

1974

## The Chinese High Command "A History of Communist Military Politics"

David W. Elabor  
*U.S. Marine Corps Reserve*

William H. Whitson

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### Recommended Citation

Elabor, David W. and Whitson, William H. (1974) "The Chinese High Command "A History of Communist Military Politics"," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 27 : No. 4 , Article 18.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol27/iss4/18>

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those who are required to practice leadership, for those who wish to seriously study it, and for those who are responsible for the teaching of the subject.

CARL E. GIESE, JR.  
 Commander, U.S. Navy

Whitson, William H. *The Chinese High Command "A History of Communist Military Politics."* New York: Praeger, 1973. 557p.

Prior to the 20th century, succession in dynastic China was a relatively simple affair of direct inheritance. Despite their functional importance, the members of conciliar bodies had absolutely no claim to the throne. In modern China, however, the inevitable loss of Mao will create a question of succession with significant international consequences. Nevertheless, as Whitson explains in *The Chinese High Command*, the situation may not be as calamitous or grueling as one might assume. Indeed, the absence of Mao may auger an increasingly cohesive and modernized state which will be a more predictable actor on the international stage.

The focus of Whitson's book concerns the politics and machinery of the Chinese power structure in relation to the military. Extremely well organized and researched, the study represents one of the most valuable publications concerning modern China. Whitson has compartmentalized his subject into three principal areas. The sections offer a review of modern China's political and military history, a detailed analysis of the six main army groups, and a conclusory examination of the connections and pressures which are likely to guide Chinese domestic and foreign policy in the future.

The chapters concerning the formative years of the People's Liberation Army offer a concise background detailing the creation and development of today's armed forces. Together with a

chronological presentation of the major events which forged the Communist military, there is a detailed examination of the early relationships between commanders and their military regions. The value of such personal studies is made apparent by the fact that the same military commanders of the 1930's retain power within their respective regions today. The plethora of names and intricate groupings of commanders, dates, and locations is cumbersome, yet necessary. The names and events which are inextricably interwoven both convey the conspiratorial atmosphere and highlight perhaps the most startling revelation made by Whitson, the degree of power diffusion in modern China. Modern China is not the monolith presently portrayed but a federalist state, balancing power and authority between the central and regional governing bodies. These potential sources of political power, based on either economic or military advantages, become more evident as the question of succession to Mao nears a decisive point. Indeed, the Chinese High Command mirrors a quasi-federalism which could more readily devolve into a feudalistic society, reminiscent of traditional warlordism, rather than evolve into the omniscient Communist state.

The detailed analysis of the military structure also scrutinizes the ethics and style of the military hierarchy which, despite the efforts of Mao and the political forces, remains relatively secure. The military style, comprising the organization, strategy, and tactics of the army retained by the Chinese command, reflects the influence of Russian advisers upon a military fundamentally loyal to the warlord model. The Chinese Communist experiences in the civil war and the Korean conflict indicated a triumph of the Russian warlord model of a conventional army over the peasant army concept advocated by Mao. The conventional style adopted by the military is, ironically, a product of the

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expansionist directives of Mao. For an army to wage war beyond its power base, as in India, Korea, or Mongolia, it must necessarily abandon the "fish-in-the-sea" concept. Consequently, as the military forces continue their conventional development, their utility as an international political force is enhanced. The increasing requirements of a modern army have also enabled the Chinese military to expand its domestic control over resource allocation and the administrative bureaucracy, with a commensurate decline in the civilian management.

Following the Cultural Revolution, the army was directed by Mao to restore order and establish a new administrative bureaucracy. The imposition of martial law quickly established the army as a de facto government, and by 1971 the army was irrevocably positioned as a

political force. Current military influence in the internal affairs of the PRC renders somewhat deceptive the fact that there are only 5 military men in the 25-man Politburo. Despite the failure to staff the vacancy caused by the mysterious disappearance in 1971 of Lin-Piao, former Minister of Defence, and other efforts by Mao and Chou En-lai to reduce the army's power, the military influence continues to appreciate. The growth of the army, notes Whitson, has apparently substituted the military in lieu of the party as the primary agent of Chinese communism. And, for the reason, Whitson's scholarly study of the High Command is a significant and vital contribution to our knowledge of the Asian scene.

DAVID W. ELBAOR  
Captain, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve



A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good.

*Samuel Johnson, Boswell's Life, 1763*