

# Economic Growth, Regime Insecurity, and Military Strategy: Explaining the Rise of Noncombat Operations in China

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**Abstract:** *Although China's armed forces have yet to complete its ambitious modernization program, its military strategy has begun to emphasize the ability to conduct noncombat operations such as disaster relief and peacekeeping in addition to traditional war fighting. This new component of China's military strategy is best explained by an unexpected relationship between economic growth and regime security. Although growth is key to the legitimacy of leaders in developing countries, it also creates new sources of domestic unrest and increases the vulnerability of the economy to external shocks, both of which, if unchecked, can harm future growth. As a result, developing countries such as China may use their armed forces to maintain political stability and provide services that the state lacks, such as emergency disaster relief. These conclusions are based on original data from China.*

## Introduction

In the past decade, noncombat operations have emerged as a new component of China's evolving military strategy. To be sure, preparing to fight a high technology and "informationized" war remains the focus of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) modernization and reforms. Nevertheless, China's armed forces have started to stress the importance of conducting a wide range of noncombat operations (*feizhanzheng junshi xingdong*) or the use of the military for purposes other than waging war.<sup>1</sup> These operations include disaster relief and peacekeeping, among others. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the discussion of noncombat operations in the *Jiefangjun Bao*, the official newspaper of the PLA, began in the late 1990s and has increased dramatically since 2008.

The growing role of noncombat operations in China's military strategy presents a theoretical and empirical puzzle. Within the study of international security, scholars widely believe that states will use their growing wealth to generate conventional military capabilities for traditional combat missions, especially wars with other states.<sup>2</sup>

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FIGURE 1  
 'NONWAR MILITARY OPERATIONS' IN THE *JIEFANGJUN BAO*.



Note. Each column represents the number of articles per year that include the phrase “nonwar military operations” (*feizhanzheng junshi xingdong*).

Source: *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily) database.

In addition, the majority of past rising powers have conformed to this theoretical expectation, investing solely or primarily in combat capabilities. The United States, for example, only began to develop doctrine for “military operations other than war” following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In China, however, the majority of noncombat operations described in authoritative PLA texts emphasize domestic missions, such as managing natural disaster and social unrest, though international missions such as peacekeeping also receive attention. Moreover, China has begun to emphasize noncombat operations even though the modernization of its force for traditional combat operations is far from complete. In 2010, the Pentagon classified only 25 percent of China’s naval surface combatants and fighter aircraft as “modern.”<sup>3</sup>

I argue that the rise of noncombat operations in China’s military strategy is principally a response to internal threats to regime security that are a byproduct of rapid economic growth. Concerns about domestic stability have created a new dimension of China’s defense policy. I begin with the assumption that leaders craft national policies to deal with the most pressing threats that they face, including not just external threats to the security of the state but also internal threats to a leader or a regime’s political survival. Survival at home is as important as survival abroad. Growth, especially rapid growth, is usually a source of legitimacy for leaders in developing countries such as China. Such growth, however, also generates new sources of instability such as income inequality and corruption that can fuel societal unrest, which, in turn, may jeopardize continued growth and ultimately legitimacy. Under these conditions, as Samuel

Huntington noted several decades ago, the need for continued growth creates a powerful interest in maintaining domestic political order and preventing the spread of social unrest.<sup>4</sup> The armed forces provide leaders with one important tool for achieving these goals. Thus, for developing countries, economic growth can create a strong incentive for a state's military to develop capabilities to conduct noncombat operations.

My starting point is the military strategy that China adopted in 1993. This strategy emphasized the ability to fight and win "local wars under modern especially high-technology conditions" and was revised in 2004 to highlight the role of information technology in modern warfare.<sup>5</sup> The basic goals of the strategy were defending the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) against internal threats, safeguarding China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, promoting national unification, protecting maritime interests, and supporting regional stability.<sup>6</sup> What President Hu Jintao described as 2004 China's "development interests" accounts for the PLA's new emphasis on noncombat operations. Since then, the goals of China's military strategy have reemphasized the importance of internal security and maintaining domestic political order. The scope of regional stability has broadened to include a new global dimension, especially in regions where China trades heavily. Ensuring the ability to access resources for future development has been underscored. To achieve these goals, China's military strategy has stressed the role of noncombat operations to maintain stability both at home and abroad to promote continued economic growth.

Several implications follow from my argument. First, I identify a new causal pathway through which domestic politics can influence the goals and content of a state's military strategy, especially in the developing world. To be sure, the role of regime insecurity in a state's military strategy is only a partial one and cannot account for all aspects of a state's military strategy. Nevertheless, it can help explain the noncombat dimension of a state's military strategy, especially the domestic component, that existing approaches emphasizing external factors cannot.

Second, I suggest an alternative perspective on the relationship between rising powers and the likelihood of armed conflict. Most approaches to the study of power shifts in international politics, including variants of power transition theory, assess the propensity for conflict at the systemic level of analysis.<sup>7</sup> In general terms, conflict is more likely to occur because uneven economic growth alters the relative position of states, which can create incentives for either rising or dominant powers to use force. I suggest that the conversion of material capabilities into military power is far from automatic. Instead, domestic factors such as regime security also shape the type of military capabilities that rising powers choose to develop.

Third, the growing role of noncombat operations in China's military strategy demonstrates the continued domestic role for China's armed forces, which includes the PLA, whose principal mission is external defense, and the paramilitary People's Armed Police (PAP) charged with maintaining internal stability. By contrast, scholars frequently view the PLA's focus on noncombat operations principally as a tool of statecraft designed to strengthen China's international influence.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis on noncombat operations by both the PLA and PAP suggests that China will develop combat capabilities more slowly than might otherwise be the case, especially if the sources of regime insecurity remain in the coming decade. Although detailed budgetary

data are unavailable, the organizational changes that have been implemented to conduct noncombat operations indicate that the PLA is devoting fewer resources to long-range force projection than analysts expected a decade ago. To be sure, China still remains involved in conflicts and disputes that could escalate to war, especially over Taiwan and various maritime disputes in East Asia. Nevertheless, the continued domestic orientation of China's armed forces may help to dampen spirals of hostility with other great powers associated with the security dilemma.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section outlines how economic growth can create incentives to develop noncombat capabilities by increasing political instability that then threatens future growth and legitimacy. The second section surveys Chinese language sources on military affairs to identify and discuss the three goals of China's military strategy that are shaped by concerns about economic growth and regime security. The third section examines in detail the noncombat capabilities that the PLA has sought to develop and shows how these aim to address the internal and external sources of instability created by economic growth.

### **Economic Growth, Regime Insecurity, and Military Strategy**

Why would economic growth create incentives for a developing country such as China to develop noncombat military capabilities, especially for domestic missions? One answer can be found in the relationship between economic growth and regime security. In developing countries, especially authoritarian ones, economic growth is an important source of legitimacy for the state. The process of growth, however, can increase political instability, which jeopardizes future growth and ultimately the security of the ruling regime. When political instability increases, leaders may choose to use their country's armed forces internally, which can broaden the goals and content of military strategy from external defense to include regime security.

