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**Ministry for State Security of the GDR, Main  
Department I, 'Topical Report on the Status of  
Reorganization and Modernization of the Chinese  
Armed Forces'**

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**Summary:**

A detailed report on the status of China's armed forces, including the PRC's nuclear weapons strategy.

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Topical Report

On the Status of Reorganization and Modernization of the Chinese Armed Forces

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#### 1. Main Efforts on Reorganization and Modernization of the Chinese Armed Forces

Since 1984 the PR China is implementing a series of important reforms in the armed forces and the defense industry. Those are in particular pertaining to the

- overall status of the PLA [People's Liberation Army] in society;
- further development of military-strategic concepts;
- structural reform within the Army;
- cadre reform;
- reform of the training system;
- reform of political-ideological work;
- modernization of armaments and equipments;
- armament collaboration with imperialist states

Milestones in this process were the

- 2nd Session of the VI National People's Congress in May 1984;
- Extended Session of the Central Military Commission on 6 June 1985;
- National Party Conference between 18 and 26 September 1985.

The objective of all these reforms is "to build a strong, modern, regular, and revolutionary army with Chinese characteristics".

Especially during the course of the 4th and 5th Central Committee Session and the National Party Conference, the personnel composition of the CCP Central Committee, the Politburo and the Secretariat, as well as of the Central Advisory Commission and the Central Disciplinary Control Commission, was radically changed. In addition to other aspects, the reduction of the number of leading military officials in these bodies is evident. This way the so far dominant influence of the military on overall social developments has been severely limited. The Army is again subordinate to the Party and reduced to its task of defending the country.

In the framework of modernization of national defense military-doctrinal ideas have been further developed. The so far valid "People's War Theory" has transitioned to a doctrine of "People's War under Modern Conditions". The more advanced [military]

concept is still maintaining those aspects of the "People's War Theory", which are especially applied against a superior adversary you cannot beat in the border area and which has to be mainly fought by territorial troops and the People's Militia. However, this concept is containing the following new elements:

- build-up of a strong strategic nuclear weapons potential to deter "potential aggressors";
- deployment of highly mobile, modern structured and equipped operative units from all services and branches of the armed forces to defend strategically in areas close to the border;
- early concentration of units permanently ready for combat in main strategic directions based on a system of rotation;
- liquidation of hostile groupings as soon as possible with or without the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the own border area;
- transition to pursuing and completely liquidating the adversary on its territory with or without the use of nuclear weapons.

The following principles do apply here:

- The main objective is the liquidation of adversarial military units independent from location and time, while also accepting large losses of its own territory;
- preservation of its own combat power and ability to maneuver in any operation;
- making use of flexible defense and delay to tie down the adversary in order to concentrate own units for surprise strikes through superior own capacities of maneuvering while exploiting the territory;
- securing the superiority of its own forces in offensive operations (two- to six-fold);
- attack in only one strategic direction with at least two operative directions, while applying bypassing maneuvers and parallel pursuits and avoiding frontal attacks;
- securing the initiative in all combat operations through secrecy, surprise, concentration of force deployment, combat readiness day and night, counter-intelligence operations deep behind the line;
- guaranteeing a uniform command of all forces and means of the services and branches in a strategic direction;
- normal build-up of forces in to strategic squadrons, in the operative-tactical context in two to three squadrons;
- inclusion of modern fighting forms like electronic warfare, as well as the use of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.

Concrete steps and measures of structural reform, cadre reform, reform of the training system, new organization of political-ideological work, and the modernization of armaments and equipment are outlined in Appendixes 1-5.

## 2. On the Status of Development of the Nuclear Arms Potential (see Appendix 10)

Based on the political objective to build an own modern nuclear arms potential to obtain military means for pressure and as deterrence potential, the 2nd Artillery was established as an independent branch Strategic Missile Forces. The command of the 2nd Artillery is receiving its operative orders directly from the Central Military Commission. In terms of troops it is subordinate to the General Staff ands. Itself it is in command to give orders to all carriers of nuclear weapons, this is also vis-a-vis the missile units and air force units with nuclear weaponry.

