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**11 SEPTEMBER AND CHINA:  
OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES,  
AND WARFIGHTING**

**Nan Li**

**Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies  
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## ABSTRACT

This essay examines the Chinese perspectives on the implications of 11 September for US-China relations, and for future warfighting. On US-China relations, the essay shows two major Chinese views: the optimistic view which stresses post-11 September opportunities for better US-China relations and for Chinese gains, and the pessimistic view that places emphasis on post-11 September challenges for US-China relations, and the costs that China may have to pay. While the optimism is associated with China's economic, trade, and diplomatic bureaucracies and underlies China's support for the US war against terrorism, the pessimism is largely identified with China's national security bureaucracies and underwrites China's reservation, ambivalence and criticism regarding this war. On warfighting, this essay shows that the People's Liberation Army has learned several major lessons from 11 September: for the superior (US) side, information and capability dominance, enhanced role of special operations, and fusing old and new technologies; and for the inferior (Al Qaeda and Taliban) side, asymmetrical and unrestricted warfare. All these lessons have been integrated in the two major PLA warfighting scenarios: "superior fighting inferior," and "inferior fight superior."

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Dr. Nan Li is currently a fellow at the IDSS. He received his PhD in political science from the Johns Hopkins University, and taught political science at University of Cincinnati, Dartmouth College, University of Massachusetts, and Eastern Kentucky University. He was an Olin fellow and research associate at Harvard University during 1993-95, and a senior fellow at the US Institute of Peace during 1997-98. Nan Li has published on Chinese civil-military relations, and military doctrine and organization in *Security Studies*, *China Quarterly*, *Armed Forces and Society*, and edited volumes of the Rand Corporation and Oxford University Press. His most recent publication is *From Revolutionary Internationalism to Conservative Nationalism: The Chinese Military's Discourse on National Security and Identity during the Post-Mao Era*.

# **11 SEPTEMBER AND CHINA: OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES, AND WARFIGHTING**

## **Introduction**

While there has been debate outside China regarding the implications of the 11 September terrorist attacks on America and the ensuing war in Afghanistan for US-China relations and for Chinese foreign policy,<sup>1</sup> no detailed analysis has existed on how the Chinese analysts themselves interpret and debate these implications. This study intends to shed light on the Chinese perspectives on 11 September. Specifically, it attempts to address two sets of research questions: 1) What are the major Chinese views on the implications of 11 September for US-China relations, and what are the institutional origins of these views? 2) What are the major lessons that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has learned from 11 September and the war in Afghanistan for future warfighting, what are their origins, and what are the implications of these lessons for PLA warfighting?

Several caveats are in order. First, rather than on the implications for global politics, this study focuses on the implications of 11 September for US-China relations and for PLA warfighting. To the extent China sees the US as the central source of opportunities and challenges for both its domestic policy agenda of economic and technological modernization, and its foreign policy objective of reunifying with Taiwan, and dynamics in US-China interaction may have major ramifications for the Asia-Pacific security and economy, such a narrower focus is justified. Similarly, as the PLA acquires larger budget and better technologies and its influence over Chinese foreign and defence policy grows, an analysis of the lessons it has learned from 11 September should help to throw light on the possible nature, scope, and direction of China's defence modernization drive, which may have important implications for Asian security. Second, this study concentrates on major Chinese views but not minor and marginal views. Such a

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<sup>1</sup> For the optimistic view that 11 September may provide a common cause that brings the US and China closer, see David Shambaugh and Robert S. Litwak, "Common Interests in a Hazardous World," *New York Times*, 17 October 2001, p. A31. Richard Holbrooke, "A Defining Moment with China," *Washington Post*, 2 January 2002, p. A13. For the pessimistic view that 11 September may contribute little to improved US-China relations, and may even exacerbate the conflict of interests and perception between the two, see David Lampton, "China and America after 9/11," *The National Interest*, No. 66 (Winter 2001/02), pp.106-113. Aaron L. Friedberg, "11 September and the Future of Sino-American Relations," *Survival*, Vol. 44, No.2 (Spring 2002), pp. 33-50.

concentration is reasonable largely because major views have more important implications for Chinese policy, and for thinking about coping strategies. Finally, this study is based on a reading of the Chinese analytical literature, which is concerned mainly with how Chinese interests are affected by 11 September, but not on Chinese reports regarding official or public sentiment and emotions.<sup>2</sup> A major benefit of concentrating on the analytical literature is that it provides a more rational basis for further interpretation and analysis. The bias or ambiguity in the official literature, however, is mediated by the author's own analysis.

The study is divided into two sections. The first addresses major Chinese views on the implications of 11 September for US-China relations and their origins. The second discusses the PLA lessons from 11 September and the war in Afghanistan for future warfighting, their origins, and the implications for PLA warfighting.

### **Chinese Views on the Implications of 11 September for US-China Relations**

Two major views have developed in China concerning the implications of 11 September for US-China relations: the optimistic view which places emphasis on opportunities, and the pessimistic view that stresses challenges.

#### ***The Optimistic View***

For the optimists, three major opportunities have merged that may enhance Chinese interests in dealing with the US after 11 September: 1) US distraction of attention and diversion of strategic resources from East Asia; 2) opportunities for cooperation between China and the US; and 3) other benefits.

