

CHINA'S BATTLE-READY MILITARY: ASSESSING POWER AND PURPOSE

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Battle readiness has become a defining concept in the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) modern reforms, revealing China's evolving approach to war, deterrence and its rivalry with the United States. While much attention has been paid to structural reforms, such as military restructuring and weapons acquisition, less has been studied on how Chinese media and leadership frame "battle readiness". This framing raises two critical questions: does China have the capability to fight wars and is its stance offensive or defensive?

Using advanced text-mining techniques (Latent Dirichlet Allocation and K-means clustering with Principal Component Analysis visualisation), complemented by close readings of Xi Jinping's speeches, this study shows how the PLA's combat preparedness is tied to Xi's central leadership and China's strategic posturing on flashpoints like Taiwan and the South China Sea. The findings suggest that while the Chinese Communist Party underscores military preparedness, this rhetoric reflects contingency planning for worst-case scenarios rather than imminent aggressive intent.

(Click on the link to read the above in [Chinese](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#))

Chinese:

中国的战备化军队：评估实力与意图

战备已成为人民解放军（PLA）现代化改革中的一个标志性概念，体现了中国在战争、威慑以及与美国竞争方面不断演变的思路。尽管外界对军事体制重组与武器采购等结构性改革给予了大量关注，关于中国媒体与领导层如何界定“战备”的研究却相对不足。这种界定提出了两个关键问题：中国是否具备打仗的能力？其立场是进攻性的还是防御性的？

本研究采用先进的文本挖掘技术（潜在狄利克雷分配 LDA，以及结合主成分分析可视化的 K-均值聚类），并辅以对习近平讲话的精读，展示了人民解放军的作战准备如何与习近平的核心领导以及中国在台湾、南海等热点问题上的战略姿态相联系。研究发现，尽管中国共产党强调军事准备，这一表述更体现了针对最坏情形的应急筹划，而非迫在眉睫的侵略意图。

French:

LA PREPARATION DE L'ARMEE CHINOISE AU COMBAT: ÉVALUER SA PUISSANCE ET SES OBJECTIFS

La préparation au combat est devenue un concept central dans les réformes modernes de l'Armée populaire de libération (APL). Elle révèle l'évolution de l'approche chinoise de la guerre, de la dissuasion et de sa rivalité avec les États-Unis. Si les réformes structurelles, comme la réorganisation de l'armée et l'acquisition d'armements, ont attiré l'attention, la manière dont les médias chinois et la direction politique formulent la « préparation au combat » a été moins étudiée. Cette construction soulève deux questions cruciales : la Chine a-t-elle la capacité de mener des guerres, et sa posture est-elle offensive ou défensive ?

En recourant à des techniques avancées de fouille de textes (allocation de Dirichlet latente et clustering K-means avec visualisation par analyse en composantes principales), complétées par des lectures attentives des discours de Xi Jinping, cette étude montre comment la préparation au combat de l'APL est liée à la direction centrale de Xi et à la posture stratégique de la Chine sur des points chauds tels que Taïwan et la mer de Chine méridionale. Les résultats suggèrent que, bien que le Parti communiste chinois insiste sur la préparation de l'armée, cette rhétorique reflète davantage une planification contingente pour faire face aux pires scénarios qu'une intention d'agression imminente.

Spanish:

EL EJÉRCITO DE CHINA PREPARADO PARA EL COMBATE: EVALUACIÓN DEL PODER Y EL PROPÓSITO

La preparación para el combate se ha convertido en un concepto definitorio en las reformas modernas del Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), revelando el enfoque cambiante de China hacia la guerra, la disuasión y su rivalidad con Estados Unidos. Aunque se ha prestado mucha atención a las reformas estructurales, como la reestructuración militar y la adquisición de armamento, se ha estudiado menos cómo los medios chinos y el liderazgo enmarcan la “preparación para el combate”. Este encuadre plantea dos preguntas críticas: ¿China tiene la capacidad de librar guerras y su postura es ofensiva o defensiva?

Mediante técnicas avanzadas de minería de textos (Asignación de Dirichlet Latente y agrupamiento K-means con visualización mediante Análisis de Componentes Principales), complementadas con lecturas detalladas de los discursos de Xi Jinping, este estudio muestra cómo la preparación de combate del EPL está vinculada al liderazgo central de Xi y al posicionamiento estratégico de China en puntos de tensión como Taiwán y el Mar de China Meridional. Los hallazgos sugieren que, si bien el Partido Comunista Chino subraya la preparación militar, esta retórica refleja una planificación de contingencia para escenarios de peor caso más que una intención agresiva inminente.

Executive Summary

1. Between 1 and 2 April, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) ran Strait Thunder-2025, continuing Joint Sword naval blockade drills. Its simulated strikes against Taiwan's energy and port infrastructure, escalated propaganda against Taiwan's political leadership and increased "grey-zone" tactics in the South China Sea.
2. Xi Jinping's push for a "World Class Military" by 2035 has driven PLA modernisation, including structural reforms, advanced capabilities and a major nuclear buildup, aimed at parity with top militaries such as that of the United States. Xi and theatre commanders, including the Eastern Theatre, shows that the PLA is combat-ready.
3. *People's Daily*, China's principal state mouthpiece, repeatedly emphasises "combat readiness", signalling that the PLA is poised for action. This propaganda helps normalise war in society and cultivate support for militarisation.
4. Despite its projected combat readiness, the PLA's readiness is constrained by Xi's centralised control and political indoctrination, which may undermine operational effectiveness.
5. In spite of China's drive to build a world-class, combat-ready military force, qualitative analysis of Xi's speeches and *People's Daily* coverage indicates the rhetoric chiefly serves deterrence rather than indicating offensive intent.
6. Three military-related speeches in Volume V of *The Governance of China* (27 May 2022 to 20 December 2024), the latest volume that contained a compilation of 91 of Xi Jinping's spoken and written works, were selected, emphasising the importance of strengthening military governance and political loyalty as well as reinforcing strategic capabilities in emerging fields.
7. Xi frames "maritime military readiness", protection of China's maritime rights and development of maritime economy as pillars of China's maritime governance, hinting that maritime military readiness is a means rather than an end to safeguard China's maritime interests.