

**XI JINPING RESTRUCTURES PEOPLE'S
LIBERATION ARMY'S COMMAND
SYSTEM AND MILITARY ZONES**

LIU Bojian & CHEN Gang

EAI Background Brief No. 1123

Date of Publication: 24 March 2016

Executive Summary

1. While China's Central Military Commission (CMC) remains a party-state organ of the highest military control and comprises top party and military leaders, the priorities of the four headquarters have been slightly adjusted particularly by underscoring their services under the party's leadership.
2. The new five theatre commands are designed to both strengthen Party control over the military and the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) capability of adapting to new demands of national defence. To ensure a smooth transition, generals from the ground forces still dominate the leadership of each new theatre command.
3. The Army's General Command is designed to further integrate the three forces (army, navy and air force), an urgent agenda after the PLA's leaders have recognised the weaknesses of an excessive focus on the army and the inefficient mechanism of coordinating multi-type forces in modern battles.
4. The PLA Rocket Force is China's core strategic deterrence power, which will strengthen the PLA's capability of nuclear deterrence and medium and long range precision strike.
5. The Strategic Support Force makes up the crux of PLA's joint operations; it has responsibilities that go far beyond cyber operations to include the five domains of intelligence, i.e. technical reconnaissance, electronic warfare, cyber offence, cyber defence and psychological warfare.
6. Strategically, the military reshuffle is to advance the PLA's joint operational capability, facilitate modernisation of weapon systems, accelerate China's transition towards maritime power and improve the PLA's systemic commanding efficiency.
7. Politically, with a narrower and more horizontal layout, the reorganisation enhances intra-PLA supervision and inter-section checks and balances, making it

less likely for generals to dominate certain sections that were previously too far down the hierarchy for top leaders to supervise.

8. The reform further ensures the Party's leadership over the military. Under the direct leadership of the CMC, most of the agencies are either integrated or promoted from existing PLA departments, an inevitable process of Xi's power consolidation and crackdown on the long-existing factionalism in the PLA.