The logic of political instability and regime insecurity as a source of military strategy extends earlier work on the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy. To explain alliance formation in the developing world, Steven David argues that leaders "omni-balance" by forming alliances to counter the most pressing threat that they face.<sup>9</sup> For many leaders in the developing world, especially in authoritarian states, the most pressing threats to their political survival emanate from internal political challenges, including coups, rival factions, riots, and rebellions. As a result, a leader may seek to form an alliance with an adversary abroad to balance against more immediate internal threats at home. Leaders design their foreign policies to deal with domestic problems as well as foreign ones. If internal threats can explain alliance formation, then they may also explain other national policies, including military strategy.

For leaders in developing countries, economic growth creates several powerful reasons for using their armed forces to maintain internal political stability. First, despite bolstering legitimacy, the process of rapid economic growth also creates new challenges for the state and sources of political unrest, which, if not addressed and managed, can limit future growth and ultimately threaten legitimacy. As Samuel Huntington noted several decades ago, leaders in developing countries pursuing high-growth strategies place a premium on stability and order because of the social upheaval of

modernization.<sup>10</sup> Sources of instability associated with rapid growth include internal migration, urbanization, income inequality, and corruption, among others – all of which can spark or stoke social unrest. Second, the ongoing societal transformation and sources of instability that growth creates increase the vulnerability of the economy to external shocks, which can also further increase instability and jeopardize future growth. These shocks can include negative developments in the global economy beyond the control of individual leaders, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the loss of jobs in export sectors around the world, and other events such as natural disasters and pandemics that call into question the capacity and legitimacy of the state.

Political instability can shape the goals and content of a state's military strategy in several ways. At the most general level, it suggests that one goal in the military strategies of developing countries will be maintaining domestic political order in addition to the traditional emphasis on defense against foreign enemies. States may design their military strategy not only to maximize security against external threats and combat with other armed forces, but also to manage and reduce internal threats. Key tasks required to achieve these domestic goals might include containing outbreaks of social and political unrest or providing relief and maintaining order when natural disasters occur. Whatever the specific circumstances, the general goal of maintaining domestic stability requires the capability to perform a variety of noncombat operations including disaster relief, search and rescue, riot control, counterinsurgency, counterterrorist, and other operations. Such operations tend to be manpower intensive and require specialized training because the tasks involved are not those typically used in combat (though some are, such as logistics, communications, and command and control).

Threats to economic growth and regime security, of course, can also occur beyond a state's borders, especially for developing countries that pursue growth through integration with the global economy. Through the process of development, such states acquire new interests overseas in those factors that facilitate or hinder future growth, which can also shape the goals and content of a state's military strategy. Two such interests stand out. The first is access to the key inputs for future growth, especially natural resources. Countries that depend on world markets for these inputs may consider using their armed forces to help ensure their ability to access them. The second is the stability of the world trading system, including the security of sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and access to foreign markets. To be sure, the relationship between new overseas interests and economic growth is consistent with structural approaches. At the same time, these interests can arise not just because of competition among states for relative power, but also because they can negatively affect growth, increase political instability, and threaten regime security. New overseas interests that developing countries acquire often have a domestic basis in addition to an international one.

These external interests that influence growth and political stability can also shape the goals and content of a state's military strategy in several ways. The main goal is maintaining stability in the international system to ensure the ability to gain access to resources in other countries, protect overseas investments, and enable the uninterrupted flow of trade. At a minimum, these goals require the ability to project and sustain at least a small number of forces overseas to perform noncombat operations, such as peacekeeping, disaster relief, and noncombatant evacuation as well as combat

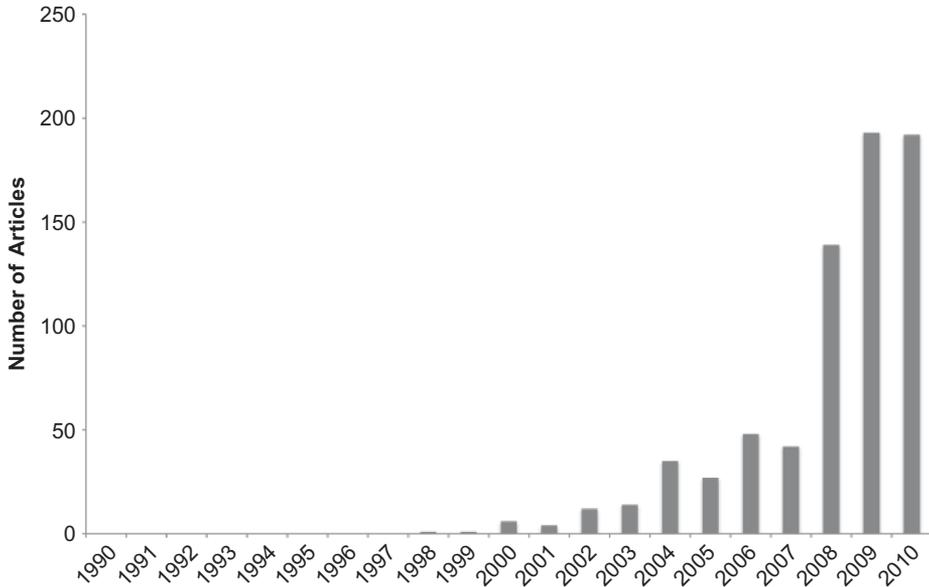
operations such as sea lane security. The ability to “show the flag” in regions where a state has investments or trades heavily can also be useful to ensure that its interests are taken into account in these regions during periods of instability.

My argument about the effect of the relationship between economic growth and regime insecurity on military offers two contributions. First, it can explain a phenomena that existing theories about rising powers cannot – namely, why a rising power would seek to develop capabilities for noncombat operations, especially domestic ones, when its military modernization for traditional war fighting is far from complete. Second, it also suggests that some externally oriented goals are more closely related to domestic political concerns than just international competition among states. Of course, growth ultimately enables a state to increase its power in the international system, but the domestic incentives for growth and how they can shape military strategy at home and abroad should not be overlooked. The relationship between growth and regime security is especially relevant for developing countries because of the fragility of their institutions and vulnerability to political instability. Whereas the state in advanced industrialized societies can take internal security for granted, the state in the developing world cannot. For these states, internal regime security is as important as external state security.

