



A monthly newsletter focused on the internal and external affairs of the PLA

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Welcome to the October 2023 edition of *PLA UPDATE*, CNA’s newsletter on the internal and external affairs of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA). We begin this issue by reviewing an article in the PLA’s official newspaper, *PLA Daily*, that discusses core competencies for the PLA’s joint force commanders. We then turn to two PLA Navy (PLAN) activities with foreign militaries: a bilateral exercise with the Saudi Arabian Navy and a multilateral training mission that took PLAN and five other countries’ midshipmen to three countries in Southeast Asia and Oceania. Next, we look at new regulations on the benefits the PLA provides to its civilian hires. We conclude with summaries of two recent PLA conferences addressing how cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), may be developed for military and defense applications.

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## DOCTRINAL ISSUES

### NDU OFFICIAL DISCUSSES CORE SKILLS FOR JOINT FORCE COMMANDERS

**The political commissar at the PLA National Defense University's Joint Operations College identified four areas for improvement in joint education and training.** On September 26, the *PLA Daily* published an [opinion piece](#) by Major General Zhang Changsheng titled "Forge Command Talent Capable of Prevailing in Future Joint Operations."<sup>1</sup> In the article, Zhang argued that the PLA should have a greater sense of urgency as it cultivates officers capable of joint command. He identified the following four categories of core competencies that the PLA should develop and strengthen in joint command officers' education and training:

- **Strategic thinking.** Zhang called on officers in joint command billets to improve their understanding of strategic concepts associated with all-domain competition in future warfare, to include better familiarity with the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP's) guidance to "consolidate and enhance the integration of national strategic systems and capabilities." (For more on this concept, see *PLA UPDATE* Issue 9.)
- **Knowledge and skills for joint command.** Zhang encouraged officers to research potential adversaries' "thinking, systems, and command" to better recognize their strengths and weaknesses. He recommended deepened studies of joint operational systems, command relations, and authorities, as well as training focused on mastering the contents and processes of joint command.
- **Technological proficiency.** Zhang wrote that the technology-dependent nature of future warfare demands that joint commanders be able to understand, innovate, and employ both new and legacy equipment and forces. He called for improving related competencies by conducting more difficult, intense, and effective training supported by information and intelligent technologies.
- **Responsiveness.** Asserting that opportunities on future battlefields will come and go in an instant, Zhang recommended that more be done in training to make commanders respond in quick and innovative ways. He recommended strengthening "free-style confrontation" (自由式对抗), or unscripted drills that push officers to their limits and force them to adopt creative approaches.

## PLA NAVY

### PLAN & SAUDI ARABIAN NAVY CONDUCT COUNTERTERRORISM TRAINING

**Naval special operations personnel from the two countries convened for their second iteration of bilateral training.** On October 9, the navies of the PRC and Saudi Arabia kicked off the three-week bilateral training activity Blue Sword 2023 in Zhanjiang, a port city in south China's Guangdong Province. More than 100 training participants were present at the opening ceremony. This was the second iteration of the two navies' special operations training; the first took place in 2019 at the King Faisal Naval Base in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.<sup>2</sup>



Opening ceremony of Blue Sword 2023.

Source: [China Military Online](#).

According to a China Military Online report, Blue Sword 2023 would focus on overseas maritime counterterrorism operations and cover topics including shooting multiple types of guns, fast roping from a helicopter, and underwater explosive ordnance search and disposal. The training would conclude with an exercise featuring a scenario in which the special operations troops of the two navies would execute a combined rescue operation aboard hijacked merchant ships.<sup>3</sup>



PLAN and Saudi Arabian Navy personnel practice hostage rescue and sniper skills during the basic training phase of Blue Sword 2023. The basic training phase would be followed by specialized training and a comprehensive exercise. Source: [CCTV-7](#).

## PLAN MIDSHIPMEN COMPLETE TRAINING MISSION IN SE ASIA, OCEANIA

**Midshipmen from three PLAN academic institutions trained alongside counterparts from five countries during a three-country training tour.** On October 7, the PLAN training ship *CNS Qi Jiguang* (AXT-83) completed a training mission that took more than 300 PLAN midshipmen and 10 midshipmen from five other countries to three countries in Southeast Asia and Oceania. The ship, which departed the



east China port city of Qingdao on September 4, made stops in Surabaya, Indonesia; Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (PNG); and Suva, Fiji. The PLAN midshipmen aboard *Qi Jiguang* came from the PLA Naval University of Engineering, Naval Submarine Academy, and Naval Aviation University, and the foreign midshipmen were from Indonesia, PNG, Fiji, Thailand, and Pakistan. During the port visits, *Qi Jiguang* conducted combined drills with the Indonesian, PNG, and Fijian navies that covered topics such as formation maneuvers and communications.<sup>4</sup> (For a summary of the ship's four-nation tour earlier in 2023, see *PLA Update* Issue 12.)

