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Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military

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Unfortunately, discussions of asymmetric warfare all too often devolve into efforts to push pet programs or ideas, attack or defend political leaders, and substitute emotion for understanding. Thankfully, *Asymmetric Warfare* is cut from a different cloth. Dr. Rod Thornton, an authority on security issues at King's College London, has produced a practical and useful primer on this important subject. In doing so, he also dispels several common misconceptions, including the ideas that *asymmetric* means *unequal*, and that asymmetric warfare is solely a tool of the weak.

While asymmetric warfare can be practiced by any actor, it is the modern terrorist who creates the most concern. Thornton takes a close look at terrorists as adversaries and how "new" terrorists differ from their historical predecessors. He identifies three characteristics as particularly important: an increased degree of fervor, an increased ability to implement attacks, and an increased ability to cause mass casualties. The author takes the time to explain why these changes have occurred and how they might manifest themselves in future attacks.

Thornton does not overlook the relationship among terrorism and asymmetric warfare and strategic communication. In addition, he explores how an asymmetric opponent would seek to win a war through attacks on infrastructure and the use of deception, electronic warfare, and psychological operations. Each of these issues is dealt with in some detail.

Asymmetric Warfare is not a perfect book. A deeper discussion of historical examples of asymmetric warfare would have been a powerful addition to the work. It may also be that Thornton

overstates the vulnerabilities of some of the unmanned systems he examines. However, these flaws are minor at best. *Asymmetric Warfare* is a valuable addition to current security-related literature. It is especially useful for readers new to the field who are seeking a cogent and readable description of asymmetric warfare, its various facets and aspects, and potential methods that might be used to deal with asymmetric foes.

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Kamphausen, Roy, and Andrew Scobell, eds. *Right-Sizing the People's Liberation Army: Exploring the Contours of China's Military*. Carlisle, Pa.: Army War College, 2007. 582pp. (Information about free copies can be obtained at www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs.)

This edited volume combines high-level inquiry into the larger purposes and dimensions of People's Liberation Army (PLA) reforms with fresh data that are difficult to find elsewhere. Its overall theme, the likely future dimensions and missions of China's military, is addressed in contributions from leading experts in the field.

The chapters, organized by service, are solidly grounded in Chinese sources and knowledge of Chinese organizations. In a characteristically sound overview of China's national military strategy, David Finkelstein is scrupulous in his explanation of the relative authority of various Chinese military documents. Evan Medeiros assesses that while Chinese nuclear doctrine has become increasingly sophisticated (while remaining opaque to foreign analysts, particularly in the

area of “no first use”), “the development of conventional missile doctrine is . . . potentially incomplete.”

There is attention to both hardware and software, with particular focus on the human dimension of PLA capabilities. In a persuasive defense of the value of open-source research, Dennis Blasko explains that the ground forces, which still dominate the PLA, are modernizing and undertaking new nontraditional missions, including domestic and international humanitarian operations. While restructuring and modernization are likely to occupy the ground forces for years, Blasko notes that salaries for many PLA personnel doubled in 2006.

A wide range of possibilities is considered. Phillip Saunders and Erik Quam offer several alternative scenarios for PLA Air Force (PLAAF) force structure, and insights into the key factors that shape them. In assessing future PLAAF operational concepts, Kevin Lanzit and Kenneth Allen state that the PLAAF is trying “to become actively involved in managing China’s military space program with an emphasis on the informatization aspects.”

While the authors are careful to offer balanced assessments of capabilities and limitations, it is clear that dramatic new possibilities are emerging for the PLA. In his chapter on command, control, and targeting, Larry Wortzel judges that PLA “informatization” could be remarkably rapid and successful. “PLA officers seem convinced that using ballistic missiles to attack naval battle groups is a viable concept, and they obviously are actively pursuing the capability,” Wortzel asserts, adding that “the PLA will have near real-time regional intelligence collection capability from space in a few short years, if it does not already have it.” On this note, Michael McDevitt estimates that China “currently

has seven satellites in orbit that can contribute to ocean surveillance.” China’s first radar satellite, launched in 2006, “can probably inspect objects as small as twenty meters in length and is thus excellent for identifying ships.” While Chinese nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) development faces a high barrier to entry in terms of acoustic signature reduction, McDevitt judges, China’s navy may be preparing “to arm nuclear attack submarines with nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.” Bernard Cole projects that, despite current limitations in naval aviation and training, “the PLAN of 2016–17, at three times its present size, will dominate East Asian navies, with the possible exception of the JMSDF [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force] . . . and will offer a very serious challenge to the U.S. Navy when it operates in those waters.”

In the final chapter, Ellis Joffe concludes that the need to deter Taiwan from declaring independence has driven much of China’s recent military modernization, and Beijing is growing increasingly confident in this regard. Yet Beijing remains far from reaching its presumed goal of achieving a “paramount position in the East Asian region.” It is hoped that this volume’s contributors will continue to probe the possibility of such a transition occurring—with the understanding that much may remain unclear to Beijing’s leaders themselves.

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Yoshihara, Toshi, and James R. Holmes, eds. *Asia Looks Seaward: Power and Maritime Strategy*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2008. 226pp. \$49.95

As the first decade of the twenty-first century draws to a close, the most