, and conflict to realize the expansion of strategic space. Many of these concepts have been analyzed individually, and some appeared in military doctrines well before the recent shifts in security policy. But these concepts take on different meanings and points of emphasis when viewed through the lens of the new security policy. This analysis proposes the term, “dispute control,” to highlight the shared political connotations of a family of concepts regarding the use of military power. Dispute control is the idea that China’s leaders seek a spectrum of military options in peacetime, crisis, and

⁴⁷ Liu Shenyang, “On War Control: Primarily from the Military Thought Perspective [控制战争：从军事思想角度来看],” *China Military Science*, [中国军事科学], 4 (2014), 1-8.

⁴⁸ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 112.

conflict to defend the expanding focus of national interests in a manner that minimizes the risk to the international stability needed to enable the country's development.

Several points about this definition merit explanation. First, the "expanding focus" of the nation's security policy lies at the heart of many challenges facing China's military. The expansion of strategic space unavoidably encroaches on the air and maritime regions claimed by other countries. The incompatibility of control over the same space underpins many of the most severe disputes involving Taiwan's status, ownership of the Senkaku Islands, and sovereignty over the islands and reefs in the South China Sea. Second, the term "dispute" denotes disagreements that are as salient in peacetime as in war. In light of the Chinese preference for seeking ways to resolve differences through peaceful methods, this seems a more appropriate term than the similar sounding word, "conflict," which suggests military hostilities. Third, although China has many disputes with other countries, this analysis is focused on disputes related to the expansion of strategic space, and for this reason the disputes of interest are mainly security related ones involving contested air and maritime regions, and to a lesser extent, the domains of space and cyberspace. However, it also includes disputes with non-traditional actors over China's overseas security interests. Third, "control" seems an appropriate word to capture the Chinese interest in finding ways to calibrate the use of military power and avoid unnecessary conflict. While authorities do indeed seek to enhance control over an increasing array of national interests and reform elements of the international order, they also prize international and domestic stability. Balancing the competing imperatives remains central to Beijing's strategic objectives, and for this reason it has a strong incentive to strengthen its control over the exercise of military power. The following section elaborates on these points by briefly reviewing the shared assumptions and political concerns that underpin the ideas associated with "dispute control."

Military trends. The advent of precision guided munitions and widespread use of digital military technologies have encouraged theorists to esteem a highly controlled type of war. Military theorists see as the most likely type of conflict ones that involve precision-guided munitions and far-flung military operations featuring information technology. In addition, the threat of annihilation from nuclear weapons has made unlimited war unthinkable. The need to operate below the threshold of nuclear war adds another imperative for military thinkers to pursue a

more controlled approach to crisis and conflict.⁴⁹ The same logic has encouraged military thinkers to prioritize peaceful means of employing military power to achieve security goals, or to avoid war if possible through effective management of a crisis and other methods.

International trends. Changes in the international strategic situation provided another impetus for military thinkers to adopt ideas associated with dispute control. At the turn of the century, Chinese authorities saw a world moving towards multi-polarity and deeper global economic integration.⁵⁰ These trends raised the cost and risk of unlimited war and thereby reinforced the need to manage escalation in any conflict and to seek peaceful means of resolving differences if at all possible. The same trends have scattered Chinese economic interests around the world, elevating in importance non-war military operations to protect those interests, principally through cooperation in multi-lateral initiatives.

Emphasis on political control. Chinese military thinkers have long emphasized the subordination of military to political objectives as a fundamental principle of the employment of armed force. The strategic risks underpinning the expansion of strategic space underscores the importance of this principle. Uncontrolled escalation of war, noted a 2009 article in *China Military Science*, will “not only have an unfavorable impact” on the domestic, political, economic, and social stability situation, but also “may cause tension in the region or even in the world.”⁵¹ Reinforcing this point, military writings regard the designation of a feasible strategic objective as the single most important means of controlling the risks of war in crisis and conflict. The 2001 version of the *Science of Military Strategy* identified the formulation of a realistic and reasonable strategic and political objective as war control’s “most basic method.”⁵² Other experts have regarded ideas such as war control and crisis management as inherently political. Deputy Commander of the Shenyang Military Region, Lieutenant General Wang Xixin, stated in a 2014 article that war control is “both political and military warfare.” He explained that political means influence the onset, conduct, and resolution

⁴⁹ Liu Shenyang, 6.

⁵⁰ Xinhua, “Full Text of Jiang Zemin 16th Party Congress Report,” November 18, 2002. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-11/18/content_633685.htm

⁵¹ *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], “A Study of Strategic Military Guidelines in the New Period of the New Century [新时期新世纪战略军事指导方针学],” 3 (2009), 36-44.

⁵² Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, 206.

of conflict, and for that reason the separation of “political means” from the “military means” of controlling conflict “does not exist.”⁵³

Expansion of strategic space. Politically, the ideas associated with dispute control respond to the reality that China’s expanding interests since the late 1990s have raised new strategic vulnerabilities, the protection of which may require a broader variety of military options than was the case in the decades in which China was much weaker and its interests fewer. Dispute control is not limited to the confrontational uses of military power, however. It includes possibilities for cooperation under multilateral frameworks as a way of providing security for overseas interests against non-traditional threats. It also shares the recognition of the need to consider the impact any military action may have on higher order strategic priorities, such as the need for international stability to enable the focus on domestic development. Because diplomatic methods may be insufficient to resolve the differences, military power may in some cases be required. But inappropriate use of military power to resolve a particular dispute could prove counter-productive if mishandled. In all cases, the application of military power must be tightly controlled and exercised only after due consideration of the impact on other important strategic interests.

Dispute control: A closer look at the family of ideas

Shared assumptions about military and international trends, the fundamental orientation towards the political task of defending an expansion of strategic space, the imperative to balance competing strategic goals, and a focus on tightly controlled military activities to realize political goals underpin many concepts invoked by contemporary theorists regarding the use of military power. “Non-war” missions include a broad array of cooperative activities; some activities fit well within the contours of dispute control. “War control” shares much with the overarching concept of “dispute control,” although its primary focus appears to be in conflict. “Strategic deterrence” shares some of the concerns of war control, although like other ideas it carries meanings that apply to purposes beyond the scope of this study. More commonly encountered in official documents are the terms “war containment” and “crisis management,” which have gained new meanings in light of the political task of defending expanding national interests. Each of these terms is briefly reviewed below.

⁵³ Wang Xixin, “Further on War Control [再论控制战],” *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], 8 (2014), 58-66.

