



China Reforms Military Reserve System

OE Watch Commentary: In late June, the CCP Central Committee and Central Military Committee announced a new adjustment to the Military Reserve System. The adjustment entails a change in the command structure, bringing the reserves under the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and the Central Military Commission (similar to the 2018 reform of the People’s Armed Police). The reserves are currently parceled out across China and subordinate to the local civilian government (province, prefecture, etc.) and military authorities (military districts).

The PLA is a Party Army—officers take their oath of loyalty directly to the CCP, not the Chinese state or constitution. The control of the armed forces by the CCP is one of the foundational principles of Chinese governance, most famously summed up by Mao Zedong as “The Party commands the gun” [党指挥枪]. As such, the adjustment will strengthen CCP’s control over all of China’s Armed Forces. The accompanying passage from *Xinhua* discusses this change.

This is a significant undertaking. Public estimates (2009 and 2019) of the size of the reserve force have hovered around 510,000. Within the reserves, active-duty PLA officers occupy some positions such as Division, Regiment, Battalion, and Company leaders while the remaining billets filled with reservists. The reserves train to the same standards as active duty PLA units, are better equipped than militia units, and receive 240 hours of military and political training each year. Others serve as civilian or technical cadres. In peacetime, the reserves are involved in national economic construction projects or disaster response. There are reserve units of all types across branches and services.

While the PLA initially established a reserve force in 1955, it abolished this in 1958. Reforms that began in the early 1980s reconstituted the reserves as a real force, wearing the same uniforms and being formally part of the PLA Ground Forces order of battle. In the 2000s, the overall number of reserve infantry divisions was reduced, replacing some with brigades or specialized units. The PLA Navy, Air Force and Second Artillery Force (now the PLA Rocket Force) added reserve forces in 2005. The Army reserves includes infantry, artillery, AAA, tank and engineering forces, among others. Navy reserve units include reconnaissance, minesweeping and laying, radar and communications units. PLA Air Force reserve units include SAM, radar and other specialized forces, while PLA Rocket Force reserve units largely appear to serve in maintenance and other support roles. More recently reserve units have been created with new combat capabilities, such as UAV units.

In early 2016, the CMC National Defense Mobilization Department (NDMD) [中央军事委员会国防动员部] was established with the goal of streamlining responsibilities ranging from conscription and militia forces to the reserves. However, these reforms appear to have encountered some difficulties, and media reports on the results of inspection tours conducted to assess the state of reforms indicate the reforms were far from complete.

The new reforms directly affect the chain of command for reserve units, which is believed to be a source of problems, including corruption. It is too early to judge the impact of the change on combat effectiveness, but the most important consequence of this will be the CCP’s strengthened control over all of China’s Armed Forces. **End OE Watch Commentary (Wood)**



“From July 1 China’s reserve military forces will be brought under the centralized and unified command of the Communist Party of China (CCP) Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.”



Continued: China Reforms Military Reserve System

Source: “中共中央印发《关于调整预备役部队领导体制的决定》(CCP Central Leadership Issues ‘Decision on Adjustment of Reserve Forces Leadership System’),” *Xinhua*, 28 June 2020. http://www.chinamil.com.cn/jmywyl/2020-06/28/content_9842325.htm

The CPC Central Committee has issued a Decision Regarding Adjustment of the Reserve Force Leadership System. According to the Decision, starting from July 1 China’s reserve military forces will be brought under the centralized and unified command of the Communist Party of China (CCP) Central Committee and the Central Military Commission.

The Decision points out that the Reserves are a component of the PLA and that the adjustment in the leadership structure is aimed at upholding the CPC’s absolute leadership over the army and building a strong military in the new era, bringing the PLA a fully world-class force, and carry out the adjustment according to the principle that military forces are military, police are police and civilians are civilians (i.e. forces should clearly follow chains of command and have clear status regarding their makeup).

The Decision requires Central and National organizations, local party committees and governments to fulfill their responsibilities for national defense construction in accordance with relevant laws and regulations and support the construction of reserve forces. It calls on relevant military and civilian units to take active and coordinated measures to implement the changes to the leadership structure, actively coordinate, work closely together, do the relevant work in detail, and ensure the smooth transformation and orderly convergence of the leadership system of the reserve forces.

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