Missile divisions ands brigades, as well as parts of securing and security units, are under the command of the 2nd Artillery. The missile units are concentrated in the Main Military Districts of Shenyang, Beijing, Lanzhou, and Chengdu. (see Appendix 8).

The following facts and tendencies can be derived:

- Through its steady launches of intelligence satellites, the PRC has obtained sufficient data for target planning, as well as its ongoing calibration, for the use of nuclear weapons.
- With the second launch of a geo-stationary new satellite in January 1986, conditions were created for the establishment and use (by 1987-88) of a mostly interference-free military communications system. Based on the experiences acquired from the Intelsat System, currently twenty ground stations are built.
- Most recent research results - also through exploiting U.S., French, and British knowledge - allowed for the development and successful testing of multiple warheads.
- The problem of producing sub-critical masses for nuclear loads of tactical battlefield weapons has been resolved.
- Launch preparation times have been shortened due to the production and introduction of solid rocket fuels; range and target efficiency were improved, conditions were created for greater mobility.
- Through improvements in electronic equipment of missiles, target precision got increased substantially (from 1,800 metes to about 450 meters).
- With the production and introduction of so far five to six nuclear-fueled submarine-launched ballistic missiles of the "Xia Class", a sea-based second-strike capacity has been created. One has to expect a further addition of three to four submarine-launched ballistic missiles until 1990.
- There are currently two directions of developments concerning the deployment of strategic missiles: transition to "hardened underground missile silos" and mobile deployment in planned areas of operations.
- In collaboration with France, the development of a tactical battlefield missile with solid-fuel engines has been finalized.
- They are working at the development of cruise missiles.
- The development of aircraft for long-range airborne forces is stagnating and will also

not enjoy priority in the future.

- The construction of an early ballistic missile warning system (a combination of satellite monitoring and "phased array radar") directed towards the Soviet Union and the Mongolian People's Republic has been finalized.

- A missile defense system to protect military, administrative, and economic centers is in the planning stage.

### 3. Assessment of Development Tendencies for the Ground Forces

Based on the fundamental deliberations to modernize the Armed Forces and to redefine their tasks, a series of administrative measures have been implemented. They are pursuing the "objectives to streamline the organizational structure, to reduce numbers of personnel with simultaneous increase in efficiency, to improve the command structure, to improve professional and physical capacities, to increase political reliability, and to improve the modernity of armament and equipment".

With about 2.9 million manpower, the ground forces are the most important and numerically strongest military branch. They are divided into

- the Central Forces (Field Army) and
- the Territorial Forces

The Central Forces are subordinated to the commanders of the Main Military Districts which simultaneously function as front staffs. Their deployment occurs in strategic directions under a uniform command.

The Army became newly introduced as an operative-tactical merger. The Army Corps will be dissolved. This process of restructuring is currently in the making and is supposed to be concluded by the end of 1987.

The scope of an Army is not uniform and gets determined according to tasks, geographical territory, and the political situation. According to insights won so far, the Armies have the following scope:

- 1 tank division or 1 independent tank brigade;
  - 1 to 2 mechanized infantry divisions;
  - 2 to 3 motorized infantry divisions (motorized only in main direction, otherwise basic infantry divisions);
  - 1 independent artillery brigade (with support by way of a mortar brigade in the main direction);
  - 1 air defense brigade;
  - 1 independent infantry brigade (suited for air transportation);
  - 1 compact helicopter wing (still in process as a wing);
  - 1 transport regiment;
  - 1 signal battalion;
  - 1 pioneer battalion;
  - 1 intelligence battalion;
  - 1 battalion for chemical warfare;
- as well as securing units of the services and branches.

Furthermore, they are establishing independent brigades as infantry, tank, artillery,

mortar, anti-tank, and pioneer brigades. They are directly subordinated to the Main Military District and can be subordinated operatively to the Armies.

