

A Comparison of Recruitment and Training Problems in the U.S. Army and China's People's Liberation Army

by Larry M. Wortzel



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In Brief

- The U.S. Army and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), although operating in disparate cultural and political norms, are facing similar recruitment and retention problems as they look to engage Generation Z (Gen Z) youth.
- More reliant on and native to technology than any previous generation, even in rural areas, Gen Zers possess vast swaths of information and higher levels of education, but they are comparatively stressed and depressed.¹ They also have higher rates of obesity and overall health problems.
- The PLA is working to compensate for demographic and generational issues through the use of artificial intelligence and technology, despite its rural population often not having access to these techniques. Can the U.S. Army learn from this?
- U.S. allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea, are facing similar problems. What can the U.S. military do in terms of designing and implementing programs to meet and overcome these challenges?

A Comparison of Recruitment and Training Problems in the U.S. Army and China's People's Liberation Army

Introduction

In the United States, military leaders and trainers have catalogued the adjustments that have to be made to accommodate or appeal to Gen Z. Even in the U.S. Marine Corps, which emphasizes tradition and history in its initial recruit training, Gen Z Marines tend to reject the personal ties between themselves and their Corps and the sense of esprit de corps that the Marine Corps works to develop.² In the Army's 18th Airborne Corps, leaders are exploring material rewards for soldiers to "mobilize the potential of soldiers."³ The old three-day pass was once used for that, while soldiers were motivated by mottos like the 9th Infantry's "Keep up the Fire," the 82nd Airborne's "All the Way!" and the 101st Airborne's "Rendezvous with Destiny." Gen Z seems to be attracted more to material outcomes.

A book on China's People's Liberation Army's (PLA's) aspirations for the conduct of future warfare, *Long Distance Operations*, argues that there is a strong sense of patriotism and nationalism in the generation born after the 1980's in China.⁴ The author attributes this to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) program of education on defense and national security in schools throughout the country. For the generation born in the 1990s, that CCP program continued at all grade levels in schools. And that generation never experienced the political upheavals of the Tiananmen Massacre, an event erased from the teaching of China's history by the CCP, while any mention of Tiananmen and 4 June 1989 is suppressed on the internet in China.

This deep sense of nationalism and a patriotic resentment of perceived foreign interference has been reinforced by the ideological efforts of the party under Xi Jinping (习近平). During his tenure as CCP general secretary and chairman of the Central Military Commission, Xi Jinping has emphasized the "Century of Humiliation" that China suffered at the hands of Western nations.⁵ This refers to the period between 1842 and the Opium War and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when Western powers and Japan invaded China and divided parts of the country into extraterritorial zones.

In a speech to the PLA National Defense University of Science and Technology, chosen by the PLA as one of his most important speeches, Xi Jinping pointed out that the future of the PLA depends on recruiting and maintaining high-quality, educated personnel conversant in modern technology and its application in military affairs.⁶ Xi also emphasized that there are too many instances of problems in getting young, new college graduates through their initial military training, noting that young people are often not able to adjust to the conditions of military life. Xi used the colloquial Chinese term for being out of sorts or uncomfortable in an environment that one would use for a person who had bad jet lag or was thrust into unfamiliar and uncomfortable surroundings (水土不服). In that October 2013 speech, Xi summarized the problems that the PLA faced in finding senior leaders who understood and embraced applying high technology to warfare and exposed the difficulties faced with Gen Z recruits and young officers.

Andrew Scobell and Frank Miller point out that Chinese leaders often manipulate crises or even manufacture them to stir up nationalist sentiment and exploit “deep emotional groundswells of nationalism” to strengthen a rationale for CCP rule.⁷ The effect of this CCP propaganda education has been to produce a Gen Z that is often hypernationalistic, even if it has many of the same traits as Gen Z in the United States.

China’s defense problems also are compounded by a low birth rate, making it harder to maintain a large standing army.⁸ China’s military leaders have tried to compensate for that by turning to automation, artificial intelligence and smart, high-technology weapons. However, that objective is frustrated by the fact that the level of education in rural areas of the country is lower than in urban areas.⁹ Another complication is that, although educated Gen Z youth in the city have the skills that the PLA needs, they would rather make money and enjoy themselves than join the military. Youth in the countryside may find the military more attractive than working in agriculture or in a factory far away from home, but they lack the tech savvy.

