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## **Current Trends in the Modernization of the PRC Armed Forces**

The article is devoted to the issues of modernization of the armed forces of the People's Republic of China. The author considers the structure of reforming the PLA, which provides for the formation of 5 commands of the ground forces, missile forces and a strategic support unit of the PLA. The foreign policy analyzed the Republic of China at the modern stage and the prospects for changing the role of China in the region of Central Asia and World.

*Key words:* PRC reformers, communist party of China, central military council, PRC Armed Forces, PLA, ARMED Forces reforms.

### *Introduction*

China continues to implement the reform of the armed forces, launched in 2016, which includes the restructuring of the command and control system, the command structure of the armed forces, the territorial command structure, and the number and structure of troops.

The goal of large-scale reforms is to achieve a new level of controllability of the People's Liberation Army of China (hereinafter referred to as the PLA), to optimize the structure of the army.

The strategic goal is «the transformation of the PLA into the world's foremost military force by 2049». This is evidenced by Xi Jinping's report at the 20th Congress of the CPC, where he stated that «realizing the goal of the 100th anniversary of the PLA on time and accelerating the pace of transforming the Chinese People's Army into an advanced world-class armed force is a strategic requirement of a comprehensive building a modernized socialist state» [1].

The purpose of this article is to describe the modernization processes of the PRC Armed Forces, which began in 2016.

### *Methodological basis*

The research methods include components of military-historical, historical-logical, political science and sociological analysis.



### *Main part*

As is known, since 2016, by the decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (hereinafter referred to as the CPC Central Committee) and the Central Military Council (hereinafter referred to as the CMC), a new military reform has been launched, which provides for the formation of 5 commands of the ground forces, missile forces and a strategic support unit of the PLA.

Five military districts have been created: Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central. Their headquarters are in Beijing, Shenyang, Chengdu, Guangzhou and Nanjing. The indicated commands of the military districts are responsible only for combat operations, all political leadership has been transferred to the Central Military Commission. These measures by the PRC authorities have increased the combat effectiveness of the PRC armed forces, making them more mobile, modern and technically equipped. It should be noted that this is not the first reduction in military districts. In 1985, the number of military districts was reduced from 11 to 7, but their structural feature was clearly expressed - the orientation towards the probable withdrawal of troops into the interior of the country, in the event of aggression against China. Since 2016, 300,000 ground troops have been laid off. Thanks to this, the size of the land army for the first time in history fell below 50% of the total number of personnel. After the reduction, the size of the army amounted to 2 million people [2].

In his speech, Xi Jinping emphasized the special significance of the land army in the history of the CPC of China, its «indispensable» role in protecting the interests of state sovereignty, security and development. The entire staff of the Land Army must cherish the glorious traditions of the army and adhere to an excellent style of work, correspond to the profound shifts in the construction model and forms of use of the land army in the era of informatization, study the features and patterns of development of the land army, in accordance with the strategic requirements of mechanized combat operations and «stereoscopic attacks and defense», strengthen the master plan and management, improve the structure of the Armed Forces and their recruitment, accelerate the transition from a regional, defensive army to an army capable of conducting the entire range of combat operations, build a powerful, modernized land army of a new type [3].

The PLA Rocket Forces are the strategic pillar of China's status as a great power and an important cornerstone of national security. The Rocket Forces, in accordance with the strategic requirements of combining nuclear and conventional weapons and global deterrence, are strengthening a reliable nuclear deterrence and retaliatory nuclear strike capability, strengthening the creation of a medium-range and long-range precision strike force, and strengthening strategic balancing capabilities.

Strategic Support Troops are a new type of fighting force that ensures national security. They are tasked with system integration and civil-military integration, efforts to achieve accelerated development in key areas, promote accelerated,



integrated development of a new type of combat capability. The strategic support forces will combine the space troops and cyber troops.

In addition, the General Staff, the Main Political Directorate, the Main Logistics Directorate, the Main Armaments Directorate have been transformed into 15 functional units, which are directly subordinate to the supreme military body of the Central Military Commission. These measures contribute to strengthening the leadership of the army by the Central Military Council and increasing its effectiveness. At the same time, this should ensure better interaction between the branches of the armed forces and the conduct of joint operations by them.

In March 2018, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs was created, which will deal with the problems of soldiers and officers dismissed from the army. Prior to this, veterans after their dismissal did not receive employment and payments.

Thus, as part of the implementation of military reforms, the PRC troops are gradually transforming into a new-style army with a powerful fleet and aviation capable of conducting combat operations abroad. A stimulating factor is considered the adoption of a law on the fight against terrorism, which allows the PLA to participate in a foreign anti-terrorist campaign. The permanent conflict situation in the South China Sea explains the strengthening of the PRC Navy. Today, in addition to the aircraft carrier «Lyayuning», China is working on creating its own analogue with a displacement of 110 thousand tons.

The number of marines increased to 100 thousand people (previously it was 20 thousand people). It is assumed that the updated Marine Corps will protect facilities along the maritime part of the One Belt, One Road project, primarily the base in Djibouti, the port of Gwadar in Pakistan [4].

The PLA is widely involved in the missions of international peacekeeping, sea escort of ships, international humanitarian aid, etc. China's participation in UN peacekeeping operations began only in 1990 with the dispatch of 5 observer officers to the Middle East. As of 2012, about 2,000 Chinese troops were already involved in UN peacekeeping operations, mainly in Africa. The Chinese fleet fought Somali pirates in the Gulf of Aden for several years, and in 2010-2011. a large hospital ship visited a number of affected countries in Africa and the Caribbean to provide medical care to their residents.

In general, military experts note that thanks to peacekeeping missions, China has reached a new level of professionalism in disaster relief campaigns and conducting global general operations, such as combating piracy in the Middle East.