The Army Staffs are established on the basis of the staffs of the [former] Army Corps. A couple of divisions were changed to brigades while omitting the regiment level.

Currently between 16 and 18 Army Staffs have been established. Until the end of 1987 the formation of additional 8 to 10 Army Staffs is to be expected. General redeployments of troops have not become known so far.

The groupings and units of the Territorial Forces are subordinated to the Military Districts. Their deployment is just for territorial defense, to secure and support the Central Forces, to build reserves, and to support the border units of the Armed Police in military areas of tension. They are closely cooperating with the forces of the People's Militia and guarantee the military training for the latter.

The Territorial Forces are sub-divided in divisions, garrison commandos, independent brigades, independent regiments, and fortified spaces. Garrison commandos were just created to secure important political, administrative, and economic centers. In some cases (Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Shenyang, special economic zones, Chengdu, Chongqing, et cetera) they are comprised of several divisions.

Divisions and brigades of the Territorial Forces are deployed in form of infantry divisions with modest support means to secure the borders with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the People's Democratic Republic of Laos, the USSR, and the Mongolian People's Republic.

Fortified spaces are covering strategically important areas and places (coastal regions, islands, traffic junctures, river crossings, industrial areas, et cetera). They are comprised of independent infantry regiments and brigades. They have only limited mobility and weaponry and can be reinforced by units from artillery troops.

Special attention is devoted to mobility, impact force, and fire power. Progress has been made in improving the level of equipment with tanks, armored personnel carriers, all-terrain trucks, artillery, and modern control assets. Since the technical level of existing tank technology does not correspond to what is required, currently full production capacity is not utilized in entirety. In order to phase out old battle technology and to numerically increase the standard of equipment, until the end of 1988 about 5,000 tanks of an improved Type T-69 (similar to T-62) with a 105 millimeter gun will be introduced. The addition of armored personnel carriers and self-propelled guns is currently moving along at a rather slow pace (annual capacity is about 250 to 300 units). The stock of grenade launchers, mortars, anti-tank guns (57 to 100 millimeter), recoilless guns, field artillery (122 millimeter howitzers, 130 millimeter cannons, and 152 millimeter cannon howitzers), tank-guided missiles (similar to TOW<sup>[1]</sup>), and anti-aircraft guns gets steadily increased. The annual production capacity is about 2,000 units.

#### 4. Assessment of Development Tendencies in the Air Force (cf. Appendix 11)

The Air Force of the PLA is divided into flying and air defense units, as well as airborne troops. The flying units are sub-divided into air force divisions and permanent air force regiments; they are subordinated to the command of the Air Force. They are guided operatively by the staffs of the Main Military Districts. The previous commando level Air Force Corps has been eliminated.

The air defense units are consisting of the air defense artillery brigades and

independent anti-aircraft rocket regiments, as well as of temporarily assigned fighter aircraft divisions. They are guided operatively by the staffs of the Main Military Districts. The territory of a Main Military District corresponds to the respective Air Force units.

Airborne troops are commanded centrally and, if necessary, they are fully or in part operatively subordinated to the Main Military District.

Fighting power and battle potential of the air forces are getting improved by the following elements:

- establishment of a uniform system of command for air defense (control systems for communication, target display, and aircraft);
- expansion of the air space monitoring system and its equipment with the most recent radar technology;
- development and introduction of new battle technology (F-8, F-9, F-10, F-12);
- modernization of existing battle technology through conversion to improved electronic control for monitoring, guidance of weapons, and communication;
- improvement of cannon and missile armaments (23 and 30 m millimeter cannons and air-to-air missiles - replicas of U.S. AIM-9B Sidewinder and French Matra Magic R-530);
- expansion of for transportation capacities through adding new Yun Type aircraft;
- improvement of training by increasing the number of flight hours to 300 to 400 per year.