The U.S. Army finds itself in a similar position, finding it hard to attract upwardly-mobile, self-absorbed Gen Z recruits. Meanwhile, the birth rate in the United States has fallen to the lowest level in 35 years.¹⁰ Attitudes among Americans are changing; there is less stigma about not having children than in previous generations, and people are working harder and longer to make ends meet. All of this drives business and the military to find ways to automate and harness technology to make up for the lack of manpower.

The result of these demographic and technological influences is that the militaries in both countries are seeking to use artificial intelligence, swarming unmanned weapons and a variety of technology-driven automated systems to make soldiers and their equipment more effective and to reduce the need to maintain a large military force. It is not only the United States that faces these problems. The same challenges face the U.S. Army’s partners and allies in Asia in places like Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand and most of the Southeast Asian nations.

Characterizing Gen Z in the United States and China

The stereotypical characterization of Gen Z youth, also called “NetGens” or the “iGen,” is that they are “increasingly self-absorbed since the advent of the Internet,” have grown up in a world dominated by the cell phone and are individualistic and irreligious.¹¹ Although stereotypes can be misleading when dealing with individuals, some of these traits are evident in the young people entering the military. Military organizations have to deal with a “more fluid conception of career and authority identified in younger people” rather than a generation that

is used to hierarchical authority—a generation that may be “intellectually prepared for danger and uncertainty, and is full of determination and self-confidence” but still can be “uniquely fragile.”¹²

In the United States, Gen Z learns differently from previous generations. Libraries are no longer the primary source of information; students can ask a cell phone or automated device for answers to questions. Online videos show how to complete projects, and Gen Z seems to prefer a more collaborative learning process, meaning teachers have to adapt teaching methods and styles.¹³ That is not exactly a learning style that fits into traditional basic training in the Army or U.S. military, where things may be done “by the numbers” and tasks are repeated and expected to be done in specific ways.¹⁴

For the PLA, youth in China also learn differently and adjust to training differently from earlier generations.¹⁵ Complicating the matter of training style, PLA regiments or brigades receive new recruits and train them every three or four years at the same time. Thus, at different places around China, at the same time, a PLA cadre (noncommissioned officers—NCOs—and officers who are usually CCP members) trains its new soldiers. There is no drill sergeant academy in the PLA.

The U.S. Army has five basic combat training (BCT) centers and has a standardized program across the Army to train drill sergeants to ensure that methods of instruction and standards are the same at all the BCT centers. The PLA does not handle its conscripts or recruits the same way. It may even take some new soldiers right out of their educational institutions and make them specialized technical NCOs. In a PLA army (the ground forces) division, one regiment or brigade will be fully trained and fully operational in any given year; one regiment or brigade will be in the later stages of training; one in the process of more advanced unit training; and an entire regiment or brigade will be undergoing basic training and advanced skills training at the same time.¹⁶ That creates a unique set of problems for the PLA, making it more difficult to maintain training standards and methods.

In the PLA, although there are some “academies” devoted to different fields such as artillery or communications-electronics, there is no such thing as a “Center of Excellence” as there is in the U.S. Army. And, the PLA is having its own troubles getting new recruits and officers to adapt to military life. PLA psychologists and doctors are studying the use of Buddhist-like mindfulness training during initial military training, trying to find ways to relax recruits, often using U.S. Army studies as a model. For older generations, such as baby boomers, the only mindfulness training received in boot camp or basic combat training was the front-leaning rest, pushups, squat-thrusts and double-timing a few miles in formation.

Some of the differences in Gen Z also mean it has different values from earlier generations. In the U.S. Army, that translates to different ways of training and motivating new soldiers.¹⁷ Indeed, there are ironic similarities in the ways that the U.S. Army and the PLA seek to develop certain traits in Gen Z soldiers, despite each military seeing the other as a potential enemy. CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping has made it clear that the United States is the greatest potential threat to the achievement of China’s military objectives; for the U.S. military, China is the “pacing threat.”¹⁸ Still, the PLA tends to draw directly on U.S. Army training techniques, programs and psychological studies of Gen Z to try to instill traits such as mental toughness, valor and loyalty in its Gen Z soldiers and officers. As an article in the party and army newspaper *PLA Daily* (解放军报) points out, China’s military leaders are working to keep the “essence of Chinese culture and CCP culture in training, while adopting what they can from the U.S.”¹⁹