Source: [CCTV-7](#).

## LAWS AND REGULATIONS

### PLA ISSUES PROVISIONAL REGULATIONS ON CIVILIAN HIRES' BENEFITS

**The PLA continues to refine policies aimed at improving recruitment and retention of civilians serving in China's armed forces.** On October 15, new provisional regulations went into effect governing the benefits provided to civilian personnel hired by the PLA. Although the text of the provisional regulations

was not made public, a *PLA Daily* [report](#) stated that they addressed areas including civilian hires' salaries, housing, and healthcare. The report described the regulations as an important development in the PLA's efforts to improve benefits and support as it continues to reshape the system of civilian service in China's armed forces.<sup>5</sup>

The issuance of the provisional regulations follows a series of policy changes made to the management of the PLA's civilian employees since 2005 that appear aimed at rectifying retention issues and improving the attractiveness of a career as a PLA civilian. For more information on the most recent iteration of the "Chinese People's Liberation Army Civilian Personnel Regulations," see *PLA UPDATE* Issue 7.

## MAJOR CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### PRC TECHNOLOGY EXPERTS ATTEND PLA AEROSPACE MEDICINE FORUM

**The two-day forum focused on cutting-edge technologies that could improve medical treatment and rescue services for PLA servicemembers.** The 2023 Aerospace Medicine Forum was held in Beijing from September 26 to 27. Organized by the PLA Air Force Medical Center, the forum brought together military and civilian experts from across China to discuss the integration of theories and technologies concerning digitization, AI, and cognition into aerospace medicine. Forum attendees discussed topics such as the design of future airborne equipment, applications of AI in medical treatment, and battlefield rescue.<sup>6</sup> For example, Senior Captain Wang Shifeng, director of the PLAN Medical Center's Research Department, gave a presentation at the forum titled "Development Status and Prospects for Airborne Submarine Rescue." Speaking on the sidelines of the forum, Pan Chong, president of Beihang University's School of Aeronautic Science and Engineering, said the university was exploring ways to use human-computer interaction, virtual reality, and intelligent assistance to simplify mission payloads and improve aviators' abilities to apply technologies in tactical actions.<sup>7</sup>



Senior Captain Wang Shifeng presents at the forum.

Source: [CCTV-7](#).

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### NUDT HOSTS FORUM ON TECHNOLOGIES FOR FUTURE WARFARE

**The PLA's top institution for scientific research hosted thousands of domestic experts to discuss research and applications of AI in future "intelligentized warfare."** From September 25 to 28, the inaugural National Defense Technology Highland Forum (国防科技高地论坛) was held in Changsha, the capital of central China's Hunan province.<sup>8</sup> The forum was hosted by the PLA National University of Defense Technology (NUDT)—the PLA's premier institution for scientific research and education—in collaboration with the Hunan provincial CCP and government authorities, the PLA Academy of Military Sciences, and China Electronics Corporation. More than 5,000 domestic military and civilian experts attended the event.<sup>9</sup>

The forum was divided into one "main forum" and 17 "sub-forums." The names of the reports delivered at the main forum are as follows:

- Looking at Intelligence from a Computational Perspective
- AI Supports Leap-Forward Development in Space Transportation

- Thoughts on the Application of Future Network Technologies in National Defense Affairs in the Intelligent Era
- The Development and Application of Mathematics in the Intelligent Era
- Opportunities and Challenges of Institutions of Higher Education Promoting “Three-in-One” Education-Technology-Talent Development

The names of the event’s 17 sub-forums are as follows:

- “Technology+Military Affairs” in Future Warfare
- Top University Presidents
- Intelligent Optics
- Intelligent Numerical Prediction
- AI for Science
- Intelligent Sensing and Confrontation
- Intelligent Uncrewed Vanguard
- Intelligent Aerospace Technologies
- Intelligent Changes in Information and Communications
- Military-specific Translation Capacity Building in the Age of Intelligence
- Electromagnetic Defense in Intelligent Communications
- Applied Mathematics in National Defense Affairs
- Building and Making Use of the Digital Intelligence Space
- Transformation of Scientific and Technological Achievements in National Defense
- Self-Reliance in the Information Industry
- Intelligence Competition
- Collaborative Innovation in National Defense Science and Technology.<sup>10</sup>



Photo from the sub-forum “Military-specific Translation Capacity Building in the Age of Intelligence.”