As a rapidly developing country, China offers a rich environment in which to explore the relationship between economic growth and military strategy. First, since the start of opening and reform, the percent of the population living in urban areas increased from 19 percent in 1979 to 43 percent in 2008.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, internal migration has mushroomed. Although the “roving population” of migrant workers is hard to count, it appears to include more than 17 percent of the population, or approximately 221 million people.<sup>12</sup> Second, given the ongoing societal change, the government faces constant pressure to provide jobs in both urban and rural areas. In 2007, only 71 percent of college graduates were able to find work.<sup>13</sup> Although the official jobless rate measures only a portion of the labor force, a 2010 white paper suggested that true unemployment that included surplus labor in rural areas hovered around 20 percent.<sup>14</sup> Third, the level of inequality has increased steadily. When Deng Xiaoping started his reforms, the gini coefficient (that measures the distribution of income within a state) was 0.30, which suggested a relatively equal distribution. By 2010, however, it had jumped to 0.47.<sup>15</sup> Although lower than other developing countries such as Brazil (0.59) and Mexico (0.55), this jump nevertheless reflects a fairly substantial change in society.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the economic foundations of growth are shaky. In recent years, and especially since the global financial crisis in 2008, local governments borrowed heavily from China’s banks and their debt is now one third of China’s gross domestic product (GDP), a fact that significantly increases the overall debt-to-GDP ratio from 20 percent to well over 50 percent.<sup>17</sup> The emphasis on growth through investment and not consumption continues to run the risk for high levels of inflation, which would only heighten the pressure on employment.<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, Chinese officials have expressed growing concern about maintaining stability. In February 2011, the Central Party School convened a special and unprecedented study and discussion session (*yantao ban*) for provincial- and ministerial-level cadres that the entire Politburo attended. During his speech at the opening session,

FIGURE 2  
 'SAFEGUARDING STABILITY' IN THE *JIEFANGJUN BAO*.



Note. Each column represents the number of articles per year that includes the phrase “safeguarding stability” (*weiwen*).  
 Source: *Jiefangjun Bao* (PLA Daily) database.

President Hu Jintao noted the importance of “social management” (*shehui guanli*) amid China’s rapid social and economic development. Hu stressed that improved social management was needed to “maintain social order, promote social harmony, [and] ensure that people can live and work in peace.”<sup>19</sup> At around the same time, China’s security services reacted swiftly and sharply to appeals from overseas activities to launch a “jasmine revolution” (*molihua geming*) following the popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt in early 2011. Reporting in the Chinese media is also consistent with growing leadership concerns about instability. As shown in Figure 2, the number of articles in the *Jiefangjun Bao* that mention “safeguarding stability” (*weiwen*) has increased dramatically since 2000.

Below, I trace how economic growth and concerns about regime security have affected the goals and content of China’s military strategy. Toward this end, I tap new and original data from Chinese language sources. The use of Chinese military writings poses several challenges for scholars, including assessing the authoritativeness of any particular work and determining the degree to which it represents mainstream military viewpoints. I address these challenges in two ways. First, I use a collection of previously unpublished speeches given by Hu Jintao to various military audiences within the PLA in his capacity as the chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC).<sup>20</sup> These speeches offer insight into how China’s senior leaders view the use of military power as well as the goals and content of China’s military strategy. That these speeches were not openly published matters for two reasons.

First, the views contained in the speeches were not tailored for the ears of foreign audiences. Second, the speeches were disseminated as part of a campaign to educate the PLA about its “historic mission in the new phase of the new century” (*xinshiji xinjieguan wojun lishi shiming*).<sup>21</sup> The concept of a new historic mission described how the need to ensure China’s continued development required that the PLA shoulder new tasks known as the “three provides and one role” (*sange tigong, yige fabui*). These tasks are to: (1) maintain the CCP’s status as the ruling party, (2) provide a security guarantee to safeguard China’s continued development, (3) help safeguard China’s expanding national interests, and (4) play a role in fostering world peace.<sup>22</sup>

Second, I examine professional military writings by Chinese military strategists in the PLA. In particular, I use writings primarily from two authoritative and influential institutions that play a central role in developing the PLA’s military strategy. The first is the Academy of Military Science (AMS), which is a research institute for military theory directly under the CMC. Scholars from the AMS, for example, led the drafting of the combat regulations that were published in 1999. The second institution is the National Defense University (NDU), which is the PLA’s main teaching and training organization for senior officers across the military services.<sup>23</sup> Both organizations maintain active publishing houses for works on military affairs along with flagship journals, including *Zhongguo junshi kexue* (*China Military Science*) and the *Guofang daxue xuebao* (*Journal of the National Defense University*), respectively.<sup>24</sup>

### **Broadening Strategic Goals: From Survival to Development**

In the past decade, the goals of China’s military strategy have increasingly emphasized development in addition to survival. The effect of economic growth on China’s military strategy can be observed in three goals that expand and broaden the 1993 strategy. These goals include: (1) reemphasizing internal security and maintaining domestic political order, (2) widening the scope of regional stability to include a new global dimension, and (3) highlighting access to resources that China views as necessary for continued growth. To be sure, the importance of other goals, such as achieving Taiwan’s unification or defending claims in territorial disputes, has not diminished. The PLA is developing the capabilities to pursue multiple objectives simultaneously. Nevertheless, the effect of growth has been to stress factors related to development in addition to China’s traditional security concerns. As Hu Jintao explained in 2004, China’s armed forces “must pay attention not only to protecting national survival interests but also to protecting national development interests.”<sup>25</sup>

The concept of a “new historic mission” for China’s armed forces demonstrates how growth has broadened the scope of China’s military strategy to include noncombat operations. Hu Jintao introduced the concept of a new historic mission in December 2004 in his first major speech as chairman of the CMC (a position he assumed from Jiang Zemin in September 2004). As detailed by Hu, the concept outlined the role of the armed forces in ensuring China’s continued economic growth. Moreover, and underscoring the link to regime security, the CCP tasked the PLA and PAP with this new historic mission. When Hu introduced the concept, he described how it was necessary to support the CCP’s own “three great tasks” of continuing China’s economic

modernization, completing national unification, and safeguarding world peace and promoting common development. According to Hu, “Amid this great historic process, what kind of historic mission our army should undertake is a great task that must be deeply considered.”<sup>26</sup> The overarching purpose of identifying a new historic mission for China’s armed forces has been to further the CCP’s own objectives, which in turn, remain centered on economic development, for its own survival as well as for its political objectives.

The emphasis in descriptions of the historic mission concept on protecting economic development reflects greater attention within the PLA to China’s growing economic interests. In many military publications, discussions of the economic dimension of security have become increasingly prominent.<sup>27</sup> According to noted AMS scholar Major General Li Jijun, for example, “Traditional security with national defense as dominant is the pillar of national security.” At the same time, however, “nontraditional security with economics at the core is the foundation of national security.”<sup>28</sup> Likewise, reflecting the growing emphasis on economics, scholars from the PLA’s Nanjing Political Academy conclude that “at present, China’s most important national interests are the promotion of economic development and the achievement of national unification.”<sup>29</sup> Such statements are perhaps a natural reflection of China’s steady economic growth during the past three decades.

