



Beijing's Response to REFORPAC Projects

Calm Confidence

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Introduction

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) conducted Resolute Force Pacific (REFORPAC) 2025 across the Indo-Pacific theater from July 8 to August 8, 2025. Beijing's response to the exercise was muted, as it was to what had been the largest exercise in the region, Mobility Guardian 2023.ⁱ Beijing's response to REFORPAC similarly projected confidence. Chinese commentators writing in official media, however, argued that the USAF will fail to overcome the logistical difficulties of operating in such a vast theater and that overall U.S. strategy in the region will fail. Those arguments diverged in approach and validity, but neither offered conclusive proof of Beijing's actual assessment of REFORPAC.



U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Julian Martinez, right, 354th Air Expeditionary Wing assistant dedicated crew chief, awaits instructions as U.S. Air Force Lt. Col Erik Gonsalves, 355th Mission Generation Force Element commander, prepares for a flight during exercise Resolute Force Pacific 2025, July 17, 2025. Source: Pacific Air Forces (<https://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Photos/igphoto/2003757557/>)

REFORPAC

REFORPAC was one of a series of five large-scale exercises that the USAF and the U.S. Space Force conducted in the Indo-Pacific theater during the summer. Altogether the series of exercises involved more than 12,000 personnel and 350 aircraft at more than 50 locations across 3,000 miles, but REFORPAC's share of those numbers was the largest.¹ REFORPAC tested the USAF's capability to project airpower and to sustain air operations across a theater in which there exists no sanctuary from China's huge arsenal of missiles.

ⁱ For an analysis of Beijing's response to Mobility Guardian 2023, see Derek Solen, "PRC Media's Coverage of Mobility Guardian Projects Self-Confidence," China Aerospace Studies Institute, September 5, 2023, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/Display/Article/3505084/prc-medias-coverage-of-mobility-guardian-projects-self-confidence/>.

Beijing's Official Responses

While one would expect REFORPAC's scale alone to draw Beijing's attention, because the purpose of REFORPAC was widely reported to be preparation for a potential war with China, it would be reasonable to expect an agitated response to the exercise from Beijing. However, Beijing displayed the same attitude towards REFORPAC as it displayed after Mobility Guardian 2023. Beijing's response to that exercise projected "calm and self-assuredness."² The spokesman of China's National Defense Ministry delivered Beijing's highest-level response to REFORPAC during the ministry's regular monthly press conference in July:

[...] the Pacific Ocean is a place of peace, so it should not become an ocean in which people stir up trouble. The USA persists in its Cold War mentality, blindly displaying its military might in the Asia-Pacific region, vainly trying to use military exercises as a cover for its efforts to form a gang, threatening and pressuring other countries, and destroying the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific. No matter how the wind blows and the waves crash, we will sit calmly on the fishing platform. The Chinese military has the confidence and the capability to respond to all dangers and challenges[.] It will resolutely defend our national sovereignty, security, and developmental interests, and it will always serve as a resolute force for defending international and regional peace.³

While Beijing clearly disapproves of REFORPAC, this statement similarly projects confident aloofness.

Only two articles evaluating REFORPAC appeared in official media.ⁱⁱ One article was published in the Global Military section of *Liberation Army News*, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Military Commission, which is equivalent to the U.S. Defense Department. The other article was published in *China Youth Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party's youth organization, the Chinese Communist Youth League. The former article was written by Xu Bingqun, whose affiliation is unknown, but who has written several articles about foreign—mostly American—military affairs for *Liberation Army News* in the past five years. The latter article was written by PLA Army Senior Colonel Wu Minwen, a professor at the PLA's National University for Defense Technology as well as a regular contributor to *China Youth Daily*.⁴

Both articles' reporting on the details of REFORPAC was accurate, albeit brief. Xu additionally identified three significant characteristics of REFORPAC. First, Xu wrote that REFORPAC "fully displayed the characteristics of distributed operations" and that the U.S. military is attempting to use distributed operations to overcome the "challenges of a so-called future regional war."⁵ Next, Xu wrote that the target of REFORPAC is "sufficiently clear."⁶ He

ⁱⁱ One article about another exercise in the series, Resolute Space 2025, was published, but although it contained some critical boilerplate about American hegemony and an arms race in space, the article was primarily just a summary of the exercise. During the period in which the series of exercises was conducted, an article summarizing a U.S. Government Accountability Office report concerning the U.S. military's cooperation with allies in space was also published. 王晓艳 [Wang Xiaoyan] and 丰松江 [Wang Songjiang], "美太空军演习暴露维护霸权野心" [U.S. Space Force exercise exposes ambition to maintain hegemony], 解放军报 [Liberation Army News], August 3, 2025, accessed August 6, 2025, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2025-08-03&paperNumber=04&articleid=960498; 朱江 [Zhu Jiang], "美与盟友太空军事合作成效遭质疑" [US military space cooperation with allies faces doubts], 中国国防报 [China National Defense News], August 1, 2025, accessed August 1, 2025, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/gfbszbqxq/index.html?paperName=zggfb&paperDate=2025-08-01&paperNumber=04&articleid=960369.