“*Non-war missions*” Non-war missions [非战争] include a broad range of non-combat operations designed to address threats such as piracy, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and terrorism. The term appeared around the turn of the century, reflecting in part the influence of Western writings on “missions other than war” that flourished in light of anti-terrorism military operations following the attacks on September 11, 2001. PLA writers regard non-war missions as especially relevant for managing non-traditional threats to overseas economic interests. Many of the activities that fall within the scope of non-war missions apply directly to the protection of core interests through non-violent means and the shaping of a favorable security order at the heart of the expansion of strategic space. Relevant tasks include activities, such as military engagements, multilateral peacekeeping operations and support to law enforcement operations in defense of sovereignty claims.⁵⁴

The terms “non-war missions” and the related term, “diversified military tasks” (which includes both traditional warfighting and non-war missions) have received official backing as an accurate description of the types of duties expected of the military in light of the country’s increasing security requirements. The terms have appeared in official speeches by Hu Jintao as early as 2006, and in subsequent defense white papers. Indeed, the 2013 defense white paper, titled, the “Diversified Employment of the Armed Forces” featured both concepts prominently.⁵⁵

War control. Western scholarship on Chinese concepts of “war control [控制战争]” to date has remained limited. Studies of Chinese deterrence and nuclear doctrine have acknowledged the concept, but generally only in passing.⁵⁶ Lonnie Henley’s 2007 study remains the most complete and definitive, and for this reason merits a brief review. Drawing from Chinese definitions, Henley explained that “war control” is the employment of all elements of comprehensive national power to shape the international environment and make war less likely; manage crises and prevent unintended escalation; put China in a favorable position if

⁵⁴ Zhao Xiangang and Zheng Tiechang, “Accurately Understanding Diversified Military Missions [准确理解多样化军事任务],” *PLA Daily* [解放军报], September 9, 2008. URL: <http://military.people.com.cn/GB/1078/7878875.html>

⁵⁵ Xinhua, “The Diversified Employment of the Armed Forces,” State Council Information Office, April 16, 2013. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-04/16/c_132312681.htm

⁵⁶ Forrest Morgan, Karl Mueller, Evan Medeiros, Kevin Pollpeter, Roger Cliff, “Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century,” (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2008).

war does occur; control the course of the conflict once it is underway; and conclude the conflict on terms in line with political objectives.⁵⁷ Thus, although the term appears designed to facilitate the waging of war, its application goes well beyond conflict. The concept covers “pre-war crisis management” as well as “stability control after war.” Indeed, Chinese writers agree that war control’s highest ambition seeks to “win without fighting.”

In practical terms, war control consists of military measures to “shape the situation [造势],” which one Chinese expert defined as the “creation of a powerful posture and strong offensive capability that is irresistibly fierce and overpowers the enemy” through a “rational concentration and employment of forces.” In a pre-conflict state, Henley noted, war control seeks to shape the security environment, reduce the threat of war, manage crises, and carry out military intimidation and deterrence activities. During conflict, war control methods include steps to define war objectives, and manage military targets, techniques, and operational parameters. War control seeks the termination of conflict on favorable terms and calls for measures to shape the post-conflict situation. Henley observed the importance of seizing the political and military initiative throughout all phases in the Chinese writings. “It is difficult to overstate,” noted Henley, “how prominent the concept of the initiative is in Chinese writings.” Chinese experts explain that seizing the initiative “creates freedom of action” for the military forces, while a reactive posture limits options. Henley saw in this idea the risk that Chinese authorities could be tempted to overreact in a conflict.⁵⁸

The concept of war control directly supports the expansion of strategic space. Chinese leaders seek a tightly controlled form of war flexible enough to achieve limited political objectives, and this concept is well suited for this purpose. Yet despite its relevance, the official significance of the “war control” term remains unclear. A handful of articles on the topic have appeared in military journals since 2001, and both the 2001 and 2013 versions of the *Science of Military Strategy* carried chapters on the idea. However, the term has not appeared in any speeches by senior leaders or any official policy statements, such as defense white papers, probably due to sensitivities over such an easily misconstrued term.

⁵⁷ Lonnie Henley, “War Control and Escalation Management,” *Assessing the Threat: The Chinese Military and Taiwan’s Security*, by Michael Swaine, Andrew Yang, and Evan Medeiros (ed.), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC (2007), 85-110.

⁵⁸ Henley, 91.

War containment. Chinese writers define “war containment” or “war deterrence [遏制战争]” as the whole of government efforts to prevent a crisis from escalating to conflict. In a 2002 article, AMS Department of Strategic Studies researcher Yuan Zhengling, stated that war containment includes “preventing and delaying the outbreak of war, and avoiding the escalation of war once it breaks out.” He explained that it includes the “comprehensive employment of military, political, economic, diplomatic, and other means,” but “does not abandon or neglect the position and role of the military in realizing strategic objectives.”⁵⁹ This concept again seems well suited to the political needs of a leadership eager to calibrate the use of military power in peacetime, crisis, and conflict to realize limited political objectives.

War containment has featured prominently in government documents, which suggests the term has some level of official backing. The 2002 Defense White Paper invoked the idea, and most subsequent versions have carried the term as well. Senior leaders have frequently mentioned the concept in their speeches to military personnel. In 2006, for example, Hu Jintao directed the military to “respond to crisis, maintain peace, contain war, and fight and win wars.”⁶⁰

Strategic deterrence. Chinese writings on strategic deterrence [战略威慑] emphasize the display or limited use of military power to impose one’s will on the enemy as a method of de-escalation. The 2001 *Science of Military Strategy* defined strategic deterrence as the “display of force or show of determination to use force to compel the enemy to submit to one’s volition and refrain from taking hostile actions or escalating hostile actions.”⁶¹ Strategic deterrence is generally conceived as taking place within peacetime conditions, but may also apply in a crisis or even during conflict. It represents another way to modulate the use of military power to intimidate or compel an adversary from taking provocative actions. It is a concept with application that goes beyond the main concerns of dispute control. Nevertheless, it shares in common with war control and war containment the idea of employing military force to deter or compel adversaries to behave in a manner consistent

⁵⁹ Yuan Zhengling, “An Active Defense Strategy to Protect National Interests [积极防御战略维护国家利益],” *National Defense* [国防], December 24, 2002, 8-10.

⁶⁰ Xinhua, “Hu Jintao Stresses the Need for Rapid Development of National Defense and Armed Forces [胡锦涛强调推动国防和军队建设又快又好的发展],” March 11, 2006. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2006-03/11/content_4291493.htm

⁶¹ Peng, 213.

with China's strategic objectives without necessarily engaging in conflict.

The term "strategic deterrence" has scarcely appeared in speeches by senior leaders or official documents, again possibly reflecting political sensitivities over such a term. However, within military strategic circles, the concept appears among other variations of deterrence. Michael Chase has noted an increased willingness to explore more flexible interpretations of nuclear deterrence in PLA doctrinal writings, for example.⁶²

Crisis management. The idea of "crisis management [危机管理]" rose to prominence in the late 1990s and 2000s.⁶³ The idea of crisis management goes beyond military topics. Officials have used this term to discuss a variety of unstable events, ranging from the global financial crisis to epidemics of communicable diseases.⁶⁴ For the military, crisis management generally refers to PLA support for civilian led efforts to deescalate or restore to stability some dangerous situation involving military forces. The 2001 *Science of Military Science* defined crisis as a "state of danger in which there is possibility of confrontation or military conflict between or among nations or political groups" and recommended measures to de-escalate the situation and reduce the risk of conflict.⁶⁵ Other writings in the early 2000s that discussed "crisis management" similarly focused on basic methods and procedures to increase communication and de-escalate tensions.⁶⁶ As applied to the expansion of China's strategic space, the idea of crisis management can be further narrowed to the group of destabilizing incidents related primarily to contested air and maritime regions within China's first island chain.

