

PLA Fields New Integrated Command Platforms, Improving Combined Arms Operations

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OE Watch Commentary

The accompanying excerpted articles from *China Military Online* describe improvements resulting from the deployment of integrated command platforms within China's People's Liberation Army (PLA). These improvements highlight the PLA's continuing emphasis on using modern command and communication systems to make the force nimbler and more lethal.

The first article highlights an exercise conducted by an artillery brigade under the 72nd Group Army (Eastern Theater Command). The exercise featured the use of both a scout team and a unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) company. Pointing to the changing nature of war, the brigade commander noted that it is imperative to improve the speed at which artillery can acquire targets, fire on them, and displace to a new position. In the exercise, the artillery battalion was also able to coordinate with a UAV company, using an improved command-and-control system that streamlined communications between reconnaissance, command, and firepower units. According to the article, the PLA partnered with the Chinese defense industry to address deficiencies in the artillery command systems. The resulting integrated command system allows them to have a constantly updated view of

the battlefield, quickly identify enemy targets, direct friendly units to suitable terrain, and issue fire mission plans.

China is rapidly upgrading the mobility of its artillery across the force, with an emphasis on replacing towed systems with wheeled variants. Last December, Chinese state media showcased a new 122mm system designated the PCL-171, and other reports indicate that the 155mm PCL-181 entered service with the Eastern Theater Command in early 2020. The PLA is also adopting wheeled systems for Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) across the force (see "PLA Ground Force Adopts 155mm Mobile Artillery System," *OE Watch*, August 2020).

The second excerpted article discusses the role of these platforms in improving operational design planning. Reporters witnessed an exercise held by an unidentified unit under the 81st Group Army (part of the Central Theater Command) in which a new command system was used. Officers noted that these systems allowed much closer coordination than before and reduced setup times for command posts, which had been time consuming, vulnerable to the weather, and laborious to move.

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PLZ-07 122mm self-propelled artillery.

Source: Wikimedia User Dan from Beijing, China https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Self-propelled_artillery_of_PLA.jpg Attribution: Self-propelled artillery of PLA, CC BY 2.0

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Source: Tong Zujing [童祖静], Hong Wei [洪伟], “发现即摧毁！他们这样练就‘秒杀’绝招 (Discover and destroy! This is How They Practiced the ‘Insta-kill’ Trick),” China Military Online (Official news outlet for the People’s Liberation Army), 13 October 2021. www.81.cn/lj/2021-10/13/content_10097972.htm

An artillery brigade of the 72nd Group Army relied on informatization to improve its rapid counterattack capability—This “Iron Firepower Fist” is able to fight at further ranges, faster and more accurately.

As three sirens sounded, an artillery brigade of the 72nd Group Army kicked off a training exercise in southern Jiangsu Province. Upon hearing the order, a long-range strike team moved quickly to firing positions. Analyzing available information on targets in the cabin of a command vehicle, Xu Yifeng [徐逸峰], the commander of an artillery battalion, quickly selected targets and ordered strikes to be carried out. Acting quickly, they were able to go from alert to fire strike completion significantly faster than the unit’s ‘excellent’ standard for training.

According to Xu, “In the past, artillery’s ability to shoot and retreat was measured in minutes. Now it is accurate to the second. The line between being destroyed and surviving is just a blink of an eye. On the battlefield, if return fire is even one second faster, and the chance of victory is that much greater.”

In order to improve the ability of artillery to respond quickly, the brigade set up a task force to work with equipment manufacturers to streamline information sharing between the reconnaissance, command, and firepower combat components to make combat planning and command decision-making more accurate and efficient.

Based on the requirements of rapid firepower response, they systematically addressed issues that introduced delays in receiving and transmitting commands, modifying equipment, and upgrading software, resulting in an informationized command platform that integrates battlefield environment awareness. Combat plans can now be dynamically updated based on this information to ensure that a given unit can respond to orders to fire at any time.

According to the command staff of the artillery brigade, with the accelerated development of informatization and the widespread use of precision-guided weapons, artillery cannot simply be focused on achieving “one shot, one hit” accuracy—reconnaissance and intelligence support and command and control methods must also be improved across the board. Seizing the initiative on the battlefield makes being lethal at “longer ranges, at faster speeds, and with greater accuracy” imperative.

Source: Wang Song [王松], “互联互通：一体化作战指挥平台让营级指挥所战场视野更广阔’ (Interconnected: The integrated operational command platform allows battalion-level command posts to have a broader perspective on the battlefield),” China Military Online (Official news outlet for the People’s Liberation Army), 10 November 2021. www.81.cn/lj/2021-11/10/content_10106571.htm

In late autumn, an operational design exercise [作战筹划演练] was in full swing at a field training site of a brigade of the 81st Group Army. Inside the command vehicle, the battalion commander and several staff officers gaze intently at a screen as they discussed the next phase of the battle plan virtually with their superior officer. This new scene is only possible due to the brigade’s introduction of an integrated operational command platform.

According to the brigade leadership, “In the past, sand tables, maps, and documents were required for designing operations. Establishing command posts for each operational level was time-consuming, laborious, cumbersome and easily susceptible to environmental impacts.”

They also noted that with the introduction of a new set of equipment, connecting operational units is now possible. They took this as an opportunity to invite factory technicians to visit training ground and work with officers and enlisted to build an integrated combat command platform. They were able to deploy and debug the new command and control software in a relatively short period of time.

According to reports, with the help of this platform, commanders and staff of the brigade at all levels can now carry out collective discussions, real-time situational mapping and other command operations virtually. Coordinated team operations are now more convenient and efficient, and operational command efficiency has been greatly improved.