#### *Internal Security and Political Order*

As my argument about political instability and regime security suggests, authoritative PLA sources emphasize the many internal threats to China’s continued development, especially domestic unrest and instability. Indeed, in Hu Jintao’s introduction of the PLA’s new historic mission, concerns about regime security receive as much attention as external interests. As a result, the first task that Hu Jintao assigned to the PLA as part of its new historic mission is, unsurprisingly, “to provide an important powerful guarantee to consolidate the party’s ruling status.”<sup>30</sup> Although defense of the CCP and regime survival have been a longstanding goal for China’s armed forces that predates even Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, it was reemphasized by Hu because of the new challenges that the party faces as the transition from a planned economy to the market continues. It also demonstrates that China’s leaders believe that political instability can not only disrupt economic growth in a variety of ways but also pose a clear challenge to legitimacy of the CCP.

During a speech at an enlarged meeting of the CMC in December 2005, Hu Jintao described how China’s rapid economic development and integration into the world economy created new threats to the CCP’s power. His statement is worth quoting at length:

In the current stage, our country’s social contradictions and problems are increasing, and contradictions and problems in society are increasing. International and domestic hostile forces constantly scheme to use these contradictions and problems to stir up trouble. As our country’s connections with the outside world increasingly expand and deepen, the interactive quality of internal security and international

security strengthens. If not handled well, some internal problems could evolve into international problems; some international problems may also be transmitted internally and bring out problems of social instability. We must have a clear understanding of this new characteristic of the national security situation.

Hu then described the various actors that threatened China, especially those that targeted the CCP, such as “separatist forces,” democratic movements, and Falungong activists.<sup>31</sup>

In one of the first PLA studies of its new historic mission, internal threats to the regime are prominent. According to scholars from the NDU, “the pounding of complex social problems” exerts the greatest influence on China’s development. The scholars note that income inequality poses an especially serious threat because it decreases public trust in government, undercuts support for domestic reform, increases social unrest, and weakens the government’s authority.<sup>32</sup> In light of these complex challenges, an editorial in the *Jiefangjun Bao*, the PLA’s official newspaper, observes that “social contradictions are influencing one another, and the number of factors harmful to social stability have increased. Whatever aspect is not prevented or is mismanaged will influence and strain [development goals].”<sup>33</sup> Political order remains central for economic growth and regime security.

For China’s leaders, internal threats to domestic stability and political order are easy to find. Indeed, many of these threats would be classified as nontraditional because the source is not another state but nonstate actors (including societal groups) and the natural environment. The first set of internal threats includes the sharp increase in “mass incidents” whereby citizens protest against local governments over a range of social issues associated with reform and rapid development, including corruption, land seizures, and environmental degradation. The number and scope of demonstrations, protests, and riots classified as “mass incidents” in China has increased dramatically from 8,700 in 1993 to potentially as high as 170,000 in 2009.<sup>34</sup> The second set includes terrorism and ethnic unrest, such as the large-scale protests in Lhasa and throughout Tibetan areas in March 2008 and the ethnic violence in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, in 2009. Ethnic unrest is especially worrisome for China’s leaders because many ethnic groups reside in frontier regions adjacent to China’s international boundaries.<sup>35</sup> The third set of threats includes natural disasters, such as the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan that killed more than 8,700 people (and wounded more than 374,000),<sup>36</sup> the snow and ice storms in January 2008 that threatened to cripple national transportation networks, or the earthquakes and droughts in 2010. Other threats include pandemics such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) crisis in 2003 and China’s own vulnerability to cyber attack.

All of these, especially if more than one occurs at the same time, are perhaps the threats most likely to derail China’s continued growth and, as a consequence, threaten regime survival. Moreover, China’s leaders clearly recognize the potential threat. During the National People’s Congress (NPC) in 2009, Hu Jintao called on China’s armed forces “to provide mighty support for national interests and social stability.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, in March 2010, Premier Wen Jiabao’s report at the NPC noted the “major task of safeguarding stability in key areas” for the PLA and PAP.<sup>38</sup>

*External Stability*

The importance of external stability is a commonly discussed factor in scholarly analysis of China's grand strategy. This was a goal in the 1950s during the "Bandung Era" and received renewed attention after Deng Xiaoping launched China's reform drive in 1979. The goal of external stability remains today but assumes an even broader scope and greater importance than before because of China's integration into the global economy. In the past, China sought stability abroad to conserve resources for domestic policy initiatives. The primary concern was that conflict abroad would drain resources and attention away from reform. This concern remains today. Yet with China's gradual shift to a market economy amid deepening integration with the global economy, China is more vulnerable to instability abroad than ever before, especially in regions beyond its immediate periphery.

At the 16th Party Congress in 2002, Jiang Zemin put forth notion of a "period of strategic opportunity" for China's development in which to build a "moderately well-off" (*xiaokang*), or middle-class, society. The opportunity for such development existed because the odds of great power war during the coming two decades were deemed to be low and Deng's reforms had created a foundation for further growth. After becoming general secretary, Hu Jintao has embraced this goal and instructed the PLA to "provide a strong security guarantee for protecting the great period of strategic opportunity for national development" as part of its new historic mission.<sup>39</sup> As the *Jiefangjun Bao* editorial noted, "The key to maintaining and seizing this period [of strategic opportunity] lies in creating a stable and dependable security environment."<sup>40</sup> Threats to stability that authoritative military publications identify include the escalation of China's outstanding territorial and maritime disputes with its neighbors as well the conflict over Taiwan.<sup>41</sup> According to the *Jiefangjun Bao*, the PLA can safeguard the period of strategic opportunity against these threats by "using the deterrent role created by military power to prevent or postpone the outbreak of war."<sup>42</sup> The implication is not that China would necessarily settle these disputes through force, but that with a strong military, it would deter others from challenging China on these issues and thus divert attention away from continued economic development.

Beyond these traditional security interests, however, another component of the PLA's new historic mission includes contributing to the protection of the global commons and hedging against the spread of armed conflict. On the one hand, a stable external environment for China requires not only peace on its immediate periphery, where China has active disputes with other states, but also stability in other regions where China has new interests such as investments and where instability could adversely affect China's development. Toward this end, Hu Jintao instructed China's armed forces in December 2004 to "play an important role in maintaining world peace and promoting common development."<sup>43</sup> As a *Jiefangjun Bao* editorial echoed, the PLA "must undertake more duties and play a bigger role in all kinds of activities for safeguarding world peace," such as through peacekeeping or international disaster relief operations.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, many military publications observe that economic globalization will also increase friction, especially among developing countries, that can threaten stability worldwide. According to the *Jiefangjun Bao*, "The more opportunities [developing countries] have to enter the international arena, the more

opportunities they will have for clashes and conflicts with hegemony [and] power politics.”<sup>45</sup>