One good example of this is a study by researchers at the PLA National Defense University of Science and Technology. It draws heavily on U.S. Army studies in seeking to develop attitudes of valor (勇敢), determination (坚定) and mental toughness or tenacity (顽强) in new soldiers and officers.²⁰ The PLA journal—in the manner of Charles Portis’s 1968 novel that was adapted as the John Wayne movie, *True Grit*—calls these three qualities “grit.” Concurrently, the study also sought to make new recruits and officers admire and emulate these qualities and select emergent leaders that showed these qualities. Nine of 14 citations for this article draw from studies used in U.S. Army training programs. This is an example of how the PLA sees the U.S. military as the “gold standard” for a modern army while, at the same time, seeing it as a major potential threat.

There are strong similarities between the way that Gen Z recruits in China respond to training and military service and the ways that their generational cohorts in other Asian countries handle the same challenges in their entry into military service.²¹ Studying these similarities, and comparing the knowledge to how the U.S. Army has approached Gen Z recruits and succeeded in training and acculturating them, can be applied to U.S. Army Pacific engagement and training programs with allies and partners in Asia.

However, there are also some traits unique to China that make military service unpopular and create recruiting, morale and other problems that should be kept in mind by U.S. planners and strategists.²² Gen Z consumers in China purchase huge amounts of luxury goods, which makes service in the PLA less attractive because of lower salaries. China’s Gen Z population has a “massive consumption capability” and a tendency toward “impulsive shopping.” That makes the PLA far less popular; off-duty time of new recruits and officers is tightly restricted and structured, and the training often takes place in remote areas without access to luxury goods or the electronic devices that the generation depends on. Gen Z youth also expect that their needs will be personalized for them. Personalized treatment and catering to personal needs are not elements of initial PLA training.

Cross-Cultural Differences and Similarities

A cross-cultural study from a Shanghai-based Chinese investment bank and brokerage firm, Orient Securities (东方证券), provides useful cross-cultural profiles of Gen Z in the United States, Japan and China.²³ One can apply the results of this study to the challenges of recruiting soldiers and officers from Gen Z into the PLA, developing leaders among them and teaching and training them. The Orient Securities study reinforces how traditional methods may have to be modified in the U.S. Army and the PLA.

In the United States (and Japan), the dividends of high economic development influence what Gen Z seeks in material needs and create a higher level of pursuit of a social identity and self-realization. This creates what Orient Securities calls a confusion about material goods and independence (物质-迷茫-独立). In China, however, Gen Z differs somewhat from its counterparts in more developed economies and societies in terms of economic preferences, material needs and decisions, consumption philosophy, patriotism and education. Across cultures, according to Orient Securities, as Gen Z becomes the mainstream society, “consumables (卖萌)” have “become the embodiment of the aesthetic forms and values of Generation Z.” Gen Z wants specialized forms of marketing that are considered “cute” or attractive. Gen Z youth tend to “chase the stars,” creating what Orient Securities calls a “brain hole (脑洞)” or a new way of thinking, values and desires for entertainment. Their consumption is driven by physical manifestations of self-image and the internet.

In learning, material consumption and group orientation, Gen Z seeks “interest-oriented social scenes, decentralized video entertainment and User Generated Content (UGC).” Through a process that Orient Securities calls “planting grass (种草化),” Gen Z maintains a group affiliation, while at the same time pursuing individuality. In marketing (which for the purposes of this study can translate into military values and a military work ethic), new ways of providing UGC for learning and training have to be adopted, meaning Gen Z recruits must be internet savvy and be able to create their own unique learning styles. Moreover, according to Orient Securities, members of Gen Z tend to make choices based on the choices of opinion leaders in their chosen group affiliation.

In China, Gen Z is in the process of changing from a subsistence culture to being well off. In general, members of Gen Z have few worries about food and clothing; thus, they pay more attention to their own desires and mental or spiritual life. They also seek enjoyment in a content-rich, networked world. China’s Gen Z also follows trends in consumption. Members tend to spend more on luxury goods than earlier generations. Their education is test-oriented, focusing on outcome-based learning. Finally, they tend to be patriotic and proud of China and its achievements, even if they may seek to avoid or have trouble adjusting to the discipline and isolation of military service.

There is a tendency in Gen Z in Asia to adopt the characteristics of idealized models, creating an “idol culture.” In China, rural or urban life usually is related to economic status and translates to different levels of development and material goods. The development status and the material basis are usually the decisive factors that affect the personality of the cohort of Gen Z that the PLA must recruit or conscript.

