CHINESE VIEWS ON THE IMPLICATIONS OF 11 SEPTEMBER FOR WARFIGHTING

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Introduction

While there have been various interpretations of the 11 September terrorist attacks on America and the ensuing war in Afghanistan for future warfighting, there is no systematic analysis of the Chinese views concerning the issue. This paper examines the Chinese views by addressing the following questions: What are the major lessons that the PLA (People's Liberation Army) has learned from 11 September for warfighting? What are the institutional origins of these views? What are the implications of these lessons for PLA warfighting?

Major Lessons

The PLA has learned four major lessons from 11 September and the war in Afghanistan:

- "Information and capability dominance" for the superior (U.S.) side.
- Enhanced role of special operations.
- Fusing old and new technologies.
- "Unrestricted warfare" for the inferior (terrorist and Taliban) side.

Most Chinese military analysts are impressed by the performance of the superior side in the war in Afghanistan. First, it was pointed out that the U.S. military has been able to achieve almost complete information dominance, or unilateral battlefield transparency. This has happened largely because it can deploy a constellation of information-collecting 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 Taliban opponent. Such information technology superiority in turn has enabled the U.S. side to timely and precisely detect not just the infrastructure-related strategic targets, but also the more mobile and much smaller tactical targets, and to optimise the utility of the intelligence through a high level of systems integration. Moreover, the U.S. side has allegedly achieved almost total capability dominance. This means that the U.S. side has been able to strike from a longer distance (beyond the reach of the adversary), more precisely, and in a more sustained manner due to its comparative advantage in related technologies.

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

Third, some analysts are quite impressed by the ways the U.S. side combines the old and new technologies (dumb bombs enhanced by the attached GPS-based gliders,

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continued relevance of B-52s and aircraft carriers, etc.) to achieve objectives at lower cost. 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 Talibans: familiarity with the difficult terrain and the climate, and years of experience in fighting guerrilla wars.

For the inferior side, some analysts argued 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 new 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 (greater 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.

Implications for PLA Warfighting

In the current Chinese debate on warfighting doctrines, there are three major schools of thought:

- "Local war under high tech conditions" school.
- RMA (revolution in military affairs) school.
- People's war school.

As far as the origins of the three schools are concerned, they fall roughly into three institutional categories. 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-oriented sectors of the PLA, such as the Academy of Military Science, the National Defense University, 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.

The lessons learned from 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 when one looks at the two main scenarios that underlie the current PLA thinking on warfighting.

"Superior Fighting Inferior"

The first scenario is that of "superior fighting inferior." Advocated mainly by the "local war" school, this scenario is based on the premises that:

- In the event that 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.
- By concentrating its best arms and forces in a limited conflict, the PLA can achieve conditional and temporary superiority over the adversary.
- 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 U.S. 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). In specific terms, such emulation means the PLA would strive to achieve:

- Information dominance.
- Capability dominance.

Information dominance would be achieved gradually by integrating the more sophisticated space-based, airborne, and ground and individual-oriented surveillance, positioning, and communications technologies into the PLA's overall development. China's defence industry, for instance, has been developing the high-resolution electro-optical satellites and the radar satellites that can penetrate cloud cover. It is also developing a navigation satellite constellation similar to the U.S. GPS, and has deployed the more dedicated military communications satellites. Moreover, the PLA has been enhancing its Elint (electronic intelligence) capabilities by developing Elint satellites, deploying the indigenous EW (electronic warfare) planes, and developing the tactical reconnaissance systems for its ground forces. It has also been negotiating with Russia to acquire four to six AWACS (airborne warning and control system) planes. Moreover, the PLA has been improving its UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicle) by adding stealth features and GPS to its medium-range Changhong UAVs and by experimenting with the W-series UAVs. Finally, the PLA 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. It has also been investing in automated C3I (command, control, communications, intelligence) to integrate the service-based information systems and weapons platforms, and to be extended to the basic unit level.