The idea of crisis management has appeared prominently in official documents and senior leader speeches. Official policy documents frequently carry the directive to "contain crisis" or "respond to crisis." For example, defense white papers since 2006 have highlighted the importance of crisis management. Hu Jintao similarly tasked the military with "responding to crisis" in a 2006, a theme frequently seen in senior

⁶² Michael Chase, "China's Transition to a More Credible Nuclear Deterrence," *Asia Policy*, 16 (2013), 69-101.

⁶³ Iain Johnston, "The State of International Relations Theory in China: Considerations for the Ford Foundation" (Beijing: Ford Foundation, 2003).

⁶⁴ Wang Lao, "Hu Jintao Demonstrates New Type Leadership Visit [胡锦涛出访展示新领导人开放形象]," *People's Daily* (人民日报), June 6, 2003.
URL: <http://www.people.com.cn/GB/guojj/24/20030606/1009931.html>

⁶⁵ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, 205.

⁶⁶ Johnston, 36.

leader speeches to the military since then.⁶⁷

This group of ideas shows considerable variation in the level of official backing seen in policy documents and senior leader speeches, and in their points of emphasis. The concepts that more explicitly discuss the application of military power in war, such as war control or strategic deterrence, are infrequently mentioned in official documents and speeches. By contrast, concepts that focus on peaceful methods to realize security, deter war, or manage crises feature more prominently in official literature. This suggests, in part, a political sensitivity to terms that evoke war or nuclear weapons. Chinese leaders frequently assert, after all, that their military forces exist principally to “promote world peace and common development.”

Application in peacetime, crisis, and conflict

Official discourse has focused principally on peacetime actions, the avoidance of war, and the importance of managing crises well, all of which reinforce broader messages regarding the country’s intent. Ideas on how to manage much more dangerous crises with a higher risk of escalation to conflict, such as those potentially involving Japan in the Senkakus, are less commonly seen in official documents, and there may not be a ready consensus on how to handle such incidents.⁶⁸ Military writings advocating the exploitation of crises for strategic gain have grown more common in recent years. Strategic gains that China has experienced in past disputes include: control of a disputed geographic feature, as happened with Scarborough Reef in 2012; increased access and exploitation of a rival’s exclusive economic zone, as China did with its Haiyang 981 deployments near Vietnam in 2014; and the expansion of administrative powers over disputed regions, as China did with the establishment of the Sansha prefecture to administer the South China Sea islands in 2012.⁶⁹ In the past cases cited, China justified favorable changes in the status quo as a “retaliation” for actions undertaken by rival disputants.

As these examples suggest, the influence of these ideas on policy

⁶⁷ Xinhua, “Hu Jintao Stresses the Need for Rapid Development of National Defense and Armed Forces [胡锦涛强调推动国防和军队建设又快又好的发展],” March 11, 2006. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/misc/2006-03/11/content_4291493.htm

⁶⁸ Erickson and Liff, 212.

⁶⁹ *NamViet News*, “Sansha: New City in the South China Sea,” August 28, 2012. As of March 26, 2018: <https://namvietnews.wordpress.com/2012/08/28/sansha-new-city-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

remains unclear, but the logic expressed does appear consistent with the shifting focus of defense policy towards the expansion of strategic space and China's conduct in recent maritime disputes. The following section surveys the literature on ideas related to dispute control for insight into how political and military elites may be thinking about ways to protect expanding security interests through military activities in peacetime, crisis, and war.

Peacetime application

Non-military and non-war military actions play a key role in supporting the expansion of strategic space in peacetime. As the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* observed, in light of “contradictions, frictions, and struggles encountered within the nation’s expansion of interests,” China should “rely more upon such non-military powers, such as political, economic, and diplomacy to resolve them.” The book stated that the military is expected to play a “powerful role” in ensuring, and supporting, the non-military means of “defending national sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity.” It prioritized war prevention and crisis management accordingly.⁷⁰ Chen Zhou similarly recommended the “expansion” of security policy to prioritize “containing war as the primary objective of military strategy.”⁷¹

Military writings have in recent years elaborated a more complex and sophisticated variety of non-war actions to achieve two goals: first, reduce the risk of war; and second, support efforts to gain control of core interests and reform the international security order. The inherent tension between these competing goals has encouraged military writers to recommend the simultaneous implementation of a broad array of somewhat cross-cutting measures. Important ideas that prioritize the former include the promotion of military diplomacy and multilateral security activities. Measures that prioritize the latter include planning for contingencies, enhanced deterrence, and the expansion of actual control through principally non-military means, albeit with coordinated military support.

Military diplomacy and multilateral security activities. Military thinkers advocate military-diplomatic actions to build a favorable security environment, promote cooperative security relationships, and reduce

⁷⁰ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 111.

⁷¹ Chen Zhou, “On the Development of China’s Defensive National Defense Policy Under the New Situation,” *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], 6 (2009), 63-71.

the risk of crisis. One article explained that war containment requires efforts to “guard against and handle a crisis” by taking “appropriate actions and measures to forestall the crisis or prevent it from escalating into a military conflict or war.” Relevant measures include peace-keeping operations, military exchanges, and participation in bilateral and multi-lateral exercises. Multi-lateral security cooperation to provide humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and counter-transnational threats such as piracy can also promote a stable and more hospitable environment.⁷² The term, “preventive diplomacy,” which shares many of these ideas, has appeared in speeches by senior leaders since the late 2000s.⁷³ In September, 2015, China announced its intention to furnish a permanent force of 8,000 troops to the United Nations for peace-keeping operations.⁷⁴

Military strategists have also advocated establishing and shaping international institutions and mechanisms as another important means of reducing the risk of war.⁷⁵ This idea has the added benefit of facilitating the expansion of Chinese influence over the terms of international security. Other writers argue for more effective “prediction and identification” of the possible sources of conflict. In a 2014 article, Deputy Director of the Shenyang Military Region Wang Xixin argued for taking appropriate measures in peacetime to “resolve the sources of dispute,” so that these “do not develop into crises.” He explained that this requires building “consultation mechanisms” and “actively carrying out international cooperation.”⁷⁶ Examples might include efforts to build an alternative regional security system based on the SCO, CICA, and other Chinese led multilateral organizations. In early 2017, China announced its first security policy for Asia, which envisions a greater role for the PLA and Chinese-led security mechanisms.⁷⁷

Manage security competition. Military thinkers envision environ-

⁷² *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], “A Study of Strategic Military Guidelines in the New Period of the New Century [新时期新世纪战略军事指导方针学],” 3 (2009), 36-44.