First on US distraction and diversion, some Chinese analysts argue that the post-11 September US war on terrorism has largely shifted the US attention away from East Asia

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<sup>2</sup> Such reports range from Jiang Zeming's expression of sympathy for the US losses, to the more cynical view shared among some Chinese that the US got its share for what it did earlier to the Chinese embassy in Belgrade.

to Central, South, and South East Asia.<sup>3</sup> Such a shift may reduce the US military pressure on East Asia, a region that has, since the end of the Cold War, become China's security policy priority.<sup>4</sup> While there had been a marked increase in anxiety in Beijing since the April EP-3 incident and the statements made by President Bush that China is a "strategic competitor" and that the US "would defend Taiwan with whatever means necessary," 11 September had led to a general sigh of relief. This happened largely because some believe that the earlier US shift of policy emphasis to China-related issues may be delayed by the war on Terrorism, if not completely abandoned.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, some suggest now that the US military has to fight on both the overseas front and the homeland defence front, its strategic and military resources would be spread even thinner than before 11 September, when these resources had already been spread thin by its global ambitions.<sup>6</sup> This may work to the advantage of China if it chooses to achieve limited policy objective within a sufficiently short duration, before the US is capable of effectively reorganizing its resources for intervention. The possible shift of resources from missile defence to conventional warfighting and homeland defence may also reduce the pressure on China to spend resources on developing the countermeasures.<sup>7</sup> Finally, some argue that 11 September has made it much more difficult for American politicians to mobilize public

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<sup>3</sup> Ni Shixiong, Zhuang Shizhong, "Fancong gaibian zhongmei guanxi" ("Counter-Terrorism Changes Sino-US Relations"), *Huanqiu shibao* (Global Times), 7 February 2002, p. 7. *Global Times* is a subsidiary of *People's Daily*, and is available at [www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn), the website of *People's Daily*. Ni Shixiong is a professor at the School of International Affairs and Public Policy, Fudan University, Shanghai.

<sup>4</sup> The new priority has been given to the security of China's prosperous east coast and the associated maritime territories, and the issue of Taiwan. See Nan Li, *From Revolutionary Internationalism to Conservative Nationalism: The Chinese Military's Discourse on National Security and Identity in the Post-Mao Era* (Peaceworks No. 39, US Institute of Peace, May 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Yang Chengxu (Director of China Institute of International Studies, the research arm of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), "Daguo guanxi quzhe duobian, weipo geju" ("The Relations among Major Powers Are Tortuous and Changeable, (but) There Is No Breakaway from the Basic Pattern"), 19 December 2001, downloaded from <http://military.china.com>, a popular website on military issues in China.

<sup>6</sup> Tang Suifu (of Xinhua News Agency), "Neiwai binzhong, guonei youxian – '9.11' shijian hou meiguo junshi zhanlue de tiaozheng" ("Give Equal Weight to Foreign and Domestic, and the Priority is Domestic – Adjustment of the US Military Strategy After '9.11' Incident"), *Jeifangjun bao* (Liberation Army Daily), 24 December 2001, p. 4. The author also notes that before 11 September, the US military strategy was mainly concerned with foreign policy. *Liberation Army Daily* can be downloaded from [www.pladaily.com.cn](http://www.pladaily.com.cn).

<sup>7</sup> This point was made in connection with the argument that earlier US priority on missile defence was wrongly conceived, because it was widely off the mark in preventing 11 September from taking place. See "Interview with Dr. Wang Yizhou (deputy director of the World Economics and Politics Research Institute, Academy of Social Sciences) on 11 September Terrorist Attacks on America," 12 September 2002, *Qiangguo* (strengthening the Country) Forum of [www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn).

support for the “China threat” theory.<sup>8</sup> This is because no politician who advocate such a view would gain much public support in face of the more imminent and real danger of terrorism, where thousands of people were killed and billions of dollars of properties were lost. In comparison, China may offer a much more benign image, with its emphasis on economic development and trade, and on a moderate pace of defence modernization.

Second, on opportunities for cooperation, some suggest that the US war on terrorism may create a situation where US-China cooperation can be diffused from the top to the more bureaucratic and technical levels, ranging from intelligence sharing, diplomatic cooperation at the multilateral institutions, interdicting drug-trafficking and money laundering to block funding for terrorist groups, to arms control dialogue. The increased interaction and entanglement between the functional bureaucracies of China (the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of State Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the PLA) and the US (the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department, the Treasury Department, and the Defense Department) may provide new impetus and incentive for more extensive cooperation.<sup>9</sup> This may work favourably for China, because it may enhance the Chinese leverages in related issues (through the “tit for tat” game of exchanging favours). It can also gain China the much-needed “breathing space” by diverting attention away from the more contentious issues in US-China relations.

Moreover, China can benefit from the US war on terrorism in several other aspects. First, the replacement of the radical Islamic regime of the Talibans with a moderate government in Afghanistan allegedly may enhance Chinese security. This is because one of the suspected major safe havens for the “separatist” groups of the ethnic minorities such as the Uighurs in Xinjiang has been eliminated. Moreover, the war on terrorism may enhance the legitimacy of the Chinese government in its own effort to crack down on “separatism” in Xinjiang, Tibet, and other ethnic minority-dominated areas on the margins of China. Finally, US constraints may also have the subtle psychological effect of

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<sup>8</sup> Nie and Zhuang, “Counter-Terrorism Changes Sino-US Relations.” Ren Yujun, Ding Gang, “Zhongmei zuijin bijiao re” (“Sino-US Relations Are Quite Warm Recently”), *Global Times*, 11 February 2002, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Nie and Zhuang, “Counter-Terrorism Changes Sino-US Relations.”

deterring Taiwan from pursuing formal independence, thus enhancing the chances of reunification.<sup>10</sup>

The optimists also tend to play down the concern about the increased US presence in Central, South, and South East Asia that may constitute the containment-driven “encirclement” of China. It is pointed out that the US military presence in these regions is still rather limited and temporary, and is confined to advising, training, and logistics, and its objective is to fight terrorism, but not China. Some argue that some level of US military presence may generate a measure of stability and security against terrorism, which can translate into improved security in China’s western provinces.<sup>11</sup> But even if the US decides to substantially expand its military presence by establishing more numerous and more permanent bases in these regions, this may increase but not decrease US vulnerability. This is because 1) such expansion would alienate the Muslim population to the point there may be more terrorist attacks on the US facilities and personnel; and 2) bases close to China may be held hostage in case a major US-China conflict erupts.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the overly extensive and assertive US presence in Central Asia may eventually alienate Russia, which considers the region as too vital to its own security to be dominated by US influence.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, increased US economic aid to Pakistan, a Chinese ally, may reduce the vulnerability of the current Pakistani government to the radical Islam-based terrorism.<sup>14</sup> This may enhance Chinese interests because US aid may reduce the