The emphasis on the global dimension of China’s external security environment reflects the vulnerability of China’s economy to threats beyond its borders in addition to domestic political instability. Greater integration brings less national autonomy and control over domestic affairs. The commandant of the Nanjing Ground Forces Academy, Major General Chen Yong, notes, for example, that economic globalization produces a “butterfly effect” (*hudie xiaoying*) in international security affairs. Because globalization deepens interdependence among states, an incident in any one area can influence other states and other regions, “creating a global shock.”<sup>46</sup> The recent global financial crisis, for example, underscored China’s vulnerability to the whims of the global economy, with implications for employment and central government tax collection.<sup>47</sup> Discussions of nontraditional security threats highlight other problems, from domestic terrorism to environmental security, that globalization creates or intensifies.<sup>48</sup>

A final component of external stability is the security of trade routes and SLOCs. Sea lane security is a traditional combat mission, but in Chinese writings, it has received new attention in the context of concerns about domestic stability. The vast majority of China’s trade is transported via the sea, as China relies upon overseas markets for its exports.<sup>49</sup> As the rise of piracy in the Gulf of Aden demonstrates, trade routes require protection and are part of the global commons. The security of maritime transportation routes affects all sea-borne trade but is especially salient for energy resources. Hu Jintao reportedly highlighted the problem of sea lane security with his November 2003 remark about the “Malacca Dilemma,” which referred to the large proportion of China’s imported energy supplies that traveled through this narrow waterway plagued by piracy.<sup>50</sup> A study from the PLA’s NDU indicates that more than 50 percent of ships flowing through the Strait of Malacca are bound for China.<sup>51</sup>

#### *Access to Resources and Markets Overseas*

Authoritative PLA writings on military affairs have identified access to resources and markets overseas for continued growth as a new interest that affects growth and needs protection. International competition, and not domestic stability, is the dominant driver of this set of concerns, but their discussion in the context of China’s domestic instability only increases their importance. As several military economists note, China’s economic development increasingly depends on access to overseas markets and resources, such as petroleum.<sup>52</sup> AMS scholar Wang Guifang, for example, argues that “the unimpeded supply of resources” is a “main interest” (*zhuyao liyi*) for the nation.<sup>53</sup> Energy, perhaps unsurprisingly, was one of the key resources that Wang highlights. Likewise, General Li Jijun reaches a similar conclusion, stressing the importance of access to overseas resources for continued development.<sup>54</sup>

More generally, descriptions of the PLA’s new historic mission notes new interests in resources that China has acquired. In the December 2004 speech, Hu Jintao described this task as “providing powerful strategic support for safeguarding national interests.”<sup>55</sup>

The first set of interests concern maritime resources. In introducing the historic mission concept, Hu Jintao described the ocean as “a treasure chest of strategic resources for the continued development of mankind.”<sup>56</sup> Other military publications during the past decade have echoed this theme by underscoring the importance of securing China’s “maritime rights and interests” (*haiyang quanyi*).<sup>57</sup> The importance of maritime security has increased because the ocean contains abundant resources, whose importance one scholar notes will only grow with the continuation of globalization.<sup>58</sup> In addition, China’s disputes over offshore islands and maritime demarcation, especially in the South China Sea, cannot be separated from a concern for resources.

The second and third areas where Hu Jintao noted that China’s interests in resources have expanded are in space (*taikong anquan*) and the “electromagnetic sphere” (*dianci kongjian*). When compared with the maritime domain, China’s interests in these areas are driven more by the dominant military position of the United States than by specific economic interests. Both space-based sensors and information networks are key components of American military power, whose “command of the commons” constrains the PLA.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, space is also seen as “a vast vista for the development of mankind” with resources for development.<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the increasing role of information technology in China’s economic development increases the vulnerability of its own economy to cyber attack.<sup>61</sup> Military publications express concern that if China fails to develop capabilities in these areas, then it will be “marginalized” and unable to tap their potential in the future.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Hu referred to space and the electromagnetic sphere as new “development security interests.”<sup>63</sup>

### **New Methods for New Goals: The Rise of Noncombat Operations**

The content of a state’s military strategy describes the “ways” or “methods” for achieving its strategic goals. When Hu Jintao introduced the concept of a new historic mission for the PLA, he also outlined the capabilities that it should possess. During an enlarged meeting of the CMC in December 2005, he said: “Starting from the overall international and domestic situation, we must . . . take strengthening the ability to win local wars under modern conditions as the core, and continuously raise the ability to deal with multiple security threats to ensure that our army can deal with crises, maintain peace, contain wars, and win wars under different kinds of complicated situations.”<sup>64</sup> During a 2006 meeting with PLA delegates to the NPC, Hu similarly instructed the PLA to “work hard to develop capabilities to deal with many kinds of security threats and complete diversified military tasks.”<sup>65</sup>

In Hu’s speeches, the phrase “many kinds of security threats” refers to the goals discussed in the previous section. By contrast, “diversified military tasks” means using China’s growing military capabilities in two different ways. The first highlights traditional combat operations and war-fighting capabilities. Although China’s economic growth through integration with the global economy increases the potential costs of conflict, China has not slowed its military modernization drive.<sup>66</sup> Instead, the PLA continues to stress the need to fight and win short wars as well as the importance of “strategic deterrence” so that the costs of conflict may be contained.<sup>67</sup> The second way of using military power emphasizes noncombat operations to enhance regime security

and promote economic development by maintaining stability at home and abroad. Despite the continued – and primary – importance of combat operations, the broadening of the goals of China's military strategy has focused attention on developing new capabilities for noncombat operations to conduct “diversified military tasks.”

### *Types of Noncombat Operations*

Consistent with a focus on regime security and the primacy of maintaining domestic stability, the types of noncombat operations most frequently discussed by Chinese military strategists are internal missions to help the state maintain public order and, ultimately, defend the CCP. Table 1 displays the results of a survey of 16 books published by the PLA on noncombat operations since 2004.<sup>68</sup> These books represent studies by research groups at different military institutions, including the AMS and the NDU, and many were published for internal use only (which enhances their authoritativeness on the subject). The survey demonstrates the dominant role of domestic noncombat operations in PLA writings on the subject, which can be grouped into three broad categories. The first is disaster relief and rescue, such as the operations that the PLA conducted after the 2008 Wenquan earthquake in Sichuan. The second is maintaining social stability, including containing demonstrations, riots, uprisings, rebellions, and large-scale mass incidents that would upset social order, especially in China's ethnic minority regions. A third category includes counterterrorism, which primarily addresses domestic terrorism, such as the attacks against government officials in many areas of Xinjiang in the 1990s or the heightened concerns about terror attacks during the 2008 Olympics and the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic in October 2009. What unites these types of operations along with others such as border security and garrison operations is that they all stress bolstering regime security through maintaining social order and managing internal challenges to the CCP.<sup>69</sup>

As Table 1 shows, not all of the new noncombat operations identified for China's armed forces are domestic. The two most frequently discussed international noncombat operations are peacekeeping and disaster relief. Peacekeeping is the only international noncombat operation that receives as much attention in Chinese writings as the domestic ones. In addition to enhancing China's image in international society, these operations play an important role in maintaining a stable external environment that facilitates China's development and bolsters regime security indirectly. Peacekeeping has attracted the most attention, and it is the one international noncombat operation where the PLA and PAP have accumulated the most experience.

