



STATE OF THE GAME

BUILDING PACAF'S COMPETITIVE MINDSET

JUNE 2020

HOW CHINA VIEWS ITS ENLISTED FORCE

A world-class military must empower its enlisted members.

Despite its name, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the army of the Chinese Communist Party, not the Chinese people. To be acknowledged as a PLA leader, you have to be a Party member—and it may be estimated that more than 90% of the conscripts that make up the enlisted force aren't part of that club. [According to a study](#) by the [China Aerospace Studies Institute](#) (CASI), PLA enlisted members serve *without the trust of their services and the Party*; even those in NCO-level positions can only be “*acting leaders*” due to their lack of party affiliation and other institutional constraints. By neglecting the force-multiplying value of its enlisted force, the PLA fails to harness the potential of the vast majority of its people, likely leading to shortfalls in warfighting readiness relative

to the USAF, our Allies, and Partners.

In the USAF, we value the leadership, innovation, and experience of our enlisted force; conversely, China's airmen are viewed by their service largely as necessary for menial tasks but not as leaders or experts, regardless of their time-in-service. This contrasts with the American approach to military service which prizes the initiative and experience of the individual, regardless of rank; that's why we entrust junior enlisted members with responsibilities as weighty as serving as the crew chief of a multi-million-dollar aircraft or leading engagements with Allies and Partners. The value we place on our enlisted force is an enduring American strategic competitive advantage.

ALLIES AND PARTNERS: STRONGER TOGETHER

PACAF Airmen keep America the partner of choice.

PACAF Airmen have the opportunity to make a significant difference with every partner interaction. Most recently, the Air Forces of Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Nepal provided feedback stating engagements conducted by PACAF Airmen within the last five years have had a direct positive impact on their countries' COVID-19 response efforts. These positive interactions and meaningful results continue to tie our militaries and nations together as we seek to maintain a safe, secure world and a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The [National Defense Strategy](#) implores us to expand the competitive space beyond conventional weapons and tactics of war. The [infinite game](#) of great power competition has many fronts, including the other nations in the region. We are standing guard alongside like-minded countries to maintain a [free](#)

[and open Indo-Pacific](#).

The transparent, non-coercive nature of the [rules-based international order](#) provides a genuine opportunity for all nations to work together to combat tough problems. Every engagement PACAF Airmen have with our partners can tilt the scale one way or the other.

We have been told our partner Air Forces prefer to collaborate with PACAF Airmen because we are professional, knowledgeable, and keep the interests of both parties in mind. Positive engagements from face-to-face [discussions on TTPs](#) to [large flying exercises](#) improve our interoperability, information sharing, access, relationships, and our partners' ability to stand up to bullying and malign activities. We are counting on every Airman to continue pursuing these goals with every interaction.

THE DAY THE CCP WANTS TO FORGET

The CCP tries to erase history, but on June 4th, the rest of the world remembers.

Thirty-one years ago, the CCP ordered the PLA to put an end to Tiananmen Square's [pro-democracy demonstration](#). But if you were to ask a Chinese citizen, you might be surprised that they cannot recall the details of the event. Unlike the May 4th Movement, the CCP wants you to forget June 4th.

The protest for more liberal, democratic reforms started in April 1989 in honor of the death of former CCP General Secretary and liberal reformer Hu Yaobang. The protest reached new heights on 4 May when people gathered to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the May 4th Movement. The next day, regional troops attempted to occupy Tiananmen Square but they were stopped by protestors. The troops were initially ordered to not to fire on civilians, but after weeks of protests, China's President Deng Xiaoping and the CCP feared losing control of the military and ordered a more aggressive stance. On 3 June, troops tried to enter Beijing, and people attempted to stop them once again. To the civilians' surprise, this time they were met with gunfire.

When civilians refused to be turned away, the troops opened fire indiscriminately. Shocked Beijingers began to clash with troops throughout the city and were met with varying levels of resistance from the PLA. CCP



leaders were surprised to learn not all [PLA units](#) would attack their countrymen. Various reports indicate that more than 2,000 protestors were killed that night.

Why it matters: Due to the Tiananmen protest, liberal voices inside the CCP were silenced. Liberal political reforms made after the Cultural Revolution were pulled back. The CCP's leadership was replaced by hardliners such as Jiang Zemin, who would later become Deng Xiaoping's replacement. This led to the CCP strengthening its political control, but loosening the economic sector. This allowed China's economy to grow rapidly and develop a relatively free market with Chinese characteristics, bettering its people while further entrenching the party's power.

THE SPARK

Information to grow knowledge of China and spark curiosity about the Indo-Pacific region

If you ever visit Tiananmen Square and use your phone to search for additional information, you will find nothing regarding the events of 1989; the CCP has censored all aspects of the event. If your visit coincides with the June anniversary, you will find heightened security—and year-round, state security services are using high-tech means including surveillance systems, crowd-sourced social responsibility scores, and censorship to ensure these kinds of protests never happen again.

NEXT ISSUE

- **The military mindset in conflict vs. competition**
- **Lasting impacts of the Cultural Revolution**

COMPETE DAILY

Want to learn more? The Strategic Competition Team recommends:

- Read a [first-hand account](#) from the Tiananmen Square Massacre, by former Assistant Air Attaché to Beijing Ken Allen.
- Expand your knowledge of China's efforts to integrate its military and civilian sectors by listening [to this episode of the China Power Project's podcast](#), hosted by Bonnie Glaser.
- [Learn](#) how the people of the PLA live and what's changing.
- Want even more? Visit the [Strategic Competition Team's NIPR Intelink page](#).

- **Xi's Little Red Book**
- **Maritime disputes: Really about the resources?**



A monthly review of competition thoughts and activities from PACAF's

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