added that because the title “REFORPAC” follows that of the exercise “Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER),”ⁱⁱⁱ the exercise’s title “fully exposes the U.S. military’s strategic perception that regards the Indo-Pacific region as a ‘new cold war front.’”⁷ Finally, Xu wrote that the U.S. military is seeking to integrate the forces of Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Australia to build a “‘USA-plus-X’ alliance operations framework.”⁸ “What is especially alarming,” Xu wrote, is that through REFORPAC, the U.S. military would “strengthen its deployment” on a base on the Philippines’ Palawan Island, and the “strategic intent” of this action “needs no explanation.”⁹ Wu Wenmin also mentioned testing the Agile Combat Employment concept as a goal of REFORPAC, but he added his absurd speculation that REFORPAC was also conducted as a gift to President Trump for the president’s “preference” for the USAF as manifested by the creation of the U.S. Space Force, support for the F-47, and the initiation of Golden Dome.¹⁰

China’s official media usually finds reasons to doubt the efficacy or feasibility of the U.S. military’s efforts, and Xu’s and Wu’s articles were no exception. Xu argued that the U.S. military’s “excessive expansion” runs the risk of a “strategic overdraft,” and that transferring military resources to the Indo-Pacific theater while there are conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East will cause an imbalance in the U.S. military’s “strategic disposition.”¹¹ He also argued that “the distributed operations capability that the U.S. military took pains to display during REFORPAC still has obvious weaknesses.”¹² Xu wrote that distributed deployment causes an “obvious decrease” in military aircraft’s mission capable rates, and that there are “many challenges” to conducting “precision logistics” in a threat environment.¹³ Consequently, Xu continued, the long-term maintenance of a network of military facilities and “strategic prepositioning” will consume a huge amount of resources.¹⁴ Xu finally added that Agile Combat Employment “faces numerous practical challenges, such as excessively long logistics chains.”¹⁵

The PLA’s critique of Agile Combat Employment often mentions logistics because logistics will indeed be a major challenge for forces that are dispersed across a theater as broad as the Indo-Pacific.^{iv} In March 2025 the newspaper *China National Defense News*, the sister publication of *Liberation Army News*, published an article by frequent contributor Liu Bei that assessed that the U.S. military’s Joint Concept for Contested Logistics (JCCL) would “fall short.”¹⁶ As Xu would do later, Liu first argued that the maintenance of so many logistical nodes will be extremely expensive, and he added that the U.S. military is facing a shortage of personnel, especially those working in logistics.¹⁷ Liu also cited unspecified American and other foreign media reporting that some say that the JCCL is indistinct from other concepts and that America’s foreign allies are unenthusiastic about helping the U.S. military with logistics because of the problems that currently exist in their countries’ relationships with the USA.¹⁸

ⁱⁱⁱ It was initially reported in the American press that “REFORPAC” was an abbreviation of “Return of Forces to the Pacific,” so REFORGEN was likely the inspiration for the exercise’s title, but the official, full title of the exercise was “Resolute Force Pacific.” Greg Hadley, “REFORPAC: Allvin Details New Indo-Pacific Exercise Debuting in 2025,” *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, August 20, 2024, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/return-of-forces-to-pacific-exercise-coming-2025/>; Greg Hadley, “Air Force, Space Force Kick Off Major Pacific Exercises,” *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, July 8, 2025, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/air-force-space-force-summer-pacific-exercises-series/>.

^{iv} For a fuller analysis of the PLA’s assessment of ACE’s weaknesses, including logistics, see Derek Solen, “The PLA’s Critical Assessment of the Agile Combat Employment Concept,” *China Brief* 21, no. 14 (2021): accessed August 6, 2025, <https://jamestown.org/program/the-plas-critical-assessment-of-the-agile-combat-employment-concept/>.

Except for his speculation about President Trump's "preference" for the USAF, Wu Wenmin's reporting about REFORPAC as well as recent events between the USA and its Asian allies was mostly factual. However, he shifted his critique from REFORPAC to what he deemed to be America's Indo-Pacific strategy, and his arguments for why that strategy will fail were surprisingly fatuous. First, Wu wrote that New Delhi's traditional, non-aligned foreign policy has not changed, so America's Indo-Pacific strategy lacks India's support and participation.¹⁹ However, although India is indeed an important country, it is not the keystone of America's military strategy in the western Pacific, nor is it the keystone of America's policy towards East Asia. Next, Wu wrote that the Philippines is too weak economically to be an "important ally" to the USA,²⁰ but Manila's provision of an additional base for U.S. operations alone has a significance that Xu Bingquan acknowledged in his article and described as "especially alarming."²¹

Finally, Wu wrote that "the greed of arms dealers will corrode America's national interests."²² He stated that the U.S. Defense Department's proposed 2026 budget is "undoubtedly [...] a 'sumptuous banquet for a *taotie* [a mythical creature that represents ferocity and greed]" between the department and "arms dealers," and he cited a document from the Quincy Institute that supposedly "revealed" that some American "arms dealers" pushed President Trump to strike Iran's nuclear facilities.²³ Then Wu again quoted a member of the Quincy Institute and finished his article by asking if the "arms dealers" will consider the interests of the country and especially those of the American people and taxpayers.²⁴ However, the connection between the supposed greed of "arms dealers" and the success of America's Indo-Pacific strategy, much less its military strategy in the region, is convoluted. Ultimately, Wu offered no critique of REFORPAC itself, and his critique of American strategy in the region—at least as he understands it—was slapdash.