To achieve capability dominance, the PLA would attempt to:

- Introduce new force structures and technologies that can reduce response time and staging need, and enhance the agility and mobility of the forces.
- Fuse the new technologies with its more numerous old weapon platforms, with particular emphasis on integrating better sensors and more advanced positioning and guidance systems that can "amplify" the situational awareness, precision and lethality of these platforms.

China's defence industry, for instance, has developed a range 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 heavier and less manoeuvrable tracked vehicles. The PLA has also reportedly ordered 30-40 more Russian IL-76 large transports for air mobility.

Moreover, the PLA Air Force has been developing the GPS-guided bombs similar to the JDAM (joint direct attack munitions), and 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). The PLA navy has also been revamping its large fleet of Ming submarines with new sound absorption/proofing technologies and more powerful sonar. Moreover, the PLA's Second Artillery (strategic missile force) has been upgrading its DF-11 and DF-15 ballistic missiles and some of the larger MLRSs (multiple launcher rocket system) with GPS guidance. Finally, the PLA ground forces have been upgrading its large inventory of T-59 tanks with larger calibre guns and better fire control systems.

"Inferior Fighting Superior"

The second scenario underlying the PLA thinking on warfighting is "inferior fighting superior." This refers to a situation where a superpower intervenes in a PLA-related local war, causing a shift in the balance of forces and turning the PLA from the superior side to the inferior side. In such a scenario, the central challenge to the PLA is how it could fight to reduce this superiority to the point it can survive and then hopefully regain the 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:

- Counter-information dominance strategies.
- Counter-capability dominance strategies.
- 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. The PLA, for instance, has developed its FT-2000 surface-to-air anti-radiation missiles (ARM) and is developing the air-launched ARM system, both for the purpose of decapitating the enemy's radar systems. China's defence industry has also been experimenting with the EMP (electronic-magnetic pulse) systems that can attack and burn the circuits of the adversary's electronic devices. Moreover, China's aerospace industry has reportedly been developing a small "parasitic" satellite that can be pre-deployed, and activated to interfere or destroy the enemy's satellites in times of war. The recent successful test launch of the "Shenzhou III" manned space capsule may very well be the prelude to a manned space station, which can serve as a launching platform for anti-satellite weapon systems.

To counter information dominance, the PLA 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 "firewalls" to block channels of information leaks; by developing new technologies to enhance electronic interference; and by computer hacking to deploy "logical bombs," launch "virus attacks," or insert misinformation. A research institute of China's aerospace industry, for instance, has recently introduced a vehicle-based system that can simultaneously simulate 100 radar signals, to deceive the radar wave detection system of the enemy.

On counter-capability dominance, the PLA is likely to focus on developing technologies, techniques, and tactics to fight aircraft carriers; and on enhancing air defence, particularly in capabilities against stealth, long range, and precision air strikes, and cruise missile attacks. The PLA Technological University, for instance, has reportedly established a "work station" to study the methods and technologies of fighting aircraft carriers.

The PLA has also 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 the Russian Buk-M1-2), HQ-17 (Chinese copy of the Russian Tor-M1), and HQ-18 (Chinese copy of the Russian S-300V). Enhanced by more advanced and powerful radars, some of these missiles are capable of strategic missile defence. The recent Chinese report about the testing of the "Shenguang 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 anti-satellite weapon.

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's rear, cyber warfare, psychological warfare, media warfare, financial warfare, to energy and environmental warfare.

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.

Conclusion

It is still too early to conclude that the PLA has the ability to fuse all the new concepts and systems in a seamless fashion so that it can fight and win wars. This paper, however, does illustrate the possible direction and scope of China's defence modernization drive, and the efforts that are being made toward these ends. As the PLA acquires larger budgets and better technologies, it now seems all the more necessary to analyse the role of the military in China's security policy, and its implications for Asian security.