



Thoughts from the Chairmanⁱ Friendlies before the World Cupⁱⁱ

China has spent the last thirty years laser focused on modernizing the military, with one goal in mind, to catch up to the United States and its allies and partners. This program of modernization has spanned the rule of Jiang Zemin, who launched the modernization campaign in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, where China was forced to watch as the United States, along with its allies and partners, showed the world what a modern military conflict was. The U.S. fought at night, fought through smoke, fought with precision weapons, with laser guided bombs, with secure communication, from air, from land, from sea, and from space, all of it along with its allies and partners, and it decimated the 5th largest military in the world in a number of hours (or days if you count the entirety of the air campaign leading up to the invasion). China had nothing close, and General Secretary Jiang kicked the system into action. The CCP held steady programs, plans, policies, and most importantly- funding, across the Hu Jintao era, where they laid the foundation in the Chinese industrial base, that allowed them to build the world largest, and youngest, navy. Enter Chairman Xi Jinping onto the stage in 2012. With his “Made in China in 2025” program, Xi capitalized on the work that had proceeded him, and continued naval expansion, built a nuclear triad, added a focus on space, on the Information Domain, and on missiles, missiles, and more missiles. China today has the world’s largest navy; a 4th and 5th generation fighter force- at a time when the U.S. Air Force is the oldest and smallest it has ever been; and the world broadest and deepest missile program- capable of reaching anywhere from Guam, to Alaska, to the homeland of the U.S. And China just saw its military equipment, in the hands of its partner Pakistan, defeat modern western aircraft and systems, flown by the Indian Air Force. China’s military might has been shown, and demonstrated to the world.

However, the armed wing of the Communist Party, the People’s Liberation Army, hasn’t fought a war since the 1979/1980s border war with Vietnam. The kit may be all new, but what about the people. The PLA has no real world experience in modern combat. Chairman Xi directed a massive reorganization of the PLA in 2015/16, changing the command and control, the leadership structure, and the doctrine of the PLA, and its only been ten years. Will the people of the PLA be trained and ready, will the command and control structures be able to fight on an informationized battlefield, is the PLA ready, and how can CCP leaders know.

If I were the Chairman of the Central Military Commission, I’d be thinking..... before I have my team play in the World Cup and take on the undisputed champions, i.e. the U.S., maybe we’d better at least play in a friendly as a warm-up. But where can I test the PLA, test the men, the materiel, the doctrine, all against someone who can put up a reasonable fight

ⁱ The “Thoughts from the Chairman” series are not factual, but meant to be thought provoking, providing one possible viewpoint or idea.

ⁱⁱ Aka play a regular season game before playing in the Super Bowl

that would make the ‘test’ worth it, but still not start a full scale war which might weaken the very forces I’m trying to test.....And I need to worry about not subjecting the PRC and the people of China to unnecessary hardships, sanctions, and opprobrium. We know what happened to Russia when it launched its special military operation, we don’t want that kind of blow back on China, not until we are fully prepared and the juice is worth the squeeze, aka Taiwan. Where can we find such a test.

Let’s try the Indian border. There is an active border dispute. People die in military actions there from time to time. It won’t be seen as an invasion of an independent nation, so the rest of the world will probably just sit back and watch, no one will move to sanction either side, since it is a long running international dispute. In India, the PLA would face a fairly modern, fairly capable, adversary. One which has western military equipment, and some from the Russians as a bonus, which can test the PLA, but won’t likely be able to overwhelm it. It will give the CMC a chance to test out the new Theater Command command and control structure, delegating certain authority to the Western Theater Command while retaining the important decisions at the CMC’s Joint Operations Command Center here in Beijing. We could test the PLA Air Force against modern fighters, test the long range logistics system of the Joint Logistics Support Force, test the PLA Army in austere environments, test space and cyber capabilities to set the conditions for war, against a worth foe. And we can do it all in an area that neither side is likely to escalate the conflict, and certainly not likely to go to nuclear war. What we should do is build up some of the bases in the Himalayas, strengthen the austere logistics capabilities, build up the lines of communication, and prepare ahead of time. We can then control the timing, and the pace of the conflict and see how well the PLA performs, dialing it up or down depending on how well they perform.

The one drawback is of course, there is no Navy involvement. China doesn’t want to expand the conflict into the Indian Ocean, because that would go against the idea this was a limited justified conflict. So the PLAN will have to learn lessons from others doing. There really isn’t an alternative, the Philippines doesn’t have a credible military, our Coast Guard could handle them, and that might tip our hand and bring in the Americans, through their treaty, before we want them. So we can create conditions for a test run against India, and then decide if the PLA still needs more training, exercises, manning, and equipment; or if they are ready to step up and play in the world cup against the champs, and try to claim Taiwan by force.

*To reiterate, this article is nothing more than informed musings.
It is intended to provoke thought and discussion. Nothing more.*

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