In the past decade, the deployment of PLA and PAP soldiers in noncombat operations is consistent with the emphasis on domestic and not international missions contained in doctrinal writings. Table 2 lists the number of soldiers that participated in major noncombat operations since 1998. Four events involved the deployment of more than 100,000 troops. During the ice storms that swept through 21 provinces in China in January 2008, for example, Chinese soldiers helped to clear 32,000 km of roads and restore power in 21 provinces in the country.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, following the 2008 earthquake in the Wenquan region of Sichuan, Chinese soldiers rescued 3,338 individuals and evacuated more than 1.4 million people.<sup>71</sup> As Dennis Blasko notes, these deployments

TABLE 1  
PLA RESEARCH ON NONCOMBAT MILITARY OPERATIONS

	Domestic Operations						International Operations					
	Disaster Relief	Social Stability Maintenance	Counter-terror	Border Control	Garrison Operations	Nuke-Chem-Bio	Local Development	Peace Keeping	Disaster Relief	Military Cooperation	Show of Force	SLOC Protection
Zhang 2004	Y	Y	Y					Y				
Wang et al. 2006	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y			Y	
Fu et al. 2008	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y			
Han and Yue 2008	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y			
Jundui tufa shijian guanli yanjiu xiaozu 2008	Y	Y	Y					Y				
Ran 2008	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
Yang et al. 2008	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	Y		
(No author) 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	
Liu Xiaoli 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Liu Yuan 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	
Shou and Xu 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	
Song et al. 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	
Wang 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Xiao and Li 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Zhao 2009	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Wu 2010	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Total Mentions	16	14	14	8	7	3	2	13	7	6	3	3

Note: This table reports the results of a survey of 16 books on nonwar military operations that were written by teams of scholars from different PLA institutes. All but 2 were published since 2008.

Sources: (no author), *Zhixing diaoyanghua junshi renwu zhong de zhengzhi gongzuo* [Political Work in the Implementation of Diversified Military Tasks] (benshu bianxiezu, 2009); Fu Zhanhe, Zhang Ce, and Yang Jianjun, eds., *Feichuantong anquan junshi xingdong zhibui yanjiu* [Research on the Command of Nontraditional security military operations] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008); Han Weigong and Yue Shixin, eds., *Wancheng diaoyanghua junshi renwu [alu yuyong yanjiu* [Research on Legal Applications for Accomplishing Diversified Military Tasks] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2008); Jundui tufa shijian guanli yanjiu xiaozu, ed., *Jundui canyu chuzhi difang tufa shijian lingdao shiyu* [Leading Practice for the Military's Participation in Local Sudden Incidents] (Shenyang, China: Baishan chubanshe, 2008); Liu Xiaoli, ed., *Jundui yingfu zhongda tufa shijian be weiji feizhanzheng junshi xingdong yanjiu* [A Study of Nonwar Military Operations by the Armed Forces to Deal with Major Sudden Incidents or Crises] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2009); Liu Yuan, ed., *Feizhanzheng junshi xingdong zhong de zhengzhi gongzuo* [Political Work in Nonwar Military Operations] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009); Ran Ali, ed., *Shiming: Duoyanghua junshi renwu de feizhanzheng xingdong houqin* [Mission: Nonwar Military Operations Logistics for Diversified Military Tasks] (Beijing: Hachao chubanshe, 2008); Shou Xiaosong and Xu Jingnian, eds., *Jundui yingfu feichuantong anquan weixie yanjiu* [Research on the Military's Handling of Nontraditional Security Threats] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2009); Song Guocai, Shi Limin, and Yang Shu, eds., *Feizhanzheng junshi xingdong shili yanjiu* [Case Studies of Nonwar Military Operations] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2009); Wang Mingwu et al., eds., *Feizhanzheng junshi xingdong* [Nonwar Military Operations] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2006); Wang Naichang, *Quangxian juzai xingdong yanjiu* [Research on Rescue and Relief Operations] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2009); Wu Chaojin, ed., *Feichuantong anquan jundui xingdong wenti yanjiu* [Research on Nontraditional Military Operations] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2010); Xiao Tianliang and Li Guoting, eds., *Feizhanzheng junshi xingdong zhibi wenda* [Questions and Answers about Nonwar Military Operations] (Beijing: Junshikexue chubanshe, 2009); Yang Jin, Xu Feng, and Xu Lisheng, eds., *Feizhanzheng junshi xingdong gailun* [Introduction to Nonwar Military Operations] (Beijing: Junshikexue chubanshe, 2009); Zhang Aihua, ed., *Feizhanzheng xingdong* [Nonwar operations] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2004); Zhao Zongqi, ed., *Suixing duoyanghua junshi renwu zuzhi zhibui yanjiu* [Research on Organization and Command for Carrying Out Diversified Military Tasks] (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2009).

TABLE 2  
MAJOR TROOP DEPLOYMENTS FOR DOMESTIC NONCOMBAT OPERATIONS

Year	Event	PLA and PAP Troops	Reserve and Militia
1998	Major flooding of the Yangtze, Songhua, and Nen Rivers	300,000	5,000,000
2002	Flooding in Shanxi, Fujian, and 19 other provinces	20,000	170,000
2003	Flooding of the Huai River in Jiangxi, Hunan, and Shanxi provinces	48,000	410,000
2008	Snow and ice storms in 21 provinces	224,000	1,036,000
2008	Earthquake in Wenquan, Sichuan	146,000	75,000
2008	Security for the Olympics	131,000	na
2010	Earthquake in Yushu, Sichuan	16,000	na
2010	Mudslides in Zhouqu, Gansu	7,600	na

*Note.* Reliable data on PLA and PAP deployments in Tibet in 2008 and Urumqi in 2009 are unavailable.