Gen Z, Fitness and Health

The manpower pool in the United States is shrinking for the U.S. Army.²⁴ Americans from the southern states, on which the Army has traditionally been able to depend for recruits, are increasingly too obese or in such poor physical condition that they cannot serve.²⁵ Additionally, in 2020, the U.S. birth rate fell to the lowest point in 50 years. The Heritage Foundation, in 2018, reported that “71 percent of young Americans between 17 and 24 are ineligible to serve in the military—that is 24 million of the 34 million people of that age group.”

Army recruiters are conducting physical fitness training programs to adequately condition new recruits before they head off to basic combat training.²⁶ Once in training, recruits that start out unfit have a higher rate of injury than in the past.²⁷ Compounding the problem, according to the Heritage Foundation, many Americans cannot qualify for military service because of a low educational level, a criminal background or the use of illegal narcotics.

The PLA faces similar problems. While crime and drug use may not be as bad in China as in the United States, PLA recruits have trouble paying attention in training,²⁸ and they are suffering a higher injury rate in training than the PLA has seen in earlier generations.²⁹ In cities and rural areas, mass transit has replaced walking and bicycle riding, the traditional ways to get around. Stress fractures in PLA trainees are higher than in the past, creating longer training times and a group of recruits that cannot complete training.³⁰ The PLA is also having problems recruiting soldiers and officers among college students.³¹

Adjusting to Military Life: Morale, Mental Health, Loneliness and Isolation

Military life can be a difficult adjustment for young soldiers who are used to living with parents or on their own. In a study of workplace and work-style choices that the *Economist*

conducted in the United States, Gen Z workers “were more likely than any other age group to cite personal choice . . . as the main reason for continuing to work remotely.”³² That makes selling the Army to Gen Z harder. At some point, there are barracks (even with private rooms), formations, organized training and, for some, compartmented facilities where work must be done—as part of a team, not alone. Whether in the United States or China, entering the military means learning to work and live with people from different backgrounds in a group setting and following orders and procedures exactly. In both the U.S. Army and the PLA, trainers and leaders work hard to facilitate this adjustment. In the PLA, however, the continued use of the political commissar (政治委员 or 政委) system creates a more complicated set of problems.³³ Before continuing the discussion on the difficulties of adjusting to military life, however, the reader must understand the role of the political commissar in the PLA.

Political commissar systems are not new to military organizations; they were used in the French Revolutionary Army, the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War, the Soviet Red Army (until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991) and Nazi Germany. Currently, Taiwan’s military (the Republic of China) still has a system of political commissars, just as China does.

In the PLA, the political officer or political commissar (PC) is equal to the commander. The PC is responsible for the ideological education of soldiers and officers, manages the PLA’s personnel system, manages party and personnel security files and keeps dossiers on all the soldiers in a unit, including the unit commander. Promotions, disciplinary actions, awards and schooling all come under the purview of the PC. Thus, even if the commander may have an equal say in a decision, that commander is not likely to contradict or countermand a demand from a PC, even if the commander outranks the PC. This creates a form of collective decisionmaking in the PLA.

There are two examples of events that demonstrated the influence of political commissars on command decisions and awards. The first was a training incident in the 15th Airborne Army; unit commanders and NCOs sustained injuries in a parachute training exercise because of high winds, and the PC took over. The second is concerned with the way that awards for heroism were made during the 1962 Sino-Indian Border War.

The PLA airborne forces (the 15th Airborne Army of the PLA Air Force) did not train for mass tactical jumps for decades. Instead, the units were used in squad-, platoon- or company-size elements for reconnaissance, interdictions, raids and ambushes.³⁴ Their parachute landings were Soviet style, with parachutes running with the wind facing the objective and stand-up, squatting landings.³⁵ The role of the airborne changed for the PLA as China entered the 21st century and the PLA was given the mission to develop a better capacity for expeditionary operations. As large-capacity aircraft were added to support the airborne, the 15th began deployment exercises and mass tactical jumps.³⁶

In a modern mass tactical deployment exercise, “Red Sword-2018 (红剑-2018),” a combined-arms battalion with attached support from the 15th Airborne Army loaded on aircraft in Kaifeng in central China and flew directly to a simulated combat jump in the western desert of China.³⁷ Despite very high winds, the battalion commander ordered the jump to take place at the designated time. The battalion took a high number of actual casualties on landing, losing a number of platoon and company commanders and political commissars. With the commander of a company and other subordinate leaders injured, the political commissar took over. Rather than immediately establishing a chain of command and attempting to carry out the mission, the PC first ensured that his commissar system was in place. In the time it took the

PC to do that, the opposing force inflicted crippling simulated casualties on the remainder of the paratroopers. The mission was a failure, and, along with the actual casualties, the opposing force inflicted crippling simulated injuries on the remainder of the paratroopers.

