

# CHINA CARRIES OUT OVERHAUL OF MILITARY

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Lean and mean: The Army now absorbs less than half of the total personnel in the Chinese armed forces. Reuters

China is on course to overhaul its military by pumping in technology and cutting down personnel, to enable its leaner armed forces to project power far beyond their borders.

The Xinhua news agency reported that for the first time, the Army now absorbs less than half of the total personnel in the Chinese armed forces.

Beijing is also modernising its nuclear deterrent, based on a triad of long range missiles, bombers that can deliver atomic weapons, and nuclear submarines. The size of China's Type 094 nuclear submarines, which entered service in 2010, is expected to climb to eight by 2020.

The Xinhua report signalled that the Navy, Air Force, rocket force and strategic support force, which handle areas such as cyber warfare, comprise more than half of China's armed forces. Besides, the entire chain of command in the People's Liberation Army has been changed to enable integrated warfare of all combat units, steered by a joint operational chief of staff.

"The Army's share of the total number of troops in the military has fallen below 50%; the number of active duty members in non-combat institutions has been reduced by nearly half, and the number of officers has decreased by 30%," says the report.

## 'Holistic reforms'

The write-up points out that the military's "holistic and revolutionary reforms" began in November 2013, when the Communist Party of China, in its 18th edition, held a plenary session of its Central Committee, a top decision making body.

The report follows Chinese President Xi Jinping's remarks earlier this month that Beijing wanted a peaceful unification with Taiwan on a one-country-two-systems basis. But Mr. Xi also warned that China reserved the right to use force. In 1997, Hong Kong peacefully integrated with mainland China under the one-country-two-systems formulation, allowing the metropolis to function as a self-governing unit.

China's military reforms became visible in early 2016 when President Xi, as head of the apex Central Military Commission (CMC) inaugurated the formation of five-theatre commands. The Eastern, Western, Northern, Southern and Central theatre commands have been tailored for joint combat under the supervision of the CMC. The Joint Staff Department of the CMC is the overall command center and the headquarters of the PLA.

China's intent to cut down its human resources had become visible, even earlier when President Xi announced in September 2015 that he intended to shed 300,000 troops from the PLA. Despite its long-term goal of military advancement, some analysts say China will have to consistently add new aircraft carriers to dominate the high seas far away from its shores.

Last month, the state-run tabloid *Global Times* quoted Chinese military experts as saying the PLA Navy will have to operate at least five to six aircraft carriers in the near future, including the country's first two nuclear-powered ones, in order to exercise a blue water footprint. China has

one aircraft carrier, while another has begun sea trials. A WeChat article from Xinhua on November 25 announced that the construction of a third aircraft carrier had commenced.

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