

## TAKING THE FIGHT TO THE ENEMY: CHINESE THINKING ABOUT LONG-DISTANCE AND EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS

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This Letort Paper uses the book *Long-Distance Operations* by Jiang Yamin, a Chinese-language book published by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences (AMS) in 2007, as a point of departure to analyze PLA thinking about how expeditionary operations fit into future warfare. In addition to *Long-Distance Operations*, this Letort Paper also examines several other contemporaneous PLA publications and explains how they fit into China's evolving military doctrine.

*Long-Distance Operations* provides an internal critique by a PLA strategist of PLA operational and equipment deficiencies. More importantly, the book advocates that the PLA develop capabilities to hold an enemy's population and homeland at risk. Many of the capabilities, concepts for engaging an enemy, and forms of expeditionary operations called for in *Long-Distance Operations* have become operational doctrine in the PLA or have been reflected in weapons development programs since the book's publication. For instance, the PLA has made long-distance deployments with flotillas and expeditionary task groups, conducted long-range air operations, conducted exercises for long-distance ground force deployments, and used expeditionary forces for non-combatant evacuation operations.

At about the same time *Long-Distance Operations* was published, other Chinese military thinkers advocated for similar forms and concepts of operations, along with the development of similar weapons systems, indicating important currents of thinking in the PLA about future warfare. The publication of *Long-Distance Operations* and the other books discussed in this Letort Paper were aspirational. However, the publications appear to have followed calls from

high-level PLA leaders for new forms and concepts of expeditionary operations, as well as new capabilities for undertaking them. Most notable, *Long-Distance Operations* called for capabilities to take the fight to a distant enemy's homeland.

The focus of *Long-Distance Operations* on expeditionary capabilities and operations is a response to the challenge of protecting the ever-expanding geographic interests of the Chinese state; a response that is underwritten by the Communist Party leadership

The recommendations related to expeditionary operations are couched under the rubric of China's longstanding "active defense" strategy. As part of active defense, one of the key ideas advanced in *Long-Distance Operations* is the need to target an adversary's homeland and bring the threat to an enemy's civilian population.

The analysis in this Letort Paper suggests that there is estimative value in tracking the writings of PLA officers advocating new weapons systems, forms of operations, and operational concepts. The research can offer leading indicators of, and context for, emerging PLA capabilities. Observers should compare the ideas in the aspirational literature to actual PLA exercises and training to determine which concepts are being put into practice and at what rate.

Finally, it is important to realize that tracking the careers of individual Chinese military strategist-authors who participate in debates about future capabilities may be a useful window into the salience of particular currents of thought and the relative importance of particular domains of warfare as perceived by the PLA.

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