In the case of the Sino-Indian Border War in 1962, the majority of awards for heroism on the battlefield went to PCs rather than to small unit commanders, NCOs or individual troops.³⁸ Of course, it is entirely possible that their strong commitment to the CCP led PCs and political officers to commit extraordinary acts of bravery, more than the average soldier or officer. However, this writer is skeptical. After all, it is the PCs who control the awards system.

The bottom line is that in dealing with many morale, discipline, adjustment and mental health issues, responsibility in the PLA seems to be split, with the PC acting as counselor, morale and welfare officer and the equivalent of chaplain or spiritual counselor (and here the term *spiritual* refers to support for the Communist Party). Imagine being in a U.S. Army unit and spending almost half of your time in political meetings reading “*The Works of General X, the Chief of Staff of the Army.*” That has to detract from training for military missions.

In the United States, Gen Z is more stressed about news and life than earlier generations and is more likely to report or seek help to address that stress.³⁹ Military leaders must learn to address the generation differently, to motivate them and to deal with a cohort of recruits that learns quickly, is dependent on technology and grew up in a nation at war and with a society facing volatile economic and social problems.⁴⁰ Still, some of Gen Z’s ability to think for themselves adapts easily to the Army’s concept of mission command.⁴¹ More than in the past though, the Army finds itself developing programs to address mental health and the stresses of military life.⁴² “Suck it up and drive on” is no longer the order of the day.

In China, the PLA faces a similar set of problems, compounded by the fact that millions of young men and women are left behind in smaller towns and villages to be cared for by relatives while their parents work in factories hundreds of miles away and seldom visit them at home.⁴³ Identifying mental health problems, helping Gen Z adapt to military life and integrating Gen Z into units as officers or young soldiers has challenged the PLA’s military health workers, leaders and PCs.⁴⁴ The sheer number of studies being produced by military medical institutions and health professionals in China shows the seriousness of the problem for the PLA. Moreover, psychology was traditionally not a major field in China, and instances of mental illness were dealt with harshly. The majority of the current Chinese studies designed to help recruits and new officers to get through training and adapt to military life draw on American scholarship on these subjects.

Training Injuries and Retention

A U.S. Army study found that, for men and women, the common reasons for seeking medical attention in basic combat training (BCT) was “pain in joint, lower leg” (15 percent), limb pain, ankle and foot pain, sprains, backache and joint, knee and shoulder pain.⁴⁵ About 40 percent of men and 61 percent of women trainees sustained injuries in BCT. During advanced individual training (AIT) and integration into unit training, the rate of injuries differed, and some types of injuries were more common in certain fields. For instance, in the infantry there were more lower leg and joint injuries, while in artillery lower back pain and strain were more common.⁴⁶ The Army puts a lot of time, manpower, money and effort into keeping soldiers healthy.⁴⁷ Still, the U.S. Army has the advantage of conducting BCT and AIT at designated centers, meaning Army problems can be addressed in specific ways.

For the PLA, with training taking place in literally hundreds of regiments or brigades all around China in the ground forces and the paramilitary People's Armed Police, the problem is harder. Go to any unit, and a cadre will have its own methods for dealing with recruit training. There is no central schooling for instructors or drill instructors. PLA medical personnel study the issue, and instruction may go out, but the PLA depends on a variety of health professionals to study these matters and make recommendations on how to address injuries.⁴⁸

There are dozens of studies on injuries to recruits, soldiers and officers, but it is difficult to gauge whether the recommendations of these studies are recognized and implemented PLA-wide.⁴⁹ The decentralized way that the PLA brings in new personnel and trains them creates its own problems, affecting combat effectiveness.

