

**THE MILITARY ROLE IN CHINA'S
FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING**

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Executive Summary

1. The perception of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) influence on Beijing's foreign policy-making may not be wrong, but it may not be accurate either. Instead of being an outside influence, the PLA is an integral part of the decision-making process.
2. Xi Jinping represents PLA interests in and viewpoints on foreign policy in the Politburo Standing Committee as commander-in-chief. PLA representatives sit in the Council of State Security (CoSS), which sets the strategic direction of China's national security (NS) initiatives. The PLA's organizational presence in the CoSS is both heavy and decisive.
3. Functionally, Beijing's international pursuits are managed by the Leading Group on Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoF) and the Central Military Commission (CMC). The MoF is in charge of China's generic foreign affairs and daily diplomacy, while the CMC is responsible for NS/military-related foreign affairs and defining the bottom line for employing force in conflicts.
4. The top civil-military bodies are on par in institutional status. The line between this division of labor can be thin over key diplomatic issues. Very often, it is difficult to demarcate where Beijing's normal diplomacy ends and where NS/military dynamics begin.
5. Many international incidents involving China are foreign affairs that have heavy NS/military implications. Their functional differences have not been fully explored, nor adequately ascertained.
6. Institutionally the PLA's role is more directional than detailed and often behind the scene. The confusion is further muddled by the opaque nature of Beijing's decision-making process, the ill-institutionalized civil-military reaction to external threats, and the power disparity between top diplomats and generals in managing China's core national interests at a time of intense territorial disputes.

7. An analysis of civil-military interaction on foreign policy-making has to be taken from two perspectives, namely, the broad CCP/PLA consensus on regime stability at a time of domestic change and world pressure, and the PLA's role in China's NS/military related foreign affairs under generic civilian guidance. Their interplay is governed by their institutional procedures and codified rules of the game.
8. The ultimate civilian guidance for foreign policy-making has shifted from Hu Jintao's internally focused strategic patience (the strategic opportunity period) to Xi's parallel emphasis on domestic stability (regime consolidation) and sovereignty security.
9. This shift has greatly enhanced the PLA's role and onus in China's overall foreign policy-making process as sovereignty security is a PLA domain as assigned by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s.