

# WebMemo



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## Is There Still a Need for War Time Mobilization? China Thinks So

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One of the little-noticed actions in the recently concluded session of the Chinese National People's Congress was the enactment of a National Defense Mobilization Law. In an age when conventional conflicts are planned to conclude in a matter of days or weeks, it is striking that the People's Republic of China (PRC) should choose to ensure its readiness for a protracted war. Indeed, it suggests that the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is thinking about future wars in a very different way from their Western counterparts, where full-scale mobilization is rarely discussed at all. Whereas the U.S. and its allies have mostly neglected the prospect of a prolonged high-intensity conflict, the PLA appears intent on preparing for both short- and long-term wars.

The actions of the National People's Congress have distinct implications for U.S. defense planners, as they portend an opponent who may choose to fight a protracted conflict—but with anti-ship missiles rather than IEDs. And it should also raise questions among foreign investors—how might their facilities and assets be treated in the event of a crisis?

**The Continuing Need for Mobilization.** Chinese writings about “Local Wars Under Informationalized Conditions” focus on fighting limited wars on a come-as-you-are basis, often with little preparation or warning time. Yet Chinese mobilization planning suggests that the PRC thinking is broader. In particular, many aspects of mobilization that receive special emphasis, such as the mobilization of scientific and technical resources, are characterized in terms that suggest preparations for a prolonged war.

How does one reconcile these inconsistencies? One possibility, as PLA analysts observe, is that “Local Wars Under Informationalized Conditions” are likely to entail high rates of weapon expenditure, significant destruction of available forces and assets on both sides, and potentially little warning time. In this eventuality, the PLA—and indeed any modern military—would not only have to rely on the available stocks of weapons and troops but might also have to call upon the larger resources of the national economy. In essence, mobilization remains an important, relevant concept in the Chinese view of modern warfare.

At the same time, the PRC views itself as still-developing economy; consequently, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cannot simply focus on military requirements. Indeed, Chinese analysts have taken note of the downfall of the Soviet Union, and have no intention of repeating Moscow's mistakes, such as an over-commitment of resources to defense. This year's reduced PLA budget increase, marking the first time in over a decade that the PLA's budget has grown by less than 10 percent, suggests that the CCP is restricting the amount of resources devoted to defense.

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**Development of China's Mobilization Infrastructure.** An essential part of the Chinese approach to resolving this dilemma is to subordinate military development, or "army building" (*jundui jianshe*) to the broader goals of national economic construction (*guojia jingji jianshe*). The policy of civil–military integration has been pursued by Chinese leaders Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and Hu Jintao. Hu, the current leader, has specifically endorsed the policy of "combine the civil and the military, combine peacetime and wartime production, embed the military in the civilian."

Furthermore, in the context of the evolving Chinese economy, the government is no longer able to rely primarily on "administrative measures"—that is, requisitioning—to meet wartime demands, much less peacetime requirements (e.g., for exercises and training). As Chinese analysts recognize, such measures can generate only a limited return; it is much better to rely on legal measures. Moreover, legal approaches provide predictability and consistency, which are essential for sustaining peacetime economic development. This is further reinforced by the desire for foreign investment—an essential source of capital and expertise that would evaporate if investors thought their assets might simply be seized.

With the creation of a National Defense Mobilization Law, there is now a baseline for national, provincial, and local laws and regulations providing nationwide consistency regarding mobilization obligations, recognized limits on authority, and a common understanding of what individuals, companies, and provinces are liable for in the event of mobilization. This, in turn, will facilitate PLA planning for wartime support so that, whether it is the Nanjing Military Region (MR) or the Jinan or Chengdu MR, comparable items will be available within a specified timeframe.

Of particular import, in this regard, is the greater access to essential civilian assets, including transportation systems, as well as scientific and technical facilities and equipment. The former, which includes requisitioning civilian shipping and aircraft and associated crews and incorporating military requirements into infrastructure projects (e.g., roads, railroads, and port facilities), clearly

has implications for a Taiwan contingency. It is the latter element, however, that arguably merits greater attention.

PLA writings about the mobilization of scientific and technical personnel, assets, and facilities envision a very close linkage between the military and civilian infrastructures. Technical personnel, for example, might be called upon to provide direct support for such activities as maintenance and repair of sensors or communications equipment. In this regard, it would resemble American use of civilian contractors.

In addition, though, it involves exploiting facilities and assets from a variety of sources to provide research and development support for military operations. This would include not only national laboratories and research centers but also universities and corporate facilities. Similarly, it might entail not only access to physical equipment but scientific intelligence in order to help develop counters to foreign weapons and tactics or to innovate new systems and responses for the PLA.

**Implications for the United States.** The passage of the National Defense Mobilization Law should serve as a clarion call for American defense planners and potential investors in China.

- For defense planners, it suggests that there is a need to reexamine assessments of what kinds of capabilities the PLA might have to sustain a conflict. The ability to effectively draw upon the resources of the entire Chinese economy suggests a very different ability to wage a protracted conflict than one that is centered on extant stocks of materiel. This has implications not only for military planning but also for reconsidering whether the Chinese subscribe to the same views of future warfare, including duration and requirements, as their American counterparts.
- For corporate investors in China, there is the need to consider how safe one's investments are in the PRC. In peacetime, there is little reason to think that corporate assets and facilities might be vulnerable. Indeed, the new law arguably improves this situation by setting out the conditions for the employment of "special measures" in support of mobilization. In the event of a cri-

sis, however, there is at least some potential that non-Chinese companies may find their assets and facilities subject to exploitation by the government and the PLA.

Finally, more broadly, the creation of this new law raises again the question of Chinese governance. It is a further step through rule *by* law, but not rule *of* law. While much more predictable than

the personality-driven leadership methods of the first generation of Chinese leaders (e.g., Mao Zedong), it is nonetheless still a far cry from the accountability expected from one the world's largest economies and polities.

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