

# China's Assertive Behavior

## Part Four: The Role of the Military in Foreign Crises

Michael D. Swaine

The previous essay in this series on China's assertive behavior (*CLM* 36) examined the general role of the Chinese military in the PRC foreign policy process, focusing on leadership and organizational issues. This *CLM* essay builds directly on that essay by focusing in particular on the military's role in leadership decision-making and lower-level implementation with regard to political-military crises with foreign powers.

As one would expect, the same caveats apply in this instance as with the previous *CLM*, except even more so. That is, very little detailed, reliable information exists regarding crisis decision-making in general and the military's role in particular, especially concerning the informal and high-level dimensions of the decision-making process. Much of the information presented herein is thus derived from interviews with both civilian and military Chinese scholars and analysts conducted by the author and other analysts—especially Bonnie Glaser and Alastair Iain Johnston—and from the existing literature on past political-military crises. The latter includes some of the findings to date of an ongoing collaborative project on crisis management issues in which the author is involved.

Hence, many of the observations herein are tentative and certainly subject to future clarification and correction. Nonetheless, enough is known about certain aspects of the role of the PLA in foreign political-military crises to draw an overall picture of the decision process, and to identify significant gaps or gray areas in our knowledge.

This essay covers eight areas of relevance to the military's role in crisis decision-making:

- The Main Participants
- The High-Level Deliberation and Decision Process
- Senior Advisory and Management Groups
- Lower-Level Advisory and Management Groups
- Intelligence and Information Flows
- Pre-existing Plans
- Research Institutes
- Unplanned or Uncontrolled Behavior

Within each area, the more general features of the crisis decision-

making structure and process often provide the larger context and background for our assessment of the military's role and presence. Some of this analysis is drawn from the analysis of the military's role in foreign policy presented in CLM 36. And, as with that essay, this study will also conclude with a summary and overall assessment.\*

## The Main Participants

The critical senior players in China's formal crisis decision-making process include:

- The CCP general secretary, who for almost all of the past two decades has simultaneously held the positions of PRC president and chairman of the Central Military Commission.
- At least some of the remaining members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC)—and quite possibly informal subgroups among them.
- Senior leaders responsible for aspects of foreign relations within relevant party, state, and military institutions—including the State Council, CCP Politburo, CCP Central Committee, International Liaison Department of the CCP, and General Staff Department, as well as military heads of the CCP's Central Military Commission (CMC), the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), the Minister of State Security (MSS), and leading officials responsible for propaganda affairs (primarily to handle public opinion).
- Individual, trusted senior advisers of the CCP general secretary, including but not limited to top-level officials close to him.

Among these individuals, PBSC members perform the primary role in any major political-military crisis. And within that body, the CCP general secretary, as in normal times, acts as “first among equals”—organizing meetings, selecting participants of ad hoc bodies, directing decisions, and appointing overseers responsible for implementing major decisions made at the top. However, all key decisions are usually made by the PBSC as a group, including major military decisions that could involve confrontations or conflicts with foreign powers.

Subordinate or secondary players in a crisis include both civilian and military individuals formally charged with the implementation of decisions and less formal players who can influence senior leadership views and the actions of implementers, as the crisis unfolds. The former include subordinate civilian and military agencies and units (both central and local), as well as leadership staffs and secretaries. The latter include the media, the public, and perhaps scholars, both civilian and military. The role of retired party and military elders in advising (formally or informally) active leaders remains obscure and the subject of considerable speculation.

## The High-Level Deliberation and Decision Process

The crisis decision-making structure and process, especially at senior levels, and involving most key decisions, is apparently largely informal and ad hoc, rather than

institutionalized and regularized. Moreover, the entire process often involves subjective judgments and decisions made by top leaders and utilizes personal relationships between, in particular, the CCP general secretary and both his PBSC colleagues and his personal advisers. That said, certain features and patterns are apparent in those structures and processes, based on the study of the post–Deng Xiaoping era.