##### 5. Assessment of Development Tendencies in the Naval Forces (see Appendix 12)

The naval forces are centrally guided by the command of the naval forces via the three naval staffs. So far there have been no changes made to the structure.

Noteworthy, as far as new tendencies of development are concerned, is the following:

- accelerated expansion of the fleet of nuclear-powered missile submarines of the modified Xia Type (a new launch about every 16 to 18 months);
- continuous new construction of destroyers of an advanced Luda Type (4 destroyers until 1988) and frigates of Type Jianghu and Jiangdong (8 frigates until 1988) and their equipment with modernized engine devices (General Electric and MTU<sup>[2]</sup>);
- new construction of air defense frigates (1st launch in December 1988);
- expansion of missile and artillery speed boat forces;
- introduction of new ship-to-ship-missiles (advanced CSS-N-2 with a range of 40 nautical miles; Missile "Seagull" - replica of Exocet model; air-to-ship version of the CSS-N-2);
- standardization and modernization of gun armaments and their weapon control

systems;

- introduction of new modern communication and monitoring electronics;
- construction of landing crafts based on air cushion technology.

With the modernization of the fleet, the intensified training, and the improved logistics for security on sea, the Chinese naval forces are aiming at an expansion of their radius of action. Thus they will also become a political factor of power projection in other waters. So far the Chinese naval forces have been the first and only service [of the PLA] that participated in joint drills with capitalist countries (United States, Great Britain, Australia) and they generously have granted fleet visits (with the exception of nuclear-equipped warships).

## 6. Conclusion and Tendencies

Since 1984 the PR China is implementing a series of important reforms in the armed forces and the defense industry. The process of modernization does continue with determination. A comprehensive conversion of the armed forces towards armament and equipment resembling about the level of the 1970s is taking place. The focus is lying here on production of these armaments and equipments in factories of the Chinese armament industry. In the context of searching for ways and means to modernize the armed forces, close cooperation is envisaged with military experts and arms companies from capitalist countries.

The reforms initiated are the foundation for a relativization of the role of the armed forces in domestic politics. They [reforms] are assigning the latter with solving specific military tasks. One has to assume that, with the overall modernization of the country's economy, and in particular of its armament industries, in combination with the comprehensive reforms in the armed forces, the military potential of the PR China will continue to grow in accelerated fashion. Therefore the importance of the armed forces as an effective instrument for pursuing foreign policy objectives is growing.

In the framework of modernization efforts priority is assigned to the further expansion and qualitative advancement of the nuclear missile potential - and the guarantee of its flexible and effective use by expanding a second-strike capability as well as the introduction of nuclear battlefield weapons. Another priority is the expansion of the aerial and naval forces.

Despite all efforts to adapt military-doctrinal concepts and operative-tactical deployment rules to the requirements of modern war, while adopting and copying West German and U.S. American models; despite efforts to create a qualitatively new officer corps, to implement structural reforms, and to newly equip the armed forces while overcoming strong internal contradictions - a comprehensive effectiveness of the reforms is not to be expected within the next 3 to 5 years.

Undeniably there will be an increase in fighting power and combat readiness of the Armed Forces. However, the objectives as outlined appear unrealistic.

List of Footnotes

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- 1: Structural Reforms in the PLA
- 2: Cadre Reform within the Armed Forces
- 3: Reform of Educational System and Restructuring of Political-Ideological Work



- 4: Reform Process within the Armament Industry
- 5: Modernization of Armaments and Equipment
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- 7: Grouping of the Armed Forces
- 8: Deployment of the Armed Forces of the PR China
- 9: Leadership of the PLA
- 10: Nuclear Weapons
- 11: Combat Resources of the Air Force
- 12: Combat Resources of the Naval Forces

## Appendix 1

### Structural Reforms in the PLA

The structural reforms contain the following measures:

- transfer of the railway units (about 200,000 men) from the PLA and their subordination to the Ministry of Transportation;
- transfer of the investment construction pioneer troops and their subordination to the Ministry for Urban and Rural Construction and Environmental Protection;
- creating the "armed police";
- transfer of the Departments for Arming the People and their subordination to the local organs;
- reduction of the number of Main Military Districts from 11 to 7;
- transition from Army Corps to Army structures with flexible numbers;
- introduction of a brigade structure for independent troops respectively for parts of support units;
- Re-introduction of the triple system in division structure;
- redistribution of tasks between Main Military Districts and Military Districts;
- establishment resp. increase of garrison commandos;
- establishment of "fortified spaces".