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<sup>10</sup> For the three points, see Wu Yixiang, “Meijun ke’ neng chaiqu de junshi xingdong jiqi dui woguo de yingxiang” (“The Possible Military Operations that the US Military May Adopt and their Impact on Our Country”), 15 September 2001, downloaded from <http://military.china>.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* These points are also linked to the larger argument that China can benefit from US military presence in Asia, because such presence sustains the “hegemonic stability” which China can benefit from. See Pang Zhongying (Senior Fellow, Institute of International Studies, Qinghua University), “Lengzhan hou de zhongguo guoji diwei yu duiwai zhanlue” (“China’s International Position and Its External Strategy in the Post-Cold War Era”), speech given at Qinghua University, 16 April 2002, downloaded from <http://www.cmilitary.com>.

<sup>12</sup> Yimin, “Meijun nengfou changzhu afuhan?” (“Can the US military be deployed in Afghanistan for Long?”) *Zhongguo guofang bao* (China National Defence Daily), 5 February 2002, p. B4. *National Defence Daily* is a subsidiary of *Liberation Army Daily*, and is available at [www.pladaily.com.cn](http://www.pladaily.com.cn). Wu, “The Possible Military Operations.”

<sup>13</sup> Tong Lin, “Mei jie fancong taru erluosi ‘houyuan’” (“The US Uses the Pretext of Counter-Terrorism to Step into the ‘Backyard’ of Russia”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 22 April 2002, p. 12.

<sup>14</sup> This interpretation of the Chinese view on US aid to Pakistan was provided by Jingdong Yuan (senior research associate, East Asian Non-proliferation Program, Monterey Institute of International Studies), in his



economic burden of China as the primary supplier of aid. At the same time, a stable, secular and moderate government in Islamabad can be preserved and sustained. Such a government clearly serves Chinese interests better than a radical Islam-dominated government.

Finally, immediately after 11 September, some analysts believed that the psychological trauma of the horrific human losses might make it more difficult for the US government to build up public support for intervention in overseas crises (such as Taiwan), where substantial US casualty may be incurred.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the tremendous financial and material losses and the heightened popular sense of insecurity in the US might trigger a loss of confidence among the investors and consumers in the US economy.<sup>16</sup> An economic downturn in the US may result in China's loss of some revenue from its declining export to the US and from tourism. But China may also benefit because major foreign capital may shift to China, which among other things offers a seemingly more peaceful and tranquil alternative.

### ***The Pessimistic View***

Unlike the optimists, the pessimists see major challenges China may have to face in enhancing its security and other interests, particularly after the US war in Afghanistan has been successfully executed and the US economy is back on track. First, some analysts argue that the extensive, prolonged, and unmitigated US military presence in Central, South, and South East Asia may undermine Chinese influence in these regions, and make it more difficult for China to achieve its security, economic, and energy objectives in the

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talk on Sino-India relations, Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 11 March 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Ding Baozhong, "Yuji weixiao, youlu nanchu – meiguoren dangqian xintai" ("Fear Lingers on, and Worry and Anxiety Are Hard to Eliminate – the Current State of Mind of Americans"), *Liaowang* (Outlook), No. 41, 8 October 2001. *Outlook* (a weekly news magazine) is a subsidiary of the Xinhua News Agency (China's official news agency), and is available at <http://www.xinhua.org>.

<sup>16</sup> "Interview with Wang Yizhou." "Interview with Dr. Pang Zhongying on Terrorist Attacks on America," 12 September 2001, *Qiangguo* Forum of [www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn).

future.<sup>17</sup> Also, some claim that the US government follows a policy of “double standards” in fighting terrorism by refusing to treat the “separatist” groups in China as terrorists. It is alleged that some US human rights groups even call them freedom fighters.<sup>18</sup> As a result, as the US expands its influence to Central Asia, the US may replace the Taliban as a major source of shelter for “separatist” groups in China, thus undermining the stability of China’s western provinces. This may in turn force China to shift its strategic resources from the eastern seaboard to the western frontiers, thus frustrating China’s strategic priorities.

Another major concern among the pessimists is that 11 September may make it much easier to mobilize US domestic support for defence budget increases and for developing the missile defence. These in the long run would translate into reduced US vulnerability and increased Chinese vulnerability, particularly in the area of China’s retaliatory nuclear strike capabilities. Furthermore, as the US improves the security of its homeland and facilities abroad after 11 September, the US would become much less vulnerable.<sup>19</sup> This would make it more difficult to wage the so-called “unrestricted warfare” against the US homeland and its overseas facilities if open conflict between the US and China takes place. Both would render the US the unilateral invulnerability and therefore the incentive to intervene in foreign crises. This in turn would severely limit China’s freedom of choices to reduce its own vulnerability.

Moreover, some argue that the swift and successful execution of the US war in Afghanistan, with relatively low military casualty and little collateral damage, may

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<sup>17</sup> He Yijian, “Meiguo zai yazhou bubing mang” (“The US Has Been Busy Deploying Troops in Asia”), *Outlook*, No.20, 13 May 2002. Gao Qiufu, “Meiguo jinjun zhongya de ruyi suanpan” (“The Smug Calculations of the US by Marching into Central Asia”), *Outlook*, No.18, 29 April 2002, p. 57.