⁷³ Xinhua, “Xi Jinping Meets Venezuela President Chavez,” February 9, 2009. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-02/19/content_10848042.htm

⁷⁴ Jane Perlez, “China Surprises U.N. with \$100 Million and Thousands of Troops for Peacekeeping,” *New York Times*, September 28, 2015.

⁷⁵ Liu Shenyang, 8.

⁷⁶ Wang Xixin, 63.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation,” January 1, 2017.

URL: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1429771.shtml

ments in which China's relationship with other countries have undergone severe strain, yet do not devolve into conflict. In a relationship of intense strategic competition, military thinkers call for "carrying out rational, advantageous, and restrained struggles." Wang Xixin explained that this involves deflecting potential rivals from "stirring up trouble for their own interests everywhere," presumably through diplomatic efforts and military deterrence. Should the relationship develop an arms race, he advocated the "active promotion of arms control and disarmament." Wang also called for "strengthening the forces of peace so that an opponent does not dare to lightly launch war," which suggests the idea of building friendly military diplomatic relationships with powerful nations such as Russia.⁷⁸ Organizational reforms announced in 2015 are designed to enhance the lethality of the PLA as an integrated, joint force capable of fighting short duration, high intensity regional conflicts at greater distances from China, such as those centered on the control of reefs in the South China Sea or contingencies involving naval and air forces in operations up to the second island chain.⁷⁹

Plan for contingencies and preposition forces. Military experts advocate prudent preparations for contingencies in peacetime. This requires formulating "specific strategic plans" and setting up "strategic positions in advance" so that the "source of threat" knows that China is monitoring any potentially dangerous situation. One article called for developing a "variety of preparedness plans" for crisis situations. It also advocated shortening decision processes to improve the country's ability to respond in an accurate and timely manner. The writings also emphasize the importance of developing ways to provide strategic warning and deploying forces prudently to maximize the available options for decision makers. Liu Shenyang commented, China should "strengthen strategic forecasting and analysis" and "prepositioning of forces to actively create and maintain a favorable situation to protect national security and peaceful development."⁸⁰

Enhance military deterrence. Chinese thinking about deterrence has undergone considerable evolution. To support the expansion of security needs, Chinese thinkers have explored more flexible

⁷⁸ Wang Xixin, 66.

⁷⁹ Department of Defense, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," 2016, i.

⁸⁰ Liu Shenyang, 3.

interpretations of the long-standing principle of “No First Use.”⁸¹ Other thinkers have advocated conventional deterrence, as well as deterrence in the space and cyber domains. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* advocated a “composite nuclear and conventional deterrence” designed to the “deter key major military crises, effectively contain war, delay the eruption of war, curb escalation, avoid or reduce damage from war.” The book regarded deterrence as an important peacetime method of using military power to “create favorable conditions and subdue troops without fighting,” principally through the establishment of a “normalized deterrence posture to force an opponent to not dare to act lightly or rashly.”⁸² China has in recent years undertaken measures to elevate its deterrence posture. In 2016, China also elevated the Second Artillery Corps into an independent service and renamed it as the PLA Rocket Force. Chinese JIN class ballistic missile submarines are expected to soon carry out nuclear deterrence patrols, which will likely operate in the deep waters of the South China Sea.⁸³

Military support to non-military coercive policies. While preferring to achieve strategic objectives through cooperative actions, writings on dispute control recognize the possibility that coercive approaches may be required. In general, these writings advocate a close coordination of military and civilian assets, with law enforcement and other civil authorities in the lead. Recommended coercive non-war actions range from messaging, warning, demonstrations of power, and other measures to defend Chinese interests. As an example, the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* called for the “flexible adoption” of “non-war military activities” including those of a “confrontational nature.” It described confrontational non-war activities in terms of “low intensity military activities against actual and potential opponents to demonstrate military power, express security concerns, declare the strategic bottom line, and detect the opponent’s movements.”⁸⁴ In the South and East China Seas, China’s reliance on legal arguments, economic incentives, propaganda, and Coast Guard vessels and aircraft to strengthen control over disputed features embodies this approach.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Chase, 75.

⁸² *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 115.

⁸³ David Logan, “PLA Reforms and China’s Nuclear Forces,” *Joint Force Quarterly*, October 1, 2016.

⁸⁴ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 119.

⁸⁵ Simon Denyer, “US ‘Hypocrisy’ and Chinese Cash Strengthen Beijing’s Hand in South China Sea,” *Washington Post*, June 19, 2016.

Crisis and crisis management

Despite assessing a generally low risk of war, many Chinese analysts acknowledge that the country's focus on peaceful expansion has raised the risk of militarized crisis. An article in *China Military Science* observed that although the possibility of large-scale wars “continues to diminish... various crises that can easily lead to military conflict or even trigger localized wars” have become “major threats” to national security.⁸⁶ Zhang Tuosheng, an expert in international crisis at the China Foundation for International Strategic Studies, similarly noted, “The frequency of wars has shown a downward trend, but the frequency of crises has shown an upward trend.”⁸⁷

Experts on inter-state crises have published numerous studies and analyses, the study of which can provide some insight into how the country's experts regard crisis management. These experts tend to focus on the more dangerous, crisis-prone “military crises” [军事危机]. Some experts distinguish between conventional and unconventional types. Conventional military crises tend to carry higher risks and are caused by disputes over territory, sovereignty, resources, ethnicity, religion, or geopolitical influence. Unconventional crises, by contrast, stem from terrorist activity, pirate attacks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and other non-traditional threats. Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, researchers at the Crisis Center at the National Defense University, also distinguished between “sporadic,” that is, unplanned, crises, and “non-sporadic,” or pre-planned, crises. The latter include crises manufactured to provide a pretext for war and crises instigated for brinkmanship purposes.⁸⁸ In China's history, the start of the Sino-Vietnam war provides an example of a crisis instigated for purposes of starting a war. Chinese propaganda claimed Vietnam had shelled and attacked its citizens across the border as justification for its “defensive” operation to invade its southern neighbor and thereby discredit Hanoi's alliance with the Soviet Union.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *China Military Science* (2009), 38.

⁸⁷ Zhang Tuosheng, “A Study of China's Behavior in International Military and Security Crises [中国军事安全危机行为研究],” *World Economics and Politics* [世界经济与政治], April 14, 2011, 103-121.

⁸⁸ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, “On the Control and Management of Military Crises [论军事危机的管控],” *China Military Science* [中国军事科学], 7 (2013), 62-71.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Koo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Soviet-Vietnam Alliance*, Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011.

