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China's Dream Army

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In Chinese politics, slogans can come to define the governing philosophy and goals of a paramount ruler. Jiang Zemin promoted the “Three Represents” and Hu Jintao worked for a “Harmonious Society.” Although the Xi Jinping presidency has just begun, the “China Dream” (中国梦), announced at the 18th National People’s Congress, may come to crystallize Xi’s initial governing philosophy. According to Xi, the China Dream is to realize the hopes of the Chinese people and achieve the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.¹ While Politburo level leadership has left the exact definition of these goals vague, other government and military officials have read their own aspirations into the dream such as raising living standards, creating a level playing field, strengthening party training, and building a strong military.² The “Strong Army Dream” is the principal military interpretation of the China Dream. Since its formulation in December 2012, Central Military Commission (CMC) leadership has absorbed and affirmed this principle and is using it to push for a broader development of People’s Liberation Army (PLA) power projection capabilities.

The “China Dream” is not a new phrase. The term has been the subject of political tracts well before 2012.³ Its current use may date back to 2010, when Colonel Liu Mingfu wrote the book *China Dream: The Great Power Thinking and Strategic Positioning of China in the Post-American Age*. This book calls not only for China to confront inequality and corruption, but also for the building of a powerful military and the renaissance of the Chinese military spirit.⁴ Liu is quoted as saying, “One, it means to be No. 1 in the world. Secondly, it’s the rejuvenation of the nation.”⁵ If this is the basis of the China Dream, it is broad, ambitious, and geopolitically salient. However, Xi Jinping’s formulation of the China Dream at the National Museum of China “Road to Revival” exhibition in November 2012 does not contain those specifics and does not progress beyond calls for achieving the aspirations of the Chinese people and national rejuvenation.⁶ They are, however, part of a larger set of goals to achieve a “moderately prosperous society” (小康社会) by 2021 (the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Chinese

1 “习近平在十二届全国人大一次会议闭幕会上发表重要讲话” [Xi Jinping Delivers an Important Speech at the Closing of the First Meeting of the 12th Session of the National People’s Congress], *CCTV*, March 17, 2013, <http://news.cntv.cn/special/xijinpingjianghua/index.shtml>.

2 “靠什么让梦想成为现实” [What to Rely on to Make a Dream Reality], *Renming Wang*, April 26, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/zyd/mil/20130426/c_115550753.htm?prolongation=1.

3 “Xi Jinping and the Chinese dream.” *The Economist*, May 4, 2103, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21577070-vision-chinas-new-president-should-serve-his-people-not-nationalist-state-xi-jinping>.

4 Christopher R. Hughes, “In Case You Missed It: China Dream.” *The China Beat*, April 5, 2010, <http://www.thechinabeat.org/?p=1814>.

5 Sophie Beach, “Chasing the Chinese Dream.” *China Digital Times*, April 30, 2013, <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2013/04/defining-the-chinese-dream/>.

6 Ren Zhongping, “人民日报任仲平：筑就民族复兴的“中国梦” [Daily Ren Zhongping: Build on the “China Dream” for National Revival], *People’s Daily*, April 1, 2013, <http://opinion.people.com.cn/n/2013/0401/c1003-20979482.html>; “习近平：中国梦，人民的梦” [Xi Jinping: China Dream, People’s Dream], *International Finance*, March 18, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/fortune/2013-03/18/c_124470716.htm.

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Communist Party) and a strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and modernized socialist country by 2049.⁷

These tenets share the “path of rejuvenation’s” focus on the Century of Humiliation,⁸ the period of roughly 100 years between the First Opium War and the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 when foreign powers took advantage of a weak China.⁹ Core to the idea of the China Dream is that China is finally reclaiming a position of prosperity and power enjoyed before the period of national humiliation. To achieve the dream, China requires an effective government, a prosperous economy, a harmonious society, and a strong military.¹⁰

The PLA’s “Strong Army Dream” (强军梦) had its genesis in Xi Jinping’s inspection of the Guangzhou Military Region in December 2012, a visit in which he prominently visited the destroyer Haikou.¹¹ There, Xi did not mention the Strong Army Dream, but did expound on the need for a strong military to achieve national rejuvenation. Xi impressed upon observers the need for increased training, Party control of the military, and the ability to fight and win any type of war.¹² Similarly, Xu Qiliang, vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission and former head of the Air Force has stated, “The China Dream explicitly set forth the Party’s goal of strengthening the military.”¹³

Xi’s visits to naval installations have led many Chinese Navy observers to state that the dream involves naval power and the need to protect territorial seas. During Xi’s inspection of the Guangzhou Military Region, which showcased naval reviews, South Sea Fleet Commander Jiang Weilie stated, “The over three million square kilometers of territorial waters represents an important strategic resource for the achievement of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the China Dream.”¹⁴ In addition, in April 2012, President Xi visited the naval base at Sanya, a strategically important base in Southern Hainan province that lies at the northern part of the South China Sea. There, Xi stressed that the Navy keep in mind the goals of a strong army, merge individual ideals with the Strong Army Dream, and strengthen the sense of mission.¹⁵