<sup>18</sup> PLA analysts cited in Yun Shan, “Guoji anquan mianlin duochong tiaozhan: junshi zuanjia zhonglun ‘9-11’ hou shijie junshi xingshi” (“International Security Faces Multiple Challenges: Military Experts Comment Widely on the World Military Situation after ‘9-11’”), *Outlook*, No. 49, 2 December 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Xiong Yuxiang, “You jingongxing xiang gongfang jianbeixing zhuanbian: mei yunniang dui hezhanlue jinxing zhongda tiaozheng” (“Transformation from the Offence Type to the Offence-Defence Type: the US Deliberates on Major Adjustment to Its Nuclear Strategy”), *National Defence Daily*, 24 January 2002, p. 1. Ding Zhihong, “Meiguo wei fancong kaichu da jiaqian” (“The US Spends Lavishly on Counter-Terrorism”), *National Defence Daily*, 29 January 2002, p. 2.

embolden the US to embark on a policy of unilateralism,<sup>20</sup> which would eventually undermine Chinese interests. The possible expansion of the US war on terrorism under the rhetoric of “axis of evil,” for instance, may place China in an awkward position: China’s good relationship with North Korea and Iran and the associated benefits may be jeopardized if it chooses to side with the US; or it could choose to side with these countries and criticize US policy, and pay a public relations price. But the more important concern is that once the US has accomplished its objective of defeating terrorism, it may gain a freer hand in focusing on the “China question,” thus reducing the “breathing space” for China to pursue its interests and to expand its influence.

The pessimists have also identified other costs China may have to pay or challenges it may have to face. In spite of China’s cooperation with the US on the terrorism front, some complain that there is very little reciprocity from the US side. China shares intelligence with the US on the terrorist groups, but the US allegedly continues to gather intelligence on China through a variety of means.<sup>21</sup> On issues such as arms sales to Taiwan and missile defence, the US has not made any concession, but rather has taken steps that alienate China further. These steps include the sale of more sophisticated arms to Taiwan, and the US decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. The US even invited Taiwan’s defence minister to visit the US, and put China on the list of targets for future US nuclear strikes.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, some analysts worry that the US war on terrorism may produce other unintended consequences that may hurt China’s interests. Too close cooperation between the US on the one hand, and Russia and the Central Asia countries of the former Soviet

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<sup>20</sup> Ma Xiaojun, “‘Xin afuhan zhanzheng’ zhenghe daguo guanxi” (“‘New Afghan War’ Integrates the Relations among the Major Powers”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 18 March 2002, p. 12. Major General Peng Guangqian (of AMS) and Professor Xiao Tianliang (of NDU) cited in Yun, “International Security Faces Multiple Challenges.”

<sup>21</sup> Ren qiulin, “Meiguo quan fangwei jianting zhongguo” (“The US Eavesdrops on China from All Directions”), *Nanfang ribao* (Nanfang Daily), 17 April 2002, available at <http://www.nanfangdaily.com.cn>.

<sup>22</sup> Tang Tianri, “Jisuo buyu, wushi yuren” (“If Oneself Does Not Have the Desire, Do Not Impose on Others”), *Liberation Army daily*, 19 March 2002, p. 5. “Wujiao dalou, bie gao ‘he ezha’” (“Pentagon, Do Not Engage in ‘Nuclear Blackmail’”), *National Defence Daily*, 19 March 2002, p. 6. “Meitai junshi hezuo shengji pohuai yatai heping wending – guofang daxue zhuanjia xuezhe tan meitai jiaqiang hezuo de weihai” (“Upgrading of US-Taiwan Military Cooperation Damages Asia-Pacific Peace and Stability – NDU Experts and Scholars Speak on the Danger and Harm of Strengthening US-Taiwan Military Cooperation”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 20 May 2002, p. 9.

Union on the other, may undermine years of Chinese effort to build up influence in the region, particularly in the framework of the “Shanghai Five” security cooperation.<sup>23</sup> This in the long run may constrain the pursuit of Chinese interests in the region. The war has also produced an excuse for Japan to expand its military deployment abroad.<sup>24</sup> This may in turn lead to Japan’s rearmament, making it more difficult for China to pursue its security objectives in East Asia. As far as India-Pakistan relations are concerned, the scenario that serves China’s interests best is the pre-11 September status quo: not too close so that a moderate level of tension between India and Pakistan can distract Indian resources from the India-China border; not too apart so that no war breaks out between the two that may require more substantial Chinese material or manpower aid to Pakistan. The US war on terrorism, however, may upset the delicate balance of the status quo: it may bring the two much closer in a US-sponsored united front against terrorism.<sup>25</sup> But the more likely and more worrisome scenario is that the radical Islamic groups in Pakistan may instigate terrorist attacks in Kashmir and India by exploiting the weakness of the Pakistani government, thus triggering a war between Pakistan and India.<sup>26</sup> This may either draw China into a military conflict it has neither the desire nor the interest in participating in, or the war may spill over into China, thus destabilizing China’s west.

### ***Origins of the Two Major Views***

What are the origins of these two major views? Some may argue that the old ideological divide between those who are criticized for advocating a “revisionist” or “bourgeois” foreign policy (where China allegedly capitulates to the Western governments by seeking peaceful coexistence with them), and those who stand for a revolutionary foreign policy (where China supports the world class struggle/revolution by aiding the

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<sup>23</sup> Lu Zhongwei (director of China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, the research arm of the Ministry of State Security), “Yatai anquan ‘chongxin xipai’” (“Reshuffling Cards’ for Asia-Pacific Security”), 19 December 2001, downloaded from <http://military.china>. Gao, “The Smug Calculations of the US.”

<sup>24</sup> Sheng Xin, “Ribei: jiekou ‘fancong’ tupo jingqu” (“Japan: Break out of the Forbidden Area under the Pretext of ‘Counter-terrorism’”), *National Defence Daily*, 25 December 2002, p. 1. PLA analysts cited in Yun, “International Security Faces Multiple Challenges.”