Source: [NUDT](http://www.nudt.edu.cn/).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Zhang Changsheng (张长生), “Forge Command Talent Capable of Prevailing in Future Joint Operations” (锻造制胜未来的联合作战指挥人才), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Sept. 26, 2023, [http://www.81.cn/szb\\_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfb&paperDate=2023-09-26&paperNumber=07&articleid=916152](http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=jfb&paperDate=2023-09-26&paperNumber=07&articleid=916152).

Although not specified in the *PLA Daily* report, Zhang Changsheng’s military rank and title were identified in recent reporting by the official mouthpiece of the Vietnamese armed forces. See “Lieutenant General Phung Si Tan Meets Delegation of Officials and Students from China’s National Defense University” (冯士晋上将会见中国国防大学干部、学员代表团), *People’s Army Newspaper* (人民军队), June 27, 2023, <https://cn.qdnd.vn/cid-6153/7190/-604109>.

<sup>2</sup> “China-Saudi Arabia Joint Naval Training “Blue Sword 2019” Kicks Off,” China Military Online, Nov. 20, 2021, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/9679466.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/9679466.html).

<sup>3</sup> Chen Xiaojie and Chen Xiaoren, “China-Saudi Arabia ‘Blue Sword-2023’ Naval Special Operations Joint Training Kicks Off,” China Military Online, Oct. 10, 2023, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/16257594.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16257594.html).

<sup>4</sup> Nie Hongjie and Wang Fei, “Chinese Naval Training Ship Qi Jiguang Visits Papua New Guinea,” China Military Online, Sept. 27, 2023, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/16254965.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16254965.html); Nie Hongjie and Wang Fei, “Chinese Naval Ship Qi Jiguang Arrives in Fiji for Goodwill Visit,” China Military Online, Oct. 7, 2023, [http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA\\_209163/TopStories\\_209189/16256732.html](http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16256732.html).

<sup>5</sup> “Central Military Commission Releases ‘Provisional Regulations on Pay and Benefits for the Military’s Civilian Personnel’” (中央军委印发《军队文职人员待遇保障暂行规定》), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Oct. 8, 2023, [http://www.81.cn/szb\\_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=ifjb&paperDate=2023-10-08&paperNumber=01&articleid=916544](http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=ifjb&paperDate=2023-10-08&paperNumber=01&articleid=916544).

<sup>6</sup> Li Jianwen (李建文) and Zhao Jianqiang (赵建强), “2023 Aerospace Medicine Forum Held in Beijing” (2023 航空航天医学高峰论坛在京举办), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Sept. 28, 2023, [http://www.81.cn/szb\\_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=ifjb&paperDate=2023-09-28&paperNumber=03&articleid=916316](http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=ifjb&paperDate=2023-09-28&paperNumber=03&articleid=916316).

<sup>7</sup> “2023 Aerospace Medicine Forum Held in Beijing” (“航空航天医学高峰论坛-2023”在京举办), *Military Report* (军事报道), CCTV-7, Sept. 27, 2023, <https://tv.cctv.com/2023/09/27/VIDEabX5HIR2zeWZxzKzpiAp230927.shtml?spm=C52346.PiumOrlYLNUM.E0VXtwLj8YU7.8>.

<sup>8</sup> Kong Xiangku (孔祥库) and Wang Weili (王微粒), “Inaugural National Defense Technology Highland Forum Held in Beijing” (首届国防科技高地论坛在长沙举行), *PLA Daily* (解放军报), Sept. 29, 2023, [http://www.81.cn/szb\\_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=ifjb&paperDate=2023-09-29&paperNumber=03&articleid=916345](http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbxq/index.html?paperName=ifjb&paperDate=2023-09-29&paperNumber=03&articleid=916345).

<sup>9</sup> Zhang Shaobo (张少波), Wang Weili (王微粒), and Sun Xiangku (孙祥库), “Seize New Heights in Intelligentized Warfare” (抢占智能化战争新高地), *China Youth Daily* (中国青年报), Sept. 28, 2023, [http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2023-09/28/nw.D110000zgqnb\\_20230928\\_2-08.htm](http://zqb.cyol.com/html/2023-09/28/nw.D110000zgqnb_20230928_2-08.htm).

<sup>10</sup> “Inaugural National Defense Technology Highland Forum Officially Begins!” (首届国防科技高地论坛正式开启!) National University of Defense Technology (国防科技大学), Sept. 25, 2023, <https://www.nudt.edu.cn/xwgg/tzgg/8da0c022846e45c8ae65329fe2850821.htm>.

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