At least some experts regard militarized crises linked to nontraditional threats as growing in frequency. Zhang Tuosheng noted a “steady decline globally” in military conflicts triggered by traditional inter-state disputes, but a rise in crises caused by non-traditional security problems. Noting that major powers share considerable interests today, Zhang saw a strong incentive for the countries to cooperate to resolve problems. While acknowledging the persistence of maritime disputes, he nevertheless argued that such disputes were much more “controllable” than disputes over land. Deepening political, economic, and security ties between China and its neighbors also provided incentives for all countries to control the risks of escalation in a crisis.⁹⁰

Regardless of the cause or type, many theorists attribute the potential onset of crises involving China and other countries to an intensification of fundamentally incompatible interests that arise from the expansion of China’s strategic space. Fears about friction over various disputes between China and the allies of the United States had reportedly increased interest in topics related to crisis management among Chinese decision makers. Zhang Tuosheng observed in 2011 that there had been a “clear change in the crisis concept of China’s leaders.” He noted that crisis management had become “highly valued by the Chinese government and strategic studies community.”⁹¹

Reflecting a strand of opportunism consistent with the logic of a security policy premised on the expansion of strategic space, many military theorists recommend exploiting crises for strategic gain. Meng Xiangqing stated a “so-called crisis is simply danger taking a turn for the better.”⁹² Similarly, the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* stated that the military should seek to “guide circumstances to transform crisis into opportunity.” Crises, it argued, present both “risks and windows of opportunity to resolve contradictions and issues.”⁹³ The sense of opportunity inherent in crises extends to even the more dangerous militarized crises. Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang explained that “if handled properly,” a militarized crisis can “provide a major opportunity to promote national interests and achieve peace.” They argued that the “risk associated with a military crisis is proportional to the opportunity it offers. Large risk is accompanied by great opportunity.” Their article stated that a well-man-

⁹⁰ Zhang Tuosheng, 104.

⁹¹ Zhang Tuosheng, 105.

⁹² Huang, 1.

⁹³ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 115.

aged military crisis could result in China “securing more interests, establishing a new strategic balance, and maintaining peace for a longer period of time.”⁹⁴ Although Beijing has avoided high-risk crises, it has pursued provocative policies that favorably changed the status quo. For example, China’s establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the East China Sea exacerbated tensions with Japan and the United States, but resulted in a favorable change in the status quo that arguably damaged U.S. credibility and provided a useful justification for expanded Chinese military air activity near Japan.⁹⁵

Crisis management. The persistence, or even exacerbation, of deep-seated differences, combined with an increasing risk of militarized crises and with an opportunistic posture that seeks gain through crisis situations has elevated the importance of crisis management as an idea. Due to the dangers of escalation, Zhang Tuosheng argued, China must “place the containment and control of crises as important components of military strategy.” This requires “crisis management,” in coordination with “military deterrence and non-war military activities” to prevent situations from escalating into war.⁹⁶ China’s approach to North Korea exemplifies this approach. As the standoff between North Korea and the United States has escalated, China has both stepped up non-military activities, such as backing United Nations sanctions to pressure Pyongyang and diplomatic engagement with all parties to reduce tensions. At the same time, Beijing has also maintained military deterrence activities to dissuade both sides from launching attacks.⁹⁷

Crisis management experts distinguish between measures that reduce immediate risks of conflict and those that address the root causes of conflict. According to Zhang Tuosheng, the main objective of crisis management is to “prevent the escalation of a dispute into military conflict, while doing all one can to protect one’s interests.”⁹⁸ Scholars make the distinction between compromise settlements that temporarily reduce the risk of a clash and the resolution of a dispute that permanently resolves the source of conflict. Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang noted that

⁹⁴ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 63.

⁹⁵ Michael Green et al., “Counter-Coercion Series: East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone,” Asian Maritime Transparency Initiative, June 13, 2017. As of March 23, 2018: <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-east-china-sea-adiz/>

⁹⁶ Zhang Tuosheng, 110.

⁹⁷ BBC, “Beijing’s Balancing Act Over North Korea,” September 12, 2017.

As of March 27, 2018: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41236742>.

⁹⁸ Zhang Tuosheng, 115.

other than in situations in which a country designs a crisis to provoke war, parties involved in a crisis can often find some compromise settlement through negotiations. The authors emphasized, however, that success in crisis control and management is not equal to finding a resolution to the root drivers of disputes. Without resolving the core issue, crises will “come and go repeatedly.”⁹⁹ Zhang Tuosheng similarly argued, “Conflict resolution goes beyond temporary crisis settlement” in that it “thoroughly eliminates the sources of conflict.” He explained that once crisis management yields major results, China should “redouble its efforts in pushing conflict resolution.”¹⁰⁰ An example of this may be seen in the aftermath of the U.S.-China Hainan Island incident in April, 2001. In that event, a U.S. Navy EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft collided with a Chinese fighter plane, resulting in the loss of the Chinese fighter pilot’s life and the capture of the U.S. aircrew. China and the United States managed the crisis and resolved the immediate issue, but subsequently China pushed for the United States to permanently reduce risks of such collisions by halting the reconnaissance flights.¹⁰¹

According to Zhang, there have been a number of principles of crisis management that have remained constant over the past sixty years. These include the ideas that China should: 1) promptly give a diplomatic warning; 2) adopt certain military actions to demonstrate credible deterrence; 3) dominate by striking second and don’t be the first to use force; 4) seek necessary compromises while safeguarding long-term overall interests; and 5) care about justice and ‘face’.¹⁰² Western and Japanese analysts have observed similar tendencies. Iain Johnston identified a “need to claim the moral upper hand,” “beliefs about Chinese exceptionalism,” and the pursuit of “absolute flexibility,” among recurring themes in crisis management writings.¹⁰³ A study by Japan’s National Institute for Defense Studies concluded that Beijing’s crisis management aims at “preventing an escalation while maximizing national interests.” Examining a number of case studies, NIDS identified as persistent features the tendencies to: stand firm on issues related to their principles such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, while behaving in a flexible

⁹⁹ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 67.

¹⁰⁰ Zhang Tuosheng, 116.

¹⁰¹ Shannon Tiezzi, “Preventing Another ‘Hainan Incident,’” *The Diplomat*, August 27, 2014. As of March 27, 2018: <https://thediplomat.com/2014/08/preventing-another-hainan-incident/>.

¹⁰² Zhang Tuosheng, 117.