<sup>25</sup> Lu, “Reshuffling Cards’.” Ding Zhengyi, “Inmei junshi hezuo yinren guanzhu” (“India-US Military Cooperation Attracts Concern and Attention”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 24 February 2002, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Jinjun, “Inba: hai she ‘he wei gui’” (“India and Pakistan: It Is ‘Noble to Make Peace’”), *National Defence Daily*, 15 January 2002, p. 1. Cao Yongsheng, “Inba: yao woshou buyao zhanzheng” (“India and Pakistan: Shake Hands but not Make War”), *National Defence Daily*, 8 January 2002, p. 1.

foreign Maoist or Marxist groups against their governments) defines the origins of these two views. Such an argument may no longer explain well, largely because the majority from both the optimistic and the pessimistic camps are technocrats but not ideologues, and besides their own career mobility and the associated material gains, they share similar goals: the economic and technological modernization of China and the advancement of China's security interests, but not world revolution. What they disagree with one another over, however, concerns mainly the priority of goals and the means to achieve these goals. Moreover, unlike the old centralization model where one charismatic, revolutionary strongman (such as Mao or Deng) dominated, the current style of collective leadership means that the policy process has become more diffused than before, and the top leadership makes policy decisions largely based on the mediation and aggregation of the sometimes divergent input from the major functionally specialized bureaucracies.

To the extent the current policy agenda in China is dominated by two major functional issues of 1) national economic and technological development, and 2) national defence and security, it is highly plausible to assume that the two major functional bureaucracies responsible for the two issues constitute the institutional origins of the two major views. The State Council (and its subordinate economic, trade, and diplomatic commissions and ministries), the major bureaucracy responsible for China's economic development, should be the originator of the more optimistic view. Such a view represents a more benign interpretation of China's external environment and argues for a more moderate policy (mainly through the more integrative economic and diplomatic means) to promote Chinese interests abroad. This view should also be shared by many policy analysts affiliated with China's civilian think tanks such as the Academy of the Social Sciences, and the emerging but still embryonic community of international relations and foreign policy scholars working in China's major universities. It should even find expression among a small minority of more opportunistic strategic analysts affiliated with the PLA.

The institutional origin of the pessimistic view is likely to be the bureaucratic cluster responsible for China's national defence and security: the Central Military Commission, its subordinate four PLA general (command, political, logistics, and armament) departments, and the PLA think tanks such as the Academy of Military Science (AMS) and the National Defence University (NDU). Such a view should also be shared

by some quarters on the State Council side that are affiliated with the Ministry of State Security, and by the nationalist intellectuals working in civilian think tanks and universities. But more importantly, such a view may have popular appeal, particularly at a time when populist nationalism has been on the rise in China.

The current Chinese policy for the most part is the outcome of aggregation and mediation at the top level (mainly through the CCP Foreign Affairs Leadership Small Group, and the CCP Politburo and its Standing Committee), and it reflects both views. China's support for the US war on terrorism, for instance, is clearly influenced by the analyses of the optimists, who have a few powerful patrons at the very top (including Premier Zhu Rongji). Such a support, however, is highly cautious and conditional. At the early stage of the US war on terrorism, for instance, China cautioned the US to provide concrete proof, to act within the United Nations framework, and to avoid civilian casualties in executing the war in Afghanistan. After President Bush implied to expand the war against terrorism to the "axis of evil," Chinese support of the US war on terrorism has become more ambivalent, and criticism of US unilateralism in the Chinese media has mounted. All these caution, ambivalence, and criticism clearly reflect the view of the pessimists, and they are intended to place constraints on the US in pursuing its objectives. It also demonstrates that the influence over policy by the analyses of the pessimists remain quite substantial, and they apparently enjoy the strong endorsement of very powerful institutions such as the PLA, as well as support from some segments of Chinese society.

### **Chinese Views on the Implications of 11 September for Warfighting**

Besides the political implications, the Chinese analysts have also carefully examined the military implications of 11 September. The following paragraphs discuss the major lessons that the PLA has learned from 11 September, the origins of these lessons, and the implications of these lessons for PLA warfighting.

#### ***Major Lessons for the PLA***

The PLA has learned four major lessons from 11 September and the war in Afghanistan: 1) information and capability dominance for the superior (US) side; 2)

enhanced role of special operations; 3) fusing old and new technologies; and 4) “unrestricted warfare” for the inferior (Al Qaeda and Taliban) side.

Most Chinese military analysts are quite impressed by the performance of the superior side in the war in Afghanistan. First, it is pointed out that the US military has been able to achieve almost complete information dominance, or unilateral battlefield transparency. This has happened largely because it has established a multi-spatial (*duowei kongjian*) information-gathering network by deploying highly effective sensors, ranging from reconnaissance satellites, manned and unmanned surveillance aircraft, to ground and individual-based information-gathering technologies, while suffering very little interruption from the inferior side such as the Taliban.<sup>27</sup> Such information technology superiority in turn has enabled the US side to timely and precisely detect not just the infrastructure-related strategic targets or campaign targets, but also the much more mobile and much smaller tactical targets, and to optimise the utility of the intelligence through a high level of systems integration. Moreover, the US side has allegedly achieved almost total capability dominance. This means that the US side has been able to strike earlier (than the adversary), from longer distances (beyond the reach of the adversary), more precisely, and in a more sustained manner due to its comparative advantage in related technologies.<sup>28</sup>

Second, besides the hardware side, some suggest that the highly mobile and smaller special operations units have played a crucial role in connecting the sensors with the shooters. Armed with high-tech information gadgets and operating on the ground and

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<sup>27</sup> This lack of serious interruption has been attributed to an elaborate US strategy of destroying the Taliban's C3I (command, control, communications, and intelligence) and air defence through early air strikes, while deliberately leaving some of the tactical information systems of the Taliban intact, for the purpose of further target acquisition. Li Jiantao, “Meijun xinxing xinxizhan tuxian” (“New Type Information Warfare of the US Military Displays Prominently”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 10 April 2002, p. 12. Peng Bo, “Xinxi huoqu jueheng weilai” (“Information Acquisition is Decisive to Victory in the Future”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 15 May 2002, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Li, “New Type Information Warfare.” Hu Siyuan (of NDU), “Linglue jinri ‘kongzhong hua’ zhanzheng” (“Appreciating Today's ‘Aerialized War’”), *National Defence Daily*, 15 January 2002, p. 6. Major General Huang Bin (of NDU), “Ershiyi shiji zhanzheng de sanba ‘lijian’” (“Three ‘Sharp Swords’ for the Wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”), *National Defence Daily*, 5 February 2002, p. 6.