According to interviews with knowledgeable Chinese observers, at the onset of a political-military crisis, the CCP general secretary usually convenes an ad hoc enlarged PBSC meeting. This meeting normally includes all members of the PBSC, plus additional relevant senior leaders (both military and civilian) and trusted senior advisers of the general secretary. When the crisis involves significant military issues, participants probably include one or both of the two uniformed vice chairmen of the CMC and possibly their senior staff.<sup>1</sup> These additional participants beyond the PBSC are usually designated by the general secretary.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this initial senior-level meeting is to understand and determine the features and significance of the crisis, and to agree upon a set of principles and guidelines for handling it. For example, in this meeting, the leadership will often identify what political and/or policy interests are at stake, what dangers the crisis presents, and what outcomes are desired. It will also set out some key parameters for subsequent crisis management, for example, to exchange tit-for-tat with the other side, to only employ military force in response to a use of force, and so forth.<sup>3</sup>

As indicated in *CLM* 36, the convening of such an enlarged PBSC meeting at the initial stage of a crisis follows from two features or requirements of the system: 1) the overall collective nature of the party leadership, which demands that the general secretary and his colleagues all provide their input and become vested in any major decisions made; and 2) the general need of the top leaders to obtain relevant information (including military intelligence) and advice regarding the unfolding crisis. As a result, even though a major crisis with a foreign power might require quick and decisive action, the oligarchic nature of China's current leadership system can result in delayed responses as top leaders convene, obtain information, deliberate, and hammer out a basic consensus position. Indeed, such delays have been evident in recent Sino-U.S. political military crises.<sup>4</sup>

In this high-level process, senior military leaders within the CMC and GSD likely play an important role in providing general guidance, supplying intelligence, and offering assessments relating to national security and military issues. In general, the role of senior military leaders in making basic decisions during a crisis was arguably more critical in the 1990s and earlier, when senior PLA leaders were members of the PBSC or more experienced “elder cadres.” Yet their role could still prove critical, even today, if the crisis were to include a major military dimension.<sup>5</sup>

## Senior Advisory and Management Groups

In addition to convening an enlarged PBSC meeting, the CCP general secretary will also usually establish or delegate a working-level group or groups to manage and oversee the crisis for the senior leadership, and to provide advice as needed.

According to interviews, in the case of an unanticipated crisis (such as the 2001 EP-3 incident or the 1999 bombing of the Belgrade embassy), the general secretary might order the creation of an ad hoc interagency crisis working group whose membership would be determined on the basis of the nature of the crisis. In the case of an anticipated or ongoing crisis (such as the slow-motion North Korean nuclear crisis), it is more likely that a relevant CCP leading small group (LSG), such as the Foreign Affairs LSG (FALS), the National Security LSG (NSLSG), or the Taiwan Affairs LSG (TALS), would be delegated to manage the crisis on a continuous basis in support of the senior leaders.<sup>6</sup>

In some instances, however, an ad hoc working group and one or more LSGs might both play a role in crisis management, depending on the preferences of the general secretary and the PBSC. In particular, an LSG might be involved in crisis decision-making if the general secretary or other members of the PBSC had become dissatisfied with the advice and support provided by the ad hoc working group.<sup>7</sup>

Whether an ad hoc or an existing LSG (or both), this working group would usually operate under the leadership of a single PBSC member. In the case of the ad hoc group, the specific member selected to perform this leadership function, and the composition of the working group, would be determined by the general secretary (for example, Jiang Zemin apparently designated Hu Jintao to head what was probably an ad hoc working group to manage the EP-3 incident)<sup>8</sup> and report directly to the PBSC. The group's functions would primarily consist of advising and carrying out the directives of the PBSC and coordinating the actions of relevant organizations. Membership would include the heads of all relevant organizations potentially involved in the crisis, as well as some additional participants from the abovementioned enlarged PBSC meeting. Such members would almost certainly include one or more PLA representatives, and especially the senior PLA officer responsible for military intelligence.

In addition to the above bodies, the general secretary might also convene other informal discussion groups or individual meetings in the early stages of a crisis, to gather different opinions and to provide advice. These ad hoc bodies or fora would meet separately from any crisis working group, PBSC, CMC, or LSG meetings, and could also include PLA representatives. However, the existence and composition of such informal entities would depend on the personal leadership style of the CCP general secretary. For example, Jiang Zemin was known to seek advice from outside normal bureaucratic channels during both normal policy deliberations and at the time of a crisis. In contrast, Hu Jintao has generally been more dependent on the existing bureaucracy for advice.<sup>9</sup>

## Lower-Level Advisory and Management Groups

Once a crisis working group (or groups) is established at the top, crisis teams are then reportedly set up in relevant party offices, government ministries, and the PLA to carry out the orders of the senior civilian and military leadership. Such teams are likely formed in the case of both anticipated and unanticipated crises. For examples of the former, during the EP-3 crisis and the embassy bombing incident, both the PLA General Staff and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs set up crisis teams to handle information and monitor the situation around the clock until the crisis was resolved. As an example of the latter, similar crisis teams also apparently exist to handle the North Korea nuclear crisis on an ongoing basis.

