

Conventional Forces Modernization

~~(C)~~ Conventional forces modernization centers around low-cost reforms intended to raise the combat effectiveness of the PLA until economic expansion permits large-scale weapons acquisition. Such reforms include enhanced education and training, force restructuring, doctrinal changes, and the selective upgrade of some equipment as an interim measure.

- o ~~(C)~~ After several years of sustained emphasis on improving the officer education system, the proportion of officers with college degrees is now 27.6 percent, up from 10.9 percent in 1981. In addition, older officers have attended remedial education classes, and some 92 percent have completed high school, up from 50 percent in 1981.
- o ~~(C)~~ Unit commanders in the individual military regions are less frequently determining their own training methods and schedules. New training methods are being taught at national-level military schools and this practice has injected some standardization into the training system. In addition, a "pilot unit" concept begun in 1982 has provided control and evaluation of experimental training methods and is developing new tactics, doctrine, and training methods.
- o ~~(C)~~ There is a great deal of debate taking place within the PLA whether the original one million troop reduction (which will be completed this year) should be followed by a further significant reduction in troop strength, somewhere between 500,000 and 750,000. The consensus is that there should be no further demobilization until 1990 at the earliest to allow the lessons of the first reduction to be absorbed.
- o ~~(C)~~ In order to supplement a smaller active force, China is developing a formal reserve force. This force includes reservists proper and armed "backbone" militiamen organized into regimental and lower units.

Administered at the local level in peacetime, these units would round out the active force in wartime.

- o (U) The PLA is implementing a civilian cadre system to insure long-term retention of military scientists and technical personnel. The PLA is also reestablishing a military rank structure and an awards system.
- o ~~(S)~~ China's central military doctrine is changing. Emphasis is shifting toward new strategies for forward defense, local wars, and rapid deployment.

~~(S)~~ Over the past few years the most extensive reforms have occurred in the ground forces. Group Armies created to provide a combined arms capability are now the mainstay of the army. An Army Aviation Corps has been established to provide antitank and airlift capabilities which previously did not exist.

- o (S/WN) China has 24 Group Armies ranging in size from 60,000 to 90,000 men.
- o (S) The Army Aviation Corps will enhance the ability of the PLA to field a credible military force. Although the Corps is still in development, it will provide ground force commanders with reconnaissance, air transport, and aerial antitank assets.

~~(S)~~ Air force modernization emphasizes retiring aged aircraft, selectively enhancing the capabilities of some, and developing new aircraft for specific missions. The air force has also reorganized in order to better perform its various roles. Emphasis has been placed on better coordination with group army operations in combined arms exercises and on increased air defense responsiveness.

- o ~~(S/NF/WN)~~ Since 1985, approximately 1,000 fighters, bombers, and transports were transferred or retired out of combat units, including as many as 100 B-5/BEAGLE bombers, over 600 MiG-15/FAGOT and F-5/MiG-17/FRESCO, and at least 200 transport aircraft. China's newer F-7/FISHBEDs and the F-8/FINBACKs are being selectively deployed as replacements to front-line fighter units. China has an estimated 500-600 F-7/FISHBED and about 70 F-8-1/FINBACK A aircraft.