Relationships to Superiors in Gen Z

In the United States, the Gen Z workforce wants "human interaction at work."⁵⁰ They can be cynical because they are exposed to a 24-hour news cycle and social media and have seen a lot of corruption, dishonestly and negativity. They are skeptical and resent being taken advantage of in the workplace. They want managers to give them regular feedback that addresses specific points. Finally, they expect a work plan developed together to track performance and facilitate communication. A lot of that fits into the way a small unit operates in the U.S. Army. However, Gen Z workers can be dismissive of older people and supervisors who do not have technology skills.

There are strong attitudes about work and supervisors in Gen Z.⁵¹ They want some control of and input into work schedules. They tend to have little patience for being forced to work when they don't want to, and they want time off when they request it. That kind of work ethic doesn't always fit well into military life. Finally, Gen Z workers seek inspiration from their leaders even for performing routine tasks. Army concepts such as mission command can provide the environment that Gen Z seeks.

In China, Gen Z is often taught in a rote memorization style, introduced with heavy lectures. There is not always a lot of interaction in the classroom. Despite the over-layering of Marxism-Leninism imposed by the CCP, Chinese society is still underpinned by a Confucian system and respect for elders and seniors. Indeed, these same characteristics can also be found in the Gen Z cohort in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore. That makes some of the transition to military life in China a little easier than it is for American youth, but there are still problems.⁵² And, just as with Gen Z in other countries, as the research presented in this study suggests, Gen Z expects supervisors and leaders to have some grasp of technology.

Military Effectiveness

The U.S. Army trains for specific tasks, to standards, gets regular evaluations and feedback and maintains a professional military development program for soldiers, NCOs and officers.⁵³ As a large, standing army, it is one of the most effective military organizations in the world. There is a regular system of feedback for operations and exercises; leaders receive evaluations designed to improve or correct performance and the commander in chief, regardless of his or her political party, can count on the military to obey orders. There is a system to investigate corruption or abuse of office, notwithstanding complaints in Congress that occur from time to time.⁵⁴

In China, as chairman of the Communist Party Central Military Commission, general secretary of the CCP and president, Xi Jinping does not have the confidence in the PLA that the U.S. president may have in the Army or armed services. Xi was not happy with the PLA when

senior leaders bribed their superiors for promotion, education or command. In units, junior leaders were expected to bribe superiors to get ahead; from the time that he took over as CMC chairman, he has worked to correct that.⁵⁵ Xi has been vocal about his lack of confidence in the PLA for some time.⁵⁶ He does not have complete confidence that the PLA is effective or that it can execute the missions he has set out for it. He has accused his senior leaders of what he calls the “five incapables (五个不会), or being unable to 1) judge the battlefield situation, 2) understand the intent of senior leaders, 3) make operational decisions, 4) deploy troops properly [on the battlefield], and 5) deal with unexpected situations.”⁵⁷

Conclusions

In the U.S. Army and the Chinese PLA, there is a common focus on new technologies, data fusion and developing systems, designed to compensate for a smaller military. The Army and the PLA seek to employ artificial intelligence and technology to compensate for demographic and generational issues, to use unmanned systems and enhanced intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems to maintain awareness of the battlefield.

The U.S. Army is probably in a better position than the PLA in that it is continually striving to meet the challenges of generational change and adapt to Gen Z while taking advantage of that generation’s embrace of information technologies. It is clear from this research that the PLA faces many of the same challenges but, in general, is also following the lead of the U.S. Army in how to address the new generation it seeks to recruit and train.

A major advantage that the U.S. Army has is that it has taught its people to think and incorporates them in decisionmaking, empowering them to use initiative and to follow the concept of mission command in acting. That is harder for the PLA, in part because of the structure of society in China, but also because of the role that the Communist Party and the political commissar play in the military.

Reinforcing its own strengths and understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the PLA can help the U.S. Army to be in a better position to respond to China’s provocations and aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region.

This research also has identified areas where U.S. allies and partners in the region face similar problems. Thus, looking at the results here that bear on the militaries of Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand may allow USARPAC and the entire Army to design programs to increase partner capacity in societies and nations facing similar technological, generational and demographic changes.

Notes

- ¹ “Generation Z is stressed, depressed and exam-obsessed,” *Economist*, 27 February 2019.
- ² Captain Dan Stallard, “Esprit de Corps: Morale and Force Preservation,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, April 2018.
- ³ Haley Britzky, “The 18th Airborne Corps wants YOU . . . to help fix the Army,” *Task and Purpose*, 20 August 2020.
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