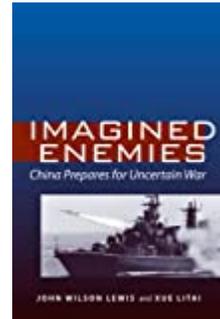




John Wilson Lewis, Xue Litai. *Imagined Enemies: China Prepares for Uncertain War.* Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2006. Illustrations. 384 pp. \$63.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5391-3.



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The Coming War with Taiwan

One of the hallmarks of superpower status is the ability of a nation to extend its power and influence over its neighbors and beyond. Such power and influence can be extended both economically and militarily, among other means. Despite the impressive growth of China's national economy over the last several decades, however, its military has not kept pace with rapid reform and modernization. Thus, China has yet to achieve superpower status, at least according to authors John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai. Their argument is compelling. In *Imagined Enemies*, Lewis and Xue argue that China has yet to become a military superpower largely because of lingering bureaucratic impediments, corruption, the continued obsession of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with obsolete doctrines, and the failure of Deng Xiaoping to make military modernization a foremost objective in the agenda of national reforms initiated under his leadership. Yet the authors caution that China nonetheless poses a very real military threat to Taiwan, and it has recently geared the modernization of its military forces toward an "imagined" war with Taiwan and her presumed ally,

the United States.

Presented as the fourth and final installment in Lewis and Xue's brilliant series on the Chinese military, the book is a meticulous study of the evolution of the military of the People's Republic of China and the challenges that modernization has posed to it in a rapidly changing world. Now internationally recognized as leading experts on China's military, Lewis, the William Haas Professor Emeritus of Chinese Politics at Stanford University, and Xue, a research associate at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford, have a proven track record of explicating such complex and intriguing subjects as this in language that is accessible to nonspecialists. The purpose of this book is to go beyond the studies presented in the first three volumes in the series, which focused on the development of nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and nuclear-powered submarines in China, by examining "the underlying decision processes and operations of a Chinese military on the move, the People's Liberation Army in action" (p. 6). The central thesis of the book contends that the priority

placed on national modernization and economic growth came at high price for the military in the form of opportunity costs that “narrowed the scope for military development and planning” even while the changing nature of war and its concomitant risks transformed “Chinese military doctrines, strategies, and preparations” (p. 20).

Part 1, “History, Memory, and Experience in Chinese Military Thinking,” offers an overview of the “traditional military mind-set or culture” of China dating back some 2,500 years (p. 27). In chapter 2, “The Threat of War, the Necessity of Peace,” the authors offer a brief comparison of Eastern vs. Western military philosophies, and locate the origins of Chinese strategic thinking in Sun Tzu’s *Art of War*, ostensibly written around 500 BCE. The authors also introduce one of the central themes of Chinese political and military history, that is, defending the nation against “inside disorder and outside calamity” (p. 21). Regardless of which dynasty or modern political regime has been in power, maintaining domestic tranquility while defending against external military threats proved to be among the greatest challenges facing Chinese rulers. Harkening back to Sun Tzu and discussing a select few of his key aphorisms, the authors provide a broader historical context that informs readers of what comprises traditional Chinese military thought, and what may be considered strategic ideals even today. In comparing East vs. West, the authors note the traditional Eastern proclivity to focus on “software” (intellect, strategy), while the West has trended toward development of “hardware” (science, technology) in their approach to military doctrine (p. 25). Other comparisons observe the inclination of China historically to look inward with a “certain smugness” while the West “looks outward and seems restless to expand and control” (p. 25). These may appear, at first, to be somewhat superficial and overly generalized observations, but the argument is given substance throughout the book as the authors discuss modern China’s preoccupation with the development of ground forces—too often at the expense of building up naval and air forces—while the United States, for example, followed in the tradition of the British Empire in spreading its influence by sea, and, more recently, by air and space. Rounding out the historical discussion, the authors identify the “six domains and five goals” of the PLA at the turn of the twenty-first century. The six domains of strategy include politics, military affairs, economy, science and technology, culture, and society. The five goals are: “safeguard territorial sovereignty and ‘rights’; maintain domestic stability and a stable environment in the Asian-Pacific region; promote economic growth; oppose hegemony and

power politics; and build a new international political and economic order” (p. 29). These domains and goals provide the foundation on which contemporary Chinese military doctrine has been built. Chapter 3, “Strategic Challenges and the Struggle for Power, 1964-1969,” completes the section on historical context by examining the principal military challenges of that period, namely, the border conflicts with the Soviet Union, the rise to power of Mao Zedong’s one-time ally turned rival Lin Biao, the test of China’s first nuclear weapon, and the formation of national security directives in light of these developments.