At the same time, the further improvement of the Chinese army until 2030 will be carried out depending on various interrelated factors.

First, internal aspects: internal problems and tasks that China needs to solve. Beijing is well aware that any military conflict is a failure of the plan to restore the state since 1949. Any military aggression is the loss of all great achievements over 70 years of development.

Secondly, the following external factors have a significant impact on the pace of China's military buildup: the level of bilateral relations with the United States and the development of the situation in the nearby region. Depending on the degree



of tension in the East and South China Seas, Beijing is forced to develop mechanisms to deter Washington from intervening in a possible conflict.

In addition, the PLA leadership seeks to increase its ability to deploy its forces to remote regions to protect Chinese citizens and investments as they go global. To this end, in 2016, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for the first time passed an anti-terrorism law, laying the legal framework for conducting counter-terrorism operations abroad.

Thirdly, technological aspects and propensity to innovate will also determine the future shape of the PLA. Thus, the PLA has the second military budget in the world after the United States. According to the IISS Military Balance, the Chinese military budget for 2020 is \$178.8 billion (US \$732 billion, India \$71 billion, Russia \$65 billion). At the same time, you need to pay attention to the 4-fold gap between the first and second military budgets in the world, while the American military budget is 38%, and the Chinese about 12% of 1.9 trillion. US dollars of global spending on military development and defense. According to SIPRI experts, over the 10 years since 2010, China's military budget has shown the most significant growth in the last ten years (an increase of almost 85%). And in the early 1990s, China's spending on the army amounted to about 10 billion US dollars.

In recent years, significant funds have been allocated to the development of research projects to increase the technological potential of the country's army [5].

Against the background, three strategic vectors for the further modernization of the PLA can be distinguished: a focus on the Asian Pacific Region (hereinafter referred to as the Asia-Pacific Region), the creation of an army with global coverage, and a significant weakening of the PLA.

Experts note that the first option may take place in the event of Washington's more active implementation of the «Pivot to Asia» strategy and attempts to contain the PRC in the immediate vicinity of its borders, as well as as a result of a change in the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula and the continued escalation of the conflict in the East and South China Seas.

If the trend is reversed, Beijing will seek to simultaneously develop military-political, military-technical and infrastructure projects that will allow it to deploy forces on a global scale (the plan for the formation of an expeditionary force, the «String of Pearls» strategy, the creation of a Chinese analogue of GPS, etc.).

In contrast to the first option, the second one will involve the need for large investments in increasing the number of nuclear submarines, heavy vehicles, ships with a landing platform, landing ships, and expeditionary air forces.

According to experts, the third scenario is possible in case of an armed conflict in the nearby region or an economic crisis, which will require the allocation of funds to the social sphere and the strengthening of internal forces in order to prevent possible destabilization.

### *Conclusion*



Today, the main distinguishing feature of the PLA is that many systems and weapons, armored vehicles, cruise and intercontinental ballistic missiles, in terms of tactical and technical characteristics, are not inferior to their Western counterparts. Therefore, the main goal of the ongoing reforms is the implementation of the tasks originally set by Xi Jinping on the formation of a strong and combat-ready army, the reduction of the human contingent in exchange for the modernization of weapons.

According to Gong Fangbin, a professor at the National Defense University, an important factor is that the Central Military Commission is vested with direct executive power over the armed forces, instead of decisions previously made with the help of 4 structures (general staff, main departments: politics, logistics and armaments).

It is obvious that the enlargement of the districts will concentrate the full military power of the leader of the PRC, who will receive the right to directly control military operations, bypassing the hierarchy of commanders, as well as the creation of «elite units of the armed forces».

Beijing's statement about the reduction of the army by 300 thousand people minimizes the criticism of foreign, primarily neighboring countries, about the growth of China's military power. Against this background, it is possible that the defense industry will continue to grow, but with an emphasis on the development of the latest technologies for the competitiveness of key enterprises operating in the defense industry, based on the development of key scientific and technical projects. The faster commissioning of the second nuclear aircraft carrier will make it possible to ensure the advantage of the PRC in the entire western part of the Pacific Ocean.

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**Современные тенденции модернизации Вооруженных сил КНР**



Статья посвящена вопросам модернизации вооруженных сил Китайской Народной Республики. Автор рассматривает структуру плана реформирования, который предусматривает формирование 5 командований сухопутных войск, ракетных войск и подразделения стратегической поддержки НОАК.

Во внешней политике проанализирована Китайская Республика на современном этапе и перспективы изменения роли Китая в регионе Центральной Азии и в мире.

Анализируется внешняя политика Китая на современном этапе и перспективы изменения роли КНР в регионе Центральной Азии и во всем мире.

*Ключевые слова:* реформы КНР, коммунистическая партия Китая, Центральный военный совет, Вооруженных сил КНР, НОАК, реформы Вооруженных Сил КНР.

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### Қытай Қарулы Күштерін модернизациялаудың қазіргі тенденциялары

Мақала Қытай Халық Республикасының Қарулы Күштерін жаңғыртылу мәселелеріне арналған. Автор Құрлық әскерлерінің 5 қолбасшылығын, зымыран әскерлерін және ПЛА стратегиялық қолдау бөлімшелерін құруды көздейтін реформа жоспарының құрылымын қарастырады.

Қытайдың бүгінгі таңдағы сыртқы басымдықтары сараланып, оның Орталық Азия өңірі мен әлемдегі артып келе жатқан ықпалы жан-жақты қарастырылған.

*Кілт сөздер:* ҚХР реформасы, Қытай коммунистік партиясы, Орталық әскери кеңес, ҚХР қарулы күштері, ПЛА, ҚХР Қарулы Күштердің реформалары.

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