close to the enemy, they are allegedly indispensable in collecting vital intelligence, in selecting targets, and in directing air firepower to the targets.<sup>29</sup>

Third, some analysts are quite impressed by the ways the US side combines the old and new technologies (dumb bombs enhanced by attached GPS (global positioning system)-based gliders, and continued relevance of B-52s and aircraft carriers) to achieve objectives at a lower cost.<sup>30</sup> The marriage of information dominance and capability dominance through a high level of systems integration and special operations, together with the flexible and optimal use of the existing and new technologies, has helped to achieve the goal of reducing and diminishing the supposed advantages of the Taliban: familiarity with the difficult terrains and the climate, and years of experience in fighting guerrilla wars.

For the inferior side, some analysts suggest that the 11 September attacks confirmed the new warfare that this weaker side can employ in the age of globalisation, as depicted in *Unrestricted Warfare*, a book written by two PLA Air Force political officers. This warfare involves the non-military and non-state actors (terrorist networks, computer hackers, etc.), who exploit the weakening of both the national boundary (freer flow of people and information) and the civil-military boundary (more availability of dual-use technology-related asymmetrical means), to attack the vulnerable but highly symbolic targets of the superior side, to achieve strategic objectives. It also shows that the superior side does have many vulnerabilities that can be exploited by the inferior side, ranging from intelligence, border security, immigration checks, airport security, inter-agency coordination, to air defence.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Li, "New Type Information Warfare." Jin Yuan, "Meijun ruhe tezhong zuozhan?" ("How Does the US Military Conduct Special Operations?"), *National Defence Daily*, 11 December 2002, p. 8.

<sup>30</sup> Zhang Liangfu, "Rang xianyou zhuangbei xingcheng zhengti zhandouli" ("Let the Existing Arms Develop into Comprehensive Combat Effectiveness"), *Liberation Army Daily*, 19 March 2002, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> "Interview with Senior Colonels Wang Xiangsui and Qiaoliang (authors of *Unrestricted Warfare*) and Dr. Jin Canrong (of American Studies Institute of Academy of Social Sciences) on Terrorist Attacks on America," 12 September 2002. *Qiangguo* Forum of [www.people.com.cn](http://www.people.com.cn).



### ***Institutional Basis of the Lessons of 11 September***

The lessons of 11 September have largely been integrated in the current Chinese debate on warfighting doctrines. In this debate, there are three major schools of thought: 1) “local war under high tech conditions” school; 2) RMA (revolution in military affairs) school; and 3) people’s war school. Each of these has an institutional basis. The “local war” school is largely associated with the command and staff departments of the PLA at all levels, and most scholars and researchers from the command and staff colleges and related research institutions. The institutional basis of the RMA school, on the other hand, involves mainly the more forward-looking, more experimental, and more technology-savvy sectors of the PLA, such as the AMS, the NDU, and the research and teaching institutions affiliated with the PLA armament departments, as well as some from the command and staff side of the PLA bureaucracy. Finally, the people’s war school is primarily identified with the operational, research and learning institutions of the PLA’s political commissar system, as well as the provincial PLA institutions responsible for running the reserve and militia units.

### ***Implications for PLA Warfighting***

The lessons of 11 September are likely to strengthen the arguments of the “local war” school and the RMA school, and modify the argument of the people’s war school. This becomes evident if one looks at the two main scenarios that underlie the current PLA thinking on warfighting.

The first scenario is that of “superior fighting inferior.” Advocated mainly by the “local war” school, this scenario is based on the premises that 1) in case diplomatic initiatives fail, the PLA may engage in local, limited military conflicts with China’s smaller or weaker neighbours over territorial disputes and economic resources; 2) by concentrating its best arms and forces in a limited conflict, the PLA can achieve conditional and temporary superiority over the adversary; and 3) there is no superpower intervention in such a limited conflict.

In such a scenario, the PLA is on the superior and offensive side, and therefore would emulate the US military operations in Afghanistan. This means that the PLA would

aim to strike first, to fight and win a quick battle, and to place emphasis on technology (a significant departure from the Maoist concept of people's war, where the PLA would engage in the defensive second strike, wage a protracted war of attrition, and stress manpower and revolutionary consciousness).<sup>32</sup>

In specific terms, such emulation means the PLA would strive to achieve 1) information dominance and 2) capability dominance. Information dominance would be gradually realized by accelerating the programmes to integrate the more sophisticated space-based, airborne, and ground and individual-oriented surveillance, positioning, and communications technologies into the PLA's overall development.<sup>33</sup>

To achieve capability dominance, the PLA is likely to speed up the programmes of 1) introducing new force structure and technologies that can reduce response time and staging need, and enhance the agility and mobility of the forces;<sup>34</sup> and 2) fusing the new technologies with its more numerous old weapon platforms, with particular emphasis on

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<sup>32</sup> See Nan Li, "The PLA's Evolving Campaign Doctrine and Strategies," in James Mulvenon *et al.* (eds.), *The People's Liberation Army in the Information Age* (Santa Monica: Rand, CF-14-CAPP/AF, 1999), pp. 146-174.

