



China: Will COVID-19 Slow Military Modernization?

OE Watch Commentary: In May, representatives of China's government and military convened at the 13th National People's Congress (China's national legislature), where they discussed ongoing military reforms and COVID-19. The first accompanying article from *Jiefangjun Bao*, reminds readers what had been stated in 2017 during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, that 2020 is the year in which China expects to achieve its goal of "building the national defense and the military," while also constructing a "solid foundation" that will ensure a "first-rate military in the world." This is the year that the army expects to have completely achieved "mechanization" with major progress made in "informationization," while significantly improving its "strategic capability."

The article describes the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic as having seriously challenged the military. For example, it states that the control and prevention of the epidemic has been a "major test" for the Joint Logistics Support Force, which had undergone reforms that were based on the growing requirements of joint operations, joint training, and joint support.

Meanwhile, Xi Jinping continues to push the military to the forefront of the battle against COVID-19, while also stressing the need to strengthen combat training, being highly responsive, and safeguarding national sovereignty, security, economic development, and strategic stability. China's English-language state-sponsored media sources, such as the second and third accompanying article extracts from *China Daily* and *Xinhua* respectively, reported widely on Xi's attendance at the 26 May event, where, during a meeting, he stressed the need to up the military's involvement in multi-functional roles. According to the articles, some of these roles include: gearing up combat preparation, conducting battle drills in a flexible manner, developing plans for the next five years in a way that will maximize the defense budget, "accelerating capacity building on biosecurity defense, supporting social development, and offering assistance to help alleviate poverty." All the while, Xi urged the PLA to achieve its goals while also maintaining "effective epidemic control on a regular basis." **End OE Watch Commentary (Hurst)**



Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

Source: Palácio do Planalto via Wikimedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xi_Jinping#/media/File:Xi_Jinping_2019.jpg, CC BY 2.0

“In a time where epidemic prevention and control is on one hand and combat capacity building is on the other, achieving the goals on time is not optional. It is mandatory.”

Source: Chen Guoquan, "Military Representatives Engage in Spirited Discussions on Reforms to Strengthen the Military: Solving Development Difficulties, Accelerating Development Progress," *Jiefangjun Bao*, 26 May 2020. http://www.81.cn/2020zt/2020-05/26/content_9821916.htm

Military Representatives Engage in Spirited Discussions on Reforms to Strengthen the Military: Solving Development Difficulties, Accelerating Development Progress

“With regard to the Army, the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China put forth that by 2020, mechanization was to be achieved, informationization was to have made significant progress, and strategic capability was to have greatly improved. Whether this goal can be accomplished on time depends on whether or not the strategic deployment and national defense can be advanced and completed on time.” Many military representatives said that efforts to prevent and control the coronavirus epidemic should not slacken and that building combat effectiveness cannot be relaxed for a moment. In a time where epidemic prevention and control is on one hand and combat capacity building is on another hand, achieving the goals on time is not optional. It is mandatory.

The prevention and control of the epidemic has been a major test that demonstrated the effectiveness of the Joint Logistics Support Force. In joining the main battlefield of combatting the epidemic in Wuhan, Hubei, the Joint Logistics Support Force resolutely acted as the guardian of the defenders of the people's safety and health, successfully withstanding the severe test.



Continued: China: Will COVID-19 Slow Military Modernization?

Source: Huang Panyue, “Xi Urges Military Combat Readiness,” *China Daily*, 27 May 2020. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2020-05/27/content_9822805.htm

Xi Urges Military Combat Readiness

Effectiveness of national defense system reforms tested by outbreak

... the novel coronavirus outbreak has had a profound effect on the world situation and China’s security and development. Therefore, he [Xi Jinping] said, the Chinese military must stick to bottom-line thinking, comprehensively strengthen combat training, respond effectively and in a timely way to sophisticated scenarios and firmly safeguard national sovereignty, security, development interests and its strategic stability.

... gear up combat preparation and conduct battle drills in a flexible manner.

Xi also ordered the military to produce sound plans for its development in the coming five years. It should make detailed and accurate calculations on how to spend the defense budget to make sure every expenditure is worth making.

Moreover, he requested that troops support economic and social development and offer assistance to poverty alleviation work.

Source: “Xi Emphasizes Strengthening National Defense, Armed Forces,” *Xinhua*, 27 May 2020. http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/2018/tpxw/202005/t20200527_800207496.html

Xi Emphasizes Strengthening National Defense, Armed Forces

Chinese President Xi Jinping Tuesday stressed ... accelerating capacity building on biosecurity defense, among others.

Xi demanded reform and innovation to address new situations and problems exposed in the epidemic and ordered accelerating the research and development on COVID-19 drugs and vaccines by tapping the advantages of military medical research.

He also stressed scientific innovation on national defense and training of high-caliber professional military personnel.

Noting that this year marks the end of the 13th five-year plan for military development, Xi said extraordinary measures must be taken to overcome the impact of the epidemic to ensure major tasks on the military building are achieved.

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