In fact, according to Chinese sources, the MoFA apparently calls an emergency meeting and sets up an ad hoc team to deal with every major crisis or potential foreign crisis, even if there is no leadership-level crisis working group in place to handle the issue. Also, if a crisis extends over many days or weeks, the Foreign Affairs Office (FAO) of the CCP Central Committee might play a critical role in convening meetings that include mid-level or high-level officials from the PLA and relevant government ministries, as well as directors of Chinese think tanks and outside experts. It also likely distills and forwards information from various bureaucracies to the leadership, sometimes with policy recommendations attached.<sup>10</sup> The FAO usually includes both MoFA and PLA representatives.

## Intelligence and Information Flows

During a political-military crisis, leadership decisions and the actions of subordinate actors are often critically dependent on the timeliness and quality of information and intelligence received. In the Chinese case, according to interviews, there are three main branches through which information and intelligence flows in such a crisis: the party, the military, and the government.<sup>11</sup>

Within each of these branches, intelligence and other reports by crisis management teams located within ministries, offices, and the PLA/GSD are funneled upward to one of three general offices within the Central Committee, the CMC, and the State Council. In these institutions, the general office reviews reports to determine if they meet the requirements to be forwarded to the Politburo and to the ad hoc crisis working group or LSG that has been created or designated to manage the crisis. The General Office directors play an influential role in this process because they are the ultimate arbiters of whether a document is sufficiently critical and time sensitive to pass on to the senior leadership. However, despite the oversight exercised at various levels in the chain of command, including the general offices, some Chinese crisis management experts have indicated that these reports often discuss issues rather than present options, thus engendering further debate within the LSGs and PBSC and delaying timely decision-making.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to these formal channels, a small number of urgent intelligence and other reports by senior officials may be sent directly to the senior leadership, but it is unclear under what circumstances this occurs. For example, some reports signed by the foreign minister are reportedly submitted directly to the Politburo or a select number of PBSC members and need not pass through the State Council General Office. This direct channel may be used more frequently during a crisis than during routine times.

Perhaps most notably, by all accounts, all three of the above branches operate independently from one another in providing intelligence. Thus, no single set of integrated intelligence is provided to senior Chinese leaders in a crisis. The lack of a mechanism for adjudicating among the various sources of incoming information often results in the PBSC having to further delay decision-making while attempting to decipher the actual conditions on the ground.<sup>13</sup>

At least some of this coordination failure is attributable to interagency bureaucratic competition, with different actors seeking to promote their particular interpretation or interests in a given crisis scenario. Overall communication between the MoFA and the military is especially problematic. It is likely that very little sharing of intelligence occurs between them, thus further inhibiting effective crisis management.<sup>14</sup>

That said, some Chinese and outside sources also state that the senior party leadership at times relies heavily on intelligence provided by the PLA (via the CMC or GSD—see below), at least in the early stages of a military-related crisis, largely because no other branches are able to provide timely information, and perhaps also because the MoFA does not enjoy the reputation or official rank of the CMC. However, as is often the case in other governments, whether military or nonmilitary in origin, this initial intelligence is often incorrect, and must be adjusted or corrected using information provided by other agencies.

In a crisis, as indicated above, military intelligence is passed up the chain of command to the GSD, which then provides the information to the CMC General Office and at times directly to the Politburo or PBSC. Within the PLA, there is usually a strict hierarchy from the bottom to the top. Normally information has to go through every level before it gets to the top. When intelligence reaches the top, the CMC usually holds a meeting to discuss what it has received and subsequently submits a report to the above-mentioned ad hoc crisis group under the PBSC.

However, in very urgent situations, the CMC may be bypassed when providing information to the leadership. For example, in the case of the 1999 Belgrade embassy bombing, according to Chinese sources, there was apparently insufficient time to hold a CMC meeting to receive information, assess the situation, and provide military-related views to the PBSC; hence, the CMC was informed of the incident after a PBSC meeting was held. Despite this instance, it is not common for the GSD to bypass the CMC entirely. However, the GSD does routinely report *simultaneously* to the PBSC and the CMC. In other words, the GSD apparently has an established channel to the PBSC that it might use in a crisis. That said, the most senior military leaders would probably be

informed of such direct GSD reporting, especially given the fact that all such leaders are members of the CMC.