<sup>33</sup> China's defence industry, for instance, has been developing the high-resolution electro-optical satellites and the radar satellites that can penetrate cloud cover. Besides the current *Beidou* satellites, it is also developing a navigation satellite constellation similar to the US GPS, and has deployed the more dedicated military communications satellites. Moreover, the PLA has been enhancing its Elint (electronic intelligence) capabilities by developing the Elint satellites and deploying the indigenous EW (electronic warfare) planes. It has also been negotiating with Russia to acquire four AWACS (airborne warning and control system) planes, and has been improving its UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicle) by adding stealth feature and GPS to its medium-range Changhong series UAVs and by experimenting with the W-series UAVs. Furthermore, the PLA has been developing a range of longer range and anti-stealth radar, and has been investing in the automated C3I that can integrate the service-based information systems and weapons platforms, and be extended to the basic unit level. Finally, it has been developing at least two types of individual soldier systems that include laser range finder, GPS receiver, mobile satellite communications kit, and digital voice/video/data links. For satellites, Elint, AWACS, UAVs, and radar, see Richard Fisher, "China's Space Agenda," *China Brief*, 11 April, 2002 (available at <http://china.jamestown.org/pub-brief.htm>), and "PLAAF Equipment Trends," paper presented at the Conference on PLA and Chinese Society in Transition, National Defence University, October 30, 2001, Washington, DC (available at [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/China\\_Center/Rfisher.htm](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/China_Center/Rfisher.htm)). For C3I and individual soldier systems, see Yuan Fan, "Di sanjie zhongguo guoji guofang dianzhi zhanlanhui tebao" ("Special Report on the Third China International Defence Electronics Exhibition"), *Bingqi* (Weapons), June 2002, pp.13-16, and email correspondence with Richard Fisher, 16 April 2002.

<sup>34</sup> China's defence industry, for instance, has developed a variety of wheeled APCs (armoured personnel carrier), AFVs (armoured fighting vehicle), guns, and radars to compete for the new lighter, more mobile brigade-battalion formation. This formation is gradually replacing the old mechanized division-regiment formation armed with the more cumbersome and less manoeuvrable tracked vehicles. The PLA has also reportedly ordered 30-40 more Russian IL-76 large transports for air mobility. For wheeled vehicles, see *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 5 April 2002. For transports, see Fisher, "PLAAF Equipment Trends."

integrating better sensors and more advanced positioning and guidance systems that can “amplify” the situational awareness, precision and lethality of these old platforms.<sup>35</sup>

The second scenario is that of “inferior fighting superior.” This refers to a situation where a superpower intervenes in a PLA-related local war, causing the shift of the balance of forces and turning the PLA from the superior side to the inferior side. In such a scenario, the central challenge for the PLA is how to fight to reduce this superiority to the point the PLA can survive and then hopefully regain initiative. In this scenario, the PLA has learned the lesson of the Talibans: in order not to suffer total defeat, it has to adopt at an early stage 1) counter-information dominance strategies; 2) counter-capability dominance strategies; and 3) alternative battle space-based “unrestricted warfare.”

On counter-information dominance, the PLA is likely to adopt the RMA-related asymmetrical strategies, and introduce counter-sensor technologies that can disable the key nodes of the adversary’s information network. Such technologies range from anti-radiation, EMP (electronic-magnetic pulse), to ASAT (anti-satellite) weapon systems.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The PLA Air Force, for instance, has developed a laser/IR (infrared) pod that would enable its large fleet of J-8II, Q-5, and JH-7 ground attack aircraft to carry LGBs (laser guided bombs), and has been developing the GPS-guided bombs similar to the JDAM (joint direct attack munitions). The PLA’s Second Artillery (strategic missile force) has also been upgrading its DF-11 and DF-15 ballistic missiles and some of the larger MLRSs (multiple launcher rocket system) with GPS guidance. Furthermore, the PLA navy has been revamping its large fleet of Ming submarines with new sound absorption/proofing technologies and more powerful sonar. Finally, the PLA ground force has been upgrading its large inventory of Type 59 tanks with larger calibre guns and better fire control and communications systems. For bombs and missiles, see email correspondence with Fisher, 16 April 2002. For submarines, see “Zhongguo gaijin ‘ming’ ji qianting” (“China Modifies ‘Ming’ Class Submarine”), *Junshi xinwen* (Military News), 14 February 2001, *Bingqi zhishi* (Weapons Knowledge) website at [www.bqzs.org.cn](http://www.bqzs.org.cn), and *Kanwa News*, 20 April 2002, available at [www.kanwa.com](http://www.kanwa.com). For tanks, see Song Yanming, “Zuang 120 haomi tangke pao de 59 shi tangke” (“Type 59 Tank Armed with 120 mm Gun”), *Weapons Knowledge*, May 2002, downloaded from <http://military.china.com>.

<sup>36</sup> The PLA, for instance, has developed its FT-2000 surface-to-air anti-radiation missiles (ARM), and is developing the air-launch ARM system, both for the purpose of decapitating the enemy’s radar systems. China’s defence industry has also been experimenting with the EMP systems that can attack and burn the circuits of the adversary’s electronic devices. Moreover, China’s aerospace industry has reportedly been developing the small “parasitic” satellite that can be predeployed to the adversary’s satellites, and activated to interfere or destroy the enemy’s satellites in times of war. The recent successful test launch of the “*Shenzhou* (divine vessel) III” manned space capsule may very well be the prelude to a manned space station, which can serve as a launching platform for ASAT weapon systems. For ARM development, see Fisher, “PLAAF Equipment Trend.” For EMP, see Michael Pillsbury, “China’s Aspirations for Assassin’s Mace Weapons: a View from Open Sources,” unpublished paper presented at the Conference on PLA and Chinese Society in Transition, National Defence University, Washington, DC, 30 October 2001, p. 18. For ASAT systems, see Cheng Ho, “China Eyes Anti-Satellite System,” *Space Daily*, 8 January 2000, and China Profile at <http://www.fas.org/spp/guide/china/military/asat/index.html>. For *Shenzhou* III, see Fisher, “China’s Space Agenda.”