## Appendix 2

### Cadre Reform within the Armed Forces

The cadre reform within the PLA its aiming at a rejuvenation, as well as at an improvement of training qualifications for commanding and political cadres - with the simultaneous elimination of bodies of thought from the Cultural Revolution. Through implementation of the Military Draft Law from May 1984, the Recruitment Instruction from 24 October 1985, as well as of the Instructions for the Demobilization of Army Personnel, the following has been accomplished so far:

- new personnel for the General Staff, the Political Main Department, the Main Department Military Supply-Chain Management and other central commandos and administrations, as well as of the staffs of the Main Military Districts, the Armies, and the Military Districts;
- reduction of personnel of central staffs by 23.8 percent, lowering of the average age by about 10 years, raising the level of education (90 percent of all commanders are

graduates of the Academy);

- retirement of military cadres who were on high and mid-level commands levels during the Cultural Revolution (so far about 47,000 officers in central staffs and about 60,000 officers from the Military District and Army Corps level; one has to expect an annual retirement rate of about 80,000 officers and noncommissioned officers within the next 2 to 3 years);

- turning military recruitment commissions at the county administrative level into civilian bodies (therefore about 90,000 officers are subordinated to the Ministry of Interior);

- a cut in personnel of about 3 percent in the naval and aerial forces (about 25,000 men)

Overall in 1985 about 800,000 members of the Army have been released from the PLA, of which about 670,000 have been reassigned to civilian functions. For 1986 one has to expect the dismissal of about 830,000 men.

### Appendix 3

#### Reform of Educational System and Restructuring of Political-Ideological Work

A restructuring of the educational systems is coming with the foundation of the Defense University:

- reorganization of all military educational institutions according to uniform guidelines and the elimination of factionalism within the various military services and branches;

- increase in takeover of graduates from civilian colleges and universities as officers for the Army in order to improve the educational level of the military specialists;

- preferred drafting of new recruits among graduates of secondary schools;

- current offer of evening courses in the Army with the objective to reach the educational level of secondary school graduates (about 2 million members of the Army participated in such courses between September 1985 and 1987).

The reform of the educational system is connected to a new structure for political-ideological work. It is to serve the unconditional subordination to the Party and the elimination of bodies of thought from the Cultural Revolution. The previous dominance of political education became relativized in favor of military training. The commanders are directly responsible for both types of training [resp. education].

### Appendix 4

#### Reform Process within the Armament Industry

The armaments industry has been tasked to contribute more to the modernization of industry through cooperation with civilian businesses - in addition to its general mission to provide for national defense.

The extent of profitability is supposed to increase through exports of armaments and

equipment.

Currently the following tendencies of developments are showing:

- armament factories that are producing modern armament and equipment also suitable for export, and which are capable to produce consumer goods for the population, are receiving preferential treatment regarding investments and opportunities to acquire foreign technologies; they are provided comprehensive security and have to increase production.
- such armament factories, which are basically not working at capacity, have to change their production profile and to begin producing civilian goods.
- scientific research and development institutes of the PLA and the armament industry have to provide their results to the civilian sector for analog uses.

