



ANALYSIS

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Xi Jinping's Intensifying Engagement with the Military and Defense Industry

Xi Jinping has been a regular visitor to military and defense industrial facilities since becoming Communist Party General Secretary and Central Military Commission Chairman in 2012. But the frequency of these engagements picked up significantly in the summer of 2016. The focus of these visits were on new organizations and new initiatives that central to his vision of turning the Chinese defense establishment into a state-of-the-art outfit able to fight and win twenty-first century wars.

PLA Army, Strategic Support Force, and Rocket Force

From July through September 2016, Xi Jinping visited the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Army Headquarters, PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF), and the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF). Each of the visits coincided with the First Party Congresses of the respective services. They mark Xi's first visits to any of the five military service headquarters in almost two years—the last [visit](#) being his April 2014 inspection of PLA Air Force headquarters.

The [visit](#) to PLA Army Headquarters was made on July 27 just prior to the August 1 anniversary of the founding of the PLA. Xi's speech encouraged the PLA Army to improve its capabilities in areas including rapid response, remote mobility, and special operations. Loyalty to the party and party leaders was heavily stressed.

Xi's [visit](#) to SSF during its First Party Congress on August 29 was his first visit to the newly created service since its establishment in December 2015. Information regarding the SSF's role and operations is still incomplete, but it is regarded as the [core of China's information warfare force](#). Xi's visit included an inspection of an operations command center.

In his remarks, Xi called the SSF a new-type of combat force to safeguard national security and an important support for the military's joint combat systems. Innovation was a key focus of his speech, including a summon to focus more heavily on actual combat, being innovation-driven, system construction, "intense efficiency", and strategic guidance of civil-military integration (CMI). Xi included an admonition to seize, or "grab by the bull nose", science and technological innovation and the development of advanced technology and equipment, as well as the development of S&T talent. Regarding CMI, Xi stressed the need to seize it and not let go, and to play to the advantages of the conditions in a socialist market economy, coordinating force resources, and expanding the depth and breadth of CMI to build an integrated national strategic capability.

Xi's [visit to the PLARF](#) was made during the First Party Congress of the PLARF on September 26. This was his first visit to the newly created force since its establishment in December 2015. PLARF replaced the Second Artillery and was elevated from an independent branch to a military service alongside the PLA

Army, PLA Navy, PLA Air Force, and the also newly created SSF. Song Zhongping, a former Second Artillery officer and a professor at the PLARF's Equipment Research Academy, [expects that the PLARF](#) will eventually expand beyond its predecessor's responsibility of land-based nuclear capabilities and conventional missile force to include responsibility for all nuclear forces in China's nuclear triad.

Xi's speech lauded the PLARF as "irreplaceable" in protecting global strategic balance and stability and encouraged the rocket force to accelerate its development and increase its strategic capability. Xi further stressed the need to achieve new breakthroughs to enhance China's strategic deterrence capability, and emphasized the need to implement the military strategic principles and the Outline of the 13th Five-Year Plan for the building and development of the armed forces. He also called for the creation of a PLARF-specific development strategy aimed at creating a more "scientific" rocket force structure and troops and to increase combat effectiveness. This would include fully integrating the PLARF into the all military joint operations command system. Xi further discussed at length the need of the PLARF to be ideologically and politically in line with the party.

Civil-Military Integration (CMI)

On July 29, Xi gave a [speech at an award ceremony](#) in Beijing for individuals promoting civil-military solidarity and model cities and counties. Over 400 cities and counties were recognized during the ceremony along with dozens of organizations and individuals. Xi's remarks as a whole reflected his statement made during the speech, "When military and civilian act as one, see who under heaven can oppose" (军民团结如一人，试看天下谁能敌). CMI has been a hallmark of Xi's focus over the past couple years, highlighted by its elevation to the level of national strategy in early 2015. Much of the emphasis has been at coordination at the national level and crafting of policies, regulations, and institutions that will overcome current barriers to its progress. At the local level, cities and counties have been rapidly forming organizations and policies also to develop CMI and to provide opportunities for local companies to enter the defense industry. Xi's visit to the award ceremony is a recognition of these efforts and the successes that have been achieved by some.

On October 19, Xi [visited the 2nd Civil-Military Integration Development High-Tech Achievements Exhibition](#) at the PLA Armored Forces Engineering Academy in Beijing. During the visit, he emphasized CMI's status as a national strategy and called for greater cooperation between the military and civilian sectors. Xi also stressed the need to further innovate in CMI reforms to increase both demand and supply for CMI products and to promote better management, operation, and policy making in CMI. The exhibition featured innovative CMI products that have come out since the 18th National Congress in 2012 that brought Xi to power. Items on display included Beidou, hybrid power stations, underwater robots, cloud data encryption technology, large-scale 3D printers, and UAVs.

China Aero Engine Corporation

On August 28, Xi [sent a letter](#) to be read at the establishment ceremony of the China Aero Engine Corporation. The letter encouraged the company to accelerate the realization of indigenously researched and produced aero engine and gas turbine in order to make China into a global aviation power. Xi and China's top leadership support of the aero engine was well known and led to the announcement of the new company in March 2016, but continued leadership support will be important for its ongoing progress.

Other Military Visits by Xi

Xi Jinping also [visited the Wuhan Joint Logistics Support Base and Joint Logistics Support Center](#) (September 13, in Beijing), and a [symposium](#) to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Liu Huaqing, a former vice chairman of the Central Military Commission and a PLA Navy commander regarded as China's founding naval strategist and who is given credit for the modernization of the PLA Navy (September 28).