*Sources:* Liu Junjun and Cai Pengcheng, "Zai suixing duoyanghua junshi renwu zhong chengzhang: fang Zongcan yingjiban zhuren Li Haiyang [Growth During Implementation of Diversified Military Tasks – Interview with Director Li Haiyang of the GSD's Emergency Response Office]," *Jiefangjun Bao*, December 3, 2010; State Council Information Office, *China's National Defense in 2008* (Beijing: State Council Information Office, 2008); Xiao Tianliang, *Junshi liliang de feizhanzheng yunyong* [The Nonwar Use of Military Power] (Beijing: Guofang daxue chubanshe, 2009).

represent the largest use of Chinese soldiers since China's 1979 invasion of Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> Overall, between 2005 and 2010, 2,785,000 PLA and PAP troops participated in disaster relief efforts, including 1,845,000 in 2009 and 2010 alone.<sup>73</sup>

By contrast, PLA and PAP involvement in international noncombat operations and the scope of their activities are limited. Between 1990 and 2010, 17,390 Chinese troops have participated in UN peacekeeping operations, a small fraction of the number that has participated in domestic noncombat operations.<sup>74</sup> China's first deployment of peacekeepers occurred in 1990, when five observers were dispatched to an United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) mission in the Middle East, and such deployments have increased substantially in the last decade. In December 2010, China had 1,955 peacekeepers overseas, primarily engineering troops and civilian police officers.<sup>75</sup> Although China has dispatched medical or search and rescue teams to ten different natural disasters in other countries since 2001, the total number of personnel involved was fewer than 1,000.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, roughly 7,040 sailors and marines have participated in antipiracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden since December 2008.<sup>77</sup> Finally, in February 2011, China's military conducted its first noncombatant evacuation operation when it dispatched four IL-76 transport aircraft from Xinjiang to Libya. The PLA Navy sent a frigate that was conducting escort missions in the Gulf of Aden to the Mediterranean to escort civilian ships that had been chartered to evacuate Chinese citizens from Libya.

Chinese writings also discuss two other types of noncombat operations. The first is military cooperation, which includes military exchanges, joint military exercises, and military aid.<sup>78</sup> Broadly speaking, these efforts can help to demonstrate China's growing military power, which is useful for strategic deterrence. At the same time, these activities also strengthen the PLA's ability to conduct domestic noncombat operations because many of the joint military exercises strengthen the PLA's ability to conduct counterterrorism or disaster relief operations at home. The majority of China's joint military exercises with other countries have emphasized counterterrorism operations and maritime

operations (mostly search and rescue). For example, the largest such exercise, “Peace Mission 2007,” involved the deployment of 1,600 Chinese troops to Russia to conduct counterterror exercises. From 2003 to 2010, China has participated in 33 joint military exercises, most of which were based either around maritime search and rescue (14) or counterterrorism (14).<sup>79</sup> As Scott Tanner suggests, both peacekeeping and joint military exercises focusing on counterterrorism and search and rescue strengthen China’s ability to conduct such operations within its own borders.<sup>80</sup>

The second emphasizes border security. Broadly speaking, border security operations are designed to maintain stability along China’s periphery, including the vast ethnic minority frontiers within China as well as areas adjacent to China’s land and sea borders. As discussed above, enhanced interdependence suggests new challenges to China’s interests. One type is border control closure and control operations (*fengkong xingdong*) designed to prevent the flow of illicit materials, weapons, and other contraband into China. According to one source, China conducted its first closure and control operation on its borders with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Nepal after the United States attacked the Taliban following September 11, 2001.<sup>81</sup> In 2005, for example, Hu Jintao specifically called for greater funding for frontier and coastal defense forces.<sup>82</sup> Another type is what Chinese sources refer to as garrison operations, which includes law enforcement in frontier regions and maritime areas as well as other operations designed to defend its interests on its immediate periphery. Border security is manpower intensive, involving 200,000 soldiers from local PLA units in various provincial military districts in addition to 100,000 border defense troops from the PAP.<sup>83</sup> Although border security is an old mission for the PLA and PAP, it has received renewed attention because of concerns about limiting flows across borders that might increase domestic instability.

As the example of border security illustrates, noncombat operations involve soldiers from both the PLA and the PAP. Although the PAP is a paramilitary force tasked with maintaining social stability, it cannot fulfill its missions without substantial support from the PLA.<sup>84</sup> During the 2010 earthquake in Yushu, Qinghai, for example, 12,798 troops were deployed within the first ten days of the disaster. Sixty-three percent of this force, or 8,143 soldiers, were PLA troops, primarily from the Lanzhou Military Region, while the others were from the PAP.<sup>85</sup> During the unrest in Tibet in 2008 and the riots in Urumqi in 2009, soldiers from PAP units were deployed visibly, riding in armored vehicles or suppressing demonstrations.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, consistent with its operational doctrine, PLA units were most likely sealing off affected areas to contain the spread of unrest even though they were not observed in media reports.<sup>87</sup>

### *Organizing for Noncombat Operations*

Organizational change to develop capabilities for noncombat operations is consistent with the domestic emphasis in Chinese doctrine and troop deployments for noncombat operations. The first area of change concerns training, an important indicator of priorities within any military organization. In 2001, a new *Program for Military Training and Evaluation* included for the first time noncombat operations. In September 2002, a new generation of military training regulations issued to implement the 2001 *Program*

introduced training for noncombat operations, focusing on antiflood, rescue, and relief operations.<sup>88</sup> Emphasis on training for these operations continued throughout the decade. In January 2008, for example, the General Staff Department's annual training directive highlighted training for noncombat operations in addition to combat-oriented training. The directive instructed the PLA to "strengthen training for non-war military operations" for counterterrorism, dealing with "sudden incidents," safeguarding stability, and disaster relief – all domestic operations. The directive also included for the first time a section for training for peacekeeping operations in addition to disaster relief and domestic stability operations.<sup>89</sup> In June 2009, the PLA opened a peacekeeping training center for predeployment training for units formed to engage in peacekeeping operations.<sup>90</sup> Starting in 2009, several large-scale exercises for noncombat operations were held, with "Great Wall-6" on counterterrorism and "Land-Sea 2009" on maritime search and rescue.

A second area of change emphasizes command mechanisms and force structure. In March 2005, a leading small group for emergency responses to sudden incidents was formed along with an Office for Emergency Response in the Operations Department of the General Staff Department.<sup>91</sup> In 2006, the CMC and State Council called for strengthening coordination among the military and local governments, which resulted in a master plan for managing sudden incidents that was published in November 2006. Afterward, the General Staff Department established liaison mechanisms for coordinating with twenty ministries and agencies.<sup>92</sup> In January 2009, the CMC approved a force-building plan for noncombat operations.<sup>93</sup> By July 2010, the PLA had created eight specialized units, including maritime search-and-rescue teams; rapid response teams for floods, earthquakes, nuclear or chemical disasters, pandemics, and transportation emergencies; and rapid air transport and mobile communications support.<sup>94</sup> These specialized emergency forces include almost 100,000 soldiers, with roughly 50,000 soldiers at the national level and 45,000 soldiers at the provincial level.<sup>95</sup>

The third area of organizational change to support noncombat operations concerns the creation of a legal regime. Relevant regulations and laws governing the PLA's activities in these areas have been issued in recent years, including the PLA's 2005 regulations (*tiaoli*) for participation in disaster relief and rescue operations and a 2007 law on handling domestic crises (*tufa shijian*).<sup>96</sup>

The fourth and final area of change includes a dramatic increase in government spending on public security, which includes civilian police as well as the PAP. In 2009 alone, for example, spending on public security increased by more than 47 percent, to 129 billion *yuan*. In 2010, such spending increased by another 14 percent.<sup>97</sup> China's official defense expenditure also includes costs associated with noncombat operations. According to the 2010 white paper on national defense, one reason of three reasons listed for the growth of China's defense budget was "increased investment in improving capabilities for non-war military operations."<sup>98</sup>