Conclusion

Beijing's response to REFORPAC repeated the low-key response to Mobility Guardian 2023, projecting confidence and thereby signaling to the Chinese public and to Washington that the PLA is prepared to defeat America's military strategy to counter Chinese aggression. Although the commentators representing Beijing offered reasons to question the feasibility of the USAF's efforts, their arguments diverged. Xu Bingquan's argument was grounded in the logistical reality of operating in a vast, contested environment, but Wu Wenmin avoided dealing directly with America's military strategy, instead dismissing America's Indo-Pacific strategy with a jumbled argument. However, Wu's argument is not inconsistent with Beijing's official line or even Xu's argument, so the divergence is likely a result of individual differences in approach rather than central direction. Wu also displayed a livelier style in his response to Mobility Guardian 2023, a stylistic choice that may better suit the intended audience. Regardless, although Beijing could very well regard the logistical difficulties of America's military strategy to be insurmountable, the most that can be said about Xu's and Wu's articles is that they represent what Beijing wants China and the world to believe, not necessarily what Beijing itself believes.

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Endnotes

¹ Greg Hadley, “Air Force, Space Force Kick Off Major Pacific Exercises,” *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, July 8, 2025, accessed July 31, 2025, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/air-force-space-force-summer-pacific-exercises-series/>; Pacific Air Forces Public Affairs, “REFORPAC 2025: High-powered international team ready to conduct Air Force’s largest Pacific contingency-response exercise,” Pacific Air Forces, July 8, 2025, accessed August 20, 2025, <https://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/4209076/reforpac-2025-high-powered-international-team-ready-to-conduct-air-forces-large/>; Pacific Air Forces Public Affairs, “REFORPAC 2025: U.S. Air Force Executes Unprecedented Surge into Pacific Theater,” Pacific Air Forces, July 16, 2025, accessed August 20, 2025, <https://www.pacaf.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/4247649/reforpac-2025-us-air-force-executes-unprecedented-surge-into-pacific-theater/>.

² Derek Solen, “PRC Media’s Coverage of Mobility Guardian Projects Self-Confidence,” China Aerospace Studies Institute, September 5, 2023, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/Display/Article/3505084/prc-medias-coverage-of-mobility-guardian-projects-self-confidence/>.

³ “2025 年 7 月国防部例行记者会文字实录” [Written record of the National Defense Ministry’s regular press conference of July 2025], 国防部网 [Website of the National Defense Ministry], July 30, 2025, accessed July 30, 2025 http://www.mod.gov.cn/gfbw/sy/tt_214026/16399673.html.

⁴ Derek Solen, “PRC Media’s Coverage of Mobility Guardian Projects Self-Confidence.”

⁵ 徐秉君 [Xu Bingqun], “‘美空军史上最大规模’演习冲击地区安全” [Exercise that is ‘USAF’s largest-scale in history’ impacts regional security], 解放军报 [Liberation Army News], July 24, 2025, accessed July 24, 2025, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/szbqxq/index.html?paperName=jfjb&paperDate=2025-07-24&paperNumber=11&articleid=959838.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 吴敏文 [Wu Minwen], “美国主导的系列军演严重扰乱地区安全局势” [US leads series of military exercises that upset regional security situation], 中国青年报 [China Youth Daily], July 31, 2025, accessed July 31, 2025, https://zqb.cyol.com/pc/content/202507/31/content_414388.html.

¹¹ 徐秉君 [Xu Bingqun], “‘美空军史上最大规模’演习冲击地区安全” [Exercise that is ‘USAF’s largest-scale in history’ impacts regional security].

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ 刘贝 [Liu Bei], “美军加快‘对抗性后勤’建设” [U.S. military accelerates development of ‘contested logistics’], 中国国防报 [China National Defense News], March 31, 2025, accessed August 1, 2025, http://www.81.cn/szb_223187/gfbszbqxq/index.html?paperName=zggfb&paperDate=2025-03-31&paperNumber=04&articleid=952252.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ 吴敏文 [Wu Minwen], “美国主导的系列军演严重扰乱地区安全局势” [US leads series of military exercises that upset regional security situation].

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ 徐秉君 [Xu Bingqun], “‘美空军史上最大规模’演习冲击地区安全” [Exercise that is ‘USAF’s largest-scale in history’ impacts regional security].

²² 吴敏文 [Wu Minwen], “美国主导的系列军演严重扰乱地区安全局势” [U.S. leads series of military exercises that upset regional security situation].

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.