¹⁰³ Johnston, 45.

manner; promote the appearance that the opponent is always wrong in a crisis, while seeking to gain the initiative in action; and employ military, diplomatic, and economic tools to manage crisis.¹⁰⁴

Reflecting the shift in focus in the country's security policy since 2010, Chinese experts have proposed a refinement in such principles. In light of "new requirements," Zhang Tuosheng recommended measures to: 1) "use non-military measures, such as diplomacy, and non-military actions" to manage a crisis and warn a potential adversary; 2) place "growing importance" on "acting in accordance with international law and seeking legitimacy in actions;" 3) strengthen efforts to "set up measures for building mutual security trust with interested parties;" and 4) pay more attention to "seeking mutual compromise and concessions" over disputes and "strive for win-win and avoid the no-win situation."¹⁰⁵

In terms of the execution of crisis management, experts have recommended a number of steps, many of which will likely appear familiar to practitioners in any country.¹⁰⁶ These include steps to: gather intelligence and information; and determine the nature of the military crisis. The article by Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang viewed the determination of the nature of the military crisis as a "critical step" in its management. In particular, the article emphasized the importance of judging whether the crisis was "an accident or deliberately planned." Other important steps include "setting the political objective" and the creation and implementation of a crisis management plan.¹⁰⁷

Crisis management writings accord a prominent place for the military for primarily deterrence purposes. One article explained that there are three main ways the military can be employed for deterrence purposes in crisis. It can deter through a show of force; through deployments; and through the formation of security partnerships.¹⁰⁸ The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* called on the PLA to "combine strategic unfolding with actual combat deployments to create a powerful deterrence posture, demonstrate resolve to fight, force an opponent to promptly reverse course at the last minute before danger, and position forces to transition from deterrence to conflict." Evoking an unsettling

¹⁰⁴ NIDS, "China Security Report 2013," Tokyo, Japan (2014). URL: http://www.nids.go.jp/publication/chinareport/pdf/china_report_EN_web_2013_A01.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Zhang Tuosheng, 118.

¹⁰⁶ Johnston, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 68.

approximation of brinksmanship behavior, the book recommended China “adopt activities that verge towards warfare to force an opponent to acknowledge difficulties, retreat, and terminate the crisis.” It recommended in particular the “the adoption of limited and yet effective warning type firepower strikes and information attacks,” citing as precedent the bombing of Jinmin in 1958 to demonstrate resolve and warn the United States.¹⁰⁹ Chinese writers also consider some forms of attack a variation of deterrence. Reflecting a theme commonly seen in Chinese military writings, Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang commented, “Actual combat may be required to further deter the enemy.” They explained that a “small battle may be waged to stop a large one, or to keep the confrontation from escalating further.” However, the authors reiterated the principle that military confrontation should always serve political and diplomatic objectives.¹¹⁰

Reviewing such literature, Western scholars have expressed skepticism regarding the country’s preparedness to handle major crises. Some experts have identified persistent problems in Chinese decision-making and crisis management. Ian Johnston noted persistent problems in China’s top-level decision-making processes, military command and operations. Johnston noted, for example, the PLA’s propensity to hide critical information if it reflected poorly on the military, the lack of effective intra-ministerial coordination mechanisms, as well as difficulties in making fast decisions due to the requirements for consensus.¹¹¹

Wartime application

The expanding focus of the country’s security policy has elevated in importance the role of military actions in peacetime and crisis. However, Chinese writers recognize the risk that crisis situations could escalate into a military clash. Emphasizing a continuum between war and non-war activities, one expert explained that should non-war actions fail to secure political objectives, China should be “ready to quickly employ war methods.”¹¹²

Experts acknowledge that controlling war remains extremely difficult. Relevant writings acknowledge that war control requires extensive military preparation. Important measures for wartime control methods include the establishment of joint operation command mechanisms and

¹⁰⁹ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 119.

¹¹⁰ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 66.

¹¹¹ Johnston, 50.

¹¹² *China Military Science* (2009), 42.

a theater of operations. Wang Xixin also recommended quickly establishing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities to allow a “multi-domain and multi-dimensional” awareness of the battlefield. In terms of operational capabilities, he emphasized the role of elite forces that are capable of rapid deployment, of full-spectrum operations, and that possess the ability to quickly establish control of a situation.¹¹³

War control writings emphasize management of the means, operational methods, and targets of conflict.¹¹⁴ Military thinkers highly prize precision strike and information technologies to achieve more precise effects. Liu Shenyang regarded “target-centric warfare” as the practice of war control in conflict. He explained that its goal is “neither annihilation of enemy forces nor occupation of all territories.” Instead, it focuses on “achieving operational objectives as quickly as possible,” “gaining control over the situation,” “sabotaging [command and control] links and nodes,” and “paralyzing the entire system,” by which he meant integrated networks of commanders and troops responsible for specific battlefield tasks¹¹⁵

Writers on war control note the favorable impact of technology for the purposes of controlling combat operations. In particular, the maturing of information technologies in combat has enabled “greater transparency of the battlefield,” according to Wang Xixin, which reduces the risk of “unauthorized warfare initiation and uncontrolled abuses of attacks due to misjudgment.” Wang also noted that improvements in precision-guided munitions had “reduced non-target collateral damage,” while the use of “soft kill methods” [i.e., cyber attacks, electronic jamming, and other non-kinetic means of disabling information networks] could reduce wartime violence. In addition to the continued widespread international condemnation of war, Wang regarded recent military technological developments as favorable to the exercise of war control in combat.

Despite these apparently favorable features of military technologies, writings on war control evince anxiety about the potential for unintended escalation. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* recommended setting limited political, military, and economic objectives of conflict and for limiting the use of military power so as not to threaten the enemy government’s survival or to destroy its military. The goal, instead, should

¹¹³ Wang Xixin, 65.

¹¹⁴ Peng Guangqian and Yao Youzhi, p. 206-8. *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 115.

¹¹⁵ Liu Shenyang, 6.

focus on compelling the adversary to compromise. To control the risks of escalation, it also recommended limiting the scope of conflict, the geographic area of conflict, and making efforts to avoid drawing in the entire breadth of territories of the two countries at war. It also called for making distinctions between major and minor targets, with the priority going to targets that enable the adversary to wage and sustain war, such as leadership organs, military command and control centers, bases for hi-tech weapons, important supply facilities, etc. To the extent possible, it recommended avoiding targeting civilians and respecting laws of war and international treaties.¹¹⁶

To aid in managing escalation, experts discuss the calibration of escalation options in coordination with political efforts to resolve the conflict. Wang Xixin listed a range of military options, from the least to the most escalatory. At the lower end, he recommended military demonstrations, exercises, simulated bombings, and adjustments to deployments. A higher-level escalation involves “military intervention,” which he defined as the deployment of troops to “seize a disputed territory” or “establish military bases in a conflict area.” A more violent application consists of “military strikes,” which he claimed should seek to “use war to end war” through the implementation of “limited and appropriate military strikes” to prompt an enemy’s return to the negotiating table.¹¹⁷

Post conflict

Military writers discuss the management of disputes and conflict with an awareness of the need to anticipate the post-conflict situation. While vague, the writings generally recommend the termination of a conflict after meeting political objectives. As with the pre-conflict and conflict stages, war control in the post-conflict stresses the maintenance of momentum. One writer echoed a common theme in the writings when he called for ending war “at the right time and under the right situation” to “solidify accomplishments.” Just as military conflict is seen as an escalation of a fundamentally political conflict, the termination of military conflict is regarded as a step in the continuation of the political dispute. The same author noted that war termination should be used to “create favorable conditions for the ensuing political and diplomatic struggle.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 122-124.

¹¹⁷ Wang Xixin, 65.

¹¹⁸ Liu Shenyang, 4.