Part 2, “Lessons Applied: Security Policymaking and Military Operations,” offers a detailed analysis of how the lessons learned during this critical five- to six-year period shaped national defense policy for the next thirty-five years. Chapter 4, “National Command Authority and the Decisionmaking Process,” offers a detailed examination of the organization and operation of the central command authority with a particular focus on the role of the Central Military Commission (CMC). The chapter explicates the function of the CMC together with the respective roles of the Party Secretariat, the Politburo, its Standing Committee, and its top members in the decision-making process concerning national security. Chapter 5, “Military Command, Control, and Force Operations,” examines China’s efforts to implement a modern command-and-control organization, meaning the administration and employment of the armed forces. This chapter is particularly valuable just for the extensive nuts-and-bolts type of information it provides, such as: showing how only the CMC chairman and not China’s president has the authority to launch a nuclear strike (with clearance from the Politburo Standing Committee and the CMC), clearly defining China’s seven military regions and their administration, and thoroughly describing the organization of the PLA. The complex organization of China’s command-and-control operations is illustrated graphically in a hierarchical flowchart identifying all the principal agencies and their relative status (pp. 122-123). This information-packed chapter concludes with a discussion of how China’s war with Vietnam in 1979 and the U.S. war with Iraq in 1991 became the two most important influences on the reform of China’s command-and-control system in the 1990s. In discussing the history of this system, the authors articulate one of the central lessons of Chinese history: “Limiting the power of the region commander to control of the ground forces, we believe, reinforced the center’s authority and prevented ‘warlordism.’ Beijing was limiting the power of the re-

gion commander in order to assure its dominance of the military, but these limits came at a high cost" (p. 137). That is, for the center to maintain control over the periphery, it had to restrict the powers of regional commanders, which to some extent compromised their defense capability. But at the same time, this policy reduced the likelihood of a regional strongman emerging to challenge Beijing's authority, directly addressing the age-old concern of "inside disorder" (p. 21).

Part 3, "Modernizing the Main Arsenal," addresses preparations for "outside calamity" (p. 21). Chapter 6, "Redefining the Strategic Rocket Forces," offers a detailed history of the Second Artillery, China's primary strategic rocket force. The authors argue that the Second Artillery adopted a French-style deterrence policy, that is, adopting "the basic requirements needed by a small nuclear power to survive a nuclear attack and to launch a second strike in defense of its 'core values'" while remaining focused on cost-effectiveness by using "the fewest weapons for greatest effect" (pp. 209, 206). In preparation for the next "imagined" war, against Taiwan and the United States, China has only recently begun to revise its doctrine for fighting a conventional war toward fighting a "high-tech local war," for which, the authors argue, China is presently ill-prepared (p. 133). The comparatively backward state of the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) is the subject of the next chapter, "The Quest for a Modern Air Force." Here, again, the authors explain how the U.S. war against Iraq influenced changes in policy and doctrine for the PLAAF. Having witnessed the wholesale destruction of the Iraqi air forces—mostly on the ground—the PLAAF had to reconsider its "no first strike" policy, invest more in science and technology, and develop plans for military preparedness again "from winning a conventional local war to winning a high-tech local war" (p. 232).

Part 4, "National Strategy and Uncertain War," contains the final chapter, "Sun Tzu's Pupils and the Taiwan Challenge." Here, the authors apply one of Sun Tzu's principal aphorisms, "know your enemy," and assess how well China knows the military policies and strategic planning of its "imagined" adversary Taiwan. It is the specter of war with Taiwan, supported by the United States, that continues to shape and reshape the role of the PLA and its military doctrine. With its emphasis on U.S.-Taiwan defense strategy and scenarios for the outbreak of a regional war in East Asia, this final chapter may be of most interest to foreign policy specialists and U.S. State Department experts charged with monitoring potentially dangerous incidents in the Taiwan Strait. It is nothing less than a dramatic epilogue to an intriguing and fact-filled

narrative that should be of interest to anyone interested in contemporary China.

As useful and relevant as this book may be, however, it is not without problems. First, the number of agencies and institutions named in the study becomes overwhelming, and a glossary of acronyms would have been very convenient for reference. Providing the Chinese characters (*hanzi*) for these would also have been useful for more specialized readers. The authors manage to explain the military nomenclature well in the narrative, but the sheer volume of it, combined with the plethora of acronyms, becomes somewhat cumbersome even for specialists. Some of the acronyms, such as C4ISR for "command-control-communications-computer-intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance," for example, become unwieldy and distracting, especially the further along one gets in the book (p. 39). The three charts included are very helpful in bringing clarity to the complex hierarchies described in the narrative, but more illustrations, particularly maps, are needed. Too often, names of various provinces, military districts, border regions, and so on are mentioned, but only those very familiar with China will be able to follow along easily without some graphic aid. Several interesting photos are included, but most are never referred to directly and one has to determine their significance for oneself while reading through to the end. These are relatively minor complaints, however, and one can imagine that such editorial decisions were more within the purview of the editor and publisher than with the authors themselves.

Finally, one might be tempted to criticize this work for the sources on which this study has been based. Most scholars, however, will sympathize with the authors' limited access to important primary sources, as much remains classified and inaccessible, especially to Western scholars. The authors are to be commended for their tremendous effort in accumulating, evaluating, and exploiting a wide range of sources for this book. One can imagine the challenge they faced as they attempted to obtain such sensitive documents in Chinese. Moreover, the authors are careful to qualify some of their conclusions and to indicate where the sources used were problematic. This level of honesty only adds credibility and integrity to their work, which is what we have come to expect from this team of scholars.

In conclusion, this is a book that should be of interest to specialists and general readers alike, although it will no doubt be more challenging for the latter. Its focus on contemporary issues may date the book more quickly

than more standard historical monographs, but given its weight of sheer information on the Chinese military, it is not likely to become obsolete any time soon, and should stand as one of the more thorough and reliable accounts of the Chinese military recently published. *Imagined Enemies* is, without question, required reading for anyone interested in China's military or the possible coming war with Taiwan.

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