The absence of integrated intelligence, the presence of direct lines of communication to the PBSC, and the existence of personal advisers to the party general secretary mean that lower-level units and individuals can exert a disproportionate influence over crisis assessments and decisions made at the top. For instance, during the crises triggered by the Belgrade embassy bombing and the EP-3 incident, Jiang Zemin reportedly relied considerably on the senior PLA officer in charge of military intelligence and foreign issues (Xiong Guangkai), a trusted advisor.<sup>15</sup>

## Pre-existing Military Plans

As no doubt is the case in other countries, the military can also influence decision-making, especially during the early stages of a crisis, in large part through the use of pre-existing operational plans that it has drawn up to cover possible related military contingencies. For example, during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis, a pre-approved PLA operational plan involving exercises and missile firings near Taiwan was apparently put forth (and ultimately accepted) as a ready means of expressing Beijing's resolve. Moreover, this plan was reportedly never reexamined as the crisis evolved.<sup>16</sup>

If true, at least two implications can be drawn from this feature: first, the existence of such preexisting plans might provide the PLA with considerable leverage over the evolution of a crisis. Second, they could also create difficulties for the senior civilian leadership by limiting their options and locking them into a particular response, especially if few other immediate options for conveying resolve are readily available.

## Research Institutes

In general, reports by research institutes or think tanks are not submitted directly to the senior leadership unless: a) a top leader directly tasks a research institute to produce a report; b) an individual researcher has a personal connection to a leader's staff; or c) a specific report is judged to be urgent by a person in a position of authority.

In a crisis, according to interviews, think tanks attached to military analysis and intelligence units—such as the Academy of Military Sciences (AMS)—are likely called upon to provide assessments and recommendations regarding relevant military issues. Such organizations reportedly also analyze potential future crisis situations, and assess the outcome or impact of a crisis after it concludes. For example, the AMS apparently plays a significant role in predicting when and what kind of military-related crises might occur. Once a crisis occurs, it might also observe and analyze the unfolding situation, providing reports to the CMC or senior PLA officers at various intervals. The AMS also reportedly provides post-crisis analysis at times, synthesizing lessons learned and providing suggestions for handling future crises.

Other nonmilitary research or coordinating entities might also play a similar role. For example, if a crisis is prolonged, the FAO might task both civilian and military research institutes to analyze specific questions relating to the event. For example, the MoFA conducted an after-action evaluation of the EP-3 incident that was submitted to the Chinese leadership, according to Chinese sources. The MoFA's report proposed bilateral steps that could be taken to enhance crisis management in Sino-American relations.<sup>17</sup>

LSGs can also play a role in “post-crisis” analysis. For example, according to interviews conducted in China by Bonnie Glaser, in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the NSLG allegedly discussed and offered an assessment of the incident's immediate and long-term implications for China. However, generally speaking, they do a poor job of preserving lessons learned from a crisis, as they lack clear lines of authority, crisis response plans, and formalized reporting mechanisms.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, in general, Chinese governmental actors—especially those within the PLA—tend to be biased against relying on outside experts for policy advice or assessments. According to some Chinese crisis management experts, this results in an insufficient level of input from think tank scholars during crises.<sup>19</sup>

## Unplanned or Uncontrolled Behavior

It is axiomatic that intense events such as political-military crises can involve unplanned or uncontrolled behavior by direct or indirect participants that influences developments before, during, and after the event. As suggested in *CLM* 36, in a defense-related area, PLA actions can certainly play an important role in precipitating and shaping the course of a crisis in ways unintended by the senior civilian leadership. This is largely because local PLA entities are not necessarily under the close direction of the senior civilian (or perhaps even military) leadership and thus can at times take actions that run counter to the overall intent and strategy behind PRC foreign policy.

Possible past examples of such unplanned or uncoordinated behavior that resulted in incidents or crises include: PLAN submarine incursions into Japanese territorial waters during November 2004; PLAN or PLAN-related “aggressive” ship or aircraft maneuvers in or over contested waters of the East China Sea or within the PRC EEZ at various intervals during the past decade; military clashes in the South China Sea in 1974 and 1988; the surfacing of a PLAN submarine within the defense perimeter of a U.S. carrier in 2007; and the refusal to give safe harbor to two U.S. minesweepers during a storm in 2007, along with the last-minute denial of a request for a visit by the *Kitty Hawk* to the port of Hong Kong a few days later.<sup>20</sup>