Policy implementation to expand strategic space

The shift in the nation's strategy towards a limited, peaceful expansion has imposed complex and difficult demands on China's political and military leadership. At the same time that central leaders have called for a greater application of military power to protect a proliferating array of national interests and to support the reform of the international order, they have also restricted the military from taking actions that could provoke regional war or otherwise undermine the stability required for the nation's sustained rise. These somewhat conflicting imperatives have raised the need for a higher, more precise concept of the controlled use of military power and its role in policy. To carry out this approach to dispute control, Chinese leaders require four important functions: First, leaders need a stronger, more centralized civilian control of security policy in peacetime, crisis, and conflict to calibrate the use of force and manage the risks to competing security objectives. Second, authorities need to implement measures to stabilize relations with the United States, reduce the risk of conflict, and improve crisis management. Third, senior leaders require a modernized, versatile professional military capable of carrying out a diverse set of military operations. Fourth, leaders seek a professional, capable civilian or law enforcement force capable of acting in close coordination with the military. In recent years, China has stepped up efforts to carry reforms consistent with these requirements. Progress remains deeply incomplete, however, and many weaknesses pertaining to decision making remain. For example, China still relies on consensus-decision making, which can slow decision-times in a crisis; and China's preference for strong centralized control impairs adaptive, flexible action and initiative at the tactical level.

Centralized civilian control. Central leaders in recent years have implemented measures and promoted ideas designed to improve central control and civilian oversight of security policy. The creation of a National Security Commission in 2013, formulation of the "holistic security concept," and the promulgation of a "National Security Law" in 2015 reinforce the idea of centralized control of security policy to manage the competing imperatives of stability and expansion in day-to-day security developments and in crises.¹¹⁹ Erickson and Liff's study of the National Security Commission expressed considerable skepticism about the commission's readiness to effectively manage a crisis. They concluded

¹¹⁹ David Lampton, "Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: Policy Coordination and Political Power," *Journal of Contemporary China*, 24: 95 (2015), 759–777.

that the NSC remains “domestic-oriented, under institutionalized, and confronting major political-bureaucratic headwinds, especially from the Politburo Standing Committee and PLA.”¹²⁰

Crisis prevention, management measures. Since 2010, Chinese authorities have carried out a number of measures designed to stabilize bilateral ties, reduce the risk of conflict, and improve crisis management. In 2013, President Xi Jinping urged the United States to adopt a “new type of great power relationship” premised largely on U.S. strategic concessions as a way to reduce the risk of conflict.¹²¹ Chinese willingness to establish rules for use of a military hotline, and to develop confidence-building measures governing maritime and air-to-air military encounters similarly reflect an underlying anxiety about the rising risk of militarized crises.¹²²

Modernized, tailored military forces. The vision of a networked military force capable of expeditionary activity and tailored force packages capable of employing precision strikes to achieve carefully delineated political objectives dovetails with the general thrust of the PLA’s modernization. In the pursuit of the ability to prevail in a “local war under informatized conditions,” the ground forces have sought to transform from a large formation, Cold War style force into a brigade structure capable of a diverse array of military missions; the naval forces have expanded operations both within and beyond the first island chain; while the air forces have sought to develop both offensive and defensive capabilities as a “strategic air force.” The PLA as a whole has also sought to improve its ability to execute joint operations and enhance its reliance on information systems.¹²³ In 2016, the PLA announced a major overhaul of its command structure and organization to enable joint operations over vast distances.¹²⁴ Xi Jinping has also initiated a major anti-corruption drive as part of a broader effort to improve military readiness and competence.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Erickson and Liff, 214.

¹²¹ Jane Perlez, “China’s ‘New Type’ of Ties Fails to Persuade Obama,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2014.

¹²² Phil Stewart, “U.S., China Agree on Rules for Air-to-Air Military Encounters,” Reuters, September 25, 2015.

¹²³ State Council Information Office, “China’s Military Strategy,” May 26, 2015. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2015-05/26/c_134271001.htm

¹²⁴ Michael Chase, “Xi in Command: Downsizing and Reorganizing the People’s Liberation Army (PLA),” AMTI website, September 11, 2015. URL: <https://amti.csis.org/xi-in-command-downsizing-and-reorganizing-the-peoples-liberation-army-pla/>

¹²⁵ Aditya Tejas, “Xi Jinping to Overhaul China’s Military Structure to Solidify Control:

Despite efforts toward reform, the PLA continues to struggle with numerous weaknesses, ranging from low quality personnel, weapons shortfalls, corruption, and obsolete command structures.¹²⁶

Modernized civilian and new domain forces. The shift towards peaceful expansion has further elevated the demand for military and non-military forces to collaborate in the defense of national interests in the maritime, space, and cyber space domains. The latest defense white paper affirms China's intent to develop appropriate capabilities. It noted the "need to develop a modern maritime military force structure commensurate with China's national security and development interests." China's rapid expansion of its surface combatant fleet, addition of replenishment vessels, and commissioning of one aircraft carrier and planned deployment of at least two more supports the PLA Navy's ability to project power. Similarly, the establishment of its Coast Guard in 2013 and expansion of its forces directly supports this requirement.¹²⁷ Western observers have already noted improvements in the ability of the Chinese Coast Guard to coordinate with the PLA Navy. Moreover, China already has the world's largest fleet of Coast Guard vessels and some of the world's largest cutters, with the largest weighing more than a U.S. Navy Arleigh-Burke destroyer at 10,000 tons.¹²⁸ While expressing its "opposition to the weaponization of space," the 2015 Defense White Paper also noted the country's intention to "secure its space assets to serve national economic and social development." The paper affirmed the country's intent to develop a "cyber force," a development affirmed by authorities in other announcements.¹²⁹

Once the reforms are carried out, China's political and military leadership could be better positioned to deploy and control tailored

Report," *International Business Times*, September 1, 2015. URL: <http://www.ibtimes.com/xi-jinping-overhaul-chinas-military-structure-solidify-control-report-2076876>

¹²⁶ Michael Chase, Jeffrey Engstrom, Tai Ming Cheung, Kristen A. Gunness, Scott Warren Harold, Susan Puska, Samuel K. Berkowitz, *China's Incomplete Military Transition: Assessing the Weaknesses of the PLA* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015). URL: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR893/RAND_RR893.pdf

¹²⁷ Kathrin Hille, "China to Merge Maritime Patrol Units," *Financial Times*, March 10, 2013.