The Strong Army Dream is not the sole purview of the PLA Navy, however. General Armament Department chief Zhang Youxia, for example, is quoted as saying, “We must lose no time preparing the necessary equipment for military struggle, accelerate the promotion of high-tech equipment projects, concentrate efforts on resolving contradictions and problems that restrict the innovation and development of equipment, complete the rendezvous and docking of the Shenzhou 10 ... and Tiangong 1, and make our due contributions to the realization of the ‘China Dream’ and

7 Cary Huang, “Just what is Xi Jinping’s ‘Chinese dream’ and ‘Chinese renaissance’?” *South China Morning Post*, February 6, 2013, <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1143954/just-what-xi-jinpings-chinese-dream-and-chinese-renaissance>.

8 Wen Xianyuan, “用“关键一招”实现“中国梦” [Use a ‘Key Trick’ To Materialize the ‘China Dream’], *Jingji Ribao Online*, January 10, 2013, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/201301/10/t20130110_24017122.shtml.

9 “努力实现中华民族强军梦” [Diligently Implement the Strong Army Dream of the Chinese People], *People’s Daily Online*, May 14, 2013, <http://military.people.com.cn/n/2013/0514/c1011-21480401.html>.

10 “习近平九提‘中国梦’” [Xi Jinping Mentions the China Dream Nine Times], *China Today*, April 16, 2013, http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctchinese/reports/article/2013-04/16/content_533776.htm.

11 “习近平在广州战区考察时强调 坚持富国和强军相统一 努力建设巩固国防和强大军” [During an Inspection of the Guangzhou Military Region, Xin Jinping Stressed the Unity of Being a Prosperous Nation and a Strong Military and the Need to Strive to Build a Consolidated National Defense and Strong Army], *Xinhua*, December 12, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-12/12/c_114003822.htm.

12 Fa Guang, “习近平：为实现“中国梦” 军方需改善作战能力” [Xi Jinping: To Achieve the ‘China Dream,’ Military Must Improve Combat Capabilities], *RFI*, March 17, 2013, <http://www.chinese.rfi.fr/中国/20130317-习近平：为“中国梦”-军方需改善作战能力>.

13 “在北京军区调研时强调切实实用党在新形势下的强军目标统一思想凝聚力量引领发展” [Xu Qiliang Inspects Beijing Military Region, Emphasizes Unifying Thinking, Gathering Strength, Directing Development According to the Party’s Goal of Military Strengthening Under the New Situation], *Xinhua*, April 12, 2013, <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2013/0412/c64094-21117911.html>

14 Bai Ruixue, Gao Yi, and Gan Jun, “南海大练兵-专访远海训练编队指挥员蒋伟烈” [Large-Scale Training in the South China Sea -- An Exclusive Interview with Jiang Weilie, Commander of the South Sea Fleet Distant Sea Training Formation], *Xinhua*, April 1, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/mil/2013-04/01/c_124530104.htm.

15 “牢记强军目标献身强军实践” [Remember the Goal of a Strong Army, Devotion Realize a Strong Army], *People’s Daily Online*, April 12, 2013, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2013/0412/c1024-21107503.html>.

‘dream of a strong army.’”¹⁶ Wei Fenghe, commander of the 2nd Artillery division, reinforced this technology interpretation by stating that his forces should “use the ‘China Dream’ and the ‘dream of a strong army’ to educate and stimulate officers and men, exert to build a strong strategic missile force based on information technology...”¹⁷ These views are consistent with the current Military Strategic Guidelines, which call for winning wars under conditions of informatization.¹⁸

While the precise meaning of the Strong Army Dream is ill-defined, statements from high officials, including President Xi, and its connection to the China Dream mean that this concept is likely to be a guiding force in Chinese military policy. This overarching dream is conceptually ambitious both in the military and non-military realms. However, the government has yet to take concrete action that will show the dream’s effect on military modernization. It may signal more funds for a blue water navy, an increased effort to informatize the military, or a mix of both. At this point, it appears that Chinese military modernization is set to continue under Xi Jinping in much the same lines as that under Hu. As this policy is more a continuation than a break, we may never see a policy that is an obvious direct result of the dream. Whatever the relative focus of the Strong Army Dream, a PLA with increased capacities in all areas will most likely result.

16 Cao Zhi and Li Xuanliang, “解放军代表表示: 加快推进国防和军队现代化” [PLA Delegates Talk About Accelerating the Modernization of National Defense and the Armed Forces], *Xinhua*, March 6, 2013, http://www.gov.cn/2013lh/content_2347555.htm.

17 *ibid.*

18 David M. Finkelstein, “China’s National Military Strategy: An Overview Of The ‘Military Strategic Guidelines’” in *Right Sizing the People’s Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China’s Military* (Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College (SSI), 2007), pp 98-126.