The military, or at least some military officers, could also influence the course of a crisis indirectly through comments, statements, or articles published in China's increasingly raucous public media and cyber sphere. These avenues of public expression are open to a growing number and variety of Chinese citizens, including retired or semi-

retired military scholars and officers. In a crisis with major military dimensions, the role of such military commentators could shape public views significantly.<sup>21</sup> That said, in a truly serious crisis, the senior party leadership would almost certainly seek to control, guide, or (more likely) censor military views, and especially those that did not accord with their approach or policies. Military officers or scholars who ignored such efforts would likely be doing so at their peril.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, the potential adverse impact on crisis management of unplanned or uncontrolled behavior by the PLA is likely reinforced due to problems of military signaling during a crisis. As one of China's leading crisis management specialists explained in an interview with Alastair Iain Johnston, the Chinese military's ability to engage in external signaling is underdeveloped and largely limited to military signaling on the Taiwan issue. As a result, it is entirely possible that attempts to convey benign intentions during a crisis, for example, are undermined by poor messaging by local or perhaps even central PLA actors.<sup>23</sup> Further compounding this potential problem is the apparent fact that, in the early stages of a crisis, China tends not to coordinate diplomatic and military moves when signaling. Rather, if the crisis is predominantly diplomatic, the impulse of Chinese officials is not to employ the PLA to reinforce diplomatic messages. Thus, the threshold at which military actions are required may be higher, relative to the United States.<sup>24</sup>

## Summary and Conclusions

To an arguably even greater extent than in the case of foreign policy decision-making, many features of the role of the PLA in political-military crises are either dimly understood or entirely unknown to outside observers. This is in large part due to the generally secretive nature of decision-making in China, especially at senior levels. It is also at least partly because, in political-military crises, much of the decision-making process apparently involves ad hoc or informal organizations and interactions. For example, little is known about the scope and type of interactions that occur among the party general secretary, other members of the PBSC, and both the ad hoc crisis working group and LSG(s) that support the leadership in a crisis.

Even less is known regarding the type of interactions that undoubtedly occur at the senior level between these civilian party leaders and the most senior military officers, via the above-mentioned enlarged PBSC meeting and the subordinate working groups, or through personal, individual contacts. As noted above, senior military officers are almost certainly present in both types of organizations to provide a variety of critical advice, information, and intelligence, in some cases (e.g., Xiong Guangkai) as personal associates of PBSC members. Moreover, up until at least the 1990s, senior PLA officers apparently played very key roles in shaping basic decisions taken by the general secretary or the entire PBSC during political-military crises such as the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis or earlier events. This was largely because of their “elder” status or their party position at the time as members of the PBSC, or as a result of the highly militarized nature of the crisis in question.

Since then, PLA leaders have arguably wielded less power over such basic decisions, due to the death of many of the remaining powerful senior elder PLA officers and the removal of PLA representation from the PBSC. That said, one can speculate, with some confidence—based on the foreign policy process outlined in *CLM* 36—that the two most senior serving military officers (i.e., the two vice chairmen of the CMC) will continue to play critical roles when a crisis involves military issues or military intelligence (such as the EP-3 incident), at the very least in advising and shaping the views of the general secretary and the entire PBSC.

At lower levels of the crisis decision-making system, PLA officers and analysts reportedly play important, perhaps at times critical, roles as providers of intelligence and analysis, overseers of military-related aspects of regime crisis behavior, and creators of operational plans used in a crisis, via membership in ad hoc and leadership working groups, the CCP CC FAO, advisory and management teams formed within the GSD or other PLA agencies, military intelligence and planning units, and military research organs. However, little is known regarding the level and type of influence exerted on crisis decision-making in general by such lower-level individuals and their organizations, given both the highly secretive nature of intra-PLA processes under both normal and crisis conditions, and the fragmented and stovepiped structure of the overall crisis decision-making system. As noted above, sharing and coordination during a crisis between such military players and their civilian counterparts within the MoFA or party system is usually either poor or nonexistent.

As suggested in *CLM* 36, the overall lack of adequate levels of cross-agency civil-military communication and coordination, and of senior civilian oversight of PLA activities undertaken beyond China's borders can both trigger political-military crises and undermine senior-level efforts to manage such crises over time. This problem results from the generally insular nature of PLA behavior (especially at lower levels of the military system), the inexperience and lack of knowledge of military matters among senior civilian party leaders, and the absence of an NSC-type system to perform such functions under both normal and crisis conditions.