¹²⁸ Ryan Martinson, "China's Second Navy," *Proceedings*, April 2015. URL: <http://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2015-04-0/chinas-second-navy>

¹²⁹ "China to speed up the development of a cyber force," PRC Government website, May 26, 2015. URL: http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2015/05/26/content_281475115069380.htm

groups of military forces to carry out a broader array of missions in peacetime, crisis, and conflict than has been the case in the past. Comparing the anticipated effects of the reforms with China's performance in the EP-3 crisis in 2001 can provide a sense their potential. In a future crisis situation, a unified national security decision-making apparatus could speed the sharing of information between ministries and allow a more rapid outreach to the leaders of other countries involved in the crisis, overcoming the lack of information sharing mechanisms between bureaucracies and delay in decision making that typified China's response to the Hainan Island crisis in 2001. The employment of coast guard and non-war assets could reduce the overall risk of escalation in a crisis, an option scarcely available in the 2000 time frame. Even if military forces were involved in a crisis, an overhauled command structure and better reconnaissance capabilities could allow senior leaders in Beijing to monitor events and flexibly respond and could reduce the ability of local commanders to deceive their superiors, as happened in 2001, when military commanders did not disclose to their superior that the PLA Navy fighter plane was responsible for colliding into the U.S. reconnaissance plane. Moreover, the maturation of crisis management hotlines and confidence building measures could provide mechanisms to stabilize a situation and facilitate the exchange of information between China and the counter-part country in the crisis — options that, again, were not available in 2001. Together, the combined effects of these reforms could result in a political and military leadership that can more effectively respond to, and manage, a militarized crisis that erupted along the country's periphery.

The weakening prohibition against offensive operations

The expanding focus of China's defense policy continues a significant weakening of a decades-long prohibition on offensive military activities. Military force can no longer be justified simply on the obvious basis of defense of the homeland. Instead, new sources of moral and legal justification are required to justify the use of military power in crises and conflict situations and to defend national interests outside China. Clashes in the East or South China Sea, for example, would occur in areas whose sovereignty is disputed by other countries. China could accordingly be expected to invoke legal and moral arguments to defend any military action. The publication of official white papers outlining political and legal arguments for Chinese control of those areas provides

a useful justification in the event a crisis should break.¹³⁰

Reflecting criticism of a purely defensive policy that pervaded the text, the 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* argued that the “righteousness or unrighteousness” of war is “determined by the war’s political attributes, rather than the adoption of defensive or offensive military activities.”¹³¹ Official documents and military writings increasingly define China’s “defensive” security policy in terms of a political posture that regards the legitimate use of military actions in terms of the defense of whatever interests authorities regard as necessary for the nation’s development, regardless of where they may be. It should be emphasized, however, that actions to defend interests could include multi-lateral peacekeeping operations and other non-war actions.

The literature on war control and crisis management has similarly shown a growing emphasis on the importance of acting in accordance with international law as a means of gaining political support in a militarized crisis. Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang explained that gaining public support is “the most important step in control and management of a military crisis.” To the extent possible, they argued, China should “try to sway international opinion to isolate and attack our opponent” and ground its actions on international law “to justify the action.” The authors recommended in particular “acting in accordance with the law” and “respecting and utilizing international laws” to gain international support.¹³² The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* has similarly esteemed highly the importance of carrying out conflict in a manner consistent with international laws.¹³³

Consistent with the pursuit of the moral and legal high ground to justify military actions, military writers highly apprise recent incidents in which actions by other countries provided China the pretext to seize strategic gains. One scholar pointed to the “Huangyan (Scarborough Reef) and Diaoyu (Senkaku) Islands incidents” as examples of “significant crisis incidents” that have brought “extremely rare opportunities” to “declare our sovereignty.” He concluded that if it were not for the provocations that started the crises, China “would not have had such opportunities.”¹³⁴

¹³⁰ State Council Information Office, “Diaoyu Dao: An Inherent Territory of China,” September 2012. As of March 27, 2018: http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2014/08/23/content_281474983043212.htm.

¹³¹ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 107.

¹³² Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 68.

¹³³ *Science of Military Strategy* (2013), 213.

¹³⁴ Huang, 1.

China has also published several white papers outlining the legal arguments justifying the country's control of the disputed features.¹³⁵

For now, the aversion to war will continue to constrain China's willingness to pursue offensive military actions to defend sovereignty claims or other interests. Nevertheless, the adoption of a security policy oriented toward the expansion of strategic space, no matter how limited its scope, has set an important precedent. So long as leaders can justify military action as within China's legal, historical, or moral right, they will face fewer political and ideological constraints to use that power than was the case in previous decades when leaders faced the constraints of a military and security policy oriented toward homeland defense.

A disturbing foretaste of such a possibility may be seen within the strand of war control literature that highly appraises the potential strategic benefits that could be gained through a crisis or even a limited clash. Some military experts advocate the limited use of force to secure gains or probe the resolve of adversaries in a crisis. Liu Shenyang explained that China should "make prudent decisions and never lightly make war," but also "dare to use conflict to rebuild peace." He explained that China should be "proficient in using military means to control our opponents" to improve its situation and "avoid damage to our national security and interests."¹³⁶ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang similarly argued that in a situation that remains "in stalemate" or in which "strategic choices are confusing," limited military action can "clarify the situation by finding the bottom line of the opponent."¹³⁷ Although provocative, there remains little evidence that senior leaders have adopted these views.

Implications

This study has highlighted the political developments that have shaped the meaning and potential application of key concepts related to the employment of military power in peacetime, crisis, and conflict. It has argued that the shift in defense policy away from homeland defense towards one premised on the expansion of strategic space has profoundly influenced how political and military leaders view the use of military power. Official documents and scholarly writings call on China's military to rely principally on peacetime methods to consolidate control

¹³⁵ State Council Information Office, "White Paper: Diaoyu Dao, an Inherent Territory of China," Xinhua, September 25, 2012. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-09/25/c_131872152.htm

¹³⁶ Liu Shenyang, 4.

¹³⁷ Zhao Zijin and Zhao Jingfang, 67.

over core interests and reform aspects of the international order. Senior leaders have clearly directed the military to avoid war if possible to pursue these aims.

How much the ideas related to dispute control might inform actual Chinese behavior in a serious military crisis or conflict remains unclear, as Beijing to date has succeeded in avoiding engaging in these more high-risk, escalatory types of confrontations. These ideas also contain considerable flexibility, which is perhaps more useful than rigid doctrines that regard military force as applicable in wartime alone. Ideas of dispute control thus provide leaders the intellectual tools to calibrate the use of military power to the adversary and the needs of a situation. China can be expected to consider more risky options when facing weaker foes, in situations featuring a lower risk of escalation to major war, or involving especially sensitive core interests, such as Taiwan. Moreover, the fact that concepts related to dispute control permeate official documents that outline the country's security policy suggests some level of influence. Years of analysis have yielded a body of literature from which political and military leaders can draw to formulate policy and indoctrinate relevant bureaucracies, and as a result these officials may well be better prepared to handle a serious military crisis than was the case in past decades.

Better political preparation may bring higher risks, however. The persistent bureaucratic, command, and organizational weaknesses of its political system that have impaired efficient decision making could play out in a manner quite different than in the past. Growing confidence combined with increasing military capabilities could provide Chinese leaders an incentive to pursue brinkmanship tactics in any future militarized crisis, raising the risk of miscalculation. Further research would be required, however, to more clearly illuminate how the changing political environment may affect China's potential behavior in a crisis.