## Appendix 5

### Modernization of Armaments and Equipment

Currently the following priorities are set concerning the modernization of armament and equipment:

- further development of battlefield loads of nuclear weapons;
- Further development of strategic and operative-tactical missiles with the objective to improve range and target precision, as well as shortening pre-launch preparation times;
- modernization of the aircraft fleet through improving electronic equipment and avionics, as well as expanding engine and helicopter development;
- modernization of submarines and surface vessels of the fleet through building new nuclear-powered missile-submarines, destroyers, escort vessels, as well as mine-hunter and mine-sweeper ships; while applying improved reconnaissance, target-seeking and fire-control system electronics as well as standardizing armaments of missiles and artillery;
- introduction of modern battlefield electronics, communications, and missile technology to the ground forces, as well as improvement in tactical and technical parameters of existing main-battle technology.

In order to implement these plans, a wide-ranging corresponding collaboration is practiced with companies from the United States, Great Britain, France, the FRG, Italy, Switzerland, Sweden, and other imperialist countries. An expansion of such cooperation is to be expected, whereby especially Australia, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile will be included.

Focus areas of such cooperation are:

- purchase of arms and equipment patterns, as well as small series;
- acquisition of technological know-how and licenses;
- acquisition of semi-finished products and specific raw materials;

- joint development offices with Western armament companies;
- acquisition of factories and equipment lines;
- Joint Ventures regarding production and marketing in third countries.

## Appendix 6

Organization of the Command of the Armed Forces  
[charts, not translated]

## Appendix 7

Grouping of the Armed Forces

[Charts/Lists: Geographical Direction - Geographical Front - Names Main Military District - Names Military District - Number Divisions of Army, Territorial Forces, Air Force - Forces and Means: Numbers Personnel, Tanks, Artillery 100+ Millimeter, Aircraft]

## Appendix 8

Deployment of the Armed Forces of the PR China

[not translated]

## Appendix 9

Leadership of the PLA

[Lists: Names Main Military Districts - Names Commanders - Names Deputy Commanders - Names Political Commissars]

## Appendix 10

Nuclear Weapons

□□□

□□□□

Missiles (2nd Artillery)

Number

Max. Range

Notes □□□

□□□□

Medium-Range Missile

CSS-1

50-100

1,800 KM[3]

transportable □□□

□□□□

Long-Range Missile

CSS-2  
50-60  
3,200 KM  
transportable, in part sheltered □□□  
□□□□  
Inter-continental Missile

□□□  
□□□□  
- Limited Range

CSS-3  
50-80  
7,000 KM  
stationary □□□  
□□□□

- Full Range

CSS-4  
72-86  
12,000 KM  
stationary □□□  
□□□□

Long-range Missile

CSS-N-3  
72-86  
2,700 KM  
submarine launch □□□  
□□□□

□□□  
□□□□  
Aircraft (temporarily assigned)

□□□  
□□□□  
Bomber Hong-6  
B-6  
120  
2,300 KM<sup>[4]</sup>  
strategic bomber; bomber up to 3 megatons  
(modern TU-16) □□□  
□□□□  
Fighting Bomber Qiang-5

A-5

500

600 KM<sup>[5]</sup>

operative-tactical depth, bombs 5 to 20 kilotons □□□

□□□□

□□□

□□□□

Submarines

□□□

□□□□

Xia Class (12 launch shafts)

2

nuclear-powered □□□

□□□□

Official Xia Class (16 launch shafts)

3-4

nuclear-powered □□ □□

Appendix 11

Combat Resources of the Air Force

[Lists of Numbers, Types, NATO Codes, Soviet Types of Aircraft; e.g. a Chinese Jian - 5 is F - 5 in NATO and MiG - 17 in the Soviet Union]

Appendix 12

Combat Resources of the Naval Forces

[Lists of Numbers of Aircraft, Vessels, Submarines, and other Ships and Boats, including Equipment with Missiles where applicable]

[\[1\]](#) Tube-Launched Optically-Tracked Wire-Guided Missile.

[\[2\]](#) Motoren Turbinen Union, a West German company.

[\[3\]](#) Kilometers. 1 kilometer = 0.62 miles.

[\[4\]](#) Radius.

[\[5\]](#) Dto.