As in the case of the PRC foreign policy system, these deficiencies will likely present increasingly serious obstacles to any efforts by China's leaders to avoid or manage future political-military crises involving foreign powers, especially as China's military expands its foreign presence and diversifies its foreign activities. Indeed, the frequency and severity of such crises could increase over time, creating the image of an increasingly "assertive" and dangerous China. Thus, any current and future Chinese efforts to improve crisis behavior must address such military-related weaknesses of the decision-making system.<sup>25</sup>

---

## Notes

\*I am deeply indebted to Rachel Esplin Odell, Oliver Palmer, and Raymond Lu for their assistance in the preparation of this essay. I am also indebted to Bonnie Glaser, Chris Clarke, and Alastair Iain Johnston for their comments on earlier versions.

<sup>1</sup> Both of these senior PLA officers are usually also members of the PB or the CCP Secretariat.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the CMC and the role of the vice-chairmen, see the following sources: Gong Li, Men Honghua, and Sun Dongfang, “China’s Diplomatic Decision-making Mechanism: Changes and Evolution since 1949,” *World Economics and Politics*, November 2009, [http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article\\_en/CJFDTO-TAL-SJJZ200911006.htm](http://en.cnki.com.cn/Article_en/CJFDTO-TAL-SJJZ200911006.htm); Qi Zhou, “Organization, Structure and Image,” pp. 109–122 (on military involvement in foreign policy, CMC) and pp. 131–188 (on leading small groups in Chinese foreign policy); Nan Li, *Chinese Civil-Military Relations: The Transformation of the People’s Liberation Army* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 2; Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Decision-making in China*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); David Bachman, “Structure and Process in the Making of Chinese Foreign Policy,” in Samuel Kim, ed., *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Policy Faces the New Millennium*, 4th ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998); Michael D. Swaine, *The Role of the Chinese Military in National Security Policymaking* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, National Defense Research Institute, 1998); Carol Lee Hamrin, “The Party Leadership System,” in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 114; Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Decision-making in China*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 11; and Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution through Reform* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> According to Chinese observers, these assessments usually adhere to Mao Zedong’s guideline for handling confrontations with foreign powers: “on just grounds, to our advantage, and with restraint” (有理、有利、有节). Under this formula, China’s leaders would seek to determine the basic principles involved in a crisis, and then determine some key guidelines for managing it, including thresholds for certain actions. See Michael Swaine, “Understanding the Historical Record,” in Michael Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng, with Danielle F.S. Cohen, ed., *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), pp. 23–24. Also, in some crises, this meeting will seek to answer specific key questions. For example, according to interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser, in the case of the embassy bombing, contrary to the widely held belief that the top leadership tried to determine if the bombing was deliberate or accidental, this meeting tasked the FALSG to answer the question, “Did President Clinton order the bombing?”

<sup>4</sup> For example, for many hours following the April 2001 EP-3 incident, the Chinese government did not respond to repeated attempts by the U.S. embassy to establish contact. This delay could have been due, in part, to the above factors. See John Keefe, “Anatomy of the EP-3 Incident, April 2001,” Center for Strategic Studies (a division of the CNA Corporation), October 26, 2001. According to some Chinese observers, senior leaders were outside of Beijing for Arbor Day celebrations when the two planes collided, a factor that might also have contributed to the delays in a Chinese response. See Zhang Tuosheng, “The Sino-American Aircraft Collision: Lessons for Crisis Management,” in Michael Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng, with Danielle F.S. Cohen, ed., *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), pp. 394–395.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Jiang Zemin reportedly interacted closely with fellow PBSC member Li Peng and senior PLA elders Liu Huaqing and Zhang Zhen to make all major decisions during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis. Senior serving PLA officer Zhang Wannian reportedly also played a critical role as the lead implementer of the senior leadership’s military-related decisions during the crisis. Zhang was appointed head of a specially formed headquarters established in Beijing to direct the military exercises and missile “tests” carried out during the crisis and to coordinate among the PLA services operating within the Nanjing War (or Campaign) Theater (战区), which comprised the Nanjing and Guangzhou Military Regions, the East China Sea Fleet, and the entire Taiwan Strait area. However, Jiang Zemin, as head of the CMC and party general secretary, almost certainly approved all the military exercises and missile “tests” undertaken during the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait Crisis. That said, it is highly unlikely that he supervised, much less directed, military operations as Mao and Deng had done during crises in the ’50s, ’60s, and ’70s. For an account of the roles played by senior Chinese civilian and military leaders during the 1995–96 Taiwan

Strait Crisis, see Robert L. Suettinger, *Beyond Tiananmen: The Politics of U.S.-China relations, 1989–2000*, (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2003), pp. 200–263. For an analysis of the decision-making structures regarding Taiwan policy during the Jiang era, see Michael Swaine, “Chinese Decision-Making Regarding Taiwan: 1979–2000,” in David Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 293–294.

