

**Beyond the Strait: PLA Missions Other than Taiwan.** Roy Kamphausen, David Lai, and Andrew Scobell, eds. Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2009. 398 pages. \$5.94 **Reviewed by Richard Halloran**, former foreign correspondent in Asia and military correspondent in Washington for *The New York Times* and onetime lieutenant of airborne infantry.

Sometime in the 1970s an Army intelligence officer was asked how far the Chinese could project military power. His answer was succinct: “About as far as their army can walk.” Today, that is no longer true as this well-documented, carefully reasoned, and altogether invaluable book asserts. With each passing day, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), which encompasses all branches of China’s armed forces, becomes more capable. The critical and probably unanswerable question is when will the leaders of the PLA feel that their forces are strong enough to take on those of the United States and win. Therein lies the danger of miscalculation, history’s most frequent cause of war.

The editors and authors of this volume have defined distinct missions for the PLA, roughly in this order of priority:

(1) To maintain the Chinese Communist Party in power. The PLA, say authors David Lai of the Strategic Studies Institute and Marc Miller of the National Bureau of Asian Research in Seattle, is “directly controlled by and responsible to the Chinese Communist Party.” Chinese officers take an oath of allegiance to the party, not to a constitution or the national government, and party leaders regularly remind PLA senior officers that it is the party, not the PLA, that controls the gun. It is as if the US armed forces swore allegiance to the political party that was in power.

(2) To maintain internal order. The PLA was called out to subdue demonstrating students camped in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Because the PLA was not trained in riot control and relied on brute force to restore order around the square, civilian casualties numbered in the thousands. Later, the PLA relinquished some of that mission to the People’s Armed Police, but the PLA was still visible in Beijing to provide security during the Olympic Games in 2008.

(3) To defend the nation’s borders, a mission assigned to most armies around the world. The chapter by Robert Modarelli, of the US Center for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation staff in Seattle, notes that China’s frontiers “stretch over 22,000 kilometers [13,200 miles] and border 14 different countries.” With several of those nations, such as Vietnam and India, China has fought border wars in the last six decades. The PLA recently moved large formations of forces from one corner of China to another to train for conflict on its frontiers.

(4) To deter the self-governing island of Taiwan, over which China claims sovereignty, from declaring formal independence. Failing that, Beijing has built a force intended to pound Taiwan into submission, then to invade the island before anyone else, namely the United States, can intervene. Andrew Scobell, a former scholar at Texas A & M, writes that “how China handles the Taiwan issue will inevitably affect not just the kind of national defense policy China adopts but how China deals with almost every other issue—foreign and domestic.”

(5) To forge a strategic nuclear deterrent aimed beyond Taiwan. “The central element of this posture,” says Brad Roberts, a researcher at the Institute for Defense Analysis in Washington, “is China’s force of ballistic missiles tipped with nuclear weapons.” Named the Second Artillery by the late Premier Zhou Enlai to distinguish it from conventional artillery units, Roberts quotes a Chinese official as saying the Sec-

ond Artillery's "targets are countries with nuclear weapons." That means the United States, Russia, and India, at the least.

(6) To project conventional power beyond Taiwan. Mark Cozad, an intelligence officer at the Defense Intelligence Agency in Washington, says Chinese decision-makers have been engaged in a wide-ranging discussion that "encompasses a much broader array of national security themes than in the past and is heavily focused on determining critical PLA missions beyond Taiwan." Among them: protecting access to energy and other resources, economic lifelines, and lines of communication.

This may be more of a revolution than most people outside China realize. The PLA, Cozad says, "remains a military dominated by the army" that has lacked experience in maritime and air operations. A central issue during the next decade, however, will be whether the PLA Navy and PLA Air Force will develop capabilities that will enable China to challenge regional powers and support territorial claims in Southeast Asia.

Recent discussions have centered on protecting the sea lines of communication in the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea through which flow large amounts of oil and other resources to China. Military diplomacy, including exchanges with foreign armies and combined exercises with foreign navies, Cozad says, "are likely to become a key component of China's power projection in both the East and South China Seas."

For all its merits, *Beyond the Strait* has flaws, one of them serious. Like many collections with different authors, the chapters are uneven, with some better than others. A more firm editing hand could have trimmed out some of the repetition. Some material in the footnotes would have been better placed in the narrative and vice versa. Too many authors fall into the bad academic practice of quoting a presumably authoritative source without identifying him or her in the narrative. As the famously demanding editor of the *New Yorker*, the late Harold Ross, would have scribbled in the margin, "Who he?"

The vital flaw is the absence of an index. With three editors and 11 contributors all writing about a many-faceted and painfully complicated topic, an index would have eased the way for a reader or researcher to trace what everyone had to say about missiles or the South China Sea, for example. As it is, the reader is caught in a tangle of fact and analysis with no way to get out.