Long-range power projection capabilities are less prominent in writings on China's noncombat operations than perhaps might be expected. Interestingly, the NDU study discussed above does not identify aircraft carriers as a key capability for the PLA Navy to acquire nor do other authoritative military publications on China's economic interests or maritime interests stress heavily aircraft carriers.<sup>99</sup> In the 2006 edition of *The*

*Science of Campaigns* (*Zhanyi xue*), for example, the discussion of campaigns for sea lane security focuses almost exclusively on counterblockade operations around China's ports, not the projection of combat power in distant waters.<sup>100</sup> In other discussions of China's maritime strategy, many military publications give less weight to developing naval combat power versus other means for protecting China's interests in various regions of the world.<sup>101</sup> To be sure, some power projection capabilities will be developed for peacetime operations such as peacekeeping and disaster relief, but in general, new economic interests linked with development have not been mobilized to emphasize the long-range projection of combat power.

In addition, even discussions of naval modernization include noncombat operations. In a study from the NDU, scholars identified three main drivers for naval modernization: trends in naval modernization among the great powers; China's own maritime challenges including maritime sovereignty disputes, maritime resource conflicts, and sea lane security; and Taiwan.<sup>102</sup> The most important new requirement for the PLAN to meet these challenges was "comprehensive planning and development for peacetime and wartime."<sup>103</sup> This requirement stressed improving the strategic uses of the PLAN in peacetime for activities such as maritime security cooperation, naval exchanges, disaster relief, fisheries protection, counterpiracy, and countersmuggling, in addition to maritime deterrence. Although the scholars note that the same forces must have a wartime purpose, the focus on peacetime activities reflects an effect of expanding economic interests in the maritime domain. China's deployment of eight task forces to participate in counterpiracy patrols in Gulf of Aden highlights the role that the PLAN can play in noncombat operations.

## Conclusion

This article examines why China's armed forces have sought to strengthen their ability to conduct noncombat operations, especially domestic ones, even though China's military modernization for traditional combat operations is far from complete. The answer lies in the relationship between economic growth and political instability. Although key to the legitimacy of leaders in developing countries, growth also creates new sources of domestic unrest and increases the vulnerability of the economy to external shocks, both of which, if unchecked, can harm future growth. Thus, developing countries such as China may use their armed forces to manage or prevent domestic unrest as well as to provide services that the state lacks, such as emergency disaster relief. For this same reason, they may also use their forces to help maintain stability in their international security environment, as such stability allows leaders to concentrate resources on domestic affairs. The logic linking economic growth and regime insecurity with noncombat operations is not unique to China and should apply to other countries undergoing similar transformations.

The role of regime insecurity in China's military strategy should not be overstated. China's economic growth continues to generate additional resources for the PLA's modernization drive, which emphasizes potential contingencies around its immediate periphery, especially Taiwan and increasingly the South China Sea. China now spends more on defense than any other country apart from the United States. Nevertheless,

to date, the principal effect of economic growth has not been to identify expansive interests overseas that require new capabilities for offensive operations and long-range combat power projection for their protection. Instead, it has reinforced China's interest in external stability as an important factor in its development and in its domestic stability, both to avoid a costly conflict and to ensure the ability to access resources in other countries and the free flow of trade upon which China's economy relies.

The relationship between regime insecurity and other foreign policy outcomes in China since the end of the Cold War strengthens the plausibility of the argument in this article. Throughout the 1990s, for example, China compromised in numerous territorial disputes to enhance regime security, especially within its large ethnic minority frontier regions.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, one of the key goals in the 2006 Foreign Affairs Work Conference was to ensure that foreign policy would serve China's domestic priorities linked with growth and stability.<sup>105</sup> Because the CCP's legitimacy depends heavily on continued economic growth, concerns about political instability among China's leaders are likely to persist and should continue to influence China's military strategy.

Whether China's rise will continue to be peaceful is a question that animates scholars and policymakers alike. The growing role for noncombat operations in China's evolving military strategy provides cautious ground for limited optimism. These operations are manpower intensive and, moreover, require specialized training and organization. Although they may enhance the ability to conduct traditional combat operations, especially in the areas of logistics and communications, they draw resources away from other aspects of military modernization and may help to dampen heightened security competition, especially in areas far from China. In particular, the rise of noncombat operations suggests that the PLA is devoting fewer resources to long-range power projection than it otherwise might and that such capabilities will grow at a slower rate than they otherwise would. The emphasis on noncombat operations, especially domestic ones, also suggests that China's leaders will continue to maintain an inward orientation and preoccupation with domestic politics, not foreign policy. As long as China's leaders remain wary of potential threats to regime security, the importance of developing noncombat operations is likely to continue.

## NOTES

1. A complete and literal translation of the Chinese is "nonwar military operations." China's armed forces have three components: the PLA, the People's Armed Police (PAP), and the militia. In this article, I focus on the PLA and PAP. The PLA's principal mission is external defense, but as argued in this article, it also plays an important role in domestic noncombat operations, especially disaster relief. The PAP is a paramilitary force whose principal mission is maintaining public order. On these distinctions, see Dennis Blasko, *The Chinese Army Today: Tradition and Transformation for the 21st Century* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 18–19.
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3. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2010* (Department of Defense, 2010), p. 45.
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10. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.
11. World Bank, "World Development Indicators." Available at <http://databank.worldbank.org>
12. "China's 'Floating Population' Exceeds 221 Million," *Xinhua*, February 27, 2011.
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15. Chen Jia, "Country's Wealth Divide Past Warning Level," *China Daily*, May 12, 2010
16. Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transition and Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 217.
17. Victor Shih, "China's 8,000 Credit Risks," *Asian Wall Street Journal*, February 8, 2010.
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20. Zong zhengzhi bu, *Shuli he luoshi kexue fazhanguan lilun xuexi duben* [A Reader for Establishing and Implementing the Theory of Scientific Development] (Beijing: Jiefangjun chubanshe, 2006).
21. For two overviews of the PLA's new historic mission concept, see Daniel M. Hartnett, *The PLA's Domestic and Foreign Activities and Orientation* (Testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Washington, DC, 2009); James Mulvenon, "Chairman Hu and the PLA's 'New Historic Missions,'" *China Leadership Monitor* No. 27 (Winter 2009), pp. 1–20. Unlike Hartnett and Mulvenon, I translate "*shiming*" (使命) as "mission" as in "purpose," and not "missions" as in specific military tasks or objectives, which is the common usage in the US military. In other words, the party has identified a new purpose for the army of historical importance. Hu Jintao makes clear that there is one mission that requires the "correct grasp" of four tasks. English-language PLA publications such as the *Jiefangjun Bao* also translate "*lishi shiming*" as "historic mission."
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