<sup>6</sup> As indicated in *CLM* 36, LSGs are advisory, coordinating and consensus-building bodies, not decision-making bodies, especially regarding major decisions. Although institutionally subordinate to the CCP Secretariat, LSGs are usually presided over by the PBSC member who holds overall responsibility for the major policy sector relevant to the LSG (e.g., Li Changchun over ideology-propaganda; Wen Jiabao over economics and finance). The de facto LSG for military matters is the CMC. Other LSGs relating to national security and defense matters—i.e., the NSLG, the FALG, and the TALG—include a PLA representative, often the senior officer in charge of intelligence and/or the minister of defense. Ad hoc crisis interagency working groups would presumably be structured and staffed according to the needs of the leadership and the nature of the crisis, but would almost certainly also include a PLA representative, if the crisis had a military dimension. See Swaine, *The Role of the Chinese Military*; Qi Zhou, “Organization, Structure and Image,” pp. 131–171; A. Doak Barnett, “The Making of Foreign Policy in China,” *SAIS Papers in International Affairs*, no. 9, 1985; Alice Miller, “The CCP Central Committee’s Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 26 (Fall 2008), <http://www.hoover.org/publications/china-leadership-monitor/article/5689>; Carol Lee Hamrin, “The Party Leadership System,” in Kenneth G. Lieberthal and David M. Lampton, eds., *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision Making in Post-Mao China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), p. 103; and Wei Li, *The Chinese Staff System: A Mechanism for Bureaucratic Control and Integration* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1994), pp. 33–34.

<sup>7</sup> According to interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser in China and communicated to the author, LSG(s) would usually operate in parallel with the ad hoc crisis working group in supporting the senior leadership during a crisis. Coordination between LSGs and any ad hoc group would usually be facilitated by the CCP Central Committee’s Foreign Affairs Office (FAO), a body that usually acts as staff for foreign affairs–related LSGs.

<sup>8</sup> Some media reports claimed that the NSLG under Hu Jintao served as the key working group during the EP-3 crisis, but this conflicts with the views of some Chinese scholars who have insisted that an ad hoc group under Hu played that role. Interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser in China and communicated to the author. Also, Jiang Zemin might have designated Hu to head this group in his absence, since he departed on a trip to Latin America during the crisis.

<sup>9</sup> Based on interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser and communicated to the author.

<sup>10</sup> Based on interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser and communicated to the author.

<sup>11</sup> For references to such a lack of policy coordination by a well-known Chinese scholar, see Wu Xinbo, *Managing Crisis and Sustaining Peace between China and the United States* (United States Institute of Peace, 2008), p. 25, [http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PW61\\_FinalApr16.pdf](http://www.usip.org/files/resources/PW61_FinalApr16.pdf); Wu Xinbo, “Understanding Chinese and U.S. Crisis Behavior,” *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 1 (Winter 2007–2008), p. 72, [http://www.twq.com/08winter/docs/08winter\\_wu.pdf](http://www.twq.com/08winter/docs/08winter_wu.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Alastair Iain Johnston, *The Development of International Crisis Management Theory in the People’s Republic of China* (unpublished manuscript, December 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. For example, during the EP-3 incident, the three main sources of intelligence for the senior leadership were the MSS, the PLA General Staff, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; they did not coordinate or talk to one another, and sometimes apparently refused to share information, according to interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser.

<sup>14</sup> Interviews conducted by Bonnie Glaser and Alastair Iain Johnston, *The Development of International Crisis Management Theory*.

<sup>15</sup> Xiong was reportedly allowed to brief the PBSC and thus apparently gain the upper hand over other competing sources of intelligence during those crises. According to interviews conducted in China by Bonnie Glaser, in both crises, Xiong personally briefed Jiang and other members of the Politburo. Moreover, in the case of the embassy bombing, General Xiong persuaded Jiang that the attack could not have been accidental and advocated a tough response. Information based on interviews conducted in China by Bonnie Glaser and communicated to the author. This level of influence reflected Xiong’s larger

privileged position within the Jiang Zemin leadership. “For more than a decade, General Xiong Guangkai used his position as the head of military intelligence to shape and influence Chinese leadership assessments of foreign and security policy, especially Sino-U.S. relations.” See James Mulvenon, “‘Ding, Dong, The Witch is Dead!’: Foreign Policy and Military Intelligence Assessments after the Retirement of General Xiong Guangkai,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 17 (Winter 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Michael Swaine, “Chinese Decision-Making Regarding Taiwan: 1979–2000,” in David Lampton, ed., *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Information based on interviews conducted in China by Bonnie Glaser and communicated to the author.