It would also attempt to restrict the adversary's ability to acquire timely and true information by deploying the technologies and techniques of concealment and deception, and setting up the "firewalls" to block channels of information leaks;<sup>37</sup> by developing new technologies to enhance electronic, laser, and IR interference and jamming;<sup>38</sup> and by computer hacking to launch "virus attacks" or to insert misinformation.<sup>39</sup>

On counter-capability dominance, the PLA is likely to focus on developing technologies, techniques, and tactics to fight aircraft carriers;<sup>40</sup> and on enhancing air defence, particularly in capabilities against stealth, long range, and precision air strikes, and cruise missile attacks.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> A research institute of China's aerospace industry, for instance, introduced a vehicle-based system that can simultaneously simulate 100 radar signals, to deceit the radar wave detection system of the enemy. See *Kanwa News*, 30 January 2001. For development of other decoys and obscurants, see Fisher, "PLAAF Equipment Trends." For firewalls, see Shao Cungong, Wang Yao, and Yang Lei, "Zhulao wangluo 'fanghuoqiang'" ("Build Solid 'firewall' for the Web"), *National Defence Daily*, 21 February 2002, p. 3, and Aarti Anhal, "China Erects 'Great Firewall' in Effort to Regulate Internet," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 May 2002. See also Yan Qingshen, Liu Wei, "Gongtong jujiao xinxi wangluo anquan" ("Focus together on the Security of the Information Network"), *Liberation Army Daily*, 15 May 2002, p. 11, and Han Chunjiu, "Gouzhu xinzhizhan jianshi dunpai" ("Construct Solid Shield for Information War"), *Liberation Army Daily*, 7 November 2001, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> See Fisher, "PLAAF Equipment Trends." Han, "Construct Solid Shield." *Kanwa News*, 10 May 2002, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> See the chapter entitled "Deception through the Computer Web," in Liu Weiguo *et al* (eds.), *Gaojishu tiaojianxia junshi qipian* (Military Deception under High-tech Conditions)(Beijing: National Defence University, 2001, circulation within the PLA only). Qi Jianqing (Professor of the PLA Electronic Engineering College) and Tan Heyi (Ph.D.), "Wangluo: quanshikong gongfangzhan" ("Web: Offensive and defensive Warfare of Total Time and Space"), *Liberation Army Daily*, 15 May 2002, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> The PLA Technology University, for instance, reportedly established a "work station" to analyse the technologies and methods to fight aircraft carriers. See *Kanwa News*, 20 January 2002. See also Pillsbury, "China's Aspirations," pp. 23-24, and Feng Changsong, Xu Jiafeng, and Wang Guosheng, "Hangmu de liuda 'kexing'" ("Six Major 'Methods to Subdue' Aircraft Carriers"), *National Defence Daily*, 5 March 2002, p. 4. The recent launch of China's first oceanic survey satellite (called *Haiyang* (Ocean) I, to be followed by ten more launches of similar but improved satellites in the next 15 years) should be the first step in establishing the space-based ocean surveillance capabilities that can identify, track, and position the hostile "large naval formation (the PLA verbiage for aircraft carrier battle group)." For launching, see "Woguo jiben jianli changqi wending yunxing weixing duidi guance tixi" ("Our Country Has Largely Established the Long Term, Stable Orbital Satellites-based Earth Observation System"), *Liberation Army Daily*, 16 May 2002, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> The PLA has been acquiring or co-producing a variety of Russian surface-to-air missiles, ranging from HQ-10/15 (Chinese licensed copy of Russian S-300 and S-300PMU1), HQ-16 (jointly developed version of Russian Buk-M1-2), HQ-17 (Chinese copy of Russian Tor-M1), and HQ-18 (Chinese copy of Russian S-300V). Enhanced by more powerful radar, some of these missiles are capable of strategic missile defence. The recent Shanghai TV's report about the testing of the "*Shengguang* (divine light) II," where eight separate laser beams were controlled and focused into one enhanced beam, indicates the potential of using laser devices both as an anti-missile system and as an ASAT weapon. For air and missile defence, see Fisher, "PLAAF Equipment Trends," and China Profile at <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/airdef/>. For laser

The counter-information dominance and counter-capability dominance strategies, however, may not work because the dominance of the adversary may be too overwhelming. Under such circumstances, the PLA would follow the Maoist dictum of “you fight your way and I fight mine.” This means the PLA would try to avoid the brunt of the adversary’s absolute superiority over the formal battlefield, and attempt to develop alternative battle space where the adversary may be more vulnerable. This may in turn allow the PLA to regain the initiative by exploiting such vulnerability. The new battle space-related operations may range from operations behind the enemy rear, cyber warfare, psychological warfare, media warfare, financial warfare, to energy and environmental warfare.<sup>42</sup>

The “alternative battle space” concept smacks of the Maoist notion of people’s war in two major ways. One is that such battle space may be dominated by the civilian actors (or the “people”), but not the military professionals. Second, this battle space may be less restricted by the rules of engagement and therefore more informal and non-conventional. This new, modified “people’s war under globalisation conditions,” however, is also different from the old people’s war in two significant ways. One is that rather than the mobilized peasants, the “people” now range from the computer programmers, the journalists, to the financial speculators. Second, unlike the old people’s war where the enemy would be lured deep into the familiar territory of the homeland or base areas, the new “people’s war” can be extended into the territory of the adversary.

As shown by the 11 September tragedy, globalisation may have inadvertently created the conditions that render such “unrestricted warfare” more likely. It now seems a major challenge facing governments is how to enjoy the benefit of globalisation, while at the same time design strategies to prevent such warfare from taking place.

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testing, see Gu Shunping, “shenguang erhao – quyu fandao de liqi” (“Shenguang II – the Effective Weapon for Area Missile Defence”), 6 April 2002, downloaded from <http://military.china.com>.

<sup>42</sup> Geng Jianzhong, “Xinxi zhanchang de mohu jiaoliang” (“Obscure Competition on the Information Battlefield”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 20 February 2001, p. 11. Sha Ziping, “Lun xinxi zhanchang de youlue zhuanhuan” (“On the Transformation between Superiority and Inferiority on the Information Battlefield”), *Liberation Army Daily*, 29 January 2002, p. 6.

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