<sup>18</sup> Johnston, *The Development of International Crisis Management Theory*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* Johnston states: “Such entities have low trust of outsiders, and consequently are unwilling to share information with them. Or they don’t believe outsiders are expert enough to have sufficient inside information to make informed judgments. The situation is not helped by the relatively low quality of many think tank analysts, or their lack of practical policy advice, or the publicity/media seeking incentives many have. The effect of these problems is to make it hard for Chinese experts to assess China’s performance in a crisis.”

<sup>20</sup> Regarding more aggressive maneuvers in the East China Sea, see Michael Swaine and M. Taylor Fravel, “China’s Assertive Behavior Part Two: The Maritime Periphery,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 35 (Summer 2011); and Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China*, SIPRI Policy Paper 26, September 2010, pp. 15–16.

Regarding the “Han Incident,” in which a Chinese PLAN nuclear submarine ventured into Japanese territorial waters, see Peter A. Dutton, “International Law and the November 2004 ‘Han Incident,’” in Andrew Erickson, *China’s future nuclear submarine force*, China Maritime Studies Institute and Naval Institute Press, pp. 162–211; and Joseph Ferguson, “Submarine Incursion Sets Sino-Japanese Relations on Edge,” *China Brief*, vol. 4, no. 23 (November 24, 2004), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=3695](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=3695).

Regarding the USS *Kitty Hawk* and minesweepers incidents, see David Axe, “China’s Overhyped Sub Threat,” *The Diplomat*, October 20, 2011, <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/10/20/china%E2%80%99s-overhyped-submarine-threat>; Bonnie Glaser and Daniel Murphy, “China and the USS *Kitty Hawk*,” *CSIS Critical Questions*, December 6, 2007, [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/071206\\_cq\\_glaser\\_china.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/071206_cq_glaser_china.pdf); U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2008* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China\\_Military\\_Report\\_08.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Report_08.pdf).

Regarding the Sino-Vietnamese naval skirmish at Johnston Reef in 1988, Lu Ning suggests that the incident resulted indirectly from a decision made in November 1987 by the State Council and the CMC to establish a permanent presence in the Spratly Islands. This decision supposedly led to the deployment of a naval task force to the area, with instructions to play a strictly defensive role, and the subsequent occupation by the Chinese navy of features unoccupied by other claimants. The resulting round of island-hopping races between China and Vietnam led to a military clash, which resulted from an order given by the Chinese naval commander on the scene, apparently without higher approval. See Lu Ning, *The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Decision-making in China*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 126–127.

<sup>21</sup> See Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Foreign Policy Actors in China*, SIPRI Policy Paper 26, September 2010, p. 14. Although military publications have often tracked closely with civilian media in their responses to political or security crises, they have sometimes exerted a more independent influence on public discourse and decision-making. In the aftermath of the EP-3 incident, for instance, military intelligence and PLA publications played a key role in claiming that the U.S. plane had “veered” toward the Chinese fighter and caused the crash. Civilian leaders apparently relied on military accounts of key details, such as the maneuvers both planes took prior to the collision, at least during the outset of the crisis. These accounts may have fueled public outrage over the incident, and possibly shaped the MFA’s early statements. See James Mulvenon, “Civil-Military Relations and the EP-3 Crisis: A Content Analysis,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 1 (2002).

<sup>22</sup> In late 2009, retired Major General Luo Yuan gave a public address in which he denounced Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou’s policy of “Three Nos” as a form of “peaceful separation.” As Bonnie Glaser notes, Luo Yuan appeared to have “crossed a boundary” with the remark, earning a reprimand for his

---

implicit criticism of Taiwan policy under the Chinese leadership. See Peter J. Brown, “The PLA Raises its Voice,” *Asia Times*, March 9, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Interview cited in Alastair Iain Johnston, *The Development of International Crisis Management Theory*.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Johnston suggests that this could create problems in a crisis if the other side resorts to military means early on, as Washington often does. In such circumstances, “Chinese decision-makers may believe the situation has evolved more quickly than expected to a serious military crisis and thus over-react.”

<sup>25</sup> In fact, according to some observers, this issue has been under some debate within Chinese policy circles for many years. Some observers apparently argue that the current system is satisfactory overall, while others insist that it must be improved, as part of a larger effort to create a more centralized and coordinated national security decision-making structure.